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THE RUSSIAN PATRIARCHATE
AND THE ATTEMPT TO
RECOVER SYMPHONIIA

The Russian Revolution in February, 1917, brought to the surface disputes about the internal government of the Orthodox Church and about the Church’s proper relations to the state. For nearly two hundred years the Church had labored under the Ecclesiastical Regulation (Dukhovnyi eglament), proclaimed by Peter the Great on 25 January 1721, which abolished the Patriarchate of Moscow and replaced it with an Ecclesiastical College modeled on the collegial system just introduced into the civilian administration. To ensure docility, Peter invented the position of Ober-Procurator in 1722 to keep close watch on its proceedings and appointed Ivan Boltin to be the first Procurator. One of the more burdensome features of the Regulation was the subjugation of the clergy to police supervision and their cooptation into the machinery of political surveillance. Priests were obliged to witness against their penitents or face severe penalties themselves. The Regulation had the immediate effect of strengthening the Old Believer schism and the long term effect of alienating the clergy from their flocks. The Regulation signified a secularizing and protestantizing of the Russian Church, a departure from canonical norms of symphoniiia that traditionally defined church-state relations.¹ The struggle to regain symphoniiia began

in the latter years of Peter's reign and continues in the latter years of the twentieth century.2

The last effective Procurator under the tsarist regime was Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev, 1827-1907. He served from 1880 to 1905, and oversaw a major restructuring of ecclesiastical education and an impressive expansion of the parish school system. Unintentionally, he stimulated a major controversy about reform in the Church and spent the latter years of his career attempting to contain and stifle it.3 He was opposed by forceful personalities such as Antonii Vadkovskii, Metropolitan of St. Petersburg (1898-1912), Sergei Witte, chairman of the Committee of Ministers (1903-05), and Prime Minister (1905-06), and Antonii Khrapovitskii, Bishop and Archbishop of Volhynia (1902-14). Controversy over church reform became a crisis during the 1905 Revolution. Witte was persuaded by the two Antonii that termination of the Reglement and restoration of autonomy of administration were essential for the good government of the Church. The bishops outmaneuvered synodal bureaucrats and had the Synod itself declare for reform.4

A Pre-Sobor Commission was formed to outline an agenda for a National (Pomestnii) Sobor. The Commission was promised by Nicholas II that they could set the date for the Sobor once their deliberations were concluded. The Commission concluded their

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