

## **Tikhon was Never Putin's Confessor but He is His Conservative Agent in the Orthodox Church**

### **Culture**

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**&ldquo;&hellip;the newly-minted metropolitan would appear to have a brilliant career ahead of him in the Moscow Patriarchate as long as not-so-former KGB officer Putin is in the Kremlin.&rdquo;**

By Paul Goble for &ldquo;Window on Eurasia&rdquo;; Bishop now Metropolitan Tikhon (Shevkunov) [pictured] was never Vladimir Putin&rsquo;s confessor despite many rumors to that effect, but he was and remains the Kremlin leader&rsquo;s agent in place within the Russian Orthodox Church to promote a radically conservative line against the more moderate Patriarch Kirill, according to sources within the church. Tikhon&rsquo;s role and rise &ndash; some say he is odds on favorite to succeed Kirill as head of the Moscow Patriarchate &ndash; began in 2000 when Tikhon till a priest attracted attention from the incoming Russian president not only for his conservative line but also for his push to unite the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. The story of Tikhon&rsquo;s activities is recounted by &ldquo;Nezygar,&rdquo; the notoriously well-informed but always anonymous Telegram channel. Its substance is recounted by the Facebook account of the ROCA at facebook. (comgroups1454447321234314permalink1975019795843728). Moscow patriarchs including Aleksii I and Pimen had long promoted the idea, but they had gotten nowhere for two reasons. On the one hand, the ROCA was not only the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad but an institution formed on the basis of anti-communism and anti-Sovietism. And on the other, the ROCA was far more conservative than the Moscow Patriarchate in its interpretation of church dogma. Consequently, even those who favored bringing all Russian Orthodox churches under a single patriarchate were concerned that bringing the ROCA into the fold would tilt the Moscow Patriarchate in a way that would compromise its future. At the turn of this century, however, many churchmen began talking about taking this step given the relatively small size of the ROCA compared to the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. But it is unlikely anything would have happened had it not been for the efforts of Father Tikhon and his contacts. First of all, Nezygar says, Tikhon engaged in &ldquo;unofficial contacts with the Russian diaspora in the US and Europe.&rdquo; He was aided in this by his friendship with Zurab Chavchvadze, the representative of Grand Duke Vladimir Kirillovich in Russia, a relative,&rdquo; by the way, &ldquo;of Patriarch Illii II.&rdquo; Through these contacts, Tikhon got to know the Princes Golitsyn, Boris Iordan, and Sergey Palen. Tikhon was also able to develop contacts with the Nikolaevites and Michael of Kent. &ldquo;All of these one way or another took part in the process of uniting&rdquo; the two churches, the Telegram channel continues. But Tikhon&rsquo;s main contribution was &ldquo;brilliant,&rdquo; it says. He was able to &ldquo;&rsquo;take control&rsquo; of all the basic nodes of administration of the ROCA,&rdquo; financial as well as administrative. Archpriest Petr Kholodny who was the treasurer of the ROCA worked closely with Tikhon in doing this. Kholodny became involved with Russian businesses, including Norilsk Nickel, and dramatically improved his standing in Moscow, something that had always been compromised by the fact that he was the grandson of Aleksandr Kiselyev, the spiritual advisor to General Vlasov, the leader of the anti-Soviet Russian Liberation Army under the Germans. Tikhon helped engineer all this and thus set the stage for unification,

pleasing his Kremlin contact who also wanted a common steam of Russian history and a conservative rather than liberal and ecumenical Moscow Patriarchate and who likely was pleased that Tikhon behaved in a way that recalls the methods the KGB traditionally used against religious groups. Indeed, it is highly likely that this style of work won Putin over even more than the ideological position Tikhon chose to show him. And thus the newly-minted metropolitan would appear to have a brilliant career ahead of him in the Moscow Patriarchate as long as not-so-former KGB officer Putin is in the Kremlin.

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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](mailto:paul.goble@gmail.com)

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