

REDISCOVERING THE ORTHODOX PAST: THE MICROHISTORICAL APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IN IMPERIAL RUSSIA*

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Serious scholarly research on religious history in general and on Russian Orthodoxy in particular is still in its infancy. While prerevolutionary scholars did make some creditable contributions (chiefly in the sphere of source publication and institutional history, narrowly defined), they had hardly begun to tap the rich reservoirs of archival and printed resources. In part, this neglect was due to the Church's jealous monopoly over archives and its predictable reluctance to expose these materials to use by muckraking scholars, especially secular historians.¹ But a good share of the blame rests with the historians, who took little interest in modern religious history, in large measure because of religious indifference, a condescension toward the "superstitious" masses, and a visceral belief in

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¹ To be sure, the Russian Orthodox Church sought to refute criticism of restricted access; see, for example, its press rejoinder to criticism in *Rech'* (no. 168: 22 June 1912), claiming that all researchers were in fact admitted to the archive (RGIA, Fond 797, opis' 82, otdel 2, stol 3, number 339, folium 1). In fact, of course, access was restricted; even the scholarship of researchers from the ecclesiastical domain was subject to close scrutiny and censorship.

an inexorable secularization that would gradually efface the folk's vestigial darkness. Even this modest level of research ended in 1917: apart from antireligious potboilers in the twenties, Soviet scholarship ignored religion (with a slight dispensation for the "anti-feudal" Old Believers).² Only in the last decade have scholars, in Russia and abroad, seriously engaged ecclesiastical and religious history.³ Given the poverty of prior scholarship, one might be tempted to conclude that almost *any* research would make a positive contribution. The qualifier "almost" is necessary, since some research in fact has added little—either because it is redundant or because it makes merely decorative use of printed and, especially, archival sources. Perhaps the most depressing example of redundancy is the deluge of repetitive works about Soviet repression of the Church,⁴ the aim being not to analyze religious history, but to demonize Bolsheviks and to canonize (literally) believers as martyrs. Even the better scholarship tends to concentrate on Bolsheviks, not believers, and zealously demonstrates how profoundly the Bolsheviks despised and destroyed the Church and its adherents—which is hardly breaking news. Nevertheless, some historians—in Russia and abroad—have finally begun to explore important, but neglected areas such as monasticism, missions, and popular Orthodoxy.

² The obvious exception is the "Pokrovskii school"—those highly productive scholars trained and gathered around N. N. Pokrovskii in Novosibirsk, with diverse and original works on the Old Belief and, to a lesser extent, Russian Orthodoxy. A few other works might also be cited, such as the historical study by an anthropologist, Nosova, "Bytovoe pravoslavie."

³ Apart from a plethora of local studies, antiquarian and mindless summaries that Hayden White would dismissively categorize as an "archival report" (*Metahistory*, ix), there have been some substantial studies at the diocesan, city, and biographical level, including: Nosova, "Bytovoe pravoslavie"; Spasenkova, "Pravoslavnaia traditsiia"; Dixon, "Church, State and Society"; Chulos, *Converging Worlds*; Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy*; and Kizenko, *A Prodigal Saint*. Compared with European and American historiography, however, research is still relatively modest in empirical, comparative, and theoretical terms. Alas, even when local repositories are used, the research tends to follow traditional lines of ecclesiastical history, to replicate earlier scholarship, and to forego the opportunity to exploit new questions or to pose old ones in new ways in the light of new sources. For example, see Rimskii, *Pravoslavnaia tserkov'*.

⁴ Throughout, this text makes a sharp distinction between the "Church" (national institution) and the "church" (the nuclear parish unit, coterminous with the parish community of believers).

Perhaps most encouraging of all, even stalwart secular historians—who for decades denied the significance of religion and simply ignored this dimension—have come to include chapters and sections on religious and ecclesiastical life. Most historians, even if not engaged in research on ecclesiastical or religious history, would now concur that such research is not esoteric but essential for a proper understanding of both the imperial and Soviet periods.⁵

While this research has been quantitatively massive and thematically innovative, it has been less resourceful in conceptual and methodological terms. Apart from the general failure to employ new approaches (especially anthropology, sociology, and post-modernist textual analysis) and to frame the research comparatively, recent historiography on religious history has generally been disappointing in strictly empirical terms: it has failed to make substantial, critical use of the abundant sources (especially archival). Quite apart from a superficial empirical research, rarely have historians deconstructed and historicized their sources—in particular, by rethinking the structure and limitations of the existing (and now accessible) repositories. Archives are not fountains of divine truth, but the skeletal remains of defunct institutions; it is as important to understand their limitations as it is to use them.⁶

Western historiography has, over the last decades, long since recognized the need to shift from national (or meta-) historical frameworks and to explore more manageable, concrete units—be they regional, community, or biographical. Whether from a distrust

⁵ For an assessment of new research on Russian Orthodoxy, see Freeze, “Recent Scholarship,” 269–278. See also the overview by Engelstein, “Holy Russia in Modern Times,” 129–156.

⁶ The need for a critical deconstruction of archives and for greater use of oblast and city repositories has informed recent Russian scholarship, reflected in the profusion of provincial monographs and dissertations, but also in thoughtful, sophisticated work on the use of such local courses. See, for example: Luehrmann, *Religion in Secular Archives*; Lurman, “Chto my mozhem znat’”; Mitrokhin, “Bolezn’”; and Mitrokhin, “V poiskakh.” On a general theoretical level, see the informed discussion in Blouin and Rosenberg, *Processing the Past*. It must be said, however, that comparable historicization of Russian archives is making slow progress; even conferences and collections emphasizing the importance of provincial archives for the study of Russian church history do little more than list and describe materials rather than historicize their collection, structure, and preservation. See Afanashev, *Arkhivy*.

of theoretical constructs of the social sciences, a determination to address significant issues at a “real” level, or a desire to produce more engaging forms of narrative, historians have shown less interest in synthesis than in the singular. That interest in the particular is hardly new; antiquarianism, in ecclesiastical or secular history, has long been extant. But the “new local history”—sometimes lumped under the slippery, diffuse term “microhistory”—differs fundamentally from its forebears, partly because of a professionalization of the field, more recently because of the influence of postmodernist challenges to the earlier historiography. The fundamental objective is to extract a lot from a little, not a little about a lot; the capacity for autonomous generalization (whereby the historian, not some bureaucratic intermediary writing a summary report) presupposes use of the original, undigested data and reports that ultimately found a dim, even distorted, reflection in the documentation at higher levels in a given institution. This new approach has generated a plethora of path-breaking microhistorical studies, not by antiquarians seeking to discover the local past and its glories, but by prominent professional historians. Underlying this scholarship is a growing body of theoretical literature, delineating the opportunities—and the limitations—to microhistory.⁷ Although the recent fashion in “transnational” and “global” history has disposed some to dismiss microhistory as “arcane” and “antiquarian,” most historians recognize complementarity—the fruitfulness of combining the big and the small, the macro and the micro, the intimate stories and the larger narratives in the study of history.⁸

⁷ For critical, extended discussions of the new local history, see: Brown, “Microhistory and the Post-modernist Challenge,” 1–19; Peltonen, “Clues, Margins, and Monads,” 347–359; Levi, “On Micro-History,” 97–119; Lepore, “Historians Who Love Too Much,” 129–144; Schulze, *Sozialgeschichte*; Richardson, *Changing Face*; Raftis, “British Historiography Decentralizes,” 143–151; Amato, *Rethinking Home*; Ginzburg, “Microhistory,” 10–35; Schlumbom, *Mikrogeschichte*; Muir and Ruggiero, *Microhistory*; Dülmen, *Historische Anthropologie*; Medick, *Weben und Überleben*; Kuehn, “Reading Microhistory,” 512–534; and Carroll, “Reflections on Regionalism,” 120–131.

⁸ Aslanian, “How Size Matters.” For spirited defense of microhistory and elucidation of its importance, see: Magnússon and Szijártó, *What Is Microhistory?*; Trivellato, “Is There a Future?”; and, Szijártó, “Four Arguments for Microhistory.”

This paper will argue for the need to “de-imperialize” Russian Church history and to conduct intensive, local studies. It is not merely because of the obvious need to go beyond the capitals (Petersburg was no more Russia than Paris was France), but critically to assess the epistemological basis of our research, especially archival. While the need for local studies is self-evident when materials exist *only* in diocesan archives,⁹ the argument here is that it applies no less to spheres where the holdings in central archives are voluminous and seemingly inclusive. It is essential, given the provenance and structure of the sources, for religious history to be written from the bottom up (literally, not nominally) and to draw heavily on local repositories—that is, oblast and city archives, along with a host of other unofficial, decentralized collections (personal *fondy*, library manuscript holdings, and the like). Such research can not only augment, but fundamentally reshape, the conclusions constructed on the basis of files in central repositories. In conceptual terms, it is important to recognize that the “Imperial Church” is a social construction, an analytical imaginary, something that elites strove to reify institutionally, but which parishioners vigorously contested, evaded, and ignored. Despite the systematic attempt by the post-Petrine Church to usurp the traditional prerogatives of the parish, believers—especially from the mid-19th century—tenaciously battled to reassert their rights and will. Power gravitated downward; to understand power and politics in the Church, it is essential to shift attention from the center to the periphery. While one should not ignore the center (both its policies and its documentation—massive, well preserved, and systematized for easy access), it is essential to conduct the kind of grassroots research that has long dominated modern scholarship on ecclesiastical and religious scholarship in the West.¹⁰

⁹ Thus, whereas the Synod has the *formuliamye spiski* (service records) of clerical elites (bishops and abbots), one must turn to diocesan repositories for analogous information about the parish clergy and rank-and-file monastic clergy—in the *klirovye vedomosti* (parish staff records) of white clergy and the annual reports on monks and nuns. For the monastic records, see typical files for Vladimir diocese with data on age, education, social and geographic origin, and date of tonsure, in GAVO, Fond 556, op. 1, Nos. 4428, 4425, 4215, and 4426.

¹⁰ Although the focus here is on central and diocesan archives, similar differences pertain to printed sources, especially the ecclesiastical and secular provincial press, both central and local. Apart from the well-known

After first historicizing the institutional development and hence structure of archival repositories, this paper will examine three cases (of many) to show how the use of diocesan archives can not only supplement, but substantially change our database, our methodology, and ultimately our conclusions: 1) confession and communion statistics; 2) ecclesiastical reports about popular religiosity; and, 3) divorce cases. While scholars have used central archives to elucidate these matters, it is important to see how the use of local repositories dramatically changes, not merely enhances, our understanding.

Historicizing Church Archives

To begin with, historians should rethink the applicability of such notions as “institution,” especially with respect to Russian Orthodoxy. “Institution” itself is an alien abstraction, borrowed from Western sociology and long lacking a clear linguistic analogue in Russian language and social thought. Significantly, even the progenitor of this conception—Western sociology—has of late come to realize how deficient, even misleading, this term has come to be, referring simultaneously to a broad range of diverse phenomena (from corporate organizations to normative customs) with wide variations in

(but little-used) diocesan gazettes (*eparkhial'nye vedomosti*) that began to appear from 1860, it is important to tap as well the local secular press. Above all, that includes the non-ecclesiastical local newspapers and journals that increased so rapidly in the late 19th and early 20th century. This local press contains a wealth of ground-level reports that significantly complement the files in Church archives. In Vladimir diocese, for example, local newspapers like *Vladimirskii listok* and *Staryi vladimirets* regularly included much about religious and Church affairs. For example, *Staryi vladimirets* reported about a radical priest in Kursk diocese (11 February 1910), clerical protests against plans for a public dance during Lent (3 March 1910), relative quiet during carnival (6 March 1910), and results of a recent diocesan assembly (9 March 1910). The local papers also included a fair share of anticlerical reports, for example, complaints about priests who rush pell-mell through the liturgy (“Golos mirian,” *Ivanovskii listok*, 1911, no. 60 [18 March]:3) and disorders in a monastery (“V monastyre,” *Staryi vladimirets*, 1913, no. 203 [17 September]:3). But the local papers also published very interesting accounts of religious life, such as processions and pilgrimages (for example, “Krestnyi khod,” *Ivanovskii listok*, 1911, no. 145 [10 July]:2, and “Khronika,” *Vladimirskii listok*, 1913, no. 19 [26 May]:1) and miraculous healings (“Istselenie bol'noi poslushnitsy v Skorbiashenskom monastyre,” *Ivanovskii listok*, 1911, no. 16 [22 January]:1).

their structure, purpose, and powers. Worse still, the term “institution” often becomes ahistorical, with continuities and consistencies concealing the processes of change and differentiation within a single “institution.”

These same qualifications apply to the Russian Orthodox Church as an “institution.” In fact, it lacks the presumed static features of an institution, as it underwent profound changes in its formal structure, property and assets, and allocation of operational power. The Imperial Church certainly did evince the strains toward (and from) standardization and centralization, but that process of institution-building was incremental, incomplete, and uneven; contested by lay parishioners, it was ultimately undone by the Bolsheviks.¹¹ What St. Petersburg decreed *was* important, but its wishes did not invariably (even often) become grassroots reality. To be sure, from the mid-18th century, the ecclesiastical authorities in St. Petersburg (initially the Synod, later the chief procurator) sought to centralize ecclesiastical power and to standardize religious practice, but that was a slow, difficult undertaking—all the more for an organization now bereft of its landed wealth (after 1764) and charged with administering a realm so vast, so dispersed, and so diverse.

Nor was the process unilinear: from the mid-19th century the Imperial Church began to undergo countervailing, “deinstitutionalizing” processes. In that sense, the turning point in the modern history of Russian Orthodoxy was not 1917 but 1850: hitherto church authorities had gradually expanded their control over parish life, but henceforth they gradually relinquished, or forfeited, their control over popular religious life. If in 1850 the episcopate controlled clerical appointments, supervised parish churches, siphoned off their candle revenues, and tightly regulated such matters as marriage and divorce, they gradually relinquished this power in succeeding decades. By the final decades of the *ancien régime*, its administration proved too small—and resistance too great—to manage religious life and institutions at the base. When the Bolsheviks disestablished the church in 1917–1918 and transferred “all power to the parish,” they essentially completed and codified a process already long at work.

¹¹ See Freeze, “Von der Entkirchlichung zur Laisierung”; and Freeze, “Vsiia vlast’ prikhodam.”

There were several principal reasons for this dismantling of ecclesiastical power. One was ideological: it correlated with similar processes elsewhere in society, specifically, the decentralization and empowerment of local society to address, and effectively to resolve, local needs. As in the case of state administration, clergy—even conservative bishops—came increasingly to favor proposals to transfer authority from St. Petersburg to the diocese and to construct a far more decentralized administration based on regional units (metropolitanates), with greater autonomy at the diocesan level as well. While the goal was partly to increase efficiency and to be more flexible in dealing with local problems, these proposals derived principally from a desire to liberate the church from state tutelage—reified in the personae of chief procurators like D. A. Tolstoi and K. P. Pobedonostsev. That impulse, ever present, gained momentum from the mid-19th century but became particularly powerful after the manifesto on freedom of religious confession in April 1905.

A second factor was the desire to tap into the wellspring of popular Orthodoxy—that is, to revive the parish and lay participation. The motives for such “parish empowerment” were diverse: some sought to mobilize the laity against an incipient de-Christianization, others envisioned an opportunity to reassert Orthodoxy’s role in secular affairs (through the “parish commune”).¹² But still more important in driving such ideas was pressure from below: in the post-reform era, the laity came increasingly to contest ecclesiastical policy and power, to reassert their traditional prerogatives. Although church authorities fought such “usurpation,” they increasingly had to contend with attempts by the laity to choose their local clergy,¹³ to restructure and especially to reduce

¹² Freeze, “All Power to the Parish?” 174–208.

¹³ Although the Church did not formally concede the right of parishioners to select their clergy until 1917 (which was then substantially withdrawn by the Church Council [*sobor*] in 1918), the issue was widely discussed in the press and various Church commissions. Even without a formal concession, the parishioners began to exert pressure by resorting to accusations—grounded or false—to rid themselves of unwanted clerics. For a typical complaint, see the petition from parishioners in August 1904 to the Lithuanian consistory. See LVIA, Fond 605, op. 9, No. 741, folia 176–204v. The increase in such complaints provoked concern, especially among the clergy, and impelled the clerical assembly of the Lithuanian diocese to ask the bishop to proceed warily before authorizing a full-scale, humiliating criminal investigation. See LVIA, Fond 605, op/9, No. 1724, ff. 105–106.

financial support for the clergy,¹⁴ to regulate local religious practice,¹⁵ and to control the expenditure of parish funds.¹⁶ As the Church engaged in protracted (and fruitless) debates about “parish reform” in the early 20th century, virtually the entire discussion concerned how, and to what degree, the Church should recognize lay power in these critical matters.

A third dynamic driving deinstitutionalization was the growing gap between ecclesiastical resources and goals: the Church simply lacked the human and financial resources to expand its administrative apparatus to keep pace with the demographic, social, and cultural changes overtaking late Imperial Russia. The sheer rate of demographic growth outdistanced the expansion of ecclesiastical administration, as the ratio of parishioners to ecclesiastical administration inexorably increased, especially at the diocesan level. As the massive, complex protocols and journals of the Synod and diocesan consistories make clear, the Church faced an administrative task of mind-boggling complexity, their small and underfinanced staff being charged with a vast array of obligations, from conducting divorce trials to managing an immense physical plant (including not only churches and lands, but also various pieces of commercial real estate).¹⁷ The accelerating pace of social changes

¹⁴ For example, see the case in Vladimir diocese in 1905 where the parishioners adopted a resolution to reduce the gratuities paid to the clergy—to the latter’s predictable dismay. See GAVO, Fond 556, op. 111, No. 1111, ff. 387–388v [consistory journal of 14 December 1905].

¹⁵ Most important was the Church’s acquiescence, begrudging at the central level, to the canonization of local saints in the final decades of the *ancien régime*. See the discussion and references in Freeze, “Subversive Piety,” 307–350.

¹⁶ The “parish question”—reestablishment of the laity’s right to choose priests and to control parish resources—was a central focus of reform discourse in the early 20th century. For the Church’s recognition of the need to resuscitate the “parish community” but its abiding ambivalence toward empowering the “dark masses,” see the discussions that followed a synodal invitation on 18 November 1905 to discuss the issue—as, for instance, in *Sobranie dukhovenstva i tserkovnykh starost tserkvei g. Arkhangel’ska po voprosu ob ustroenii prikhodskoi zhizni* (Arkhangel’sk, 1906), 9–12; TsDIAK Ukrainy, Fond 127, op. 1003, g. 1906, No. 8; DAZhO, Fond 1, op. 33, No. 2501, ff. 5, 7.

¹⁷ For example, the protocols of the Lithuanian consistory in the 1890s reveal how much time it had to devote to handling financial matters, overseeing construction projects, leasing land, selling timber from Church-owned forests, establishing new parishes, administering gifts and donations, and the like (LVIA, Fond 605, op. 9, Nos. 327 and 444).

associated with industrialization and urbanization proved no less taxing; with the ever growing numbers of uprooted and unregulated departing the village, with the reverse intrusion of urban culture through migrant labor and universal military conscription, the Church quite naturally faced the impossible task of tracking and teaching a mobile, acculturating flock. Indeed, it feared both de-Christianization and re-Christianization, with intense and mounting changes from the Old Belief, sectarianism, and recantation of those previously—voluntarily or otherwise—converted to Orthodoxy from other confessions.

This “re-localization” of power from the center to periphery had two significant implications for the structure of archival repositories. First, in sheer quantitative terms, the center of gravity in documentation shifted downwards: although the absolute volume of documentation sent to the center increased, the relative share sharply contracted, with St. Petersburg receiving a dwindling proportion of total paperwork. As bishops ruled and parishes resisted, as the rationale and politics of decentralization gained ascendancy, an increasing proportion of decision-making came at the diocesan and indeed parish level. Moreover, the sheer increase in the magnitude of ecclesiastical administration mandated “filtering”—to reduce the quantity of documents sent to St. Petersburg and, no less important, to homogenize and to simplify their content. Petersburg authorities obtained more and better documentation, but that very growth entailed significant distorting elements: the need for annual reports to process, tabulate, and summarize required that the information be aggregated, generalized, and abstracted. As power devolved downward, the documentation to St. Petersburg became more formulaic and uniform, belying the vast complexity and kaleidoscopic diversity of diocesan, district, and parish realities. That growing disparity between central and local documentation (and its implications for historical research) is apparent in three quite different types of sources: 1) the statistics on confession and communion; 2) clerical reports about religiosity; and 3) records on marital breakdown and divorce.

The Statistics on Confession and Communion

In an effort to quantify and measure “religiosity,” European historians utilize a number of indices—none of which is perfect, but which collectively provide some measure of the intensity and forms of popular piety. Recruitment to holy orders (reflecting geographic and social affiliation with the Church), material contributions (amounts, types, sources, targets, geographic distribution), records

on church attendance, and data on confession and communion—such are some of the statistical measures used to determine whether the flock (and which flocks) were willing to pray and pay. These quantitative indicators, to be sure, are a very imperfect measure: not only are the records incomplete and inaccurate, but they tend to measure conformity more than conviction, to equate public with private piety, to privilege institutional over informal observance, and to conflate activists and conformists into a single category of “believer.” Nevertheless, these different indicators do provide a useful index of popular recognition of organized religion, with decreases—or increases—providing insight into the fortunes of a particular church. The data on confession and communion, in particular, constitute a key statistical indicator in the historical sociology of religious life in Western Europe.

The Russian Orthodox Church did not record, much less assemble in St. Petersburg, such data until the 18th century. The initial impulse came under Peter the Great (principally to identify and tax dissenters), but decades would pass before priests recorded and bishops collected these reports. By the 1770s, diocesan and central Church authorities were systematically collating and summarizing these data, and they would continue to do so until the end of the *ancien régime*. The reports, moreover, included more than the mere numbers of those who performed, or omitted, their duty to make confession and receive communion. Using the nominal lists filed by parish priests after the annual Easter services,¹⁸ diocesan officials compiled elaborate tables on the patterns of religious observance. These tables, which were subsequently sent to St. Petersburg, included several variables: geography (city and district), gender, social estate; and type of observance—full compliance (confession and communion), confession only, and noncompliance (because of young age, excused absence, and “lack of zeal” [*neradenie*]). The reports also included, as a separate category, any registered Old Believers residing in the parish.

The data on confession and communion are a valuable indicator, but hardly represent a perfect measure of religious practice, much less “piety.” The compilation of the lists itself was fraught with

¹⁸ In the late 1730s, for the first and last time, the Synod ordered copies of the nominal lists, not mere statistical summaries; once the tons of documentation from tens of thousands of parishes began flooding into St. Petersburg, authorities realized the folly of such a demand and thereafter sought only to acquire a numerical summary. See Mironov, “Ispovednye vedomosti” 102–117.

difficulty, especially in large parishes; given the pressure to hear confession and dispense the Holy Elements to communicants, the priest inevitably had to compile the lists later—from memory. Although the priest was likely to recall the few who failed to appear, errors were inevitable. More problematic is the honesty of compiling lists: the noncompliant, especially Old Believers, had a strong incentive to evade detection—including the special taxes that such exposure entailed.¹⁹ While fear of ascription to the Old Belief, with attendant fines, disappeared in 1800 for Old Believers and in 1801 for negligent Orthodox, believers still were under some compulsion to perform this duty until mid-1851: in exceptional cases (where they omitted the duty for several consecutive years), they were subjected to public penance (in rare cases even entailing a few weeks incarceration in a monastery). While such coercion was extraordinarily rare, far more significant no doubt was pressure from the family or community to comply. In that sense, the statistics on confession and communion record only observance, not the degree of fervor or belief. But even that statistic is revealing, for the sheer willingness to conform is a measure of acceptance and acquiescence—an index that plummeted rapidly in Western Europe, especially from the mid-19th century, but one that remained astronomically high by European standards.

Hence the massive tables in the Synodal archive are of considerable interest and value.²⁰ Above all, they provide a rough map to the patterns of religious observance and how these changed from the late 18th century to World War I. Most importantly, they show an astonishingly high level of religious observance—close to 90 percent;²¹ despite signs of religious “indifference” (the percentage of “unzealous” rose), the percentage of believers who confessed and received communion was exceedingly high, especially when compared with the withering figures of 10 to 20 percent reported by the Western Churches.²² Moreover, these tables show

¹⁹ Metropolitan Platon of Moscow attributed inaccurate reports specifically to the attempt to conceal Old Believers and therefore prescribed stiff fines and even dismissal for clergy found guilty of collaborating with them. See Rozanov, *Istoriia Moskovskogo eparkhial'nogo upravleniia*, vol. 3, pt. 1, 117–119.

²⁰ For a summary description, see Freeze, “Russian Orthodoxy: Church, People, and Politics.”

²¹ This percentage excludes children too young to make confession and receive communion, nominally deemed to be under the age of seven.

²² Compare, for example, the figures cited for various European Churches in McLeod, *European Religion*; McLeod, *Secularization*, 171–184.

distinct regional patterns, with higher rates in the densely compacted central dioceses and in the confessionally contested western provinces, but lower rates in the sparsely-populated northern and Siberian dioceses (which were “under-churched”—with vast, sprawling parishes not easily accessed—and challenged by Old Believers and sectarians). The aggregate statistics also show a slight differential between men and women, chiefly in terms of full compliance (women ranking slightly higher) and excused absences (men being far more likely to engage in migrant labor and therefore unable to perform rites in their home parish).

Perhaps the most striking change was the disappearance of “partial observance” (i.e., those who performed confession but omitted communion) and the increase in “excused” and “unexcused nonobservance.” Given the shift between the two columns, one might speculate that the semi-observant simply ceased to comply, either because of religious indifference or because of the expanding role of migrant labor in the towns and factories. The series data also show fluctuations, sometimes reflecting popular response to fear-inspiring events like war.²³ Although the data show some differences in social estate and gender, these are relatively small when compared with the geographic correlations. Region, far more than class or gender, determined the level of observance or deviance. Finally, despite some small signs of deviance, bishops could—and did—cite the statistics as proof that popular piety remained resilient, not only among the rural population, but in the cities and elites as well.

If, however, one uses diocesan and parish records, this picture changes significantly. First, the tabular data in central archives are incomplete, not only because some priests were lackadaisical and inept, but also because parish boundaries remained highly porous, especially in urban areas, making an accurate count extremely difficult. As a result, the tables—especially for urban areas—under-report deviance among migrant laborers (including the proverbially irreligious workers in factories). Hence the resident population of cities like Viatka and Kostroma significantly exceeded those netted in the annual reports on confession and communion. While these corrections do not demolish the picture of relatively high

²³ The outbreak of World War I, for example, triggered not only patriotic but pious upsurges; see, for example, the report from deans in Vladimir diocese in GAVO, Fond 556, op. 1, No. 4955, ff. 45–46, 49, 56, 67, 90–94, 96. The same is true of Lithuanian deaneries; see LVIA, Fond 605, op. 9, No. 1924, ff. 8, 21, 43, 45, 61, 69.

rates of religious observance (especially when compared with European Churches), they do reduce the gap, especially in the most industrializing and urbanizing segments of imperial society.²⁴

Second, the parish-level summaries reveal a pattern of observance far more complex than that suggested by the Synodal tables based on diocesan units, with neat subcategories of “city” and “district.” In effect, it was the official structure of arbitrary administrative units, not the data, that underlay the statistical map of the official structure of religious observance. That aggregation necessarily distorts the totals for a given unit, at once concealing the myriad complexity in each area and producing an artificial “average” for a given geographic unit. Where some parishes were massively observant, others were equally nonobservant. Thus these tables—aggregated on the basis of artificial administrative boundaries—cannot generate a meaningful religious cartography, indicating “hot” and “cold” spots that overlap and defiantly traverse the formal administrative boundaries. No less important, these averages do not capture the kaleidoscopic variability *within* a particular district, where a host of factors—not only religious fervor, but also the presence of other confessions, the zeal and veneration of the priest, even the vagaries of weather and accessibility during the spring thaws—directly affected rates of observance. Thus, even in a single district, observance ranged sharply—from total compliance to massive deviance. In short, the diocesan and district “averages”—crammed into artificial administrative units—conceal the particularism endemic in this belatedly modernizing, secularizing, society.²⁵

Finally, only the nominal lists (the confessional lists, *ispovednye rospis*) in diocesan and parish repositories allow one to decode the reality behind the numbers. Above all, these lists add an important variable lacking in the diocesan totals: age. Apart from correlating rates of observance and deviance with age, these records shed light on the substantial proportion of individuals who made confession but did not receive communion. The nominal lists in many

²⁴ On the other hand, clergy in St. Petersburg argued that the rates of actual observance were higher than those recorded in official statistics, chiefly because the priest simply failed to record communicants who were not formally registered in his parish (RGIA, Fond 796, op. 442, No. 2598, f. 69, quoted in the metropolitan’s report for 1913).

²⁵ For a case study of these complex variations within Vladimir diocese (including an official diocesan study attempting to make sense of this diversity), see Freeze, “Pious Folk?”

parishes included those who failed to receive communion because of indifference, but also many (sometimes the overwhelming majority) who did so “upon the counsel of their spiritual father.” Although such behavior invites various speculative interpretations (in particular, the willingness of semi-dissenters [*polu-raskol’niki*] to make the pro forma confession, but not to receive communion), in rural parishes deviance correlates closely with age and marital status: it was principally younger couples who, “upon the advice of their spiritual father,” refrained from taking communion—in all likelihood, because they had violated the rule to abstain from sexual intercourse during Lent.²⁶ And, above all, the nominal lists showing semi-observance record lay religious observance in all its glorious heterogeneity: some parishes have full compliance, others numerous semi-observers because of “indifference” and “upon the counsel of the spiritual father,” in wildly varying proportions.²⁷

In the second half of the 19th century the phenomenon of “semi-observance” virtually disappeared. In some measure, that reflected Church policy: already from the 1830s, the Synod enjoined priests to discourage parishioners from semi-observance, arguing

²⁶ Bishop Leonid of Kostroma, in a report from in 1853, explained the phenomenon of semi-observance as due “solely to their awareness of their unworthiness and because of the difficulty of performing, especially in younger years, all the conditions to be worthy of receiving [the Holy Elements].” RGIA, Fond 797, op. 22, otdel 1, st. 2, No. 241, f. 30. See the similar observations by the bishop of Penza in his report for 1850 in RGIA, Fond 132, g. 1851, No. 2363, ff. 177v–178. The link between nonobservance “upon the counsel of the spiritual father” and age (married youths between twenty and thirty years of age) is particularly evident in the nominal lists; see the 1750 lists for Suzdal’ in GAVO, Fond 556, op. 1, No. 61.

²⁷ The nominal lists for Suzdal’ okrug in 1755, for example, have few parishes with semi-observants, but one had approximately 139 (of 1225 parishioners). GAVO, Fond 556, op. 111, No. 7, ff. 19–38. A century later, such heterogeneity still prevailed. See, for example, the 1845 lists from Vladimir, where one parish (with 975 parishioners), had 655 full compliants, 301 semi-compliants (“upon the counsel of the spiritual father”), nine with excused absences, 18 unexcused, and two listed as Old Believers. Another parish had 293 semi-observants, where five omitted communion at the priest’s recommendation and the rest because of “indifference.” Another parish reported a balance between those omitting communion because of the priest’s recommendation (123) and those who had no excuse (81). In another parish the balance was reversed: of 428 semi-observants, 331 did so because of “indifference” and 98 because of the priest’s counsel. GAVO, Fond 556, op. 111, No. 491, ff. 1–228.

that full observance was preferable and exclusion from communion to be imposed in only rare cases.²⁸ Hence ecclesiastical policy, together with absenteeism (associated with migrant labor and trade) and religious “indifference,”²⁹ significantly increased the proportion of those who did not either make confession or receive communion. Among men, for example, this proportion rose from 2.76 percent (1797) to 12.45 percent (1900), with the “unzealous” the larger share (6.69 percent). The data show, significantly, not only the continuance of an extraordinarily high level of observance, but also the emergence of a small, yet substantial, minority of those who openly rejected their “Christian duties.” As one should expect, Russian society was clearly in the midst of growing religious differentiation, the spectrum of “activists,” “conformists,” and “dissenters” becoming ever more clearly defined.

Reports (*Otchetny*) on Popular Religiosity

From the Petrine reforms and, especially, from the mid-19th century, central authorities sought to obtain diocesan reports about the level of popular belief. Emulating the example of the Western Churches, the Russian Church required bishops to conduct visitations, assemble various data, and submit annual reports. Although the Church periodically campaigned to obtain such reports from the early 18th century, it was only from the late 1840s that the Church finally emulated the example of state administration (which, since 1810, required annual, standardized reports from provincial governors).³⁰ That impulse derived mainly from the government, which demanded that the Church assemble and publish annual reports, as the ministries were doing in the secular domain; to facilitate

²⁸ RGIA, Fond 796, op. 113, g. 1832, No. 1837, ff. 1–150; *PSZ* (2), 7:5971 (Synodal decree of 10 February 1833).

²⁹ The term “indifference” (*neradenie*) can include both the irreligious and dissenters: Old Believers and sectarians who, as the regime relaxed repression, felt less compulsion to conform and mask their deviance. In reality, then, the correct term is probably “dissent,” encompassing both types, but for the sake of convenience the terms “indifference” and “indifferent” are employed here.

³⁰ In November 1844, the Synod approved the standard format for the annual reports, after complaining about the heterogeneity in diocesan reports. It finally used the new format in October 1847, with the requirement that the report be submitted at the first of the following year (LVIA, Fond 605, op. 9, No. 983, ff. 31–31v).

the timely processing of such data, the Synod adopted standardized forms for reporting on such matters as diocesan administration, monasteries, the parish clergy, catechization, and “the flock” (*pastva*). To be sure, not all dioceses complied, provoking repeated reprimands from St. Petersburg and causing some published annual reports to omit some dioceses from the tabular reports. In 1865, some two decades after establishing the new order, the Synod complained bitterly that the reports were not only tardy, but that some were exceedingly superficial and general.³¹ In the following decades, however, the bishop (more precisely, his consistory) complied with the requirement, gradually increasing the specificity and detail in the reports.

For the period 1850–1916, these annual reports provide the single most systematic, comprehensive overview of popular piety. Whereas the earlier reports were quite perfunctory, especially with respect to popular “piety” (*blagochestie*),³² by the early 20th century they had become far more detailed and carried some critical notes. Above all, they do reflect a growing alarm about the spiritual health of the flock. Thus the report from Novgorod affirmed that the general situation was excellent, but admitted a darker side—specifically, the “libertine spirit” (*vol’nyi dukh*) among the youths who migrated to the factory and city.³³ But it was only the Revolution of 1905–1907, with the upheavals of the “liberation movement,” that brought a far more somber, at times deeply alarmist, picture of the “moral-religious conditions” of the folk. Not surprisingly, these reports from the inter-revolutionary years (1907–1916) attracted considerable interest from Soviet historians bent on

³¹ Quoted in LVIA, Fond 605, op. 9, No. 983, ff. 31–31v. The Synod also admonished the bishops to include only pertinent materials in the report and not to raise issues that required separate files. RGIA, Fond 796, op. 146, g. 1865, No. 1458, ff. 1–5. Such directives, predictably, had limited effect to the very end of the *ancien régime*, the Synod and chief procurator bewailed the problem of belated and incomplete replies.

³² Typical was the assessment offered by Bishop Damaskin of Tula in his report of 1 January 1851: “In all fairness one can say that, by the mercy of God, the diocese of Tula is in every respect in a desirable condition of good order.” RGIA, Fond 796, op. 132, g. 1851, No. 2357, f. 144v.

³³ RGIA, Fond 796, op. 132, g. 1851, No. 2357, f. 144v. Such generally positive assessments prevailed below as well. See, for example, the positive reports from the dean of Vyborg district in St. Petersburg in 1900, describing a religious upsurge in 1900 (TsGIA Spb., Fond 19, op. 92, g. 1900, No. 14, f. 212v).

demonstrating pervasive de-Christianization as a natural prelude to the revolutions of 1917 and post-revolutionary secularization of popular culture.³⁴

Nevertheless, these reports—while a valuable source on episcopal perception and on the construction of central images of popular religious life—are a very imperfect guide to grassroots Orthodoxy. One deficiency was the sheer formalism of such reports, as bishops generalized—in a few paragraphs, at most a few pages—about religious life in a diocese with up to a million or more registered believers. Sloth also played a role: in many cases, the bishop's staff shamelessly plagiarized the report from the previous year, replacing old numbers with more recent ones, but reproducing the old text word-for-word.³⁵ Apart from the recurring failure of bishops to file the reports and data on time (a bane for the chief procurator who himself was responsible for publishing the annual report on time),³⁶ it was clear that many bishops failed to offer serious analyses of religious conditions in each's respective diocese, contenting themselves with sweeping generalities (about the piety of peasants and religious indifference of migrant laborers). In the wake of the 1905 Revolution, the chief procurator took them to task not only for the tardiness but also the formalism of the reports, demanding that they address such matters as the rise or fall of popular religiosity, list amounts of cash donations, and the like.³⁷ While the reports do contain much interesting data,

³⁴ For typical examples, see the voluminous (and overlapping) publications of L. I. Emeliakh, such as *Istoricheskie predposylki*. Other examples include Kadson, "Otnoshenie," 208–219; Kadson, "Materialy po istorii," 204–209.

³⁵ For example, in the text pertaining to the laity, Archbishop Aleksei recycled the same text in 1915 that he had used the previous year. For the 1914 and 1915 reports, see RGIA, Fond 796, op. 442, No. 2628, ff. 35–36, and No. 2690, ff. 35–36.

³⁶ Thus, in 1909 the chief procurator complained that the situation had not improved and that the delays had forced central authorities to delay the publication of the annual report by several years. See his circular to diocesan authorities in Vil'na in LVIA, Fond 605, op. 9, No. 983, ff. 31–31v.

³⁷ In the Lithuanian diocese, the 1909 Synodal instruction impelled the consistory to disseminate a new, more elaborate format for the deans' reports, calling for more information in a standard form to facilitate the compilation for the annual report: LVIA, Fond 605, op. 9, No. 983, ff. 38–39.

chiefly with respect to diocesan administration and clergy,³⁸ they cannot—in a few spare pages—adequately characterize religious life in their vast dioceses. A few bishops did include excerpts from the local deans (*blagochinnye*), but chiefly to footnote their generalizations and not to generate a picture of the complexities, problems, and patterns of religious change.³⁹ In short, while historians have been eager to use and quote these “general reports” in central archives, they in fact reveal more about the bishops who wrote them than they do about believers whom they purport to describe.

By contrast, the raw materials in diocesan archives—which theoretically were to serve as the source for the annual reports—provide a far more nuanced picture of parish realities (the plural is deliberate). Of particular importance are the lower-level, biannual reports of deans (*blagochinnye*) that, in a filtered and truncated fashion, sometimes entered into the general diocesan report to the Synod. Although the Church first established the office of dean in the mid-18th century (as the bishop’s agent), not until a century later did it require them to file regular reports about conditions in the deanships (usually 10 to 15 churches). These reports were a key factor in shaping diocesan policy, indicating problems and impelling bishops to issue circulars to deal with them.⁴⁰ But the annual diocesan reports to St. Petersburg made only superficial use of the voluminous memoranda from the deans; the diocesan reports remained compendia of terse generalization, rarely providing a sophisticated picture of the diversity so characteristic of popular Orthodoxy.⁴¹

³⁸ The reports included some telling statistical data, particularly with respect to the clergy and their activities. For example, the 1914 report from Vladimir boasted that local priests (1,301) had delivered 40,129 sermons and homilies, most of which were read from printed collections (27,824), with another 3,955 impromptu and 8,350 original, written sermons: RGIA, Fond 796, op. 442, No. 2628, f. 29v.

³⁹ For example, the 1913 report from the bishop of Ekaterinburg quoted the report of a dean about the high religious fervor of factory workers in his district (RGIA, Fond 796, op. 442, No. 2576, f. 88–88v). The same is true of the reports for St. Petersburg (No. 2598, f. 69–69v) and Zabaikale (No. 2579, f. 9).

⁴⁰ For example, after receiving reports from deans that some priests were omitting vespers, the bishop of Penza issued a circular reiterating their obligation to perform this service. See Anirov, *Sbornik tsirkuliarnykh rasporyazhenii*, 33–34.

⁴¹ In addition to the semiannual reports, the deans in some dioceses convened to discuss the needs of the Church and how to deal with them.

The biannual reports from the deans, by contrast, accent the enormous variability and volatility in popular religious life, even within a single deanship, let alone across a diocese with hundreds of parishes and hundreds of thousands of believers.⁴² This heterogeneity, not standardization, characterized religious practice at the end of the *ancien régime*; the diversity emphasized in such reports demonstrates that Orthodoxy was still fundamentally “parish,” notwithstanding the “imperial” construction of Church and state. Moreover, the deans’ reports tend to be distinctly more concrete, candid, and sometimes alarmist—even before the Revolution of 1905–1907, emphasizing the corrosive impact of migrant labor, the assertiveness of youth, and the breakdown of traditional mores. Although deans routinely affirmed the piety of most believers,⁴³ they provide a far less sanguine picture than that found in the reassuring (often complacent) dispatches to St. Petersburg. Such anxiety was especially pronounced in peripheral areas where Orthodoxy was the minority faith and confessional challenges increasingly bold.⁴⁴ In the

See, for example, the protocols of the deanship assemblies in Lithuania diocese in 1870 in LVIA, Fond 605, op. 8, No. 402.

⁴² Predictably, the deans’ reports vary considerably in quality and candor, ranging from the terse and formulaic to the prolix and perspicacious. In 1851, the bishop of Iaroslavl’ complained that “the reports of the deans, for the most part, are too monotonous, and especially the periodic reports are almost a replication of earlier ones” (RGIA, Fond 796, op. 132, g. 1851, No. 2357, f. 108). In general, however, they tended to improve (and expand) in the last decades of the *ancien régime*. Compare, for example, the bland, superficial reports sent by the deans of Vladimir diocese in 1864 (GAVO, Fond 556, op. 1, No. 2259) with those filed in 1915 (No. 4955). For a systematic source analysis of the deans’ reports from Lithuania diocese, see Freeze, “Russian Orthodoxy on the Periphery,” 124–131.

⁴³ The deans’ reports from Vladimir diocese in 1895, for example, generally provide a very positive picture of popular piety and morality; only in isolated parishes did they discern problems of indifference, chiefly among the youthful and migrant laborers (GAVO, Fond 556, op. 1, No. 3815). Even in 1905, many deans in St. Petersburg diocese were still reporting that the “religious-moral condition” of parishioners was good, although some began to exhibit signs of waxing anxiety. See TsGIA Spb., Fond 19, op. 97, g. 1905, Nos. 36 and 37. However, inspection reports from the same year also attest that, while the clergy perform services like vespers zealously and deliver homilies, “the parishioners are not especially zealous in attending” (No. 35, f. 12).

⁴⁴ For Vladimir diocese, see GAVO, Fond 556, op. 1, No. 3815, ff. 1–141 (1895) and No. 3285 (1885). For the deans’ reports in Volhynia in 1906, see DAZhO, Fond 1, op. 34, No. 1908, ff. 1–303.

wake of 1905, when alarmist warnings pervaded even a bishop's annual report to St. Petersburg, the deans' biannual reports provided a more differentiated picture, not only in spatial but temporal terms, emphasizing patterns of religious revival as well as dissent and indifference. The deans' report from Vladimir in the first half of 1909, for example, posited the basic piety of parishioners, but also confirmed that they had become less "zealous" with respect to their church and religious duties.⁴⁵ But more striking than this perceived decline was the enormous variability, even in a single deanship, with religiosity ranging from white-hot fervor in some parishes to rampant de-Christianization (or "re-Christianization" as Old Believers or sectarians) in others.⁴⁶ This heterogeneity reflected the great variability in parish religiosity, a variability that underlay the kaleidoscopic differences in contemporary ethnographic reports, like those in the Tenishev collection in the Russian Ethnographic Museum.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Thus, in 1909 one dean (III *okrug*, Aleksandrov *uezd*) reported that the parishioners "have become less zealous toward the divine church: they come more rarely and in fewer numbers to the church, and have become less respectful toward the needs of their pastors—they have come to treat them coldly, attempt to reduce the fees for rites (formerly they gave rye but have now ceased to do so), causing the clergy to become terribly poor amidst the current rise in the cost of all food products and the decreased harvest of grain": GAVO, Fond 556, op. 1, No. 4719, unpaginated. Nor did the picture improve in succeeding years. In 1914, for example, one dean (III *okrug*, Iurev-Pol'skii *uezd*) wrote that "the parishioners are all Orthodox (there being neither Old Believers nor sectarians in the district), but the people's former zeal for the divine church has ceased to exist," with many neglecting their religious duties (GAVO, Fond 556, op. 1, No. 4883, f. 3). But others painted a more positive picture (for example, the dean of the IV *okrug*, Suzdal' *uezd*, in *ibid.*, f. 37–37v).

⁴⁶ For example, the visitation reports for St. Petersburg diocese in 1905 reveal that the "parishioners come to services zealously" in one parish, attend "rather zealously" in another, but rarely appear in others. See LGIA, Fond 19, op. 97, g. 1905, No. 35, ff. 12, 20, 51, 107v.

⁴⁷ Russkii etnograficheskii muzei, Fond 7 (Tenishev). Differing, even diametrically opposed assessments routinely emanated from the same diocese, reflecting not only the authors' personal biases, but also the heterogeneity of religious practice. Compare, for example, the reports from the provinces of Viatka (e.g., op. 1, No. 433, f. 15 and No. 441, f. 2); Kaluga (No. 540, f. 1 and No. 495, ff. 1–8); Kostroma (No. 572, ff. 1, 11–11v and No. 595, ff. 13, 28); and Novgorod (No. 782, ff. 1–18 and No. 750, f. 8). For a published edition of the responses from Vladimir diocese, see Firsov and Kiseleva, *Byt velikorusskikh krest'ian-zemlepashtsev*.

To the deans' reports must be added the other documentation found in diocesan archives that reached the Synod, if at all, in a highly abstracted, filtered form.⁴⁸ Thus, rich and revealing detail abounds in the diocesan files on specific issues for which the Synod had solicited a special report. In such cases the Synodal archive preserves the final, neatly written (or, later, typed) formal submission, usually without any indication of how the bishop had compiled the document. The diocesan files, by contrast, can show the process of its compilation: whether the report was generated by the prelate himself, personal aides, the consistory, or a special commission of diocesan clergy. The diocesan files, moreover, may include the underlying (and unreported) data, deliberations, and disagreements that vanished as the report underwent

⁴⁸ This principle applies, without question, to the other kinds of information that the bishop assembled for his regular reports to St. Petersburg—for example, the clergy's service files (*klirovye vedomosti*). Apart from the fact that these contain much information lacking in the report to St. Petersburg (about age, geographic and social origin, family members, origins, property, kinship within the parish staff, and the like), even the data used for the annual report is infinitely richer than the statistical tables sent to the Synod. For example, the bishop compiled data—upon the insistence of the Synod—about the education of priests, deacons, and sacristans, and these reports clearly demonstrated the level achieved by the three ranks, with a deep gulf between priests (virtually all of whom had a seminary degree) and the deacons and sacristans (who rarely graduated from the seminary). But the original personal service file shows much more—the precise nature of education (which rank, *razriad*, of the priest's seminary graduating class, or just how far the deacon and sacristan advanced in ecclesiastical schools). More important still, these parish-level records include the dean's assessment of the religious knowledge of the deacon and sacristans—namely, whether they know the catechism or not; it was by no means uncommon, especially in the first half of the 19th century, to report that the deacon or, especially, sacristan had partial comprehension or even no knowledge of the catechism—and hence was of no use to the priest in his task to raise the cognitive understanding of Orthodoxy among the laity. These service registers also contain information about the pastoral activities of the priest himself to enlighten his flock—in particular, how many sermons (and what kind—original or cribbed from a printed collection) that he delivered during the year. The *klirovye vedomosti* from a district in Kursk diocese in 1840, for example, show that the deacon or sacristan “knows in part,” “understands,” or “does not know” the catechism (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Kurskoi oblasti, Fond 20, op. 2, No. 10). A similar picture emerges from the service registers for districts in: Irkutsk in 1730 (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Irkutskoi oblasti, Fond 50, op. 1, No. 3840); Tver' in 1830 (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Tverskoi oblasti, Fond 160, op. 1, No. 16272); and Kiev in 1830 (TsDIAK Ukrainy, Fond 127, op. 1009, No. 275).

editing, simplification, and generalization. For example, in 1913 the Synod—at government behest—conducted a survey of diocesan opinion about youthful social deviance (“hooliganism”) and its root causes; the inquiry ultimately resulted in a thick Synodal collection of diocesan responses. To analyze this issue, some bishops formed special commissions, solicited the opinion of local clergy, but ultimately produced a concise summary of these more complex, often contradictory, analyses of the problem. Sometimes the initiative for diocesan conferences and assembling opinions from below emanated from diocesan authorities, not the Synod.⁴⁹ The perceived need for such input from below sharply increased after 1905. The archbishop of Vladimir diocese, for example, convoked a “special commission on the question of improving the religious-moral condition of the population of Vladimir diocese,” which prepared an elaborate analysis of the differentiated religious conditions then prevailing in the diocese.⁵⁰

Not only commission reports but everyday documentation (*deloproizvodstvo*)—consistory protocols, individual files—provide the bricks for reconstructing parish life. For mapping the religious attitudes of the faithful, the diocesan archives offer varied and unmediated paperwork. The consistory archive of Vladimir, for example, preserved not only the consistory’s own minutes (with details on cases and their dispositions), but the original files on a broad variety of subjects, such as the bishop’s visitations,⁵¹ penance and deviance,⁵² reports on miracles,⁵³ requests to authorize icon

⁴⁹ By far the most significant initiative for parish-level opinion was the systematic collection of information and opinion in the 1860s by the special commission for reform of the parish clergy, which solicited—and obtained—detailed responses on the economy and schools of parishes all across Russia. The responses, a massive collection, are in RGIA, Fond 804, op. 1, razdel 3.

⁵⁰ GAVO, Fond 556, op. 1, No. 4856, ff. 1–10. For the relevant texts and analysis, see Freeze, “Dechristianization in Holy Rus?”

⁵¹ GAVO, Fond 556, op. 1, No. 3887.

⁵² For example, the case of a believer who refused to perform penance (GAVO, Fond 556, op. 1, No. 4307).

⁵³ Reports of miracles, whether dismissive or supportive, abound; see, for example, GAVO, Fond 556, op. 1, Nos. 2166 and 4681. These reports sometimes found their way into the diocesan gazette; see, for example, “Chudesnoe itselenie besnovatoi,” 287–290.

processions,⁵⁴ annual reports on charitable and missionary societies,⁵⁵ sundry types of parish demands (including the removal—and sometimes return—of the local priest),⁵⁶ investigations of radical priests⁵⁷ and seminary disorders,⁵⁸ accounts from missionaries and priests about the Old Belief,⁵⁹ sectarians,⁶⁰ and apostasy of believers.⁶¹ While some such matters required Synodal review and approval (indeed, the acquisition of real estate even required the personal approval of the emperor himself), much was left to the discretion of the bishop and left no trace in the Synodal archive in St. Petersburg. And even when such matters required central approval (e.g., the formation of women's religious communities), oversight and further development remained an object of diocesan, not central, record-keeping. Even in matters of intense concern to St. Petersburg, such as missions and religious dissent, the disaggregated, raw files at the diocesan level add much to what was filtered

⁵⁴ From the mid-18th to the mid-19th century, Church authorities were highly distrustful of icon processions, but thereafter proved more accommodating—in a transparent desire to use such occasions to mobilize and demonstrate the faith. The faithful eagerly exploited the shift in policy; see, for example, GAVO, Fond 590, op. 1, No. 469.

⁵⁵ See, for example, the requisite annual report of a parish trusteeship (*popечitel'stvo*) in GAVO, Fond 556, op. 1, No. 4216.

⁵⁶ GAVO, Fond 556, op. 110, No. 273, ff. 191–212; and op. 3, No. 956, ff. 1–29. Parishioners also fought to regain control over the parish treasury and to limit, even abolish, the gratuities traditionally paid to the local clergy (GAVO, Fond 556, op. 111, No. 1111, ff. 387–389).

⁵⁷ GAVO, Fond 556, op. 1, Nos. 4594, 4595; and op. 3, No. 942. It bears emphasizing that the central repositories contain but a fraction of local reporting; most, in fact, came through the offices of the chief procurator on the basis of complaints by the Ministry of the Interior. For an overview of the central reports, showing much more clerical radicalism than traditionally recognized, see the discussion in Freeze, “Church and Politics,” 269–297; Freeze, “Priests and Revolution”; and the detailed study of 247 radical priests in Pisiotis, *Orthodoxy versus Autocracy*.

⁵⁸ GAVO, Fond 454, op. 3, No. 225.

⁵⁹ GAVO, Fond 556, op. 1, No. 4331, ff. 1–94.

⁶⁰ Sectarians became increasingly worrisome, with a corresponding increase in reports; see, for example, GAVO, Fond 556, op. 1, Nos. 4277 and 4632.

⁶¹ After the manifesto on religious freedom in April 1905, underground sectarians made haste to file for legal exit from the Orthodox Church; see for example, the application for conversion to the Old Belief in GAVO, Fond 556, op. 111, No. 4785.

and sent to the capital. Thus diocesan authorities amassed their own files on dissenters, from the Old Believers to the new sectarian movements, with rich detail on the challenge and diocesan responses.⁶² Still more graphic and concrete were the files upon which such reports were based but which found only pale reflection in the general commentary for the diocese.⁶³

In sum, while the annual diocesan reports are useful, they were perforce a terse simplification of the underlying files in diocesan consistories. Above all, the reports tend to propagate the “myth of the mean,” to offer generalized accounts that conceal the principal characteristic of popular Orthodoxy—its very heterogeneity, the particularism that was the quintessence of religious life at the grassroots. Moreover, a careful reading of the local files reveals a highly differentiated picture of popular religiosity, not only in the deans’ reports, but also in the array of files on clergy-parish conflicts, reassertion of parish prerogatives, and the like.

Divorce: Social Change and Administrative Breakdown

From the mid-19th century, cases involving marriage and divorce gradually emerged as a central, increasingly dominant preoccupation of ecclesiastical administration. Such had not been the case in earlier times; until the late 18th century, the Church had formal authority over such matters, but lacked the documentation, administration, and even the incentive to intercede.⁶⁴ By the 1850s it had

⁶² In Vladimir diocese, for example, the bishop received elaborate reports and proposals from local clergy about the Old Belief (GAVO, Fond 556, op. 1, No. 4275, ff. 1–19; and No. 4331, ff. 1–94) and sectarianism (No. 4885).

⁶³ For the commentary by a diocesan missionary in Volhynia, see DAZhO, Fond 1, op. 43, No. 166, unpaginated. The same file includes the draft text of the final text by Archbishop Antonii (Khrapovitskii). For the array of commentaries by local deans in Lithuania, see LVIA, Fond 605, op. 9, No. 1587, ff. 52–74.

⁶⁴ See Freeze, “Bringing Order,” 709–746. I fear that I cannot accept the views expressed in Daniel Kaiser, “‘Whose Wife?’,” 302–323. Although he has combed the extant sources, he does not give due critical consideration to the institutional backwardness of the pre-Petrine Church (in personnel, finance, and the lack of such rudimentary but essential documentation as metrical books and marriage licenses), but relies upon incidental and sporadic documentation, and equates the prescriptive with the quotidian. An incomplete source base is of course the bane of medieval Russian history; nonetheless it is essential, as I have argued here, to historicize, not simply invoke, the extant documentation.

established a complex of rules to regulate the making and unmaking of marriage; the goal was to protect this holy sacrament from violation and frivolous dissolution.⁶⁵ Although such cases remained relatively rare at mid-century (fewer than 100 to 200 coming before the Synod per annum), they steadily proliferated—coming to number in the thousands and to constitute over half of all Synodal business on the eve of World War I. Most striking was the Church's adamant resistance, yet steady acquiescence to marital dissolution. Most strikingly, in the mid-19th century the Church approved a minuscule number of divorces (the subtext to *Anna Karenina*) and formally precluded the option of separation (the convenient alternative for Catholic countries in the West). Given the small volume of cases, the Synod had ample time to make a close review—and found cause to reject—divorces already recommended by diocesan authorities.

That meticulous review became increasingly difficult in the late 19th century: the sheer volume of cases overwhelmed the Synodal administration, devouring much (if not most) of the time and resources of this central governing organ of the Church. This rigorous policy came just as the family order began to undergo the profound, even revolutionary, transformation—symptoms of which included the breakdown of patriarchal authority, extended families, submissiveness of youth, and the like. Whereas in the mid-19th century, the Church had to deal with only a handful of divorce cases, by the early 20th century these had increased exponentially—to some 7,000 percent over the earlier level. While the Synod insisted on its duty to review and approve all divorces, the sheer volume of cases made that increasingly impossible.

These Synodal files on marriage and divorce are as valuable as they are voluminous. Above all, they provide a clear guide to official policy, indicating the Church's adamant adherence to canons (e.g., the categorical ban on a fourth marriage), as well as its willingness to accommodate undeniable changes in social reality. Apart from central policy on the family and divorce, the files also provide some insight into individual cases. Namely, the files sent to

⁶⁵ Not that such devotion to indissolubility of the matrimonial sacrament was unique to the Russian Orthodox Church: not only the Catholic, but also Protestant Churches opposed a liberalization of divorce, whether construed as the secularization of a holy rite or the breakdown of social order. See, for example: McBride, "Public Authority," 747–768; and Bennett, "Church of England and Divorce," 625–644.

St. Petersburg for confirmation include an “extract” (abstract) summarizing the case and justifying the diocesan recommendation to grant divorce.

Nevertheless, such files are an abbreviated abstract of the originals in diocesan repositories. The latter include:

- the original petition for divorce (often prolix, personal, poignant);
- the signed (sometimes emotional, contentious, annotated);
- responses to the mandatory “exhortation” to preserve the marriage;
- material evidence (love letters, lewd photographs, written confessions);
- any requests for representation by a lawyer;
- the defendant’s initial deposition, conceding or contesting the accusations of the spouse;
- the court hearing (*sudogovorenje*);
- the investigation and testimony of witnesses;
- the consistory’s summation and recommendation;
- the bishop’s final verdict;
- the defendant’s post-verdict deposition,
- the Synod’s formal review, either approving or denying the divorce;
- certificate of divorce for the plaintiff;
- provisions for penance for the “guilty” party.

Doubtless, the most arresting and interesting feature of the diocesan cases is the “narrative” of plaintiffs and defendants—sometimes terse and scripted by lawyers (in the case of elites), but often personal, disjointed, emotional (especially in the case of the disprivileged). These depositions tell a story and invoke dominant myths and norms in a desperate effort to persuade the ecclesiastical court. No less important is the procedural dimension, revealing how parties initiated, negotiated, contested, compromised, and sabotaged the process. If the Synod files tell us the final outcome, the diocesan files reveal how—and why—the parties fought to dissolve, or sustain, each of their marriages.

More important, however, are the files *not* in the Synodal archive: those divorce applications rejected by the bishop as

unproven or not based on legal grounds.⁶⁶ The bishop (in fact, his consistory) terminated numerous cases for sheer lack of evidence, reflecting their determination to keep the family sacrosanct.⁶⁷ But the most interesting cases were those that sought a divorce on *illegal* grounds, a phenomenon that sharply increased as divorce became “more democratic,” involving the disprivileged and no longer mainly the elites. Thus, while the Synod did review (to confirm or deny) all cases that the bishop approved, it never saw the vast majority of cases—namely, those that the bishop had *denied* and hence had not forwarded to St. Petersburg for approval. These applications are significant not only because of their sheer numbers,

⁶⁶ In many cases, sharp-eyed, vigilant diocesan authorities rejected the divorce on factual or technical grounds. Failure to provide the mandatory documents, pay the obligatory fees, and appear for the court hearings could all bring a case to an inconclusive end, with the consistory terminating the file and sending it to the archive. For decisions to terminate consideration on formalistic bureaucratic grounds, such as the lack of requisite documents (metrical copy on the marriage and the like), see two cases from 1912 in Kholm (TsDIAL Ukrainy, Fond 693, op. 1, No. 809, ff. 1–5; and No. 810, ff. 1–3), and from 1913 in Kholm (No. 24, ff. 31–34). In 1910 the Volhynia consistory terminated a divorce case when the plaintiff failed to file the requisite documents (DAZhO, Fond 1, op. 37, No. 207, f. 20–20v). Moreover, the consistory carefully investigated each divorce application and often concluded that the plaintiff had filed false data. For example, in 1913, the Kholm consistory rejected a divorce application on the grounds prolonged disappearance (defined as five years of unknown whereabouts), noting that within the last year the couple had co-signed a legal document. TsDIAL Ukrainy, Fond 693, op. 1, No. 25, ff. 27–28v. It also rejected suits where the plaintiff lacked sufficient evidence (especially in the case of alleged adultery). For example, when Col. I. D. Kudel’skii sought to divorce his wife on grounds of adultery, his wife affirmed that she was indeed guilty and did not agree to remain married to him. Nevertheless, the consistory denied the divorce on the grounds that the “eyewitnesses” had not in fact seen her in the act of intercourse but only in the company of men. TsDIAL Ukrainy, Fond 693, op. 2, No. 348, ff. 1–128. When the husband appealed the negative decision, the Synod upheld the consistory (25 June 1915).

⁶⁷ For example, Archbishop Tikhon (later patriarch) carefully reviewed divorce cases; even when the consistory approved the divorce, he interceded to quash the decision on the grounds that the “eyewitness” testimony was dispositive. See LVIA, Fond 605, op. 9 No. 1877, f. 62–62v. For similar action in four other cases, see No. 1919, ff. 3, 258; and No. 1920, ff. 97–98v, 218–220v.

but because of their content: plaintiffs, in overwhelming numbers, demanded divorce on grounds not recognized by the Church:

- spousal abuse, including attempted homicides,⁶⁸
- syphilis,⁶⁹
- desertion and refusal to cohabit (including “abhorrence of sex”);⁷⁰
- mutual adultery (since *both* were “guilty,” neither had a claim to having suffered as the “innocent” party);⁷¹
- apostasy;⁷²
- epilepsy;⁷³

⁶⁸ In a typical case, a peasant woman applied for divorce because of “cruel treatment,” but the Vladimir consistory responded that this cause “cannot serve as the grounds for the dissolution of marriage” (GAVO, Fond op. 109, No. 611, f. 152–152v). Fedor Davidiuk, after 16 years of marriage, applied for divorce on the grounds that his wife was mentally unstable, had threatened him repeatedly with an axe, and in various ways had revealed her intent to take his life. Because he failed to provide evidence of premarital insanity, the consistory refused to take action (TsDIAL Ukrainy, Fond 693, op. 2, No. 381, ff. 1–13).

⁶⁹ In one extraordinary case, the Synod obtained the emperor’s permission to grant divorce on the basis of syphilis; see RGIA, Fond 797, op. 79, otdel 2, st. 3, No. 214, ff. 1–3. See also RGIA, Fond 797, op. 76, otdel 2, st. 3, No. 106, f. 11–11v.

⁷⁰ For example, see the petition from a husband complaining that his wife refused to cohabit and was leading a lascivious life (TsDIAL Ukrainy, Fond 693 (Kholm skaia dukhovnaia konsistoriia), op. 1, No. 809, ff. 1–5). In another case, where the wife abandoned her husband and refused to return, triggering his application for divorce, the consistory patiently explained that “the disinclination of one spouse to continue to cohabit and their separate residence is not foreseen by the law as a ground for the dissolution of a marriage” (TsDIAL Ukrainy, Fond 693, op. 1, No. 506, f. 5–5v). For two similar cases in Vladimir in 1909, see GAVO, Fond 556, op. 111, No. 1128, ff. 37–37v, 42–43.

⁷¹ For a case in which a couple jointly requested divorce, with both confessing to adultery, and the Kholm consistory automatically rejected the suit, see TsDIAL Ukrainy, Fond 693, op. 1, No. 29, ff. 47–48.

⁷² Some applicants sought to exploit the Church’s inherent distrust of mixed marriages, claiming that the spouse had committed apostasy and demanded divorce on these grounds. In a case in 1910, the Kholm consistory investigated and found that the true cause of family conflict, threats, and separate residence, and therefore denied the application (TsDIAL Ukrainy, Fond 693, op. 2, No. 343, ff. 1–21).

⁷³ N. I. Rozhkov, for example, asked for divorce on the grounds that his wife “suffers from epilepsy and is completely incapable of physical labor,” and as a result “I have no one to prepare my food and to wash my

- physical deformities (from “deafness” to “stench from the ear”),⁷⁴
- postmarital insanity;⁷⁵
- sexual incapacity (variously defined to include impotence, infertility, even bedwetting and desertion);⁷⁶
- consensual agreement to dissolve the marriage.

In part such applications reflected the sheer increase in demand, especially among the uneducated lower classes, but many also indicate a willingness to challenge accepted verities and a determination to impose popular norms and values on the Church, not vice-versa. A close analysis of the diocesan holdings reflects, for example, a profound change in gender relations, above all, in a new female assertiveness and challenge to traditional patriarchy.⁷⁷ This mass of diocesan paperwork also provides some important clues to the capacity of ecclesiastical administration to function effectively: in a word, the massive increase in paperwork, particularly the cases involving marriage and divorce, gradually had a paralyzing impact on Church administration, both at the center and diocesan levels. The Synod itself had become primarily a divorce court; whereas in the mid-19th century it handled fewer than 200 cases per year, by the early 20th century such cases had mushroomed into the thousands and increasingly overwhelmed the workload of its understaffed administration. Matters were still worse at the diocesan level. In St. Petersburg diocese, for example, by 1902 this diocese alone had to process 303 cases (50 percent

clothes.” The Kholm consistory rejected the application explaining that epilepsy was not grounds for divorce: TsDIAL Ukrainy, Fond 693, op. 2, No. 518, ff. 1–6. For a similar case in Volhynia diocese, see DAZhO, Fond 1, op. 33, No. 305, ff. 1–2, in which the consistory flatly declared that “epilepsy cannot serve as a legal basis for divorce.” For a case from Odessa see DAOO, Fond 37, op. 2b, No. 3838, ff. 1–16. In this case the plaintiff, even after the consistory flatly explained that epilepsy was not grounds for divorce, continued to plead for marital dissolution on these grounds.

⁷⁴ TsDIAL Ukrainy, Fond 693, op. 2, No. 382a, ff. 1–3; and LVIA, Fond 605, op. 9, No. 984, ff. 197–199v.

⁷⁵ TsDIAL Ukrainy, Fond 693, op. 2, No. 381, ff. 1–13.

⁷⁶ RGIA, Fond 796, op. 189, No. 3473, ff. 8–9; DAOO, Fond 73, op. 1, No. 3811, ff. 1–2; and LVIA, Fond 605, op. 9, No. 1376, ff. 90–90v.

⁷⁷ For a more extended analysis of the divorce crisis in late Imperial Russia, see Freeze, “Profane Narratives.”

more than the Synod in 1850), and the number increased dramatically in the last decade of the *ancien régime*: 694 by 1913.⁷⁸ While such problems afflicted spheres of state administration,⁷⁹ the overloading of divorce cases proved particularly devastating for the Church—given the sheer volume of cases and the frozen state of its resources and staffing.

Local Archives: Promises and Perils

This paper has suggested the need to excavate diocesan and local church archives more systematically. The argument is *not* that one should eschew synthesis and generalization, or that one should fixate on the diocese, parish, or individual; rather, it is that historians must engage in multidimensional research, seeking to link the micro and macro, to tap the raw, unprocessed, often chaotic local archives and not simply the more accessible, better organized, and better preserved repositories for central institutions. However important the central archives may be, it is no less essential to incorporate grassroots case studies that draw upon local documentation.

To be sure, the local repositories vary enormously in their completeness and coverage. Diocesan authorities, with scant resources at their disposal, could do little to preserve properly the amassing volume of documentation; the steps taken by the metropolitan of Moscow in 1776 to organize the consistory archive were exceptional.⁸⁰ Elsewhere authorities were more zealous about preserving “ancient” (pre-Petrine) documents and indifferent to the fate of more recent materials.⁸¹ An inquiry by the chief procurator in 1797 found that some archives (e.g., in Suzdal’) were in decent condition, but elsewhere matters were quite different. In Kazan’, for example, “because of the negligence of the consistory,” the files

⁷⁸ Altogether, for 1905–1916, this diocese had to process a total of 6,632 files, of which only 4,706 had been resolved by 1916, the rest still unresolved by the February Revolution (RGIA, Fond 797, op. 96, No. 271, ff. 216–219 (*spravka* in the chief procurator’s archive).

⁷⁹ For the case of the Senate, see Peter Liessem, *Verwaltungsgerichtsbarkeit im späten Zarenreich*, 82–87.

⁸⁰ Rozanov, *Istoriia Moskovskogo eparkhial’nogo upravleniia* 3(1): 31–32.

⁸¹ In the case of one monastery in Voronezh, the diocesan archive had 86 volumes of materials, but few from the mid-18th century. Nikol’skii, “Materialiia istorii,” 19–22.

were “in the worst condition, without any order and good care, so that because of the poor state of the place of preservation many files were covered not only by dust but a massive amount of snow.”⁸² Underfinanced and marginalized, they suffered substantial losses, failed to undergo the rationalization and reorganization characteristic of central repositories, and sometimes lost major portions of their holdings.⁸³ Fire took a heavy toll. Flames destroyed virtually the entire archive in Tobol’sk on 5 November 1797; an inventory of the Viatka archive from 1773–1777 showed that almost all the files from 1700–1778 had been destroyed by a consistory fire.⁸⁴

Matters improved, but unevenly, in the late imperial period. The Church, beginning in 1869, undertook a deliberate campaign to establish some order in the diocesan archives; initial reports showed that most dioceses had indeed failed to organize and preserve their files in secure, proper conditions.⁸⁵ As reports from the late imperial era attest, many diocesan archives were subject to pilfering,⁸⁶ expurgation, and storage in pernicious conditions;⁸⁷ consistory archives suffered enormous losses. An inventory of the Vladimir diocesan archive in 1880 reported 162,073 files; of that immense sum only about 13,000 survive—and these include

⁸² RGIA, Fond 797, op. 2, No. 1502.

⁸³ For the case of the Moscow consistory archive, see Rozanov, *Ob arkhive*.

⁸⁴ RGIA, Fond 797, op. 2, No. 1502, ff. 74v, 26–28.

⁸⁵ For the response of the Lithuanian consistory to the Synodal decree of 19 January 1869, see LVIA, Fond 605, op. 8, No. 378, ff. 1–85. An inventory on files scheduled for re-storage indicates the presence of various files from Brest, Minsk, and Polotsk consistories (ff. 17–18v). Relocation, associated with the reorganization of boundaries and formation of new dioceses invariably led to losses and confusion. For the example of Ekaterinoslav (where files were shipped in 1801 from Poltava), and the attendant losses, compounded later by the theft of readers, see Bednov, *Svedeniia*.

⁸⁶ The choirboys in the episcopal residence of Viatka, for example, pilfered and sold files in the 1880s (Ignat’ev, “Rukopis’ podkantselearista Gavriila Blinova,” 26–28).

⁸⁷ According to the *reviziia* (inspection) of Vladimir diocese in 1915, the consistory archive occupied the first floor (“a moist, cold never heated space”) of the dilapidated building that housed the consistory itself. RGIA, Fond 796, op. 202, No. 1736, f. 5v.

new files from the post-1880 period.⁸⁸ And still later depredations were to come in the 1930s, when the closing of churches proceeded without regard to the preservation of parish archives.⁸⁹ While prerevolutionary archival inventories⁹⁰ and documentary publications help to fill the gap,⁹¹ still much has been lost and little has been reordered for easy processing and analysis. But other collections cover the entire imperial period and preserve tens of thousands of files (see Table 1).⁹²

While central collections remain important (for lacunae, *revizii*, and policy), it is essential to tap diocesan and local repositories. Only thus can one “decentralize” Russian religious history to discern the kaleidoscopic complexity at the grassroots, and to recover rather than mask the particularism that prevailed under the *ancien régime*. Microhistory cannot, of course, promise to lay bare “reality,” things as they “really” were; in this age (or afterglow) of postmodernism, only a troglodyte might fancy that local documents are photographic records of the past. What they do offer, however, is more detail, sometimes revealing, often (seemingly) extraneous, that allows the historian—not some diocesan clerk, bishop, or Synodal official—to draw his own inferences and conclusions.

⁸⁸ For the 1880 inventory see RGIA, Fond 796, op. 440, No. 32, ff. 118–119; for the Soviet inventory of 1959, see Batulin, *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Vladimirskoi oblasti*.

⁸⁹ Even so, the parish archives before 1917 were poorly maintained: priests had neither the time nor the incentive to compile and preserve archival materials (other than metrical books, which were critical for regulating marriage and other matters). Significantly, despite repeated attempts by the Synod to require that priests compile “historical-statistical chronicles,” few in fact did so. See a typical Synodal decree of 12 October 1866 in RGIA, Fond 796, op. 146 g. 1865, No. 1759, f. 26.

⁹⁰ Malitskii, “Vladimirskii konsistoriskii arkhiv XVIII v.”; and Znamenskii, “Opisanie dokumentov,” 51–72.

⁹¹ See, for example, the list of works in Freeze, *Russian Levites*, 299–307.

⁹² In addition to consistories, oblast and other local repositories hold a host of other ecclesiastical collections—the archives of monasteries, some churches, the seminary, and sundry other ecclesiastical organizations. For a comprehensive inventory, see *Istoriia russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi*.

Table 1 Holdings of Diocesan Consistories: Sample Inventory

Diocese	Number of Files	Years of Coverage
Arhangel'sk	32,647	1744–1920
Astrakhan	1,671	1708–1917
Don	14,310	1829–1918
Iaroslavl'	32,424	1740–1918
Irkutsk	12,602	1725–1919
Kaluga	9,980	1780–1919
Kamchatka	216	1856–1910
Kazan'	20,308	1724–1919
Kostroma	4,620	1792–1919
Kursk	1,653	1742–1919
Moscow	104,530	1725–1929
Nizhnii Novgorod	42,163	1672–1917

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Diocese	Number of Files	Years of Coverage
Novgorod	5,447	1702–1918
Orel	489	1721–1917
Orenburg	17,019	1800–1918
Penza	1,172	1818–1917
Pereslavl' DK (Iaroslavl')	2,634	1722–1844
Perm'	2,751	1761–1922
Petersburg	61,079	1720–1918
Pskov (Velikie Luki)	1,322	1720–1909
Riazan'	34,919	1708–1918
Samara	32,609	1787–1917
Saratov	10,055	1799–1919
Simbirsk	8,121	1815–1918

Diocese	Number of Files	Years of Coverage
Smolensk	5517	1744–1918
Stavropol	38769	1886–1918
Suzdal'	1,900	1717–1800
Tambov	2,454	1759–1923
Tobol'sk	36,407	1721–1919
Tomsk	18,811	1759–1921
Tula	110,903	1800–1918
Tver'	93,090	1744–1918
Velikii Ustiug	6,374	1721–1788
Viatka	111,427	1722–1937
Vladimir	12,911	1708–1919
Vologda	27,408	1654–1917
Voronezh	1,342	1704–1874

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