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## **Tribulations, Trials and Troubles for the Russian Orthodox Church**

**by Nathaniel Davis**

### **Accusations of Profiteering**

On November 10, 1996, a bomb exploded at a cemetery memorial service for the assassinated leader of the Afghan Veterans Invalids Fund. The bomb had such force that it hurled mourners hundred of feet through the air and obliged investigators to search for body parts in the trees and among distant grave stones. It was clearly a gangland killing, executed by Russia's Mafia, and the issue was control over the free import privileges and exemptions for tobacco, alcohol and other goods granted the veterans by the Russian Government.<sup>1</sup> The Russian National Sports Fund, dear to Boris Yeltsin's heart, and the Russian Orthodox Church were the two other organizations enjoying this special status, a highly profitable opportunity for Russia's organized crime.

It is small wonder that the Church also found itself vulnerable, and the Russian Church itself was desperately close to bankruptcy.<sup>2</sup> The hierarch who inherited the unenviable job of managing the special import privileges was Metropolitan Kirill (Gundyaev), head of the Office of Foreign Church Relations. Apparently the free import privilege was granted in 1994 and renewed in 1995 and 1996, permitting the admission of up to 50,000 tons of cigarettes duty free, or one sixth of the total importation of cigarettes from the West, a very substantial accommodation if one considers that 30% of the value of the cigarettes plus 20% of the value plus excise duty was forgiven.<sup>3</sup> It is not altogether surprising, therefore, that the Metropolitan was accused - with or without reason - of improper practices. Accounts of privileged importation of alcohol and tobacco appeared in the press during the autumn of 1996. The Church claimed that the "humanitarian assistance" was being used to succor orphans and restore churches ruined or destroyed during Soviet times, but the press expressed doubt that eyewitnesses in the countryside could confirm these uses of the money. It was alleged that the Church had received excise stamps worth 21 million dollars, but "where had the money gone?"<sup>4</sup>

According to the press, the Russian Government had belatedly moved to

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Specter, "Cemetery Bomb in Moscow Kills 13 at Ceremony," *The New York Times*, Nov. 11, 1996, pp. A1, A8.

<sup>2</sup>See Nathaniel Davis, *A Long Walk to Church; A Contemporary History of Russian Orthodoxy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 187-193; Nathaniel Davis, "The Russian Orthodox Church, Opportunity and Trouble," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol, 29, No: 3, 1996, pp. 281, 283-85.

<sup>3</sup>Igor Tolokonnikov, "Church Business: with the Lord Almighty and Humanitarian Aid" *Kommersant*, Oct. 8, 1996, pp. 38-39.

<sup>4</sup>See Sergei Bychkov, "Business-Tobacco; 'To Smoke or Not to Smoke?' *Moskovski Komsomolets*. Oct- 3, 1996; and "They [the Holy Synod] Removed Metropolitan Kirill from the Cigarette Trade," *Moskovski Komsomolets*, January 5, 1997, p.1.

discontinue the practice of granting free import privileges in the summer of 1996.<sup>5</sup> A journalist named Yuri Ryazhski asserted that the Patriarch and the Holy Synod then decided on their own to discontinue the practice of importing customs-free cigarettes through the office of Foreign Church Relations, but the office, in the first days after the Patriarch intervened, intensified its importations. Allegedly the Church had become the largest supplier of foreign cigarettes in Russia. Ryazhski also alleged that the Deputy Chief of the Office's humanitarian aid department, Archpriest Vladimir Veriga, had been recalled from San Francisco after accusations of improperly diverting funds at the Cathedral of St. Nicholas in that city.<sup>6</sup> *The Economist* alleged that the Church's Council of Bishops met in early 1997, and "burly men in mafia-mauve jackets with badges marked 'security' on their shoulders made sure that prying journalists were kept well away from the assembled 133 prelates."<sup>7</sup> Another journalist, Sergei Bychkov, claimed that there were ties of friendship between Metropolitan Kirill and Anatoli Chubais, the powerful colleague of President Boris Yeltsin, accused of lining his own pockets and extending his financial holdings under the Russian Government's privatization program.<sup>8</sup>

As already noted, the Church has found itself virtually bankrupt, and there is no evidence that Metropolitan Kirill has actually embezzled funds. What is more likely is that profits from the importation of tobacco and cigarettes have been used for urgent, pressing Church expenses. Public accounting of receipts has not been good, however, and the Church authorities have resisted issuing detailed, accurate reports.

Another financial activity that has resulted in unfavorable press comment has been the exportation of petroleum products under "sweetheart" arrangements with the Russian Government.<sup>9</sup> Apparently the Russian Orthodox Church has a 20% financial stake in the International Economic Partnership (MES) and has benefitted from the Partnership's ability to buy export quotas and priority export rights from Russian Government Ministries. Allegedly MES has exported more than 20 million tons of oil and oil products between 1992 and 1996. The profit in 1996 was said to be \$2 billion. Regulations governing oil exports were changed in July, 1997, and the Church has

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<sup>5</sup>Resolution No. 816. See Tolokonnikov, p. 38. This withdrawal of privilege was modified in part by governmental decision No. VCh-P22/38 of January 29, 1997. See Sergei Bychkov, "Tobacco-Connected Metropolitan," *Moskovski Komsomolets*, February 18, 1997, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup>Yuri Ryazhski, "Moscow Patriarchate Continues to Milk Holy 'Camels'", *Moskovski Komsomolets*, February 1, 1997. pp. 1,4.

<sup>7</sup>*The Economist*. April 5, 1997, p. 50.

<sup>8</sup>Sergei Bychkov, "The Tobacco Connected Metropolitan," *Moskovski Komsomolets*, February 18, 1997, p. 1,2.

<sup>9</sup>See the *Moscow Times*, February 25, 1997, p.3: Tolokonnikov, p.39.

stopped trading.<sup>10</sup> The Patriarchate also owns or partially own several banks: the Orthodoxy Bank, Bank Peresvet, Christ the Savior Cathedral Bank, and some others. When one investigator in Volgograd allegedly discovered that local traffic police had been shaking down motorists for church donations, it was said that the ruling bishop, Archbishop German (Timofeev) excommunicated him.

Archbishop Aleksandr (Mogilev) of Kostroma, with the help of John King of Lake Arrowhead in California, has started selling "Saint Springs" bottled water, as have a few other ruling bishops.<sup>11</sup> The trouble seems to be that needy local parishes do not appear to get much benefit from the money taken in.

The mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, has financed the greater part of the construction of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior by pressing businesses in Moscow to make donations. As Aleksandra Stanley put it in a recent article in the *New York Times*, "the Mayor singlehandedly forced through the reconstruction project - which has already cost \$200 million and is far from complete .... It stands as a shimmering testament to his power, vision and steely will".<sup>12</sup>

In 1996 the Russian Government reportedly gave the Moscow Patriarchate \$11.8 million from Russia's hard currency reserve to recover a collection of icons for the museum of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. The Patriarch had asked the Government for a license to export 650,000 tons of petroleum tax-free to pay for the recovery, but Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin disapproved this arrangement as contrary to law. It then transpired that there were actually three collections that might be available. The first was the "Van Rein" collection, named after a Dutch art dealer who had gone bankrupt, worth about \$12 million. The second was an icon collection belonging to Prince Mikhail, of the Greek royal family, living in the USA. This was worth about \$7 million. The third was a collection of icons that was in the possession of a legal firm in Zurich, worth about \$12 million. The Russian authorities and the Patriarchate assembled a team of distinguished experts in the field who reported that Prince Mikhail's collection was by far the best. For unknown reasons the Prince declined to deal with the Patriarchate. The Patriarchate spent the \$11.8 million, however, \$9.15 million on one of the other collections, the identity of which the Patriarchate declined to clarify -- delaying the collection's public display by about two years, and spent the remainder of the \$11.8 million on individual icons, without extensive consultation with the experts. The newspaper, *Moskovskie Novosti*, was highly critical of the secrecy of the transactions, particularly as the \$11.8 million represented

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<sup>10</sup>*The Economist*, March 15, 1997, p. 70; Vanora Bennett, "Russia's Church: A Material Calling?," *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 4, 1997, p. A10.

<sup>11</sup>Bennett, pp. A1, A10. Felix Corley, "Unsuccessful Orthodoxy in Russian Heartlands," *Religion, State and Society*, March, 2000. Vol. 28, Number 1, p. 50. Reportedly Metropolitan Feodosi (Protsyuk) of Omsk diocese, with a private company, Rosar, has been engaged since 1996 in bottling and marketing Achaisky Monastery mineral water.

<sup>12</sup>Valeria Korchagina, "Cathedral Planners Turn Eye to Décor," *Moscow Times*, Oct. 22, 1996, pp. 1.3.

public moneys, and parliamentary deputies had sought clarification without success.<sup>13</sup>

I myself have seen plaques in parish churches expressing thinly veiled thanks to local Russian Mafia leaders for their help in restoring the church in question. I suppose that there is nothing truly wrong with such generosity, and Russia is certainly not the only country where the Mafia Dons give such support!

## **The Canonization of Czar Nicholas II**

The Russian Orthodox Church has had a particular problem. The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad has long since canonized the Czar, his family and faithful servants, and there is a monarchist streak in many Russians, including the leadership of the Church itself. On the other hand, neither Nicholas nor Alexandra lived altogether saintly lives. There was an assassination attempt against Nicholas when he visited Japan as a young man, but Nicholas' reaction was to call the Japanese "little short-tailed monkeys." He despised Jews, whom he called "zhidy" [kikes]. He told an advisor that, at heart, the English were no better than zhidy themselves.<sup>14</sup> On May 18, 1896, four days after Nicholas' coronation there was a festival on Khodynka field where the crowd panicked and stampeded. Over 5,000 people apparently died or were seriously injured. Nicholas and Alexandra, despite the advice of Count Witte and other senior members of the government, went on to attend the French ambassador's ball that evening and returned to Khodynka field a few days later to receive the salute of more than 40,000 soldiers, including 67 generals, in a grand finale to his coronation celebrations. Early in 1906, when an aide brought Nicholas reports that specially-chosen army units had burned the farms of thousands of peasants suspected of revolutionary sympathies and shot any who tried to flee, Nicholas' reaction was: "This really tickles me."<sup>15</sup>

The empress was little better. During World War I she told Nicholas: "Russia loves to feel the whip," and once cried out: "How I wish I could pour my will into your veins!"<sup>16</sup> Special trains had to bequisitioned every week to bring fresh flowers from the distant Crimea for the Empress' boudoir even when every locomotive was needed to carry men, weapons, ammunition and rations to the front.<sup>17</sup>

How did the Church respond to its dilemma? The first thing it did was to appoint a commission to consider the matter under the chairmanship of Metropolitan Yuvenali (Poyarkov), a bishop since 1965 and Metropolitan of Krutitsa and Kolomnoe since 1977.

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<sup>13</sup>Tatiana Andriasova, "Chernomyrdin's Gift," *Moskovskie Novosti*, August 23-30, 1998, p. 16.

<sup>14</sup>Robert K Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra* (New York: Dell, 1967), p.27.

<sup>15</sup>14" Bruce Lincoln. *In War's Dark Shadow: The Russians Before the Great War* (New York: The Dial Press, 1983), pp. 280.283. The official figure was 1,389 people killed and 1,300 injured, but "it is generally agreed that the numbers of killed and wounded were several times greater," Massie, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup>Massie, p.29.

<sup>17</sup>Bruce Lincoln, *Passage Through Armageddon: The Russians in War and Revolution. 1914-1918* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1986) p. 89.

The commission commenced its work in 1993 and did not hurry its deliberations. One of the complicating factors was the conviction among some that the Czar had been the victim of a Jewish-Masonic conspiracy, and cabalistic signs in the room where the Czar and his family were executed could fuel such suspicions. Another complication was a certain degree of doubt within the Church leadership that the identification of the remains found in a swamp outside Yekaterinburg were those of the Czar and his family. This sliver of doubt was probably useful to the Church in delaying a decisive finding.

In February, 1997, the Council of Bishops approved a report from Metropolitan Yuvenali's Commission on Canonization saying that, while Nicholas II did not deserve sainthood for the way he lived and ruled Russia, the humble Christian way in which the royal family faced imprisonment and death qualified them as saintly "passion bearers."<sup>18</sup>

As things turned out, President Boris Yeltsin attended the interment of the royal family's bones in the Peter and Paul Fortress in St. Petersburg in 1998 and the Patriarch did not. As the DNA testing of the remains had left virtually no doubt of the authenticity of the remains, the Patriarch was considerably criticized for his "cowardice and indecision."<sup>19</sup>

On January 30, 2000 Metropolitan Kirill (Gundyaev) of Smolensk told news reporters that myrrh falling from an icon of the Czar at the Ascension Church in Moscow could be a sign. Apparently the myrrh began to ooze forth on November 7, 1998, the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. Apparently no miraculous events have been observed in St. Petersburg where the Czar and his family are interred.

On June 2, 2000, the secretary of the Holy Synod's Commission on Canonization, Priest Maxim Maximov, told the press that Nicholas and his family (but not his faithful servants and retainers) would be canonized at the Jubilee Council of Bishops in August, 2000. Over 850 new martyrs who were killed or died in prison during Soviet times would also be canonized.

On August 14, 2000 the Bishops Council duly canonized Nicholas, Alexandra, their four daughters and the Czarevich Aleksii.

### **Protestantism and Paganism on the March?**

In the first issue in the year 2000 of the publication *Frontier* Philip Walters, Chief of Research for the Keston Institute, wrote: "One thing is becoming clear: Russian Orthodoxy does not predominate outside the European Russian heartland."<sup>20</sup> While this statement has a grain of truth, it is somewhat exaggerated. The Russian Ministry of Justice maintains detailed statistics, which can be regarded as generally accurate, and they

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<sup>18</sup>Boris and Gleb murdered in 1015, were the Church's first saints and "passion bearers."

<sup>19</sup>*The Moscow Times*, July 14, 1998, p.10.

<sup>20</sup>*Frontier*, No. 1, 2000, p. 1.

do not altogether support this blanket assertion.<sup>21</sup>

The 1998 figures list 14,719 registered societies of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russian Republic. The main Protestant churches have 2,000-2,500 registered societies listed.<sup>22</sup> Unless one is prepared to conclude that the Protestants have much, much larger church societies than the Orthodox, which I think is unlikely, then the number of Protestant adherents can hardly be more than 20% of the number of Russian Orthodox.<sup>23</sup>

What *Frontier* is suggesting, however, is that Protestantism is replacing Russian Orthodoxy “outside the European Russian heartland.” According to the Russian Ministry of Justice, there are twenty oblasts or equivalent territories out of a total of 82, where the number of Protestant registered societies is greater than the number of Russian Orthodox parishes. Of these 20, two are in republics of the North Caucasus, where Islam heavily predominates in any case.<sup>24</sup> In two others the number of registered societies of any kind is small.<sup>25</sup> In Murmansk, Karelia and Kaliningrad-remote areas on the edge of Russian power-the Protestants have had comparative success.<sup>26</sup> We now come to the crux of the

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<sup>21</sup>I am indebted to Aleksandr Kudravtsev, Chief of the Registration Department for Religious statistics, for providing me with detailed statistics. Those are meticulously compiled, down to the number of communities of Sikhs (one registered society), Zoroastrians (one society), Copts (one society), Spiritual Unity Tolstoyans (one directive center and one society), etc. I have found over 46 years of study that the authorities are well informed and quite accurate.

<sup>22</sup>Evangelical Christian Baptists 667  
7th Day Adventists 306  
Pentecostals 445  
Evangelical Christians 354  
Jehovah's Witnesses 205  
Presbyterians 159

<sup>23</sup>There can be great ambiguity in the way one counts Russian Orthodox adherents. Every Russian Orthodox parish has a large number of nominal adherents, who may go to church for weddings, funerals, baptisms, Easter, etc. The Protestants' membership is on the whole more active and involved.

These statistics do not address Protestant areas outside the Russian Republic (Lutherans in Estonia and Latvia) nor Muslims within the Russian Republic (Tatarstan, Bashkortstan, the North Caucasus, etc.), nor Buddhists in Buryatiya and Kalmykiya, nor Roman Catholics and Greek Catholics in Lithuania and Western Ukraine. Nor do they address predominantly Muslim areas outside the Russian Republic (most notably Central Asia).

<sup>24</sup>1999 figures: Dagestan: 1,200 registered Muslim societies, 14 Protestant societies and 9 Russian Orthodox parishes; Kabardino-Balkarskaya Republic: 101 Muslim societies, 19 Protestant societies, and 14 Russian Orthodox parishes.

<sup>25</sup>Khakasiya: 20 Protestant societies and Russian Orthodox parishes; Northern Osetiya-Alaniya 20 Protestant societies, 17 Muslim societies and 13 Russian Orthodox parishes.

<sup>26</sup>Murmansk: 38 Protestant societies, 38 Russian Orthodox parishes; Kareliya: 61 Protestant societies, 45 Russian Orthodox parishes; Kaliningrad: 74 Protestant societies, 53 Russian Orthodox parishes. In no one of the three jurisdictions has there been a resident, ruling Russian Orthodox bishop

matter - the Russian territories East of Irkutsk. In ten of them, the Protestants have had real successes.<sup>27</sup> These territories are mostly remote and small, however, and twice that number of territories East of the Urals (19) have more Russian Orthodox parishes than Protestant societies. These territories include the great jurisdictions of Novosibirsk, Sverdlovsk (Yekaterinburg), Chelyabinsk and Krasnoyarsk and the historic provinces of Omsk and Tomsk.<sup>28</sup> Keston Institute's Roman Lunkin used Sakhalin as his example of Protestant predominance in *Frontier* magazine and in that territory Keston is no doubt right.<sup>29</sup> I myself visited Sakhalin several years ago, and found the local situation there essentially as Lunkin describes it. In particular, there was a Bahai missionary woman who accomplished extraordinary feats of dedication and committed service that greatly influenced the local scene. It is most difficult, however, to support the general proposition that "Russian Orthodoxy does not predominate outside the European Russian heartland."<sup>30</sup>

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during most of the past forty years if not longer.

<sup>27</sup>Amur: 53 Protestant societies, 27 Russian Orthodox parishes; Birobidzhan: 13 Protestant societies, 10 Russian Orthodox parishes; Chita: 44 Protestant societies, 25 Russian Orthodox parishes; Chukotsk: 8 Protestant societies, 3 Russian Orthodox parishes; Irkutsk: 69 Protestant societies, 45 Russian Orthodox parishes; Khabarovsk: 68 Protestant societies, 27 Russian Orthodox parishes; Primorski Krai: 76 Protestant societies, 48 Russian Orthodox parishes; Sakhalin: 58 Protestant societies, 43 Russian Orthodox parishes; Tyva: 8 Protestant societies, 3 Russian Orthodox parishes; Yamalo-Nenets: 15 Protestant societies, 14 Russian Orthodox parishes.

<sup>28</sup>Keston has used the case of Yakutsk (Sakha) to buttress the argument that the Russian Orthodox are a minority religious community in Eastern Siberia. *Keston News Service* says: "In fact it is likely that the Orthodox Church is not the strongest religious community in the east Siberian region. In Yakutsk the Baptist and Pentecostal Churches... have a congregation greater than the Orthodox. There is a flourishing Catholic Youth Center headed by a Slovak priest." Official statistics for 1998 and 1999 both show 30 Russian Orthodox parishes in Sakha (Yakutiya), 25 Protestant communities and 5 Roman Catholic parishes. Keston is no doubt right about the city (the bishop is much criticized) but I would appreciate more evidence before concluding that all of Sakha has more Protestants and Catholics than Orthodox of at least nominal persuasion. Novosibirsk: 73 Russian Orthodox parishes, 51 Protestant societies; Sverdlovsk: 238 Russian Orthodox parishes, 136 Protestant societies; Chelyabinsk- 101 Russian Orthodox parishes, 13 Protestant societies; Krasnoyarsk: 85 Russian Orthodox parishes, 55 Protestant societies; Omsk: 61 Russian Orthodox parishes, 31 Protestant societies; Tomsk: 32 Russian Orthodox parishes, 14 Protestant societies.

<sup>29</sup>Roman Lunkin, "Fear of the Law Forces Sakhalin's Dissimilar Protestants Together," *Frontier*, No. 1, 2000, pp. 8-9.

<sup>30</sup>In another paper - to be presented to the November meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies - I address the situation of the Old Believers, Roman Catholics, and the splintered Orthodox in Ukraine. In a *Keston News Service* article of August 15, 2000, Nikolai Mitrokhin, "Tajikistan: Practicing Protestants Outnumber Orthodox Christians," stated that Protestant worshippers exceed three thousand, compared with fifteen hundred Orthodox. This may well be true, but we are talking about six Orthodox parishes in a sea of Islamic faithful. Moreover, 90% of the "Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Moldavians and some Roma." (gypsies) have emigrated, and the Russian



The situation of the religious communities other than Russian Orthodoxy and Protestantism does not greatly change the picture. Except for pockets of historic Muslim and Buddhist strength, the number of other religious societies is small throughout the Russian Republic. The main exception that Keston seems to make is to observe a resurgent paganism, or shamanism, although Keston's author in this field, David Lewis, is candid - and I believe correct - in attributing the strength of paganism to "more of a local tradition than a strongly held belief system." In any case the number of pagan communities in the Russian Republic - two religious central offices and eight societies is small, and the number of registered Shamanist communities is only three.<sup>31</sup> I myself attended a pagan, shamanist day of ceremonies just outside of Yakutsk (Sakha). There was a shrine where rites were observed and candles lighted half way up the mountainside, and dances, entertainments and food served in the fields below. The atmosphere was festive and the ceremonies were attended by several thousand people including dignitaries of the Sakha Republic, but the event was, as Lewis says, traditional and national more than competitive with Orthodoxy. I have also seen videos of pagan/shamanist rites in the provinces of Bryansk, Kaluga and Smolensk in European Russia, and the impression given was much the same.<sup>32</sup>

Philip Walters mentions "Rerikhism" as "an example of a thoroughly Russian New Religious Movement." I agree entirely, but there appear to be only two Rerikh religious societies in the whole Russian Republic.<sup>33</sup>

### **Weakness of Leadership in Siberia**

Despite my disagreement with Philip Walters over his assertion that "Russian Orthodoxy does not predominate outside the European Russian heartland," he is no doubt correct in saying that Russian Orthodoxy is having difficulties in Siberia that one might relate to weaknesses in leadership. The case of Bishop Nikon (Mironov), then of Yekaterinburg has already drawn extensive comment, both because of allegations that he publicly burned books of distinguished Russian theologians like Aleksandr Men and

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Orthodox Church, unlike some evangelical Protestants does not proselytize actively among Muslim Tajiks, and other Central Asian Islamic peoples. The Tashkent Russian Orthodox diocese has 104 parishes, and its six parishes in Tajikistan are a small element in Orthodoxy's success or failure in Central Asia. Russian Orthodoxy has achieved reasonably vigorous growth in Central Asia as a whole, increasing from 67 parishes in 1996 to 104 parishes in 1999.

<sup>31</sup>Figures are from the Russian Ministry of Justice, compiled in 1998. David Lewis, "Unbroken Pagan Tradition on the Edge of Europe", *Frontier*, No. 1, 2000, pp. 6-7. Lewis writes about pagan ceremonies in the village of Shorunzha, where he traveled with a group under the auspices of the Mari-El Republic's Ministry of Culture.

<sup>32</sup>The Videos were filmed by Elena and Sergei Minyonok of the Institute of World Literature in Moscow. Folklore of Rural Russia (<http://www.earthwatch.org/expeditions/xminyonok.html>).

<sup>33</sup>Statistics of the Russian Ministry of Justice, 1998. The Rerikh community apparently is also called the community of the Living Ethic.

Americans like Alexander Schmemmann and John Meyendorff, but also because he was said to have been a sodomite. Moreover he was alleged to have tried to force priests and other seminarians into perversion, to have extorted money, icons and altar vessels from his parishes, to have taken bribes, to have driven five priests in his diocese to defect to the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, to be a foul mouthed drunkard and to have provoked complaints from the majority of priests in the diocese.<sup>34</sup> He was removed in 1999.

Bishop Arkadi (Afonin) of Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk and Tomsk was also accused of homosexual acts, never officially confirmed, and “inability to manage a diocese.”<sup>35</sup> He was removed from the Tomsk diocese in 1998, but reappointed to Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk and the Kuriles at the end of 1999. As I myself called on bishops in Siberia and the Pacific maritime provinces, I was confronted by several personal diocesan secretaries who had the aura of being more than clerks, about whom old ladies of the diocese whispered about a relationship with the ruling local bishop more intimate than the duties of office management. The old ladies may have been mistaken, of course, and the problems of celibacy of the hierarchs has been around a long time. In the Eleventh Century St. Peter Damian bemoaned that “the befouling cancer of sodomy is spreading... through the clergy ...like a savage beast...”

Other weaknesses like the sins of promiscuity, arrogance, and pride have reportedly beset the Church in Siberia. Bishop Gavriil (Steblyuchenko) was removed from the diocese of Khabarovsk in 1991 for “abuse of power” and arrogance toward his priests and people, with overtones of past collaboration with the Soviet authorities to become ruling bishop of Blagoveshchensk in early 1994, after a period in residence at the Monastery of the Caves, West of Pskov, and the Konevetsky Monastery on Lake Ladoga.<sup>36</sup>

Metropolitan Feodosi (Protsyuk) of Omsk was accused of intimidating the priests in his diocese and refusing to allow his clergy to campaign to regain confiscated churches. This action prompted an exodus of several priests to the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in 1988, and the defection of another priest to the Roman Catholics. There are just over 60 parishes in the diocese serving over two million people.<sup>37</sup> Allegedly Feodosi

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<sup>34</sup>Corley, pp. 45-47, N. Mitrokhin and S. Timofeeva, *Episkopy I Eparkhii Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi* [Bishops and Dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church], M.:000 “Panorama,” 1997, ISBN 5-85895-031-0. Statistics given under the name and diocese of each bishop, pp. 205-206. The Mitrokhin-Timofeeva book was denounced in the *Moskovski Tserkovny Vestnik* [the Moscow Church Herald], Evgeni Polishchuk, “Ostorozhno: Nedobrokachestvenny Produkt” [ Careful: Not a Good Quality Product], May 7, 1998, pp. 34; David Lewis, “How Will Russia's Last Tsar Be Commemorated?,” *Frontier*, No. 2, 2000, p.9.

<sup>35</sup>Mitrokhin and Timofeeva. pp. 79-80.

<sup>36</sup>Davis, *A Long Walk to Church*, pp. 96, 144, 149 and 297 (Note 4). Bishop Arkadi (Afonin) was sent to the Monastery of the Caves, west of Pskov, after his removal.

<sup>37</sup>Official statistics give 61 parishes in 1998 and 1999. Corley gives the figure of 64 parishes, 18 of which are in the city of Omsk itself. Corley, p.50.

seduced the wife of a high-ranking person when he was assigned in Germany and "proposed cohabitation" to the wives of priests in his diocese. Embezzlement has also been alleged, as has collaboration with the Federal Security Service (FSB), domestic successor to the KGB.<sup>38</sup>

Bishop Antoni (Masendich), then 31 years of age, was instrumental in organizing the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kiev Patriarchate in defiance of the Moscow Patriarchate in 1992. Antoni himself was raised to the dignity of Metropolitan, but then resumed his allegiance to Moscow in 1994 and was appointed Bishop of Barnaul and the Altai. Numerous complaints from priests and lay people ensued. He forbade the well-known Archpriest, Mikhail Pogiblov, from conducting services, along with the other priests in the St. George church in Novoaltaisk. Apparently their transgression had been publicly to attack the bishop for "non-canonical methods of leading the diocese and excessive diocesan assessments, with fines for nonpayment." Confrontation and violence occurred. Antoni took a monarchist, anti-heretical and anti-ecumenist stand against straying "liberals" in the Church.<sup>39</sup>

Bishop Veniamin (Pushkar) of Vladivostok has assumed an extremely conservative position, railing against perfidious schismatics, renovators, liberalists, "Russophobes," and ecumenists in the Church. A convinced monarchist, he has not only been agitating for the canonization of Nicholas II, while rejecting the Church's present official position that there were two periods in the Czar's life, but has also proposed the canonization of Grigori Rasputin.<sup>40</sup>

There have also been magnificent hierarchs in Siberia. To mention one, Bishop Luka (Voino-Yasenetski), a courageous and dedicated priest, surgeon, and World War II hero, had roots there.

### **The New Religion Law and Foreign Missionaries**

Russia's 1997 Law in Religious Organizations established two categories of religious communities.<sup>41</sup> Communities under the first category, "religious organizations," must have had 15 years of legal recognition, while "religious groups" have inferior rights. The latter category would have no guaranteed opportunity to publish religious literature, create schools or broadcast in mass media, request deferment of military duty, conduct services in places like hospitals, schools, orphanages, barracks, retirement homes and

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<sup>38</sup>Corley, p. 50.

<sup>39</sup>Mitrokhin and Timofeeva, pp. 70-73; Davis, *A Long Walk to Church*, pp. 99-101, 278, Note 30.

<sup>40</sup>Mitrokhin and Timofeeva, pp. 92-93.

<sup>41</sup>Article 27 of the 1997 law makes the distinction between "organizations" and "groups." The 1997 law entering into force on October 1, superseded Russia's 1990 law on freedom of conscience. Russia 1993 constitution states that all faiths are equal before the law, but this assertion is not altogether upheld by the 1997 legislation.