

Mother Russia by Luba George

Next Patriarch a Germany handler?

The promotion of Pitirim to "metropolitan" relates to Moscow's plans to absorb Germany into its empire.

At the beginning of 1987, Pitirim, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) Archbishop of Volokolamsk (Moscow) was promoted to Metropolitan of Volokolamsk and Yuryevska.

Long the head of the Moscow Patriarchate's publishing department, Pitirim has often visited West Germany, and has been at the center of talks between the ROC and the "neutralist" leadership of the Protestant Church of West Germany (EKD). Under the cover of "theological" discussions, these talks have explored the potential for a German-Soviet strategic accommodation based on setting up a pro-Russian, *neutral*, reunified Germany.

The 60-year-old Pitirim, with an enormously long white beard (even by Orthodox standards) is well-informed and well-connected. His intense eyes emanate that Rasputin-like "all-knowing" guru look which seems to have mesmerized many in the EKD. Pitirim is the "Germany expert" of the Russian Church hierarchy. During his many tours of West Germany, escorted by leading EKD officials, he has engaged in long talks with West German business, industrial, political, and religious leaders, some of whom have donated handsome sums towards the ROC's 1988 "Christianization" of Russia millennium celebrations.

Witnesses to discussions Pitirim held in West Germany confirm his talents in organizing Western funds for the upcoming millennium. A high percentage of the 1988 costs is being met by money from the West.

Sources in the World Council of

Churches see Pitirim's promotion as giving him the "inside track" to succeed the long-ailing 76-year-old Moscow Patriarch Pimen. It was clear to all observers in Western European church hierarchies by summer 1986 that Pimen was gravely ill, and that the Orthodox hierarchy was planning the succession. At that time, three possible successors were mooted:

1) **Alexei**, until mid-1986 Metropolitan of Estonia and Tallin (Reval), promoted last year to Metropolitan of Leningrad, while keeping his old post. This move restores the unity of the Leningrad and Tallin archdioceses that existed until the end of War World II. Alexei's promotion also signaled Moscow's "German card," as his real name, von Rüdiger, is that of a German noble family from Estonia.

2) **Denisenko**, the Metropolitan of Kiev, who has an outside chance.

3) **Pitirim**, whose promotion was tipped off months ago by a high-ranking ROC official who insisted that a "mere archbishop" like Pitirim will not be ignored in the succession. "If necessary, Pitirim can be appointed Metropolitan one day and Patriarch the next," he said, to the amazement of the inquirer.

Pitirim is no ordinary archbishop. His family (surname Nechaev) maintains an unbroken continuity, say his EKD friends, to Joseph of Volokolamsk, who led, together with Philotheus of Pskov, the opposition to the Union of the Eastern and Western churches achieved at the Council of Florence in 1439. The pair hatched the mystical world-empire doctrine of

"Moscow, the Third and Final Rome."

Joseph of Volokolamsk was Russia's chief ideologist of the brand of hesychasm (Orthodox mysticism) called "Josephism" (*Iosifyanstvo*) in the middle to late 1400s. Under Josephite rule, anyone who dared to import foreign ideas into Mother Russia was anathemized as a "Judaizer" (a label applied to those introducing such "Western" ideas as geometry, which was banned by the hesychast monks). Joseph (Sanin) of the Volokolamsk Monastery wrote against the "Judaizer movement" and promoted the aggressive claim that Moscow, after the fall of Constantinople to Turkish rule in 1453, was the rightful heir to world political as well as religious leadership. He sought a "concordat" with Muscovy's new rulers by providing them with a concept of theocratic power to justify their rule.

Today, Pitirim, a descendant of Joseph of Volokolamsk's family, is a leading exponent of the "concordat"—church-state accommodation—with the Soviet regime. The *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, which he runs, last year proclaimed that the "Third Millennium will be the Slavonic Millennium" and launched fierce attacks against Pope John Paul II.

Pitirim's collaborator in West Germany and expert on "Russian Orthodox spirituality," Prof. Fairy von Lilienfeld, of Erlangen, delivered a report in honor of her "dear friend" Archbishop Pitirim at the 500th anniversary celebrations of the Moscow Theological Seminary in 1985. The report was titled "Young St. Joseph of Volokolamsk."

The German Protestant news agency "epd" was the first in the West to report Pitirim's promotion in January, adding that the new metropolitan "entertains very close relations to the Protestant Church of Germany."