

Why Patriarch Kyrill was called "Tobacco Metropolitan"

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Patriarch Kirill: Why he was called the "Tobacco Metropolitan"

Many Westerners know little about the new Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Father Kirill. Many Russians know him as a great orator and a host of a weekly TV show "Pastor's Word." However, very few know that Kirill (Vladimir Gundyayev by passport), a billionaire and a former KGB operative, made his fortune in tobacco, alcohol, and oil sales. His activities were among the main reasons why not-for-profits in Russia lost tax-deductible status. The new Orthodox leader is fond of playing with stocks, car racing, downhill skiing, and breeding exclusive kinds of dogs. He owns villas in Switzerland and a penthouse with a view of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow.

Kirill graduated with honors from Leningrad Spiritual Academy in 1969. In 1970, he earned his master's degree, and after several minor positions was appointed a personal secretary to Mitropolit Nikodim, chief of the external church relations. Since that moment, Kirill became the face of the Orthodox Church in all foreign trips to Western Europe. According to vlasti.net website, Kirill's colleagues and competitors linked all his travels to his work for the Soviet KGB where he was known by

nickname "Mikhailov." Starting in 1972, Kirill/Gundyaev /Mikhailov became more involved with the countries of the Middle East. In 1975, at a forum in Nairobi, he defended the Soviet Union and downplayed dissidents' letters by making historic claims that people of faith were not persecuted and there were no human rights abuses based on religion in the Soviet Union.

Kirill is progressive, speaks foreign languages, worked on the issues of unarming the USSR and the US, and advocated usage of the modern Russian language (instead of old Slavic) during the services. In 1991, the year the Soviet Union fell apart, he earned the title of Mitropolit. The new era of capitalism brought new achievements to Mitropolit Kirill's life. In 1996, Kirill became a board member of bank "Peresvet" that is responsible for servicing the financial interests of the Russian Orthodox Church. The 1996 September issue (#34) of the Moscow News reports that Kirill, now for two years, had been organizing imports of highly taxable products, mostly tobacco, under the tax-exempt non-profit banner of the Orthodox Church. The claims were supported by other respectable news sources, including the Moskovsky Komsomolets.

The soon-to-be Patriarch confirmed the import of the highly unchristian products. By 1997, Kirill admitted the import of alcohol and tobacco, but claimed that the Russian Orthodox Church could not refuse the "humanitarian help." The Russian Orthodox Church and Kirill's private foundation "Nika" were not-for-profit organizations, and in 1996 alone they imported eight billion cigarettes to Russia. Kirill's "church" business took off like a snowball, as the legal competitors could not compete with his low prices for tobacco and alcohol.

The importers were naturally pushed off the market as they could not match Kirill's prices after paying the necessary government dues.

http://www.russiablog.org/2009/03/patriarch_kirill_leader_orthodox_tobacco_alcohol_oil.php