

Orthodoxy insulted

December 1980
Seattle, Washington

Dear Editor:

I rarely say anything at all about things which, strictly speaking, don't directly concern me, but I want to add my voice to that of Grace Nichols in her letter of Oct. 25, 1980 titled "Gone to Extremes" that appeared in the Tundra Times for November 15, 1980.

I had never heard of the book "Going to Extremes" until I read the above questioned letter. I have no opportunity to read the book to find out what exactly is going on. Yet, I felt hurt by what I read in the letter and what I know at least has gone on, especially in Alaska, but also elsewhere to Russian Orthodox Christians.

I am not Eskimo, but Russian. I have never been personally put in such difficult circumstances and had my life and faith treated so badly as did the writer of the letter. But I have sometimes invited "mainstream" Americans to our Russian Orthodox Church for something important to us as the Russian Orthodox Christmas and felt them take what I feel is holy and treat it with disdain,

disrespect and irreverence. This has frequently been done by American writers in books that I have read on the Russia and Native Orthodox way of life in Alaska, but it has also been done to me personally by American Protestants whom I may have invited to share our experience at something like Russian Orthodox Christmas in church — for in Seattle we have only our church, not a whole village to celebrate such things.

I noticed immediately the phrase "spinning the prayer wheel" in column three of the letter. "Spinning the prayer wheel" is specifically Tibetan Buddhist, NOT Orthodox Christian, Eskimo or Russian. It shows the height of disdain, disrespect, and irreverence as well as inordinate pride, and a feeling of conceited superiority to reduce the prayers of Orthodox Christians, especially at a time like Christ's Birth, to such a blasphemous and superficially mechanical action such as "spinning a prayer-wheel."

Without commenting on the book, which I haven't had the opportunity to read, it is obvious that a person who would write a book along the lines outlined in this letter,

solely from what I can read in the letter, is so absolutely certain that the faithless, largely functionally atheistic "mainstream" American way of life is so obviously superior to anything else not only in the eyes of (objective?) men but also in the eyes of God that instead of us having done something good to them out of the goodness of our hearts by asking them to be with us at such sacred times in our lives, they think that they did us an unbelievable favor by agreeing to be with us when it clearly went against every aspect of their "nature" and they feel it to be almost a "sacred duty" to present our lives and our way of life as some sort of similar thing to the most sordid, deviant and malcontent image that they can think of in their world and to assert that there really isn't any difference between us and that."

I'm sorry if I have hurt or offended anyone in any manner by saying this, but I wanted to express it to someone.

Yours Sincerely,
V. P. Lekanof
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Bingo blues

428 North Price No. 2
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December 23, 1980

Dear Editor:

Sometimes the only way I can express my opinion and thoughts about something I don't like or feel helpless to fight is to write a poem about it. Hence the poem I have enclosed.

I want to clarify something about its content: in it the speaker tells of winning \$333 at Bingo — that is something that I did just recently, and it came just in time to help me get over the Christmas hump. I went again the next night, "Just to see if my raffle ticket (which came with the win) will be drawn."

The second night (when I wasn't in such a blaze of euphoria) I saw the same things that had disturbed me only slightly the night I won. And this time I went by myself. The first night I went for the first time with my sister and brother, and it was a new experience for us all. We enjoyed the games and commented on the brisk sales of the "paper chances." But when I went alone, I had a lot of time to look around. I saw people I have known for years, some I went to school with (one woman inspired this poem) and others I had met when I worked for the government.

I came away with a profound sense of sadness for the many lonely people I saw, whose lives were being filled, not by the warmth of friends and family and fun, but the desperate (for some) hope that their card

would be the winning one, that the rip-up slips would hold money for them. I saw a woman actually win \$500 from a "paper chance" — but she had spent \$100, and I thought, "What if she had not won tonight?"

I write this with a message in mind to people who have

become over-involved with what was meant to be a harmless, occasional pastime: "Be careful you or your family are not consumed by your growing obsession."

Thank you for the opportunity to express myself.

Sincerely,
Vernita Zilys