

“I voted for Lukashenko.” Monastery for the glory of the dictator

 belarus2020.churchby.info/ya-golosoval-za-lukashenko-monastyr-na-sluzhbe-u-diktatora

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*The largest (in terms of number of inhabitants and workshops) monastery in Belarus has repeatedly found itself in social and political scandals in recent years. The St. Elisabeth Monastery owes this largely to the pro-government (pro-Lukashenko) position of its confessor, Archpriest **Andrei Lemeshonok** . We tell the story of these scandals .*

“Thank you for not closing the churches”

The first major scandal that befell the monastery in the year of protest 2020—the year of the presidential elections in Belarus—was the story of the mass infection of nuns and sisters with the COVID-19 infection, with the monastery denying the problem itself. Despite the recommendations of the epidemiological service and the leadership of the BOC, the monastery did not close on Easter and organize any additional measures to contain the spread of the epidemic (strict mask regime, spacing of parishioners, etc.). As the media were able to find out , then about half of the nuns fell ill, many of them suffered the disease very seriously and were hospitalized. It is known that at least 3 sisters of mercy and one nun died as a result. Thus, by denying the epidemiological danger, the monastery became a hotbed of infection in Minsk.



Nun Maria (Kovalchuk) who died after contracting COVID-19 . Photo from facebook.com / [Nasha Niva](#)

It should be noted that even then the confessor of the monastery was armed with arguments not from the church vertical (the Russian Orthodox Church went for strict restrictions, and the BOC also recommended refraining from mass visits to churches on Easter), but from **Lukashenko** . He, in a well-known populist manner , stated that “my strict demand is that we will not close churches” during the epidemic.

During one of the meetings with sisters and novices, **Lemeshonok** was asked about the fact that the nuns were campaigning against vaccination.

“We are neither for nor against,” the priest answered with a smile. — Personally, like our **Alexander Grigorievich**, I will not get vaccinated. I look around our yard. A lot of people have gotten sick right now. But I told them: our vaccine, inoculation, is the body and blood of Christ. The human body develops immunity. And I see that this immunity works.

...

We don't have any campaigning. Maybe the sisters, due to their foolishness... You wrote, I will scold them and ask them: “Are you agitators? You must serve God and comfort people.” We are not campaigning for anything. If a person does this, he does it on his own. And we will scold my sister for this. But we can reason, no one takes this right away from us.”

The monastery still had to be closed from visitors for a short period, but it was too late. “I am like our Alexander Grigorievich” - set the understandable tone for the behavior of the monastery leadership in the political crisis brewing that summer.

“I voted for Lukashenko”



Archpriest **Andrei Lemeshonok** and **Alexander Lukashenko** / Photo: president.gov.by

“Personally, I voted for Lukashenko. In no case am I imposing my opinion - every person has the right to a free choice, ” the state publication “SB.BY” quotes Lemeshonok a week and a half after the presidential elections in the country, “ And free choice is when a person does not depend on, according to at least he tries to be independent of external circumstances. But if something is imposed on him (for example, today I see that people who voted for the current president are afraid to talk about it openly, because there are those who shout, who chant about “freedom”), then is it freedom?

...

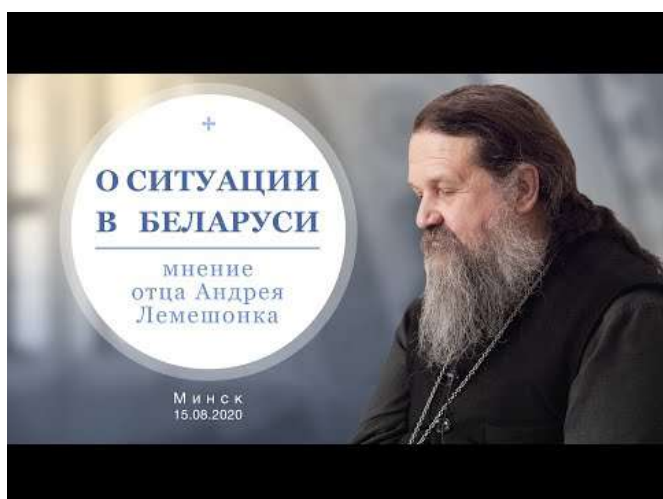
For example, I am grateful to our president that he did not close the churches, that he held a parade...

...

The fact that law enforcement agencies exceeded their authority somewhere on the streets and there was violence is bad. But, on the other hand, how many victims were there among the police? The hospital surgeon told me that for several days in a row they were brought in

soldiers with wounds, with their arms torn off. After all, it is clear that all this was not organized spontaneously, they were preparing for these protests. And not only in Belarus, but also outside it. Indeed, it would be very beneficial for someone to see our country turned into a NATO colony, and they would pay for it. But we have our own life, and we must think with our own heads how we should build our lives and what values our people should have.”

The abundance of these propaganda cliches, which have not been confirmed in any independent publication (about many cases of wounded soldiers, casualties among police officers, a scenario of a military coup in Belarus being prepared in the West, etc.) accompanies the archpriest's big speech entitled “On the situation in Belarus”, published on August 15, 2020 (6 days after the end of the elections) on the monastery's YouTube channel. Conspiracy theories, actively disseminated through state media, began to be broadcast through monastic tools.



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/NmExa3JmRgo>

The priest's rhetoric in this pastoral commentary, it must be admitted, indeed largely repeats Lukashenko's rhetoric: the manipulative and populist style brings the speakers together.

Many in the monastery did not share the opinion of the confessor

Not everyone in the monastery supported this politically engaged position of Archpriest **Andrei Lemeshonok**. Already on August 25, 2020, a collective appeal appeared from more than a hundred employees, former employees and parishioners of the St. Elisabeth Monastery to Metropolitan Paul, the then head of the BOC. The authors of the appeal did not agree with the authoritarian behavior of the confessor, repressive practices against those who disagree with his position, and criticized the failure to take proper measures during the rampant epidemic in the monastery.

Unfortunately, this appeal was not given due attention. The answer came more than two months later. Its addressee, Metropolitan **Pavel** , was removed from the leadership of the BOC on the day the appeal was signed, and the new primate, the future Metropolitan **Benjamin**, took the pro-regime side of the conflict, which is why the working group he created in the fall of 2020 formally responded to the requests voiced in the appeal. The conflict only intensified. **Nun Juliania (Denisova)** , regent of the monastery's festive choir, left the monastery .

But this did not at all weaken the authoritarianism in the confessor's behavior.

On November 22, 2020, at a meeting with nuns, he, having given the floor to one employee and realizing that she was raising the topic of young people beaten by riot police, rudely began to interrupt her speech with the phrase “fuck you” and began to counter with traditional propaganda cliches that the riot police “saved country”, “the security forces were massively beaten”, “if not for Russia and its help, where would we be”, “in Libya under dictator Gaddafi it was almost ideal - the only president for the people” and the like. And most importantly, the parents of peaceful protesters beaten by riot police must themselves repent for raising such children.



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/Bt-CCk8qggg>

“Crusades” for Lukashenko and the monastery

In the fall of 2020, during a period of peaceful protests in Belarus, activists supporting Lukashenko's policies began holding marches in Minsk. They were few in number, but their participants were not dispersed by the security forces. A distinctive feature of these processions was that the column was usually led by a colorful trio of men: one of them was carrying a crucifix, and the second was carrying the state flag on a pole. The bearded flag bearer was the organizer of the procession ceremony: it began and ended with prayer. He instructed the participants on behavior during the procession and led the column. In the column you can also see people carrying other religious objects: icons.



Campaign “For Belarus!” in Minsk / Nasha Niva

As the media managed to find out , this organizer was an employee of the St. Elisabeth Monastery **Sergei Poznyak** , a former military man.

“You don’t have to be a monk to work in a monastery. There are a number of social projects, for example, helping former criminals, alcoholics, and drug addicts. The monastery also helps disabled children,” an interlocutor close to the monastery told Nasha Niva. — Previously, Sergei worked at the Bald Mountain farmstead, organizing work and assistance for former convicts.

As for rallies, he does it absolutely sincerely, not at the instigation of someone, not for money. But because he sincerely believes and considers it right.”

Poznyak's companion , carrying a large crucifix, was Minsk IT specialist **Sergei Kovrigin** . Although he positioned himself as an Orthodox Christian, he turned out to be anything but humble in character. It was during that period of time that an incident occurred that became known to the public: in an elevator he beat his neighbor in front of his own wife and children. In March 2021, the court found him guilty of fighting and awarded him a fine of 150 basic units (4,350 rubles), compensation for costs and moral damage to the victim in the amount of 2,900 rubles.

Kovrigin , as **Kirill Frolov**, who calls himself the head of the **Association of Orthodox Experts**, claims in his telegram channel , is a parishioner of the parish of the church in the St. Elisabeth Monastery. True, as far as we know, the monastery disowned such a parishioner.

But the most interesting thing is that the son of the archpriest himself, Dmitry Lemeshonok , who shares extreme pro-Russian views, was seen at such processions . At rallies, he usually carried the national flag of Belarus on his shoulders.



Dmitry Lemeshonok with the flag of the Republic of Belarus on his shoulders at the Lukashist procession

As we see, even in street forms of support for the Lukashenko regime, at least 3 persons related to the St. Elisabeth Monastery participated.

“This one is taller than Putin”

On Christmas Day 2023, **Lukashenko** visited the temple in honor of St. John (Maximovich) of Shanghai and San Francisco, part of the complex of the St. Elisabeth Monastery. He praised the monastery for helping the Russian military and donated the icon. And the confessor of the monastery reciprocated - he enthusiastically listed **Lukashenko's** “merits”, which Belarusian society considers crimes and evil: suppression of protests, deepened integration with Russia, which started the war in Ukraine, etc.

The next day, in his Sunday sermon, Archpriest **Andrei Lemeshonok** could not help but return to **Alexander Lukashenko's** Christmas visit to the monastery, although he was not at the service. There seemed to be no reason to use this theme in an address, but the preacher found them:

“The president also came to us yesterday. And for us this is a holiday. You know, I looked at him - this is a personality. You see, this is a personality. Despite my respect for Vladimir Vladimirovich, it seems to me that this one is taller. Actually, you do. You don't know, but you feel it when you're next to a person, when he says something. So we are under reliable leadership.”



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/JFVlcuuxhzQ>

As we see, **Lemeshonok** and **Lukashenko** provide mutual services to each other: the dictator, at all costs, needs at least some visible support from society - in this form, it is supplied by groups of devoted (or imitating devotion) officials, including church ones. And the abuse of church authority leads to the fact that an entire monastery is forced to express this

devotion. This behavior of the monastery leader and his subordinates, understandably, causes even more bewilderment among Orthodox parishioners in particular and among Belarusian society in general.