



Illustration: OVD-Info

08.12.2022, 14:23 Sverdlovsk Oblast

СВОЙ ОПЫТ

Putin-antichrist and a sermon of unjust victory: why a priest from the Sverdlovsk region was fined 100,000 rubles

A court of Verkhoturye ruled Evgeniy Pinchuk aka Nikandr (a priest of Russian Orthodox church abroad) to pay a fine of 100,000 rubles for a repeated discreditation of the Russian army (part 1, article 280.3 of the criminal code) last October. The reason for the prosecution is Pinchuk's post on the VK social network, where he called the actions of the Russian army an occupation. OVD-info publishes the priest's story.

Текст на русском

I was probably the last one to find out that a criminal case had been started against me. I got a call from some journalist. He asked me if I was the priest who was oppressed for his anti-war position. I answered that it was me and I started to tell him everything that had happened to me recently. I didn't realise at first that he had been talking about a criminal case.

It all started in March. Right after the invasion of the Russian army into Ukraine, I saw an announcement that there would be a sermon for victory in the local men's monastery. I was outraged: «Have we been attacked? Are we defending ourselves?» The monastery proclaimed that it would pray for victory in the invasion. I criticized this initiative in a local public group on VK and later I was fined 35,000 rubles for this post according to the article of the discreditation of the Russian army (article 20.3.3 of the Administrative code).

I think that the posts in the local public groups were monitored by the police. But there were also several reports written by «law abiding citizens.» One of them was from the monastery itself, another was from the Ekaterinburg eparchy itself. These reports helped police to work faster.

I was unable to collect all the money for the fine, so 40 hours of public works were added to my fine and I was mowing lawns and cleaning up garbage in the center of the city for two weeks and a half.

Ever since that time, I have remained on the hook. I was constantly stressed by getting visits from the police and being summoned for interrogations.

Initially, I was visited by two officers from Center E from Ekaterinburg: they looked wild, like madmen, like gopniks (delinquents) from the 90's. One was bald, the other was permanently smoking an e-smoke pipe, as if he was Sherlock Holmes. They must be recruited this way on purpose, so they would frighten people with their looks. If they hadn't had

documents, I would have thought that they were bandits. Their poor language, jargon and manners were of the underworld.

So they came to my home and started to persuade me to come with them. «We need to have a conversation,» they said. They brought me to the local police station and spent about six hours questioning me.

They asked me about my comments on VK. In one of those I condemned the Russian Orthodox Church for calling for victory where they should be calling for peace. If they don't, it means that they themselves violate God's commandments. It is hard for me to understand that game of the Great Patriotic War, search for the enemy, fight against evil fascists that have supposedly attacked us all over again.

In another post, I wrote that Putin is the Antichrist. I deleted my VK account after that conversation with the policemen, but officers of Center E had taken screenshots of all my posts. They were also helped by «law abiding citizens», this time locals.

During the questioning the officers would read my own comments to me and ask me if I had written them; I would admit that I had.

«What was the purpose of these posts?»

«I wanted to express my personal opinion and attitude towards the current events.»

«How many people have read your publications?»

«I don't know. In total, I have about a thousand followers on VKontakte. However, only 5-10 of them liked my posts.»

But of course, what matters to the police is not how many people actually saw the posts, but the fact that I wrote them. As soon as I confirmed that I was, indeed, the one to write

those posts, their eyes immediately lit up — they've found the culprit. A typical NKVD attitude.



Hieromonk Nikandr (Pinchuk Evgeniy) / Photo: Tatiana Kungurova

Some time later, I was summoned to the Investigative Committee. I was questioned about those very same posts for close to eight hours.

Just as I was finishing telling the journalists about all of it, two FSB officers, a law enforcement officer and an investigator knocked on my door. They explained that a criminal case had been **opened** against me under the Article on Repeated Discreditation of the Russian Armed Forces (Article 280.3 (1) of the Criminal Code). After that, my house was searched. They were looking for phones and computers, but my laptops had broken down, and I lost my phone not long before that.

As a result, they seized empty flash drives and an old smartphone that I never used.

They explained that they were taking those items for formal examination. I was asked to go with them to the Investigative Committee. They questioned me once again. During this «conversation», the police began to put psychological pressure — if I make a deal, they will commute my punishment; and if I keep resisting, things will be looking much worse for me. They tried to persuade me to plead guilty and to write a confession.

In total, seven of my comments appeared in the case file, but only one of them fell under the «Discreditation of the Russian Armed Forces» category. It was a criticism of the Russian Armed Forces — I referred to them as «the face of the Antichrist», and to events in Ukraine as an «aggressive invasion».

So the investigator asked me to confess that I was the one who wrote all the comments that appeared in the case file. Supposedly, if I were to agree, they would petition the court to dismiss my criminal case. And I would only have to pay a court fine of 6,000 to 20,000 rubles.

I agreed and almost immediately realized that I had been scammed. There was no motion to dismiss the case in court. I was immediately awarded a 100,000 ruble fine. And just like that the hearing was over. The judge announced the decision condescendingly: allegedly, 100,000 rubles by installments for 9 months is a very lenient punishment, and I should be grateful. But for our region, 100,000 rubles is a huge amount of money — it would equal a million rubles in Moscow.



A view of the street where Nikandr's parish is located. Verkhoturysye / Photo: Yandex. Maps

Our town is small — it is more of a village, really — there are only 7,000 residents. And I am the only to be prosecuted under the article on discrediting the Russian Army. The news spread quickly here, and a lot of people were shocked when they found out about my criminal case. For the most part, everyone is sympathetic. Nobody expresses their support directly, but their reaction shows that they too do not approve of any of this nonsense, and that they understand that repression can affect everyone.

Criminal cases for discrediting the army are being initiated for this exact purpose — to scare people into submission; and the law enforcement, siloviki, are sending a clear message: if you say something incriminating, we will come for you too.

Most of my relatives are also supportive. Of course, there are some people who have fallen victim to the propaganda. Their position is as follows: we should stick to our business and keep our heads down. My answer to this is: «Is it acceptable for us to have been dragged into a war that nobody needs? Should we, at such times, let ourselves be exploited by the higher-ups?»

I don't blame those who keep their silence. I understand that plenty of people have valid reasons for not speaking openly. However, they oughtn't advocate the invasion of Ukraine because, as far as Christianity is concerned, it is a sin to support this unjust war.

All of my Orthodox friends refuse to be part of the Moscow Patriarchy. The vast majority of them, like me, are against the war. Still, the parishioners of the Moscow Patriarchate find themselves bombarded by propaganda: they are constantly being told a false version of what is happening. It is difficult for me to call these people believers because a true believer should be able to easily recognize good and evil, and separate all the lies and propagandistic messages from what is really happening. If they are unable to do this, it means that they have already become Orthodox zombies, not truly religious people.

Oddly enough, after everything that has happened, I'm not afraid. At this point it doesn't matter to me whether I get imprisoned or not. I understand perfectly well that as soon as they set their eyes on you, they will find an article under which to prosecute you. They can find fault with anyone now.

I don't speak openly on Russian social media anymore. I left only one Facebook account, where I post my thoughts on current events. But I made my account private, to be safe. I have my own social circle, and for now that is enough for me.

I have already started a funding campaign among my friends. They have donated as much as they could. This amount will tide me over for several months. Unfortunately, I can't leave Russia right now. My parishioners are here. Besides, my elderly mother lives with me. She supports me in all my endeavors. She, too, was shocked when «law enforcement officers» came to search our house.

Recorded by Karina Merkuryeva

More to read



The strangling of Crimea

Denis Shedov and Dan Storyev explain how the repression in occupied Crimea was structured and how it evolved