

Patriarch Kirill Working to Ensure Tikhon's Pskov Appointment is an Exile Not an Elevation

Opinion

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“It is clear that Patriarch Kirill is seeking to deprive his competitor of ties with Moscow” and also of the income that the Sretensky Monastery can provide. “Tikhon does continue as head of the [synod’s] council on culture, but this is as nothing compared to a monastery next to the Lubyanka.” Photo: Bishop Tikhon (I), President Putin and Patriarch Kirill during a Putin visit to the Sretensky Monastery, May 25, 2017 [Photo courtesy Putin personal website]

By Paul Goble for “Window on Eurasia”; June 1 – When Vladimir Putin’s “spiritual advisor” Tikhon (Shevkunov) was appointed to the Pskov Metropolitanate, a debate broke out between those who saw this as an elevation that would put him in a position to succeed Patriarch Kirill and others who argued that Putin’s man was being exiled by being sent away from Moscow. Those who view this move as an elevation would appear to have a strong argument: By being named to Pskov and immediately elevated to the status of a metropolitan, the former bishop has acquired the status needed in modern times to be considered as a serious candidate to head the Russian Orthodox Church. But St. Petersburg analyst Stanislav Volkov says the move increasingly appears part of a plan by Patriarch Kirill to freeze out Tikhon from the center of the Moscow Patriarchate, ensuring that his point of view can be isolated and that his prospects for further elevation will be limited (gorod-812.ru/eto-ssylka-zachem-kirill-otpravil-tihona-shevkunova-v-pskov/). Because of his ties to Putin and his control of the Sretensky monastery with its links to the FSB, many have viewed Tikhon as Kirill’s competitor and putative successor ever since he was created bishop three years ago, especially given that Tikhon’s personality and policy positions stand in sharp contrast to Kirill’s. From the point of view of many, Volkov continues, Kirill is an ecumenist, a Westernizer, and a modernist; and “worst of all, there is the suspicion that in the depth of his soul, he considers ‘the church higher than the state.’” Tikhon in contrast is vastly more traditionalist, lacks ties to the West, and is less ambitious for the church. Consequently, many of Tikhon’s supporters viewed his elevation to a metropolitan, with control over a church territory, as the logical next step on his march to the patriarchate. But even if that should prove to be the case in the long run, the church analyst says, Kirill is working hard to make Tikhon’s time in Pskov an exile not an elevation. On being named to Pskov, Tikhon was stripped of his post at the Sretensky Monastery, even though church rules would have allowed him to retain that position in Moscow. Indeed, many of those with power in the church have both a territorial see and a position in the capital from which they can expand their influence. “It is clear that Patriarch Kirill is seeking to deprive his competitor of ties with Moscow” and also of the income that the Sretensky Monastery can provide. “Tikhon does continue as head of the [synod’s] council on culture, but this is as nothing compared to a monastery next to the Lubyanka.” At the same time, however, Volkov continues, “Tikhon’s source of strength is in the external world and an apparent defeat within the Russian Orthodox Church cannot significantly weaken him” if Putin and others in the organs want him to ultimately succeed. But Kirill has

reduced Tikhon's influence within the church and that is not nothing.

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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

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