

Russian Clergy in the United States (late 19th – early 20th centuries): Problems of Recruitment and Motivation¹

Valentin V. Pechatnov

Vladimir O. Pechatnov

MGIMO University, Moscow, Russia

Abstract. This article, through archival materials, develops the understudied theme of clergy recruitment and motivation for service in the North American diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church. It explains why the recruitment of the clergy for the diocese was a serious problem: the church did not have enough resources to train priests in America, while candidates from Russia were deterred by such factors as the language barrier, the lower social status of Orthodox priests in the United States, the meagre salary compared to in Russia, and the fact that American culture was so alien to them. On the other hand, many of those who expressed the desire to serve in the United States were unsuitable as candidates. Various categories of people are identified in this paper who entered the ministry in the diocese both from Russia and from among local residents. The best clergymen, who made up the cream of the Orthodox clergy in America, turned out to be church people from the Russian Empire, selected by the heads of the North American diocese themselves, especially during their visits to Russia. The motives of the candidates for the remote diocese are analysed on the basis of their applications addressed to the head of the diocese, compared with data from other primary sources, such as analytical conclusions of St. Tikhon (Bellavin), head of the diocese in 1898–1907; messages from the Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod Konstantin Pobedonostsev, who collected information about applicants; and the memoirs of Archbishop Plato (Rozhdestvensky), who headed the diocese from 1907 to 1914. The study revealed a great variety of motives: from sincere desire to serve the Church and save people's souls, to aspirations unrelated to church service, such as the desire to see an interesting and rapidly developing country and to supplement one's education. In addition, the American periods of the lives of two Russian clergymen, reconstructed from archival materials and summarized in this article, shed light on the realities of the lives of talented young Russian people in America at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. Finally, the life path of the best clergymen of the diocese is outlined in the article.

Keywords: Aleutian (North American) Diocese, Holy Synod, Konstantin Pobedonostsev, Bishops Nickolay (Ziorov), Tikhon (Bellavin), Plato (Rozhdestvensky)

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In recent years, Russian scholars have been actively engaged in the history of the Russian Orthodox mission in the United States: seminal monographs on the development of the Aleutian and Alaskan (North American) diocese, illuminating documentary materials, and works on individual aspects of the organization and the reform of its activities have appeared (Kapalin 2009; Efimov, Lasaeva 2012, *The American Period of the Life...* 2014; *The Letters of Saint Tikhon...* 2010)². But one of the less studied issues is the “human dimension” of Russian Orthodox missionary work in North America. The biographical essays on prominent figures of the Russian spiritual mission in the United States that have appeared in recent years (Pechatnov, Pechatnov 2021; 2022a; 2022b; 2023; Pechatnov 2021) only partially fill this gap, since much of the Russian clergy – hundreds of ordinary Orthodox ascetics with their own concerns, motives, and daily duties – remains “behind the scenes.” What were these people like? How did they end up in a country that was completely foreign to them? What motivated them? The answers to these and other questions will help us better understand the real life of Russian clergymen in a distant overseas diocese. The sources used in the writing of this article included documents from the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA) on the correspondence of the diocese leadership with the Holy Synod (primarily the annual reports of bishops on the state of the diocese), the personal files of clergymen, and numerous applications for service in America preserved in the Archives of the Russian Church in the United States (Library of Congress, Washington)³.

“The biggest problem is the people,” wrote Ober-Procurator of the Most Holy Synod Konstantin Pobedonostsev in May 1893 to Bishop Nicholas (Ziorov), who had been appointed head of the Aleutian and Alaskan diocese shortly before. “They need to be selected, equipped, and sent over... The appearance of yet another unfit person will be nothing but an additional burden for you⁴.” To be sure, the problem of selecting worthy clergymen was key to the fate of the overseas diocese, as virtually all researchers of its history acknowledge. There was indeed a shortage of worthy, educated, and motivated priests in Russia, let alone America. Few people were willing to go to the ends of the earth, especially to the harsh conditions of Alaska. Other parishes existed there for years without priests, because, as one of the reports of the diocese stated, “none of the monks is prepared to go and suffer in the horrors of the icy kingdom and the most impossible living conditions.” Those who went there were often unprepared for missionary work, knew nothing of the local customs and dialects, and spoke with their parishioners through interpreters (Kapalin 2009: 355; Pechatnov 2021). Even the central part of the United States had a climate that was unusual for Russian people.

² Khayrulina P. A. 2004. *The Russian Orthodox Church in the U.S.: The Search for Ways to Modernize and the Activities of Saint Tikhon (Bellavin) in the Last Third of the 19th to the Beginning of the 20th Centuries*. (Summary of a doctoral dissertation for the degree of Doctor of History: 07.00.03). Chelyabinsk.

³ Alaskan Russian Church Archives, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division (ARCA)

⁴ Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA). Fond 1574, Series 2, File 247, Item 26.

“The heat here is unbearable now. My God, what horror!” wrote the head of the diocese in 1907–1914, Bishop Platon (Rozhdestvensky), from New York, where the seat of the diocese had been located since 1905. “It is so humid that there is not enough air to breathe. And they say it will be even worse come July. We pine for Russia and are shocked when people decide to flee abroad⁵”.

At the junior level, this shortage of personnel was partially filled by locals, both natives and Creoles – the offspring of mixed marriages with Russian settlers from the time that Alaska belonged to Russia. But these people were, as a rule, poorly educated, having at best graduated from the Novo-Arkhangelsk Theological School in Sitka or the parish school at the cathedral in San Francisco, which offered training to the level of psalm-reader only (Pechatnov 2021). “It was extremely difficult to attract decent clergymen from Russia here,” wrote Ober-Procurator Konstantin Pobedonostsev in *The Most Devoted Report on the Department of the Orthodox Confession for 1890–1891* about the state of the diocese. “The local clergy was replenished for the most part by random newcomers, many of whom, in terms of their education and moral qualities, did not meet the spiritual needs of the flock, while others, under the influence of a profit-seeking environment, had come to forget their pastoral duty.”⁶ The training of local clergymen only started to improve with the establishment of theological seminaries in Minneapolis in 1905 and Sitka in 1906, when the diocese was headed by Saint Tikhon (Bellavin). Although, by 1914, the main seminary (in Minneapolis) had only trained around 30 graduates in nine years – priests, psalm-readers, and teachers (Merkishina 2009).

There were other reasons that discouraged Russian clergymen from serving in the United States: the multi-confessional environment was completely alien to them; they struggled with the language (very few clergymen knew English, which was almost never taught in seminaries and academies); and the Orthodox clergy did not enjoy the same privileged position in society as their colleagues in the Russian Empire (Pechatnov 2021). “... Newly arrived priests have trouble settling in. Some are overcome with homesickness, which is natural, others cannot come to terms with the new conditions of life, completely inconsistent with the tastes and habits of the Russian clergy,” Pobedonostsev wrote in his report for 1896–1897⁷. Bishop Tikhon (Bellavin) wrote in more detail about the problem of recruiting clergymen to America based on his own experience in his report on the diocese for 1905: “It is somewhat risky to take someone on without even having met them (you cannot always rely on official reports about them). Sometimes people who are not particularly suitable for the work are sent here, people who soon become disillusioned with America, and you become disillusioned

⁵ June 10, 1908. RGIA. Fond 796. Series 205. File 738. Item 38 verso.

⁶ *The Most Devoted Report of the Ober-Procurator of the Most Holy Synd on the Department of the Orthodox Confession for 1890–1891* (1893). P. 321.

⁷ *The Most Devoted Report of the Ober-Procurator of the Most Holy Synd on the Department of the Orthodox Confession for 1896–1897* годы (1899). P. 162.

with them even faster. Even those who turn out to be suitable do not stay here for long: the yearning for their homeland and their loved ones; the completely different way of life in America, which are not always attractive for Russians; the need to send their children to Russian schools – this and much more cause our missionaries to rush back to their native land” (Tikhon 2000: 182–183).

One more reason was the difference in salaries: while priests in the United States did receive a guaranteed salary from the Holy Synod, their income from parishes was incomparable to what their colleagues in Russia received. Granted, priests could claim a pension after ten years of impeccable work, although there was a great deal of red tape involved.

The shortage of personnel in the diocese was especially dire in the late 1880s to the early 1890s. Following the tragic death of His Grace Nestor in 1882, the diocese was left without a leader, and its management was entrusted to a member of the Spiritual Board in San Francisco, Archpriest V. Vechtomov, under the general supervision of the Metropolitan Isidore of St. Petersburg. Discipline among the clergy, who had been left without proper supervision, waned significantly, especially since Archpriest Vechtomov did not get along with the other members of the board and did not bother to replenish the ranks. To fill the vacancies that had opened up, the Holy Synod even issued a special circular to all the theological educational institutions in Russia in the summer of 1888 that had a brochure attached entitled *An Outline of the State of the Aleutian Diocese* “which aimed to introduce students of the said institutions to the diocese” and identify those who wished to enter the service there. Interested students were encouraged to submit an application “with the appropriate certificates” to the diocesan authorities through the Economic Administration of the Holy Synod⁸. But the initiative fell flat and was further undermined by what happened next. The newly appointed Bishop Vladimir (Sokolovsky) would soon find himself at the centre of a much-publicized trial, defending himself against charges of sodomy brought against him by a local physician by the name of Nicholas Russel (Nikolai Sudzilovsky), a well-known émigré populist. Other members of the Board were drawn into the scandal. The attempts of the Russian consulate and diplomatic mission in Washington to hush it up failed, and, after a lengthy trial, the bishop was recalled to Russia under threat of arrest. The entire affair undermined the standing of the Russian Church in the United States, and called the moral fibre of its clergy into question. The Holy Synod even considered attaching the Alaskan diocese to one of its Siberian jurisdictions, but after Pobedonostsev and the Metropolitan Isidore intervened, the diocese was given another chance with the appointment of the young but experienced administrator Bishop Nickolay (Ziorov) as its head. In his first report on the survey of the diocese in 1892, Bishop Nickolay reported to the Holy Synod that “the Alaskan diocese is in a sorry state.” The

⁸ To His Grace Vladimir, Bishop of the Aleutians, June 3, 1888. Alaskan Russian Church Archives, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division (ARCA). Cont. D 474–475. San-Francisco, Over-Procurator – Holy Synod (1888–1902).

clergy had gone downhill: “with the exception of Sitka priest Vladimir Donskoy, no one does anything for the benefit of Orthodoxy: they rarely give service (only mass on Sunday afternoons), and in many cases do not visit their parishioners for years, as a result of which many are born and draw their last breath without being anointed and without Holy Communion.” And: “Instead of church work, priests and clergymen are engaged in extraneous activities that are in no way connected to their rank and position. The church economy is run extremely poorly... Coming from Creoles and having long served in the Trading Company, the clergy of the Aleutian diocese are almost all in league with the Company’s agents and are therefore completely indifferent to the violence and robbery carried out by the clerks and agents of the Company.” The report goes on: “Church singing is in decline, schools are virtually non-existent, and the remaining schools are in an extremely sad state. They no longer teach the Russian language, so their children grow up not knowing Orthodox worship”. The bishop sums up gloomily: “It has all gone wrong, so much so that in just twenty-five years, everything that Innocent and his companions had worked for has gone to waste [...] If we leave things the way they are now, then [...] in another twenty-five years, Orthodoxy will be but a distant memory in the Aleutian diocese”. Bishop Nickolay’s report confirmed Pobedonostsev’s worst fears. “Our great misfortune,” Pobedonostsev lamented in a letter to Nickolay in January 1893, “is that there are almost no reliable clergy anywhere – there are drunkards, reprobates, and thieves everywhere. Unfortunately, there is nothing that can be said against this accusation¹⁰”. Little wonder that the new bishop set about implementing the radical renewal of the clergy as his primary task.

Clergymen for the diocese (and for other foreign Orthodox churches) were selected by the Holy Synod from among recommended candidates or (more often) volunteers – so-called “enthusiasts.” Most of these (candidates and volunteers) were people from the church milieu – children of clergymen, plus the odd representative of other social strata (lower military ranks, teachers) (Pechatnov 2021). Occasionally, there were even people from the nobility, such as Nikolai Vasiliev, who graduated from the First Cade Corps and then the Mikhailovskaya Military Artillery Academy, before entering the Nikolaev Academy of the General Staff with the rank of lieutenant. He was expelled from the academy for “domestic matters” and ended up resigning from military service altogether. An application for Vasiliev’s appointment to the Aleutian diocese was granted, where he was ordained first as a deacon and then as a priest (1893), becoming rector of the Three Saints Church in Anzonia, CT¹¹.

The appointment of Vasiliev, who did not have a spiritual education, was more of an exception made in view of his background. The preference for applicants of noble descent continued in subsequent years, as the speedy appointment of the nobleman by

⁹ From the report of the Most Reverend of the Aleutians with a Report on the Situation of the Aleutian Diocese and on the Measures Needed to Improve It. RGIA. Fond 796. Series 173 (1892). File 2762. Item 2–7.

¹⁰ RGIA. Fond 1574. Series 2. File 247. Item 11 verso 12.

¹¹ Clergy List of the Aleutian Diocese as of 1896. RGIA Fond 796. Series 178. File 3549. Item 102.

birth N. Stepanov as a teacher in Cleveland in 1915 proved¹². Graduates of theological academies or, in extreme cases, seminaries (as was the case with embassy churches) were, as a rule, appointed priests (Kudryavtseva 2017: 15). Preference, especially for missionary positions, was given to monks as the most unpretentious and zealous in service. However, even their inappropriate behaviour would occasionally cause problems.

Information about postings abroad was published by the Holy Synod's periodical *Tserkovnye Vedomosti*, as well as in special appeals from the Synod. Potential applicants would also hear about the possibility of working for the Church overseas from those who had already done it, or from the leader of the diocese during his travels around Russia. Applications from enthusiasts were submitted to the Alaskan Spiritual Board through the Holy Synod, or the Board directly, where they would typically be verified by requests for recommendations from their church superiors. But official recommendations did not guarantee that the person being recruited was suitable for the position. "Alas, one cannot rely on these recommendations," Ober-Procurator Pobedonostsev wrote in a letter to Bishop Nickolay in the spring of 1894, "... People do not hesitate to go against their own consciousness and praise an obviously bad person for the purpose of finding him a position or to not harm him."¹³ Exceptions did occur, however, when the church authorities would give a less than glowing appraisal of an applicant. For example, the rector of the Moscow Theological Academy, Archimandrite Kliment (Vernikovskiy), wrote the following to Bishop Nickolay in response to a request about one of his graduates (who had expressed a "strong and ardent desire to serve the holy missionary cause"): "[the man] sets himself apart with his unpeaceful character and unaccommodating nature, and he thus cannot be recommended to the Board as a man capable of serving in a responsible position in the mission." The Archbishop wrote "Thank you for telling the truth for once!" on the note¹⁴. The Most Reverend himself, upon returning to Russia, often gave negative appraisals of candidates he knew, and his opinion held much weight in the diocese. Bishops relied more on the opinions of priests in their diocese about the "enthusiasts" they knew.

What motivated these people to travel to the other side of the earth, to a foreign land? Reasons varied, and Bishop Tikhon spoke about this very candidly, drawing from his own experience of leading a diocese: "There is no shortage of willing people, but some of them immediately give themselves away by listing first their desire to receive a travel allowance, a relocation allowance, and a government salary. In other words, they look at service here as a gold mine (!). Others ask to be posted in a university town where they can continue their studies by attending lectures (even though they don't know English!). Still other ask to go to America because they want to 'see the world,' to travel at the government's expense. Not all applicants are like this, of course – some

¹² June 19, 1915. ARCA. Cont. D 450–452. New York Correspondence (1910–1924).

¹³ To His Grace Bishop of the Aleutians and Alaska, April 29, 1894. RGIA. Fond 1574. Series 2. File 247. Item 47 verso.

¹⁴ To the Alaskan Spiritual Board, February 18, 1897. ARCA, Cont. D 470–472. Applications (1897–1899).

truly do want to work hard and be useful. However, it is difficult to find out who these ones are without meeting them first in person, and it is easy to make a mistake" (*The American Period of the Life...* 2014: 134).

The motives of "enthusiasts" can be judged by their applications, which have been deposited in Russian and American archives. While most applicants gave the standard response that they wanted to serve the cause of Orthodoxy in distant America, numerous other motivations were voiced, which looked very similar to the reasons that would later be offered as a matter of course for membership in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (such as "I want to be in the front ranks of the builders of communism"). It is important when analysing these applications not to lose sight of the fact that these people were promoting themselves, since some of them had no qualms about painting a vivid picture of their merits and motives. Take these words, for example, written by a rural deacon from the Stavropol diocese in his application: "I dare not to praise myself, but assuming that the Orthodox Church in America, surrounded as it is by other confessions, requires good clergymen – to humbly add that I have a good voice and the ability to serve with inspiration for myself and for those who pray with me¹⁵". Or the application of Vasily Balanovksy, a deacon from Kharkov Province: "I am drawn by an inner calling to serve in a foreign and distant country, a calling that emanates from a heartfelt reverence for its loftiness and is accompanied by a sincere desire, with complete selflessness and a brotherly love for our neighbours, to give my entire life to the work of Christ...¹⁶".

Of course, many of the applicants were sincere in their desire to do missionary work, as their zealous service in the United States would prove. Among them were such preeminent missionaries as Alexander Hotovitzky, Ivan Alexandrovich Kochurov, Jacob Korchinsky, and Theophilus Pashkovsky, who went to the United States at the call of Bishop Nickolay when they were very young (graduates of seminaries). The ardent enthusiasm of youth also shines through in the application received by Bishop Nickolay from two students in the final year of study at the Odessa Theological Seminary in early 1898. Having learned from the reports of the Holy Synod and their fellow countrymen serving in America about the vacancies that had opened for psalm readers in San Francisco, the two men approached the Bishop to explain their motivations for applying for the position, which deserves special and detailed attention here: "Why do we wish to serve in America and not Russia? Maybe for certain selfish reasons? We will see! What would we gain by serving in America? And what would we lose? Leaving for "far-off lands," we will find ourselves in a new, cold, and indifferent environment, where there is nothing familiar; everything is alien, the familiar is somewhere there, far away, in Russia... it would seem that there are no selfish calculations here. Perhaps we are attracted by the monetary side of the matter, a generous salary and all that? But we know full well from the information we have seen that there

¹⁵ January 11, 1904. ARCA. Cont. D 470–472. Applications (1904–1921).

¹⁶ March 29, 1905. Ibid.

are no grounds to count on this from the American side – the work is great and the remuneration small. What selfish calculations can there be here? Perhaps we have lofty ambitions – to achieve high-ranking positions and status in society? This cannot happen, as we know very well that in America you cannot climb higher than the position of archpriest. Only one reason remains: we feel a calling to missionary work, and in America this field of work is broad and quite accessible.” The students added that they dreamed of serving under someone from the same region as them, a graduate of their alma mater, and hoped for his personal patronage, bypassing the bureaucracy of the Holy Synod. But their hopes were not justified. The Bishop’s resolution read: “There are no vacancies in San Francisco, I don’t think they will go to Alaska after Odessa and the blessed south of Russia. Their request is therefore rejected.”¹⁷ Students at the seminary were also more ambitious and more inclined to “change their situation” than the older generation with families, who were accustomed to their established places. “While I am young and not tied down, I have the opportunity to travel far, and then, once I become a priest, I will not be able to even dream of America,” Vasily Skvortsov, a student at the Stavropol Theological Seminary, wrote to Bishop Tikhon¹⁸.

There were also a few applications from older orthodox zealots, including people from other faiths. These were most often Uniate priests who had converted to Orthodoxy, sometimes along with their parishes. The diocesan leadership accepted them into its ranks subject to the approval of the Holy Synod. The most famous and prominent of these was Archpriest Alexis Tovt, who became rector of the parish in Wilkes-Barre, PA, in 1891. There were also priests who had received a Catholic education – M. Balogh, G. Grushka, and D. Gebbey. Converts with Protestant backgrounds were rarer, but they did exist. For example, in November 1904, Bishop Tikhon received an application from a certain Johann Janus, a former Lutheran teacher from Riga who had converted to Orthodoxy and served for almost twenty years as a psalm-reader and teacher at an Orthodox school in Tver and Livonian Governorate.

Janus was also a student of Estonian literature, and he watched with horror as his fellow Estonians, who had moved in droves to America and Canada, started to convert to Lutheranism under the influence of local pastors. “I feel sorry for my lost compatriots I resolved to travel to America with God’s help and find the means there to return them to the path of truth,” he wrote to Bishop Tikhon. “But since I am not a rich man, the only way for me to realize my dream is to fall at the feet of Your Grace with a most humble request: would you be so kind, Your Grace, as to appoint me to the position of psalm reader in the diocese entrusted to you?” Bishop Tikhon took this request very seriously and asked the Canadian Rural Dean, Father Skibinsky, to contact Janus and consider the possibility of accepting him as a psalm-reader and teacher with the subsequent promotion to the rank of priest, “if he deserves it.” Bishop Tikhon continued in his resolution, “Inform Janus that there is no psalm-reader’s position with a reliable

¹⁷ February 24, 1898. ARCA. Cont. D 470–472. Applications (1897–1899).

¹⁸ November 6, 1906. ARCA. Cont. D 450–452. New York Applications (1899–1915).

salary among the Estonians, so I propose that local Estonians take up his sustentation for themselves, and he will be notified upon receiving their answer, although it will be difficult for him and his family to live in America¹⁹”. Bishop Tikhon was known for treating people with sensitivity, and he would often warn applicants about the high cost of living in America and the fact that a psalm-reader’s salary was not enough to support a family, rather than simply denying a request. For example, in one case, he asked that the following be conveyed to the priest from Kherson Governorate, a graduate of the Odessa Theological Seminary: “I do not advise the applicant to go to America now: he probably has a decent position in the Kherson diocese, and we currently do not have an opening for the position of priest with a full-time salary²⁰”. Plus, there was no longer a dire shortage of personnel in the diocese (with the exception of Alaska). So, suitable candidates were sometimes put on a “waiting list” until new vacancies opened up. The more persistent of them sent multiple requests.

Another category of enthusiasts was made up of people who were unemployed or were having problems at work and were looking for any kind of work. For example, the deacon from Podolsk Governorate, Mitrofan Mankovsky, who was repeatedly chastised by the Spiritual Consistory for various violations, wrote in his application: “Instead of treating the misfortunes that befell me as a test from God and dealing with them with humility and resignation, I crazily cried bloody murder that earned me new punishments and new misfortunes... My homeland of Podol has become an evil step-mother for me, and I would like to devote the rest of my days to serving God and my neighbour far from it, where I could lay my bones to rest.” Bishop Tikhon’s resolution read: “There are no vacancies, and it is difficult to grant the request due to the black marks in the man’s service record²¹”.

Ober-Procurator Pobedonostsev called such applicants “unfortunates.” He wrote to Bishop Nickolay: “Yesterday, we received a slew of applications from various unfortunates. Great caution is required²²”. A cautious attitude towards volunteers can also be seen in other letters from the Ober-Procurator to Nickolay. “Today, Sabler [*Vladimir Sabler, a friend of the Ober-Procurator – author’s note*] received a letter from Archimandrite Kliment, Rector of the Moscow Theological Academy, regarding three young enthusiasts – whom he recommends highly – who want to be appointed psalm-readers,” he wrote in the autumn of 1893. “As for the Vologda enthusiasts, of whom there is an entire list, all of them, according to the information I have received, turned out to be unfortunates²³”. Another letter written a year later: “There is a pile of requests for admission to your service, especially from Ryazan. But be careful with these ap-

¹⁹ November 18, 1904. ARCA, Cont. D 470–472. Applications (1904–1921).

²⁰ August 7, 1902. ARCA, Cont.D 470–472. Applications (1900–1903).

²¹ June 13, 1902. Ibid.

²² To His Grace Bishop of the Aleutians and Alaska, April 29, 1894. RGIA. Fond 1574. Series 2. File 247. Item 47. 12

²³ To His Grace Bishop of the Aleutians and Alaska, October 15, 1894. Ibid., Item 30 verso.

plicants, most of whom are unfortunates. We are collecting information about them, but it would be useful to know how many people you currently need, and what kind of people²⁴”.

Many of the enthusiasts, as Bishop Tikhon noted, asked to go to America out of idle curiosity: “Most of those who come from Russia want to see the much-touted ‘new world’; like it or not, we have to send them too, because we don’t have any people of our own to take up psalm-reading positions,” Ober-Procurator Pobedonostsev wrote in May 1899 (*Letters of Saint Tikhon...* 2010: 31). Others wanted to try their hand in a new environment. “I wish to serve in the Aleutian and Alaska diocese while I have the curiosity to experience a new life in the New World, and as long as I have the strength and health to serve in such a remote place,” the Hieromonk Irinarch from Tobolsk Governorate wrote in his application to Bishop Nestor (Zass)²⁵.

But it was not just the “Chekhov boys” who were fascinated by the distant and mysterious country. As Bishop Tikhon’s successor, Bishop Platon, said about these people and their curiosity at the pastoral congress of the diocese in 1908: “America, which appears as a fairy tale in the minds of many, has seemed to us since we were children a land of wonder, an extraordinary country. The conditions of life here have always been interesting to many of us. Financial security, higher pensions for a relatively short period of work, the do-it-yourself attitude and freedom of initiative, the loose attitude to certain external liberties – all these are great impulses for many Russian priests²⁶”. Applicants usually had a poor understanding of the real conditions of life and work in America, mistaking wishful thinking for reality. “Knowing nothing about the nature of the missionary work that awaits us, and if we do have some information about it, it is, for the most part, hit or miss, so to speak, when we come here from Russia,” Bishop Platon continued in his speech²⁷.

Family circumstances were also cited as a reason to be sent to the United States for missionary work. For example, the priest Xenophon Konfrotsky from Podolsk Governorate asked to be assigned to a town by the sea or ocean with a warm climate, since his wife, who was ill with tuberculosis, had been prescribed “warm sea bathing,” and he attached a certificate from the district doctor to prove this. “Deny it. Never before has someone been admitted to service because their wife is ill,” Bishop Nickolay wrote on the application with irritated surprise.²⁸ Another young priest from the Sukhumi diocese named N. Kholin, who had recently been widowed, hoped that a new place of service “would calm my heart from the oppressive melancholy I feel after the death of my wife²⁹”.

²⁴ To His Grace Bishop of the Aleutians and Alaska, August 13, 1894. *Ibid.*, Item 49, 49 verso.

²⁵ Received on October 6/18, 1880. ARCA, Cont. D 474–475. Zass, Nestor, Bishop to (1879–1880).

²⁶ Report on the Situation of the Aleutian Diocese for 1908. RGIA. Fond 796. Series 440. File 1238. Item 18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Item 17 verso.

²⁸ October 21, 1898. ARCA, Cont. D 470–472. Applications (1897–1899).

²⁹ February 10, 1903. ARCA, Cont. D 470–472. Applications (1900–1903).

But perhaps the most curious category of applicants was made up of people who were striving to break out of the narrow world of the provincial Russian clergy into the vastness of a new and, as they believed, far more promising life that the advanced and rapidly developing America promised. The thirst for knowledge, education and new useful skills and the opportunity for growth and self-fulfilment – that is what drove these people.

“By travelling through many countries and meeting new people, I am sure that I will broaden my horizons and gradually become more educated,” a student of the Stavropol seminary wrote to Bishop Tikhon³⁰. The head of the Vologda Spiritual Consistory, E. Sokolov, asked to be appointed to one of the diocesan shelters: honestly admitting his lack of special abilities (“Of course, I do not know English or the local foreign language, I do not have much of a voice, unfortunately, and I sing very poorly”), he spoke of his desire “to see a new land, to get to know a nation that has been progressing for years, not centuries, and to learn a lot.” The Most Reverend’s response was dry: “Leave without consequences³¹”. Bishop Nickolay and other heads of the diocese were extremely sceptical about this category of applicants, seeing them (and not without reason) as “job-hoppers” for whom service in America was nothing but a springboard to other, wordily pursuits.

Priest Andrei Gerashchenko from Poltava Governorate wrote to St. Tikhon that the idea of serving in America first occurred to him during Bishop Nickolay’s visit to the Poltava Theological Seminary in 1895, and the desire had only grown stronger since he started serving as a priest. The reason he cited was the “deplorable state of our white clergy, which oppresses and kills me. Our clergy, due to financial insecurity, are placed in such conditions that they are forced, like it or not, to make compromises, to make deals with their conscience, the consequences of which are a lack of self-improvement, a hindrance to pastoral service, degeneration, deadness...” The priest continued, “I will note from you, Your Grace, that I am also drawn to America by curiosity: I want to see progressive, educated people, I want to live in a country where life is in full swing, does not let you become complacent and pushes you forward and forward.” Priest Andrei asked to be sent to a place “where I can grow both morally, working for the benefit of the Orthodox Church, and intellectually, living in a country of progress and science,” preferably, “in a university city or close to such a city.” Tikhon underlined “progressive, educated,” and put a question mark in front of these adjectives – he clearly did not like a comparison that painted his compatriots in a negative light. The Bishop requested a review of the unusual applicant from the Bishop of Poltava (“what is he like in character and behaviour?”), but, judging by the fact that his name does not appear in the clerical records of the diocese, we can conclude that Priest Andrei Gerashchenko was never accepted for service in the United States³².

³⁰ November 6, 1906. ARCA, Cont. D 450–452. New York Applications (1899–1915).

³¹ January 10, 1898. ARCA, Cont. D 470–472. Applications (1897–1899).

³² April 13, 1899. ARCA, Cont. D 470–472. Applications (1897–1899).

The fate of another similar applicant, namely, Alexander Arkhangelsky, the son of a priest of the Ryazan diocese, who was enrolled upon request in 1894, was different. Bishop Nickolay sent him as a psalm-reader and part-time supervisor of the parish school in Sitka, since so few people were willing to serve in Alaska. After a year and a half of work there, Arkhangelsky asked to be transferred to the contiguous United States – “closer to a university or college.” He wrote to Nickolay, “Even in Russia, moving in a familiar circle, I somehow grew used to considering my education and my knowledge to small to be able to rely on them in life [...] Something inside me compelled me to study, but I did not have the chance to do it in Russia. The purpose of my trip to America was partly the desire, having learned English, to study at a real educational institution or obtain specialized knowledge in some area of production... I don’t have any money to speak of, and I cannot live and study with no source of income from my own labour. I do not know any craft. I can only be a labourer, that is, I can only be what nature itself has taught me to be. My present place of service gives me some free time, which I spend on learning English, although in theory only. It is true that I speak a little, but I cannot be a translator in the church yet. There are no educational institutions here³³”. Despite the tearful requests of the psalm-reader, the Bishop did not let him leave Sitka, although Arkhangelsky had firmly decided not to be a priest and “to learn something practical here that could be successfully applied in a professional in Russia. Like electricity, for example,” he wrote to Bishop Nickolay. He would soon be transferred and continued to work as a psalm-reader, marrying an American woman. The young couple stayed in Sitka, but Arkhangelsky did not abandon his plans to study. On the contrary, having met the president of Stanford University, who was visiting Sitka, he decided to move to California to study engineering. The entrance exams, he told Bishop Nickolay, were not difficult – you just have to pass algebra and geometry, “which I know very well.” Arkhangelsky continued in the same letter: “The annual allowance (*at the university – author’s note*) does not exceed three hundred dollars [...] My wife will help out partly, and I may find some occupation requiring the knowledge of Russian, etc. And I have some acquaintances, who, I hope, if worst comes to worst, will not refuse to help out. The first year will be most difficult, I know this, but then I can find a job. The main thing is to have the desire and determination to work³⁴”. The situation described by Arkhangelsky was typical of the life of Russian students in America; the Russian consulate in Chicago made similar observations around the same time. Getting into university was easy, as Consul General Baron E. Schilling noted in his annual report, “but, due to the high cost of living, studying there is im-

³³ To His Grace Bishop of the Aleutians and Alaska (n.d. 1896). ARCA, Cont. B 1-2, Arkhangelskii, Alexandr (Mikhailov) (1894–1902).

³⁴ October 27 / November 8, 1896. Ibid.

possible for those without means. As a result, students often end up dropping out of university courses they have been accepted onto due to lack of funds and enrolling in evening courses, usually so they can find a job and earn money³⁵.

We don't know whether Arkhangelsky's dream came true. The last mention of him in surviving documents is from April 1898 and indicates that he was still asking to be relieved of his duties with payment for his service as a part-time psalm-reader. Bishop Nickolay made the following resolution at the request of the Sitka dean, Archimandrite Anatoly: "I do not find it reasonable to either send Arkhangelsky a salary or keep him in service any longer. With such an abundance of employees at the school, as well as the choir, I find it completely incomprehensible to keep a psalm-reader who cannot even sing. And this means that the school has still not fulfilled its main purpose – to prepare psalm-readers for the diocese, which is most saddening!"³⁶

A similarly unusual fate befell Vasily Burov, a peasant's son from Rostov-on-Don and student at the St. Petersburg Theological Seminary, who also longed to study at an American university. Before arriving in America, he had served at the embassy church in London, where he learned English. It was during his time there that he was noticed by Pobedonostsev, who, after meeting Burov in person, recommended him to Bishop Nickolay. "Let us know by telegraph, and we will send him immediately," he wrote to the Bishop in September 1894³⁷. The Bishop agreed, and in October, Burov got his passport³⁸. Two months later, the Ober-Procurator informed the Bishop that "Burov [had] left the other day – he is being sent to Chicago. Keep an eye on him, he is a bit odd, but I think he can be put to good use. He knows the language, reads a lot, has experience in converting atheists (including abroad) and says that he is rather good at it"³⁹. Burov was appointed a psalm-reader in the Chicago church, where the rector was priest of Greek origin by the name of Ambrose Vretta, a capable missionary who, unfortunately, was not particularly diligent when it came to church office work. Burov also drew the ire of his superiors with his freethinking and the fact that he combined his church duties with studies at the University of Chicago. His letters to the Spiritual Board, which would open with the expression "Gentlemen!" and close simply with "Bouroff," were typically demands to send overdue rent, otherwise they would "be thrown unceremoniously out of the apartments in which the church is located." The Bishop would write "I've already read this" in the margins and displeasedly underline the obscenities⁴⁰. Worse still, the wayward psalm-reader refused to confess regularly,

³⁵ Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (AVPRI). Fond 305/1 (Consulate General in Chicago). Series 1. File 1. Item 19–20

³⁶ April 30, 1898. ARCA. Cont. B 1-2, Arkhangelskii, Alexandr (Mikhailov) (1894–1902).

³⁷ September 5, 1894. RGIA. Fond 1574. Series 2. File 247. Item 52–53.

³⁸ October 27, 1894, AVPRI. Fond 133. Series 470 (1894). File 22. Item 38.

³⁹ November 3/15, 1894, RGIA. Fond 1574. Series 2. File 247. Item 59.

⁴⁰ To the Spiritual Board of the Aleutian and Alaskan Diocese, June 12/24, 1895. ARCA, D 442–445, Illinois, Chicago correspondence (1892–1915).

declaring that “at the present time, he does not feel the spiritual need for confession, and that his conscience remains clear before His Almighty,” as the Dean of the New York District Evtikhii Balanovitch reported to Bishop Nickolay⁴¹.

Eventually, the head of the diocese lost patience and decided to replace the entire clergy of the Chicago church, and Burov was given a travel allowance to cover his return to Russia. But Burov was in no hurry to leave for his homeland, explaining the dragging of his feet by the fact that he was waiting for a response to his letter to Pobedonostsev. While that letter has not survived, we can surmise from the Ober-Procurator's response that it concerned a request to stay in America to continue his studies. “As for Burov,” Pobedonostsev wrote to Nickolay in January 1896, “there is something abnormal about him, and I am concerned about his possible return to Russia [...] But perhaps it would be better to leave him in America to settle at the university and teach Russian⁴².” The bishop did not object, and Burov continues his studies at the University of Chicago, but he encountered an unexpected obstacle there: in order to complete his studies and secure employment at the university, he had to accept American citizenship (“they wanted to snap up at least one Russian intellectual,” he wrote to Bishop Nickolay), a condition that the former psalm-reader categorically refused. “... Even so, I will not give my life for the benefit of a foreign nation [...] I stayed here to study, not serve in Washington,” he wrote to Bishop Nickolay in March 1897. Burov requested, if he could not have a place in the diocese, to be given a travel allowance to return to Russia⁴³. Noting the Ober-Procurator's apparent fondness of Burov, Bishop Nickolay made Burov a steward at the Sitka Theological School, but the stubborn former psalm-reader did not stay there for long, butting heads with his colleagues. In the autumn of 1898, he was dismissed from his post as steward and sent back to Chicago to continue his studies at the university. But, strangely enough, the stern Ober-Procurator continued to play a hand in the fate of this “not quite normal” peasant's son, who was sure to keep him abreast of his plans. When he got back to Chicago, Burov received an unusual letter from the Spiritual Board outlining the opinions of Pobedonostsev and Nickolay himself on the matter. “Dear Sir, Vasily Andreevich!” the letter began, unusually warmly. Firstly, His Grace Nickolay, the letter read, “is most pleased that you have settled into the university and are studying successfully. Second, he received a letter from Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev, in which he expresses his approval of your intention to complete your university course [...] The Bishop expressed his confidence to you that Konstantin Petrovich, as someone who is positively disposed towards you, can provide you with his assistance in arranging your future in Russia.” The bishop

⁴¹ To His Grace Nikolai, Bishop of the Aleutians, August 31, 1895. ARCA, D 450–452, New York, New York, Balanovitch Evtikhii (1895–1896).

⁴² To His Grace Nikolai, Bishop of the Aleutians, January 31, 1896. RGIA. Fond 1574. Series 2. File 247. Item 73.

⁴³ To His Eminence, Most Reverend Nikolau, Bishop of the Aleutians and Alaska, March 13, 1897. ARCA. Cont. 442–445. Illinois, Chicago correspondence (1892–1915).

even expressed his willingness to give Burov his travel allowance (100 dollars) that had been withheld up until that point, “in view of your intention to remain in Chicago until the end of your course, as well as in view of Konstantin Petrovich’s support for this enterprise of yours,” albeit on a reimbursable basis. In conclusion, the Bishop gave Burov his prelate’s blessing and wished him “great success, peace of mind, and joy⁴⁴”.

But Burov’s epic American adventure did not end there. Not only did he complete his studies at the University of Chicago, but he also became involved in the progressive movement in the United States, penning a fairly well-known book in English entitled *The Impending Crisis. Conditions Resulting from the Concentration of Wealth in the United States*, criticizing the American oligarchy⁴⁵. However, his life in the United States was rather disordered and he never gave up on the thought of returning to Russia. Having met Burov in Chicago in the autumn of 1902, Bishop Tikhon wrote to Pobedonostsev that Burov was “in great need” and asked the Ober-Procurator to find him a position in Russia, for example in the Ministry of Finance (Letters of Saint Tikhon... 2010: 114). Nothing is known of him after this, other than the fact that it would seem Burov never returned to Russia.

These kinds of applicants did not disappear in the following years. “Some of the priests just beg to come here,” the Most Reverend Platon said, referring to the request received, “to this provincial city of North America, where there is a university, where one can attend lectures (of course, without knowing English)⁴⁶”.

Pobedonostsev himself took on the leading role in managing the selection and recruitment of personnel for the United States in the 1880s and 1890s. He met with the candidates personally to determine their suitability. “It is always difficult when it comes to volunteer candidates, most of them turn out to be unfortunate rubbish,” he wrote to Bishop Nickolay in late 1894. “The Ryazans are recommended, but we think we should summon them to test them first⁴⁷”. The Ober-Procurator kept Bishop Nickolay updated about the progress of certain candidates, the terms and conditions of their posting, which had to be agreed upon with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was in charge of issuing passports, and a separate correspondence was conducted with the Holy Synod about this (which can be used to track who was sent to America and when)⁴⁸. The Ministry of Finance was responsible for paying the relocation allowances and issuing work permits. This process could drag on for months. The Ober-Procurator regularly informed Bishop Nickolay about the status of this process. For example, in May 1893, he wrote to Bishop Nickolay: “Now we have Vasiliev (from the officers) [*the abovementioned*”

⁴⁴ To V. A. Burov (n.d.). Ibid.

⁴⁵ Bouroff, Basil A. (1900). *The Impending Crisis. Conditions Resulting from the Concentration of Wealth in the United States*.

⁴⁶ Report on the State of the Aleutian Diocese for 1908. RGIA. Fond 796. Series 440. File 1238. Item 17 verso.

⁴⁷ To His Grace Bishop of the Aleutians and Alaska, December 3, 1894. RGIA. Fond 1574. Series 2. File 247. Item 59.

⁴⁸ RGIA. Fond 133. Series 470. Files 22–27.

⁴⁹ To His Grace Bishop of the Aleutians and Alaska, April 29, 1894. RGIA. Fond 1574. Series 2. File 247. Item 47 verso.

tioned graduate of the First Cadet Corps – author’s note], Malyarevsky will soon leave... Modestov has not yet received money from the Ministry of Finance. Pustyakovsky was in Kyiv and they transferred money to him there, but it turns out that he had left for Vologda⁴⁹. The matter was complicated by the fact that Pobedonostsev, despite his high status as a minister and a member of the State Council, as a representative of secular power was in a difficult relationship with the spiritual staff of the Synod, and therefore could not always reject even clearly unsuitable candidates. “The other day, a man named Popkov came from Vologda, completely uneducated, but already appointed by the Synod and had to be sent away,” he wrote to Bishop Nickolay in May 1893⁵⁰. Occasionally, the Ober-Procurator himself looked for suitable candidates, recommending them to Nickolay. “We have found you a priest and a deacon who can be very useful to you,” he wrote to the bishop in early 1895, “Priest Balanovitch, small and active, who comes from the south, knows the Little Russian and German languages... speaks well, and served as a priest here on the Black River.” He has a wonderful deacon. We negotiated with them... And neither of them touches alcohol whatsoever⁵¹. In America, Balanovitch really showed himself to be a capable administrator, but soon found himself involved in a parish scandal and was forced to return to Russia.

The bishops themselves played an important role in the selection of clergymen, none more so than Nickolay, who took on the bulk of the work on replenishing the ranks of the diocese. He knew some of the candidates personally, having studied or served together in the South of Russia. An analysis of the updated composition of the diocesan clergy as of 1896 and the correspondence of the Holy Synod with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the issuing of passports for foreign travel shows that the majority of new recruits were from the Kyiv, Kherson, Odessa, and Poltava governorates, which the bishop knew very well.

The year 1895 was particularly eventful in this regard, when Bishop Nickolay spent his vacation in Russia and used the time to select new clergymen. One of these was Kyiv Theological Seminary graduate and Kiev-Pechersk Lavra novice Fyodor Pashkovsky, whom Nickolay appointed psalm-reader at the Jackson Church in California. He would later rise to the top of the church hierarchy to become Metropolitan Theophilus of All America and Canada, the successor to the Russian spiritual mission in the United States. Three men occupy a special place in the 1895 collection of new recruits: Ivan (John) Kochurov, Alexander Hotovitzky, and Ilya Zotikov. All of them were recent graduates of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy and were selected by Nicholas during his stay in the capital. And they all travelled to America with him.

Hotovitzky would go on to become one of the founders and rector of the new St. Nicholas Cathedral in New York, editor of the diocese’s first ever journal, the *American Orthodox Messenger*, and, after Bishop Nickolay left the United States, the first

⁵⁰ To His Grace Bishop of the Aleutians and Alaska, May 26, 1893. *Ibid.*, Item 26.

⁵¹ To His Grace Bishop of the Aleutians and Alaska, January 3, 1895. *Ibid.*, Item 61-61 verso.

associate of Bishop Tikhon in America (Pechatnov, Pechatnov 2022b). Zotikov, the son of a priest who had served in Finland, started out his career as a psalm-reader before becoming the second priest at that very same church. Upon their return to Russia, the two friends continued to serve in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour under Patriarch Tikhon. They would later both be sent to the Butyrka prison, before facing a firing squad as “Tikhonites” and enemies of the people. A martyr’s crown also awaited Kochurov. He would later return to Russia and be sent to the Tsarskoye Selo church. It was here where, in November 1917, he attempted to prevent bloodshed between the Bolsheviks at the advancing detachments of Yudenich by organizing a religious procession, for which he was brutally murdered by Red Army soldiers (Pechatnov, Pechatnov 2023: 78–79).

Today, archpriests Hotovitzky and Kochurov have been canonized as holy martyrs of the Russian Orthodox Church, with Father John being the first Orthodox priest to suffer at the hands of the Bolsheviks. The name Jacob Korchinsky would also be included in this glorious group of ascetics. The son of a bourgeois from Kyiv Governorate, he had graduated from paramedic school and had been called to service in the United States by Nickolay. His record of authentic missionary service is extensive, having spread the word in Alaska and Hawaii in the United States, as well as in Canada, Mexico, and Australia. He eventually returned to Russia, where he faced a firing squad in 1941 for “subversive activities,” having clandestinely continued to provide spiritual guidance to believers.

In his report on the state of the diocese for 1896, Bishop Nickolay wrote of the work that had been done on improving the clergy: “Over the past five years, the clergy of the Aleutian diocese has, with the exception of two or three men, been almost completely replaced by new people, primarily from the Russian clergy⁵²”. A review of the register of clergy attached to the report confirms that Bishop Nickolay did indeed succeed in radically renewing the personnel of his wards: according to 1896 statistics, 18 of the diocese’ 25 full-time priests and 15 of its 18 full-time psalm readers has been appointed under him, and work to renew the clergy continued after 1896⁵³.

“The wholesale expulsion of the former clergy (in the words of Bishop Nickolay himself) disgruntled many people, several of whom took revenge on the bishop by fabricating scandals involving him and denouncing him to Pobedonostsev, among others. But the Ober-Procurator, knowing the worth of these letters, threw them away. The ‘cleansing of the ranks’ brought other problems too, including finding positions for the clergy who had been recalled from America. ‘Very many of them [...] turn out to be unfit and return to us, and we have no idea what to do with them,’” Pobedonostsev complained to Nickolay⁵⁴. Some of the “returnees” tried to beg for a new position even before they had been sent on secondment. One man who particularly annoyed Pobe-

⁵² Report on the State of the Aleutian Diocese for 1896. RGIA. Fond 796. Series 178 (1896). File 3549. Item 3–6.

⁵³ Register of Clergy in the Aleutian Diocese in 1896. Ibid., Item 41–161.

⁵⁴ To His Grace Bishop of the Aleutians and Alaska, November 19, 1896. RGIA. Fond 1574. Series 2. File 247. Item 86 verso.

donostsev was Ambrose Vretta, a Chicago priest of Macedonian origin who had formerly been a Uniate, and whom the bishop wanted to fire because of his weakness for alcohol. “And now that scab Vretta is threatening to come over,” the Ober-Procurator wrote in November 1896, “you must get rid of him and send him away as soon as possible. What are we supposed to do with this reprobate here?”⁵⁵ Even such virtuous undertakings as Nickolay’s initiative to send graduates of American missionary schools to Russia for further training often failed. “The foreigners you have sent here for training are nothing but trouble,” Pobedonostsev complained to Nickolay in the summer of 1898. “In the seminaries, both have turned out to be worthless and bad-tempered, and they don’t want to study at all. One has already been sent back, at a cost of 750 roubles. Now I’ve got to get rid of the other one too. The loss is considerable⁵⁶”. Bishop Tikhon wrote in response, “The Russian educational institutions seem to be very much burdened by the newcomers sent by us. And there are good reasons for this: the latter are ill-prepared and thus struggle to keep up with their Russian peers in terms of mastering the curriculum; they study subjects in Russia that are not needed here and end up neglecting or forgetting what is absolutely necessary for them here (for example, English and local Alaskan dialects); they grow quite unaccustomed to life in America, having got used to the way people live in Russia, so they are reluctant to return here to the very business for which they were sent to Russia in the first place⁵⁷”.

The overall situation with personnel in the diocese improved somewhat under St. Tikhon (1898–1907) and his successors, Plato (Rozhdestvensky), and Evdokim (Meshchersky), when the shortage of clergy would be partially compensated for by graduates of the theological seminaries in Minneapolis and Sitka, both of which were established at the behest of St. Tikhon. But even then the problem persisted due to the increase in the number of churches and parishes, opened mainly by Orthodox Rusyns. According to a report by the Most Reverend Platon, no fewer than 22 new parishes were opened in 1908 alone⁵⁸.

It is no surprise that the growth of the clergy could not keep pace with the growth of the diocese, and the bureaucracy of the Holy Synod, without the prodding of Pobedonostsev, who had been forced to leave his post, worked even more slowly than before. “Nineteen new parishes have been opened,” Bishop Plato wrote to a trusted correspondent in the spring of 1908, “but only two priests have arrived in Russia so far, the rest are waiting. Things are moving, in the fullest sense of the expression, at a snail’s pace.” And the following year: “Priests are arriving from Russia at an unbearably slow pace, and the need for them is dire, meaning that sometimes we have to take on almost the first person we meet as a priest⁵⁹”. The red tape with registering clergy members

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ June 15, 1898. RGIA. Fond 1574. Series 2. File 247. Item 128 verso. For more detail on the problems encountered trying to teach graduates of these institutions in Russia, see Efimov A., Lasayeva O. Op. cit. P. 258–260.

⁵⁷ Tikhon (Bellavin V. I.). Report on the state of the Aleutian Diocese for 1905. *Theological Collection*. 6. P. 183.

⁵⁸ Report on the state of the Aleutian Diocese for 1908. RGIA. Fond 796. Series 440. File 1238. Item 3 verso.

⁵⁹ April 10, 1908, February 6, 1909. RGIA. Fond 796. Series 205. File 738. Item 38 verso, 31 verso – 32.

had another undesirable consequence. “We get Uniate communities wishing to join us and asking us to provide a priest (with their commitment to financially support him),” Bishop Tikhon wrote about the problem. “And thus begins the agonizing search for a priest. You choose one of those who have asked, you write to him and about him to Russia; all of this takes several months, sometimes almost an entire year passes until the priest finally arrives. And the Uniates are not sitting on their hands during this time: Uniate priests get their hooks into people who want to accept Orthodoxy, trying to talk them out of their decision in any way they can, sowing discord and dissension, dividing (as they say here, or sometimes “fooling”) the flock. Meanwhile, the priest we have promised is still absent, and when he finally does arrive, not everyone in his parish is willing to become an Orthodox Christian – many, exhausted by the long wait, succumb to entreaties by the Uniate priests and remain in the union...” (The American Period of the Life... 2014: 145).

The fates of the Russian clergy serving in the United States varied after the fateful year of 1917. Most returned to Russia, often with tragic results. Some of those who returned, such as Archpriest John Nedzelnitsky and Bishop Plato, were able to make their way back to America and continue serving in the successor to the diocese, the Metropolinate of All America and Canada. Others remained in the United States, some of whom suffered in poverty, such as Andrew Kashevaroff, while others served diligently and rose up the church hierarchy, including Feodor (Theophilus) Pashkovsky and Leonid (Leontius) Turkevich, who came to America with St. Tikhon in 1906 and became the first head of the Metropolinate of All America and Canada of Russian origin. Whatever the case, the experience of serving in America was not in vain for any of the clergy who did it.

We hope that it is clear from this article that, despite the numerous difficulties, the Russian Church managed to cope with the personnel problem in its overseas diocese in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For this, credit mostly goes to the bishops, the heads of the diocese – especially Nickolay, who used his vacations in Russia to select clergy, picking out the best candidates, people who would later be glorified as saints – and St. Tikhon, who opened two seminaries in America to train clergymen there. The Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod, Konstantin Pobedonostsev, also played a major role in this: he supervised the selection of personnel for the North American diocese, personally met with candidates, and tried in every possible way to speed up the process of registering and sending suitable candidates to the United States. At the same time, the Russian Church was unable to eliminate the personnel problem in the United States completely, and it even worsened in the decade leading up to the Russian Revolution due to the sharp increase in the number of parishes in the diocese after many Rusyns converted to Orthodoxy. Newly opened American Orthodox seminaries were unable to train enough clergy to fill the new vacancies.

It would seem that the pre-revolutionary experience of selecting and, especially, training clergy for service in America is valuable even in our time, when the Russian Orthodox Church is again faced with a shortage of personnel in its overseas dioceses, in particular in the Exarchate of Africa.

About the Authors:

Valentin V. Pechatnov – Ph.D. (History), Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy, MGIMO University, 76, Prospect Vernadskogo, Moscow, Russia, 119454.

E-mail: vpechatnov@yandex.ru. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9340-9363>

Vladimir O. Pechatnov – Doctor of Sciences (History), Professor, Department of European and American Studies, MGIMO University, 76, Prospect Vernadskogo, Moscow, Russia, 119454.

E-mail: vopechatnov@gmail.com. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6733-031X>

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