

Putin's Spiritual Advisor Now Set to Challenge Patriarch Kirill's Policies if Not Position

Culture

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Putin's favorite priest – and said by many to be Putin's choice to succeed Patriarch Kirill – has a history of beliefs many find peculiar. For example, Bishop – soon-to-be Metropolitan Tikhon claims Czar Nicholas II may have been killed in a ritual slaying, a century-old canard blaming the Jews for regicide*.

By Paul Goble for "Window on Eurasia": May 15 – Bishop Tikhon (Shevkunov), long identified as Vladimir Putin's spiritual advisor and noted for his numerous outspoken comments on a wide range of subjects (portal-credo.ru/site/?act=topic&id=902), has been appointed to head the Metropolitanate of Pskov and Porkhovskiy by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church. He will presumably be elevated to the rank of metropolitan, thus putting him in a position to play a far greater role in church affairs than hitherto --- he has had the relatively minor role of head of the Patriarchate's council on culture, a position he supposedly will retain – and puts him in a position to run for the position of patriarch once Kirill passes from the scene. That possibility has been the subject of almost all commentary on the bishop's elevation (e.g., kasparov.ru/material.php?id=5AFA8C21760A2, svoboda.org/a/29226589.html, forum-msk.org/material/news/14638502.html, bbc.com/russian/news-44089827, ruskline.ru/news_rl/2018/05/14/v_etih_pomeweniyah_reshalas_sudba_russkoj_pravoslavnoj_cerkvi1/, diak-kuraev.livejournal.com/2026704.html and sobkorr.ru/news/5AFA8C21760A2.html). And it is certainly not impossible or even improbable. If Tikhon eventually becomes patriarch, he could be expected to put his and thus Putin's mark on the church. But such a further elevation is some time in the future. The more interesting question is what does Tikhon's latest rise say about relations between the Kremlin and the Patriarchate and Patriarch Kirill. First and most obvious, it shows that Putin already has effective control of the church hierarchy. Kirill has often gone off the reservation as far as the Kremlin is concerned, on issues having to do with Ukraine and Abkhazia, for example. But Tikhon was elevated by the hierarchs, a signal to Kirill that he doesn't control the church as much as he may think. Second, it gives Putin yet another lever to ensure that the Patriarchate and the Patriarch do what the Kremlin wants, especially as issues surrounding autocephaly for Ukrainian Orthodoxy highlight the weakness of Moscow within the Orthodox world. Kirill now knows there is someone the Kremlin would be only too happy to see replace him. And third, Tikhon's elevation likely puts the Orthodox Church on track to support an even more traditional caesaro-papist traditionalism than even Kirill has been willing to champion. The stronger Tikhon becomes, the more the Orthodox church can be counted on to promote the Russian regime's portion of archaic and obscurantist anti-Westernism. Those three things, even more than the distant possibility that Tikhon will one day be patriarch, are the most important consequences of his elevation this week

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The commentary above is from Paul Goble's "Window on Eurasia" series and appears here with the author's permission. Contact Goble at: paul.goble@gmail.com *A recent article in The Tablet describes the anti-Semitic claim that the newly promoted Metropolitan is said to support: "The myth of Jewish Bolshevik regicide, spawned by exiled and bitter monarchists, remains palpably alive in some quarters. That is certainly the case among a minority of the old guard of the more reactionary and conspiracy-minded Russian Orthodox clergy. For many Russians, the blood of the last Czar continues to stain the communal hands of Russian Jewry, binding them in an act of symbolic original sin against the body politic. For too many Russians, the butchering of the since-canonized and revered royal family by men commanded by a Jewish Bolshevik directly parallel that of the killing of Christ by the Jews..." To access the complete article from which the statement above was excerpted, link below: [http://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/25070 ... -gains-political-traction](http://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/25070...-gains-political-traction)