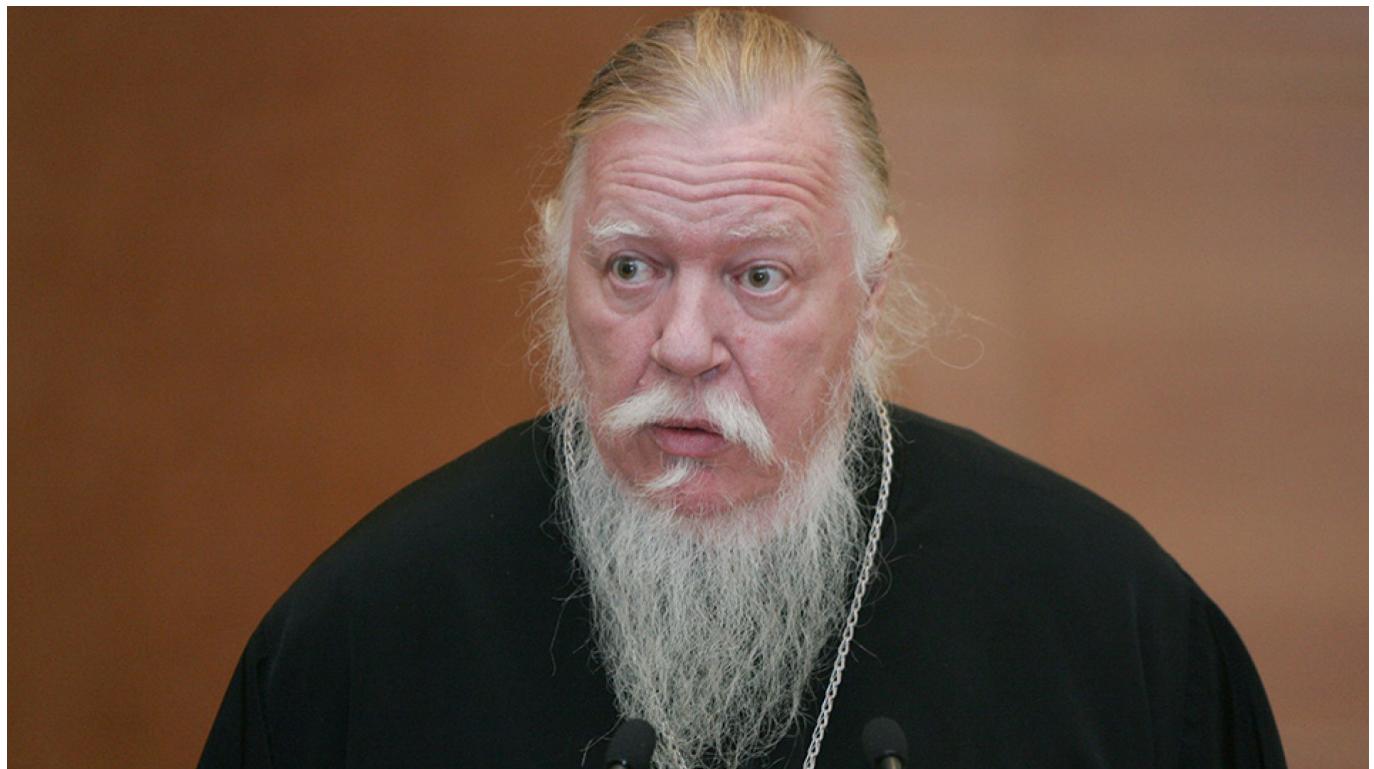


Russian Priest Under Fire for Calling Common-Law Wives 'Prostitutes'

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Archpriest Dmitry Smirnov has raised eyebrows in the past for calling abortions "worse than the Holocaust" and comparing young men to "scrawny chickens." **Anvir Galeyev / TASS**

An outspoken Russian priest has sparked public ire for comparing common-law wives to "prostitutes."

Archpriest Dmitry Smirnov, who has raised eyebrows in the past for calling abortions "worse than the Holocaust" and comparing today's young men to "scrawny chickens," said recently that Russian women "don't know what marriage is."

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"They don't want to say 'I'm a free prostitute,' so they say 'I'm in a civil marriage,'" Smirnov said.

"No, you just provide services for free, but no one considers you a wife," he said at an

Orthodox community meeting published online last week.

Irina Kirkora, the deputy head of President Vladimir Putin's human rights commission, criticized Smirnov's remarks as "humiliating and offensive."

"Can we call men who live in a civil union something too?" Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova asked the Russian Orthodox Church facetiously.

Margarita Simonyan, the chief editor of the Kremlin-funded RT network, brought up her own common-law family as a counterexample to the archpriest's comments.

The Russian Orthodox Church called Smirnov's remarks "an unsuccessful trolling attempt."

Smirnov heads a patriarchal commission for children's and mothers' rights.

His remarks come amid proposals to add a line to Russia's Constitution defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman. Commenting on the proposed changes, Putin vowed not to legalize gay marriage as long as he was in the Kremlin.

Putin has closely aligned himself with the Russian Orthodox Church and sought to distance Russia from liberal Western values during his two decades in power.

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