

Dear NARWals,

Thank you for reading my work one final time. This is the epic closing chapter of my dissertation. Basically, this is where many of the dangling narrative threads and actors from the previous five chapters come together. So this is sort of a catch-all. What I'm trying to do is use the litigation over St. Nicholas Cathedral in New York City to show how the world of American Orthodox Rus' unravels during the 1920s. The shorthand is that litigation helped to transform a church of mission to one of self-preservation, representing in microcosm the changes 1917 brought to Russian Orthodox church life in America.

At the same time, this chapter is a bit of a placeholder. You'll see that much of the story revolves around John Kedrovsky, a long maligned and misunderstood character in Orthodox historiography. As far as I know, I'm the only scholar to use his papers, which his family donated to the Archives of the Orthodox Church in America in two chunks right as I was starting my dissertation. I visited the archives after the first chunk arrived, but before the second. Then as I was preparing to go back for the rest, the archive closed for a lengthy renovation project. I strongly suspect that there is much more there now than what I copied at the time, but I have no way of knowing. Such is life.

I'm not certain that this chapter will appear in the book manuscript for this project. At this point, the Kedrovsky project will either turn into its own book (it's a big part of three of my chapters), or this chapter will find its home as a standalone book chapter. I'm interested to know your thoughts on this. How can this be spun off? Should it be spun off? And where?

This chapter has put me far out of my comfort zone as a historian of the United States. While I have a background in Russian and Soviet history, I'm not a specialist. This chapter has me bouncing back and forth across oceans and situating myself in two separate historiographies. This makes me nervous, but it's necessary. Do I pull it off? Is there too much Russia? Not enough US?

And I'm fully aware that this chapter is long (which is kind of my thing). This is essentially the polished first draft, with wonky footnotes and all. I've not yet done the work of condensing and cutting. Any suggestions are more than welcome!

I'm including with this note the (completely OPTIONAL) opening chunk of my introduction, which is referenced in this chapter. It might help you make more sense of the cathedral. I'm also including the table of contents for the dissertation to help you understand where this fits in.

Thanks again, and I look forward to our conversation!

Aram

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Introduction:

“Those whom the gods would destroy they first make mad”

“These millions we have bred and reared—what will become of them? Where have the enlightened efforts and the inspiring visions of great thinkers led us? What good can we expect of our future generations?”

The truth is that one day they will turn and trample on us all. And as for those who urged them on to this, they will trample on them too.”

– Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, “The Easter Procession” (1966)¹

One Tuesday evening in late July of 1925, Father Leonid Turkevich stood before the large wooden doors of St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Cathedral on Manhattan’s Upper East Side holding a large, double-bladed axe. Flanked by police officers, lawyers, and other clergy, in view of a large crowd crammed onto East 97th Street despite the steady rain, Turkevich and the others hoped to enter the complex and end a weeks-long standoff over the headquarters of the Russian Orthodox Church’s North American Archdiocese. One of the most historic and important Orthodox temples in the United States, built in 1902 in part through the personal benevolence of Tsar Nicholas II, then made the administrative see of the archdiocese in 1905, the cathedral had become a potent symbol for believers across the continent. Yet shortly after the fall of tsarist rule, the archdiocese became crippled by a financial crisis, tangled in a web of civil property lawsuits that left vulnerable many of its parish properties, and subject to overlapping claims to authority that cast doubt on its leadership. Just as swiftly as it had become a symbol of the church’s growth and prosperity in North America, the cathedral would transform into a contested site that represented the future of the archdiocese in an uncertain time.

On July 1st, Bishop Adam (Philippovsky) had come to the cathedral bearing a court order he claimed gave him authority over the entire archdiocese, having convinced a judge the widely

¹ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Stories and Prose Poems*, Michael Glenny, trans. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 131.

popular Metropolitan Platon (Rozhdestvensky) was little more than an imposter. Adam then convinced an otherwise uninformed captain of the New York City Bomb Squad to help him serve the order. Breaking through the building's locked door, Adam ascended the stairs into the cathedral and handed the document to a bemused Turkevich, the cathedral's dean. Adam put on his vestments, and served a short service of thanksgiving for his new cathedral. "That made a good appearance," Adam remarked as he led police through a side door and into the cathedral residences. Platon was found "sitting quietly in a front room of the rectory, with a huge portrait of Czar Nicholas II and the Czarina on the wall." Platon was furious, believing that a court injunction barred Adam from taking the property. "Where must I go?" he asked Adam and the policemen who crowded the rectory. "Must I go into the streets like a dog?" Hours later, Platon did just that.²

Adam was but one actor in a complex scene, and to this point, it had not been a significant role. Consecrated as the vicar bishop of Canada in 1922, Adam's claim to leadership was relative nonsense. It was a strange twist in the already-tangled narrative of church life in the archdiocese since 1917, and one that made sense to few with familiarity of the situation. At three consecutive archdiocesan councils between 1919 and 1924, clergy and lay delegates had overwhelmingly elected two successive archdiocesan hierarchs, neither of which were Adam. Yet he claimed that both had been illegitimate, and that he was the sole remaining valid Orthodox bishop in the archdiocese. While few agreed, Adam had the support of several dozen parishes across the Northeast, largely composed of Carpatho-Russian immigrants from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and he was determined to seize on a particularly vulnerable moment of instability to elevate his own position for the sake of his people.

² "Oust Anti-Red Clergy From N.Y. Cathedral." *New York Evening Post* [NYEP] July 1, 1925; "Police Oust Ruler of Russian Church" *New York Times* [NYT] July 2, 1925

The cathedral community quickly mobilized against Adam, whom they saw as an illegitimate usurper whose claims to authority held little weight. A public meeting convened by clergy and lay leaders, including aviation pioneer Igor Sikorsky, drew 700 people to protest and strategize against the insurgent bishop. Over three successive Sundays, lay men and women from the cathedral's sizable congregation engaged in a sustained campaign of civil disobedience to disrupt Adam's use of the cathedral. They handed out leaflets on the cathedral steps, interrupted services and sermons inside with jeers and shouts, and berated Adam and his clergy as they entered and exited the building, jeering them as imposters and Bolsheviks. The cathedral's well-regarded choir, which had performed widely across the city and recorded several sides for Columbia Records, refused to sing. A group of Platon's supporters targeted Adam's substitute choir director Adam, detaining the man on the corner outside his Lower Manhattan residence and seizing his books of sheet music.³ An end seemed in sight when on July 25th when a court ruling ordered Adam to vacate the cathedral, levying \$250 fines on both the bishop and his lawyer (approximately \$3500 today) and threatening both with thirty days in jail for contempt if he Adam not leave the premises. "These parties have simply run amuck," the judge admonished. Taking slight liberties with a line from William Anderson Scott by way of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, he quipped, "It would seem like 'Those whom the gods would destroy they first make mad.'"⁴

Yet Adam refused to comply. And so on the following Tuesday evening, July 28th, after Adam had been served with the order demanding that he vacate the building, Father Turkevich stood outside the cathedral holding an axe. After a long wait in the rain, reassured that the police

³ "Pastor is Jeered at Russian Church." *NYT* 6 July 1925; "Russian Prelate Wins Point in Ouster Suit." *NYT* July 1925; "Assail Ousting of Platon." *NYT* 12 July 1925; "Police Eject 30 at Russian Church." *NYT* 13 July 1925; "Police Again Quell Russian Church Row." *NYT* 20 July 1925; "Bishop and Lawyer Fined; Face Prison." *NYT* 25 July 1925; "Bishop Defies Court and Church's Plan." *NYEP* 27 July 1925; "Jail Threat Fails to Budge Bishop." *NYT* 27 July 1925

⁴ Decision, Melnechuk, et al v. Chomkowitz, et al, 25 July 1925. *Amerikanskyi Pravoslavnyi Vestnik* [APV] September 1925, 74-75.

would not stop Turkevich and his party from forcing their way into the building, the group obtained two more hatchets from a nearby store and set about hacking at the doors and boarded-over windows of the cathedral. As a volunteer attempted to pry through a window, word spread that there were twenty people inside, several of whom carried revolvers. Fearing a riot, the police called for reinforcements, then forced the large crowd away from the cathedral and down East 97th Street and onto Fifth and Madison Avenues. Turkevich beat at the door with his axe until one of the panels broke free. A member of the group squeezed through to the sounds of women and children shrieking in the darkened rectory, and was met with gauntlet of long sticks. Determining Adam was still inside, the party decided not to press the issue, hoping the court would issue a definitive order of removal in the morning.⁵ The occupation continued over the next two days as Adam and his followers remained barricaded in the building, subsisting on what food the cathedral's ice man could smuggle in by passing through a narrow service alley, over two fences, and through a rear door.⁶ New York's newspapers wrote with great relish in anticipation of Adam's date with the city lockup. A *New York Times* reporter who managed an interview with Adam described him as being in a state of "martyr-like resignation." Speaking to the reporter through a rear window in the rectory, Adam expressed his steadfast intention to stay. "If they insist I shall go to jail," he said. "I shall not make any resistance. They can come and take me."⁷

⁵ "Priest Batters Archbishop's Door With Ax in Russian Church War." *New York Herald [NYH]* 29 July 1925; "Uses Ax to Break Into Bishop's Home." *NYT* 29 July 1925; "Cathedral Turned into a Feudal Fort." *Binghamton Press* 29 July 1925

⁶ "600 Chase 'Escaped' Bishop as Court Orders Him Jailed." *NYEP* 30 July 1925

⁷ "Russian Bishop Due to Go to Jail Today." *NYT* 30 July 1925.

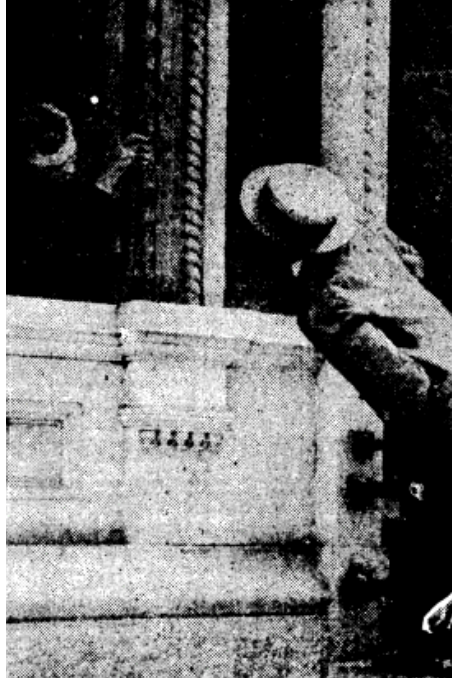


Figure 1: Bp. Adam (Philippovsky) speaking with reporter, July 29th, 1925 (Hammond Lake County Times August 4th, 1925)

Early Friday afternoon, a crowd numbering over 600 had gathered, once again braving a heavy rain. Now several hours past the court's final deadline to leave the property, Adam remained barricaded inside. At long last, the *New York Herald* reported, "The great door of the cathedral swung slowly and majestically open upon Bishop Adam Phillipovsky," and two sheriffs handed him the document ordering his arrest. Shielded by an umbrella, Adam calmly read the paper, lit by the intermittent flashbulbs of photographers, then surrendered himself to the officers. Followed by two of his loyal priests, the bishop walked through a corridor of officers holding their nightsticks aloft to protect them from the crowd. Officers placed the three men in a taxi bound for the Ludlow Street Jail. Led to his cell, Adam kissed the priests on both cheeks in the traditional Russian fashion, blessed them, then went behind bars, where he would remain for the next thirty days.⁸ Back at the cathedral, all hell had broken loose. After Adam's departure, Platon's followers had charged the

⁸ "Cathedral Seized as Bishop is Jailed." *NYT* 1 August 1925; "Russian Bishop Jailed, Denies Defying Court. *NYH* 1 August 1925

building with “two-by-fours and heavier timbers,” battering the front doors, window grills, and a rear window. The *Evening Post* deemed that, “It was a good old riot.”⁹

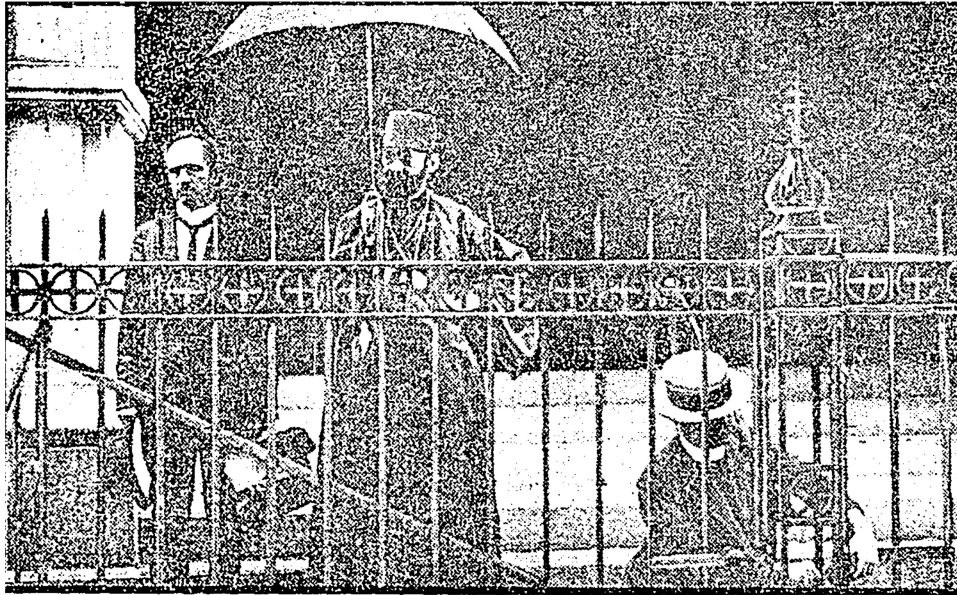


Figure 2: Bp. Adam (Philippovsky) surrendering to police, July 30th, 1925 (New York Herald August 1st, 1925)

When the building had finally been cleared of Adam’s remaining followers, Platon triumphantly entered the cathedral and held a service of thanksgiving. The building was in such a state that Platon declared no further services could be held until the space could be scrubbed of Adam’s occupation. Minor building repairs were required, and some items were missing. Ten gallons of sacramental wine—a year’s supply—were found to have been drunk to the last drop. Adam’s group had also left with the *plaschanitsa* (the “winding sheet” or burial shroud depicting Christ’s crucified body, used during Holy Week through the Thursday prior to the Feast of Ascension), the consecrated *antimins* (a consecrated altar cloth required for services to be held), and the seals of both the archdiocese and the Diocesan Council. Adam’s seizure proved so disturbing to the sacred space that Platon and the other clergy would expend great time and effort

⁹ “Mob Rushes Russian Church As Bishop Rides to Prison.” *NYEP* 31 July 1925; “Cathedral Seized as Bishop is Jailed.” *NYT* 1 August 1925

to re-consecrate the entire temple. This process of anointing the old icons, blessing the vessels anew, and meticulously re-consecrating the altar table spanned a week. They had been used by Adam, who was “no Bishop at all.”¹⁰ Services resumed on August 9th. Three days later, Platon suspended Adam from his position as vicar bishop.¹¹

At the close of 1925, standing in St. Nicholas before its re-consecrated altar, Platon took a moment to reflect on what had befallen the cathedral’s congregation over the previous year.

Behold, last summer a certain Adam Philippovsky, calling himself a bishop and wishing to be the head of our local Church, breaks into this very temple, where we were accustomed to receive and experience spiritual joy and which, thus, is extremely close to our soul and exceedingly precious, chases us out of it and robs us of the site and wellspring of our spiritual joy. There were no limits to our grief, and no limits to our gladness when we received the opportunity to again to be here, to pray to the Lord God, to the Pure Mother, to our Blessed Father Nicholas and all the Saints... Our joy was truly fulfilling, ‘and our joy is without end.’ We now rejoice and luminously celebrate this great day in this holy place.¹²

Adam’s fleeting success to seize the church revealed not just the extent of instability within the post-1917 archdiocese, but also the fierce importance with which Russian Orthodox believers treated incursions into their spiritual worlds. Indeed, the “holy place” of St. Nicholas Cathedral was a primary focal point around which life in the Russian Archdiocese of North America now seemed to revolve. The cathedral was litigated in court and fought over in the streets, occupied and reoccupied, seized and defended. But what would make faithful Russian Orthodox Christians take to protesting, kidnapping, and rioting, accept going to jail, even to wield guns, axes, and battering rams, all for the sake of a sacred space? What was the seed of spiritual fervor that would provoke actions most profane?

¹⁰ “Cathedral Seized as Bishop is Jailed.” *NYT* 1 August 1925; “Platon Re-Enters Russian Cathedral. *NYT* 10 August 1925

¹¹ “Bishop is Excommunicated.” *NYT* 13 August 1925

¹² “Slovo proiznesennoe v Sv. Nikolaevskom Kafedral'nom Sobore v g. N'iu Iorke 25 Dekabria 1925-go goda.” *APV* January-February 1926, 2.