



**A New Look at the First Anti-Church Decrees
of the Soviet Government**

**Review of: Vladimir Vorob'ev and L.B. Miliakova,
eds. 2016. *Otdelenie tserkvi ot gosudarstva i shkoly ot
tserkvi v Sovetskoj Rossii, Oktiabr' 1917–1918:
Sbornik dokumentov* [Separation of church from state
and school from church in Soviet Russia, October
1917–1918: Collection of documents]. Moscow: PSTGU
(in Russian). — 944 pp.**

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The early decrees of the Soviet government, including those affecting the religious sphere of Russian society, have been published repeatedly in both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. It would seem unlikely that any new discoveries in this area would arise. However, a collection of documents published by the publishing house of the Saint Tikhon's Orthodox University of Humanities provides a new perspective on the earliest stage of the formation of state and church relations in the Soviet period. Previous publications, as a rule, gave preference to documents created by the party and state, or those that covered events in one region or a single problem (for

example, Soviet educational policies).¹

The authors of this peer-reviewed edition have set a different goal for themselves. They did not limit themselves to documents created by the party and state, but supplemented them with church documents, including religious protests, as well as publications in the press. The authors sought to present a complete picture of relations between the church and the state in 1917–1918 — to create “a di-

1. Cf: N.A. Kazakevich, V.V. Markovchin, T.S. Tugova, et al., *Pravoslavnaja Moskva v 1917–1921 gg.: Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* [Orthodox Moscow in 1917–1921: Collection of documents and materials]. Moscow, 2004.

verse thematic collection of documents on the most acute problems of the history of the church in the early years of Soviet power" (36).

Materials of the central and Moscow archives served as the basis for the published corpus of documents: the State Archives of the Russian Federation (the files of the Sovnarkom [Council of People's Commissars], the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, the People's Commissariats of Justice, Education, Property, and Internal Affairs, and the Holy Council of the Russian Orthodox Church of 1917–1918); the Russian State Archives of Social and Political History (the files of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party [Bolsheviks], the Sovnarkom of the RSFSR, and the personal papers of the leaders of the party and the state); the Central State Archives of the Moscow Region (the papers of the Moscow Soviet of People's Deputies [Mossovet], the county councils of Moscow Province, and the Commission on Protection of the Party; and the State Archives of the Moscow Region (the files of Mossovet, the county councils of Moscow Province, and the Commission on the Protection of the Orthodox Church). Along with archival documents, the authors include a wide selection of periodical publications,

both Bolshevik and oppositional (44).

As a result, the collection includes documents that come from both the Soviet authorities (at various levels) and the church (from all levels of the hierarchy, including simple believers); documents created in various regions of Russia that were under the control of the Bolsheviks at the time; and different types of documentary materials (laws, protocols, reports, letters, petitions, resolutions of gatherings, punishments, etc.). The overwhelming majority of these materials are published here for the first time. All this makes the reviewed collection "the most complete academic publication on this subject" (43).

Chronologically, the documents included in the collection cover events that took place in the country from October 1917 to the end of 1918. The editors also publish a number of documents from 1919 that refer to the events of 1918 (primarily in connection with the beginning of the campaign to expose holy relics). The collection is divided chronologically into two parts (October to December 1917 and 1918). The second part contains six thematic sections: the drafting of secular legislation, the creation of state structures for its implementation, and the attitude of the church and believers

to state policy; the nationalization, requisitioning, confiscation, and looting of the property of monasteries and churches, and the imposition of subsidies and taxes on the clergy; the implementation of decrees on dissolution of marriage and civil marriage, and the drafting of a decree on cemeteries and funerals; the appeal of the clergy to the rear militia and the performance of labor conscription; the exclusion of the church from public and daily life; and the separation of schools from the Orthodox Church. From the titles of these sections it can be seen that the thematic coverage of the collection is extremely wide.

Undoubted innovations include the publication of documents showing the reaction of the church to the decrees of the Soviet government; materials related to the examination of the Moscow Kremlin after the artillery shelling in October 1917; and numerous materials on the resistance of believers and their attempts to find new forms of existence in a hostile reality. Petitions, appeals, stories about the organization of religious processions and the reaction of local authorities to them, reports on the requisitioning of church property, including monastery premises, attacks on monasteries, the organization of believers to protect

church heritage, protests against the imposition of huge indemnities and taxes on the clergy, as well as against their conscription to the rear and the recruitment of workers — most of these materials are published for the first time.

A number of documents in the collection cover the activities of the delegation of the Holy Council of 1917–1918 in negotiations with the Sovnarkom, which was tasked with reviewing the discriminatory legislation. These materials are accompanied by documents related to the activities of N.D. Kuznetsov, a thinker, a religious and public figure of the prerevolutionary period, and an active participant in the Council of 1917–1918, who, in fact, took on the role of the main defender of the rights of the clergy and believers before the Soviet authorities in the period under review.

The documents on the economic activities of church organizations in the revolutionary period are of great interest, in particular, those on the fate of candle factories, which the authorities planned to nationalize, including the reasoned objections of the Central Committee for Candle Factories and Warehouses. A number of documents address attempts to preserve house churches closed by the Soviet authorities, and in particular, attempts

to preserve the house church of Moscow University. Other documents relate to attempts to preserve the Petrograd Theological Academy by merging it with Petrograd University.

The compilers of the collection sought to ensure the inclusion of the maximum number of contemporary voices for each of the topics: not only representatives of the authorities, but also believers; residents not only of Moscow and Petrograd, but also of remote provinces. This polyphony is the most important feature of the publication, which distinguishes it from previous works.

In addition, the editors tried to find the most convenient way to present the entire variety of documents on a particular topic for the reader. Inside the thematic sections there are both single documents placed in chronological order and collections of documents dedicated to a specific event or problem. These collections have their own title (and hence number), and the documents within them are also titled, numbered, and placed in chronological order. For example, section 3 of the collection contains a collection of documents titled "On Requisitions in the Alexander-Svirsky Monastery of Olonets Diocese" (454–65), including the report of the bishop of Olonets

to Patriarch Tikhon (November 14, 1918), the statement of N.D. Kuznetsov in the Sovnarkom on this occasion (December 20, 1918), and the report of the Olonets Cheka on requisitions (March 22, 1919). In this case, the selection is placed among other documents of the section in accordance with the date of the section's first document. The abovementioned collection is placed between the documents dated November 11 and 15, 1918. And although the chronology of the documents published in this case is not maintained (this should be borne in mind by the reader of the collection), the collections allow each of the events to be seen with exhaustive completeness.

Finally, the collection is provided with the necessary academic apparatus (comments, indexes), and the documents are preceded by three introductory articles: a historical introduction written by the compiler of the collection, L.B. Miliakova (PSTGU); a source study by S.G. Petrov (Institute of History of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences), a leading expert in the study of sources pertaining to state and church relations of the Soviet period; and an archaeographic preface authored by I.A. Ziuzina and L.B. Miliakova.

What is the overall impression of the collection? When

reading documents of various origins, a high degree of bitterness on the part of the authorities toward believers is evident. This can be seen not only in the reports about the firing squads in different parts of the country (144–45 and passim), but also in the way that the opposite side is described. Thus, the newspaper *Bednota* (Poor thing) describes a procession in Moscow on Red Square that took place in May 1918 on the feast of St. Nicholas of Myra as a collection of marginalists and provocateurs and calls it “a demonstration of obscurantism” (295). The photos of this procession show that it actually appears as a giant national celebration (Red Square is entirely filled with people). But the article in *Bednota* does not just

distort reality, it is imbued with the desire to dehumanize the enemy, even if this enemy is all people of faith. It is becoming clear that not only the hierarchs and clergymen, but also ordinary believers found themselves in an atmosphere of daily psychological pressure.

This peer-reviewed edition undoubtedly makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the initial stage of Soviet anti-religious policy. This collection of documents is poised to become a handbook for researchers dealing with the early evolution of state and church relations and the protest of believers in the Soviet period.

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That Whereof We Cannot Speak, Thereof We Must Imagine

Review of: A. Zygmunt. 2018. *Sviataia negativnost': nasilie i sakral'noe v filosofii Zhorzha Bataia* [Holy negativity: Violence and the sacred in Georges Bataille's philosophy]. Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie (in Russian). — 320 pp.

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Alexey Zygmunt's monograph is an event in Russian-speaking religious studies; at least, it claims to be, challenging the scientific community with the very title.

The main works of French thinker Georges Bataille such as *L'expérience intérieure*, [1943], *La Part Maudite* [1949] and others are available in Russian