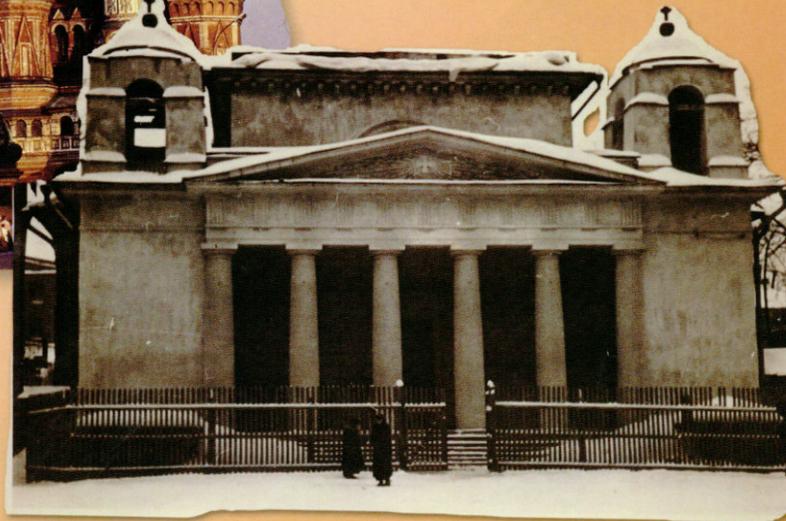
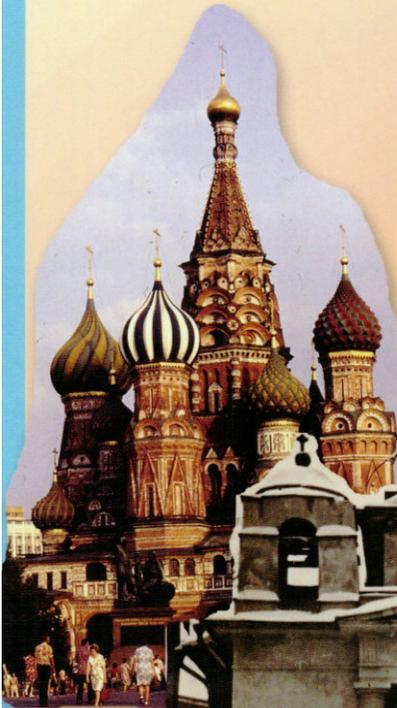




# The Catholic Chaplaincy in Moscow

A Short History  
1934 - 1999

*Robert J. Fortin, A.A.*





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1934–1999

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2004



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# Introductory Word

In March of 1950, barely two months after his arrival in the Soviet Union, the third American Assumptionist assigned to the Moscow chaplaincy, Fr. Louis-Robert Brassard, in the midst of several seemingly interminable conflicts with the Communist government, penned these words to his superiors, “The situation could be very disheartening because, as yet, I have not been able to minister to my flock. Nevertheless, I feel that my mission is being accomplished even though it is not taking the shape that I would desire. *Just my being here means that the Church is still alive* (emphasis mine).” “Just my being here means that the Church is still alive.” For nearly 65 years American Assumptionists stationed in Moscow kept the flame of the Catholic faith alive, at certain times the only officially recognized Catholic priest allowed to function publicly in the entire country. They were beacons of hope, sources of moral encouragement, and ministers of grace to many who felt isolated in an anti-Western and atheistic society.

As we commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement and the arrival of the first American Assumptionist in 1934, Fr. Leopold Braun, and the one hundredth anniversary of the Assumptionist presence in Russia, we do well to recall the nine Americans who served the Moscow chaplaincy so generously and so competently from 1934 to 1999. For too many years we may have too easily taken for granted the innumerable struggles they faced: not just the inevitable loneliness which resulted from being far from one’s brothers and isolated from local citizens, but the daily hassles of having one’s apartment bugged, of not knowing how you would be able to pay your rent or find food for meals, of being followed regularly, of encountering endless red-tape when seeking documents, of seeing one’s parishioners harassed, of trying to maintain your integrity and good sense, of locating a place to say Mass, or of being constantly considered, as one chaplain said, “an agent of the Vatican and the United States government.”

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In the name of the entire province of North America, I would like to thank Fr. Robert Fortin, who himself served as a chaplain from 1983 to 1986, for accepting to organize the following reflections on the Moscow chaplaincy. In addition to the reflections on his years of service, he provides his readers with a thorough and compelling history of the chaplaincy until 1955, the result of much personal research. We can only hope that he will be able to complete his work for the rest of that history, time permitting. Until then, I would like to thank him for pulling together as well the comments concerning the chaplains who served after 1959. All of the chapters contained in this brief overview introduce us to a remarkable story of faith and courage.

Toward the end of his life the founder of the Assumptionists, Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon, wrote, "Russia has become my great concern." Already he had sent many members of his fledgling congregation to the Near East with the hope one day of founding a community in Russia. However, he would not see the arrival of the first Assumptionist there (1903) during his lifetime. For sixty-five years American Assumptionists, at what may have arguably been the most difficult time in Russia's history, fulfilled their founder's dream. They, like he, could easily have agreed with Fr. Louis-Robert's words, "I feel that my mission is being accomplished even though it is not taking the shape that I would desire. Just my being here means that the Church is still alive."

Very Rev. John L. Franck, A.A.  
Provincial Superior  
Brighton, Massachusetts  
Easter Sunday, April 11, 2004

# A HUNDRED YEARS

A hundred years have already passed  
Since the sons of d'Alzon fulfilled his dream  
To tread the sacred soil of Holy Russia  
With the Kingdom of God in their hearts.  
A hundred years, Son-Jesus, we have labored,  
We have sown your Word of Love  
In a sometimes apparently hostile land,  
Waiting for the spring rains of your grace.  
A hundred years, Holy Spirit, in the dark night  
We have waited for your light and warmth  
To grow the seed, humble and hidden,  
And produce the fruits of eternity.  
A hundred years, Father of Love, of patient waiting,  
And the first flowers appear before our eyes,  
Fruit of so much labor and obscure sorrows  
But especially of your faithful Love.  
Beloved Russia, I will not forget you!

Eugene V. LaPlante, A.A.

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# Foreword

The Catholic Chaplaincy in Moscow came about within the broad context of the Russian apostolate of the Augustinians of the Assumption (Assumptionists) begun in 1903, and more particularly as an offshoot of the presence in Moscow of a French Assumptionist, Bishop Pie Neveu, who arrived in the Soviet capital in 1926 as pastor of Saint Louis-des-Français Church and as Apostolic Administrator.

Specifically, however, it came into being when the Assumptionist superiors requested and were granted the right to send the first American chaplain to Moscow according to the provisions of the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement that was signed in Washington on November 16, 1933 and that established diplomatic relations between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. One of its clauses foresaw the presence of American clergymen to administer to the spiritual needs of their compatriots in the Soviet Union.

Shortly after the signing of this agreement, the Assumptionist superiors hastened to make their request because Bishop Neveu, who had been in Russia since 1906, was not well and needed help. They reasoned that an American Assumptionist could carry out his duties as chaplain and, at the same time, serve as the bishop's assistant and companion. Accordingly, they assigned Fr. Leopold Braun to the Moscow Mission.

When Bishop Neveu returned to France for medical reasons in 1936, the American chaplain succeeded him as Apostolic Administrator and pastor of the French church, as did his successors, i.e., until 1949 when the Soviet government took the church away from the foreign Assumptionists and turned it over to a Soviet citizen, a Lithuanian priest appointed by the Catholic archbishop of Riga (Latvia).

Adjusting to the new situation, the American chaplain set up a chapel in his apartment, calling it Our Lady of Hope. He also began ministering

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not only to his compatriots but also to all foreign Catholics who sought his services. Weekday services as well as Saturday evening Masses after their introduction following Vatican II were held in the chapel, while Sunday services, after a period of adjustment, eventually moved to the United States Embassy. Starting in 1990/91, following a fire at the Embassy and increased preoccupations about security, they were moved to the Philippine Embassy for approximately two years. In 1993, they moved to the Anglo-American School on Leninsky Prospekt where they continued until June 2000. Beginning in 1997 to the present time, one Sunday Mass was re-introduced at the US Embassy, while a second one was celebrated at the Music School on Bolshaya Yakimanka from 2000 to 2002, then moved to the crypt of the Immaculate Conception Church.

Over the years, ten American Assumptionists succeeded themselves in this assignment, three of them for two tours of duty.

The present booklet recounts the 65-year history of this Catholic chaplaincy. Treatment of the subject is admittedly incomplete because its author, who lives in Jerusalem, was unable to consult the Assumptionist archives in Boston and Rome in order to update and complete a work he began—but was unable to finish—some 15 years ago. That work involved editing, further researching, and completing a still earlier work of Fr. Patrick Croghan, A.A., who died in 1977 before being able to finish his impressive project.

Moreover, these earlier studies covered only the first 25 years of the Chaplaincy (1934–59). For the follow-up period (1959–99), the only documents available to the author were the answers to a recent questionnaire that was sent to all the former chaplains who are still living.

Accordingly, two distinct styles have been used. For the first 25 years (1934–59), events and situations are presented in normal narrative style. For the follow-up period (1959–99), both the questions asked and the answers received are simply reproduced verbatim, with only a minimum amount of editing.

The booklet begins by describing the context that prepared the way for the creation of the chaplaincy: the first Assumptionists in Russia, Saint Louis-des-Français church, the presence of Bishop Neveu in Moscow, and the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement. It then gives an account of some of the situations that existed and of some of the events that took place during the stay of each of the Moscow chaplains. The conclusion highlights a few of the more significant aspects of the Chaplaincy's history.

*Foreword*

Robert J. Fortin, A.A.  
Former Moscow Chaplain (1983–86)  
Jerusalem, May 1, 2004

*The Catholic Chaplaincy in Moscow*

# Introduction



# First Assumptionists in Russia

Father Emmanuel d'Alzon (1810–80), the founder of the Assumptionists, began dreaming of sending some of his religious to Russia as far back as 1862. However, it wasn't until 23 years after his death that the first Assumptionists were able to enter the country. In 1903, **Fr. Liévin Baurain**, a young Belgian priest, was assigned to the Catholic Ecclesiastical Academy (major seminary) in Saint Petersburg as professor of conversational French. Like all other professors, he had a right to a “servant.” **Bro. Evrard Evrard**, who had just been ordained a sub-deacon in Constantinople, was chosen to fill this position. After his subsequent priestly ordination in Rome, he spent one year in Moscow before going to Odessa for two years with Fr. Auguste Maniglier (1906–07), and eventually to Kiev for seven years (1907–14) where he was chaplain to the French colony.

In 1905, **Fr. Jean Bois** was assigned to Saint Petersburg, **Fr. Auguste Maniglier** to Odessa where he built the church of Saint Peter (1913), the rectory (1915) as well as a home for French women working as governesses and tutors, and **Fr. Gervais Quénard** to Vilna as chaplain to the French colony. In 1907, **Fr. Joanns Thibaut**, a scholarly man, went first to Odessa, then to Saint Petersburg where he remained until 1913.

In 1906, **Fr. Pie Neveu** arrived in Saint Petersburg to become chaplain at the Good Shepherd Cancer Hospital and Orphanage. But in May 1907, many French and Belgian mining officials, engineers and their families in the Donetz mining region in the Ukraine petitioned to have a French-speaking priest to minister to them. As a result, Fr. Neveu was transferred to the town of Makeyevka in 1907. At the time, he was thirty years old. **Bro. David Mailland** joined him in 1917.

When World War I was declared, the French Assumptionists in Russia were mobilized and recalled to their country. Frs. Neveu and Maniglier were about to set sail from Odessa when they received a telegram from the Russian

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Minister of the Interior asking them to stay at their posts in Makeyevka and Odessa to “keep up the morale of their French parishioners.” They stayed.

In 1943, **Fr. Jean Nicolas** arrived in Odessa where he restored and repaired the church of Saint Peter, which Fr. Maniglier was obliged to abandon in 1921. He was arrested on April 29, 1945 and accused of espionage. Brought to the Lubyanka prison in Moscow, he was then sent to the Gulag. He was released in 1954.

# Saint Louis-des-Français Church

On December 31, 1786, Catherine the Great concluded a Commercial Treaty with the King of France. Article 3 stipulated that French citizens residing in Russia would enjoy freedom of conscience and be allowed “to perform freely the rites of their religion and celebrate divine services according to their customs in their homes and churches, without any hindrance whatsoever.” It also stipulated that Russian citizens living in France would enjoy the same freedom and be allowed to hold services in their own churches and homes. On a reciprocal basis, the article foresaw the right of each nation to acquire and own the buildings necessary for this purpose.

The treaty did much to improve the status of the French people in Russia and to further encourage a French presence. Until that time, French Catholics in Moscow had been attending the Polish Church of Saints Peter and Paul in the *Sloboda*, the section of the city inhabited especially by Western Europeans. But with the opening of a French Vice-Consulate, the French community organized itself into a colony and applied both to the Archbishop of Mohilev and to the Governor of Moscow for permission to have a French national parish and build their own church. This was granted by an Imperial Ukase of Catherine the Great in 1789, the year of the French Revolution. The French colony therefore bought a private house and eventually the land on which it was built and converted it into a church which was dedicated to Saint Louis and blessed and opened on March 30, 1791. When it became too small, it was replaced by the present church, which was solemnly dedicated on November 24, 1835.

The parish became an impressive complex, which eventually included not only a rectory for the priest, but also two schools for approximately 600 students: Saint Philip Neri School for boys, two-thirds of whom were

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residents, and Saint Catherine School for girls. It also included Saint Dorothy Home, a 45-room hospice for the community's elderly poor. The French ambassador, in consultation with Church authorities, would find the priest to serve the parish and advise local authorities.

On January 23, 1918, in the wake of the October Revolution of 1917, the ruling Council of the People's Commissars decreed the separation of Church from State and of School from Church, and it nationalized all church property. Some time later, it confiscated this property, except for a certain number of church buildings. There was so much unrest in the air that, by January 1919, the French Government feared it could no longer protect its citizens and formally asked them all to leave the country. Anyone staying on would do so at his own risk. The French Government would assume the travel expenses of those who could not afford them.

Upon the recommendation of the trustees, Fr. Jean-Marie Vidal, pastor of Saint Louis-des-Français Church in Moscow, decided to request a leave-of-absence from the archbishop of Mohilev and to depart with his parishioners. The French government's invitation would have been sufficient reason. But there was also the fact that, given the expected mass-exodus of the faithful, there would be hardly anyone left to minister to. Also, in this time of anarchy, foreigners would run enormous risks once their consulates were gone, to say nothing of the harassment and even the famine which they would undoubtedly have to face. The needs of the few remaining people could be met by a priest-administrator from Saints Peter and Paul Church, now served by Polish priests. One of them, Fr. Vierzbicki, happened to speak French. Until the return of the pastor, he could assure services on a part-time basis.

## **Bishop Pie Neveu, A.A. (September 4, 1926–July 31, 1936)**

In 1923, Fr. Pie Neveu tried to draw the attention of Church authorities to the fact that the Catholic Church in Russia was without a hierarchy. In early 1926, he was called to Moscow by the French ambassador and received the visit, while he was there, of Bishop Michel d'Herbigny, S.J., a distinguished Slavic scholar and rector of the Russicum in Rome. In the sole presence of Colonel Bergeret, the military attaché at the Italian Embassy, and of Mrs. Alice Ott, an admirable French woman who was the legal guardian of Saint Louis-des-Français Church from 1918 to 1947, Fr. Neveu was ordained a bishop in Saint Louis Church on April 21, 1926 and appointed Apostolic Administrator of Moscow. After his ordination, he returned to Makeyevka in order to give Bishop d'Herbigny time to perform other episcopal ordinations throughout the country. In September, he moved from Makeyevka to Moscow where he made known his episcopal ordination on October 3 in Saints Peter and Paul Church and became pastor of Saint Louis-des-Français, which had been without a resident priest since the departure of Fr. Vidal in 1919.

The Soviet Government did not delay in reacting to these events, which had taken place without its knowledge and consent, and ironically, for the most part, only a few yards from the GPU headquarters and its notorious Lubyanka prison. Realizing that it had been duped, it decided to take immediate action. The Central Executive Committee, by special decree, forbade non-Soviet citizens from exercising any religious jurisdiction in the country as well as any ministry toward Soviet citizens. With one stroke of the pen, they provided the legal basis for dismantling the organization which had just been set up by Bishop d'Herbigny, with Bishop Neveu, a foreigner, as its

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head.

On October 18, 1926, the GPU summoned Bishop Neveu to its headquarters, directing him to “stop all ministry or leave the USSR within three days” because “according to the new legislation, only soviet citizens may conduct religious propaganda.” Upon the intervention of the French ambassador and government, he was allowed to remain on condition that he confine his ministry to non-Soviet citizens. Very soon thereafter, the regulation became the leitmotif of Soviet policy regarding foreign priests, already suggesting the basis for their eventual removal from Saint Louis Church in 1950. At the time, Bishop Neveu complied with the regulation to the extent that he did not seek out Soviet nationals, but he never turned away the numerous people, often from far distant parts of the USSR, who were courageous enough to come to him.

In hand-written letters dated July 26, 1926 and given to Bishop d’Herbigny just before he left for the Soviet Union, Pope Pius XI granted Bishop Neveu additional jurisdiction: in the event of death or prolonged impediment of any apostolic administrator, Bishop Neveu was authorized to appoint a successor.

During Bishop Neveu’s first six years in Moscow, he lived in various apartments throughout the city, sometimes under the direct surveillance of NKVD agents, generally receiving the faithful in the sacristy after Mass. At the expiration of a three-year contract in June 1932, however, it had become too difficult and unwise to search for another apartment. He therefore accepted the invitation of the new French ambassador, Count Dejean, to reside with him in his personal residence. He moved in on June 30th. The advantage was that he and his housekeeper were now secure. The disadvantage was that no Soviet citizens could ever visit him, lest they be considered spies.

The long years and the strained atmosphere in which Bishop Neveu lived seriously undermined his health. With time, his religious superiors tried to send him an associate in the person of a French, then a Belgian, then a Dutch Assumptionist, but to no avail.

# Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement (November 16, 1933)

The United States had maintained diplomatic relations with Russia from 1809 to 1917, and it immediately recognized the Provisional Government of Russia following the abdication of Czar Nicholas II. However, when this government was taken over by the Bolsheviks, the United States withheld recognition of the new regime because it had not come to power through legal means and had repudiated Russia's obligations in its regard, confiscating American property without compensation. In time, the new government also engaged in propaganda to destabilize American institutions, particularly the unions.

In 1932 the Soviet Union began actively searching for recognition. It needed American credits and worried about Japan on its eastern border. When Hitler came to power in 1933, it began worrying also about its western border. The United States, for its part, was in need of additional markets to help it out of the Great Depression. Wondering if the time had not come to recognize the Soviet government, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt requested that the question be studied. Judge Walton Moore and Mr. William Bullitt were each asked to prepare a memorandum on the more important conditions and understandings that might be considered significant in this regard.

Judge Moore suggested, *inter alia*, that it would be "best in advance of actual recognition to take the time necessary to explore the entire situation," including "the personal, religious, and property status and rights of our nationals in Russia and the ports of that country."<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Bullitt wrote in the same vein: "Before recognition and before loans, we shall find the Soviet government relatively amenable. After recognition

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<sup>1</sup>*Foreign Relations of the United States (FR), The Soviet Union. 1933-39, 4-15.*

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or loans, we should find the Soviet government adamant. Among the chief agreements which, in my opinion, must be reached before recognition are the following: ... Protection of the civil and religious rights of Americans in Russia, which are inadequately protected under current Russian practice.”<sup>2</sup>

Commenting on President Roosevelt’s desire to recognize the Soviet Union, Donald G. Bishop notes: “It was not surprising that [the President] and his advisors should have included the religious aspect of American-Soviet relations in the negotiations with Litvinov. If religion had not bulked large in discussion between the two governments, the same could not be said of American public opinion. The Soviet policy toward religion was a thing which the ‘man in the street’ could understand. He may have been confused by the talk of political, economic, and social theory, but he could react to a policy that sought to do away with religion. Many Americans had religious and ethnic interest in those in the Soviet Union who were being denied the chance to worship or were even punished for doing so.”<sup>3</sup>

Counting on his powers of persuasion, President Roosevelt decided to write to President Mikhail Kalinin of the USSR on October 10, 1933, inviting him to send a representative to Washington to discuss the matter, then to agree upon recognition. Seven days later, President Kalinin replied, appointing Maxim Litvinov to go to Washington to discuss the matter.

Mr. Litvinov arrived in New York on November 7, 1933, visiting the State Department in Washington the following day. Discussions were held over a period of nine days. At first, they bogged down, especially over the questions of propaganda, religion and espionage. It even looked as though negotiations might be called off. At one point, the President stepped in and Litvinov mellowed. The final meeting came on November 16 when, after Litvinov had presumably received approval from Moscow, both sides signed a series of statements, most of them in the form of parallel letters in which they agreed to items the United States thought essential to diplomatic recognition. Among the items were “freedom of conscience and religious liberty.” That topic received the longest and most detailed treatment of all those discussed.

In his letter to Mr. Litvinov, President Roosevelt first noted his personal concern that Americans residing temporarily or permanently in the Soviet Union “should enjoy in all respects the same freedom of conscience and re-

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<sup>2</sup>*Ibid*, 16-17.

<sup>3</sup>Donald G. Bishop, *The Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreements, The American View*, Syracuse University Press 1965 p. 61.

### *Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement*

ligious liberty which they enjoy at home.”<sup>4</sup> He stressed the fact that the US Government itself had “always striven to protect its nationals, at home and abroad, in the free exercise of *liberty of conscience and religious worship*, and from all *disability or persecution*<sup>5</sup> on account of their religious faith or worship.” He was clearly interested in protecting the rights of US citizens not Soviet nationals, though he did point out that “the rights enumerated below,” which he expected the Soviet Union to respect, “are those enjoyed in the United States by all citizens and foreign nationals and by American nationals in all the major countries of the world.” The rights covered six areas:

1. The right “to conduct without annoyance or molestation of any kind of *religious services and rites of a ceremonial nature*, including baptismal, confirmation, communion, marriage and burial rites, in the English language or in any other language<sup>6</sup> which is customarily used in the practice of the religious faith to which they belong.”
2. The right to conduct those services “in *churches, houses or other buildings* appropriate for such services, which they will be given the right and opportunity to lease, erect or maintain in convenient situations.”
3. “The right to *collect* from their co-religionists and to receive from abroad *voluntary offerings* for religious purposes.”
4. The unrestricted right “to impart *religious instruction* to their children, either singly or in groups, or to have such instruction imparted by persons whom they may employ for such purpose.”
5. The right “to *bury their dead* according to their religious customs in suitable and convenient places established for that purpose” along with “the right and opportunity to lease, lay out, occupy and maintain *burial grounds* subject to reasonable sanitary laws and regulations.”
6. “The right to have their spiritual needs ministered to by *clergymen, priests, rabbis* or other ecclesiastical functionaries.” It was understood

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<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 29-30.

<sup>5</sup>Italics are provided by the present author and are not contained in the original documents.

<sup>6</sup>Until 1963, the Catholic Church used the Latin language in its liturgy, both for the celebration of the Eucharist and the administration of the sacraments.

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that the clergymen (a) would be “nationals of the United States,” (b) would be “protected from all disability or persecution,” and (c) “would not be denied entry into the territory of the Soviet Union because of their ecclesiastical status.”

In his reply, Mr. Litvinov could not state that he shared the same deep concerns as the American President about religious rights nor could he state that the Soviet Government had always striven to protect the freedom of worship of its citizens. Nevertheless, he stated that his government “as a fixed policy, accords the nationals of the United States, within the territory of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the following rights,” which he enumerated almost in outline form and supported with direct quotations from Soviet law. Close examination of Mr. Litvinov’s letter suggests that:

1. His perspective was very different from President Roosevelt’s. For Mr. Litvinov, as for his government, religion was a negative element in society, “the opium of the people.” Moreover, the church was separated from the state, not for the purpose of granting all churches equal opportunity for development, but to facilitate the party’s ability to combat both the church and religious beliefs.
2. He, too, spoke of American citizens residing in the Soviet Union. He said nothing about Soviet citizens, either in the Soviet Union or in the United States.
3. Though he had agreed not to do so, Litvinov quoted Soviet law in support of his concessions. By so doing, he in effect:
  - (a) Granted no more and no less than what Soviet law already allowed.
  - (b) Provided the basis for a Soviet interpretation of the Agreement, something Roosevelt had tried to prevent.
  - (c) Gained a propaganda advantage. Not always realizing the full extent of the control exercised by the State over religion and forgetting that the administration of Soviet law was more important than the law itself, Americans could conclude that the Soviet religious situation was not as bad as it was made out to be.
4. By quoting Soviet law to support concepts basically alien to it, Litvinov—deliberately or not—forced its meaning. He not only gave a

### *Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement*

positive interpretation to laws which, in fact, were intended to curb religious freedom, but he omitted essential provisions which importantly modified the concrete circumstances in which that freedom was exercised.

As the subsequent history of the Chaplaincy illustrates, the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement, even amid difficulties and inherent shortcomings, was able to withstand time and challenge and has served its purpose. Except for a four-year hiatus between 1955 and 1959, there has always been a Catholic chaplain in Moscow and, since 1962, a Protestant one as well. The rights granted by the Agreement have stood on their own merit, independently of their supporting Soviet legislation, except, of course, for the leasing of churches and the establishment and maintenance of burial grounds.

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# **Part I: Moscow Chaplains before 1959**



# Father Leopold Braun

March 1, 1934–December 27, 1945

For Bishop Neveu, who had been alone in Moscow since 1926, the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement seemed like an answer to his prayer. The Assumptionist congregation to which he belonged was international in character. Since all attempts had failed to obtain visas for European Assumptionists, would it not be possible, by virtue of the Agreement, to obtain one for an American Assumptionist? The American could serve not only as chaplain to his compatriots but also as an assistant and companion to himself.

In a letter dated November 20, 1933, four days after the signing of the Agreement, the bishop transmitted that thought to his superiors, along with a hope that the US Embassy staff would include at least one solid Catholic. He also voiced concern that Litvinov might have succeeded in giving the impression that full religious freedom existed in the Soviet Union. Indeed, the Soviet newspapers had said that Mr. William C. Bullitt, the person who had been chosen to be the first US ambassador (1934–36), was favorably disposed toward the USSR. If this were true, he thought, how long would it take him to change his mind once he arrived?

Moreover, Bishop Neveu had heard from Mr. Hervé Alphand, the French ambassador in Moscow with whom he was living, that Mr. Lucien André Lefebvre de Laboulaye, the French ambassador in Washington, was a personal friend of President Roosevelt. He felt sure that the French ambassador could be induced to speak to President Roosevelt and tell him the true state of religious affairs in the Soviet Union.

On December 4, 1933, Bishop Neveu wrote that Mr. Alphand had volunteered to send a coded telegram to Mr. de Laboulaye urging him to do whatever he could to ensure the presence of at least a few Catholics on the US Embassy staff in Moscow. Presumably, this was done because, on December 18, Bishop Neveu noted that Mr. Alphand had been informed by

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Mr. de Laboulaye that Mr. Bullitt himself would select the people he wished to have with him in Moscow.

### **Appointment of Father Braun**

Like Bishop Neveu, Fr. Gervais Quénard, the Assumptionist Superior General, had been quick to see the opportunity of sending an American Assumptionist to Moscow as an assistant to the bishop. He had already written to Fr. Crescent Armanet, Vicar Provincial of the Assumptionist in North America, to ask if he would find a suitable candidate for the post.

Fr. Armanet chose to ask Fr. Leopold Braun, a professor at Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts. Born in New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1903, and ordained a priest in 1932, Fr. Braun seemed like the ideal candidate. His youth, reasoned Fr. Armanet, would allow him to be sufficiently adaptable in his new milieu, while his linguistic abilities—he spoke four languages—would enable him to master Russian without too much difficulty. In mid-December, Fr. Armanet therefore asked Fr. Braun if he would accept the assignment in the event it could be arranged. After obtaining his assent, he pledged him to secrecy while negotiations were under way.

Early in January 1934, Fr. Armanet—through Mr. Henry Goguen, an alumnus of Assumption College—was able to make an appointment with Mr. James Roosevelt, son of the President, who gave him letters of recommendation to Mr. Bullitt and to Mr. Phillips, the Undersecretary of State. He then set off for Washington where he found Mr. Bullitt receptive to his proposal of sending to Moscow a Catholic priest who would be primarily chaplain to the American citizens in the Soviet Union but also secretary to Bishop Neveu. Mr. Phillips thought the suggestion had merit because it would test Soviet sincerity regarding the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement.

Next, Fr. Armanet visited the French ambassador, Mr. de Laboulaye, to ask for advice as well as the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Amleto G. Cicognani, to obtain his approval. He went to New York to enlist the aid of Cardinal Patrick Hayes, who, in turn, obtained the support of Mr. James J. Farley, US postmaster general and a close friend of President Roosevelt.

Thinking that perhaps matters might be more easily arranged after his arrival in Moscow, Mr. Bullitt acceded to Fr. Armanet's wish that Fr. Braun travel to the Soviet Union with him and his staff. Fr. Braun was summoned to Washington where Mr. Bullitt told him that he would need some kind of document giving assurance that Bishop Neveu was willing to accept him.

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At once, Fr. Armanet got in touch with Fr. Quénard who responded with a telegram stating that the bishop would be delighted to have Fr. Braun. Reassured by this and by the fact that Fr. Braun had manifested no anti-Soviet sentiment, Mr. Bullitt himself telephoned the Soviet ambassador, who had already taken up residence in Washington, to arrange an appointment for Fr. Braun. He insisted that this visa application would be considered a test of Soviet good faith.

Fr. Braun was well received at the Soviet Embassy where he was given forms to fill out. When asked why he wished to go to the Soviet Union, he replied that he had been chosen to be chaplain to the American citizens and secretary to Bishop Neveu. He showed Fr. Quénard's telegram to the Soviet official who, seemingly satisfied, told Fr. Braun that his request for a visa would be cabled to Moscow. On February 5, 1934, less than three weeks after Fr. Armanet's visit to Washington, the answer came back that the visa had been granted. Accordingly, Fr. Braun sailed from Le Havre on February 15th with Ambassador Bullitt and his staff.

### **Residence at the French Embassy**

After stopping a few days in Paris and Berlin, Fr. Braun arrived in Moscow on March 1, 1934. For the first few weeks, he lived at the Savoy Hotel. His first step was to register with the Moscow authorities as a minister of religion since, without such authorization, no clergyman could conduct services in a church or synagogue. Soon, Mr. Bullitt invited him to share his official residence, but Fr. Braun regretfully declined on the grounds that this would place him too far from Bishop Neveu to whom he was to be a companion. Then the French ambassador, Mr. Alphand, offered him a small room at the French Embassy where the bishop was staying. This he gratefully accepted.

### **Saint Louis Church**

Between the American and British embassies, Fr. Braun had about 15 English-speaking parishioners, obviously too few to justify having his own church. The simplest solution was to take advantage of Bishop Neveu's offer to use the French national church of Saint Louis des Français. An extra Mass at 9 A.M. on Sundays would not clash with regular parish services.

Fr. Braun, of course, said Mass in Latin, but he preached and made other announcements in English. On weekdays, while the Bishop was hearing

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confessions, Fr. Braun said Mass at 7:30 A.M., then served the Bishop's Mass at 8 A.M. After that came a simple breakfast of coffee and bread taken together in the sacristy where the bishop received those who wished to see him. During this period, and indeed for most of the day, Fr. Braun devoted himself to the study of Russian under the guidance of an elderly French lady.

Under threat of expulsion from the Soviet Union, Bishop Neveu had agreed to confine his ministry to non-Soviet citizens. His congregation, apart from an occasional diplomat, consisted mainly of French women—especially former teachers or governesses—who were all that remained of what had been a strong French colony in Moscow.

He did not seek out Soviet citizens. However, if they wished to attend his Mass or come to see him, which they did at their own risk, he never turned them away. There were about 25,000 Soviet Catholics in Moscow itself, mostly of Polish, Lithuanian or Latvian descent. For the most part, they attended the two Polish churches of Saints Peter and Paul (c. 15,000 parishioners) or Immaculate Conception (c. 50,000 parishioners), which were struggling as best they could with one priest each and were burdened with crushing taxes. But many Soviet Catholics also came to Saint Louis church (c. 5,000 parishioners). And because the religious persecution had eliminated almost all the priests in the Soviet Union, many people came to consult the bishop from distant parts of the huge country.

### **Apostolic administrator and pastor of St. Louis Church**

The bishop's health continued to deteriorate. In the summer of 1936, his doctors ordered him back to France for treatment. Instead of receiving the written guarantee of a re-entry visa to the Soviet Union before leaving, he was merely given a verbal promise. The visa was never granted. In 1938, Soviet authorities told the French ambassador in Moscow that, if a visa were granted, they would not be responsible for the bishop's life or safety after he crossed the Soviet border. Fortunately, before his departure, the Bishop had appointed Fr. Braun acting apostolic administrator and pastor of Saint Louis while he was away.

### **Ministering to Soviet citizens**

Within a year of the Bishop's departure, the situation at Saint Louis des Français evolved rapidly. The priest at Saints Peter and Paul was repatriated,

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and the one at Immaculate Conception, after trying to take care of both parishes, had been arrested. Catholics who used to attend these churches now began flocking to Saint Louis, the only Catholic church still open in Moscow.

Both Masses each Sunday were crowded. For the benefit of the Soviet citizens who now formed part of the Congregation, Fr. Braun began adding to his usual sermon in either French or English a short word in Russian. His typewritten schedule of daily services now appeared on the door of the church in English, French and Russian.

As his other priestly duties such as baptisms, sick calls and funerals also increased correspondingly, he saw no reason to limit his activities. On the one hand, the Soviet Constitution guaranteed freedom of conscience and, on the other, he knew of no Soviet law forbidding a foreign priest to minister to the spiritual needs of Soviet citizens or forbidding Soviet citizens from approaching a foreign priest.

Nevertheless, though there was no direct attempt to interfere with him personally, many of those who attended Mass at Saint Louis were subjected to intimidating threats or arrested on the general charge of “relation with a foreign power.”

### **Financial resources and charities**

Fr. Braun was kept busy and had no financial worries. The taxes on the church were paid by the French Embassy. Like Bishop Neveu, he received sums of money from the Pontifical Commission for Russia at the Holy See, although these came at irregular intervals and soon ceased altogether. His solvency, however, was mainly assured by the abundance of Mass stipends which came to him as the result of his being the only Catholic priest in Moscow allowed to say Mass in public.

Since Fr. Braun’s simple needs were more than sufficiently supplied, he was able to devote most of his funds to helping the poor of Moscow and, to the extent possible, the priests and parishioners who had been deported or imprisoned for political offenses.” Chief among his charities was a group of Dominican sisters who had been driven from their convent and dispersed. The community had been founded by Anna Abrikosov who, with her husband, had embraced Catholicism in Paris in 1908 and returned to Moscow in 1910. During a visit to Rome in 1913, both had become Dominican tertiaries. As a result, their home in Moscow had become an important center among

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the struggling Russian Catholics of the Eastern Rite.

In 1923, all the members of this community were arrested, imprisoned, and eventually deported to Siberia. Upon completion of their sentence, they were not allowed to return to Moscow, so they settled in a small village about 60 miles from the capital where they succeeded in leading a limited form of community life. Despite their broken health suffered as a result of their imprisonment and hard labor, and despite the difficulties encountered in finding work because of their “prison record,” they nevertheless persevered in their religious life. When the opportunity arose, they would manage to get to Moscow to see the priest at Saint Louis to discuss their difficulties. They were almost entirely dependent on the charity, first of Bishop Neveu, then of Fr. Braun.

### **Attempt to form an all-Soviet Parish Council**

It was when his church began to be filled with Soviet Catholics in 1937 that Fr. Braun started to experience his first difficulties with the Soviet authorities. First, he was requested to reconstitute the *dvatsatka* or Parish Council of “twenty members,” which was responsible to the State for (1) the administration and use of the church property, (2) the upkeep of the church building and of its articles of worship, and (3) the selection of its executive board composed of three persons to oversee, *inter alia*, all of its financial affairs.

Hitherto, this council had been composed of French and other foreign citizens. Now, he was told, it must be composed solely of Soviet citizens. Seeing this as a move by the Soviets to obtain control of the church and parish, Fr. Braun vehemently opposed it. After personally making the round of the Diplomatic Corps to compile a new list, once again preponderantly composed of non-Soviet nationals, he submitted it to the authorities who *apparently* accepted it.

### **Parish records**

Shortly thereafter, a Soviet official came to the sacristy ordering Fr. Braun to hand over the baptismal register and other church records. He refused on the grounds that, according to Soviet law the Church was separated from the State. This brought an official note from the Soviet Foreign Ministry to the

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French Consul stating that Fr. Braun was not authorized to interpret Soviet law and threatening legal proceedings if the records were not forthcoming.

Because the French were willing to comply with the Soviet request in order to avoid unpleasantness, Fr. Braun sought the support of US Ambassador Joseph E. Davies (1936–38) who took up the matter with Mr. Litvinov himself. In his letter, Mr. Davies pointed out that he was making a personal appeal, not an official representation, and he reminded Mr. Litvinov of the spirit of the Agreement made with President Roosevelt. He hoped that the Soviet Government would not allow this matter to develop into an incident which would offend the sensibilities of the American people. Presumably, as the result of the ambassador's intervention, Fr. Braun heard no more about the parish records.

### **Income taxes**

According to Soviet law, a clergyman had to pay income tax at the rate of 40% of his salary. Since Fr. Braun drew no salary, he had paid no tax since his arrival in Moscow, nor had he been requested to do so. It came therefore as a surprise and shock to him when, in 1940, he was summoned to the Income Tax Bureau and informed that he must pay income tax for the previous three years. He refused to do so, saying that the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement gave him immunity from taxation.

The new US Ambassador, Mr. Lawrence A. Steinhardt, (1939–41), did not agree with this claim, pointing out that Fr. Braun did not have diplomatic status and did not enjoy any special privileges. He advised Fr. Braun to pay the tax. There then followed a stormy scene during which, according to Fr. Braun, the ambassador stated that Soviet officials wanted him to “stop having relations with Russians,” that “they were wild” at seeing Saint Louis filled with worshipers, and that his (Fr. Braun's) problems might disappear if his contacts with Soviet citizens were to cease. Fr. Braun replied that he would neither pay Soviet income taxes nor exclude Soviet Catholics from Sunday Masses. Although he was not troubled again for income taxes, his relation with Ambassador Steinhardt became and remained strained.

### **Thefts at Saint Louis Church**

Between December 6, 1939, and February 15, 1941, the church of Saint Louis-des-Français was forcibly entered and robbed five times, the Blessed Sacra-

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ment being profaned on two occasions. Fr. Braun always notified the Soviet authorities, but each time the detectives assigned to the case professed being completely baffled. On February 17, 1941, Ambassador Steinhardt sent an official note to Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov recapitulating the series of crimes, giving details of the objects stolen, and adding that the church had been “outrageously desecrated.” He referred to his note of complaint about the fourth robbery to which he had not received the courtesy of a reply. He concluded that “it may reasonably be assumed therefore that the robberies which I have brought to the attention of the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs may be regarded as part of a deliberate plan to induce Fr. Braun to close his church which is now the only foreign church functioning in Moscow.”

This time, there was a reply in which the Soviet Government blamed the Parish Council of Saint Louis for being derelict in its duty of safeguarding the church and its property. It also stated that two minors had been arrested, that some stolen articles had been recovered, and that the investigation would continue. On March 19, the ambassador reported to the State Department that he had been informed that the various crimes had been committed by four professional thieves whose names were given. All had been arrested and were being prosecuted. The stolen articles which had been recovered would be restored to the “church attendant.”

Since the church had been nationalized at the time of the Revolution, Fr. Braun and the Parish Council were technically responsible for all losses and damages. Accordingly, he received a bill for several thousand rubles. He thought it only added insult to injury. Though the French Embassy seemed willing to pay the sum, Fr. Braun refused and eventually got his way. It was indeed difficult to see how the robberies could have taken place without at least the connivance of the authorities because guards were posted around the NKVD headquarters just a few yards away.

## **Difficulties during World War II**

Shortly after the German invasion of Soviet territory, Vichy France, under pressure from the occupying Germans, broke diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. On July 16, 1941, the French Embassy staff left Moscow. This meant that Fr. Braun, who had been living at the French Embassy since 1934, was forced to seek a new residence. He approached Mr. Steinhardt who refused to accept him at the US Embassy. Through the Turkish Embassy, which was protecting French interests, he eventually found himself an

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apartment.

As a matter of fact, Ambassador Steinhardt, ignoring Fr. Braun's expressed determination to stay at his post, informed him that he had arranged for his repatriation. Fr. Braun immediately sent a cable to his Superiors saying that he was willing to leave if Rome approved of this, but that he was in perfect health and able to hold on. Forty hours later, the reply came back stating that he could stay.

In April 1942, Mr. Roger Garreau arrived in Moscow as the representative of General de Gaulle and Free France. He at once asked Fr. Braun if he would be willing to move back to the embassy building in a supervisory capacity. Fr. Braun agreed and moved into an annex there. Unfortunately, his relationship with Mr. Garreau was not a happy one. He considered the Minister much too *Communist* in his sympathies and refused his request for permission to film a Mass at Saint Louis, saying that "after witnessing the progressive extermination of Catholicism in Russia," he considered it "revolting to be asked to use the Mass as Soviet propaganda."

However, he wrote, there had been a relaxation of religious persecution since the invasion. This, he considered to be a wartime necessity: a means of uniting the Russian people and of counteracting German propaganda that tried to justify the war as a religious crusade against Bolshevism. At the same time, he could rejoice that people were able to practice their religion without molestation, that the Masses at Saint Louis were filled to overflowing, and that he could go freely about his priestly duties. His food ration, however, had been cut so low that Admiral William H. Standley, US Ambassador in Moscow (1942—43), wrote that "on numerous occasions, I gave him food from my own mess and also furnished him with firewood."

## **Altercation and trial**

Mr. Garreau had been alternating his residence between Moscow and Kuibyshev, to which the Diplomatic Corps had been evacuated. When he permanently moved back to the French Embassy in Moscow in May 1944, Fr. Braun moved out of the annex and into his former quarters at the embassy.

On October 31, 1944, he had an altercation with the embassy janitor, a Soviet citizen whom Fr. Braun accused of stealing his firewood. Fr. Braun admits that he laid hands on the man and threatened him, but he denies that he struck him. The janitor, however, filed a complaint with the authorities that Fr. Braun assaulted him by striking him on the nose. A summons was

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issued. According to Fr. Braun, the trial was postponed until May 1945 because of the impending visit to Moscow of General Charles de Gaulle. In the meantime, he was told that his rooms at the embassy were needed for another purpose. Through Burobin, the Soviet Agency which took care of providing housing and other legitimate needs of foreigners, the French Embassy obtained an apartment for him at 15 Borisoglebsky Pereulok and paid rent in advance for the period through December. The lease, however, was in Fr. Braun's personal name.

In the spring of 1945, Mr. Edward J. Flynn, a close friend of Cardinal Francis Spellman and of President Roosevelt, visited Moscow. Fr. Braun writes that Mr. Flynn told him that, at Yalta, Stalin had requested that Fr. Braun be removed from Moscow but that the President had refused to do this. On his return to the United States, Mr. Flynn reported that Fr. Braun was narrow-minded, had fixed ideas and should be recalled. Fr. Armanet was summoned by Cardinal Spellman and informed of these findings. Fr. Armanet wrote to Fr. Quénard on April 27, 1945, to apprise him of the situation.

There can be no doubt that Fr. Braun's upcoming trial was an embarrassment to the US Embassy. The opinion there was that Fr. Braun had no alternative to standing trial except to leave the Soviet Union. If he did, the whole affair would probably be dropped. When Fr. Braun did appear in court in May, he conducted his own defense. The only witness to the incident stated that she had not seen the priest strike the janitor. Nevertheless, the Court ruled that Fr. Braun was guilty and fined him 100 rubles. After paying the fine, he appealed the conviction. At a new trial, held in August 1945, he was exonerated and the case was ordered stricken from the records.

# Father Georges Antonio Laberge

October 26,1945–January 28, 1949

## A successor rather than an assistant

During the summer of 1943, the Assumptionist superiors became very concerned about the well-being of Fr. Braun. He had been alone in Moscow for seven of his nine years under very trying circumstances. The superiors therefore decided to send him an assistant in the person of Fr. Georges-Antonio Laberge, A.A. In August 1943, Fr. Laberge applied for a passport. The State Department, without whose support nothing could be accomplished, apparently considered the time inopportune and consequently did not issue one until March 1944. For its part, the Soviet Union, which received Father's visa application the following month, never acted upon it.

Later in 1944, the US Embassy in Moscow did take up the question, only to be told by Mr. Andrei Vishinsky that the practical point was whether Fr. Laberge's presence in Moscow as assistant to Fr. Braun was really necessary. On November 20, 1944, Mr. George Kennan cabled the State Department from Moscow: "If it could be made clear to the Soviet authorities that the arrival of Fr. Laberge would be immediately followed by Fr. Braun's departure, the question of a visa might receive more prompt treatment here. I suspect that the reason for the hesitation in granting a visa is a desire on the part of the Soviet Authorities that there should be no more than one such official in Moscow."

By this time, Fr. Braun had been charged with assault. It seemed probable that his upcoming trial, whenever it took place, would make his position untenable. The visit to Moscow of Mr. Flynn and his subsequent

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report seemed to confirm the need for a change. Fr. Armanet's letter to Fr. Quénard in late April 1945 presumably suggested that something be done because, in early June, Fr. Laberge was told to make preparations for going to Moscow. At approximately the same time, i.e., just before Fr. Braun's trial in May, representatives at the French Embassy in Moscow had taken the precaution of sending for Fr. Charles Bourgeois, a French Jesuit of the Eastern Rite who was living in Tartu, Estonia.

### **Arrival of Father Laberge**

Fr. Laberge re-applied for a visa in July 1945. It was granted on August 15. He therefore left for Moscow on October 13, traveling via Paris where he spoke with Bishop Neveu, then via Berlin where he boarded a Soviet plane for Moscow. He arrived in the Soviet capital on October 26 and was met by Fr. Braun who had no idea that he was being recalled. Said Fr. Braun to his confrere: "My permit to stay has been extended so I won't be leaving Moscow for another year."

A few days later, the two priests were invited to lunch with Ambassador William A. Harriman (1943–46) who afterwards informed Fr. Braun that, in negotiating the visa for Fr. Laberge, he had asked for a two-month extension of his permit so that he could initiate his successor. The ambassador advised him not to attempt to stay longer than that.

### **Father Charles Bourgeois, S.J.**

On the morning of November 9, 1945, Frs. Braun and Laberge had a 45-minute interview with the French Ambassador, General Georges Catroux, during which the ambassador raised the question of the pastorate of Saint Louis-des-Français. After paying tribute to Fr. Braun's devotion for having accepted responsibility for the parish since 1936, General Catroux stated that there was now in Moscow a French-born priest, Fr. Charles Bourgeois, S.J. It would seem logical that he be the new pastor. Fr. Braun replied that, because of the suppression of the diocese of Mohilev and the disappearance of all the apostolic administrations except that of Moscow, it was for the Holy See to appoint a pastor for Saint Louis Church.

The Ambassador then complained that Rome had not consulted the French Government and asked Fr. Laberge how he came to be chosen. Fr. Laberge explained the recent history of the parish, adding that the pastorate

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of Saint Louis was only a secondary issue. Both Bishop Neveu and Fr. Braun were primarily Apostolic Administrators appointed by Rome and only secondarily pastors of Saint Louis. Rome, which had appointed him as their successor, was not so much concerned with national prestige as it was with ensuring canonical ecclesiastical succession. Both priests agreed that they could do nothing to modify the decision of the Holy See but assured the ambassador that Fr. Bourgeois was more than welcome to help in the parish, especially in matters concerning the French colony. And, on that note, the interview came to a close.

### **Departure of Father Braun**

Though Fr. Braun thought that Fr. Laberge was entitled to the apartment occupied by Fr. Bourgeois, he nevertheless accepted to share with Fr. Laberge his apartment at Borisoglebsky which had been obtained through the French Embassy. Fr. Laberge found Fr. Braun an excellent company at first but discovered that he was becoming more morose as the time for his departure drew near.

In the remaining two months, Fr. Braun briefed his successor on many aspects of life in the Soviet Union. Both agreed that it would be highly desirable not to be dependent on any embassy for lodging and that, at the end of the year, Fr. Laberge should assume responsibility for the rent of the apartment and should have the lease transferred to his name.

Fr. Braun was scheduled to leave the Soviet Union on December 26, 1945, but bad weather delayed the departure to the following day. He left on the same plane as Secretary of State James F. Byrnes.

### **Predicament over the apartment**

On January 4, 1946, French Ambassador Catroux wrote to Fr. Laberge saying that, as he had need of the accommodation currently occupied by Fr. Bourgeois, he was assigning him Fr. Laberge's apartment but that Fr. Laberge was welcome to stay until he found another residence. Fr. Laberge went at once to Burobin where he arranged to assume payment of the rent as of January 1, 1946. He also notified the ambassador, saying that he felt free to take this action because of the nature of the mission entrusted to him by the Holy See and because both US and French law provided for the separation of Church and State.

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There followed an exchange of letters in which the ambassador claimed that Fr. Laberge occupied the apartment only as a guest of the French Embassy and that he had no right in conscience to take such a step. Fr. Laberge felt that, as the representative of the Holy See, he should not be ordered around by the French ambassador and felt too that nobody had the right to impose another resident on him against his will, even though he had no objection personally to Fr. Bourgeois. He did, however, offer to vacate the apartment if Burobin found him alternative accommodations.

At the same time, he mentioned his predicament to Mr. Kennan, US Chargé d'Affaires in the absence of Ambassador Harriman. Without exerting any pressure, Mr. Kennan supported him and the issue was dropped. Burobin, incidentally, collected rent from both Fr. Laberge and the French Embassy during the period of the misunderstanding.

### **Ministry to Soviet citizens**

Fr. Laberge was agreeably surprised and encouraged to see the church of Saint Louis filled at each of the three Sunday Masses. True, the building was small, but the average Sunday attendance was about 1,100, 95% of whom were Soviet citizens, most of whom were former parishioners of the closed churches of Saint Peter and Paul and Immaculate Conception. Like Fr. Braun, Fr. Laberge preached each Sunday in Russian, French and English. Upwards of 150 would receive Holy Communion. At weekday Masses, the congregation seldom numbered fewer than 40 persons.

Fr. Laberge's apartment was about two miles from the church. Because the car left him by Fr. Braun was almost completely worn out, he usually traveled by trolley, a ride of 20 minutes. After daily Mass at 8:30 A.M., he continued the practice of his predecessor of receiving visitors in the sacristy. He would then visit the sick and the dying, either at home or in the hospital, which sometimes involved a journey of several miles outside the city. On such out-of-town calls, a relative or friend of the sick person would often accompany him. However, the situation was very inconvenient, particularly for funerals. When the body could not be brought to the church because of the distance, the funeral service had to be held either in the home of the deceased or in the cemetery. In April 1946, Fr. Laberge decided to buy himself a second-hand Chevrolet which greatly facilitated his movements.

## **Leningrad**

Fr. Laberge tells us that he enjoyed even more freedom than diplomats and that he was allowed to travel three times to Leningrad in the summer and autumn of 1946 to hold services in the French National church of Notre Dame de France. Although Fr. Bourgeois, on visit to Leningrad in September 1945, had been able to say Mass there, the church had had no resident priest since 1941. Fr. Bourgeois would have liked to take charge of Notre Dame de France, but the fact that he continued to say Mass in the Eastern Rite was sufficient to make him *persona non grata*. He was expelled from the Soviet Union during Holy Week of 1946.

The situation of the Leningrad Catholics, estimated at 30,000, was truly pathetic. No wonder then that, during Fr Laberge's visits, the people attended Mass and received the Sacraments with such eagerness and joy. In the absence of a priest, groups of faithful would assemble in church on Sundays and Holy Days to pray in common. Baptism was administered privately by a Madame Souchal, an 84 year-old French lady who was custodian of Notre Dame de France. She had distinguished herself in that capacity during the siege of Leningrad by her total disregard of personal safety, defense regulations, air raid warnings and bombs.

In November 1946, the Catholics of Leningrad had the consolation of again having a resident priest who was sent, with the agreement of Soviet authorities, by the Archbishop of Riga (Latvia).

## **Turning point: 1947 Conference of Foreign Ministers**

Fr. Laberge perceived a change for the worse in the religious situation in Moscow soon after the Conference of Foreign Ministers held in Moscow in March–April 1947. The common consensus of opinion was that Eastern Europe was lost to the West both politically and socially. During December 1946 and January 1947, an optimistic note was evident in the Soviet press and radio broadcasts, but it disappeared by mid-February, probably as a result of a speech by US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles which warned that any policy of appeasement towards the Soviet Union would have dire consequences.

During the first six weeks of 1947, the US Government sent five formal notes to the Soviet Government. On March 12, two days after the opening of the Conference of Foreign Ministries, there came the proclamation of the *Tru-*

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*man Doctrine* stating that it was the policy of the United States “to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressure.” Although the Soviet Union was not mentioned by name, nobody at the time doubted that Mr. Truman had that country in mind

In Europe, there was “amazement and alarm” at this “either-or challenge,” but in Moscow there was anger and resentment. In such an atmosphere, prospects for the success of the Conference were not very bright. In fact, many concluded that it was a diplomatic failure.

At this time, Fr. Laberge made it known that he would like his Superiors to begin taking steps to replace him because he was now feeling inadequate to the mission entrusted to him. He pointed out that, in diplomatic circles, a tour of duty in Moscow rarely lasted more than two years, and if it did, it was considered a hardship.

### **Arrival of Father Jean de Matha Thomas**

Though the Conference of Foreign Ministers produced no diplomatic achievements, it had one happy consequence for Fr. Laberge and the parish of Saint Louis-des-Français. Mr. Georges Bidault, the French Premier and Foreign Minister, had taken advantage of his presence in Moscow to personally request a visa for a French Assumptionist to go as pastor of the French national church. The request was granted. On May 23, 1947, Fr. Jean-de-Matha Thomas, A.A., who had spent several years in Yugoslavia, some of them in a Nazi concentration camp, joined Fr. Laberge in Moscow.

Fr. Laberge, of course, was still Apostolic Administrator, and, in that capacity, the ecclesiastical superior of Fr. Thomas. In the context of the friendly relationship which had developed between Fr. Laberge and the French Embassy, the French Government had no problems recognizing the higher authority of the American. In fact, when the embassy decided to donate a ciborium to the church of Saint Louis in July 1947, Ambassador Catroux presented it to Fr. Laberge rather than to Fr. Thomas who was now its pastor.

### **Designation of a successor: Father Louis Dion**

Fr. Laberge’s request to be relieved had been taken seriously by his Superiors. They turned to Fr. Louis F. Dion, A.A., of Assumption College, Worcester,

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Massachusetts. On June 20, 1947, Fr. Dion was in Washington to pursue his quest for a visa, having met the previous day with Mr. Michael F. Doyle, an international lawyer of Philadelphia and an influential supporter of the Moscow Mission.

From Mr. Doyle, Fr. Dion learned that the State Department would support the application for the visa but regretted that it had not been consulted or advised before the sending of Fr. Thomas to Moscow. It felt that his presence there would make it more difficult for Fr. Dion to obtain a visa. There was no doubt in Mr. Doyle's mind that the State Department shared his own preference that the pastor of Saint Louis should be an American citizen because of the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement.

While in Washington, Fr. Dion met Mr. Llewelyn Thompson, Chief of the Russian Desk at the State Department, who explained to him some of the difficulties he might encounter in Moscow. He did not think that Fr. Dion's visa would be unduly delayed, since it had been made quite clear that he was going as a replacement for Fr. Laberge.

Fr. Dion then went to see the Apostolic Delegate who told him that he would most likely be the representative of the Holy See and consequently Fr. Thomas' ecclesiastical superior. His name had been sent to Rome with a request for special faculties. He was to leave for Moscow as soon as his papers were in order. Fr. Dion returned to Worcester to wait.

### **Stepped-up harassments and persecutions**

Meanwhile, like most of the foreigners in Moscow at this time, Fr. Laberge was running into difficulties. It was significant of the new Soviet attitude that, in the fall of 1947, a US intelligence officer advised him that it would be very unwise for him to continue driving personally his recently acquired, almost new Ford car because, in case of an accident involving a Soviet citizen, he might find himself in serious trouble.

On September 25, Lisa, his cook, was arrested, allegedly for black-marketing. Fr. Laberge wrote a letter vouching for her honesty, only to be warned by a Soviet official not to interfere in a matter which concerned a Soviet law agency dealing with one of its nationals. It was Fr. Laberge's opinion that Lisa, who was of German extraction, was too fond of speaking in German on the telephone and of speaking to German prisoners-of-war. This, he felt, was the real reason for the charge fabricated against her, rather than some anti-religious motive.

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Fr. Laberge learned that new attacks were being made on the Catholic Church and the Holy Father in various publications and that they could not have been made without Government approval. He nevertheless refused to alter his personal conduct and hesitated to see the arrest of people around him as evidence of persecution. For example, he saw political overtones in the arrest, in December 1947, of Mrs. Ott and her daughter Alice. Mrs. Ott had been custodian and financial administrator of the church since the Revolution. Both she and her daughter were trained singers and the mainstay of the parish choir. Both worked for the French Embassy. In Fr. Laberge's judgment, they could have been arrested, not for an anti-religious motive but as a reprisal for the seizure by French police of a communist arms cache at Camp Beaugard in France. Mr. Ott was sent to prison, her daughter to a psychiatric hospital.

November 1947 was personally difficult on Fr Laberge. It brought the loss of his mother whose funeral he was unable to attend.

December saw the long-awaited currency reform which devalued the ruble ten to one. If it did not leave Fr Laberge destitute, as it did many of the people who had saved a little money during the war, it nevertheless compounded his financial problems.

Fortunately, his needs were now being alleviated by generous grants from the Apostolic Delegate in Washington. The French Embassy too was helping and had, since April 1947, resumed payment of the rent for his apartment, though the bill continued to be addressed to him. On the other hand, he had been put to considerable expense by the purchase of a car which he, like his predecessors, considered a necessity. Mass stipends, once a great source of income, were diminishing. The official rate of foreign exchange was poor and the purchasing power of the devalued ruble was greatly reduced. Accordingly, Fr. Laberge had to cut back on some of his charities.

Unwilling as he had been to believe that the recent arrests of his parishioners were, in reality, instances of direct religious persecution, he was forced to that conclusion in February 1948 when a young university student was arrested for having ignored repeated warnings to stop attending church services.

### **Financial bind**

On the financial side, the drain on his funds became considerable. In March 1948, he reported that the parish was no longer self-supporting. The ex-

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change rate was leveling off at 5.3 rubles to the dollar. The rewiring of his apartment, necessitated by a small fire and the fire laws of the country, was costing him 7,700 rubles. To meet his needs, he had had to request special collections from the personnel at the US and French Embassies. As for food, he did have enough to eat, thanks in great measure to his chauffeur who did not hesitate to join the various queues to obtain whatever was available.

### **Snooping, a reality of life**

But this same chauffeur, one of his parishioners, did not hesitate, either, to go through his personal papers. When told of the incident by the housekeeper who had caught him Fr. Laberge noted that the chauffeur was there through the courtesy of the secret police and had no choice but to furnish them with information. Besides, he [Fr. Laberge] had nothing to hide.

### **Improved relations with French and US Embassies**

Relations with the French and American Embassies had improved. Father was immensely gratified by the changed attitude at the French Embassy in his regard, particularly by that of Ambassador Catroux who went to great lengths to erase the memory of the misunderstanding of two year before. At the US Embassy, Ambassador and Mrs. Smith were kindness itself, often inviting Fr. Laberge for meals. The ambassador had even volunteered to supply altar wine for the church for as long as he remained in Moscow.

### **Cold War**

What concerned Fr. Laberge most, however, was the unsettling international situation which developed as a result of the Communist takeover in Czechoslovakia, the Berlin Blockade, and the Allied airlift to West Berlin in June 1948. War, if it came, would make his position untenable. And he feared it would come, all the more so that 80% of the people in the United States, according to a Gallup poll, supported American firmness in Berlin, even if it meant war.

## **Visit with Father Dufault in London**

Upon learning that Fr. Wilfrid Dufault, the Assumptionist Provincial of North America, would be in Europe during the month of June and July of 1948, Fr. Laberge decided to seize the opportunity to speak with him. Accordingly, he requested, and was granted, both an exit and a re-entry visa valid for one month. Without the latter, he would not have dared to leave Moscow.

They met in London early in July 1948. Fr. Dufault first told him that there was still no word from the Soviets on a visa for Fr. Dion who was to succeed him and that he had gone to Washington in May to discuss the question with members of the State Department. At that time, he decided to renew the request, mentioning, however, that he was not optimistic about the outcome because Soviet authorities were issuing very few visas. Fr. Laberge shared that pessimism, but for a different reason. He felt that the US Government was not exerting sufficient pressure, possibly because Ambassador Smith, considering him quiet and unobtrusive, was not willing to risk the mistakes that a newcomer might make.

Fr. Laberge then discussed several aspects of parish life, especially pastoral problems. He concluded by urging Fr. Dufault not to leave any priest too long in Moscow. Then, after visiting Archbishop Godfrey, the Apostolic Delegate in London, he returned to Moscow on July 30 via Stockholm and Helsinki.

## **Father Thomas vacations in France**

Encouraged by the success of his venture, he urged Fr. Thomas to ask permission to take a vacation in France. The permission was granted, along with a re-entry visa valid until November 23, 1948.

## **Father Laberge denounces persecutions**

During Fr. Thomas' absence, Fr. Laberge received further proof that there really was a religious persecution taking place. A young lady was arrested the day after she began singing in the choir at Saint Louis, as were three of the Dominican nuns whom he was supporting. To make matters worse, the October issue of the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* stated that the number of Catholics was increasing, thanks to the Vatican-inspired propa-

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ganda conducted by the priests at the French church. It bewailed the fact that so many of the faithful were being led astray. This, Fr. Laberge noted, was the first open attack from the Moscow Patriarchate and suggested close cooperation with the Kremlin.

In face of all this, Fr. Laberge, fearing that silence would be construed as fear or even pro-Soviet sympathy, decided to use his Sunday sermons as a vehicle of protest. He did this on several occasions, particularly on *Gaudete* Sunday, December 16, 1948, when he pointed out a twofold difference between the persecution of early Christians and that of the present time. "First," he noted, "no article of the Roman Constitution guaranteed religious freedom. Second, while martyrs then were specifically accused of being Christians, today they are accused of every conceivable thing except that. It is, however, not too difficult to pierce the thin veil of these false accusations and to detect the real motive."

### **Re-designation of a successor: Father Louis-Robert Brassard**

Fr. Laberge was still anxious to be replaced, especially now that the situation was deteriorating. He feared being the victim of a trumped-up charge. He learned, however, that the visa request for Fr. Dion had been dropped because of the grave inconvenience which would follow if he were moved from his important post at Assumption College in the middle of the academic year. In his stead, Fr. Louis-Robert Brassard, A.A. had been designated and was applying for a visa, but there was no knowing when this might be granted.

### **Fateful trip to the United States**

Foreseeing that his stay in the Soviet Union might be prolonged indefinitely, and feeling an urgent need to consult with his superiors about Church interests and his own personal affairs, Fr. Laberge decided, after discussing the matter with Ambassador Smith, to apply for an exit and re-entry visa, hoping to travel with Mr. Smith to the United States on December 26, 1948. The application, submitted on December 14, was honored on January 21, 1949 and included a re-entry visa valid for two months.

Leaving Moscow on January 28, 1949, Fr. Laberge arrived at La Guardia Airport in New York on February 1. On February 24, he received a letter

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from the Soviet Embassy in Washington inviting him to call there “in regard to a matter of interest to you.” When he presented himself on February 26, he was informed that his Soviet re-entry had been cancelled. No reason was given. When he asked if Fr. Brassard’s application for a visa, filed on February 5, had received a favorable reply, he was told that there would be news “in the near future.”

#### **Effort by Mr. Doyle**

During the month of March 1949, Mr. Doyle, in his capacity as legal counsel to the Assumptionists, made several approaches both to the Soviet Embassy and to the State Department. He also wrote to the Secretary of State, Mr. Dean Acheson, summarizing the situation and pointing out that, since there was now no American clergyman in Moscow or indeed in the entire Soviet Union, Soviet authorities were being allowed to ignore the rights guaranteed by the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement which provided that no clergyman would be denied entry to the Soviet Union because of his ecclesiastical status. He urged Mr. Acheson to take prompt official action to have Fr. Brassard’s application for a visa approved by the Soviet Government.

# [Father Jean-de-Matha Thomas]<sup>7</sup>

May 23, 1947–September 1, 1950

Meanwhile, in Moscow, Fr. Thomas was hearing all kinds of rumors but was sure of only one thing: Fr. Laberge had not returned by March 20. He therefore concluded that there must be some complication regarding his re-entry visa. He had questioned the wisdom of Fr. Laberge's trip but found no consolation in seeing his misgivings justified because he was now alone in Moscow. The news that the US Embassy had refused visas to two Orthodox priests gave him some satisfaction, but he doubted whether this slight reprisal would hasten the coming of Fr. Brassard.

## Financial situation worsens

Fr. Thomas was hoping that Fr. Dufault would continue to send funds from the United States. Shortly after Fr. Laberge's departure, the cost of electricity for the church went up more than 400% (from 60 kopeks to 2.50 rubles), almost exhausting his small reserves. The ones to suffer most were the Dominican nuns whom he could no longer help as before. He was spending merely one-third of the previous budget for his own support and was eating only the cheapest of food. Since the arrest of the cook, he no longer had her wages to pay, and, in her absence, had a good excuse for not entertaining visitors. Yet, despite his savings, he had less money because the

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<sup>7</sup>The name of Fr. Jean-de-Matha Thomas is placed in brackets because, as a French citizen, he was never technically part of the American Chaplaincy, whose history is the object of this booklet. However, his situation was so inextricably linked to that of Frs. Laberge and Brassard and to the evolution that was taking place at St. Louis Church that the latter cannot be understood without a knowledge of what was happening to him.

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de-rationing that went into effect in December 1948 was accompanied by a substantial increase in the cost of living.

Moreover, he was now in debt. He had had to borrow \$500 from the Belgian ambassador and was about to seek help from the French ambassador. He was concerned about the repairs which were needed on the church. Before his departure, Fr. Laberge, wishing to forestall any accusation of neglect, had gone to see Mr. Polyansky, head of the Department for Foreign Cults, and had assured him that the church would be repaired during the current year. When asked where the money would come from, Fr. Laberge had said that the French Embassy would assume responsibility. However, because he did not want to give the Soviets any pretext for taking over the church, he raised \$14,000 when he got back to the United States: \$7,000 for repairs, \$4,000 for a Hammond organ for the church, and \$3,000 for current expenses. Since the State Department transferred its funds openly, Soviet authorities would certainly know that the cost of repairs was being met mainly with American money.

### **Gathering signatures for a new Parish Council**

More unsettling, however, was the fact that a woman was circulating among Soviet Catholics, collecting signatures for an alleged petition to form a Polish parish. Though Fr. Thomas thought the idea legitimate in itself, he wondered how such a parish and its pastor could ever, under any circumstances, be free of government control. More importantly, he questioned the lady's ability to solicit such signatures over a ten-week period: she could not have done so without government approval.

### ***De jure* expropriation of Saint Louis church in 1918**

Fr. Thomas began to feel more and more uncomfortable. On May 7, 1949, he drew up and signed a document which gave a brief history of Saint Louis parish, together with a summary of recent developments. Recalling the decree of nationalization of church property in 1918, he pointed out that no exception had been made for property owned by foreigners and that, in spite of protests from Fr. Vidal, the then-pastor, and from the Danish Consulate which was representing French interests, the law had been enforced and a list of 100 worshipers—almost all non-Soviet citizens—had been supplied in

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order to obtain use of the church. These people were to be held personally responsible for the contents of the building and its maintenance. An inventory was drawn up, and, again under protest, the registers of baptisms, marriages and deaths had been handed over to the civil authorities. Three Catholics, Mr. and Mrs. Ott and Mr. Giraud, had signed the contract on behalf of the parishioners who were then authorized to use the church for an unspecified length of time on condition that it serve only for religious worship.

### **Parish Council of Saint Louis since 1918**

Subsequently, Fr. Thomas' document explained, the required list of names was first reduced in number from 100 to 20, then revised from time to time as foreign members left Moscow for other assignments. Mrs. Ott was in charge of these revisions. Though she had not made any since 1942, the government did not take official notice until after her arrest in 1947, at which time Fr. Thomas was summoned to the Department of Religious Affairs and asked to supply one. He said he would do so as soon as the French Ambassador (temporarily absent) returned to Moscow.

Soviet officials told him that the list of names was of no concern to the ambassador, that the church of Saint Louis, like all others, was under the jurisdiction of the Department of Religious Affairs, and that all he had to do was to take a pen and a piece of paper and have it signed by some of the people who filled his church on Sundays. Fr. Thomas replied that he was the pastor of the French and other foreigners. If Soviet citizens frequented his church, it was because they did not have one of their own. As far as he was concerned, they were guests whom he did not know. He never asked them their names nor had any direct dealings with them.

Finally, he noted, instead of giving the Soviet official a list of only 20 names, he submitted one with 100 names: all non-Soviet citizens, including 6 ambassadors and 3 chargés d'affaires. Submitted in August 1948, it was never officially approved, as past lists had been. Fr. Thomas tried to console himself with the fact that Mr. Polyansky had once told Fr. Laberge that the Department of Religious Affairs had no evil intentions in asking for such lists but merely wanted to be kept up to date.

### ***De facto* expropriation of Saint Louis in 1949**

But Fr. Thomas was justified in doubting the good intentions of the Department of Religious Affairs. It seemed clear to him that the purpose in having the lady solicit signatures was to form a new Parish Council. When he questioned her, she said she was concerned about his being alone and overburdened with work. Since Fr. Laberge would not be returning, she was trying to get a Polish priest to assist him. She had recently visited the archbishop of Riga (Latvia) and been promised a priest who was due to arrive any day. Fr. Thomas replied that he did not understand how the archbishop could send a priest to a territory which was not under his jurisdiction. He was forgetting, however, that a precedent had been set in 1946 when the archbishop had assigned a priest to Leningrad, obviously with the permission of the Soviet Government.

On Friday, May 13, 1949, the woman returned in the company of another woman. Bearing an official letter which assigned the church building to the committee they represented, they demanded that Fr. Thomas hand over the keys. When he refused to do so, an official of the Soviet Department of Religious Cults (for the non-Orthodox) suddenly manifested himself and reinforced their request with angry threats. Under the circumstances, Fr. Thomas felt he had no alternative but to give up the keys. He then went straight to the French Embassy to report what had happened: the French community had just been expropriated.

The timing of the incident had been well chosen: the French ambassador, Mr. Chataigneau, was absent from Moscow at the time. Mr. Francfort, the Chargé d'Affaires, went to lodge a complaint with the Soviet Foreign Ministry but was able to see only a minor official who assured him that there was no need to get excited just because the "Poles wanted a priest of their own." *Verbal notes* were transmitted to the Soviet Government but went unanswered. The French Foreign Ministry advised its embassy to "stand firm," and there the matter rested.

### **Appointment of Father Butirovicz as pastor of Saint Louis**

On June 11, 1949, Fr. Thomas wrote to say that the day after the "take-over," Fr. Joseph Butirovich arrived from Riga (Latvia) at 6 A.M. but left almost at once and had not yet returned. Both Frs. Thomas and Laberge

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knew him, for they had received him in January 1949 when he had visited Moscow. Fr. Thomas now wondered if the purpose of that visit had not been to negotiate an arrangement with the Soviet authorities. No matter, his arrival seems to have been delayed, despite frequent telegrams from the “new heads of the parish,” because the archbishop of Riga was said to be dying.

Fr. Thomas added that he was still being allowed to use the church for Mass on Sundays and weekdays, but that the doors were specially opened and closed for him as he arrived and departed. On the presumption that he might have had duplicate keys, all the locks had been changed. On the first evening, fearing that he would no longer be admitted to the church, he had taken home his chalice and a set of vestments so that he could at least say Mass in the apartment. No objections were made, but the outgoing articles were nevertheless examined.

Fortunately, he noted, he had the support of a lot of people. Some of his parishioners would drive him to the church each day, which, given the boils on his feet and the gout from which he suffered, was a real blessing. Some of the embassies went out of their way to invite him to receptions, as if to let it be known that they were free to choose their friends. It did not go unnoticed. One day Mr. Zorin, the Soviet Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, expressed surprise that the Dutch Embassy had invited him to a celebration in honor of Queen Juliana.

### **Father Thomas becomes Apostolic Administrator**

At the request of the papal Secretariat of State, Fr. Laberge wrote to Fr. Thomas according to the terms of Canon Law 198 and 199 to transfer to him, where applicable, whatever jurisdiction he had as Apostolic Administrator.

### **Identity of new pastor of Saint Louis**

There was understandable curiosity about the identity of the new priest at Saint Louis-des-Français. Inquiries made in Rome by Apostolic Delegate Cicognani revealed that his real name was Joseph Adamovicz Butirovicz. At one time, he had been an assistant at the Church of the Addolorata in Riga, but little else was known about him at the Vatican.

Fr. Laberge was able to add that he had met him on two or three occasions, the first being in the fall of 1948 when Fr. Butirovicz had allegedly

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come to Moscow for heart tests because of the absence in Riga of adequate cardiography equipment. They had met in the sacristy where he had asked Fr. Laberge for permission to say Mass. At Fr. Laberge's request, he had produced a current *celebret*.<sup>8</sup>

After Mass, Fr. Laberge had invited him to lunch during which they discussed the situation of the church in Riga. Fr. Laberge had gathered that the archbishop of Riga was old and sick and that the clergy was suffering from a lack of guidance. More importantly, the clergy questioned the silence of their archbishop at the arrest of one-third of his priests. There were two auxiliary bishops, one of whom—Dubinsky—was suspected of being a creature of Moscow.

From the overall conversation, Fr. Laberge had concluded that Fr. Butirovicz was an active and energetic man, but also impulsive. He did not doubt the priest's sincerity or his sympathy for the Polish parishioners of Saint Louis, but he felt that he could be easily manipulated by the Soviet authorities for their purposes.

### **Arrival of Father Butirovicz**

A letter from Fr. Thomas, possibly written in mid-July 1949, described what took place when Fr. Butirovicz took over his functions. On Wednesday July 6, representatives of the Department of Foreign Cults arrived to take an inventory of the church's possessions. It took them four days, as they checked even the remotest nooks and crannies and demanded explanations about everything, including candelabra, ciboria covers etc. They were nevertheless scrupulously correct in their behavior, exempting from the inventory the articles which Fr. Thomas declared to be his personal property.

On Friday July 8, the women of the Parish Executive Committee attended a formal reception for the new priest which was held in an office of the Department for Foreign Cults. Though Fr. Thomas was not invited, he told the women that it would be important to ascertain if the priest had credentials from his bishop.

The next day, Saturday July 9, as Fr. Thomas was vesting for Mass, the Executive Committee arrived with the new priest. Fr. Thomas recognized

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<sup>8</sup>A letter of recommendation issued by a bishop or a major religious superior stating that a priest is in good standing and therefore eligible to celebrate Mass or perform other priestly functions.

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him as the Fr. Butirovicz whom he had welcomed and befriended the previous January. He asked the priest if he had been sent by his bishop. If so, in his capacity as Ordinary of Moscow, Fr. Thomas wanted to see his official papers. Fr. Butirovicz replied that he would not be there if he had not been sent.

He then produced a document issued by the Department of Cults, explaining that it had been given him in exchange for the testimonial letters (in Latin) he had received from his bishop when he presented himself to the Department. The Department of Cults had retained the original for their archives. After commenting that it was a pity that Fr. Butirovicz had presented himself to the Department before seeing him, Fr. Thomas said he would first say Mass, after which they could both discuss the situation at length. During the Mass, he noticed that Fr. Butirovicz lost no time in beginning his duties: he donned a stole and stepped into the confessional.

After Mass, Fr. Thomas invited him to lunch, but Fr. Butirovicz politely declined, saying that he had to be very prudent. His archbishop had advised him to remain on good terms with Fr. Thomas but not to become too friendly; otherwise he might end up in Siberia. He thought they should have different services and arrange not to be seen together. In the eyes of the authorities, he would be the pastor of Saint Louis and Fr. Thomas would be the chaplain for foreigners. Having come to Moscow only out of obedience, he regarded himself as a sacrificial victim because he knew he would be encountering difficulties. At first, his archbishop did not want him to come. But because of the stream of telegrams and because Moscow was the capital, he eventually consented in order to avoid unpleasant repercussions.

### **Severing Father Thomas' contacts with Soviet citizens**

In the days that followed, and without consulting Fr. Thomas, Fr. Butirovicz began making rapid changes. He altered the hour of services. In his sermons, he began using the word "Christian" rather than "Catholic." He changed to Polish the language of the hymns sung during the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament after the High Mass on Sundays. Henceforth, he alone could baptize and confess.

As for Fr. Thomas, on Sundays he could say only the noon Mass. Four ambassadors and many diplomats deliberately chose to attend it out of solidarity with him. During the week, he had to content himself with a private devotional Mass at the side altar and should not distribute Holy Communion, especially if Soviet citizens were present. The church would be opened for

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him by members of the Parish Committee each morning at 7:30 A.M. and whenever he had the funeral of a foreigner.

For confessions, he had to wait until people specifically came to him in the sacristy. When Fr. Thomas protested that Canon Law forbade the hearing of women's confessions outside a confessional, Fr. Butirovicz told him that the practice was followed in mission countries. Besides, continued the priest, he had given the Department of Cults his word that he [Fr. Thomas] would no longer use the confessional except on Sundays, just before the Mass for diplomats. Members of the Parish Committee would be posted at the church entrance to warn people that it was forbidden to go to confession to Fr. Thomas. If he [Fr. Thomas] did not agree with all of this, there could be much unpleasantness for all concerned.

### **Status of Father Butirovicz**

As concerned as he was about these changes, Fr. Thomas was particularly preoccupied about Fr. Butirovicz' canonical standing. Unfortunately, he had no way of checking it out. Writing to the archbishop of Riga was tantamount to writing to the Secret Police. Asking a foreigner to go to Riga to make inquiries was impossible because Riga was off-limits to foreigners. Asking a Soviet citizen to run the errand was obliging someone to compromise himself. All in all, he suspected that Fr. Butirovicz was a validly ordained priest because in 1948 Fr. Laberge had seen his then-current *celebret*. But he wondered where he now stood because the priest had accused his archbishop (Anthony Springovicz) of being a schismatic for having ordained two bishops without the authorization of the Holy See. Though he did not want to yield on important matters of principle, he nevertheless did not want to break tenuous but no less real relationships either.

### **Intervention of the French ambassador**

In the weeks that followed, the French ambassador, Mr. Chataigneau, returned to Moscow. He immediately asked the Soviet authorities to return the keys of the church. He was told that the request constituted an interference in internal Soviet affairs, that the Parish Council had to be composed of Soviet citizens, and that, in a free country like the Soviet Union, the faithful could not be denied the right to choose their own priest.

## **Detentions, arrests, thefts, and threats**

Writing to Fr. Dufault on September 22, 1949, Fr. Thomas brought him up to date. His chauffeur had been detained and questioned for four hours by the police. Was this an indication that he might suffer the same fate as the housekeeper? More parishioners had been arrested. Would he himself be arrested?

Before going to Riga, Fr. Butirovicz had asked him to take charge of the parish during his absence and had offered to carry a letter from Fr. Thomas to the archbishop. Accepting to run the risk, Fr. Thomas wrote one in rudimentary Latin, all to have Fr. Butirovicz robbed of it en route (apparently, it was the only thing taken by the thief). Fr. Thomas wondered if he would not now be accused of interfering in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union, of having tried to obtain information from a closed zone, and therefore of being a Vatican agent and an imperialist, all sufficient reasons for him to be tried or shot ten times over.

Looking forward to the arrival of Fr. Brassard so that he could be sure of going to confession “more validly,” he continued to be preoccupied about Fr. Butirovicz’s basic canonical status. Fr. Butirovicz was now thinking of asking one of the auxiliary bishops of Riga, rather than Fr. Thomas, to administer the sacrament of Confirmation at Saint Louis, presumably, quipped Fr. Thomas, not to have a Frenchman “soil the heads of Soviet children” with the Holy Chrism.

From the pulpit, Fr. Butirovicz threatened the hundred or so people who persisted in attending Fr. Thomas’ Mass: if they persisted, he would take “other measures” to enforce the ban. Noting that the priests of Lithuania had recently been asked to sign a document critical of the pope, Fr. Butirovicz rejoiced that such a situation did not exist in Moscow. But, commented Fr. Thomas, Fr. Butirovicz would not have such a fine and well-furnished apartment if he had not given the Soviet authorities some type of assurances in return.

Nothing had changed, continued Fr. Thomas, regarding the church itself. Several diplomatic notes protesting the expropriation had been sent by the French Embassy, but they had all been refused.

## Financial squeeze and harassment

After acknowledging receipt of spare parts for the Ford as well as the car keys which Fr. Laberge had absent-mindedly taken with him, he noted that he had been receiving financial help from the Belgian, British, Italian, and especially American embassies. The latter had given him permission to continue using its commissary and extended him a monthly credit—now debited to “welfare”—which allowed him to purchase basic necessities. He appreciated the clarification because it did away with the fiction that Fr. Laberge was “absent.” He managed to live on about \$70 a month, often eating no more than an egg or a bit of cheese in the evening.

To be sure, since the arrival of Fr. Butirovich, some of his other expenditures were decreasing and Soviet citizens were making fewer requests for financial assistance because they did not want to risk being questioned by the Secret Police. The Dominican nuns, whom he supported, were now down to only two, the others having been convicted of receiving money from him and Fr. Laberge, therefore of having been their spies. But Fr. Thomas still sent about \$100’s worth of food packages each month to needy individuals, without ever being sure, however, that the packages were reaching their intended destination.

More importantly, the new Parish Council, finding itself strapped for operating funds but disregarding the fact that Fr. Thomas no longer received income from Mass stipends or parish collections, informed him that henceforth he would have to pay half the costs of running the parish. It also advised the sexton and the cleaning lady who came in each day that their wages for the current month of October would be paid by Fr. Thomas. Though he protested the payment, he nevertheless paid the wages from his reserves rather than allow the two people to go hungry.

Fr. Dufault sent summaries of this and other recent letters of Fr. Thomas to the Apostolic Delegate in Washington, appealing through him to the generosity of the American hierarchy. He thought that \$1,000 would be sufficient for the next four months. He added that three staff members of the Norwegian, Italian and British embassies, all persons with whom Fr. Thomas had been friendly, had recently been expelled as *personae non gratae*, and he wondered if the expulsions were not indications that Fr. Thomas’ own permit to stay in the Soviet Union—which was to expire on January 31, 1950—would be renewed.

## **Support in the midst of stepped-up provocations**

Writing again to Fr. Dufault on December 15, 1949, Fr. Thomas remarked that there was a constant change in the diplomatic personnel and that, so far, he had met very few of the newcomers. He still went to Spaso House (the residence of the US ambassador) every Sunday evening, not so much to see the weekly movie—which he could not understand—as to keep up contact. He would have been delighted to mark Thanksgiving Day with some kind of ceremony, but he had forgotten all about it, and no one either reminded him of it or invited him to anything. Ambassador Alan G. Kirk (1949–52) was apparently not as approachable and outgoing as was his predecessor, Ambassador Smith.

On the occasion of Armistice Day, Fr. Thomas had celebrated a special Mass which drew an unusually large crowd. Almost the entire staffs of the US, French, Italian, Belgian, and Dutch embassies were on hand. After Mass, most of the French went to the cemetery for the traditional service.

Fr. Thomas noted that he was being harassed, especially about hearing confessions. He was supposed to hear only those of foreigners. But as soon as he entered the confessional, a line of Soviet citizens began to form. Since he felt that he had no right to ask to see a penitent's passport, he continued to hear all who came.

He also noted in his letter that, before leaving on a recent trip to Latvia, Fr. Butirovicz had asked him to say all three Sunday Masses at Saint Louis. Fr. Thomas agreed, but, at the last minute, a messenger arrived from the Department of Cults telling him that he was to say no more than his usual 12:30 P.M. Mass. The President of the Parish Council then addressed the congregation assembled for the first Mass, saying that Fr. Thomas was old and could not say three Masses. There would be a hymn, after which people should go home and not return for a later Mass. Like on the three previous Sundays, Fr. Thomas had advanced the Mass by a half hour, 12 noon being a more convenient time for his foreign parishioners. Though the church was unheated, the Mass drew an unusually large crowd.

Because he had changed the hour of the Mass without authorization, the Parish Council charged him with breaking the law. It then complained that, because he had advanced the hour of Mass on previous Sundays, he had obliged Fr. Butirovicz to shorten his sermon, thereby depriving the people of the opportunity to sing hymns after Mass. Accepting to compromise, Fr. Thomas decided not to begin his Mass before the singing stopped, knowing

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full well that if it continued until 12:30 P.M., the diplomats would conclude that they were being harassed and would formally request a change of time.

What touched him most, however, was the reaction of the people. When they realized that Fr. Butirovicz was preaching more than forty minutes in order to prolong the service and that their own singing after Mass could be interpreted as a demonstration against Fr. Thomas, they ceased to make the liturgical responses and refused to sing any hymns after 11:50 A.M.

### **Apprehensions and new financial demands**

Before concluding his letter to the provincial, Fr. Thomas added a few more interesting details. He remarked that the French ambassador was becoming more and more apprehensive about his residency permit which, even if renewed, would mean very little. Soviet authorities did not need a reason to withdraw permits, as seen recently when they granted one to an Italian diplomat in September and withdrew it in November.

Fr. Thomas also noted that he was still being invited to receptions at the various embassies, including some to which he had rarely been invited before. He continued giving the Latin classes begun by Fr. Laberge for the children of diplomats and still visited the sick of Saint Louis parish because Fr. Butirovicz demanded taxi fare and an offering for each visit, something the people could not afford.

Finally, he noted that the Parish Committee had asked him for 2,000 rubles a month because, even with the two collections taken up at each Mass on Sunday, they supposedly still did not have enough money to operate. He realized the request made no sense but advanced the sum anyway, thinking it might be the price he had to pay for peace.

# Father Louis-Robert Brassard

January 20, 1950–February 13, 1953

## Ministry restricted to foreigners

Fr. Louis-Robert Brassard's application for a visa to enter the Soviet Union, filed early in February 1949, was still "under consideration" when, on October 28 of that same year, the question was again raised by the State Department. This brought a reply from the Soviet Embassy, dated November 5, which State Department officials rightly interpreted to mean that Fr. Brassard would be allowed to serve *only* the personnel of the US Embassy and might even be subjected to other restrictions which might limit his usefulness. In all probability, he would not be allowed to say Mass or hold any other services in the church of Saint Louis. There was no guarantee that he would even find a place to live. A cable had been sent to the US Embassy in Moscow asking for a detailed description of the general situation. When the answer arrived, a further meeting should be held with Fr. Dufault present.

By the end of 1949, however, it had become clearer to everyone involved—Fr. Brassard, Mr. Doyle, and the State Department—that it was the unstated yet firm intention of the Soviet government not so much to limit the ministry of the American chaplain to US personnel as it was to remove control of the parish of Saint Louis from foreign priests in order to sever all regular contacts between them and Soviet citizens. Time would eventually confirm that suspicion.

## Soviet visa is granted

At any rate, despite the predictable difficulties which lay ahead, Fr. Brassard agreed to accept a visa if one were granted and left for Washington. On

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December 19, 1949, he had good news for Fr. Dufault whom he called in New York: the visa was being granted. On leaving the Soviet Embassy, he spoke with reporters who had undoubtedly been primed by his companion, Mr. Doyle. The following day, he visited officials at the State Department and the Apostolic Delegate, and then returned to New York.

### **Ecclesiastical jurisdiction from Father Thomas**

Among other things, he was told by the Apostolic Delegate that if Fr. Thomas were forced to leave the Soviet Union, he [Fr. Brassard] would become Apostolic Administrator with full authority to delegate and sub-delegate, as needed. That not yet being the case, he should receive the jurisdiction he needed for his ministry from Fr. Thomas once he arrived in Moscow. There, he should accept orders from Fr. Butirovicz only to the extent that Fr. Butirovicz was speaking for the civil authorities, but he must be careful not to give the impression that Fr. Butirovicz had any ecclesiastical authority over him. Since Saint Louis church was the normal place of worship for Catholics in Moscow, he should apply for permission to say Mass there. If permission were denied, he should say Mass wherever he could.

### **The “Pilgrim Virgin”**

A brief newspaper report on the granting of the visa did not go unnoticed. On December 23, 1949, Mr. John Haffert of the Ave Maria Institute, Asbury Park, New Jersey, wrote to Fr. Dufault saying that he had spoken by telephone to Fr. Brassard about one of the three replicas of the original statue of Our Lady of Fatima which had been blessed on October 13, 1949, by the Bishop of Leiria, Portugal. Two of these statues, known as the “Pilgrim Virgins,” were already being taken in procession throughout Europe and America as part of the crusade of prayer for the conversion of Russia.

The third statue, which Mr. Haffert himself had brought from Portugal, had hopefully been destined for Russia. Because there seemed to be little chance that it would ever get there, a shrine was being prepared for it in the United States. He was now offering it to Fr. Brassard who agreed to bring it with him to Moscow on condition that the fact not be publicized. Accepting the condition, Mr. Haffert explained that the twenty-pound statue could easily accompany Father’s personal luggage. Thanking Mr. Haffert for his offer, Fr. Dufault concurred in the policy of silence.

## **Trying to register and find an apartment**

Fr. Brassard, traveling via Helsinki, arrived in Moscow on January 20, 1950. He immediately encountered some of the difficulties foreseen by the State Department, which knew the Soviet pattern of yielding on one point, only to create new problems on others.

He first saw himself refused permission to say Mass in the church of Saint Louis because, as yet, he was not officially registered as an alien, and therefore had no residency permit.

Since he was living with Fr. Thomas, he was told that, in addition to filling in an application for registration as an alien, he must also produce a certificate of residency from his "organization-landlord," in this case, Burobin. Everyday for a week, he and Fr. Thomas went to the Burobin office, only to be informed each time that the competent official was not available. Finally, word came not only that his request could not be granted but that he and Fr. Thomas would both have to leave the present apartment because all of the buildings in the entire block in which it was located would soon be torn down for re-development.

A visit to Mr. Bessapochnikov, head of the Department of Cults for the City of Moscow, brought the reply that he was not authorized to register a foreigner, his jurisdiction being limited to Soviet citizens only. Moreover, the church of Saint Louis already had a pastor, duly elected and installed according to Soviet law. He then referred Fr. Brassard's case to his superior, Mr. Polyansky, who answered in similar terms, adding that the matter must be settled by the Minister of Foreign Affairs who had issued the visa.

When Fr. Thomas asked where he was going to live in the event they tore down his apartment, he was told that the French Embassy was being offered the lease of six new apartments and that he need not worry: Burobin would find lodgings for him if necessary. As for Fr. Brassard, he should apply to the US Embassy, which was being assigned five empty apartments. Knowing that all its apartments were full and that some of its personnel were living in hotels, Fr. Brassard reported the suggestion to the US Embassy, which sent a note to the Soviet Foreign Ministry.

This elicited the reply, one week later, that Fr. Thomas' apartment was indeed to be demolished and that, since Fr. Brassard had come to Moscow to minister to Catholics of the US Embassy, it was for that embassy to find lodgings for him. Thereupon, the US Minister-Counselor, Mr. Barbour, pointed out that the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement extended to all American

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citizens in the Soviet Union, not just to embassy personnel. Consequently, it was up to the official Soviet agency *Intourist* to find Fr. Brassard a room in a hotel. The answer came back: “all [911] hotel rooms are occupied.”

### **Burobin bungalows**

At this time, in an attempt to cut costs, the French Embassy was reducing its representation in Moscow. On making inquiries, Frs. Thomas and Brassard found that it would be possible for them to rent not merely one but two of the six new apartments set aside for the French. On March 1, after signing a contract which stipulated that both apartments would be jointly occupied by them, Fr. Brassard moved his bed into one of them in an attempt to establish at least *de facto* residency.

The next day, he went to Burobin to ask for a certificate of residency. Because the apartment into which he moved was new, it depended on a different office of Burobin which, unaware of his previous requests, proceeded to give him the much-desired certificate as soon as he mentioned that he had signed a contract. He quickly took the certificate to the Office of Alien Registrations from which he received his Russian (Residency) Passport on March 17, 1950.

### **A “French apartment” at 12/24 -**

Among the apartments offered to the French Embassy was one of four rooms at a cost of 27,000 rubles per year, another of three rooms at 13,000 rubles, and one of two rooms at 8,500 rubles, all located at 12/24 Sadovaya-Samotechnaya. The four-room apartment would have been suitable, but the price was not. So they took adjoining apartments of three and two rooms (plus kitchens).

Fr. Thomas occupied the larger apartment #23, using one room as a bedroom, another as a common dining room, and the third as a combination office and reception room. In apartment #24, Fr. Brassard had an office-bedroom, a smaller room, which he converted into a chapel and where he said Mass each day, and a kitchen which he used as a laundry and for general purposes.

The inconvenience was that the apartments were on the top (i.e., the eighth) floor. When the elevator was not working, it became an ordeal for these “two pleasingly plump persons” (Fr. Brassard’s description) to climb

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all those stairs. They therefore made an arrangement: they would stop on alternate landings to tell a story.

Fr. Thomas' previous apartment had been costing the French Embassy 11,000 rubles a year. Since the funds had already been voted for fiscal year 1950, it was decided that the two priests would pay the additional 1,600 rubles for Fr. Thomas' apartment and the entire amount for Fr. Brassard's. Subsequently, however, the French Embassy graciously paid Fr. Thomas' entire portion.

Fr. Brassard quickly discovered, of course, that his new apartment building on the Ring Road was yet another in a series of "diplomatic ghettos" built by the Soviet Government exclusively to house diplomats and other foreigners living in the capital. Soviet citizens could neither live in them nor even visit without permission. A militiaman stood guard at the door around the clock. Among Father's first neighbors were the Chargé d'Affaires of Lebanon and the First Secretary of the US Embassy, Mr. Horner.

### **The die is cast for Father Thomas**

Writing to Fr. Dufault on March 27, 1950, Fr. Brassard noted that Fr. Thomas was having serious difficulties: "His passport was sent to the Protocol in January and he has heard, unofficially, that it was returned without a renewal of his visa. The French ambassador then called and made a personal request that the visa be granted and was told that this was not possible. Whereupon an official note was sent asking if this were to be considered an action against the Church or an action against France. If the former, action would be taken in Paris regarding the Russian church there. If the latter, a visa was requested for Father's eventual successor. Pressure was also to be applied in Paris where a new (Soviet) ambassador was recently installed. Some bargaining is taking place because, for some time now, a Russian bishop has been applying for a French visa."

### **Need for a place of worship**

Fr. Brassard's letter of March 27 continued: "What would happen if Fr. Thomas leaves and I am not allowed the use of Saint Louis? As yet, I have made no move to officiate outside of my apartment. The policy, I think, is to hold out for what is guaranteed by the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement. Is the decision regarding Father's situation connected with my own status?"

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Am I intended to replace him at the church or will his departure mean the end of Saint Louis for foreigners? I have told our Minister that a possible and happy solution would be our working together at the noon Mass on Sundays, Father preaching in French and myself in English, with each of us alternating in the celebration of Mass. The Minister will, no doubt, resume action on my request for a place of worship because this demand was not pushed as long as I had not succeeded in being registered as an alien. Since March 17, I have had the necessary papers which were finally given to me after innumerable visits, conferences and official letters from two embassies. The situation could be very disheartening because, as yet, I have not been able to minister to my flock. Nevertheless, I feel that my mission is being accomplished even though it is not taking the shape that I would desire. Just my being here means that the Church is still alive.”

### **Spaso House instead of Saint Louis church?**

At one point, Fr. Brassard visited the Soviet Foreign Ministry in the company of Mr. Barbour, Minister-Counselor at the US Embassy, who spoke of Fr. Brassard’s unsuccessful calls on the head of the Department of Cults and pointed out that the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement allowed not only the entry of clergymen into the Soviet Union but also the possibility of having suitable places of worship. On the basis of that Agreement, he was now requesting that Fr. Brassard be allowed to officiate in the church of Saint Louis because it was the only Catholic church in Moscow and because American Catholics had been worshipping there since 1934. On being told that he should make arrangements for services to be held at Spaso House, Mr. Barbour replied that Spaso was the ambassador’s residence and a government building, not a church. The Soviet officials countered that the matter would have to be studied further because their granting Fr. Brassard a visa was one thing, their ceding him a church was another. Mr. Barbour pointed out that that was tantamount to giving a man a hunting license but not allowing him to carry a gun.

### **Ministry-sharing at Saint Louis?**

As Fr. Brassard reflected on the overall situation, he thought: if the Soviet authorities expelled Fr. Thomas before authorizing him [Fr. Brassard] to officiate at Saint Louis, it would mean the end of his ever being able to use

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the church. If, on the other hand, he eliminated the pretext invoked by the Soviets for expelling the French priest, he might get them to relent. His idea, then, was to propose ministry-sharing at Saint Louis, as he had explained to Fr. Dufault. Moreover, he would not ask for an American chapel, at least not for the time being, because that would imply that he was giving up on Saint Louis church. If he were denied the use of the church, he could always, at some later date, invoke the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement to obtain a chapel.

Fr. Brassard explained his ministry-sharing idea to Mr. Barbour who, on a subsequent visit to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, transmitted the suggestion to the Soviets. The Ministry officials first expressed amazement that Fr. Brassard had obtained his registration as an alien and his residency permit. They speculated that there must have been a lack of coordination or some misunderstanding among Soviet bureaucrats who undoubtedly misinterpreted the contract. Since the document named Frs. Thomas and Brassard as joint tenants of two apartments set aside for the French Embassy, someone mistakenly concluded that both tenants were French citizens. Then turning to the request at hand, the Foreign Ministry officials neither rejected it out-of-hand nor came back on their suggestion to use Spaso House. They promised, instead, to consult the Parish Council of Saint Louis to see if it were feasible.

## **A new wave of xenophobia**

Fr. Brassard, however, did not have too many illusions. Conversations with various people had led him to understand that, during the last year, official Soviet policy had changed: foreigners were now the main problem rather than religion. That did not mean that there was now more religious freedom. Atheistic propaganda remained as strong as ever and all religions, including the Russian Orthodox Church, remained the enemies of the State, not just the Catholic Church which was in communion with Rome. It did mean, however, that increased attention was being given to minimizing all forms of foreign influence. The new trend was affecting particularly the members of the Diplomatic Corps who were subjected to various forms of harassment, especially in matters pertaining to their domestic help. Fr. Brassard began to feel that, on balance, the difficulties encountered by Fr. Braun might well pale before those which awaited him.

## **Temporary chapel in the apartment**

The Holy See, of course, had anticipated such difficulties. In the event that Fr. Brassard was denied use of the church, he was authorized to say Mass in the most suitable place he could find, if necessary, without using liturgical vestments, candles, relics, etc. If necessary, too, he could use a glass as a chalice, as well as ordinary bread, if unleavened bread were lacking. He could say Mass at any time of the day, even if he were not fasting. So far, however, he had not been forced to avail himself of these extraordinary permissions, all of which were exceptional for the times.

In one room of his apartment, he had erected a makeshift altar with available packing cases and placed on it a dressed-up whiskey carton which served as a tabernacle. In a corner of the room, near the window, he enthroned the statue of Our Lady of Fatima, which he had brought with him and whose new home he described in a letter to the bishop of Leiria: "It is in my 8th-floor apartment that I offer the Holy Sacrifice under the loving smile of the Moscow Pilgrim Virgin. From that fortunate oratory, Our Lady dominates the city. In the distance, one can see the towers of the Kremlin. At night, when it is dark, the two luminous red stars which crown that building appear through the window, one on each side of Our Lady, like two lamps silently paying homage to the "Queen."

On Sundays, he said Mass at 10:00 A.M., usually alone except when an occasional diplomat could not make the official noon Mass for foreigners at Saint Louis.

His hopes of being able to use the church during Holy Week came to naught, as even Fr. Thomas was excluded from it from Ash Wednesday until Easter Sunday. Accordingly, the two priests held the Holy Triduum ceremonies in the dining room of the apartment. One or two people came to *Tenebrae* each evening. On Good Friday, with the US Embassy granting three hours to those who wished to attend religious services, about twenty people, mostly Americans and including three non-Catholics attended the 3 P.M. service which Fr. Brassard conducted in English. The ceremony comprised the reading of the Passion according to Saint John, the Stations of the Cross, and the Veneration of the Cross.

On Easter Sunday, with a few non-Catholics again in the congregation, they were even able to have a High Mass sung in polyphony. During the Mass, the wheezing of the old harmonium aroused such sympathy that someone offered to arrange for a portable army instrument to be sent from Berlin.

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After Easter, a handful of people began to come regularly.

### **Abandoning ministry to Soviet citizens**

In a letter to Fr. Dufault (in Rome) dated May 17, 1950, Fr. Brassard put his finger on the main problem confronting him and his companion: ministry to Soviet citizens. Though it was too late to reverse the decision already taken against Fr. Thomas, they had both decided that, even if he were eventually allowed to officiate at Saint Louis church, he was henceforth abandoning all ministry to Soviet citizens: “Fr. Thomas is still in a state of suspense regarding his permit to stay here. The French ambassador recently went to see a Mr. Bogomolof, the new Minister for French Affairs, who said it was impossible to go back on a decision that had already been taken. The ambassador asked at once for a visa for Fr. Thomas’ successor and Bogomolof replied that he saw no need for this because Fr. Thomas’ case had not been settled. This remark may have been prompted by the ambassador’s suggestion that perhaps Fr. Thomas might refrain from preaching in Russian. In any case, in the event that I am allowed to officiate at Saint Louis, we have both decided to abandon ministry to Soviet citizens.”

### **Enforcement of new policies**

In the last part of his letter, Fr. Brassard left no doubt about the determination of Fr. Butirovicz and the Soviet Government to enforce their new policies along with the Soviet laws on Associations: “Last Sunday, there were new threats from the pulpit at Saint Louis; ‘All who attend the Mass for foreigners expose themselves to severe measures.’ They are constantly hounding Fr. Thomas for the *honoraria* he receives for Masses, often at a reduced rate, from people who cannot meet the new increased fees demanded by ‘the cuckoo’ who says two Masses almost every day. The lady who had acted as custodian of the Church of Saint Louis for the last thirty years has been dismissed because she opened the building to ‘foreigners’ who wished to rehearse the singing for a special Mass in honor of Saint Joan of Arc. The real reason was that she had distributed some rosary leaflets and had organized along with fifteen other parishioners, a Living Rosary. This was held to be an infraction of Soviet Laws on Associations, and there was a threat that the church would be closed down.”

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On May 29, 1950, Fr. Brassard wrote that his case had been mentioned to Mr. Polyansky whom he should call for an appointment. However, when he called for the appointment, Mr. Polyansky told him that he was not authorized to see him but that Mr. Sobolieff would give him the answer he sought.

### **Resistance and discouragement of the Soviet parishioners**

Then, turning to the latest at Saint Louis church, Fr. Brassard mentioned in his letter that Fr. Butirovicz had again warned the parishioners not to attend the noon Mass for foreigners. Fr. Thomas, for his part, in deference to the French ambassador's advice, had now ceased to preach in Russian and no longer heard confessions in the church on Saturday evenings. He did continue to hear them immediately before his Sunday Mass when Soviet citizens were not supposed to be there. Because some Soviet citizens continued to present themselves anyway, they were forced out of their pews and out of the church one Sunday early in June by a member of the Parish Council. Nevertheless, some managed to return a little later during the day. The day after the incident, Fr. Thomas received a note containing 300 rubles and a request that he say one Mass for the Holy Father, himself and Fr. Brassard, another for the happy death of a friend, and a third for the happy death of the woman-donor herself. The message continued: "I have saved this money, kopek by kopek, so that I could have a Catholic burial. After what happened at the church yesterday, I see that this will not be possible. I want you to have this, you who are the 'true one.' The church is filled with worshippers who cannot distinguish between the 'Red church' and the 'True Church.' God forgive me for the bitterness I have in my heart."

Fr. Brassard noted too that in recent weeks, Fr. Thomas had received offerings for several series of Gregorian Masses to be said "for the living," offerings which represented, in many cases, the savings of a lifetime.

### **Chaplaincy begins to grow**

Fr. Brassard also mentioned that his own little congregation was increasing slowly as new Catholic employees of the various embassies arrived in Moscow. He now had 19 adults and 2 children, one of whom he himself had baptized.

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Three or four other people had shown interest in learning about the Catholic Church.

Their finances were now in better shape. Since the French ambassador had given Fr. Thomas 12,000 rubles, they were able to keep the dollars received in the collections for purchases at the US Embassy commissary. Besides, at this time, they could not have changed dollars for rubles even if they had wanted to, because the Soviet Government had suspended all currency exchanges until after the new rates went into effect on July 1st (4 to 1 for US dollars).

### **Feeling the strain**

In a letter dated July 17, 1950, Fr. Brassard wrote to Fr. Dufault: "I am beginning to feel the strain of this closed-in atmosphere. I only hope that I can hold out for the period of two years. (I am not looking forward to more because a two-year tour is the rule for most foreign representatives here. They, at least, have some daily occupation while we are totally unemployed. I find comfort in the thought that it was your intention to regulate our assignments on the policy of the State Department.) I am seriously thinking of asking for some work at the embassy on a part-time basis so as to keep myself busy."

This paragraph was read with some concern by Fr. Dufault, who discussed the situation by telephone with Mr. Doyle on August 3rd. Mr. Doyle, pointing out the importance of the Moscow Mission for the country and especially for the Church, suggested that they should confer at length with the State Department and the Apostolic Delegate.

### **Little hope of getting a church**

An August 9 meeting was arranged at the State Department. Officials there first recalled that they had warned Fr. Brassard and his superiors that the Moscow chaplain might encounter difficulties which could render his presence useless, then added that the US Embassy would afford him every possible assistance within the limitations imposed by his status as an ordinary American citizen.

Fr. Dufault rejected the implication that the previous warning removed grounds for complaining to the Soviet Government about the treatment given

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Fr. Brassard stressed the importance of his assignment within the context of the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement. The prestige of the country was at stake: the US Government had to insist that the Soviet Union respect the rights of American citizens as laid down in that Agreement.

The officials assured Fr. Dufault that they would renew their requests for a place of worship but held out little hope of succeeding because, at the time, the Soviet Union really needed nothing from the United States.

### **Working for the embassy could compromise his priestly status**

These officials felt, also, that it would be unwise for Fr. Brassard to take up clerical work at the embassy because that might compromise, at least in Soviet eyes, his status as a priest. It was suggested that he use his enforced leisure to study general conditions in the Soviet Union, as there were too few Americans who were informed about Russian culture.

### **Holding on at all costs**

From this conference at the State Department, Fr. Dufault and Mr. Doyle went to see the Apostolic Delegate who repeated that it was the desire of the Holy See that a priest remain in Moscow in spite of the present difficulties. Of course, if he were expelled, that would be another matter.

### **Disappointment**

Meanwhile, Fr. Brassard, after consulting Mr. Barbour, the US Minister Counselor, had applied for work at the embassy and was hoping to start sometime in August. Consequently, he was greatly disappointed when he read Fr. Dufault's letter notifying him of the position taken by the State Department. It was of little consolation to hear that his superior approved of the idea and thought that such employment would not only be good for his morale but might afford him additional security in an international situation that was, to say the least, extremely delicate.

Acknowledging this letter on August 25, 1950, Fr. Brassard mentioned that he had been unofficially forewarned at the embassy of the State Department's hesitations and that an explanatory letter from Washington was on

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the way. Had he suspected that the matter needed clearance from headquarters he would never have asked.

As for security, he realized that if hostilities broke out, he would have to follow whatever instructions he received from the US Embassy and was already resigned to suffering the fate of a *non-diplomatic personnel*.

### **Showdown over Father Thomas**

Concerning Fr. Thomas, things seemed to be coming to a head. Summoned to the Soviet Foreign Ministry, French Ambassador Chataigneau was notified that Fr. Thomas had already overstayed his welcome and that the Soviet authorities expected him to leave soon.

Mr. Chataigneau responded by sending the Soviet Government an official protest on four counts: (1) the occupation of the French national church of Saint Louis-des-Français; (2) the installation of a Soviet priest in a French national church; (3) the imposition of a Parish Council which included no French citizens; and (4) the expulsion of Fr. Thomas. He also requested a visa for a priest to replace Fr. Thomas, suspecting, nevertheless, that even if they granted the visa, Soviet authorities would still refuse to register the priest as a “Minister of Religion,” thereby placing him in the same position as Fr. Brassard.

The Soviets responded by saying that they would grant a visa to a successor to Fr. Thomas if the French Government issued visas to Orthodox Archbishop Photius and his secretary, requests that had already been turned down. However, he would have nothing to do with the church of Saint Louis and would be limited in his ministry to the French Embassy.

Mr. Chataigneau retorted that he did not propose to exchange the freedom of France for the confinement of a French chaplain to his embassy. He then sent Fr. Thomas’ passport to the Soviet authorities for a decision one way or the other.

### **Support from the diplomatic corps**

At about the same time, Italian Ambassador Brosio, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and an accomplished jurist, had called on Soviet authorities to express the regret of his fellow-diplomats at the news of the impending departure of Fr. Thomas. He pointed out that the new priest at Saint Louis, an unknown

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quantity, did not enjoy the confidence of the diplomats and had never been invested with lawful jurisdiction to perform religious duties at Saint Louis.

Mr. Brosio also stated that it was neither practical nor desirable to hold religious services in any embassy. Not only were such buildings private residences, but individuals with personal or national grievances against a particular ambassador or his country would not feel free to go to the residence involved. The policy would therefore limit the church's universality.

A public expression of sympathy for Fr. Thomas was orchestrated on August 25, 1950, the feast of Saint Louis, the patron saint of the parish. Present at the anniversary High Mass were the French and Italian ambassadors with their entire staffs, the British ambassador and his wife, and, for the first time, Ambassador Kirk and his wife, along with a majority of the US Embassy personnel, including servicemen in uniform. Also present were representatives of all the other Western powers. The massive display of solidarity might be to no avail, but it could do no harm. With that in mind, the foreigners further decided to reassemble the following Sunday for the noon Mass and to march out in a body if Fr. Butirovicz attempted to celebrate it instead of Fr. Thomas.

## **Expulsion of Father Thomas**

The inevitable was not long in coming. On Monday evening, August 28, 1950, Fr. Thomas' passport was returned to the French Embassy containing an exit visa valid until Wednesday, August 30, and stipulating that the point of departure would be Moscow's Vnukovo Airport.

Though there was a plane leaving the following morning, it was too late to get a reservation on that flight: the ticket office was already closed. The next available plane did not leave until Friday, i.e., two days after the expiration of the exit visa. While the two priests were still trying to figure out how the deadline could be met, words came on Wednesday August 30th at 2 P.M. that the exit visa had been extended until Friday, September 1.

Having said his last Mass at Saint Louis-des-Français the day before (Tuesday), Fr. Thomas had removed all his belongings, leaving only Bishop Neveu's vestments which would be officially claimed by the French Embassy if Fr. Brassard were not allowed to use the church.

## **Transmission of jurisdiction and departure of Father Thomas**

Before leaving the Soviet Union, Fr. Thomas duly handed over his powers as Apostolic Administrator to Fr. Brassard in compliance with the instruction he had received from the Holy See for just such an eventuality.

He left the Soviet Union on September 1, 1950, with the French ambassador, Mr. Chataigneau, via Helsinki and Stockholm, never to return.

On the Sunday following Fr. Thomas' departure, the members of the Diplomatic Corps walked out of the church of Saint Louis, as they had threatened, when Fr. Butirovicz entered to say the usual noon Mass for foreigners.

## **Adjusting to the new situation**

As time went on, Fr. Brassard became more and more busy. At the US Embassy, he volunteered his services to work in the library which, because of renovations, he was asked to move and re-organize. He took charge of a little "school" for American and English children of grade-school age<sup>9</sup> whose regular teacher had returned to the United States. He began giving instructions in the Catholic faith to a lady from one of the embassies whom he hoped to receive into the Church in December. He now said three Masses on Sundays in his apartment chapel, even though it was against Soviet law to hold religious ceremonies in private residences.

## **The French continue to pay for the chaplain's apartment**

As he moved into the larger apartment which had been occupied by Fr. Thomas, the French ambassador promised him that he would try to persuade his government to continue paying the rent and even to provide extra funds, on the grounds that Fr. Brassard was of French extraction, spoke French, and was therefore able to care for the religious interests of the French.

Fr. Brassard was all the more grateful for the ambassador's gesture that it seemed to mark a change from recent policy. Since the takeover of Saint Louis, Fr. Brassard and others had had the impression that the French were less concerned about the situation than were the representatives of other countries, several of whom had made representations to the Soviet

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<sup>9</sup>The little school eventually became the much-appreciated Anglo-American School, which educates the children of English-speaking diplomats and other foreigners.

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Government. The Italian ambassador had gone so far as to say that the French were leaving it to him “to pull their chestnuts out of the fire.”

Fr. Brassard was no less impressed by the ambassador’s shrewdness. By continuing the indispensable funding of this aspect of the Moscow Mission, the ambassador was trying to maximize the chances that the American Assumptionists would continue to send a bilingual priest capable of caring for the needs of the French community, without the French Embassy having to be his official sponsor, and therefore the one responsible for all that sponsorship entails in the Soviet Union. As a matter of fact, the French Government did approve the ambassador’s request and continued its benefaction until the return of a French Assumptionist pastor to Saint Louis Church in 1992.

### **Neither Saint Louis nor any other church**

During a meeting with Soviet Acting Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko on September 15, 1950, US Ambassador Kirk asked Mr. Gromyko to intervene on Fr. Brassard’s behalf by helping him to find a suitable place for conducting religious services, as stipulated in the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement. He suggested that the church of Saint Louis be made available one hour a day, as had been done for Fr. Thomas. Gromyko replied that, since Fr. Brassard had come as chaplain to the US Embassy, arrangements should be made for services to be held there.

Ambassador Kirk explained, once again, that Fr. Brassard was not a member of the embassy staff but the chaplain for all Americans in the Soviet Union. Gromyko then said that the Russian congregation at the church of Saint Louis had elected its own priest, that the Soviet Union had no State religion, and that therefore neither he nor his Government would interfere in this affair.

The ambassador then presented Gromyko with an *aide-memoire* summarizing the views of the U.S. Government, viz., that Fr. Brassard should be provided with proper facilities for religious services in accordance with the terms of the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement. After reading it, Gromyko simply stated: “I have given you the views of the Soviet Government, and there is no more to be said.”

## **Registration as a religious society**

A report of this conversation was transmitted that same day to the State Department in Washington. On September 16, Fr. Dufault met to review the situation with Mr. Barbour, Minister Counselor at the US Embassy in Moscow (who was home for a visit) and Mr. Richard Davis, head of the Russian Section at the State Department.

The officials pointed out that Ambassador Kirk felt that the matter of using the church of Saint Louis was, in Soviet eyes, a closed issue, and that Mr. Gromyko had not offered the use of any other building. Mr. Barbour, admitting he did not know what further steps could be taken, wondered if it would help to form a committee of twenty diplomats who would appoint Fr. Brassard as their pastor and then apply to the Soviet authorities for a place of worship.

## **Recall ruled out**

Because it seemed clear that the Soviet Government had no intention of keeping the pledge given in the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement, and because Fr. Brassard was unable to reach but a small number of the faithful, Mr. Barbour further wondered if church authorities might not prefer recalling Fr. Brassard “with a certain amount of fanfare and publicity,” a step that might be more effective and profitable than all else. That, of course, would be a decision for the Church alone to make. However, if it did so, the US government was prepared to go along with it, even if it were discouraging business.

Fr. Dufault insisted—and Mr. Barbour concurred—that over and above the number of people being served, there was an important principle involved, viz., the presence in Moscow of a resident non-Soviet clergyman. His presence was considered beneficial by diplomats in general, both Catholic and non-Catholic. Fr. Dufault felt that Fr. Brassard should stay in Moscow unless he were in some immediate danger. Mr. Barbour replied that Fr. Brassard was in no immediate danger, but added: “Although Fr. Brassard is very discreet,” there always remains the possibility that Soviet authorities might trump up some accusation and stage a trial “with or without a pretext.”

## **Voluntary work at the US Embassy**

Then turning to Mr. David, Mr. Barbour asked him what he thought about Fr. Brassard's working at the embassy. Mr. Davis opposed it. Mr. Barbour did not agree. Noting that Fr. Brassard had already done useful work, unofficially, in the embassy library, Mr. Barbour thought that some regular occupation would be very good for the priest's morale. Fr. Dufault then suggested that Fr. Brassard be allowed to work without pay so as to deflect the possible charge that he was attached to the embassy staff. Mr. Barbour thought there should be some remuneration. Mr. Davis, on the other hand, tended to agree with Fr. Dufault. Recognizing that regular or frequent visits to the embassy could mean added protection in times of trouble, he seemed disposed to allow Fr. Brassard to continue working at the embassy on a voluntary basis.

## **Christmas Midnight Mass at Spaso House**

With Christmas approaching and Fr. Brassard's apartment chapel too small to accommodate all who would wish to attend, he had to find a suitable place for Midnight Mass. Ambassador Kirk and his wife, he knew, would be in the United States for the Christmas holidays. Though they were not Catholics, he thought they might not object to his using Spaso House. It would allow all his parishioners to come together and would serve as a morale booster for everyone. Even if it gave the impression that he was acquiescing to the demands of the Soviets to celebrate his services at the embassy, it would nevertheless be an exception rather than the rule. The occasion seemed to justify and demand it.

To his pleasant surprise, the ambassador and his wife had already thought of it. In fact, Mrs. Kirk was arranging to have a dinner for all the American residents of Moscow at 8 P.M. on Christmas Eve. This was to be followed by carol singing until 11:00 P.M., when the great ballroom would be prepared for Midnight Mass.

It turned out to be a very happy occasion. An impromptu choir of seven or eight volunteers, made up mostly of non-Catholics, had a small field organ flown in for the occasion and insisted that Fr. Brassard sing the Mass. The congregation, numbering about 125 (fifty-five communicants) 40% of whom were non-Catholics, represented most of the Western embassies. The friendly gathering and the carols helped set a cordial atmosphere for the Mass that

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followed. Many people were deeply impressed by its solemnity and religious fervor. As Fr. Brassard noted in a letter to Fr. Dufault: “the absence of the thrills and frills of home seemed to have left people more disposed to enter into the real spirit of Christmas.”

### **Soviet Government in no mood to grant anything**

Fr. Dufault, profiting from the presence in Washington for the holidays of Ambassador Kirk, visited him at the State Department on December 27, 1950, in the company of Mr. Doyle. When Mr. Doyle urged that the Department press for the use of Saint Louis church, the ambassador said he thought it would be useless at the present time. There being a very strong anti-American feeling in Moscow, the Soviet Government was in no mood to grant anything.

Noting that nobody believed Gromyko when he said that his Government could not interfere with “the expressed will of the faithful,” he added that he felt very strongly about the French reluctance to fight for the rights of Fr. Thomas, especially because of all the “leverage” they had as a result of the presence in France of several Russian Orthodox clergymen.

He spoke too of Fr. Brassard as well as of his work in the embassy library and with the children, explaining that the youngsters met, not in a school but in a center rented by the British. Father’s conduct and bearing, he said, have been irreproachable throughout.

### **Deadlock over Saint Louis church**

The situation regarding the church of Saint Louis was still deadlocked. Soviet authorities were hinting that they might issue a visa to a successor to Fr. Thomas if French authorities issued visas to Russian Orthodox Archbishop Photius and his secretary, insisting, nevertheless, that such a successor would merely be chaplain to the French Embassy and would not have the right to officiate at Saint Louis.

The French Government, despite Fr. Thomas’ contrary opinion, refused to make such a one-sided bargain. Agreeing to anything less than the return of the church of Saint Louis to its rightful owners implied renouncing the basic claim to the church. The diplomatic community in Moscow generally agreed with the French position, as did Fr. Brassard who thought that giving up on the church was too high a price to pay for priestly companionship.

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On February 1, 1951, the French ambassador, calling on Mr. Bogomolov of the Soviet government, brought up the issue once more. When he was again told that the Soviet Government had nothing to do with the administration of the church of Saint Louis, the ambassador asked Mr. Bogomolov how the government could require the registration of a church and its clergy and, at the same time, pretend not to control the situation. He concluded by saying that the French government would continue to refuse the visas requested for the Russian Orthodox clergymen until the former status of the church of Saint Louis had been re-established. On leaving the meeting, he resolved not to re-raise the issue again with Soviet authorities.

As time passed, Fr. Brassard's provisional chapel attracted more and more of the foreign community. Though it was large enough on ordinary weekends, it could not accommodate the larger crowds on special occasions. Consequently, Fr. Brassard kept trying to think of ways to obtain the use of a real church.

### **Easter Sunday at the Italian Embassy**

During Lent of 1951, in the apartment chapel, Fr. Brassard had two or three people at daily Mass and a good attendance at the Holy Week services. On Holy Saturday, he chose to include the rite of the Blessing of the Baptismal Font in order to underline that the people, not a building, are the church and the parish. On Easter Sunday, after a first Mass in the apartment chapel, he went to the Italian Embassy for a High Mass, complete with an organist, Gregorian chant, and a choir of 25 voices. There were approximately 100 people, though not as many non-Catholics as at Christmas because of the presence in Moscow of the Protestant clergyman who came every three months from Helsinki.

### **Attempts to merge/close Saint Louis church**

Rumor was now rife in Moscow concerning the possibility of a schism from Rome of the parish of Saint Louis and of its merger with the Russian Orthodox Church. The talk was serious enough to prompt Fr. Butirovicz to declare from the pulpit his opposition to any such move and his desire to remain in communion with Rome. That day, he even re-introduced the name of the pope which he had been omitting from the Eucharistic Prayer in the Mass.

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Whenever he was absent on Sunday, it was usual for the people to gather in the church for common prayers. On one such recent occasion, just after the sexton had lighted the candles, as if preparing for Mass, the Secret Police, assuming some unregistered priest—perhaps even Fr. Brassard himself—was going to celebrate, arrived to investigate. The same day, six members of the Moscow Soviet met with members of the Parish Council to inform them that the government was imposing on the church a new tax of 10,000 rubles.

### **Temporary chapel becomes permanent**

It had become obvious to Fr. Brassard in the fall of 1951 that he would not be given the use of a church in the foreseeable future and, therefore, that his temporary chapel was, in fact, a permanent one. His little “parish” was growing, with U.S. Catholics alone now numbering 30. On Sundays, he had to say three Masses, which were becoming quite crowded. He thought the time had come to get rid of the makeshift appearance of the chapel and to give it more dignity and beauty.

He first sent away to France for a new set of vestments to replace the old and threadbare ones he had been using since his arrival. He then designed an altar to replace the one he had made with “packing cases.” He would have it made in Helsinki where he knew that the workmanship would be good, the price reasonable, and the construction supervised by a community of Sisters. He also ordered a new tabernacle from France to replace the old whiskey container. Finally, in order to create a single large room, he would convert the single doorway between the chapel and his study into a double one, the work to be done through Burobin at a cost of 2,000 rubles (c. \$500).

The response to his plans was enthusiastic, not only among parishioners in Moscow but also among friends in the United States. Mr. Doyle, who had shown great interest in the Moscow Mission from the outset, immediately asked for the privilege of providing the tabernacle. Since renovations were being carried out at the White House, he was able to obtain through a friend some solid oak wood from the very room in which President Roosevelt and Mr. Litvinov had signed the Agreement allowing for an American chaplain. The symbolism pleased everyone, including the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Cicognani, who agreed to bless it upon completion, as well as the Little Sisters of the Assumption who lined it and outfitted it with canopies in the various liturgical colors.

Mr. Doyle would have liked to contribute more, but the Moscow parish-

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ioners, who had truly entered into the spirit of the project, insisted on participating. They provided a harmonium, carpets, new drapes and curtains, and two dozen folding chairs. A group of Sisters in the United States donated the linen for the altar. The altar and tabernacle were not expected to arrive before the beginning of 1952.

In the meantime, Fr. Brassard had begun to prepare for the 1951 Christmas Midnight Mass which again would take place at Spaso House. This time, however, he decided to train a choir which had no difficulty learning the Mass of the Angels. After two weeks of rehearsal, Fr. Brassard felt that their performance was equal to that of any normal parish choir.

All went very well during the Mass itself. When, after Mass, Fr. Brassard returned to his apartment, he was stunned to find that it had been completely transformed. Some of his parishioners, having returned from Helsinki with the altar and tabernacle and wishing to surprise him, had installed them during his absence. Since the brass candlesticks and the crucifix arrived from France during the first week of January (1952), he was able to bless the chapel before a respectable crowd on the feast of the Epiphany, January 6th. In his homily, he noted that such a ceremony was rare in the Soviet Union, perhaps the first in over thirty years. The French ambassador, who was among those present, was so impressed that, the next day, he sent Fr. Brassard a check for 2,000 rubles, the cost of the alterations to the chapel.

### **Appointment of a successor: Father Georges Bissonnette**

But Fr. Brassard was much more concerned about the compliments paid him by the State Department. He thought they might influence his superiors to delay indefinitely the choice of a priest to replace him. Though he appreciated the praises he was receiving, he felt they did little to offset the solitude which was gnawing at him and, in fact, developing into a neurosis. As he explained to Fr. Dufault in a letter dated March 5, 1952, the buoyancy of his spirits during the last few months had been induced, to a great extent, by the prospect of being relieved of his position. Now grievously disappointed, he was asking his superiors to review his case and to “give someone else the chance to work in this part of the Lord’s vineyard.”

As a matter of fact, Fr. Dufault had already begun to move in that direction. He had consulted the Holy See through the Apostolic Delegate who

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told him in mid-December 1951 that Archbishop Domenico Tardini had no objection to Fr. Brassard's being replaced. He had also decided upon a successor, Fr. Georges Bissonnette, A.A., though he had not yet done anything to implement his decision. After receiving Fr. Brassard's letter of March 5, he immediately wrote to his Superior General, Fr. Quénard, for approval of his choice and permission to begin negotiating for Fr. Bissonnette's visa. Fr. Quénard told him to proceed quietly.

### **Report to the Holy See**

On April 9, 1952, Fr. Brassard sent a report to Archbishop Tardini describing the current situation. He mentioned, among other things, that there was concern about what was happening at the church of Saint Louis. Fr. Butirovicz was seriously ill and had been unable to say Mass for four weeks. When some of the parishioners began to complain, Fr. Brassard told one of them that he would be quite willing to conduct all the Holy Week ceremonies for them. When the Parish Council requested permission for this from Mr. Bessapojnikov at the Department of Cults for the city of Moscow, they were told: "Never! We have succeeded in getting rid of them and we do not want them back. Soon we will have, not one but two priests at the church. The Economic Conference will be taking place and the delegates will see with their own eyes that we enjoy religious freedom here." There had indeed been two priests at the church on the previous Sunday, but Fr. Brassard had not been able to pick up any information about them.

### **A visa for an Orthodox clergyman**

His spirits were heightened by the subsequent news that the appointment of Fr. Bissonnette had been approved by Rome. He thought that the choice was excellent. Also, he suspected from a conversation he had had with Mr. George F. Kennan, the new US ambassador to the Soviet Union, that his successor's position might be stronger than his own. The ambassador had received the visit of Archbishop Adam who was temporarily replacing elderly Metropolitan Makary of Lvov, the Soviet Ukrainian hierarch responsible for a number of Russian Orthodox Churches in the United States. Because of his present incapacity, Metropolitan Makary was interested in obtaining a visa

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for a successor who might be able to visit his charges.<sup>10</sup> The ambassador thought the request might be useful in any further bargaining with Soviet authorities.

### **Father Bissonnette arrives**

In the meantime, Fr. Bissonnette applied for his passport, which needed a US waiver on the restriction to travel to the Soviet Union. It was issued on August 8, 1952. Six days later, Frs. Moquin (the newly appointed Provincial) and Dufault (the newly elected Superior General) and Mr. Doyle met in Washington where Mr. Doyle first went to the Soviet Embassy to pick up the visa questionnaire. Then all three went to the State Department where they were advised to use great caution in answering questions pertaining to “purpose of visit” and “time of stay.” It was suggested that “time of stay” be answered “undetermined,” and “purpose of visit” as “to replace Fr. Brassard.”

Mr. Cummings, the Minister Counselor at the US Embassy in Moscow, who had just arrived home on a visit, said that they should make no mention of “according to the Agreement” or “for religious services to American Catholics.” These arguments might have to be used later as bargaining chips. He urged that on no account should Fr. Brassard leave Moscow until his successor had arrived. He mentioned that Fr. Brassard had an outstanding record in Moscow and that he had a remarkable ability for making friends and rendering himself useful. Finally, he speculated that it would take from six to eight weeks to obtain Fr. Bissonnette’s visa.

As a matter of fact, the visa was issued on December 8, 1952. It specified that Fr. Bissonnette was to enter the Soviet Union either at the Moscow Airport or at Viborg before February 8, 1953. On learning this, Fr. Brassard wrote to point out that his residency permit would expire on February 3, that he did not want to run the risk of being denied an extension, and that he would have to apply for an exit visa before January 15, 1953. He was hoping therefore that Fr. Bissonnette would arrive early in January so that he could have enough time to brief him on the situation he was inheriting.

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<sup>10</sup>Metropolitan Makary died on November 12, 1953, and was succeeded by Archbishop Germogen-Kozin, head of the Russian Orthodox Church of Krasnodar and the Kuban. Cf. Department of State Press Release Nos. 392 (June 28, 1955) and 636 (November 4, 1955).

## **Transition period**

Because notification from Rome regarding Fr. Bissonnette's special ecclesiastical jurisdiction would not reach the Apostolic Delegate in Washington before January 12, he felt he could not leave the United States until January 16. Unfortunately, a thick fog delayed his departure till the next day. He stopped in Paris to speak with Fr. Dufault, then proceeded to Helsinki where he boarded the train for Moscow, arriving at Fr. Brassard's apartment on Sunday, January 25, at 10:00 A.M., just in time to say the 10:30 Mass.

As things turned out, Fr Brassard found it necessary to apply for an extension of his residency permit in order to have enough time to explain the situation to Fr. Bissonnette who was deeply impressed and tremendously encouraged at the amount of good will amassed by his predecessor. Fr. Brassard, he discovered, had become the adviser to almost everyone who needed spiritual help or comfort, and this was true, not only of Catholics but of non-Catholics and Moslems. Their appreciation was shown in part by the constant round of farewell luncheons, parties and dinners which almost filled the last days of Fr. Brassard's stay in Moscow and to which Fr. Bissonnette was invited as a matter of course. Although he found them very confusing, they certainly helped him find his bearing.

In between social engagements, Fr. Brassard explained his normal mode of life, stressing the need for caution and discretion. In his view, it was clear that Soviet authorities did not want the foreign priest to have any official role regarding Soviet citizens. It was a fact of life to which he had reconciled himself in order to keep the Mission alive. If the speed with which Fr. Bissonnette received his first residency permit was any indication, he had succeeded: Fr. Bissonnette's took only one week, whereas Fr. Brassard's had taken two months.

## **Departure of Father Brassard**

Almost the entire Western colony was present at the Leningradsky station on February 13, 1953, to see Fr. Brassard off on the first leg of his journey home. He intended to travel via Helsinki, Brussels, Paris and London so that he could visit some of the friends he had made. From Helsinki, he wrote to Fr. Bissonnette of his relief "at being back in the civilized world," but mentioned his apprehensions about at least one aspect of that world, viz., the gauntlet of photographer, reporter and perhaps television cameras he might

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have to run on arriving in the United States. He had asked Fr. Moquin, his provincial, for an unobtrusive arrival. He did not want to issue any official statement because he thought it impossible to make an innocuous remark about the Soviet Union. Since any statement would be interpreted as either pro or con, he thought it better to say nothing.

Fr. Moquin agreed wholeheartedly. Considering it his duty to protect both Frs. Brassard and Bissonnette from situations that could prove embarrassing or detrimental to the Moscow Mission, he had already turned down “literally dozens of requests” for Fr. Brassard to appear on television, speak on radio, grant interviews, and write articles for magazines, a decision for which he would be accused of “muzzling” his priests. Regardless, though he did not announce the particulars of Fr. Brassard’s arrival at the airport, he found there, to his surprise, a battery of reporters who, he suspected, had undoubtedly been tipped off by Mr. Doyle. On deplaning, Fr. Brassard merely greeted them and went his way.

# Father Georges Bissonnette

January 25, 1953–March 5, 1955

## Taking stock

Back in Moscow, Fr. Bissonnette began to take the measure of his assignment. He quickly discovered that he was responsible for what was, in fact, a real parish, even if it was atypical. It was neither territorial nor national. It was rather a multi-national community of transient Catholics who were not Soviet citizens. Since there were children in the community, that meant organizing and teaching catechism classes in French and English and doing what he could in Italian with his knowledge of Latin and some Spanish. Classes for the English-speaking children were held in his little chapel, while those for the others were held either at the French or Italian embassies. Non-Catholic children were accepted at the request of their parents. He spent considerable time preparing his sermons because he felt the difficulty of preaching to “a congregation made up of people from thirteen different countries, and ranging in social position and education from ambassadors to housemaids.”

Like his predecessor, he was not only chaplain but apostolic administrator. His faculties were granted especially in favor of the Russian faithful because of the state of persecution in which they found themselves. Chances were, however, that he would use these faculties only rarely, if at all, because contacts with Soviet citizens were increasingly difficult and rare. They could be used in favor of the diplomatic community, but only in urgent cases.

He had a devoted housekeeper, Maria, who came in daily and attended not only the weekday Mass but the three Sunday Masses. She had been with Fr. Brassard all the time he was in Moscow and was almost heartbroken at his departure. Then, too, he had a chauffeur, Leonia, who had also worked for Fr. Brassard, it being the opinion of the US Embassy that it was more prudent

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for Americans not to drive their own cars in order not to expose themselves to useless legal entanglements and heavy penalties in case of accidents involving Soviet citizen.

From the financial point-of-view, he quickly understood how much it would cost him to live. Though Fr. Brassard had assured him that finances would be the least of his worries, he was now able to discover for himself that the people were not only generous but very solicitous about his well-being.

### **Weekly discussions**

As he went around the various embassies, he began to realize that, from a religious point-of-view, diplomats were no different from other people: some had a good grasp of religion, while others did not, many wanting to know more about it. No matter, everyone looked to the priest for comment on any question relating to it. As the Church's representative, he was also expected to be its "expert."

This gave him the idea of starting a sort of club or open forum at which philosophy, religion, ethics and morality, etc. could be discussed seriously but informally. He chose a Friday evening for the first meeting which drew ten people. From the beginning, the pattern was clear. He would simply moderate, allowing the discussion to be propelled by its own momentum and intervening only to answer a direct question or to summarize at the close what had been said. He would then serve light refreshments. Before long, he was gratified to see that his Friday night meetings had become popular features among members of the foreign colony.

### **Parish bulletin**

In order to save time on Sunday mornings, he drew up a parish bulletin, which he entitled *Voice in the Wilderness*. Written in both English and French, it contained, like all other such bulletins, the various activities of the parish. On the first page, it also carried an article pertaining to religion or spirituality which he either wrote himself or took from another source. All political comment, however, was studiously avoided. First produced by volunteers, then by the staff of the US Embassy, the bulletin was well appreciated by the parishioners.

## **Housekeeper forced to resign**

But all did not remain quiet for very long. About a month after his arrival, Maria, the housekeeper, informed him that she could no longer work for him. Obviously distressed, she told him the real reason for her decision: the police had ordered her to resign. Convinced that this had all the earmarks of persecution, Fr. Bissonnette offered to take up the matter with some of his diplomat parishioners who knew Maria well, but she begged him not to do so because it would only make things more difficult. She added that someone had denounced her to the police, accusing her of working for the priest only because this gave her the opportunity of attending daily Mass.

Three months passed before Burobin, the Soviet agency responsible for supplying the needs of foreigners, provided a suitable replacement. During this time, the solidarity of the foreign colony made itself evident. Some sent their own housekeepers to do his shopping and to clean the apartment. Others volunteered to do his laundry. Still others prepared his breakfast. As for his other meals, he was often invited to one or another of the various embassies or legations, particularly the Belgian and the Lebanese, and he was generally invited to most of the social gatherings of the Western community.

## **Parish choir**

At one of the gatherings, he appealed for volunteers for his choir. He needed reinforcements, he said, because the Belgian diplomat who played the organ and knew Gregorian chant very well, was being transferred. Fifteen people, only half of whom were Catholics, having answered his call, he began holding weekly rehearsals with the help of some liturgical records left behind by Fr. Brassard. Following rehearsals, the people often stayed for an evening of music appreciation, bringing their own records and enjoying the friendship of other people.

## **US Marines**

A group needing special attention were the US Marines attached to the embassy. During their off-hours, they suffered from boredom. Not being able to find them a field in which they could play baseball, he invited some of them to the home of a French family whose members played volleyball among themselves. At first, the Marines were contemptuous of a game which they

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considered only suitable for girls but, as it grew on them, they soon formed their own team. Other embassies became interested and, eventually, a small league was formed with people from all segments of the diplomatic community. The games, as well as the refreshments which usually followed, helped break down whatever social barriers there were, thereby heightening morale. The Marines were the principal beneficiaries of the initiative because, until now, they had not generally shared in the social activities of the diplomatic community.

### **Bishop Thomas Quintan, S.S.C.**

Gradually, as Fr. Bissonnette settled in, his life became rather routine and his presence taken almost for granted at the various functions of the foreign community. But there were minor variations from time to time.

On one occasion, he received Msgr. Thomas Quinlan, S.S.C, and other missionaries who had been made prisoners by the Chinese during the Korean War and who passed through Moscow in April 1953 after their release from prison. The Bishop, an Irish Columban Father who had been Prefect Apostolic in Chun Chon, Korea, was to stay only overnight. Having said Mass upon arriving, he immediately arranged to say it again the following morning before leaving. When word got around of his planned second Mass, a group of parishioners from various embassies decided to attend it, posing a problem of sorts for Fr. Bissonnette. With no housekeeper, he wondered how he was going to feed them all, i.e., until the Marines arrived laden with food and until volunteers took charge of the kitchen. Their spontaneity was typical and heartwarming.

### **Trip to the Ukraine**

From time to time, stories circulated that there were still isolated groups of Catholics here or there in the Soviet Union. When Fr. Bissonnette heard that a priest was officiating in Kiev, he decided to investigate it personally. The new car promised him by Fr. Brassard having just arrived in August 1953, he consulted the US Embassy on the advisability of approaching Soviet authorities for the necessary travel permit. The embassy assured him that it had no objections. But, since he did not have diplomatic immunity, it suggested that he travel with companions who did. The embassy itself would provide them.

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When the opportunity turned up in September, he applied to and was granted permission by the Soviet Government to travel to the Ukraine. He and his companions spent a week on the road, covering almost 2,000 miles. Though they were followed throughout the entire trip, they not only could not find the priest but discovered that the Catholic church in Kiev had been converted into a radio station.

### **Trip to Central Asia**

In February 1954, Fr. Bissonnette, still convalescing after an attack of jaundice, was invited by Mr. Gropello of the Italian Embassy to accompany him on a trip to Central Asia to visit such places as Tashkent and Samarkand. Fr. Bissonnette readily agreed to go. As usual, they submitted their proposed itinerary to the Soviet authorities for approval. Fr. Bissonnette was allowed to benefit from the privilege accorded to Mr. Gropello of changing plans en route simply by notifying Moscow. Traveling by plane and by train, they covered some 7,000 miles.

### **Father Judicial Nicolas, A.A.**

Shortly after his return to Moscow, Fr. Bissonnette received another returning prisoner, this time an Assumptionist priest on his way back to France. During World War II, when Odessa had been occupied by Axis-allied Rumanian troops, Fr. Judicial Nicolas, who had been teaching in Rumania, obtained a visa to go there. His purpose was to see if anything remained of the French national parish of Saint Peter. The parish had been founded by another Assumptionist, Fr. Auguste Maniglier, who had been forced to leave at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution.

When Fr. Nicolas found the church very much in need of repairs, he returned during a subsequent vacation to do what he could to restore the building. Shortly after going back to his college in Rumania, he was asked in October 1943 to return to Odessa to minister to the Catholics there and to stay on, even after the expected reoccupation of the city by Soviet troops.

A year or so later, he was arrested on a charge of spying and was sentenced to eight years in labor camps. Following his release, he was now being repatriated at the request of the French Government, spending three days in Moscow with Fr. Bissonnette to whom he recounted his experience as a priest in Odessa and as a prisoner.

## **Trip to Odessa**

The conversation he had had with Fr. Nicolas gave Fr. Bissonnette the idea of going to Odessa to see if there was anything left of the Catholic community. This time, he hoped to travel by car, accompanied by his chauffeur, the US ambassador's secretary, and the wife of the embassy doctor.

He was busy planning the itinerary he would have to submit to the Soviet authorities when he was informed by the US Embassy that he should not leave Moscow. The US Government had just refused to extend the visa of Archbishop Germogen-Kozin of Krasnadar and the Kuban, the special representative of the Patriarch of Moscow who was on a short-term visit to the United States to visit the patriarchal parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church for which he was responsible. The US Embassy felt that the Soviet Government might retaliate by canceling Fr. Bissonnette's permit to stay in the Soviet Union.

But since nothing came of the refusal by July, it was thought that he might safely undertake the trip. His first request—for the Crimea, the eastern edge of the Black Sea, the Caucasus and the Western Ukraine—was turned down by the Soviet authorities who objected to certain cities named on the itinerary. When a revised list of places was submitted by each of the would-be travelers, the applications of Fr. Bissonnette's companions were approved, but his was not. He was told that the roads in the area he wanted to visit were impassable. Thereupon, the US ambassador intervened to ask how it was possible for the same roads to be in good repair for two people but impassable for their companion. A few hours later, Soviet officials advised Fr. Bissonnette that the roads had now been repaired and that he could proceed with his plans.

Once again, his car was followed but no attempts were made to restrict his movements. As on his previous trips, Fr. Bissonnette did not say Mass anywhere so as not to be accused of trying to minister to Soviet citizens. He returned to Moscow on July 28, 1954, after a two-week journey which revealed no trace of a Catholic priest or community in Odessa.

## **Amid increased persecutions, Khrushchev dares to toast the US chaplain**

As he took up again his routine of parish activities, Fr. Bissonnette was not personally subjected to any special harassment. Nevertheless, for Soviet

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Christians, the period marked a stepped-up anti-religious campaign which culminated five years later in Nikita Khrushchev's wholesale attack on religion. On July 7, 1954, the Central Committee of the Communist Party, concerned that young people were being attracted to the [Orthodox] Church, had voted a resolution calling on the Ministry of Education, the Komsomol, and the trade unions to intensify their antireligious propaganda.<sup>11</sup> "By August," wrote Fr. Bissonnette to Fr. Moquin on November 29, 1954, "its effects began to be noticeable and the thirty-odd embassies of the *free nations* began making reports on the changes it brought about on the local scene."

It therefore bordered on the laughable when, on November 28, 1954, Nikita Khrushchev, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, along with Georgi Malenkov, Vyacheslav Molotov, and Nikolai Bulganin, drank to Fr. Bissonnette's health at a reception held at the Yugoslav Embassy on the occasion of that country's national holiday.

## **Archbishop Boris appointed Exarch of the Russian Orthodox Church in the US**

But Fr. Bissonnette's personal tranquility would not last much longer. Patriarch Aleksii of Moscow had appointed Archbishop Boris as Exarch of the Russian Orthodox Church in the United States, in other words, as his personal deputy to take charge of the Church's overall administration in the country. Since this implied residence there, the Patriarch's action exacerbated the tensions that already existed between the Russian Orthodox groups in America which remained attached to the Patriarchate and those which had renounced their allegiance to it since 1917 on the grounds that the Patriarch was collaborating with the Soviet regime.

At the time, the Moscow Patriarchate saw the situation of its Metropolia (archdiocese) in the United States as chaotic. The vast majority of the faithful wanted complete independence from Moscow. However, a number of parishes favored a continued allegiance to the patriarchal throne. The question would not be settled until 1970, at which time the Metropolia gained

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<sup>11</sup>The most detailed descriptions in the English language of the persecutions that took place at the time are to be found in Nikita Struve's *Christians in Contemporary Russia*, London (Harvill Press, 1967), and in Michael Bourdeaux' *Patriarch and Prophets* (London, Macmillan, 1969) which is a collection of *samizdat* documents or excerpts thereof and of excerpts of Soviet press articles attacking and defaming religion.

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its autocephaly, becoming the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), and the Exarchate was abolished. However, approximately 30 parishes—known as Patriarchal Parishes—were allowed to continue under the direct jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Moreover, the Synodal Church (“the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad”), having moved first to Karlovci (Yugoslavia) in 1921, then to Munich in 1946, and finally to Jordanville, New York in 1950, had already broken away from the Mother church and was strongly opposed to all forms of collaboration with the Soviet regime.

### **Fears among the Russian Orthodox faithful in the US**

Since Archbishop Boris could only come to the United States with the consent of the Soviet Government, his appointment was strongly suspected of having political overtones and was therefore opposed by the second group. The suspicions were well founded. Historians of the Russian Orthodox Church generally recognize that, over the years, three unofficial but no less historic compromises or accommodations were reached between the Soviet Government and the Russian Orthodox Church, whereby the Government would exercise a measure of religious tolerance toward the Orthodox Church in exchange for its needed support, all the while keeping up its opposition to the Catholic Church. It was thus that a lull in persecutions had taken place from time to time, allowing the Russian Orthodox Church not only to survive but also to elect a patriarch and to re-organize itself administratively, though not without problems. As pointed out by Dimitry Pospelovsky: “The Soviet destruction of the Church was at least halted by the annexation of Orthodox or greatly Orthodox territories in the West beginning in September 1939—as it was necessary to assimilate or at least politically neutralize these millions of new citizens. The Soviet government realized it could not hope to achieve this by attacking their churches point blank. Indeed, it was through unity in a single Orthodox Church that the western Ukrainians and western Byelorussians could be most organically reunified with their eastern compatriots.”<sup>12</sup>

The second accommodation came during World War II when Stalin needed the support of the Church in the conduct of the war. Metropolitan Sergii, as head of the traditional, historical and national Orthodox Church, began active engagements in a patriotic effort to defend the motherland in

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<sup>12</sup>Pospelovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 193

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the hope that Stalin would be obliged to change his policy toward the Church. This eventually led to meetings called by Stalin himself on September 4, 1943, to discuss and arrange the conditions for a controlled but less precarious existence of the Moscow Patriarchate. Within four days of the meeting, a Sobor (Local Council) gathered and unanimously elected Sergei the patriarch. The Russian Orthodox Church was then allowed to reorganize itself.

When the war was over, another reason had to be found to justify the continued overt toleration of organized religion in a country whose official policy was militant atheism. Accordingly, the Church went out of its way to prove its usefulness to the Soviet State, especially by serving its foreign policy interests and propaganda,<sup>13</sup> often under the guise of Peace-making activity.

The Church's hierarchs stationed abroad were particularly responsible for promoting these *Cold War* interests and propaganda of the Soviet Government, hence the fear among many Russian immigrants in the United States that Archbishop Boris, who was being sent there as a resident Exarch, would be responsible for these activities.

### **Archbishop Boris denied visa extension**

Archbishop Boris and his secretary, Alexander Fedirovich Shishkin, arrived in the United States in December 1954 on a sixty-day visa. When they applied for an extension, it was refused, which meant that they had to leave New York by March 1, 1955.

### **Expulsion of Father Bissonnette**

On February 26, as Fr. Bissonnette and US Ambassador Charles Bohlen were both playing hockey at the British Embassy, Mr. Newby Walmsley, Minister Counselor of the US Embassy in Moscow, was summoned to the Soviet Foreign Ministry and informed verbally that the presence of Fr. Bissonnette in Moscow was no longer desirable. Mr. Walmsley's request for a written confirmation of the decision and the reasons that prompted it were both denied.

On being notified of the new development, Mr. Bohlen asked Fr. Bissonnette to come to his office where, after apprizing him of the news, advised him

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<sup>13</sup>*Ibid*, p. 302.

### *The Catholic Chaplaincy in Moscow*

to carry on as if everything were normal. The Soviet decision, he thought, might not be irrevocable. Any publicity about it would only make it more difficult for the Soviet Government to change its mind. Meanwhile, he would notify Washington and Fr. Moquin as well as ask for a meeting with Mr. Kuznetsev of the Soviet Foreign Ministry so as to register an official protest.

The ambassador believed that the Soviet action was a reprisal for the US refusal to extend the visa of Archbishop Boris, but he thought he should protest it as being a violation of the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement of 1933 and make no reference to Archbishop Boris. He would reserve to himself the right to point out that the two cases were not analogous: Boris was to minister to Orthodox believers who were American citizens, while Fr. Bissonnette ministered only to non-Soviet citizens. Furthermore, Fr. Bissonnette's presence in the Soviet Union was the result of a treaty, while Boris was in the United States only as a visitor. However, Mr. Bohlen was instructed by Washington to say that the US Government considered the Soviet action as retaliation for the Boris incident.

After his interview with Mr. Kuznetsev, the ambassador told Fr. Bissonnette that the Soviet Government was maintaining its position and considered that the oral communication of February 26 was sufficient notification to Fr. Bissonnette. Mr. Bohlen felt that Washington's attitude was forcing the Soviets to remain firm because it implied acquiescence to the US action regarding Archbishop Boris.

On March 2, 1955, a telephone call to Fr. Bissonnette informed him that he was to present himself at the OVIR (Section of Visas and Registration of Foreigners) before 7:00 P.M. and to bring his papers with him. There he was told that an exit visa was being prepared for him to leave the Soviet Union on March 3 or 4, and was asked at which point he wished to cross the border. At first he said he would leave by train via Helsinki but later, on Mr. Bohlen's advice, he decided to leave by plane. The difference would allow him to leave Saturday morning, March 5, rather than Thursday evening, March 3. His request having been granted, the embassy notified the State Department, while Fr. Bissonnette sent a telegram to Fr. Moquin asking for instructions concerning the disposal of the apartment and its furnishings.

### **Disposal of the apartment and its furnishings**

Agreeing to Fr. Bissonnette's proposals, Fr. Moquin replied that the apartment should be left, furnished as it was, in the name of the French ambas-

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sador who would be responsible for it until a successor to Fr. Bissonnette arrived. The sacred vessels were to be entrusted to the custody of the bishop of Helsinki, while the car was to be held in the name of a US Embassy employee until another priest arrived. If no one came, it could be disposed of later. He further instructed Fr. Bissonnette to take a plane from Helsinki as soon as possible after seeing the Bishop.

The French ambassador proved to be very helpful and co-operative, offering the services of his courier, who was taking the same plane as Fr. Bissonnette, to carry the sacred vessels in his pouch so as to avoid any difficulties with customs. He said too that he would put a seal on the apartment, send a lady to inspect it periodically, and, if the arrival of a new chaplain were long delayed, ask a bachelor member of his staff to inhabit it without disturbing the room used as a chapel.

### **Departure of Father Bissonnette**

At 9:00 A.M. on March 4, 1955, Fr. Bissonnette said his last Mass in Moscow. At the insistence of his multi-denominational choir, it was a Sung Mass attended by “just about everybody in the foreign colony.” He suggested to the people that, in the absence of a chaplain, they present themselves for the Sacraments to Fr. Butirovicz at Saint Louis church, explaining that even if they could not speak Russian, they could confess by making a simple gesture of repentance and letting the priest know that they could not express themselves.

That evening, there was a big farewell party at Spaso House to which the ambassador’s wife invited not only the diplomats but also every single Catholic in the foreign community.

The following morning, March 5, 1955, he left on schedule at 10:00 A.M. for Helsinki, the US Embassy staff having taken care of his travel arrangements. Every Western ambassador, minister or chargé d’affaires was there to see him off as well as a crowd of about 200 others.

Expressing the sense of loss felt by the foreign community in Moscow, Ambassador Bohlen was later quoted as saying: “There could be no doubt of the importance of Fr. Bissonnette’s role in maintaining the morale of the whole foreign community, including non-diplomatic personnel. He interpreted his mission to include an active, tireless, and cheerful participation in the life and problems of the entire community.”

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## **Part II: Moscow Chaplains after 1959**



# Father Louis F. Dion<sup>14</sup>

1st tour: January 25, 1959–September 22, 1961

2nd tour: August 18, 1968–August 27, 1971

## Reciprocity alleged to be contained in the 1933 Agreement

At first, Soviet authorities gave no written explanation of their action but, on March 8, 1955, the Foreign Ministry issued a note stating that Fr. Bissonnette had been expelled “in reprisal for the United States’ refusal to extend the visa of the Russian clergyman.” Curiously, the note then went on to say that the Agreement of November 16, 1933, bound both countries “to extend on the territories of their countries, to citizens of the other party, the right to satisfaction of their spiritual needs by priests, pastors, rabbis, or other ecclesiastical functionaries who are citizens of the other party.”

The United States protested that the recent Soviet action had violated the 1933 Agreement, pointing out that the cases of the two clergymen were not comparable. Fr. Bissonnette’s presence in Moscow was under the terms of the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement and had nothing to do with the temporary visits made from time to time to the United States and the USSR by ecclesiastical people.

## Father Dion requests a visa

When Fr. Moquin visited the State Department with Fr. Bissonnette on March 9, he was informed of the Soviet stance and advised to apply as

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<sup>14</sup>Since Fr. Louis Dion is deceased at the time of this writing, the account of his tenure is regrettably limited to the events surrounding his arrival in Moscow for the reasons mentioned in the Foreword to this booklet.

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quickly as possible for a visa for Fr. Louis Dion who had been selected to replace Fr. Bissonnette. When Fr. Dion submitted his application to the Soviet Embassy in Washington on March 23, he was assured that it would receive speedy attention in Moscow. On April 20, 1955, the Soviet Foreign Ministry notified the US Embassy that it was willing to issue Fr. Dion a visa, provided the United States issued one to Archbishop Boris and his secretary Shishkin for the same period of time.

### **US agrees to reciprocity provided it means equal treatment**

In a Note dated June 27, 1955, the United States stated its position more fully. Denying that there was any reciprocity in the Soviet Note of November 16, 1933, it pointed out that the United States' proposal of the same date was confined to the rights of American clergymen. The Soviet Government had given no indication at that time of being concerned about sending Soviet clergymen abroad. Absence of the word "reciprocity" was not accidental since it had been included in other notes exchanged on the same day. There was thus no basis to the Soviet claim that the United States is bound by the terms of the 1933 Agreement to admit clergymen from the Soviet Union.

The Note of June 27 went on to say that "if the Soviet Government now considers it desirable that Soviet clergymen be admitted to the United States in order to minister to the religious needs of Soviet nationals, the United States Government is prepared, in the interest of reciprocity, to extend to a Soviet clergyman the same possibilities of entry and religious activity, as those accorded to American clergymen in the Soviet Union under the terms of the November 16, 1933, Agreement."

Archbishop Boris had been admitted to the United States on a temporary visa to deal with matters pertaining to that segment of the Russian Orthodox Church, which was administratively subject to the Moscow Patriarchate. He had been in contact with people who, though members of the Russian Orthodox Church, were American citizens. And he had had the possibility of holding religious services in a number of American cities.

Fr. Bissonnette, on the other hand, had lived in Moscow only and had served the spiritual needs of Americans there, without ever having official contacts with Soviet citizens of the Catholic faith.

Reciprocity had to extend not just to the exchange of clergymen but to

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the conditions of their ministry. If Archbishop Boris were admitted to the United States, he would enjoy the right to minister to the needs of Soviet nationals.

The Soviet Government insisted that the religious functions of an Exarch could not be placed on the same footing as those of an ordinary priest like the American chaplain.

### **Deadlock**

The US Government regretted that the Soviet Government continued to link dissimilar cases by making the admission of Fr. Dion in the Soviet Union conditional on the unlimited entry of a resident Exarch of the Russian Orthodox Church in America.

Despite periodic efforts on the part of the State Department to resolve the issue, it remained at an impasse for the next three years.

### **Toward a compromise**

On November 3, 1958, Mr. Michael Doyle, on business in Washington, wrote to Fr. Louis Dion at Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts: "I have been persistently following this matter ever since the Soviets refused your application, and we have finally come to the conclusion wherein a visa is to be granted to you, and the State Department will permit Archbishop Boris to enter our country for a limited stay which is now satisfactory to the Soviet officials. I will keep you advised of this situation, as it may be possible that you can be in Moscow by Christmas."

Three days later, in an unsuccessful attempt to reach Fr. Dion by phone, Mr. Doyle called Fr. Henry Moquin in New York, asking for Fr. Dion's passport so it could be stamped with a visa authorizing him to enter the Soviet Union. There was, however, a proviso: the US Government had to grant a similar (temporary) visa to Archbishop Boris.

### **Assumptionists hesitate**

Since the proviso seemed like a repetition of their previous position, Fr. Moquin did not see anything new in the proposal. He was against any deal which provided visas for Archbishop Boris and Fr. Dion on the basis of reciprocity understood in the Soviet sense. Having consulted the Apostolic

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Delegate three years before, he knew that the Delegate and the Holy See were also opposed to one on that basis.

Mr. Doyle also told Fr. Moquin that the State Department was willing to go along with the request but wanted to be assured that Catholics would not react violently to the admission of a suspected Communist agent like Boris to the United States in exchange for the admission to Moscow of a priest who would be permitted little or no opportunity to minister to anyone outside the diplomatic community. Without consulting either Fr. Moquin or the Apostolic Delegate, Mr. Doyle—to Fr. Moquin’s consternation and displeasure—gave the State Department the assurance it was seeking.

### **Logjam is broken**

After his conversation with Mr. Doyle, Fr. Moquin immediately called the Apostolic Delegate who told him through his secretary that the Delegate was not favorable but that he would give Fr. Moquin a definite answer after consulting the Holy See. Accordingly, he asked Fr. Moquin to put the matter in writing. He added that he felt very wary of the situation because he suspected it might prompt a significant number of Americans to blame the Catholic Church for pressuring the State Department to admit a suspected Communist agent to the country. Such blame, he feared, could easily be manipulated into powerful anti-Catholic propaganda.

Thereupon, Fr. Moquin wrote that same day—November 6, 1958—to the Apostolic Delegate who transmitted the letter to Cardinal Domenico Tardini, the Vatican Secretary of State. On December 15, 1958, the Chargé d’Affaires, a.i., at the Apostolic Delegation, Msgr. Achille Lupi, transmitted to Fr. Moquin the answer he was awaiting: “His Eminence [Cardinal Tardini], after consultation with the Sovereign Pontiff, states that it would be preferable for Fr. Dion to go to Moscow, in view of the great good which would occur to the Diplomatic Corps by his presence there.” The logjam was broken.

### **Compromise**

On December 22, Fr. Dion left rapidly for Washington where he met with Mr. Davis at the State Department. Bringing Fr. Dion up to date, Mr. David told him that the State Department had profited by a new Soviet request for a visa for Archbishop Boris to point out again that a visa for Fr. Dion would also be desirable, always under the terms of the exchange of

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notes of November 16, 1933, between President Roosevelt and Mr. Litvinov relating to freedom of religion for American nationals residing in the Soviet Union.

The State Department went on to stress that *any visa for Fr. Dion should be for residence, while that for Archbishop Boris would be only for 90 days*. However, the US Government would *allow Boris to come as Exarch responsible for some 30 patriarchal parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in America, parishes obviously comprising US citizens*. The Soviet Government, without accepting the position of the State Department, would nevertheless be willing to grant *a temporary visa to Fr. Dion, with the understanding that it would be renewed routinely*. However, *Fr. Dion could not minister to Soviet citizens*. After the State Department had issued a temporary visa to Archbishop Boris, he had not only accepted it but was already on his way to the United States. The Soviet Embassy was now ready to grant a visa to Fr. Dion upon presentation of his passport.

From the State Department, Fr. Dion went immediately to the Soviet Embassy where, after only a few minutes, he was issued the entry visa he had been waiting for. It was valid until January 31, 1959. In later years, Fr. Dion would recall that his visa had to be renewed every six months, but that the procedure was in fact routine. He would fill out a questionnaire and send it to the proper authorities through his housekeeper who returned with it in hand.

### **Father Dion arrives and settles in**

Fr. Dion left New York on January 20, 1959. After stopping in Paris, he arrived in Moscow on January 25 where he was met by a hastily organized but deeply appreciated reception committee of twenty people.

Since Fr. Bissonnette's former apartment was being occupied for safe-keeping by Miss Baron, the niece of the French ambassador, Fr. Dion settled in temporarily to the *Intourist* Metropole Hotel near the Kremlin, spending his first few days meeting various diplomats.

The following Sunday, February 1, he said his first Mass at the French Embassy at 10:00 A.M. for about 40 people, then proceeded to the US Embassy for a noon Mass which attracted about 50 people. He then arranged to say a daily Mass in the apartments of various parishioners, with the understanding that anyone could attend.

Almost at once, an American officer who was going on leave for two and a

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half weeks offered Fr. Dion the use of his apartment during his absence. The American ambassador agreed to this on condition that Fr. Dion retain his hotel room and show up there occasionally so as not to give Soviet authorities the idea that he no longer needed it.

On all sides, he was advised to go slowly and to allow his diplomat parishioners to make all requests.

On Monday, February 9, he had his first hour-long Russian lesson, which was followed by others five days a week. His teacher, hired through Burobin, was also the embassy librarian.

Two days later was Ash Wednesday. Not having on hand any old palms with which to produce the ashes needed for the ceremony, Fr. Dion sent his chauffeur to borrow some from the church of Saint Louis. When the man returned with a package of Holy Oils, Fr. Dion resorted to cigarette ash, which he felt was sufficiently symbolic.

### **Return to 12/24 Sadovaya-Samotechnaya**

In the meantime, progress was being made on his eighth-floor apartment at 12/24 Sadovaya-Samotechnaya. Burobin had found a place for Miss Baron and had begun painting the one she was living in. On February 27, she moved out and one week later Fr. Dion moved in. He needed a new gas stove and refrigerator, which he hoped to obtain either in Germany, Finland, or the United States. He applied to Burobin to have the electric meter converted from five to ten amperes. Transformers were needed so that he could use his American appliances with Moscow's 220 volts. The gas pipes had to be changed and fixtures and outlets installed in the bedroom and kitchen. He was pleased when the US Embassy allowed its Russian employees to do the work.

### **Activities resume**

On Saturday, March 14, Fr. Dion held his first catechism classes: two sessions of one hour each, one for beginners and another for more advanced students. Eight children attended.

On March 23, Monday of Holy Week, he said his first Mass in the chapel. Six people were present. Good Friday attracted 40 people, while the Easter Vigil, at the French Embassy, attracted about 80. Easter Sunday, there were

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25 people at the 10:00 A.M. Mass at the French Embassy, and another 70 at the English noon Mass at the US Embassy.

On Easter Sunday afternoon, he visited Saint Louis church for the first time, introducing himself to the relatively new Pastor, Fr. Vitold Bronitski (Lithuanian) who, he learned, had replaced Fr. Stanislaus Rogovski (Polish) at the end of November 1958 at the request of the archbishop of Vilnius, delegated by the archbishop of Riga.

On Tuesday, March 31, he was finally given his residency permit.

Shortly thereafter, having learned that the French ambassador did not like being disturbed on Sunday mornings by the religious services, he diplomatically arranged to have all future Masses in his apartment chapel, which he eventually called "Our Lady of Hope."<sup>15</sup> Despite the still hostile context in which it had to operate, the unusual parish in Moscow had begun to take on the air of normalcy!

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<sup>15</sup>Suggested by Mr. Doyle, the title was approved by Fr. Dufault and Cardinal Tardini. As stated by Fr. Dion in his 1W Christmas letter, the title of Our Lady of Hope was meant to indicate the devotion to Mary throughout the centuries in Russia, and to describe the principal virtue filling the hearts of an oppressed people. Fr. Dion began using the new title on September 29, 1959.

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# Father Joseph Richard<sup>16</sup>

1st tour: August 25, 1961–September 26, 1965

2nd tour: September 2, 1971–April 4, 1976

## Why were you selected to go to Russia and under what circumstances?

One day I received a phone call from Fr. Henry Moquin, our Provincial, telling me that there was question of finding someone to replace Fr. Louis Dion who was chaplain at our mission in Moscow. I said in effect: what does that have to do with me? I was giving retreats and was booked quite far ahead, especially with retreats for sisters. I felt that Fr. Henry wasn't listening to me, so I repeated: "what does that have to do with me?" He answered: "I have to find someone to replace Fr. Louis." "Is that me?" I asked. "Yes," he said. It came as quite a surprise. I didn't think I was cut out for that type of ministry, but since he was taking a chance, I thought I'd take one too.

I was fluent in both French and English, and I had had some training in the German language, but none in Russian. Since most of the letters in the Russian alphabet are taken from the classical Greek language, which I had studied for 5 years, I was able to read it, but didn't know what I was reading.

In short, I was not too well prepared for that sort of ministry. I had been a teacher and a retreat master. I didn't quite know what I was getting into. I was not afraid but curious. The first tour, I succeeded Fr. Louis Dion. He stayed with me about four weeks to show me the ropes.

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<sup>16</sup>The following account of Fr. Joseph Richards years in Moscow is the transcript of a recorded interview conducted in the spring of 2003 by Bro. Paul Henry, A.A.

**What was the most memorable event of your stay?**

One of the highlights of my first tour was my meeting with the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Aleksii. He was 93 years old when we met, and I was in my 50s. He said to me: “I could be your grandfather.” He was very sympathetic.

**How did your stint in Moscow affect you spiritually or affect your vocation as a priest?**

I think I became much closer to God because I felt that I needed his help. It's not that I was afraid, but had something happened, I wanted to be ready. Since I was privileged to have the Blessed Sacrament in my apartment, I became much more attentive to my visit to the Blessed Sacrament. In fact, I never went away for any overnight without emptying the tabernacle. I took no chances because there could have been a desecration of the Holy Species. I was afraid of that. If I went away even for one night, I would consume all the hosts before I left.

**You said you would leave on occasion. Where would you go?**

I'd go for an overnight or for a couple of days. There were some places that I had heard about and wanted to see, e.g., Zagorsk, some 30–40 miles outside of Moscow, where there is a Russian Orthodox monastery and seminary.<sup>17</sup> I'd go there sometimes for an overnight.

**You therefore had a good relationship with them?**

Yes. And I was always well treated. I found them hospitable. If I wanted to stay, it was all right.

**What difficulties did you have?**

I must say that I met with no serious difficulties during my entire stay in what was then called the USSR. I knew I was and would be followed wherever

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<sup>17</sup>Trinity-St. Sergius Monastery founded by St Sergius of Radooezh (1314-1392). The Moscow Theological Academy and Seminary were/are located at the monastery

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I went. I knew that my phone was bugged. But, in all truth, I didn't worry about it, even though that's not like me.

### **They watched you that closely?**

There were regular reports on all foreigners. I knew that I was followed. I knew that all my movements were reported to the authorities. That didn't worry me because I wasn't doing anything wrong. Some people have asked me: did you ever try to outwit them? I've said that that would have been stupid. I wasn't trained for that. And I wasn't there for that. I was there for one thing: to be a priest.

### **What types of ministry did you do?**

First of all, I said Mass for the Catholics of the foreign colony who wanted to attend. There were also religion classes for the children of the diplomats and the military personnel who were in Moscow at the time. I would take care of the French and English myself, but I had an interpreter, a native German woman, who would translate as I spoke in French or English. I did the same with the Italians. I had an Italian woman who would translate as I went along.

On weekends, I would celebrate Mass on Saturday afternoon. I would preach in French or English, depending on the language of the majority of those present. On Sunday morning, I would say 3 Masses: 1 in French and 2 in English. My little apartment chapel could accommodate only about 30 people and maybe about 15–20 standees. And, of course, it was on the 8th floor. It was not unusual for some people to arrive late because, among the many things that didn't work too well in the Soviet Union, were the elevators. The people would simply say: *Lift, nyet rabotayet*. During the week, religion classes took about 3 days of my time. Also, from time to time, people would come in to have a Mass said or to discuss a problem they were having.

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**When you went away on occasion, did you ever do so for ministerial purposes, or was your ministry limited to Moscow by the authorities?**

It was limited. If I had gone to any other town in the Soviet Union, and if I had exercised my priestly ministry in public, I could have been taken to task.

# Father Eugene V. LaPlante

1st tour: September 14, 1965–August 28, 1968 2nd tour: July 1, 1979–September 18, 1983

## Why was I selected to go to Russia and under what circumstances?

There was a need for someone to replace Fr. Joseph Richard and I could be easily freed from teaching at Assumption College since I was there temporarily. Apparently, someone else had been asked, had accepted, and then asked not to have the assignment.

Fr. Armand Desautels, Provincial, called me to the Prep School, asked me how my health was and then point-blank asked me if I would accept to go to Moscow. It took me thirty seconds to think it over and accept in faith.

For my second assignment to Moscow, Fr. Edgar Bourque, Provincial, asked me to replace Fr. Philip Bonvouloir. Since I had already had the experience of Moscow, I accepted gladly, though my Canadian friends thought I was crazy!

## Most memorable events during my stay

- The visit of General Charles de Gaulle in 1967. I was the only non-French person invited to the reception at the French Embassy. Breaking protocol, Ambassador Beaudet took me out to the reception line (I was at the end) and brought me to meet the President just after the higher-ranking officers of the embassy.
- The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, which signaled a rather tense and anxious period in the Soviet capital.

### **Most important historical events during my stay**

- The Soviets invaded Afghanistan.
- Leonid Ilich Brezhnev died and was replaced by hardliner Yuri V. Andropov.
- The Soviets shot down the Korean Airliner 007, causing international tension. The resulting boycott of air travel to the Soviet Union caused a delay in Fr. Robert Fortin's arrival to replace me, and I had to leave by train to Helsinki rather than fly directly to Rome where I was to make my report.

### **Most difficult aspect of my stay**

The most difficult aspect of my second stay was the arrest of Vladimir Evgenevich Nikiforov, a secretly ordained priest with whom I was in contact. That resulted in my being followed more than usual and being in danger for a while until I left the country. Here's what happened.

Sometime in the summer of 1982, probably early on, the wife of one of the American officers in the Cultural Affairs Section met me in the Washington Circle Restaurant (i.e., the snack bar at the US Embassy). She spoke to me about a Catholic priest of the underground Church. Over her stay in the Soviet Union, she said, she had been helping him by bringing him books and other religious supplies. Her husband was about to be transferred and she wanted me to meet with the priest and see how I could help him. He was anxious to meet me, she added. To refuse did not appear to me to be a plausible solution. So with some fear and trepidation, I agreed to meet with him and she arranged a rendezvous. I took the subway to a particular stop and was met by a Russian who led me in a very roundabout way, circling around through a lot of streets until at last we arrived at an apartment building. There I met with Vladimir Evgenevich Nikiforov and his wife.

According to Vladimir, an underground Czech bishop posing as a tourist had secretly ordained him. About the time of his ordination, Mother Madeleine, the foundress of the Little Sisters of Jesus, who was touring the USSR with other sisters in an RV, had approached me and had asked me to provide some hosts. That is all I knew until Vladimir mentioned the date of his ordination. He confirmed that the hosts were indeed used for the Eu-

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charistic celebration on that occasion. He had been ordained with special permission of Pope John Paul II though he was married.

Through the months that followed, I remained close to Vladimir, providing him with books, catechetical materials, etc, and many discussions on theological and moral questions. I found him to be a profound thinker and zealous priest and his wife was ardently apostolic also. They both had good jobs and knew the risks they were taking. During one of our meetings, when we had concelebrated Mass together, he expressed doubts about one of the members of the secret little Catholic community, a certain Sacha. That Sacha communicated separately with me on occasion, besides accompanying me to and from the subway station. He often expressed a dislike for Vladimir as being too strict. He also asked me for a private meeting elsewhere.

For the above-mentioned meeting, we met in a wooded park area and he brought me to a house quite far from the center of Moscow at a spot where the subway goes above ground for a certain distance. The room where we met gave me a strange feeling because on a shelf all around the room there were, I would estimate, a hundred or so empty beer bottles...a kind of collection. There he mentioned that he wanted to become a religious and form a small community and wanted to become an Assumptionist. All we had to do was admit him and give him the money, and he and his community would spend their time in prayer and study. I mentioned to him that he would have to work to earn his living. He did not seem to understand that. I had to repeat the need for prayer, study, and work a few times. During this meeting he reiterated his dislike, which I felt was exaggerated, for Vladimir. I did write to Father General at the time about that. He requested another meeting but did not show up at the point of contact.

At one point, Vladimir and I met independently of the other members of the group and he introduced me to another underground priest at that priest's brother's apartment. We got a scare when there was a knock on the door. Fortunately, it was only his brother coming back to pick up something he had forgotten.

It was during that winter that the brake lines on my car were cut, but I managed to get home and stop in a snow bank in front of my apartment entrance on Kutuzovsky Pr. On another occasion, the oil plug on the car was loosened and I could have had multiple problems from that.

The following March or April, I believe, (the dates are fuzzy), I was on my way to meet with Vladimir, bringing along plastic bags full of food for dinner to celebrate the anniversary of his ordination. As I got off the

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subway train, Sacha walked quickly past me and slipped me a note. I left the station and read the note, which said that Vladimir had been picked up for interrogation. I have not seen him since. Shortly after he was arrested, two different sources (one a Sister and the other I do not remember) told me that I also was in danger. Another person told me that Sacha was the one who had denounced Vladimir and me. The plan of the KGB was to put Vladimir on trial during Pope John Paul's trip to Poland, accusing the Pope of interfering with the internal affairs of the Soviet Union and expelling me for being part of that plot. Apparently, under intense interrogation, Vladimir had quickly implicated me in the whole affair.

During that period, I could sense (and see) a much closer KGB surveillance. I approached some people at the embassy about what had happened and waited rather anxiously for my successor, Fr. Robert, to arrive. Fortunately or providentially, at the same time, Andropov was too ill to give the go-ahead for the trial, and when Robert arrived, I was able to leave unhindered. It was only a year later that TASS and Novosti, two Soviet news agencies, attacked me for my role.

Eventually Vladimir was released and permitted to immigrate to Sweden (I don't know all the negotiations that led to his departure from the Soviet Union even though we had corresponded for some time after his release). As far as I know, he is still working as a priest in Sweden.

I have purposely omitted from this account most of the names of people and organizations that were implicated in this Nikiforov Affair.

The accusation by Valia, my housekeeper, that I was inadvertently or imprudently responsible for Vladimir's discovery and arrest could be simply a case of disinformation. If it is true, I sincerely regret the imprudence, though I truly believe that Sacha was the one responsible for the problem.

### **Move of Our Lady of Hope from Sadovaya-Samotechnaya to Kutuzovsky Prospekt**

I don't remember the exact circumstances of the offer to move. The apartment on Sadovaya-Samotechnaya, rented by the French Embassy, had been the residence and chapel of the American chaplains since our removal from St-Louis des Français. When, during my second stint, Mr. and Mrs. Verdo of the French Embassy were scheduled to leave Moscow, someone from the embassy suggested to me that it would be good if we had more space to

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receive parishioners and that the Verdo's Kutuzovsky apartment was much larger and scheduled to be renovated at the time of their departure. With the person responsible for the upkeep and renovation of French apartments, I visited the space and I concurred that it would be far better because it was more centrally located and closer to the American Embassy. We planned the renovation so that the wall to the back room (used as a dining room at the time) would be cut in an arch pattern so that drapes could be hung to separate the living room from what would be the chapel area.

Since the renovations would take some time (i.e. slowly, according to American and French standards), we had ample time to prepare the move. Once the renovations were started, the French woman responsible and I would visit the Russian workers regularly. If we were satisfied with the progress, we would leave them cartons of American cigarettes and bottles of good vodka. By their standards, they did a rather quick job. I packed all my things with help from some parishioners in moving boxes from the American Embassy, and on moving day (a couple of days before we should have), a US Embassy truck made a couple of trips to bring everything. Unfortunately the floor was not completely dry and a few scratches marred the newly redone floors. The wife of the Italian Ambassador, Mrs. Maccotta, made the curtains for the chapel and living room.

One little note of interest: the plaque listing the names and dates of the American chaplains was paid for by Mrs. Bob Hope who had attended Mass in the old Sadovaya chapel.

### **Attempts at compromising me**

One day, as I was getting a haircut at the little barber shop on the corner of Chaikovskaya and Kutuzovsky, the barber, whom I had never seen there before, asked me if I liked icons. I said that I found them beautiful. He offered to sell me some. I said that, though I thought them beautiful, I was not interested in buying any. Fortunately I gave the right answer, for looking in the mirrors around the barbershop, I saw a uniformed policeman (KGB?) hiding behind a door.

Another day, three or four people contacted me to help them immigrate to the U.S. One in particular said he was an East German from Dresden. He was quite persistent. I spoke about him to security at the embassy. They showed me some photos from which I was able to pick him out. He was a known provocateur.

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On a trip to Leningrad (St. Petersburg), I took a walk along the river. A Russian came up to me to ask for help in leaving the Soviet Union.

Those were rather common experiences.

### **How my Russian stint affected my spirituality or my vocation as a priest**

It deepened my spiritual outlook of service for the Kingdom of God in a spirit of love and humility.

### **Most rewarding aspect**

The recognition in my life that I was truly serving a purpose: to preach, to teach, to counsel, to celebrate the Eucharist in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural environment.

### **Travels to other parts of Russia**

Not much outside of Leningrad (St. Petersburg), to serve the American and French Consulates there.

### **People I met and with whom I am still in touch**

I am still in touch with a few friends: Carolyn Page, Wayne and Nan Leigninger, Eve Levin, and Rev. Rodger Harrison.

### **Types of ministries**

- Teaching religion at the French and German Embassy schools in my first tour (as well as Sunday catechism at the American Embassy).
- Teaching religion at the Italian Embassy (in Italian) during my second tour (as well as religion for the American and French children).
- Pizza night discussions with the university students.
- Home Masses and all the other regular ministries of a parish.

# Father Philip Bonvouloir

April 1, 1976–July 1, 1980

## Most memorable events during my stay

- One-month visit of my mother to Moscow on two different occasions.
- Fire at the American Embassy in 1977.
- Two-hour stay in a Russian drunk tank.

## Most important historical events during my stay

- SALT talks concluded
- Death of Popes Paul VI and John Paul I; Election of John Paul II

## Most difficult aspects of my stay

- No other priests to fraternize with.
- Russian paperwork and bureaucracy when traveling, etc.

## Relations with Soviets

- No relations with Soviets. I did have some with private Russian citizens.

## **Harassment, difficulties**

- There were always problems when traveling. Permits were granted after delays. Requests had to be re-submitted because authorities contended that paperwork was lost.
- At airport arrivals in the USSR, custom officials often tried to confiscate magazines and personal items. Once you knew your rights and what their game was, you just had to confront them and not let them get away with it. It was often a case of threatening to report them to their superiors.

## **Relations with Orthodox**

- I was never invited to Orthodox services or church events. I was never considered to be the official representative of the Catholic Church in Moscow and USSR. The Minister of Cult and Religion only recognized the Lithuanian priest who served St. Louis church in Moscow, Fr. Stanislas Majeika. And Fr. Majeika was in reality a servant of the Communists without being a Communist!
- I did participate in an Orthodox wedding (a Frenchman married a Russian secretary) performed in an Orthodox church in Moscow.

## **Most rewarding aspect**

Being able to see Russian people up close and appreciate that they are good people who want what the rest of the world wants, namely, freedom to live their lives in peace and pursue their private dreams.

## **Other travels**

- Spent R & R in Helsinki, Finland, and in Leningrad (St. Petersburg).
- Visited Central Asia: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kurdistan, etc.
- Visited the Balkan countries: Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia.
- Took a cruise on the Black Sea with my mother, visiting Yalta, Odessa, and other port cities.

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- Passed through Warsaw and visited Jasna Gora, Oswiecim, etc., as I left Moscow at the end my tour.

### **Important people I met**

- US Secretary of State, Mohammed Ali (Cassius Clay), Henry Kissinger, USSR first cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin.

### **Types of ministries**

- Masses during the week at my apartment and Masses on weekends at the US snack bar at the embassy.
- Visiting families and the US Marines on a weekly basis (Marines were young and homesick).
- Taught catechism at French, German and Italian schools (primary grades).
- Prepared children for sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation.
- Performed three weddings at the US Embassy.

### **Human interest stories**

#### **Life in a drunk tank**

While cross-country skiing on the outskirts of Moscow near Moscow University, I ran into a rather elderly Russian factory worker who was seated in the forest and painting a miniature of a Russian Orthodox church. I fell in love with his painting and asked him if he had any other paintings. He said he did. We made an appointment to meet at a certain place outside of Moscow and somewhat hidden from busy roadways.

He brought some of his other paintings and displayed them on the ground. A few moments later, men emerged from nowhere and said they were the Police, and that we were to follow them. They herded the artist into the police car and I never saw him again. They told me to follow them in my car. I was brought to a police precinct outside of Moscow. I didn't recognize the neighborhood. I was placed in a cage with three other gentlemen, two of

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whom were dead drunk and were continuously proclaiming their innocence of whatever crime they had been accused of. I sat down and wondered what was next. Minutes passed. Then one hour had passed and nothing!

I finally called one of the officers and spoke loudly in English that I wanted to make a phone call. He in turn called someone else who understood English. I was told that I was not a diplomat and therefore was not entitled to make a phone call. After two hours of waiting, I was finally called out and escorted to a room where a gentleman was seated behind a desk and dressed in civilian clothes (KGB). He spoke good English but with a heavy Russian accent. His first words were: *Gospodyn (Mr.) Bonvouloir*. I immediately corrected him and said, *Otetz (Father) Bonvouloir*. He smiled. I don't know if he was amused or was being sarcastic. When the police arrested me and the artist out in the field, they never asked us for our names, addresses, etc. And yet, this KGB agent already had my name and, I am certain, an entire file and dossier on my stay and business in Moscow. He told me I had committed a serious crime in trying to buy works of art and smuggle them out of the country. I replied that I personally considered them beautiful paintings, but I doubted that they could be considered works of art worthy of the Pushkin Museum.

After an hour of monotonous and boring interrogation, the officer finally told me that I was free to go. Which I did without hesitation. Upon returning to my apartment, I called the US security officer at his apartment and made an appointment to see him the following day. I explained to him the entire incident, and he instructed me to be careful from here on. This incident occurred three weeks prior to my final departure from Moscow. The security officer explained that it was not unusual that the Soviet authorities intimidate non-embassy personnel prior to their departure from the USSR. It catches foreigners off-guard and probably convinces (or frightens) them not to be too hasty in returning to the Soviet Union because of the hassle and inconvenience.

### **Embassy fire**

In 1977, a fire erupted in the US Embassy on the upper floors of a 9-story building. The ambassador's office and high security area were located on the 8th floor. The response from the Russian firefighters was overwhelming with fire equipment, personnel, etc., probably because this was an ideal opportunity for Soviet authorities to enter the US Embassy and poke their noses

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where they didn't belong.

I received a phone call from a friend who informed me of the fire. I immediately grabbed my camera, got into my car and headed for the embassy some ten minutes away. I prudently parked my car some distance from the embassy and walked toward the excitement. It was not a blazing inferno, but more of a smoking nuisance with a few flames shooting out of some of the windows on the upper floor.

Upon arriving, militia and police told me "Nyet," I couldn't enter the embassy compound. So I went across the street and began taking pictures. Immediately, some plainclothesman (KGB) told me it was forbidden to take pictures, and secondly, he wanted to confiscate my film. I told him, "No" on both accounts: I told him that this was US Embassy property and that whoever he was, he had no authority to order me around on US property. I spoke in an angry tone and with conviction. After I said it, I realized that I was across the street and not on embassy property. But I must have impressed the gentleman with my argument because he didn't challenge me. He simply gave me a scowl, turned and walked away. I continued to take photos.

Soviet authorities are very paranoid about accidents, fires, natural disasters, etc. and prefer to keep all these events under a cloak of silence and secrecy. It's almost as if these unfortunate incidents are the sign of a weakness in the Soviet system. So everything remains a big secret. In the USSR, it is virtually impossible to obtain statistics, data and information, which would be readily available in most other countries. Try to find a phone directory in the USSR! If a plane crashes in the USSR, if no foreign passengers were aboard, the Russian citizenry would probably hear about the accident only months after. And in most cases, the true facts would be hidden, distorted or never fully revealed. Ex. Chernobyl, the nuclear submarine disaster in the Gulf of Norway, etc.

### **Traveling with 007**

Employees of the US Embassy are encouraged to take a vacation break to relieve the stress, monotony, etc. that are part of serving and working in the Soviet Union.

A group of us did just that in October 1978. We planned a trip to Central Asia: myself, a secretary (Commercial Section) and her teen-age daughter, a Secretary (Consular Section), and a Marine sergeant from embassy security.

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We made our own travel plans and did not go through the Soviet tourist agency, *Intourist*. The Soviet authorities did not like this but they couldn't stop us.

To make a long story, short, the young, single lady from the Consular Section, we found out a few weeks later, was under the employ of the CIA.

A few days after our return from Central Asia, this secretary was no longer at her post. When I went to the Consular Section to ask where she was, the only thing people could tell me was that she had returned to Washington, DC (and this happened within 24 hours).

Her identity as a CIA operative was made public by the Soviets, only because the US had revealed and made public the identity of a Soviet KGB agent who had been operative and under surveillance in New Jersey. There is tacit agreement between the two countries that when a spy is caught red-handed, he/she is shipped out of the country immediately, but it does not become public knowledge and the agent's identity is not revealed. If, on the other hand, the agent's identity is made public, then the opposing country will retaliate by revealing and expelling one of their secret agents.

This innocent-looking secretary who traveled with our group had actually been operating for some two years within the Soviet Union: dropping off messages under bridges, leaving cyanide capsules, etc.

# Father Robert J. Fortin

September 12, 1983–March 14, 1986

## Why was I selected to go to the Soviet Union and under what circumstances?

I had been in administrative positions for over 15 years, 10 in New York and 5 in Worcester where the last two were particularly trying because they involved chairing the Bylaws and Nominating Committee of the Board of Trustees of Assumption College that significantly revised the Board's bylaws. It was time for a change. When I was asked if I would like to go to Moscow, I was pleased to accept but requested a year's sabbatical in the Holy Land before going in order to breathe between assignments and to deepen my knowledge of the Bible. I attended a renewal program in Jerusalem at the Ecce Homo Biblical Institute in the Old City. This changed my life. It not only helped me deepen my knowledge of the Scriptures, but it also gave me an abiding love for the Holy Land, exposed me to the great variety of Eastern Churches, brought me in contact with the Jewish tradition, and gave me firsthand knowledge of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Importantly, but unbeknown to me at the time, it also laid the groundwork for my eventual return to Jerusalem in 1990 where, at this writing, I have spent 13 years of my life, 1 during the sabbatical, 10 at St. Peter in Gallicantu, and 2.5 at the Ratisbonne Pontifical Institute.

## Most memorable or important events of my stay

There were no truly *extraordinary* events in which I was personally involved. However, many *special* events stand out:

- Christmas Masses at Spaso House, the residence of the US Ambassador.

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- Holy Week services at the residence of the Italian Ambassador on Holy Thursday and Good Friday; the Easter Vigil at the French Embassy; and First Communion and Confirmation at the residence of the Italian ambassador on Ascension Thursday.
- The 50th Anniversary of the American Chaplaincy, which we celebrated at the German Dacha at Serebryanny Bor on June 3, 1984.
- Two pilgrimages, one to Rome where the group met Pope John Paul II in a private audience, and another to the Holy Land.
- The cordiality and solidarity of the tightly knit foreign community on the occasion of countless receptions, dinners and evenings that gave us the occasion to encourage one another.

### **Most important historical events during my stay**

1. The death of Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov on February 9, 1984. His tenure had seen a hardening of the Communist line, but his death marked the end of the power of the KGB of which he had been the head.
2. The death of Konstantin Ustinovich Chernenko on March 13, 1985.
3. The election of Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev who embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of *glasnost* (“openness”) and *perestroika* (“restructuring”). Shortly after he came to power, the African students at Patrice Lumumba Friendship University (sometimes called terrorist U”), who would come to my apartment each Wednesday evening for a prayer service, would tell me of the greater freedom with which their teachers were beginning to speak. Changes were in the air.

### **Most difficult aspects of my stay**

What I found particularly difficult was living in a totalitarian police state. It was the antithesis of everything I valued as an American. Still more difficult was coping with its militant atheism. That dimension ran counter to everything I stood for as a priest and therefore to the purpose for which

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I was there. Official Marxist-Leninist ideology considered religion as the opium of the people and translated itself into civil and criminal legislation restricting and/or preventing the exercise of religion. It saw me, a priest, as an exploiter and consequently as an enemy of the people. It was no wonder, then, that the KGB saw me—and all my predecessors—as an agent of the Vatican and the United States Government.

The measures of control were extensive and hard to deal with. Foreigners generally lived in *diplomatic ghettos* under the close surveillance of the KGB. Our apartments and telephones were bugged; our housekeepers were hired through the UPRK (the successor of Burobin), the KGB hiring service for foreign diplomats; militiamen were stationed at the entrance to the compound and in the middle of the parking lot; we were often followed on the street; we needed permission from the Foreign Ministry to travel outside the city of Moscow; as a foreign chaplain, I could not legally minister to any Soviet citizens nor have any unapproved contacts with them.

However, from a very personal point-of-view, the most difficult task I had was telling three of the five Little Sisters of Jesus (religious order founded by Fr. Charles de Foucauld), who were working for French officials in the Soviet Union but who often met secretly with local Christians, that they were in grave personal danger and should leave the country.

The first was Sister Claire Latour, who worked in the home of the Press Attaché of the French Embassy, Stéphane Chmelewsky. Sister Claire's name appeared in articles published by *Novosti* and *Tass* on October 15, 1984, and entitled "Vatican's Anti-Soviet Campaign Ends in Political Scandal." The Soviets were becoming more and more preoccupied by positions and actions taken by the Holy See, particularly by its recent document on Liberation Theology which they viewed as a determined effort on the part of the Church to stop the slide toward Marxism in Central and South America and in Africa, a slide they were counting on in their long-range thinking and were exploiting to the utmost. They were no less determined to counteract this perceived effort on the part of the Church. Among other subjects, including preposterous accusations against my predecessor, Fr. Eugene LaPlante, articles in *Novosti* and *Tass* spoke of the alleged illegal activities of an underground Catholic priest, Fr. Vladimir Evgenevich Nikiforov who was now living in Moscow and being accused of engaging in anti-government propaganda. For her part, Sister Claire was accused of having transmitted to the Pope in 1980 Nikiforov's request to send a bishop to Moscow in order to ordain him there since he was not allowed to travel to Poland where the ordination had orig-

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inally been scheduled to take place. In fact, an underground Czech bishop posing as a tourist did ordain him in 1981. When the two articles appeared, I wrote to Sister Claire, who was visiting her community in Rome at the time, asking her not to come back to Moscow lest she put herself and her employer in serious jeopardy.

The other two sisters, Sisters Germaine and Elizabeth, had been working as housekeepers and cooks at the residence of the French Consul General of France in Leningrad and had been in regular contact with believers there. It was feared that they would be brought to trial and jailed after a drunken Soviet official from the Foreign Ministry revealed their identity at a diplomatic reception in Moscow. Assuming that a Bulgarian connection would imply a Soviet one, the Soviet Union seemed to be looking for an incident that could offset the worldwide publicity surrounding the trial that was taking place in Rome of Sergei Antonov, the Bulgarian arrested for complicity in the attempted papal assassination but eventually acquitted for lack of evidence. I met with the two sisters at the French dacha at Serebryanny Bor on June 9, 1985 to discuss their situation. During a walk we took together that afternoon along the canal to avoid any possible bugs in the French dacha, we were visibly watched and photographed despite extremely heavy fog.

### **How my Russian stint affected me as a priest**

After six years as a teacher and fifteen years as an administrator, it was the occasion for me to develop a more pastoral mind-set. I quickly discovered the strength that one can derive from faith. In reading the *samizdat* and listening to the testimony of various diplomats who were in contact with a number of Soviet citizens who practiced their religion in secret, I came to admire the depth of the faith of many Russian Christians.

I also discovered the ravages that official and militant atheism can make in a society. When God is absent from society and when an individual's rights and personal dignity must constantly give way to the demands of the State, there are no limits to the restrictions that can be imposed on personal freedom and to the atrocities that can be committed in the name of a political ideology. Having experienced firsthand the existence of such an ideology, I became more convinced than ever of the importance of the Christian values promoted by the Church and of the need to instill them in society in order to make it more human and more just.

In dealing with Father Stanislas Majeika, the Lithuanian priest who was

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pastor of St. Louis-des-Français Church, I came to understand some of the contradictions he and others like him had to live with. From time to time, in the morning before each of our Masses, I would visit him in his sacristy to bring him prayer books, catechisms for children, texts of Vatican II in Russian, etc., books I would receive from time to time from the *Foyer Oriental Chretien* in Brussels. One morning, he abruptly interrupted our conversation to tell me that the Church was completely free in the Soviet Union, after which we continued on with the conversation we had been having. He thought this necessary so that he could tell the KGB, who saw me arrive and leave and who therefore would question him after my departure, that he had told me this. At dinner table in his apartment, when I went to introduce my successor to him, he cried bitterly when I said that he had remained *faithful* despite all of the difficulties with which he had to live. At a farewell dinner for me a few days later at the apartment of the representative of the BNP in Paris, Mr. & Mrs. Xavier De Beausse, he said: "People often forget that I am both a Catholic priest and a Soviet citizen." He surely collaborated with the KGB, but could he have done otherwise? As a younger priest, he had spent time in prison; the KGB headquarters were located directly across the street from the church. What would I have done if I had been in his place? I came to understand the dilemma with which Christians (priests, religious, laity) had to live on a daily basis in order to stay out of jail or even to stay alive.

On one of my trips to Leningrad, I paid a visit to Fr. Pavilonis, the elderly pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes church (a.k.a. Notre Dame de France), the only Catholic church open in that city. After a visit to the church, we went to his rectory to talk. He began by jamming the telephone on his desk in order to avoid any eavesdropping on the part of the KGB. We then conversed in French. Among other things, he felt that he was very much alone, that he was constantly under surveillance, that he couldn't trust Fr. Majeika at St. Louis in Moscow, that he was a mere employee of the Committee of Twenty legally in charge of the church, and that he had nothing to say in what took place there. With great sadness, he showed me an old copy of the Directory of the Diocese of Mohilev, lamenting the fact that almost all of the churches mentioned therein were now closed. As a result of this visit, I came to understand the loneliness and the heartache of those few Catholic priests who continued to exercise their ministry despite insurmountable adversities, and to admire their truly heroic faith and courage.

## **Relations with Soviets**

I had no relations with *high-level* Soviet officials. However, relations with *low-level* officials were constant: my housekeeper was sent by and regularly reported to the Diplomatic Corps Service Bureau (UPDK); the militia was stationed at the entrance to the compound where I lived, in the middle of its parking lot, and at the entrance to the US Embassy; a certain number of Soviet citizens (spies) worked at the US Embassy, in particular, Galia in the Embassy's General Services, and Raya ("the colonel") who was in charge of the numerous Soviet employees, our visas, travel permits, etc.

## **Forms of harassment from Soviets**

We lived under constant surveillance, as if in a glass cage, in a "diplomatic ghetto" where, as mentioned, our apartments and telephones were bugged, our housekeepers worked for the KGB, and our movements were watched. We could not travel very far outside of Moscow without special permission from the Foreign Ministry.

One day I found orange powder all over the inside of my car. I could not understand how and why it got there. A few days later, the ambassador called a meeting of all the Americans working at the embassy to tell us that the Soviets were putting orange powder in many of our cars in order to entrap Soviet citizens who might be in contact with us. The orange powder, which remained on one's hands and clothing for a certain length long time and which was involuntarily transmitted to others upon contact, could be detected only under highly specialized equipment. If found on a Soviet citizen, it was considered proof-positive that he/she had been in contact with a foreigner.

It was assumed that all foreigners were spies for their country. One of the most serious infractions was to have unofficial contacts with Soviet citizens. Consequently, entrapments were regularly set in an effort to put the foreign priest in contact with Soviet citizens. The following were some of those that were set for me:

- Requests to baptize Soviet children when one parent was a foreigner and the other a Soviet citizen.
- Requests to perform weddings of a foreigner with a Soviet citizen.
- An offer by a publisher in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, to translate from Croatian to Russian and to publish a large altar missal to be used by priests.

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Accepting the offer would have meant that I had an outlet for such missals, which, in turn, would have implied a connection with, even being the head of, the “underground Church.”

- Meetings with Soviet artists who depicted religious themes.
- During the Festival of the Communist Youth from around the world, a request to organize religious activities with a Russian Orthodox priest who claimed to be in charge of youth for the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate (this was forbidden in Soviet law!).

An invitation to meet with a so-called journalist from *l'Osservatore Romano* who was supposedly being assigned to Moscow with the alleged approval of the Foreign Ministry. None of this was true.

- A proposal made by an inebriated Orthodox cleric at a reception at the Austrian Embassy to go out drinking with him and to meet on an informal basis (in contravention of Soviet laws).
- The theft of my car's windshield wipers on the day of the release of the Nikiforov articles accusing my predecessor and a Little Sister of Jesus of anti-government propaganda and illegal contacts with Soviet citizens.
- The appearance of strange individuals (Soviet citizens) who came nervously to Mass, one on a weekday in my apartment chapel, the other at a Sunday Mass at the US Embassy, and this despite the presence of the militia standing guard at the entrance of both buildings to stop any Soviet citizens who might attempt to enter. Had these individuals not been in collaboration with the KGB, they would have been stopped at the door by the militia. Their intention seems to have been to check up on what was happening, who was there, and what I was saying. Also, the appearance of members of the KGB at my Holy Thursday and Good Friday services at the residence of the Italian Ambassador (the cars they arrived and left in had KGB number plates).
- Being followed one Sunday by the KGB as I drove from the apartment of the French Army attaché to that of another French diplomat. Once we reached the apartment, our followers kept calling us on the telephone to annoy us. The situation became hilarious when, after I had tapped with

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a regular beat on the telephone handset, I could hear them laughing at the other end of the line as they, in turn, tapped on their handset with the very same beat.

### **Relations with the Russian Orthodox**

The Russian Orthodox Church was a Church under siege. To survive, it had to accept tight control by a state that theoretically granted freedom of religion but which was itself controlled by a militantly atheistic Communist Party bent on the eventual eradication of religion. The Russian Orthodox Church felt obliged to espouse the foreign policy of the Soviet Government, preaching peace according to the gospels of Marx and Lenin.

This state of siege influenced its relations with other churches, including the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, this struck a responsive chord in the more traditional segments of the Russian Orthodox Church which viewed/view Rome as the long-standing enemy of Orthodoxy and Moscow as the Third Rome, the only one to have remained faithful to the tradition of the Fathers of the Church.

Under Patriarch Aleksii, with Metropolitan Nikodim at the Head of the External Church Relations Department, there had been an opening toward Rome. Then, under Patriarch Pimen, with Metropolitan Philaret of Minsk at the External Church Relations Department, there was a closing of the door, possibly at the request of the government. When I paid a courtesy call on Metropolitan Philaret in his Moscow office, he mentioned that, as a young priest, he had believed in Ecumenism but had now changed his mind as the result of having assumed the position of Head of the External Church Relations Department: "I do not see how Church unity is possible, now that I am where I am." Regardless, we always embraced very cordially whenever we met at official receptions.

Also, at such receptions, I would occasionally meet Metropolitan Pitirim who was equally very cordial. Later when I was living in Paris, I was one of the invited guests at a dinner for Metropolitan Pitirim at our Assumptionist residence at Francois I<sup>er</sup>. Among the other guests were several reporters from the daily Catholic newspaper *La Croix*. During the meal, they asked him several difficult questions, including one about Fr. Gleb Yakounin, a controversial Russian Orthodox priest in Moscow. The Metropolitan equivocated and sidestepped many of the issues. At the end of the meal, I was the last one to say goodbye to him. As I embraced him, I whispered in his

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ear: "Continue to do what you can." He thanked me "for being a brother" to him and added: "At least you understand."

To preserve appearances, the Protestant minister and I were invited to an elaborate dinner at the well-known Praga Restaurant during the visit of Rev. Emilio Castro, the General Secretary of World Council of Churches in Geneva, on September 18, 1985. During the speeches at the end of the meal, it was pointed out that relations were good with the other Churches and that our presence there testified to those good relations.

As a matter of fact, we had very little contact with the Orthodox Church, except for the once-a-year celebrations of the Week of Christian Unity organized by the Patriarchate to which we were invited. These ceremonies took place in discrete churches far from the crowds. Very few people attended. The presiding archimandrite always thought it necessary to explain beforehand to the handful of elderly women present what was about to take place, lest they conclude, as one of the archimandrites once explained to me, that the clergy was undermining the Russian Church by collaborating with other churches, just as this same clergy was thought to be undermining it through its collaboration with the Soviet regime.

Fr. Alexander Men, a Russian Orthodox priest, was an exception to the rule. He did all he could to keep the faith alive. Though I did not know him personally, I acquired for him, using my privilege of the diplomatic pouch, the 17 volumes of the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, which I transported to the apartment of one of the Little Sisters of Jesus who, in turn, loaded them on a small cart and delivered them to him on a sidewalk in Moscow.

I had friendly contacts with Archimandrite Niphon Saikali, the Orthodox representative of the Patriarch of Antioch to the Patriarch of Moscow. We attended each other's Masses on several occasions, especially on our respective Christmas and Easter. Among other things, I was able to use his church for the funeral services of the Lebanese ambassador and to perform the wedding of the daughter of the Senegalese ambassador.

To help ambassadors, their diplomatic personnel and others in the foreign community to understand the Orthodox and other Eastern Churches in the Soviet Union, I wrote a 58-page booklet in both English and French explaining the history of these Churches and the then-current organization of the Russian Orthodox Church. The booklet also contained the list of all the "working" Eastern Churches in Moscow at the time, as well as the civil legislation governing religious associations and the official policy of the Communist Party regarding religion. The booklet was well appreciated by the

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diplomatic community.

### **Relations with Protestant ministers**

I had an excellent relationship with the Protestant chaplain, Rev. John Johannaber, an American Methodist. We often visited each other. We prepared together the annual Thanksgiving service at Spaso House. We traveled together three times a year to Leningrad where we held separate services at the residence of the American Consul General. Attending the Catholic Masses were the employees of various consulates, especially Americans, Frenchmen, and Italians. I also had an excellent relationship with the Anglican chaplain, Rev. Michael Pitts, who, periodically, came to Moscow from Helsinki. Relations with the German Lutheran chaplain, Pastor Hans-Peter Friedrich, were good but distant for want of a common language.

### **Most rewarding aspect**

Having no church building of my own in which to operate, I came to appreciate the exceptional quality of the “living stones” out of which was constructed the spiritual edifice of the Chaplaincy: the diplomatic personnel of several embassies, business people and students, together with their respective families. These people came from about 37 countries around the world. If it was sobering to know that those who listened to the Word on Sundays were those involved in the geopolitical decisions affecting the world at large, it was reassuring to discover that so many tried to bring their Christian values to bear on their professional lives. And as disturbing as it was to see the great number of Third-World students attracted to Moscow and the very small proportion of those among them who dared practice their religion, it was no less rewarding to work with the courageous “little remnant” which braved the system by coming weekly to my apartment to worship.

The overall context was stimulating. I felt challenged by the Soviet Union, its history, ideology, political institutions, and economic system. As I tried to understand the Russian Orthodox Church, I developed considerable interest in its theology, its liturgy and its role in Russian history, and I gradually learned better to appreciate the richness of the Church’s ancient Eastern Tradition. At the funerals of Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko, I felt the weight of the country’s recent past. But at the accession of Mikhail

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Gorbachev, I sensed the stirrings of hope: could and would the seventy-year old monolith change?

### **Travels**

I did very little traveling, except for going to Helsinki on one occasion to visit the bishop, to Leningrad three times a year for services at the American Consulate, to Zagorsk a few times, and to Borodino, the site of the famous 15-hour battle between the French and Russian armies in 1812 at which Napoleon's army suffered a heavy defeat at the hands of General Kutuzov.

### **Important people I met and with whom I am still in contact**

I did not meet any highly placed individuals, such as presidents or prime ministers of any country. However, I was either in regular contact with or met a long list of ambassadors, consuls and other diplomatic personnel of many countries, particularly at the receptions given by each country on the occasion of its national holiday. From time to time, as mentioned elsewhere in these pages, I met various metropolitans (rough equivalent of cardinals in the Catholic Church) of the Russian Orthodox Church.

At Christmastime, I am still in touch with a few former French parishioners, one of whom is the wife of the current French ambassador to Denmark. Another is the wife of the former Moscow director of the BNP who went on to Romania and who is now retired and living in France. I am also in touch with the former Anglican chaplain who would come to Moscow every 2 or 3 months from Helsinki.

### **Types of ministries**

#### **A. Foreigners**

Technically, the Catholic Chaplain at the American Embassy went to Moscow to serve his compatriots. But because he was the only foreign Catholic Chaplain in residence, he was called upon to serve all the Catholics of the foreign colony. The Soviets never contested this extension of the original Roosevelt-Litvinov Accords. In fact, it is my impression that they preferred it this way because it meant a lot fewer foreigners attending Saint Louis Church,

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and therefore a lot fewer possible contacts between foreigners and Soviet citizens. Their propaganda nevertheless liked to point out that Saint Louis Church was an example of the religious freedom allowed Catholics in the Soviet Union and was attended by diplomats and other foreigners. At any rate, some foreigners did attend Saint Louis Church either out of a sense of apostolate (encouragement of the local community), convenience, curiosity, or tradition (the Eucharistic Prayer was in Latin), but the vast majority of the regularly practicing foreign Catholics attended services at the American Embassy.

A census conducted at the weekend Masses on February 2 and 9, 1986 revealed the presence of 420 individuals from 37 countries, most of who could be considered regularly practicing Catholics. In addition, there were those who came occasionally or only on major feast days (Christmas, Holy Week and Easter, Pentecost), or those who had their children baptized but did not practice. The census revealed the following:

#### **1. Summary**

Diplomats & embassy personnel	114	or 27%
Businessmen	14	3 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub> %
Students	15	4%
Correspondents	1	1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub> %
Non-working spouses	97	23%
Children	170	40 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> %
Other	9	2%
Total	420	100%

#### **2. Geographical distribution**

Africa	64	or 15 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub> %
Asia	22	5 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub> %
Europe (western)	215	51%
North America	71	17%
Oceania	10	2 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> %
South America	38	9%
Total	420	100%

## **B. Third-World Students**

Third-World students were a category of their own. Though foreigners, they were watched almost as closely as Soviet citizens. They generally came from Africa and South America (e.g., 2,000 from Peru and Columbia, respectively). They were generally from very poor families and would not have been able to receive an education at home. Some were literally taken off the streets in their countries of origin and brought to Moscow without passports (especially from South America). Those from Africa usually came through normal channels but often under false pretenses. Soviet officials in the schools were very clear about the government's purpose in granting them scholarships: it wanted to make Marxists out of them. Courses in ideology and atheism, as well as the choice of the works of literature studied in class, supported the objective.

Only a small group of African students dared to practice on a regular basis. Approximately 10 of them came to my apartment on Wednesday evenings for a prayer service. I generally profited from these occasions to discuss any problems they might have had,

## **C. Soviet citizens**

When in 1949 the Soviet authorities removed one of my predecessors as pastor of Saint Louis Church and replaced him with a Soviet priest, they did so because they did not want regular contacts between a foreign priest and Soviet citizens. They never reversed that policy. In fact, they strengthened it with several general laws, applicable to priests as well as laymen, which restricted contacts between Soviet citizens and foreigners who lived or travelled in the country. They enforced the policy by posting at the entrances of our residences and embassies militia who barred from entering these buildings any Soviet citizen who had not received prior official permission, such as our housekeepers. Any Soviet citizen known to have had regular contacts with a foreigner was warned to desist or face the consequences. The foreigner involved risked being expelled. Under these conditions, it was impossible for Soviet citizens to attend any religious services of the Chaplain.

## **D. Pastoral activity**

### **1. Regular worship services**

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Saturday evening: 6 PM at Our Lady of Hope Chapel: English and French, with an octave  
Sunday 10 AM at the US Embassy Snack Bar/Commercial Office: English  
12 noon at the US Embassy Snack Bar/Commercial Office: French  
Weekdays 8:30 AM, Mon., Tues, Thurs, Fri, OL of Hope Chapel: French  
7 PM, Wed, Our of Hope Chapel: French.

## 2. Sacraments

**Baptism:** Except for those performed during the Eater vigil, baptisms were performed in OL of Hope Chapel as needed throughout the year. I performed 44 Baptisms.

**First Communion and Confirmation:** Each year, on Ascension Thursday, I administered First Holy Communion and Confirmation to a number of children at a special Mass at the residence of the Italian ambassador. I also did as much in my apartment chapel or at Sunday Mass at the Embassy in French and in English.

**Penance:** was available anytime upon request. General Absolution was authorized by a special rescript from the Holy See and was imparted twice a year before Christmas and Easter.

**Sacrament of the sick:** I anointed only one person—a Soviet citizen—at the request of the Austrian Ambassador.

**Marriage:** couples contemplating marriage were asked to contact the Chaplain 4 to 6 months prior to the anticipated date of the wedding. During that time, I worked with the couple, using established programs from the United States. I performed 5 weddings.

## 3. Religious instruction

Classes in religious instruction were divided according to language groups:

- English: on Sundays, after the 10 AM Mass at the US Embassy.
- French: throughout the week at the French school; I taught the upper class.
- German: throughout the week at the German school during the presence in Moscow of the German priest who came from Bonn from time to time.

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- Italian: throughout the week at the Italian school as part of the curriculum.
- Spanish: at mutually convenient times at the Argentinean Embassy or in private apartments.

### **4. Other pastoral activities**

- Prayer Group: every Wednesday evening.
- Conferences: I gave a series of 8 lectures on the Old Testament during the winter of 1985–86; during Lent of 1986 I participated with the Protestant Minister in a one-evening workshop on the Psalms; from time to time I spoke to the US Marines.
- Counseling upon request.
- Cocktail/reception/dinner apostolate. These were excellent opportunities to meet people who never came to Church and to explain the Church's thinking on various topics. It was rare that someone, including ambassadors, did not raise a church-related question during such gatherings.
- Funeral services: I held 4 funeral services: (1) the funeral of the Lebanese Ambassador at the Church of the Archangel Gabriel (Antiochene Orthodox); (2) a prayer service at the Moscow morgue for a deceased employee of the Brazilian Embassy who died in an automobile accident; (3) a prayer service at the US Embassy for a Soviet employee who had died; and (4) a prayer service at the Moscow Crematorium for 2 murdered Mexicans.

### **Human interest**

On the feast of All Saints in 1983, after the evening Mass, the new French army attaché invited me to supper at his apartment. Since I didn't know where it was located (I had arrived only a few months before), he told me that I could follow him in my car. But since he first had to drive his children somewhere, he would meet me in front of the US Embassy. I put things away in my chapel, then headed for the US Embassy. It was dark. When I approached the long building, I saw at a distance a car pulling out from in

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front of it. Thinking that it was the attaché's car, I followed it onto the Ring Road for a short distance. When it turned off, so did I, when he slowed down, so did I. At one point, I realized that the driver was not the attaché, and he realized that I was following him. He eventually turned into a gas station, got out of this car, stood next to it, bent over the hood putting his hands on it and spreading his feet, as if he were allowing me to frisk him as would a policeman. It was clear that he, a Soviet citizen, felt guilty about having been in front of the US Embassy and thought that I was the KGB. Since he spoke a little Spanish, I explained to him that I was not the police and did not want to arrest him. All I wanted to know was how to return to the US Embassy. He drew a map of sorts in the dust on the hood of his car telling me how to get there. After parting, I followed his instructions and returned to the US Embassy without further problems. When I arrived there, my friend, who had seen me leave but could not catch up with me, told me that he figured I would come back. After a good laugh, I proceeded to follow him to his apartment. But I've always remembered the fearful reaction of that Soviet citizen who thought himself followed by the KGB.

On November 13, 1985, as mentioned above, I conducted a funeral service at Moscow's crematorium for two Mexicans who had been murdered: Manuel Portilla and his maid Maria del Carmen Cruz. Portilla's wife, a Soviet citizen, and his 3 adult children (2 sons and a daughter) were present. The wife was sobbing loudly and demonstrably. It was later disclosed that the 2 sons, in collaboration with the mother, were the perpetrators of the double murder.

One day the US Embassy organized a visit to the Tretyakov Museum. As we were guided through the museum by our Soviet guide, we came to a hall containing a few ancient and beautiful icons, among them the famous one of Our Lady of Vladimir off in a corner. In front of the icon, on his knees, was an elderly Russian praying and making several signs of the cross. The guide was embarrassed and told us to ignore him, but the more she insisted, the more the Americans admired the man for what he was doing.

A few days before the end of my tour of duty in Moscow, I was invited to the apartment of an Italian who had been a member of *Comunione e Liberazione* and who had married a Soviet woman some 12 to 15 years earlier. They had several children. During a conversation held on the sidelines, the Italian told me that just a few weeks before my visit, his wife had confided to him for the first time that she was a Soviet spy and had been one since before their marriage. The poor man was dumbfounded and didn't know what to do. I never found out what happened after my departure from Moscow.

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From Moscow, I went to Paris to work at Bayard Presse to study the possibility of an English edition of *La Documentation Catholique*. Six months after my arrival in Paris, I read an article in *The International Herald Tribune* about the arrest and detention at Moscow's Lefortovo prison of Nicholas Daniloff, an American journalist for *US News and World Report*. He was accused, among other things, of passing on to US authorities "political, economic and military information against the interests of the Soviet Union" and of conducting other espionage activities. His contact person had apparently been a Father Roman, an Orthodox priest.

What struck me in the Herald Tribune's article was the similarity of the *modus operandi* used in the Daniloff case and in an experience I had had. I too had been contacted several times by telephone starting in 1984 by a so-called Orthodox priest identified as "Father Roman." He called every few months over a period of a little more than a year, always with a new scheme. On one occasion, Roman wanted me to meet a correspondent from the Vatican's *L'Osservatore Romano* who supposedly had just arrived and been officially accredited by the Foreign Ministry. I later checked with Antonio Natoli, the correspondent of the RAI (Radio-Televisione Italiana) who told me what I already suspected, viz., that there was no such Vatican correspondent in Moscow. Suspecting that all of Roman's calls were provocations, I never accepted to meet him nor to participate in any of his schemes. Had I done so, I might well have ended up like Nicholas Daniloff!

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# Father Norman Meiklejohn

March 3, 1986–June 14, 1999

## Most memorable events during my stay

- Visits to Moscow of Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton.
- Attacks of Yeltsin forces and bombardment of the White House.
- Coup against Gorbachev in July of 1991 when I was in Paris.
- Running into Mr. Rogers in the locker room of the American Embassy pool.
- Installation of the first Episcopal Apostolic Administrator at St. Louis Church since Bishop Neveu.

## Most important historical events during my stay

- Break-up of the Soviet Union, with its devastating effect on foreign students and refugee seekers.
- Religion laws of 1991 and 1997.
- Gorbachev being replaced by Yeltsin.
- Suppression of the Communist Party and expulsion from their buildings.
- “Privatizations” and the sinking into poverty of a huge part of the population.

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- Brief war between forces of Yeltsin and the Duma holed up in the White House.
- The Chechen crisis and the movements of population following the end of the Afghan war, including the return of ethnic Russians, Germans and others from the newly independent Central Asian and Caucasian states.
- The economic crash of August 1998.

### **Most difficult aspects of my stay**

- Being robbed in my apartment.
- Almost being expelled from the apartment by the UPDK.
- Dealing with effects of activity of strict separation of Church and State advocates at the US Embassy.
- In the early years, tension from coping with the knowledge that the KGB had bugs everywhere and kept track of my movements.
- Dealing with difficult African guests.

### **How my Russian stint affected me spiritually**

In Moscow, doing pastoral work for the first time, I found that I loved the work. It was what I had wanted for a long time. It met all my needs.

Also, being alone, far from anyone or anything I knew, before I had friends there, I had to turn to the Lord for my situation to make any sense and for it to be tolerable. Eventually, I gave up all my hopes of being a good historian, and accepted to be as good an instrument of God's will as I could be in the work he seemed to want me to do.

### **Relations with Soviets**

- Friendliness with police guarding the residence compound.

## **Harassment from Soviets**

- No harassment; no difficulties with visas, permissions or permits.

## **Relations with Orthodox**

*During the Soviet era:*

- Regular visits of chaplains with Metropolitans Philaret and Pitirim.
- Regular attendance at Unity Octave services and receptions afterwards.

*After the end of the Soviet era:*

- No relations except with the representative of the Patriarch of Antioch to the Patriarchate of Moscow.

## **Most rewarding aspect**

- Ministry of the Marine captaincy.
- Ministry to the African students.
- My Russian language teacher and her family and friends.
- A number of friendships with diplomats from different countries.

## **Travels to other parts of Russia**

- Only to Saint Petersburg, Kiev, and Lvov.

## **People with whom I am still in touch**

- Nicole Girard-Reydet, the Colas family, InMi Gosnell.

## **Types of ministry**

- Ministry to all foreign Catholics in Moscow: baptizing, catechizing, marrying, saying Mass for them.

## **Human-interest stories**

I provided food for 500 students and refugees for several years, as well as clothing, loans and outright gifts, and lodging for many African immigrants in my apartment.

Tribute to Fr. Norman Meiklejohn, A.A. by his successor in Moscow, Fr.  
Michael John Ryan, S.M.  
Heirs and Guardians of a Tradition<sup>18</sup>

As Fr. Norman Meiklejohn's successor in Moscow, I would like to fill in some of the events of his 13 years as the pastor of Our Lady of Hope Chapel, events which might otherwise go unheralded in the history of the parish. Since the community founded and guided by the American Assumptionists for nearly seventy years is alive and well, I will first let the parishioners speak, for they are the parish's memory. Even the chapel and its contents have their history.

## **The People**

After the 6 pm Mass in the chapel on Sunday 7th March, I asked Olga Tishova what she thought. She replied that Fr. Norman lived through "such eventful times." Even Russians never dreamt that things would turn out as they have. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the change in the religion law of 1991 which meant that once again the American Assumptionists could administer the sacraments to Russians and they could come onto the diplomatic compound and worship in the house chapel established there. "Oh, and the storming of the White House in 1991 and 1993," she added. The tanks had roared down Kutuzovsky Prospekt, a few hundred yards from the chapel. The noise of firing and cannon shells could be heard. Bullets had ricocheted off the wall of our compound on the far side that faces the Moscow River and the White House standing on the other bank. CNN still has offices on the riverside of the compound and sometimes features correspondents speaking against the

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<sup>18</sup>The modesty and brevity of Fr. Norman Meiklejohn's personal account given above prompted his successor, Fr. Michael John Ryan, SM, to graciously accept to fill in some of the blanks in order to do justice to Fr. Norman's 13 years in Moscow where he served longer than any other Assumptionist chaplain during a very critical period of the Mission's history. Fr. Ryan's text is dated 19 April 2004, the anniversary of the day in 1951 when Pope Pius XII blessed the chalice still used at Our Lady of Hope for daily Mass.

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backdrop of the White House. The Duma or Parliament was restored after the new constitution came into force and now sits in a building near Red Square. The White House stands forlorn with railings and security fences all around.

The next day there was a phone call from Berlin. It was Stefanos, an Indonesian Catholic diplomat asking after Fr. Norman, and his assistants, Nigba and others. Stefanos was assigned to Moscow in the early nineties and was an active parishioner. The next day again there was a call from Anthony, a Sri Lankan presently working in the Russian oil fields asking about Norman. He remembered Stefanos. They became friends because of the parish. I told them both I was going to Worcester in the USA for the 70th Anniversary Lecture of Fr. Braun, the first priest of the Mission that became the Parish of Our Lady of Hope. Both were happy that the history would be preserved.

How many more examples? Phone calls and visits to the door show that the memory of the parish and its priests lives with people now far away. Mary Murphy of Amnesty International knocks at the door. Is there still 7 pm Mass, as in 1982, when she was a student in Moscow? Jeanne Guillaume comes to the chapel and wants to reminisce. A member of the “Cercle Saint Jean Baptiste” founded in 1944 by the future Cardinal Jean Danielou, she was a regular evening Massgoer, often late, in the 1970s and 1980s. It is clearly an emotional experience to be back in the chapel. She speaks in French about the difficult times and her work in the Embassy of Luxembourg.

Last year there was a phone call from a man settled in Holland and married there. He was enquiring about Norman. A month or two later there was a ring at the door and the same man, a Cameroonian in his thirties, was there with his wife shyly following him. He explained he must show her the chapel where Norman helped so many. Without that help he would have left his bones in the snows of Moscow. His wife has heard this many times. I took them in, offered tea and we talked. She confided to me that she now saw where it all took place and understood that for her husband this was a sentimental journey and closure of what had sometimes been a nightmare. Fr. Norman had been a shining light for him and others. Her husband walked around the apartment and chapel, remembering men in different circumstances. They were strangers to me. Before they left, his wife slipped me all she had in her purse and thanked me for what Fr. Norman had done.

Dozens of people have called from all over Europe, the States, the Middle

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East and Asia. I presume that for each person that calls there are more who intend to but never make it.

Another link with the parish history is our eighty-three year old parishioner, Marguerite Sharova. In perfect French, she speaks of her admiration for the American Assumptionists, Fr. Braun for his bravery, and Fr. Norman for his forthrightness and unflinching charity to the foreigners stranded by history in this northern capital. When she speaks, she raises her little, clenched fist to illustrate the moral courage of these bright examples in her long life. Fr. Braun baptized her, a graduate of the Linguistics Department of Moscow State University, in 1943. For her troubles, she was arrested by the secret police and sentenced to exile in Siberia for “anti-Soviet activities.” She crept back to the city after her term was finished and lived there, with her mother, under her mother’s maiden name. She remembers Frenchman, Fr. Jean-de-Matha Thomas, 1947–50. She gave him one of the white kittens born to her darling cat. But more, she remembers the American, Fr. Brassard, 1950–53. He was forbidden to mix with the Soviet Catholics worshipping in St Louis, yet she recalls him climbing into the choir loft to sing “Lauda Sion” in a baritone voice. After her “rehabilitation,” most of her professional life was spent working in the music section at the Library of Foreign Literature. She admires and loves Norman because he cared for the Africans in difficulties when no one else was interested. When Norman and I re-registered the parish in February 1999 under the new religion law of 1997, she offered her own apartment as the legal address of the parish. She told us she “was afraid of no one” and “the authorities could never make trouble for her.” Fr. Norman inspired that confidence in his parishioners. His was a steady New England hand on the rudder of the parish during the years of collapse and disorder.

Administrative inertia is another form of memory. Some government directories still have the Kutuzovsky address as the place to contact the Apostolic Administrator. In the old days, it was an American Assumptionist. Only recently has mail stopped coming here for the same official. From time to time, government offices and provincial civil servants phone the parish asking for the “Apostolic Administrator of Catholics” with invitations to official events. A couple of weeks before Easter 2004, a Dutchman called asking help from the “head of the Catholic Church in Moscow” to set up an Alcoholics Anonymous group. Yet it was 1991 when the Vatican appointed Archbishop Thaddeus Kondtusiewicz as Apostolic Administrator in Moscow, and it was more than a decade before that the title was transferred from the

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Assumptionist priest in Moscow to Cardinal Janis Vaivods, the archbishop of Riga in Lithuania, one of the Baltic republics of the Soviet Union of the time.

The city telephone company is still sending to the French Embassy the parish's phone bills under Fr. Norman's name at the Kutuzovsky address. That Embassy was the diplomatic protector of the apartment, paying its bills from 1950 until 1991, when they finally stopped with the advent of a new regime. Then, the apartment chapel passed first to the protection of the Central African Republic, then to Malta, and finally, in 1999, to the diplomatic protection of the US Embassy in Moscow. Our Lady of Hope now has an apartment under the same conditions as the apartment used by the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy. Another relic of the past is Archbishop Niphon Saikali, representative of the Patriarchate of Antioch, as curious a churchman as one could hope to find, who always asks for Fr. Norman Meiklejohn when I introduce myself to him, for the umpteenth time, at diplomatic functions.

### **The Apartment**

Fr. Eugene LaPlante supervised the move from the diplomatic building beside the Lebanese Embassy on the Garden Ring. The priest's apartment and chapel are now located on the Kutuzovsky Prospekt which leads from President Putin's residence along the Mozhaiski Shosse to the Kremlin.

This is a closed compound reserved for foreigners. It is a monument to the Soviet paranoia for security, which is being revived under the guise of the war against international terrorism. Five twelve-story apartment blocks are gathered around two yards and an immense parking lot. Besides diplomats, the neighbors are newspaper correspondents and agencies, Die Stern, the Australian Broadcasting Company, the Times of London, Newsweek and CNN. The compound's single entrance is manned by a group of security guards. The apartment is on the third floor of the fifth block. A brass plaque on the door announces "Our Lady of Hope Chapel." By Russian standards, the apartment is spacious. A floor space of 112 square meters gives the priest a living area and allows for a chapel where forty seats are squeezed together. Apart from modest decorations and a small plaque naming the different priests of the community with their years of service, there is little to recall individual chaplains. These were well-read and unassuming men. The central room, which doubles up as an office, holds a theology and Church

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history library in English and French. A corridor between the rooms and the chapel holds bookshelves crammed with paperbacks, videos and devotional books, the remains of a borrowing library from the years when it was difficult to find foreign books or cassettes in the city.

Until the nineties, the apartment was presumed to be bugged. Cleaners and uninvited visitors would have looked for interesting letters and information. An old photocopier from the 1980s was hidden there when such equipment needed the written permission of the security services. Even in the 1990s fax machines and mobile phones needed written permission and clearance from the authorities. Four holes in the office wall mark where a small blackboard was used to write confessions or speak about topics that could be “compromising.”

People who come to the “Chapel” for the first time often remark on the calm and welcoming atmosphere. Fr. Norman and the Assumptionists left their mark here.

After moments of tension such as the establishing of the four dioceses and the expulsion of a number of priests in 2001, there was a spate of phone calls by unknown people asking to be freed of Orthodoxy and accepted into the Catholic Church. It was a safe presumption that some at least were “provocations” to see if we really held to the Vatican policy of not proselytizing.” We presume that all telecommunications are monitored, at least by mechanical means, fishing for dangerous words, with recordings sometimes listened to months after they are made.

Strange journalists occasionally ask for interviews that are never published. Since we have nothing to hide, I always welcome people. The four or five gypsy cabs stationed at the entrance to the compound are also supposed to be ready to report “strange” behavior by their clients.

### **The Chapel**

The furnishings of the chapel speak of the Assumptionists, of Fr. Robert Fortin who renovated it, and of Fr. Norman, the last incumbent. A number of crucifixes, one finely carved in old ivory, and other modernist renderings of Christ in glory are reminders of the faith of the men who passed through here. Some old icons rescued long ago from churches have found a place of security on the chapel walls. Similarly, a couple of Russian brass and enamel hand-crosses used for blessings. In their memoirs, the American Assumptionists describe these items of faith left at their door, wrapped in cloths, like

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foundlings. Three modern icons of Our Lady of Hope, John the Baptist, and Christ enthroned in Glory, painted in the Moscow style by Laura Clerici and Christina Curry, former parishioners of Fr. Norman's and members of the US Embassy community, are now positioned behind the altar. There is no trace of an altar made from oak wood taken from the room in the White House in Washington where, in 1933, Roosevelt and Litvinov hammered out the agreement that gave birth to the American Catholic Mission. In a cupboard, there is a brass tabernacle. On the door is an image of a pelican feeding its young.

The chalice used for daily Mass is an unusual silver one with the stem in the form of a grapevine supporting a silver-gilt cup. Under the base is the double inscription, "Chalice used by his Holiness Pope Pius XII, April 19, 1951" and "Presented to the American Catholic Mission in Moscow by Mr. and Mrs. Edwin A. Sullivan, New York, December 8, 1951." There is a second, older chalice with the inscription under its base, "Souvenir de mon Ordination, Mai 1926, Etienne-Alma-Emile-Wilfrid-Angelise." On the base are silver medallions of St Therese of Lisieux, Christ Crucified, the Mother of God, St John the Evangelist, and St Paul.

In 2001, I discovered a number of leaves in a pile of scrap paper. They were part of a parish list compiled in 1992 with the names and addresses of hundreds of parishioners of the time. There is almost nothing in the archives. This speaks of the general insecurity when the secret services were interested in information on parish members. In 1998, when Fr. Norman and I were looking for ways to secure the parish chapel, I visited the general office of the UPDK, the agency responsible, under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for foreigners and their living quarters. A smiling lady assured me that they had "complete files on the chaplaincy and the apartment dating from 1950."

In the chapel are two chairs with an Assumptionist crest on their backs, "Donee formetur Christus in vobis." The sacramentaries and lectionaries in English, French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese are reminders of the role played by Fr. Norman and the Assumptionists. Each in his turn was the only official Catholic priest in Moscow, besides the incumbent at St Louis, placed there and supervised by the KGB. (See Fr. Bonvouloir's conversations with Fr. Stanislas Majeika.)

## **Chaplaincies and Religious Communities born from Our Lady of Hope Parish**

Since 1991, different chaplaincies have been formed for these groups. The French Assumptionist, Fr. Bernard Le Leannec, reestablished the national chaplaincy for French citizens at St. Louis-des-Français Church located in the Lubyanka compound of the secret services. The French share the building with two other parishes, Sts Peter and Paul, the historic Catholic parish of Moscow established in 1690 by special decree of Peter the Great, under the patronage of General Patrick Gordon, a Catholic exile from persecution in his British homeland, and the Our Lady of Fatima parish composed of a handful of catacomb Catholic communities that survived the last persecutions of the secret service in 1982 when their clandestine priests were arrested and compromised by the KGB.

In the early nineties, Fr. Norman gathered Catholic Korean students and postgraduate researchers in the chapel. They quickly became too numerous for the seats available and moved into the city. By 1995, they had their first priest, Fr. Austin Co, sent to Moscow as a journalist by the Seoul diocesan Catholic paper. In June 2002, Our Lady of Hope Parish helped them through the process of registering themselves as “St Andrew Kim Catholic Parish” with the Moscow City Department of Justice. Those first Korean students, now well-established in Korean society, have not forgotten their Moscow priest, Fr. Norman Meiklejohn.

Italians have gathered in the chapel since the early 1990s with Fr. Norman, then with Fr. Stefano Caprio. Fr. Guido Castelli replaced Fr. Stefano when he was named parish priest of the pre-revolutionary parish of the Holy Rosary in Vladimir. From there, he was expelled from Russia in 2002, the first casualty of official displeasure at the establishment of the four Catholic dioceses by the Vatican. The Italian Catholic community meets in the chapel on Saturday evening and Sunday morning for catechism and Mass, with Don Guido Castelli, their Chaplain since 1994.

The Hispanic communities moved from the chapel when Fathers Eusebio and Ismael arrived in Moscow in 1993. They now meet at 1 pm in the Immaculate Conception Church, formerly the Polish national church, restored to the faithful through the efforts, in the early nineties, of Fr. Pikkus, now auxiliary Bishop of Warsaw. In 1999, it was beautifully decorated for the anticipated meeting in Moscow between Pope John-Paul II and Patriarch Alexis II. On the north aisle, a huge stained-glass window shows the Pope

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venerating the Virgin of Fatima, by whose intercession he was saved from an assassination attempt planned, it is said, by the Russian KGB. In the south-aisle window are Sts. Peter and Paul, martyred in Rome, surrounded by images of Central European “Catholic” and onion-domed “Orthodox” houses of worship. The hoped-for visit never took place. Instead Cardinal Angelo Sodano represented the Pope for the grand opening and consecration on 12th December 1999.

### **The sacramental registers**

These books are also a silent witness to the presence of the Assumptionists and the heart of their mission in Moscow. The sacramental registers contain the names and statistics of the parish sacramental activities. A note in the first book indicates that the registers of St Louis from 1919–49 are in the USA Assumptionist archives and that records indicating the sacramental data from 1949 are in St Louis Church. The records of the American Mission from 1950 to 1955 during the incumbencies of Frs. Brassard and Bissonnette are not available.

Our extant parish registers date from 1959. They record every baptism, first communion, confirmation and marriage and the priest who administered them. A smaller section notes the funerals that took place in Moscow with the presence of a priest. After the mid-sixties, the registers indicate a marked increase in the numbers of people receiving the sacraments. Baptisms, Confirmations and First Communions soon reached present annual levels of between 10 to 25 persons receiving each sacrament. The names indicate that the faithful are Europeans, people from North and South America, French and English-speaking Africans and Madagascans, with a small percentage of Asians and people from the Middle East. Some entries show mixed marriages or the baptism of children born to foreign and Russian parents. These entries reflect the opening in Moscow of diplomatic missions from those countries and the arrival of large numbers of their students. They took advantage of the free education. The Soviet authorities hoped to send them home as grateful emissaries of communism once their studies were finished.

Our Lady of Hope is exceptional since it is one of a few Catholic communities of the Soviet Union, which have records. Catholic Soviet citizens often waited until they could make visits to Poland or the Baltic republics where they would receive the sacraments secretly. Parish priests in those areas often did not keep registers since the faithful were frightened of losing their

jobs, or worse, if the authorities found evidence of their religious practice.

## **Our Lady of Fatima**

In 1947, the Bishop of Leira-Fatima blessed three statues of the Blessed Virgin commemorating the apparitions to the children at Fatima. Part of the message given to the children concerned the conversion of Russia from a militant, atheistic state back to Christianity. In a book “Russia Will Be Converted” published in 1950, John Haffert, a leader in the movement to promote prayer for the conversion of Russia, describes giving a “pilgrim” statue of the Blessed Virgin to Fr. Louis-Robert Brassard, a Catholic priest serving in Moscow. On page 145, there is a photograph of Mr. Haffert presenting the statue to Fr. Brassard with the note that at the time of publication, Fr. Brassard had installed the statue in his Moscow oratory. This wooden statue is still in the chapel of Our Lady of Hope. On its base, painted in red, is the date of its blessing and diocese of origin in Portugal. It is very carefully painted with lace around the neck and the cuffs of the image of the Mother of God.

In 2003, I called the Blue Army Center in New Jersey to check an account given to me by Fr. Bernard Le Leannec in 1996 or 97 that, several years earlier, in October 1993, Mr. Haffert, by then an old man, and two groups of pilgrims from the United States had come to Moscow, and, with the permission of the Mayor of Moscow, had celebrated Mass in Red Square. They had looked for the statue, which had preceded them forty-three years earlier. The Moscow Patriarchate had taken great offense at the news of this intrusion and even inquired of Fr. Bernard who knew nothing about it. Mr. Haffert’s group had contented themselves by displaying on the altar a small statue of Our Lady of Fatima which they had brought with them. The visit and Mass were once confirmed to me by a lady who had been in the pilgrimage group that had unwittingly caused great consternation and offence to the Moscow Patriarchate by their prayers in that great theatre of communist dramatics. It helps to understand their sensitivities if we remember that the communist authorities had razed the ancient cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan and other smaller chapels located on Red Square and belonging to the national Orthodox Church.

In the middle of this confusion, Fr. Norman discretely saved the parish from controversy.

## **Registering the Parish**

After the passing of a liberal religion law in 1991, it became possible for religious organizations to seek registration and status as organizations able to rent and own buildings as well as employ staff. Initially, the parish community was hesitant. A census was drawn up in 1992. After a lot of work, parishioners from the United States Embassy drafted a constitution in French, English and Russian, and Fr. Norman registered the parish in 1995. In 1997 a more restrictive religion law was drafted for the Duma to vote on. This proposed making it more difficult to register religious organizations. Religious organizations that were registered before the law came into effect had to reregister or else they would lose their legal status. Pope John-Paul sent a personal letter to President Yeltsin pleading against the law. The Duma passed the law despite objections, and in February 1999, Fr. Norman and Fr. Michael Ryan re-registered the parish of Our Lady of Hope, as required by the 1997 law.

## **A Church for the Parish**

The Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement of 1933 contained provisions covering the eventual buying, renting or building of premises necessary for religious activities permitted by the agreement. Until 1955 when Fr Bissonnette was declared “*persona non grata*,” the community had been considering ways of finding a building of its own.

After 1959, the community accommodated to the pressures put on it by the Soviet authorities. As a result, it resorted to using different buildings and spaces on diplomatic territory. In the late 1980s, the local government had made tentative offers of a building or land on which to build along the Vernadskogo Prospekt. The US Embassy advised against taking up the offer on the grounds that it involved too big a risk since there was no provision for private property in the Russian constitution and particularly not for religious organizations. By Fr. Norman’s time, the Argentinean Embassy was used for catechism classes. Normal Sunday Masses were celebrated inside the US Embassy compound and in the Kutuzovsky Prospekt house-chapel. Holy Week services were celebrated in the French, Italian and United States Embassies. After 1992, the Italians used their embassy for Christmas and Easter Masses and celebrated one of the Holy Week services with Our Lady of Hope. The arrival in the capital of a French priest who moved into the old

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French consular church of St Louis-des-Français saw the end of French diplomatic support for Our Lady of Hope and the tradition of Mass celebrated in the French Embassy on the important holy days.

In 1990, a fire in the US Embassy and the security measures introduced after the Gulf War meant that Our Lady of Hope Chaplaincy was obliged to move its Sunday Masses out of the US Embassy. Since 1962, the Moscow Protestant chaplaincy had also used the US Embassy for Sunday services. Both communities were obliged to leave the compound. A crisis was averted when the Philippine Ambassador permitted Our Lady of Hope to use his Embassy in Karmanitski Pereulok for two years. After that, Fr. Norman moved the Community's two Sunday Masses in English and in French to the gymnasium at the Anglo-American School at 78 Leninski Prospekt. Masses continued there until June 2000. In 1997, a second English-language Mass was started in the US Embassy when numbers at the Anglo-American School increased and there were too many people to fit into the school gymnasium. Some Irish priests studying Russian in Moscow were happy to supply for that Mass. Fr. Guido Castelli used to celebrate Mass in Italian on Saturday evening in the Kutuzovsky chapel and began helping as a Sunday curate for the English Masses. In 1997, Fr. Henri Martin arrived in Moscow with his family. He was a professor of Romance Languages at Tbilisi University and had been ordained in the Georgian Orthodox Church. He was accepted as a Byzantine-Rite Catholic priest, but church politics in Moscow were too uncompromising. Fr. Norman helped by letting him celebrate the French-language Mass in the Anglo-American School three times a month. Finally in 1999, he was formally warned that he could not celebrate in the Latin-Rite. He left Moscow immediately to minister to a Greek-Rite parish in Belorussia. All the while, there was no discussion of a church building for the parish.

Fr. Norman's priority was to keep the parish together and look after students and refugees, its most vulnerable members.

### **Relations with the Nunciature and the Apostolic Administration**

An upheaval occurred in 1990–91 when the Vatican translated Bishop Thaddeus Kondrusiewicz from Grodno in Belorussia to Moscow and appointed him Archbishop responsible for the "Apostolic Administration for Latin-Rite Catholics in the European Part of Russia." Fr. Oliver McTiernan, a priest of

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the Westminster Archdiocese, was for twenty years a constant visitor to Russia and received Metropolitan Kirill in his London parish on many occasions. He once told me how Metropolitan Kirill had told him of the anger and sense of betrayal felt by Kirill in front of the Holy Synod when he announced to the Synod members that the Vatican had reassured him that there would be no Catholic Bishop in Moscow and was presented with the copy of a press release announcing the appointment of Archbishop Kondrusiewicz as the “Catholic Bishop of Moscow.”

The new regime and the new men offended others. The parish council of the St. Louis Church and its chairman or “starost,” Mikhail Wolfkovitch, discovered that not only was the new Archbishop appointed to their church but so too were two parish priests, Fr. Antoni Gei, an ethnic Pole from Kazakhstan, and Fr. Bernard Le Leannec, A.A., a Frenchman. Both laid claim to the building and the canonical appointment as parish priest of St. Louis-des-Français. The actual parish priest, old Fr. Stanislas Majeika, was surplus to requirements. It was not a glorious episode, marked as it was by denunciations and quarrels that reached the Vatican for resolution.

In the end, the old establishment was pushed aside. Fr. Majeika took to his apartment and some years later died, neglected and in poverty. The old parishioners were formally appointed to the resurrected parish of Sts Peter and Paul, which was registered under the roof of the St. Louis Church. With the help of some Russian parishioners, notably Olga Ruslanovna Kvierkvielya, Fr. Le Leannec registered a new parish of St Olga, also registered under the roof of the St. Louis Church. Following a decision taken in the Vatican, he was later appointed parish priest of St. Louis-des-Français. Another parish, Our Lady of Fatima, composed of a number of catacomb Catholic groups or cells, was persuaded to move from the different apartments where they used to meet secretly, under the leadership of people like Natalya Trauberg, to the St. Louis Church and celebrate Mass there on Sunday evenings. The new Archbishop set up his episcopal throne in the sanctuary of St. Louis and promptly registered the Apostolic Administration at the same address. To many, the arrangement was reminiscent of the Soviet system of communal apartments where four or five mismatched families were allocated to one apartment, each claiming one room apiece and sharing telephone, bathroom and kitchen.

Fr. Norman wisely stayed clear of the confusion and recrimination that marked the life of the only Catholic church building in Moscow. He continued to use the faculties granted to him by the Vatican on his appointment. He

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continued to give the sacrament of Confirmation to his parishioners and to decide marriage cases. He spared the parish the problems inherent in the unimaginable and unworkable set-up at St. Louis.

This did not endear him to the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Colasuonno. He put pressure on Fr. Norman to move Our Lady of Hope under the roof of the St. Louis Church. An agreement had been made between the Vatican and the Moscow Patriarchate to move all Catholic groups “meeting in apartments” to the St. Louis Church.

In 1995, Archbishop John Bukovsky, a naturalized American citizen arrived in Moscow as Nuncio. He told me that it was necessary to “sort out the disorder in Moscow.” There would be two “Catholic structures” in Moscow, which would be sufficient for the needs of the Catholics in the city. About this time, the Moscow Patriarchate also expressed, in print, the opinion that “two structures” would be sufficient for the Catholic presence in Moscow, which was largely a “diplomatic one.”

At this time, Archbishop Bukovsky forbade Fr. Austin Co to buy a building and register the Korean Catholic community. He told them they would have to use one of the spaces available in the former Immaculate Conception Church, which was then being returned to the Catholic community, room by room, by the different companies renting space in the secularized building. Likewise, he forbade the Moscow German Catholics from registering. After 1997 and the passing of the new, more restrictive religion law, Archbishop Bukovsky also told Fr. Alexandr Khmelnistki OP, priest of Our Lady of Fatima parish, not to register. The same instructions were given to the SVD priests who by this time had been handed the responsibility for the St. Olga Parish and had moved parish Masses to the large apartment near metro Taganskaya, vacated by two Carmelite nuns from San Rafael in California.

Fr. Norman avoided all discussion with the Nuncio and Archbishop Kondrusiewicz and, in 1995, with the support of the US Embassy community, he registered Our Lady of Hope with the Moscow Department of Justice.

In 1998, Fr. Norman asked me to be parish priest of Our Lady of Hope. The appointment was agreed with Archbishop Kondrusiewicz, and the Assumptionist Provincial for the United States and the Provincial of the English Marists.

Immediately, Fr. Norman and I began the complicated process of re-registering Our Lady of Hope, as required by the 1997 religion law. I visited the Nuncio Archbishop John Bukovsky who told me “not to register Our Lady of Hope as a parish.” Since Our Lady of Hope was not under the

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Nuncio's jurisdiction, I informed the Ordinary, Archbishop Kondrusiewicz, that Fr. Norman and I were "re-registering" the parish, as the law required. He agreed. The re-registration was completed in February 1999.

I next saw the Nuncio in the garden of the British Embassy on the occasion of the official birthday party of the Queen of England in the summer of 1999. In the presence of the British Consul, an active member of the parish, with whom I was talking, Archbishop Bukovsky informed me they were "going to close down Our Lady of Hope" and move the parishioners from the US Embassy to the Immaculate Conception Church where there would be a Mass time slotted for "three in the afternoon." I replied "Posmotrim (We'll see)" in Russian. He answered me in English "You will see," and turned his back on me. The Consul was surprised by the conversation and asked me who it was that had been talking to me. I told him it was the Papal Nuncio. Then he was outraged.

In October 1999, Archbishop Kondrusiewicz called me and said he wanted to talk to me. When we met in his office, he told me that he had "a proposition that he must put to me." The parish was being asked to move to the Immaculate Conception Church and take up a Mass slot from three to four on Sunday afternoon, when the restoration was completed which was scheduled for December. I promised to take the proposition to the parish and consult the parishioners. After a series of meetings over a six-week period, Mr. Eric Cacchia of the Maltese Embassy, Ms Geraldine Gibbons of the European Union Tacis Monitoring Group, and Mr. Dennis Curry of the US Embassy prepared three papers for the Archbishop which summed up the parishioners' opinions. I attached a short covering letter and handed them to the Archbishop and faxed copies to the Apostolic Nuncio. The unanimous opinion of the parishioners was that the best way to support the Mother Church of the diocese was to have strong independent parishes, and that to move under the roof of the Immaculate Conception Church, in the conditions proposed, would kill the parish. Archbishop Kondrusiewicz read the letters in front of me, asked about a couple words he did not understand, and commented that this was the right pastoral answer and that he agreed with the parishioners. He justified himself by saying that it was not, after all, his proposition.

About the same time, Mr. Phil Clinton, the principal of the Anglo-American Middle School located at 78 Leninski Prospekt, informed me that the Apostolic Nuncio had telephoned him encouraging him to tell Our Lady of Hope Parish that they should leave the gymnasium of his school and that they would be better lodged in the Polish Church of the Immaculate

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Conception.

Archbishop Bukovsky left Moscow at the end of 1999. The Ambassador of Uganda, Christopher Apart, invited all the Catholic African Ambassadors, the Nuncio, Archbishop Kondrusiewicz and me to a farewell dinner in honor of the Nuncio. In front of the Nuncio, he gave a moving speech thanking Fr. Norman and Our Lady of Hope Parish for the pastoral work done for the African Catholics of Moscow.

### **Caritas Academica**

Tens of thousands of students from countries described as belonging to the Third World were receiving free education in the Soviet Union at the time of its break-up. A massive devaluation of the ruble meant that their stipends and grants granted by the defunct Soviet government became worthless overnight. The re-alignment of countries across the globe led to large numbers of refugees seeking refugee status in Russia or simply transiting from their countries of origin to Western Europe. It was relatively easy since the border control system of the Soviet system largely collapsed with the regime.

Many were thus stranded, penniless, in Moscow. Africans and South Americans turned to the Catholic Church. Fr. Norman faced this trauma heroically and, like a good captain in a storm, sacrificed everything in the ship to keep the people afloat. With the help of an outstanding doctoral candidate from Liberia, Nigba Wipla, Fr. Norman got a system going which fed and saw to the needs of hundreds of distressed foreigners, including whole families. In the Kutuzovsky chapel, there is a cardboard box full of identification papers and files of beneficiaries. In 1992, Fr. Norman and an American Jesuit scholastic working with him had a serious disagreement, on principle, with Deacon Antonio Santi who was responsible for the relief work being organized by Caritas in Moscow. With the permission of Archbishop Kondrusiewicz, he established, but never officially registered, the parish charity arm, "Caritas Academica." The relief work done by Fr. Norman and Our Lady of Hope must be the subject of another paper.

### **Relations with the US Embassy Administration**

Since Fr. Braun's time, a working model of reliance and independence was established with the US Embassy in Moscow. There were always individuals

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who took an anti-religious stand regarding the unique status of the two religious organizations that relied on the Embassy for diplomatic support in a city, which was governed by a militantly atheistic administration. They felt justified by the principle of separation of church and state enshrined in the American Constitution. Other administrators, acquainted with the text of the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement and the difficulties presented for Catholic Americans and other foreigners, did their best to be accommodating. That tension played itself out during the 1990s while Fr. Norman was in Moscow. At first, with the introduction of the liberal religion law of 1991, it seemed that there was simply no need of diplomatic protection. However, a climate of hostility to all “foreign” religious groups developed in the 1990s culminating in the revised religion law of 1997. By 1999, as the State Department and the Moscow Embassy became more aware of the deteriorating climate, they began to appreciate the vulnerability of the two religious organizations that had depended on the Embassy for many decades and the need to maintain the diplomatic protection as written into the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement which celebrated its 70th anniversary last November 2003.

### **Conclusion**

I am moved when I consider the efforts of the American Assumptionist priests who ministered, in faith, to this community of Our Lady of Hope in Moscow. In the decades when there was no human reason to hope, they trusted in God and in the intercession of the Blessed Virgin to whom they were specially dedicated. I feel no constraint, being neither American nor an Assumptionist, in calling out the praises of these remarkable men, particularly Fr. Norman Meiklejohn A.A. Yes, in them, “The Almighty has shown the strength of his arm. He has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has filled the hungry with good things and remembered his mercy.”

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## Part III: Substitute Chaplain



# Father Donat Lamothe

**Replacement of Fr. Meiklejohn for 6 weeks in July–August 1992**

## **Memorable events during my stay**

- A visit to Sergei Posad (Zagorsk) as a guest of the wife of the Ivory Coast ambassador, Moise Aka. We were given “special visitor” status and were able to visit the icon collection belonging to the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate housed in the seminary with a young seminarian as guide.
- Luncheon at the French Embassy in Moscow together with Frs. Antoine Wenger and Bernard Le Leannec, Assumptionists in Moscow at the time.
- Several invitations to dinners at the Embassy of the Ivory Coast.
- July 4 reception at Spaso House, the residence of the American ambassador.

## **Important events during my stay**

That summer of 1992, Boris Yeltsin was at the helm and the Communist regime was at an end. The Russian ruble was being devalued daily. I could see the results: pensioners on fixed incomes were reduced to begging or selling their family heirlooms on the sidewalks.

Among those who were in dire straits were the African students, many with their families, who were on state sponsored scholarships funded by the Soviets, but who were now stranded. Fr. Norman Meiklejohn had befriended many of these students, many of whom were Catholics. After the fall of the

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regime, he turned over the proceeds of the collections taken up at Masses to a group of these students who started a food pantry, which was located in his apartment. At specified times each week, the Africans would set up shop at the apartment, with what they had been able to find at the markets (basics like rice, some fish and chicken). Those in need would come by to pick up the food and pay what they could afford. I was impressed by this expression of solidarity.

### **Harassment**

I did not experience any harassment. Of course, the apartment was in a housing complex reserved to foreigners and staff members of embassies. The guards at the gates could see us coming and going. I remember once that one of the guards wanted me to bring back some whisky from the US Embassy PX where I would sometimes go for lunch and pick up the mail, but I always passed by saying that I didn't understand (one could see the ravages of alcoholism quite plainly everywhere).

### **Types of ministry**

My ministry was providing daily Mass in the apartment chapel on weekdays and at the Philippine Embassy on weekends. These services were in French, Spanish or English.

### **Most rewarding aspect of my stay**

Russia, especially "Holy Russia," has interested me for a long time. I have studied Russian icons and have given lectures on them frequently over the last fifteen years. So this stay in Moscow afforded me the chance to see the masterpieces of Russian Iconography. I greatly appreciated the visits to the Moscow museums and churches, which I made in my free time.

# Conclusion



## *Conclusion*

At the end of this brief overview of the first 65 years of the Moscow Chaplaincy, several aspects of this unique apostolate deserve to be highlighted:

1. Whether at Saint Louis Church before the expropriation or at the weekly gatherings of the parishioners of Our Lady of Hope, the Chaplaincy was the religious center of gravity for those Catholics who were able to be on contact with it. It brought together people who shared a belief in God, his Son and his Church, who looked to the Gospel to give value and direction to their lives, and who tried to live by Christ's message of love, knowing that it could transform the world and the society in which they lived into a more graced fellowship.

Given this bond of faith, those who frequented the chaplaincy were able to derive from it and from one another the support, encouragement and strength they needed to face the non-believing atheistic society that surrounded them. It was for them an oasis in the middle of the barren ideological desert that kept sapping their inner strength.

2. Despite the repressive nature of the communist regime, the nationalization of church property, and the restrictive laws regulating church activity, including those forbidding foreign clergy from ministering to Soviet citizens, the Chaplaincy rendered a unique and much appreciated service to the Church at several levels:
  - (a) The first ones served were obviously the American Catholics in the Foreign Service as well as the American businessmen and their families who were assigned to the Soviet capital. This implied a significant service to the broader American Church which, otherwise, would have had to provide a chaplain through the U.S. Military Ordinariate (today the Archdiocese for the Military Services), the organization responsible for U.S. citizens in government service abroad and for their family members living with them. Though Catholic American citizens were numerically less numerous than Catholic citizens of other countries, it was their all-important presence that justified that of the chaplains and permitted the services they rendered to others.
  - (b) Because all the chaplains were of Franco-American extraction and spoke French, the Chaplaincy was able to simultaneously serve

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the needs of the Church of France. At the outset, the first chaplain also served as assistant pastor of the French national parish. Upon the departure of its pastor, he succeeded him in that role, as did his successor until the arrival of a French Assumptionist. After the expropriation of Saint Louis Church by the Soviet Government, the chaplains continued to pay special attention to the French-speaking faithful, i.e., until the return of French Assumptionists to Saint Louis Church in 1991. Partly out of gratitude and partly out of a desire not to disturb the status quo regarding the French Government's claim to St. Louis Church, the French Embassy generously paid for the chaplain's apartment until that time. The steadfastness of the chaplains throughout the difficult years undoubtedly gave additional weight to the request of the French Assumptionists to return to Saint Louis after the downfall of communism.

- (c) From 1934 to 1950 (16 years), the chaplains also served the spiritual needs of the many Soviet citizens who attended Saint Louis Church. However, after the expulsion of foreign priests from the church, this was no longer possible, save on rare occasions when one or another chaplain might have met privately and exceptionally with a Soviet citizen, at the risk of being expelled from the country if this suited the Soviet Government's political purposes at the time.
- (d) Since the United States was the only country to have an agreement with the Soviet Union that allowed foreign clergymen to minister to their compatriots, the American chaplains, as a matter of fact, served the entire international community. This obviously went beyond the provisions of the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement, but it was not only tolerated but surely appreciated by Soviet authorities because it considerably reduced the number of possible contacts between foreigners and Soviet citizens that might otherwise have taken place at Saint Louis Church, and it did away with the example of educated men and women at prayer that would otherwise have been given them, an example that would have been inconsistent with Marxist ideology which regarded religion as obscurantism intended to keep the people ignorant and subjugated.
- (e) Until 1979, the chaplains served as apostolic administrators, i.e.,

## *Conclusion*

as the personal representatives of the Holy See, thereby rendering it an exceptional service. After that date, out of deference for Cardinal Vaivods in Riga, Latvia (one of the 15 Soviet Republics), the chaplains ceased to have the title, but continued to enjoy the “very special jurisdiction” that went with the function until the arrival in 1990 of an ordained bishop who has held the position ever since. Though the chaplains rarely, if ever, had to use this exceptional jurisdiction, they were nevertheless invested with it in case of need.

3. The Chaplaincy could not have come into existence nor maintained itself over the years without four important factors coming into play:
  - (a) The Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement and the support of the US government. Thanks to President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s wisdom and foresight, the Agreement proved to be an effective and valuable instrument that served the needs of the Catholic Church at a time when no other country had such an agreement with the Soviet Union. Thanks also to the support of the US Government,<sup>19</sup> the chaplaincy was able to maintain its services through thick and thin, except during the period of 1955–59 when particular political problems between the US and the Soviet Union made this impossible.
  - (b) The collaboration and support of the French Government. Though the primary task of the first chaplain was to minister to his compatriots, he was also called upon to serve concurrently from 1934 to 1936 as an assistant to his Assumptionist confrere at the French parish of Saint Louis-des-Français. This occasioned the additional and much appreciated collaboration of the French Government,<sup>20</sup> which, at times, was essential to the survival of the chaplaincy.

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<sup>19</sup>Due to the ongoing presence at the US Embassy of advocates of strict separation of Church and State there were at times, moments of tension between the chaplains and certain government officials. Nevertheless, in times of crisis there were always enough proponents of the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement and of the chaplaincy to ride out the storm.

<sup>20</sup>The French Embassy also had its share of anti-clericals who objected to the presence of the chaplains and to the support they were given. However, they did not carry the day in times of serious difficulties.

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The departure of the French pastor in 1936 completely merged for the next 13 years the destinies of both the French church and the American chaplaincy, making the chaplains answerable to two embassies. Accordingly, from 1934 to 1949, the chaplains served not only American and other English-speaking Catholics, but also the faithful of the French church, whose parishioners also included a certain number of Soviet citizens. The Polish and German churches having been closed, Saint Louis-des-Français was the only Catholic church that remained open in the capital.

- (c) The steadfastness of the Assumptionists. As a consequence of their founder's interest in Russia and Orthodoxy, the Assumptionists had sent a very high percentage of their personnel to the Near East in the early years of their history. But with the successive wars and the expansion of communism in that part of the world, the congregation had to withdraw almost everyone. Looking back to its Golden Years, it exerted every possible effort to hold on as best it could to what was left, convinced that the Near Eastern Mission was part and parcel of its charism and that better days awaited it. It therefore held firmly to the Moscow Chaplaincy in order to serve the Church in its time of need and to be faithful to its own history.
- (d) The commitment of the chaplains themselves. Special tribute must be paid to the men who did the nitty-gritty work on the ground. They went to Moscow because they were asked to do so by their superiors. They were given no special preparation for the task that awaited them, yet they quickly immersed themselves in their new apostolate and admirably labored under very difficult conditions. Only someone who has lived under Soviet rule can begin to suspect the tensions and difficulties they experienced.

To be sure, times have changed. The harsh communist years are over. Religion is no longer outlawed in Russia. There is now an Apostolic Nuncio in Moscow, thereby eliminating the need for an Apostolic Administrator with a "Very special jurisdiction." There is also a resident Catholic archbishop in Moscow who assumes the regular functions of a local Ordinary. French Assumptionists have now returned to Saint Louis-des-Français Church, bringing with them the majority of the French and French-speaking foreigners.

## *Conclusion*

The American Assumptionists have unfortunately been obliged to withdraw from the Chaplaincy for want of sufficient personnel and have been replaced by an English Marist, Fr. Michael Ryan, S.M. However, the need for the Moscow Chaplaincy is as important and relevant today as it was in the past, not only because of the large number of English-speaking foreign Catholics in Moscow, but especially because of the ups and downs of Russian political history, and of the uneasy relationship over the centuries between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church. Without a chaplaincy based on a firm legal document like the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement—which no other country has with Russia—and without the safety net of a strong political power, the presence of foreign non-Orthodox clergymen could easily be jeopardized as situations in the country evolve from time to time.

If the Moscow Chaplaincy did not exist today, such a jurisdiction would need to be created in order to assure proper religious services (Mass, sacraments, catechism, counseling) for the English-speaking residents of Moscow. Like their French-speaking counterparts, they have a right to be served by a personal parish based on their common language, particularly when their spiritual needs cannot be met adequately otherwise. In today's context, it is unrealistic to think that most English-speaking faithful will feel comfortable and accepted as first-class parishioners in a church specifically called Saint Louis of the French. The Chaplaincy continues to answer an important need of the Church in Moscow.