

The Orthodox Church Process of Canonization/Glorification, and the Life of Blessed Archbishop Arseny

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Introduction

The legacy of Blessed Arseny (Chahovtsov or Chagovstov) is very impressive. Fr. Matthew Francis, an OCA Priest who has done a great deal of research on him stated, “wherever he went things came to life, and the Church just came alive wherever he was.”¹ As there is some controversy regarding his possible glorification, this paper starts by trying to clarify the rather indefinable process of glorification in the Orthodox Church. Hopefully, this essay will shed light on some undocumented aspects of Archbishop Arseny’s life and work. This paper by no means represents a finished product, as human holiness and saintliness is just too complex and varied to be defined in a neat package. I hope that this paper can perhaps help kindle a bit of renewed research and interest into the life of Blessed Archbishop Arseny, as there is still much that should be done and much more information that should be catalogued and/or translated if his life is to be understood and shared properly, especially as we consider his possible official glorification as saint and a proper inclusion in the Orthodox Church calendar. My gratitude is due to many people who allowed me to record their thoughts on Blessed Archbishop Arseny, and who clarified some aspects in the process of glorification in the Orthodox Church. Summaries of these interviews will be published under a separate cover.

¹ Telephone interview with Fr. Matthew Francis. . August 21, 2014.

Glorification of Saints in the Orthodox Church with Special Emphasis on North America

There are thousands of Saints which we commemorate in the Orthodox Church calendar, many remembered universally, and many more within localized contexts . It is striking in the dismissal prayers at liturgy and other services, how many and how varied is the daily list that we petition to pray for us, and yet these would be but a small fraction of the saints – the cloud of witnesses that are our family gone before us and are cheering us on to finish the race and come and join them! How did they end up on the Church calendar? What is the process and how do we select the latest additions to glorification?

The following quote from a letter to the OCA Canonization Committee demonstrates criteria that are generally considered when a person is being vetted for glorification:

As is the universal practice of the Orthodox Church, the Canonization Commission's study of individuals being considered for glorification by the Church includes the following criteria:

- Veneration
- Martyrdom
- Miracles
- Holiness and righteousness
- Orthodoxy of teachings and writings
- Spiritual impact on the Church

Not all of these criteria are absolute prerequisites in every case of glorification by the Church.²

² The Canonization Commission's report to the 14th All-American Council, July 2005, <<http://oca.org/PDF/14thAAC/canonization.pdf>>

The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity defines canonization as follows:

The process of approving the cult of a saint is normally the act of the Holy Synod & chief hierarch of an autocephalous church. The process involves investigation of the candidate's life, writings, and influence, of miracles worked before or after death, and of evidence for an existing cult. An "Akolouthia" is written for the feast day of a new saint and an icon prepared. The actual ritual of canonization varies; the Russian ritual is particularly splendid. The oldest known formal canonizations were acts of the 10th century papacy. Roman canonizations also involve creating an office, producing an image of the saint and the saint's miracles. Local informal cults are common in Eastern Christian communities.³

While this list and definition are somewhat helpful, when we consider the path towards glorification of any saint, it seldom resembles a smooth checklist. Nor can it be summed up in a dictionary definition. The process seems to have as many variations as there are saints. It is interesting to note in the above Blackwell Dictionary's phrase -- "the oldest known formal canonizations were acts of the 10th century papacy." This does demonstrate the tendency for many, even for reputable dictionary publishers, to consider the canonization process from within the more widely known and popularized lens of the Roman Catholic Church.⁴ Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky in his well-known article, "The Glorification of Saints," comments on the issue of "canonization:" "Although this term is etymologically derived from the Greek word canon, it forms a part of the terminology of the Latin Church and is not employed by the Orthodox Greeks. This is an indication that we need not use it."⁵ In addition, while perhaps not adhering to the "formalized" Latin method of canonization, Pomazansky also gives a number of examples of saints being canonized through the process of formal prayers far earlier than the 10th century:

³ Parry, Ken and David Melling, Dimitri Brady, Sidney Griffith, and John Healey Ed., *The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1999, p. 111.

⁴ "Canonization," <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canonization>>

⁵ Pomazansky, Michael. *Selected Essays*. "The Glorification of Saints". St. Job of Pochaev Printshop, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, NY, 1996, p. 29.

It is known from history that prayer meetings were held in honour of the martyrs as early as the first quarter of the second century (cf. St. Ignatius of Antioch). In all probability, they were begun in the period immediately following the first persecution of the Christians – that of Nero...In the Carthaginian Calendar, which dates from the seventh century, there is the superscription: ‘Here are recorded birthdays (i.e., the dates of martyrdom) of the martyrs and the days of repose of bishops whose annual commemoration the Church of Carthage celebrates.’⁶

Archbishop Seraphim of Canada, who has chaired the Canonization Committee of the Orthodox Church of America, describes the process as follows:

Glorification of saints starts from the bottom up, NOT like the [Roman] Catholics with the pope declaring sainthood. The [Roman] Catholic system includes a role for the “devil’s advocate,” which doesn’t exist in the Orthodox glorification process. In the Orthodox way, people come to recognize the sanctity of a person, they pray to the person to intercede before the Lord, and they do, and then the Lord does something and they say, ‘well of course this person is holy.’ Sometimes they ask the saint himself to let it be known what is his state. Depending upon what happens next you could say that phenomena occur. The relics don’t need to be incorrupt. If they are incorrupt, that can be a confirmation but sometimes incorrupt relics don’t mean sanctity; they may mean the opposite, it all depends. There have to be other things that indicate. There doesn’t have to be miracles, often there are but there doesn’t have to be...what comes doesn’t have to be spectacular...There are many cases when a saint will remain a local saint and never get on the [official church] calendars, but within a diocese that person will be remembered and the memory kept. Criterion for saints are not rules and laws; just strong opinions. So you wade through the strong opinions and just keep going.⁷

Miracles that are verified have been one of the main signs that indicate the saintliness of a person when considering their glorification. While the Orthodox

⁶ Ibid., pp. 30-31.

⁷ A telephone interview with Archbishop Seraphim, Storheim. July 26, 2014.

Church does not rigidly and formally insists evidence of miracles to be present, and there is no particular number of miracles required, as is the case within the Roman Catholic Church, they are very common, and would often serve to verify the sanctity of an individual, especially once the inevitable controversy regarding their glorification has begun. Michael Pomazansky quotes Patriarch Nectarius of Jerusalem on the subject:

Patriarch Nectarius of Jerusalem (reigned 1661-1669) gives lucid testimony concerning this. He writes: ‘Three things witness to true sanctity in people: 1) irreproachable Orthodoxy, 2) perfection in all the virtues, which are crowned by standing up for the faith, even unto the shedding of one’s blood, and finally, 3) the manifestation by God of supernatural signs and wonders.’ In addition to this, Patriarch Nectarius indicates that at the time, when abuses in reporting miracles and virtue were common occurrences, yet other signs were required, i.e., the incorruption of bodies or a fragrance emanating from the bones.⁸

However, no firm rules can be made from such statements. While St. John the wonderworker, St. Herman of Alaska, and Blessed Matushka Olga, who is presently being considered for glorification, are all on record as manifesting supernatural signs and healings, they are the exceptions in this regard among our North American saints. The other North American saints do not have this characteristic as part of their criteria. Pomazansky notes:

Also, the gift of working miracles can hardly be considered obligatory as a basis for glorification, yet one may deem an ascetic life, confirmed afterwards by the sign of fragrance emanating from the bones, as such a basis.⁹

Even though there are many variations and there are almost more exceptions to the rules than rules themselves, the occurrence of miracles in both Greek and the Russian Churches is considered to be the main deciding factor. In addressing the fact that in the early Church, exalted service to the church or a martyr’s end were

⁸ Pomazansky, p. 34.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

in themselves enough to warrant glorification, Pomazansky notes that “in the Russian Church, similar occasions of ecclesiastical glorification, aside from the working of miracles were but rare exceptions.”¹⁰

The first saint to be canonized in North America was St. Herman in 1970. Since then there have been a dozen or so more saints officially recognized, but compared to older Orthodox countries such as Romania or Serbia with hundreds of glorified saints, this is a very small number. Besides St. Herman, in North America we presently have St. Innocent Veniaminov (glorified in 1977), St. Juvenaly (and his companion, in 1977), St. Peter the Aleut (1980), St. Nicolas Velimirovic (1987), St. Tikhon Belavin (1989), St. Jacob Netsvetov (1994), St. John Maximovitch (1994), St. Alexis Toth (1994), St. Alexander Hotovitsky (1994), St. John Kochurov (1994), St. Raphael Hawaweeny (2000), St. Basil Martysz (2003), and St. Varnava (Barnabas) Nastić (2005).¹¹ At the present time there are a number of other possible candidates being considered for glorification including Metropolitan Leonty, Archbishop Arseny, and Matushka Olga.

While all of the current North American saints worked for a period of time here in North America, only two, St. Peter and St. Jacob were born on this continent, so obviously the birthplace of a future saint is not considered important in the selection process. Martyrdom certainly is a common category for sainthood, and this is true for one half (seven) of the saints on the North American saint list. Five are known martyrs: St. Peter the Aleut, and St. Juvenaly (and his companion) were both martyred here in North America. Saints Alexander Hotovitsky, John Kochurov (first Priest Martyr in Russia in 1917), and Basil Martysz – all worked here in North America but were martyred in Russia or in St. Basil’s case, in Poland. In addition, we also have both St. Tikhon Belavin and St. Varnava (Barnabas) Nastić likely being martyred.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 39.

¹¹ Gray, George A. *Portraits of American Saints*. Los Angeles, CA: Dept. of Communications Diocese of the West, OCA, 2001.

¹² Both St. Tikhon and St. Varnava were mistreated and imprisoned by communist authorities in Russia and Yugoslavia, respectively. They both died prematurely soon after their release from prison.

It is often said that the process of glorification in the Orthodox Church grows from the local veneration of the saint from the time of the saint's falling asleep in the Lord – sort of an organic love and respect begins by those who knew them the saint the best, and this then spreads beyond the local context and becomes universal. While this is certainly one common path that leads to glorification, perhaps most evident in the lives of St. Herman of Alaska, St. John of San Francisco and Shanghai, St. Nicolas (Nikolaj) Velimirović and St. Tikhon Belavin, there are also exceptions to this pattern. The path of the glorification of St. Jacob Netsvetov demonstrates a completely different approach. As Fr. Michael Oleksa explains:

There are hundreds of different paths to sainthood. We didn't know anything about Jacob Netsvetov, the first native Aleutian priest, until one day we were visiting an old abandoned church on the Yukon River, and on a whim the bishop says, "I wonder if there is anything up there in the bell tower?" One of the priests climbed up, said 'no there is nothing here,' and then literally tripped over a box that just happened to contain 18 years of St. Jacob Netsvetov's journals. He had been pretty much forgotten. Dr. Lydia Black then spent a few years translating these journals and published them, but they weren't exactly a bestseller. As no-one had ever heard of him, why would they spend \$75 on a 2 volume set of his journals? I took some highlights from the journal and included them in "Alaskan Missionary Spirituality" – published in 1987 – and they started to be circulated and read. People generally had the same reaction – 'If he's not a saint, there is no hope for the rest of us.' I was awarded the St. Innocent Cross at his glorification, but really I did nothing more than re-publish parts of what Dr. Lydia Black had already translated and published. Once his life was known, his sanctity was obvious; his apostolic zeal came through brilliantly. There may have been veneration for St. Jacob locally in the generation after he died in 1864 as there is a large St. Jacob Church in the Yukon Delta area, but today no-one can remember why it was named St. Jacob. If there was veneration back in the 1800's it had completely disappeared by the time I arrived [in Alaska].¹³

¹³ Telephone interview with Fr. Michael Oleksa, August 22, 2014.

So here we see with St. Jacob Netsvetov, an example of a North American saint who had no tangible local veneration established, but very quickly (in 1987 his deeds were discussed in Fr. Michael's book, and by 1994 he was glorified) his life became known and his saintliness recognized. Fr. Michael commented that "in a certain sense I believe the Church has this attitude -- 'He reveals His saints to the Church according to His time and will.'"¹⁴ Fr. Michael also shares St. Juvenaly's story as another example of what may be considered a "non-typical" glorification path:

Then there's Fr. Juvenaly who was also, you could say, forgotten and maligned and slandered because he was sent off to the mainland of Alaska and disappeared, and a hundred and fifty years later an American historian accepted the fraudulent translation of a diary that never existed, in which Fr. Juvenaly reportedly confessed being seduced by a native Indian woman. Well, of course, if that's the case then he is certainly not a canonizable saint. But it turns out that the whole diary itself was a complete myth, a story that was made up by the translator who wasn't translating, he was fabricating. And then for the true story to come out took even longer because we had to go back, as it were, like detectives and try to piece together the factual evidence that we did have, finally verified by the native oral tradition. It was a lot of work that took over twenty years, it wasn't like twenty years of intense work; it was twenty years of stumbling over clues and then finally reassembling the jigsaw puzzle. The point here is; there was in fact, no widespread veneration of Fr. Juvenaly and his companion, but the Church does consider anyone who dies for the faith, any martyr who sheds his blood and is killed for the faith, automatically a saint – so they don't require widespread veneration. So there are multiple standards for admitting people to the official list of canonized saints, depending upon their lives and circumstances. The first principle is that there is no consistent means by which someone is added to the canon of saints; there are all these different paths. The question is 'Why bother, why do we need all of these different saints? We have thousands already.' But it is showing that each is a unique path to holiness. It also says that can happen here, it's not just the martyrs of the 2nd century that were thrown to the lions in ancient Rome. This is the principle that differentiates us from the Roman Catholics, who believe there are certain fixed criteria that need to apply to every saint. For example, I don't know a whole lot of miracles attributed to St. Innocent Veniaminov. On the other

¹⁴ Ibid.

end, St. Herman had two well-known prophetic occurrences during his life – the tidal wave with the icon stopping it, and the forest fire. But the healings that are attributed to him are all posthumous, they all happened to people who visited his graveside. So you never know, it ain't over till it's over. Holiness is something that is wonderful in its literal sense; full of wonder. It's not something that you can analyze, it's not something that you can contain, it's not something you can define – but when you see it you know what it is. Every saint is unique. If you are looking for criteria, my answer would be there isn't any. Except, of course, those basic things that Fr. Hopko writes about, all of the saints have certain things in common. They prayed, they fasted, they attended Church, and they received the sacraments. After that they all have their own unique story. The most appropriate response to any hagiography is 'Yes, this is really an ideal to be achieved, thank God they ever passed our way.' It gives us hope that sanctity, holiness, and unity with God is something we can all obtain, because they did it and they showed us the way.¹⁵

The road to glorification is almost always filled with controversy. The enemy of mankind is especially displeased when we recognize those of our human race who have cooperated with Christ, committing their lives to union with Him, and demonstrating through their lives, that this path is real, possible and available to all of us. Satan will always attempt to place roadblocks in the way of the glorification process, and will use anything or anyone he can to do so. It would almost be a cause for suspicion if there were not such obstacles encountered along the way. The intercessions and help of the saints are of incomparable value.

The story of the demon possessed girl Katterini Krakaris, who came to Bishop Nektarios of Aegina in 1919, about a year before his repose for help is very instructive.¹⁶ Bishop Nektarios read the prayers of exorcism and his soul was very shaken and he said "this girl is tortured by one of the most terrible demons," but he could do little to help her. The entire story continues and is very interesting, but the point that I wish to make at this time is that somehow while still alive and with us physically, he could not help her. But after his death, once he started to

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Sotos Chondropoulos, *Saint Nektarios: The Saint of our Century*, Athens, Greece: Kainoyptia Publications 1997, pp. 267-271.

work many miracles from beyond the grave, she was once again brought to St. Nektarios's, now reposed. St. Nektarios's body had continued to have such life force after his death that it not only remained incorrupt, but his fingernails continued to grow. The demon shrieked "the one with the nails, Oh my bad fortune,"¹⁷ and left her for good, after which she opened her eyes and said "Where am I? My God, I am freed."¹⁸ In 1926, she became a nun at the monastery of Aegina, eventually receiving the great habit, and reposing at the monastery in 1968 after living a holy blessed life. Such is the glory of God's Saints that they may later come to our help and exceed even their earlier earthly accomplishments.

Even such a well known and beloved saint as St. Nektarios, referred to as "the saint of our century" by many, was greatly attacked by clerics and others within the Church, and his glorification vigorously opposed in some circles:

Unfortunately, despite the love that abounded for Nektarios, there also existed malice towards him. When someone is in the public eye and praised, it is inevitable that the person, no matter how kind and good he or she is, will be envied and hated by some. This is an unfortunate fact of human behaviour. Thus it is no surprise that a malicious rumour started circulating about him."... "He [Nektarios] was a scapegoat, he was slandered, He was insulted."¹⁹

To quote once again, Fr. Michael Oleksa, regarding the inevitable attacks that any effort to glorify a new saint will attract: "I don't think there is anyone who got unanimous approval. There was a lot of opposition even to the canonization of St. Seraphim of Sarov:"²⁰

Disagreement surrounding the veneration of a Saint is nothing new in the Church. For example, we all know and love Saint Seraphim as the great Russian Saint. What is not well known, however, is the extent to which people

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 271.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 53.

²⁰ Interview with Fr. Michael.

derided Saint Seraphim during his life and sought to wipe out his memory among the faithful after his death. His followers faced great hardships in glorifying their beloved father and teacher. In fact, had it not been for the influence of Tsar-Martyr Nicholas II in canonizing the Saint, his jealous enemies would have had their way, and today he would be scarcely known at all.²¹

One of our better known and loved North American Saints, St. John Maximovitch the Wonderworker, went through much scandal and attack, and his path to glorification in the Church was far from smooth:

Yet even in the role of peacemaker Vladika [John] was attacked, and accusations and slanders were heaped upon his head. He was forced to appear in public court – in flagrant violation of church canons – to answer to preposterous charges of concealing financial dishonesty by the parish council. All involved were completely exonerated; but thus Vladika’s last years were filled with the bitterness of slander and persecution.²²

Let us remember that many active church-goers, conscientious clergy and widely respected hierarchs rejected or even despised Blessed John when he was alive. They openly hissed at him when he walked into church, and they said that he was “proud” and in “*prelest*.”²³

It is also good to remember that our calendar of saints is filled with great sinners who through their repentance drew them closer to God. To be glorified in the Orthodox Church certainly does not require some perfectly lived and almost sinless life. The scriptures are very clear: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”²⁴ King David, of course, is the best example of this, but the great Apostle St. Paul, St. Mary of Egypt, St. Moses the Black, and many others are noted for reforming their lives after a very poor start. As Archbishop Seraphim

²¹ Rose Seraphim and Abbot Herman, *Blessed John the Wonderworker*. Platina, California: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1987, p. 476.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 55.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 474.

²⁴ Romans 3:23.

remarked on the question of the rather uncharitable view of Priest Oliver, regarding the libel trial Archimandrite Arseny was involved with (which is addressed a little later in this paper):

The arguments that are raised by people like Fr. Oliver about asking questions about his [St. Arseny's] sanctity; if he had done that which is being questioned, which he didn't, in his early days; our church is all about repentance. So if you are going to talk about a demand for perfect piety, our calendar would be empty and people like St. Mary of Egypt would not be there, so this is a spurious argument.²⁵

We also have an entire category of wonderful saints known as “fools for Christ” whose holiness defies any attempt to neatly categorize, and whose lives teach us the majesty and wonder of God shining through His creatures in ways we can not rationally comprehend or define. We are grateful for these great shining lights, all the saints who though they have finished their earthly course, continue to help us and intercede for us. They are of great help to us, who are still struggling towards sanctification and union with Christ here on earth. We marvel at their dedication and devotion to Christ and His Church, and at their great diversity. Ultimately only God Himself can arrange to show us who He would raise up for us as his glorified Saints. Sometimes, as it has been with St. John the Wonderworker, St. Nektarios or St. Seraphim, they are obvious to many, and the thought of their glorification begins even before their passing on; although a fierce battle will still need to be fought on their behalf. Sometimes, as with St. Tikhon Belavin, St. Innocent Veniaminov or St. Nicolai Velimirovic, the reputation of their great service to the Church makes them an obvious choice. Sometimes, like St. Jacob Netsvetov or St. Juvenaly, they may be almost completely forgotten, but through the grace of God their lives are brought to our attention – usually through an advocate or a number of them, who share their lives with us. The OCA Canonization Committee's Fr. Joseph Frawley has, perhaps, the simplest and therefore one of the best definitions: “So, the glorification of saints in the

²⁵ Interview with Archbishop Seraphim, July 26, 2014.

Orthodox Church is a recognition that God's holiness is manifested in the Church through these grace-filled men and women whose lives were pleasing to God."²⁶

Blessed Archbishop Arseny and His Journey along the Path to Glorification

While the journey to glorify Blessed Archbishop Arseny is well underway, and much has already been accomplished, it would appear that there is still much work remaining to be done. Things seemed to be moving quite quickly for a few years, but as of late the momentum seems to have stalled out a little. Granted, this is not just the case for the consideration of the potential sainthood of Blessed Archbishop Arseny, but also of Blessed Olga, Blessed Metropolitan Leonty, and others who one could say are currently "under consideration." We have not glorified any new saints in North America since 2000 when we glorified St. Raphael Hawaweeny, but no doubt we have had some controversial issues to deal with since then which have diverted our focus. St. Basil Martysz was glorified in Chelm, Poland in 2003, and is considered by the Polish Orthodox to be the Patron Saint of the Polish Army, and St. Varnava (Barnabas) Nastić (born in Gary, Indiana) was glorified in 2005 by the Church in Serbia, and we certainly recognize them, and even consider them ours in some sense as well. But it has been quite some time since we added anyone officially to our rather sparse calendar of North American saints. There are thousands of recognized saints on the calendars of older Orthodox countries, so the sentiment that is sometimes heard that "we have enough saints already over here" seems rather hard to understand when we can count them on our fingers. Some have insisted that that there is no real following among the people for glorification of Blessed Archbishop Arseny, but that somehow our retired Archbishop Seraphim and the Archdiocesan council drove the whole process in a "top down" manner, as they

²⁶ Fr. Joseph Frawley, "The Glorification of the Saints in the Orthodox Church," <<http://oca.org/FS.NA-Documents.asp?ID=83>>

wanted a “Canadian” saint.²⁷ Archbishop Seraphim has strongly denied any such motive of needing a “Canadian” saint:

What people don't seem to understand is that Canadians are very soft spoken or even non-spoken about lots of things, so in the course of my pastoral tours around, there are plenty of people who have talked about St. Arseny in the diocese, people who knew him long ago, of course now they have inconveniently reposed themselves, and I inconveniently didn't take enough notes at the time because I wasn't paying so much attention. But there are plenty of people, who were quite aware of St. Arseny's holiness.²⁸

As Archbishop Seraphim travelled back and forth in Canada with energy similar to Blessed Arseny, and as he visited many of the same places, he naturally came to appreciate the great work Blessed Arseny did to lay the foundation for the Metropolia Church here in Canada. As he shared his growing love for him, others joined in doing research, and as they did so they too came to greatly admire and feel that Archbishop Arseny was worthy of veneration. The opinion that this is only a “top down” movement to somehow create a “Canadian” saint is not supported by evidence. Besides, it is not clear why a “top down” recognition of a person's saintliness would be considered a detriment to their glorification. The journey of any saint to glorification is fuelled by those who come to know him or her, and who then tell their story to others and thereby become an “advocate.” As more and more “advocates” join in believing in the saintliness of the person, praying for the person and sharing this heartfelt belief with others, the reputation and awareness of the potential saint grows. At some point in time there becomes enough awareness of the person's saintliness that it comes to the attention of the hierarchs of the Church, and discussion starts at this level. The role of the “advocate” is always an indispensable part of the process. How can they believe if they have not heard, and how can they hear without someone telling them? This

²⁷ Telephone interview with Fr. Lawrence Farley August 19, 2014. Fr. Lawrence made it clear that the entire liturgical material for St. Arseny was written in obedience to his bishop at that time [Archbishop Seraphim], and that he is personally opposed both to a premature use of the title “Saint”, and also to a “top down” process of Archbishop Arseny's canonization. The premature use of “Saint” was also objected to by a number of others I interviewed including Fr. Daniel Ressetar, Bishop Peter, and Bishop Irénée.

²⁸ Telephone interview with Archbishop Seraphim. August 22, 2014.

process is often described as an organic “bottom up” process where the advocates are seen to be the local people who knew and were aware of the saintliness of the individual while they were alive, and then spreading the news until somehow it reaches the ears of the hierarchs of the Church. However a “top down” process is equally valid where a person of influence such as a bishop or well-known priest comes to appreciate the sanctity and contribution of a particular person in the life of the Church and becomes their “advocate.”

Whether the process is “top down” or “bottom up” matters little. Often the process starts “top down” with bishops, as when they go around their diocese and hear of such holy people, they are in a better position than most to spread the news regarding their sanctity. The spread of a potential saint’s reputation will occur when God wishes to reveal him/her to us, sometimes soon after their repose, or sometimes decades after. It seems to me that there are a very good number of us scattered through North America and even beyond, and scattered through the decades, who feel a great love and veneration for Archbishop Arseny. May God continue to reveal His saints to us and add Blessed Arseny to their numbers, if this is to be His gift to us. Perhaps he will only be venerated locally by some of us who are already feeling a great closeness to him or perhaps God will allow him to help us in a more noticeable manner with miracles that will attract greater attention by the Church. There has been at least one such incident recorded in New Zealand:

There have been people who have experienced healing from his prayers, too. A man, James Reid in New Zealand was having all sorts of trouble with a hip replacement, and was doing quite badly until he prayed to St. Arseny and asked him for help and immediately everything changed with his hip replacement, for the better I mean, about 5 or 6 years ago.²⁹

As Archbishop Seraphim put it, “sometimes they ask the saint himself to let it be known what is his state. Depending upon what happens next you could say that

²⁹ Telephone interview with Archbishop Seraphim. July 26, 2014.

phenomena occur.”³⁰ Those who actually knew Blessed Archbishop Arseny are now in their 90’s, but his memory is still very precious to those I spoke with:

Bishop Arseny was always very pleasant and he would talk about very simple things, and was always very gracious and very appreciative when we would come to help him put his very long hair up in a bun. This was my first memory of him. When we would be in the dining room and Bishop Arseny would enter into the dining room where we were and he would give us a little blessing and we would stand up of course, and he would just sit in the dining room with us and he would just be with all of us smiling and wouldn’t say anything but it was something that was so warm and pleasant for us, his being there. He had a kind of twinkle in his eyes, his eyes were very, you couldn’t help but notice them, there was a very strong kind of sense about his eyes that was very unusual and quite piercing, even though he had that twinkle, his eyes always somehow stayed with me, the way he would look at you. He very seldom would display any kind of anger; he was always very pleasant, very kind and always would say little things that we would enjoy, always in simple terms... I still have a little souvenir that I kept after he passed away, a little brush that he used in his travels. ³¹

Archbishop Arseny’s accomplishments in being the founder of St. Tikhon’s Monastery, an orphanage, and a seminary would seem to me to be major highlights of his life that would make him not just a “Canadian” saint, but a very “North American” saint, even though he took out and retained Canadian citizenship. We have other North American Saints which we also regard as Canadian Saints, as our Canadian Bishop Irénée said in responding to my comment that if he, Archbishop Arseny, is a saint he can certainly let us know:

That’s it, that’s it, and God will reveal His saints, it’s not up to us to make them up because we need them. We have local saints, you know, Archbishop Tikhon, the Patriarch, the confessor, he is a local saint, he founded our

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Telephone interview with Fr. Igor Soroka (A student at St. Tikhon’s Seminary in 1943). August 28, 2014.

archdiocese 100 years ago. He's the one who actually went and filled in the papers and founded this archdiocese. So we do have local saints.³²

Archbishop Arseny followed Christ faithfully and worked tirelessly for the Church under great hardship, and encountered occasional physical and verbal abuse. He left a great and enduring legacy in both Canada and the United States. Through doing this research and getting to know Blessed Arseny in the last while, I can say that I have now joined the ranks of those who feel he is worthy of consideration for glorification, and I am also asking him to reveal himself to the Church clearly as our intercessor and helper, should this be his new state.

There are a number of devoted “advocates” of his saintliness both here in Canada and in the United States. There have been a couple of icons circulating, and institutions named as “Saint Arseny” – with the St. Arseny Institute in Winnipeg, Manitoba being a prime example. The ruling bishop of the Canadian Archdiocese of the Orthodox Church in America, His Grace Irénée, has suggested to refer to Archbishop Arseny as “Blessed” Arseny until such time as he might be officially glorified, as there is quite a bit of resistance to using the term “saint” prematurely. Bishop Irénée clarified: “I think [a proper way to address him would be] ‘Blessed Archbishop,’ well, that’s what he is, that’s what you would call him until there is official glorification, then he will become the holy Hierarch.”³³

A great deal of work has already been done towards revealing his life to the faithful, a list of sources at the end of this paper contains some of them. However, as very little translation work has yet occurred, and there are great volumes of material that have yet to be brought into the public eye. For example, Blessed Archbishop Arseny’s writings in the *Amerikanski Pravoslavni Vestnik* (American Orthodox Herald), and in *The Canadian Field* were even sent to Russia, where they so impressed Tsar Nicolas II that the Tsar sent him a gold cross in appreciation, as the Emperor expressed it, for feeding him with this “food

³² Telephone interview with Bishop Irénée Rochon, August 26, 2014.

³³ Ibid

for the soul.”³⁴ These should all be translated into English so English language parishioners can then let our Blessed Archbishop Arseny speak to them directly from his own words. Fr. Andrew Piasta,³⁵ who has done considerable work already, is hoping to be able to do some of this translation work, as he is very fluent in Russian, Ukrainian, and English, and this would be of great value. The work that has been done already reveals an extremely special and saintly person, with inspired energy and focus, wholly dedicated to Christ and to building His Church, and greatly gifted by the Holy Spirit to bring life to whatever purpose God called him to.

The purpose of this paper is not to re-state what has been already been written about Blessed Archbishop Arseny by the Canadian Canonization Committee. What we know of his life so far is well written and readily available,³⁶ and I would encourage anyone who has not yet read it to do so. I will however summarize some of the many highlights and accomplishments of his life, just to give a basic understanding of why many of us consider his life so remarkable, and see him as saintly and gifted and worthy of veneration.

Short Chronological Narrative of Blessed Archbishop Arseny’s life

Archbishop Arseny was born Andrey (Andrew) Lvovich Chahovstov (also spelled Chagovtsov) in a “*sloboda*” (a Cossack settlement in northeastern Ukraine) in 1866. He lost his father as a young boy, but due to his distinguished intellectual abilities, he was enrolled in a school for clergy, where he spent next 11 years. He then studied at the Kharkiv Theological Academy, and graduated with distinction in 1887. He helped and supported his mother and younger siblings by tutoring while in school. He married Paraskeva in 1885, had a son Dionysius in

³⁴ Frs. Lawrence Farley and John Hainsworth. *Akathist to St. Arseny of Winnipeg and Hymns for the Services to St. Arseny of Winnipeg, with Archbishop Arseny: A Vita*. Montreal, Alexander Press, 2007, p. 39.

³⁵ Telephone interview with Fr. Andrew Piasta, August 21, 2014.

³⁶ Canonization Committee of the Orthodox Church in Canada. *The Life of Blessed Arseny*, <<http://www.archdiocese.ca/content/life>>

1886 (who later became a priest and died as a martyr saint in 1937 under the Russian communists), and was ordained to the Diaconate in 1887, and to the Priesthood in 1890. His wife Paraskeva died very young, and he experienced great anguish. His young son was taken in by relatives as Arseny is tonsured a monk in 1900. Within a year he is recognized for exceptional service and put in charge of all services at the Kuriazhskiy Monastery in eastern Ukraine. In 1902, St. Tikhon Belavin, seeing his exceptional character and talent, recruits Fr. Arseny to travel with him to North America as a missionary priest. He becomes rector of the Troy, New York, Church in 1903, and then transfers to the Mayfield, PA, Church, where he stays four years, from 1904 to 1908. This was a large formerly Uniate parish, which returned to Orthodoxy, and was brought in by St. Alexis Toth just before Archimandrite Arseny's arrival. Fr. Arseny was greatly slandered and reviled in this period for his work in former Uniate parishes by zealous Uniates, so much so that the State of New York brings a criminal libel charge against two of the employees of the Uniate newspaper *Swoboda*. In 1906, he starts both St. Tikhon Monastery and Orphanage in Pennsylvania,³⁷ and then in 1907 goes to Russia to raise half the funds needed to build the monastery. Upon his return, he brings back 50 holy relics for the North American Orthodox Church. He is assigned Dean of Canada in 1908, and works tirelessly, gaining a reputation of a great orator and is called a Canadian Chrysostom due to his greatly admired preaching skills, and his inspirational writings in an Orthodox Christian journal that he initiated (*The Canadian Field*). He is awarded a gold cross by the Russian Czar, who is much impressed with his writings. He brings hundreds of Uniates back into the Orthodox Church.³⁸ There are many records demonstrating how much he was loved by Canadians, so much so that 16 years after he left Canada, his memory was still so alive and revered. When it was time

³⁷ "His Grace, The Most Rev. Archbishop Arseny, Founder of the St. Tikhon's Monastery, Orphanage and Theological Seminary," in *The Tikhonaire: Souvenir of the Annual Saint Tikhon Pilgrimage*, Monday, May 31st, 1948, pages 3-5. <http://issuu.com/sainttikhons/docs/1948_tikhonaire/1?e=3077719/5885897>

³⁸ Telephone interview with Kyril Holden, August 13, 2014. Mr. Holden: "I've read other reports from sort of the competitors, the Uniates themselves. There are some history books that were written by some of the old timers there, and they said the same thing; they considered him to be a formidable kind of enemy of the great Catholic Church because he was so good at converting people and he had such a talent for oratory. Arseny did have the gift of conversion there's no question about that. He travelled a lot into the areas where the Uniates were."

to appoint a bishop for Canada following World War I, Canadians requested Bishop Arseny to return from Serbia, where he was in a monastery, exiled by the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. In 1910, Bishop Arseny returned to Russia due a very serious health problem. By 1913, he has already gained a strong reputation as a very popular preacher working with the Orthodox, and converting many non-Orthodox, and he is named the head of the Eparchial Missionary effort by an Act of the Holy Synod.³⁹ In the beginning of World War I, Archimandrite Arseny is assigned to pastor the large Gregory-Biziukov Monastery, and in this period he also served as a military Chaplain. During the Russian civil war triggered by the Bolshevik takeover of 1917, he joins the White Army, and is appointed head Chaplain of All Ukraine, and made chairman of the Commission for the Acquisition of Material Means. He is captured and sentenced to death in 1920, but the night before his execution, he is miraculously saved by advancing German soldiers. After the civil war, Fr. Arseny settles in Serbia where he serves as Parish Priest, and then is put in charge of the large Holy Archangel Monastery,⁴⁰ built by Emperor Stefan Dusan in 1343. While there, Archimandrite Arseny plans a large archaeological survey project, which starts in 1926. The same year he is consecrated Bishop of Winnipeg and all of Canada at the request of Metropolitan Platon of America, and with the blessing of the Patriarch of Serbia Dmitri. Among the bishops sponsoring his consecration were His Beatitude Antony, Metropolitan of Kiev and Galicia, and the Chairman of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, His Grace Hermogen, Bishop Of Ekaterinoslav and Novo-Moscow, and His Grace Gavril of Cheliabinsk and Troitskiy. Hierarchs and clergy who fled Bolshevik massacres settled primarily in eastern Europe, where they organized the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR), which they hoped to be a temporary institution serving the needs of the faithful until Bolsheviks were defeated and the Russian Church was once again reunited. ROCOR recognized Metropolitan Platon as head of the Russian Church in North America, and under this recognition they agreed to consecrate Bishop Arseny on behalf of Metropolitan Platon to serve in Canada

³⁹ *Detailed Timeline Vita of Archbishop Arseny*, pages 22 -23, items 39 and 40.

⁴⁰ "Monastery of the Holy Archangels," Wikipedia, accessed on January 14 2015
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monastery_of_the_Holy_Archangels>

under Metropolitan Platon (soon the church in North America became known as the Metropolia). After his consecration, Bishop Arseny was sent to Canada to assume his new position there. From 1926-1936, he serves as a ruling bishop in Canada, travelling constantly and initiating new projects. Among other things, Bishop Arseny started the Sifton Monastery in Manitoba, and an institute for clergy and lay education in Winnipeg. Following World War I, and havoc caused by the Russian civil war and the Bolshevik takeover, the Canadian Orthodox Church was in disarray with a number of canonical and non-canonical and heretical church groups trying to establish themselves as a Canadian national church. Besides the North American Diocese of the Russian Church under Metropolitan Platon, which was the legitimate successor of the canonical Orthodox church responsible for Canada, there were groups from the Uniate church, the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada (UGOCC), the Zhuk Ukrainian schismatic's (UOCA), the so-called Living Church created by the Russian Bolsheviks in their effort to infiltrate and destroy Orthodoxy worldwide, ROCOR, Bishop Adam Philipovsky⁴¹ and others. In 1928, Bishop Arseny writes:

Never by any means allow into the life of the Church any politics, and with all your strength root out all nationalistic chauvinism. The Sheppard must be dear to every member of the flock, whether he is from big, small, dark, white, Carpatho-Rus, Bukovina, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and so on. First of all: ORTHODOX.⁴²

In 1929, he consecrates Holy Resurrection Church in Vancouver alongside with Metropolitan Platon. In 1931, he is given a moving and loving *Gramota* (an Orthodox Church award of very special appreciation) from his Canadian flock.⁴³ In 1932, he starts an orphanage at Sifton, Manitoba, initially housing 3 children.

⁴¹ Archbishop Seraphim in his telephone interview of July 26, 2014, noted: "Archbishop Adam in the 1920's and Archbishop Arseny had much correspondence to bring him (Archbishop Adam) back into the fold, as he had become schismatic. Eventually Archbishop Adam was brought back into the fold under the Moscow Patriarchate."

⁴² The Canonization Committee of the Orthodox Church in Canada. *Detailed Timeline Vita of Archbishop Arseny* <<http://www.archdiocese.ca/content/detailed-timeline>> pages 36-37.

⁴³ The Canonization Committee of the Orthodox Church in Canada. *Detailed Timeline Vita of Archbishop Arseny* pages 43-44.

In 1935, he is shot in Canora, Saskatchewan, at a Parish meeting in a house, and his leg is left severely damaged.⁴⁴ The injury forced Bishop Arseny to retire (or so was his intent) as he was then 70 years old, and with his leg badly damaged he went back to his beloved St. Tikhon's Monastery in Pennsylvania. However, in 1937 he attended the 6th All American Council of the American Church where he realized that the need for a theological seminary in North America had not been resolved, and proposed to start one at St. Tikhon's Monastery. Therefore, he was asked to head a working group of six, (4 clerics and 2 lay persons)⁴⁵ to report back on this opportunity. Not only does Bishop Arseny submit a report, but he had the school started with 4 professors and the first 4 students by 1938. He also started a clergy retirement home at the same time. In his "retirement" he served as the first Rector of St. Tikhon's Seminary, and was much loved by all the students who looked after him. I have interviewed a few of the students of St. Tikhon's from the 1940s, who remember Blessed Archbishop Arseny, and all I have talked with have very warm and precious memories of him. Fr. Daniel Ressetar reminisces:

Every couple weeks I [Fr. Daniel Ressetar] would do a shift looking after St. Arseny at his house. He used to ask me to braid his hair before he went to bed. He used to leave his house quite early to go to Vespers and Liturgies as he couldn't move very quickly because of his injury. There were no cars at the seminary to pick him up so he would just struggle and drag himself to church services. He never served but always attended, and we would always go and get his blessing before serving.⁴⁶

In 1938, Bishop Arseny was elevated to Archbishop. Metropolitan Theophilus wrote in 1938: "let us give thanks to the Lord for the Pastor's school at St.

⁴⁴ Telephone interview with Fr. Daniel Ressetar, August 13, 2104.

⁴⁵ Fr. John Perich, *History of Saint Tikhon's Monastery – Orphanage – Seminary*. <http://www4.g3a.com/_johnp/theisis2.pdf>. This 204 page thesis written by Archpriest John Perich in 1979 on the history of Saint Tikhon's Monastery, orphanage, and-seminary and dedicated to "the blessed memory of His Holiness Patriarch Tikhon; His Eminence Archbishop Arseny; and Protopresbyter Joseph J. Pishtey" (Fr. John's grandfather), contains much information on Blessed Arseny, and has a whole chapter titled "Beginning of a new era - The Arseny Years: 1937-1945."

⁴⁶ Telephone interview with Fr. Daniel Ressetar, August 13, 2014.

Tikhon's has received a worthy beginning because of the great efforts of Archbishop Arseny."⁴⁷ In 1939, Archbishop Arseny helped to start the library at the Seminar (to which he donated most of his books), and in 1941 he and Bishop Alexy from Alaska (who he had recruited to teach music at St. Tikhon's) bless the cornerstone to start the building for the badly needed new orphanage. Blessed Archbishop Arseny lived at the Monastery until his death in 1945. At his funeral there were more than 50 priests, other clergy, and many more lay people. One of his former seminarians who actually dug his grave in 1945, Fr. Daniel Ressetar, told me: "He was very well respected, we knew he was one of the founders of the monastery when I was at St. Tikhon's, and as we had a living founder with us, and that was really something."⁴⁸

Controversy: Analysis of the Trial Transcripts and Other Issues

With the process of glorification of Blessed Archbishop Arseny controversies arose regarding one aspect of his life. The Orthodox Church does not require an official "devil's advocate" in Orthodox circles, as discussions and differing opinions are a normal state of being in the Orthodox Church in all the matters except the Doctrine and Tradition. Especially when a person is being considered for glorification, conflicting opinions are to be expected. I remember discussions at the 14th All American Council of the Orthodox Church in America held in Toronto in 2005. A Lutheran pastor friend of mine attended as he was considering coming over to the Orthodox Church, and wanted to see how we acted in our large council gatherings. There were great line ups at the microphones as representatives of the church administration were grilled on financial questions. It got pretty brutal, and I was wondering how my Lutheran friend was reacting to all the controversy. I asked him once the sessions were over, how he found all the controversy and emotion. He smiled widely and said "I loved everything; there was no discussion about anything regarding the Virgin

⁴⁷ Fr. John Perich, p. 70.

⁴⁸ Telephone interview with Fr. Daniel Ressetar.

birth, the historicity of Christ or anything pertaining to the essentials of the faith. You're just fighting about money and other comparatively insignificant matters – it's very refreshing.”

Bishop Irénée speaking about the present state of the movement to glorify Blessed Arseny pointed out that “to have objections is good, sometimes called the devil’s advocate, usually if there are objections, then you find solutions, you solve those objections, you prove them wrong.”⁴⁹ Archbishop Seraphim echoed these thoughts saying: “Of course there are other opinions. This is the Orthodox Church, there are plenty of other opinions.”⁵⁰

So in this spirit, I would like to address one major factor specific to the reputation of Blessed Archbishop Arseny, and which has had a large influence on the progress of his consideration for glorification. This is the analysis of certain court transcripts by Fr. Oliver Herbal.⁵¹ His speculations regarding the motives of those promoting the glorification of Blessed Arseny, and his much circulated opinion regarding the libel trial have had a chilling effect on the momentum toward his glorification. However, controversy is to be expected, it appears to be necessary, and proper. The 1909 court case in question is the one in which the State of New York brought a criminal libel charge against the Uniate newspaper *Swoboda* employees Konstantine Kirczow and Anthony Chukowskyz, for printing the outrageous claim that Archimandrite Arseny had raped Maria (Mary) Krenitsky (Krinitsky) and fathered her child.⁵² Although Archimandrite Arseny

⁴⁹ Telephone interview Bishop Irénée Rochon. August 26, 2014.

⁵⁰ Telephone interview Archbishop Seraphim. July 26, 2014.

⁵¹ Fr. Oliver, an OCA priest, is Pastor of the Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church, In Fargo, ND, of the Patriarchate of Antioch (Ed).

⁵² A digital copy of that issue of Newspaper *Swoboda (Liberty)* is available here: <<http://www.svoboda-news.com/arxiv/pdf/1908/Svoboda-1908-26.pdf>>. It contains most of the article, starting on page 5, in the leftmost column titled “Blagochinniy.” The beginning of the article is missing from this digital copy. The article is heavily editorialized, very vague on details, and seems to be based rumors and hearsay. For instance, it states that the alleged victim, Maria (Mary) Krenitsky was “between 23 and 25 years old,” suggesting that the author of the article did not personally interview Maria, but knew about her from secondary sources. The last paragraph of the article starts with a sentence: “This is how Orthodox laborers look like in daylight, without [their] masks” (Ed).

resided in St. Tikhon's Monastery in Pennsylvania, the editorial office of *Swoboda* was located in the New York state. I am most grateful to Fr. Oliver for making the 420 pages of trial transcripts easily available on line,⁵³ although I greatly disagree with his line of reasoning regarding the possible guilt of Blessed Arseny.⁵⁴ I would like to share my quite contrary opinion based on reading the same transcripts.

To start, I would like to point out that the mother, Mary Krenitsky, said clearly at the trial that the father of the child was one Andrew Pretash – a worker at St. Tikhon's Orphanage where she was working when she got pregnant.⁵⁵ When asked while testifying under oath if anything happened between her and Fr. Arseny on the ride back to the orphanage on July 29, 1906 (where the libellous *Swoboda* story claimed he raped her)⁵⁶ she said: "No, no nothing, not a word was said."⁵⁷ She then testified that the entire story was fabricated as she was promised payment from the men working for the *Swoboda* newspaper in the amount of \$10,000, and the promise of marriage to one of the men.⁵⁸ She stated that Father Arseny, "did not touch me with his little finger even."⁵⁹ When she found herself pregnant she moved from St. Tikhon's to Mayfield, PA, about 10 miles away from St. Tikhons, and was employed as a "domestic" by one of the town's most respected citizens, Squire (justice of the peace), Samuel Mendelson. Four months before she gave birth she told Mendelson that the father of the child was Andrew Pretash, and he [Mendelson] being a justice of the peace, issued a

⁵³ Matthew Namee, "The Archbishop Arseny Trial Transcript," *orthodoxhistory.org*, April 19 2010, <<http://orthodoxhistory.org/2010/04/19/the-archbishop-arseny-trial-transcript/>>.

⁵⁴ In his analysis of the trial transcripts, Fr. Oliver editorializes, appears to be prejudiced, looks for holes in New York District Attorney's case, and assumes some kind of guilt by Archimandrite Arseny. Fr. Oliver Herbel, "The Criminal Libel Trial and Archbishop Arseny, Part 2," *orthodoxhistory.org*, April 14 2010, <<http://orthodoxhistory.org/2010/04/14/the-criminal-libel-trial-and-archbishop-arseny-part-2/>>

⁵⁵ Namee, Part 1, <<http://orthodoxhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/Arseny-libel-transcript-part-1.pdf>>

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pages 10-13.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, page 68.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Part 2, pages 77-78.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, page 73.

process warrant to arrest Andrew Pretash; but when they went to do so he had already fled.⁶⁰

If we are to accept the story the Uniate newspaper *Swoboda*, and the *Swoboda* made no effort whatsoever to verify it, as it is clear from the trial transcripts, we would have to accept that the alleged rape occurred on July 29, 1906, and the baby was born on June 4, 1907, a week into the 11th month of pregnancy! This would be very much impossible for a human being, and according to the court transcripts it is clear that the court never entertained this idea seriously. Further, such violent behavior is something that is completely out of character for Blessed Arseny, and does not fit anywhere in his long and dedicated life. Although the trial was not completed and the verdict remains unknown, as a Jury member got too sick to attend at the conclusion, a careful reading of the 420 pages of court transcripts suggests that the State of New York had it right when they charged the *Swoboda* editors. The State of New York attorneys certainly thought that the rape story was spurious and outrageous or they would have never prosecuted to begin with. It was not Archimandrite Arseny that was on trial, it was those who published this scandalous story under very questionable circumstances, and with no effort to check any of the facts.

There is another issue that emerged from these court transcripts – questions related to Fr. Arseny’s family. When asked whether he had a son back in Russia, his reply was negative. From recently publicized records it appears that he did have a son, who was given to his relatives to raise when Fr. Arseny became a monk and left all his worldly possessions and life behind, including his son. We do not know why he denied that he had a son in Russia, whether he was attempting to protect his son back in Russia, who later died as a Priest martyr saint in 1937, or did not consider him to be his son any longer or there was some other reason – this is a matter of speculation. It is difficult to see how this issue was relevant at all, and what if anything, the defence or the prosecution might have gained or lost by Fr. Arseny suggesting that he had a son.

⁶⁰ Ibid., Part 3, page 158.

Georges Florovsky in his essay on the “Predicament of the Christian Historian” says: “Obviously, historians want to know what actually happened, but they *want to know it in perspective*”⁶¹ (Italics in the original). Anyone with knowledge of the historic situation at the time of the trial should have a good understanding of what was really going on. There was much conflict between the Orthodox and Uniate Churches, and this was obviously at play in this trial. Through the work of St. Alexis Toth starting around 1890, and continuing well into and past the date of this trial in 1908, with the great help of Blessed Arseny and others, there were huge numbers of Eastern Catholics (Uniates) who came over to the Orthodox Church; the Church that Fr. Arseny was Rector of in Mayfield being a prime example. A short quote from the OCA history website describes the background succinctly:

Yet it was the publication of the Papal Decree *Ea Semper* in 1907 (requiring, among other things, celibacy of the Uniate clergy in America) that most dramatically increased conversions to Orthodoxy. By 1916 the Roman Catholic Church had lost 163 Uniate parishes, with more than 100,000 faithful, to the Russian missionary diocese.⁶²

An interesting story that demonstrates how bitter this division was in Canada as well is told by Kyril Holden:

Around 1904 there started to be a huge legal conflict over the church at Star NWT (now Alberta) over who owned the Church, the Uniates or the Orthodox. It took over 10 years as it went through every court available and finally ended up at the Privy Council in England. It was the longest running court case in the Canadian court system at the time. It was pivotal in having the Church incorporated, as St. Tikhon’s legal council instructed him that unless the Church was an incorporated entity, there would be no sense in even pursuing the court case as there would be no official incorporated entity

⁶¹ Georges Florovsky, *Christianity and Culture*, Collected Works, Volume 2. Belmont, Mass.: Nordland Publishing Company, 1974, p. 44.

⁶² Leonid Kishkovsky, Chapter 2 “Immigration and Conversion (1870- 1920)” in his *Orthodox Christians in North America*, 1995, <<http://oca.org/history-archives/orthodox-christians-na/chapter-2>>

to award the church to, even if he won. So St. Tikon first tried to incorporate nationally with the Government of Canada. He tried to do so, going to the parliament where he won the vote to incorporate in parliament. But when the bill, which had been passed by parliament, went to the Senate, the Senate which was full of Liberal Catholics from Quebec turned it down. The Catholics were violently opposed to allowing the incorporation because the dispute was, after all, between the Catholics and the Orthodox regarding ownership of the Star Church, so they refused to let the bill pass through the Senate. St. Tikon then went and incorporated Province by Province, individually starting with the NWT where the disputed Church was.⁶³

In the trial of the Uniate newspaper *Swoboda*, all of the witnesses for the defence were members of the Uniate community, except supposedly, the writer of the article Hrycko Chaly, which was the pen name for Mr. Narruthenke, as came out later in the trial. He was apparently brought over from Russia as a well-known writer, specifically to implant himself as a spy within the Orthodox community, and to write hugely slanderous anti-Orthodox articles for the *Swoboda* paper. He started working for the *Swoboda* the day after his arrival in the United States and sent in 2 to 3 articles per month, all the while working as a chanter and teacher in the Orthodox Church. In the trial he was asked: “You knew *Swoboda* was opposed to the Russian Orthodox Church, and you were writing articles opposed to the Orthodox Church and taking pay as a Cantor in the Russian Orthodox Church at the same time?” To this Chaly answered, “Yes.”⁶⁴ Later in the trial a very offensive article attacking Metropolitan Platon and the Orthodox Church was produced, which he also admitted of writing.

The editor of the *Swoboda* Konstantine Kirczow, who was one of the defendants named by the prosecution, was also the president of the strongly anti-Orthodox group “The Little Ruthenian,” which had 12,000 Uniate members.⁶⁵ They had purchased the paper about a year before the June 26, 1908 article was published. He was a very smooth speaking and greatly slanderous person, who

⁶³ Telephone interview with Kyril Holden, August 13, 2014.

⁶⁴ Namee, Part 4, page 285.

⁶⁵ Ibid., Part 6, page 353.

went on and on suggesting that he went to Mendelson's, and Mendelson told him it was all true about Arseny, and that actually the alleged rape victim was only one of 4 pregnant ladies sent off from the Monastery, and if it was up to him [Mendelson], he would just blow it up. Kirczow said that Mendelson claimed that Fr. Arseny had told him that "every Jew should be out, but I forgive him for it" (Mendelson was Jewish). Then Kirczow added that Mendelson had told him that he had drawn up the affidavit (in which Mary Krinisky stated that Fr. Arseny never touched her nor was the father of her child), because Mr. Adamiak allegedly bothered him so much, and that he had paid him five dollars to draw it up. In the court transcripts there follows much more completely unbelievable rambling testimony from Kirczow.⁶⁶ Mendelson was then called again to the stand, and denied Konstantin Kirczow's testimony, and stated that nothing suggested by this person had ever occurred.

Mrs. Kdrovitsky, the lady Mary Krinitsky lived with immediately before and after the birth of her son, and who called the midwife to deliver the baby, was also called to testify. She clearly testified that she had been told by Mary K. that Andrew Pretash was definitely the father. The defence council Mr. Kwitkin managed to have her testimony struck on a technicality. He spent much of the trial objecting to practically every question that the Crown Attorney, Mr. Garvan asked, repeating – "objection, as is incompetent, inconsistent, and irrelevant." The judge repeatedly overruled him almost every time, to which he almost always added – "I take an exception." Obviously fed up by his antics, he judge chastised him at one point: "We have over 1000 cases to try in the courts and you must not consume time by your theatrical pose here. You waste more time than any attorney in these courts."⁶⁷ To which the defence council predictably replied: "I take an exception to Your Honour's remark."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ibid., Part 6, pages 356-361.

⁶⁷ Namee, Part 1, page 48.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

The entire trial appears to be a showcase of the ill-will between the Uniate and Orthodox Churches, and their disagreements over century ago, which resulted in Uniate activists attacking Fr. Arseny, among other Orthodox Church leaders. It makes little sense; however, to perpetuate this attack more than 100 years later by ignoring the historical reality of the case, and abusing the trial record to sully the reputation of the most dedicated founder of St. Tikhon's Monastery and Seminary, and one of our most venerable Bishops. This trial record has been presented stretched into some kind of black mark against our venerable Archbishop Arseny – yet another attempt to sully his reputation, 100 years after the original Uniate slander was unsuccessful. However, I would urge anyone interested not to take this or Fr. Oliver's analysis as their own view, but rather to read the transcripts, and prayerfully ask for wisdom and discernment in understanding them.

Other Issues

There has been a story of Blessed Arseny committing perjury in a court case that took place more than two decades after the trial addressed above. It was relayed to me by Bishop Peter, the ROCOR⁶⁹ Bishop of Cleveland when I contacted him at the suggestion of Bishop Irénée.⁷⁰ The short story of that reported event is that at one of the court cases, between ROCOR and the Metropolia Church over a church property they were both contesting ownership of, probably sometime after 1929, Bishop Arseny was in the witness stand. When asked if he had ever been part of ROCOR he allegedly denied that he had been part of it. He was then shown his own consecration papers, which he had signed, and which of course were ROCOR papers, as Bishop Arseny was consecrated by that church. Bishop Peter was told this story by Saint John the Wonderworker, as Bishop Peter was his cell attendant for the last 3 years or so of St John's life.

⁶⁹ ROCOR – the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.

⁷⁰ Telephone interview with Bishop Peter of Cleveland, August 26, 2014.

As it was described above, ROCOR ordained Fr. Arseny as Bishop of Canada, Winnipeg Episcopate, at the request of Metropolitan Platon and with the blessing of the Patriarch of Serbia, His Beatitude Dmitri, to serve under Metropolitan Platon and the North American Diocese of the Russian Church, in Canada. At that time, in 1926, ROCOR was regarded as a temporary self-governing entity still legally under the Patriarchate of Moscow, and so the North American Metropolia was viewed the same. In 1926, ROCOR accepted Metropolitan Platon as head of the Archdiocese of North America in the Russian Church, a self-governing body of the Church in Russia, the only canonical jurisdiction through which both ROCOR and Metropolia derived their own legitimacy. In other words, Blessed Arseny was consecrated not by ROCOR or Metropolia, but by the Patriarchate of Moscow, the Church of Russia. In 1927, there was a sharp break between ROCOR and its mother church, the Patriarchate of Moscow – essentially, by removing itself from Moscow’s jurisdiction, ROCOR became an uncanonical entity. This was followed by a break between the European-based ROCOR and the North American Metropolia, as quite understandably, Metropolitan Platon of America declared ROCOR uncanonical. ROCOR reacted by attempting to install Bishop Apollinary as head of the Russian Church in place of Metropolitan Platon. This was a year after Blessed Arseny was consecrated Bishop of Canada, in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Bishop Arseny’s view of ROCOR would have always lined up with his Metropolitan’s (Platon) view. It should not come as a surprise that he denied ever being consecrated by ROCOR, as ROCOR never had such independent ecclesiastic powers.

By 1929, there were court cases being held all over North America over ownership of buildings, most of which ROCOR won (from Bishop Peter’s story it sounds like they had a very good and theatrical lawyer), and this story probably comes from one of these court cases. Blessed Archbishop Arseny was fiercely loyal to the Archdiocese of North America under the Russian Church throughout all his time in North America. He would never have considered that he was ever part of ROCOR, except in as much as they were under the canonical church in Russia, which they were at the time of his ordination in Belgrade in 1926.. He would see his consecration’s validity coming from the Church in Russia, a

canonical autocephalous entity, not ROCOR, which was never a canonical autocephalous church.

Final Thoughts: Where to From Here?

There is still a fair bit of work to be done should Blessed Arseny grow from a saint of local devotion, and come to be officially glorified. His Grace Irénée, Bishop of Ottawa and Canada, proposes a good road map for future activities that would need to happen, and suggests broader dissemination of the available information on Blessed Arseny:

These people (St. Xenia, St. Herman, St. John Maximovich...) were always commemorated before, in panikhidas, and people would get answers to prayers. You pray for their soul and they answer your prayers. Nothing like that is going on [with memory of St. Arseny]. ... Nothing will happen until it comes from the people.⁷¹

In preparation to write this paper I have spent some time reading as many English language sources as I could find. Information collected by the canonization committee of the archdiocese of Canada some years ago, particularly the *Timeline Vita*,⁷² and the *Life* written by Fr. Kaleeg,⁷³ the Akathist and Hymns prepared by Archpriest Lawrence Farley,⁷⁴ the sample homilies from Archbishop Arseny, and the other articles on the *Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity*, are all very helpful sources and inspiring accounts of Blessed Arseny's life. There are also a number of very interesting articles in the old issues of the *Tikhonaire*, St. Tikhon Seminary's student yearbook and magazine.⁷⁵ He is very much commemorated as the founder of St. Tikhon's Monastery, orphanage,

⁷¹ Telephone interview with Bishop Irénée August 26, 2014.

⁷² *Detailed Timeline Vita of Archbishop Arseny*.

⁷³ *The Life of Bishop Arseny*.

⁷⁴ Frs. Lawrence Farley and John Hainsworth. *Akathist to St. Arseny of Winnipeg and Hymns for the Services to St. Arseny of Winnipeg, with Archbishop Arseny: A Vita*. Montreal, Alexander Press, 2007.

⁷⁵ *The Tikhonaire*, 1948.

and later in his life, of St. Tikhon's Seminary. I have also conducted about 12 telephone interviews with people who are familiar with his life.

My experience as I grew to know Blessed Archbishop Arseny through doing this research was an ever increasing sense of awe and respect for him. In reading and contemplating all that he accomplished, and seeing the way his life blessed the Church wherever he went, it is difficult for me to see how one could have any other response. In speaking with many of those who did the extensive research to provide the very excellent Vita and other work, I encountered the same reaction:

I am 100% certain personally of his holiness and I, having spent time like you digging into the research, I just don't see how the life that he brought with him wherever he went could be anything else but the Holy Spirit shining through him (*Fr. Matthew Francis*)⁷⁶

Arseny was very flowery in his language. When he wrote anything or gave his sermons, my Mother said that people were just awestruck by him... He very much connected with people when he spoke and even the Uniates used to call him the John Chrysostom of Canada (*Kyril Holden*).⁷⁷

I was profoundly impacted by my working on St. Arseny's life and his words.... He gave an astonishing homily – off the cuff I might add – from the Ambo, which was more like an acceptance speech than anything else, and his last words were “I am coming. My heart is ready O my God, my heart is ready.” And those words and many others of his really did impact me a tremendous amount, as did his tireless efforts (*Fr. Kaleeg Hainsworth*).⁷⁸

And he [Bishop Arseny]wrote , “*ni padai duchom*,” “do not fall in spirit,” and you do not fall in spirit either! So, the calibre of the person! He really jumps off the pages of *Ameriikanski Pravoslavnii Vestnik* (American Orthodox Herald), because there is his diary, *The Diary of a Missionary*, and you see

⁷⁶ Telephone interview with Fr. Matthew Francis. August 21, 2014.

⁷⁷ Telephone interview with Kyril Holden.

⁷⁸ Telephone interview with Fr. Kaleeg Hainsworth.

how he uses words, how he puts sentences together, how his soul expressed the truths that he knows. He was quite emotional. Joy would flood him. So, you know, I got to know him more and more through that, and then with Sifton, when you sit in the church, which even though it is not the monastery church (it's the church in town), somehow there, you feel his presence very, very strongly (*Katya Szalaszni*).⁷⁹

These sentiments echo my feelings for Blessed Archbishop Arseny now that I have done research about his life and person. I must admit that before I took the time to read and research, I was not so connected to him. I had no reason to disrespect him in anyway, and I occasionally would venerate his icon alongside other North American Saints, and he has been in the Holy Martyr Peter the Aleut Church in Calgary for many years already; I simply never knew very much about him. However, after researching his life, Archbishop Arseny has now become one of my favourite "saints," although as I said earlier I refer to him now, out of respect for the process and the present stage of his veneration, and respect for the opinion of His Grace Vladyko Irénée, as "Blessed Archbishop Arseny" or "Blessed Arseny."

It is my hope that others will take the time to get to know him and pray for him, and perhaps God will allow him to come from the other side, and once again help His Church. I am hoping that should God ask that Blessed Arseny come and reveal himself clearly as one of His Glorified Saints, that he will respond as he did at the age of 60, when he was sought out by the Canadian parishioners who so lovingly remembered him and joyously called him back to Canada from Serbia: "I am coming. My heart is ready O my God, my heart is ready."

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⁷⁹ "Prairie Voices: An Interview with Katya Szalaszni," *Orthodox Canada, A Journal of Orthodox Christianity*, Vol. 3, No. 5, 2008 <<http://www.orthodoxcanada.com/journal/2008-05-01.html>>