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Patriarch Kirill's New Posterchild Has a Suspiciously High-Ranking Daddy

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Andrei Kuraev / Facebook (edited by The Moscow Times)

This weekend, the Russian Orthodox Church put out a press release praising a young boy in Moscow, claiming that he'd turned down an invitation to join a skiing competition in Austria because it is scheduled during the week of Easter. The boy, Grisha Voronchev, reportedly wrote Patriarch Kirill a letter, explaining that he would rather observe the holiday in Moscow, together with the head of the Church.

Well ahead of Easter, Grisha got his wish this weekend, meeting Patriarch Kirill in Moscow to view the Kremlin's Christmas tree.

"I learned about this from a letter, and thought how good it would be to tell you about Grisha, a young skier who refused a very tempting offer in order to pray together with the Patriarch during Holy Week," said Kirill in a press release on Jan. 8. "I wish you, dear Grishenka, lots of strength, success, and God's help, just as I wish unto all of you, my dear children."

But Grisha Voronchev is no ordinary first-grader, and he likely has his father to thank for the remarkable access to Patriarch Kirill.

According to a Facebook post written by Andrei Kuraev, a Russian Orthodox deacon known for his dissident views, Grisha is the son of Aleksandr Voronchev, a high-ranking state official who currently heads procurement work for Russia's Sports Ministry. Previously, Aleksandr Voronchev also served as a member of a presidential council tasked with developing physical fitness ahead of the Sochi Winter Olympics.

Grisha's brand of skiing is reportedly giant slalom, which Kuraev says requires some of the most expensive equipment in the sport. "But the equipment isn't a problem. After all, his father is Aleksandr Voronchev," Kuraev wrote on Facebook.

"Grisha is no less at home in the Alps than he is in Moscow, and turning down the invitation for some skiing competition is hardly some serious [sacrifice] for him," Kuraev argued, criticizing the Russian Orthodox Church's press office for "spreading stories about kids who write Grandpa Patriarch touching little letters."

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