RELIGIOUS TENSION AND ETHNIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE LATER RUSSIAN EMPIRE*

I

Two striking particularities of the incipient Soviet Union were its ejection of institutional Russian Orthodoxy from its position of cultural dominance and its promotion of 'small people' nationalisms at the expense of a core Russian identity.[1] Yet, perhaps the empire could only have survived under a form of government that pursued just such a course. For, by the early days of the twentieth century, it was clear that the Russian Empire's confessionalization project had failed. This was the attempt to define and discipline Orthodox religious practices and to spread these practices among a multi-ethnic population. The failure was double, for it concerned the fate of both the empire-building (Christianization) and nation-building (Russification) efforts that were pursued simultaneously by the Romanov regime over the course of its last centuries.[2] The state Orthodox Church failed either to assimilate the non-Russian population of the

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[1] See, in particular, Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, NY, 2001).

[2] The intertwining of nation and empire in the late imperial period is the subject of much recent work. See, for example, Valerie A. Kivelson and Ronald Grigor Suny, *Russia's Empires* (Oxford, 2017); Alexei Miller, *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism: Essays in the Methodology of Historical Research*, trans. Serguei Dobrynin (Budapest, 2008); Alexei Miller, 'The Romanov Empire and the Russian Nation', in Stefan Berger and Alexei Miller (eds.), *Nationalizing Empires* (Budapest, 2015); James Cracraft, 'Empire versus Nation: Russian Political Theory under Peter I', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, x, no. 3/4 (1986).

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Empire or to unify the Russian population behind an emergent nation state. Instead, over the course of the nineteenth century, both Russians and non-Russians deserted the Church and took on exclusionary ethnic identities.

This was the result of political inconsistency at the centre, but the erosive impact of this inconsistency can only be understood by examining the changing dynamics of parish life. It was at this local level that churches containing mixed flocks lost their sacred character, and alienated Russian and non-Russian parishioners alike. This loss, in the Russian imperial context, affirms those theories that stipulate a close connection between 'the sacred' and social memory.[3] It also supports the idea that homogenous bodily movements most adequately endowed sacrality and communicated social memories, for the breaking down of homogeneity in gesture clearly accompanied the emergence of religious tensions and the subsequent loss of sacrality.[4] What is newly revealed in the exploration of imperial encounters in the Russian Orthodox religious sphere is that the disruption caused to social memory and sacred spaces made churches into key sites of ethnicization.[5]

The imperial turn in the historiography of Russia has done much to illuminate the complex relationship between religion

[3] Most significantly, of course, in Durkheim's ideas about religious acts being a reassertion of the original feelings of a society's collective consciousness (which are granted moral imperative from their association with ancestors), but also in Maurice Godelier's definition of the sacred as being a 'relationship that humans entertain with the origin of things'. Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman (Oxford, 2001), 142, 154, 168, 287; Maurice Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift*, trans. N. Scott (Oxford, 1999), 171.

[4] Works on both religion and social memory have emphasized the importance of homogenous gesture and ritualized movement in creating community cohesion and ideas of the sacred. See Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 175–6, 313; Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, 1989), 3 and *passim*; and A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York, 2012), 6–15.

[5] In this respect I am interested in how ethnic identities have their origins in religion and in the need for the sense of community that is found in the sacred. The work of Danièle Hervieu-Léger has also been suggestive of this relationship. She argues, for example, that the 'process by which [religious] symbols and values are reappropriated for identity is helped by the decline of the socializing and organizational capability that was proper to religious tradition', and that the absorption of religion into ethnic identity is 'compensation for the loss of collective identity'. Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, trans. Simon Lee (Oxford, 2000), 159–61.

and imperialism.[6] While it is clear that Orthodoxy went hand in hand with colonization, providing both ideological and institutional support, the picture that emerges of the role of the Church in empire-building is an inconsistent one. The approach to the faith of non-Russian subjects was often pragmatic. Differentiation by religion offered a means of governance akin to the Ottoman *millet* system; yet assimilation was seen as the ideal, and Christianization the best way to achieve this.[7] If governing by difference did, to some extent, co-opt local elites into the work of empire, the conversion of the non-Russian population to Orthodoxy — which was carried out violently in the mid-eighteenth century — has generally been seen as only nominally successful.[8] Not until the later part of the nineteenth century, when, under the influence of the orientalist Nikolai Il'minskii (1822–91), religious education and practice began to be offered in native languages, could the nominal converts be brought more firmly into the Orthodox Church. At times, this involved creating and propagating written languages where none had previously existed, and so the process ended up encouraging the development of non-Russian literary elites and helped to pave the way for ethno-national movements and, eventually, Soviet nationalities policy.[9]

[6] The excellent work of Paul Werth has been particularly important in this respect. See Paul W. Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics in Russia's Volga-Kama Region, 1827–1905* (Ithaca, NY, 2002); and Paul W. Werth, *The Tsar's Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia* (Oxford, 2014).

[7] On the inconsistency of these policies, see Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca, NY, 2004); Charles Steinwedel, *Threads of Empire: Loyalty and Tsarist Authority in Bashkiria, 1552–1917* (Bloomington, IN, 2016); Aileen E. Friesen, *Colonizing Russia's Promised Land: Orthodoxy and Community on the Siberian Steppe* (Toronto, 2020); and Danielle Ross, *Tatar Empire: Kazan's Muslims and the Making of Imperial Russia* (Bloomington, IN, 2020).

[8] On the success of governing by difference see, in particular, Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge, MA, 2006); and Ross, *Tatar Empire*. On the failure of Christianization, see Michael Khodarkovsky '"Not by Word Alone": Missionary Policies and Religious Conversion in Early Modern Russia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, xxxviii, no. 2 (1996); and Werth, *Margins*.

[9] Il'minskii's methods have attracted significant attention in the historiography. See, for example, Wayne Dowler, *Classroom and Empire: The Politics of Schooling Russia's Eastern Nationalities, 1860–1917* (Montreal, 2001), 235–8, and *passim*; Werth, *Margins*, 223–5; and Elena I. Campbell, *The Muslim Question and Russian Imperial Governance* (Bloomington, IN, 2015), esp. 36–67.

This story is well known, and it complements a second narrative concerning the counterproductive impact of those policies — most resolutely pursued from the 1860s onwards, but originating decades earlier — that have been collectively labelled Russification.[10] If creating written languages to promote Orthodoxy inadvertently nurtured national movements, the other side of Russification — the repression of non-Russian languages, religions and institutions — provoked separatist responses.[11] What held these contradictory policies together was the intention of strengthening the empire by giving it a national core; they diverged over their understanding of what constituted Russianness.[12] Generally, however, the policies reflected an increasing tendency to evaluate the reliability of the empire's subjects according to national or ethnic criteria, and to create a distinction between those who could be made into Russians and those who could not.[13] This did not mean that religious belonging mattered less; rather, confessionalization continued as a national struggle that was perceived to exist between different elites. To give an example, Il'minskii's method gained political sway in the Volga-Kama region because it framed the apostasy of non-Russians from Orthodoxy to Islam as 'Tatarization' driven by the cultural imperialism of the literate *ulema*.[14] This was, then, the period in which ethnic identities emerged in the Russian Empire, a top-down process in which policies that attempted to impose Russianness occasioned a reaction from the educated vanguard of emergent ethno-national groups.[15]

[10] For an introduction to the complexities of Russification, see Alexei Miller, *Romanov Empire and Nationalism*, 45–66; and Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multi-Ethnic History*, trans. Alfred Clayton (Abingdon, 2001), 247–82.

[11] On this impact of Russification, leading to a nationalist response from non-Russians, see Steinwedel, *Threads of Empire*, 150–53.

[12] On religion being seen as the way to spread Russian nationality, see Friesen, *Colonizing*, 34–6.

[13] Kivelson and Suny, *Russia's Empires*, 201–3; Steinwedel, *Threads of Empire*, 196–201; John W. Slocum, 'Who, and When, Were the *Inorodtsy*? The Evolution of the Category of "Aliens" in Imperial Russia', *The Russian Review*, lvii, no. 2 (1998); Werth, *Margins*, 124–5.

[14] Dowler, *Schooling*, 72–6 and *passim*; Ross, *Tatar Empire*, 132, 244; Campbell, *Muslim Question*, 63–71.

[15] On the religious identity of Tatars becoming national, see Steinwedel, *Threads of Empire*, 155–74.

In these narratives, confessionalization failed because it was superficial and because, ultimately, it only served to undermine imperial aims by provoking opposition to them. This is clearly attested to by the tens of thousands of apostasies of the non-Russian population back to Islam and animism, and the emergence of separatist nationalism, in the regions where Orthodoxy was seen as the key to national assimilation. I do not intend to refute these narratives, but to show that they are incomplete. Apostasies and, indeed, ethnic separatism were not the preserve of non-Russians, and a full understanding of the failure of confessionalization requires examining the Russian and non-Russian responses together. It was in the 1860s that the flight of non-Russians from the Church reached such levels as to be labelled the 'Great Apostasy'.[16] But it was also in these years that thousands of Russians deviated to Old Belief — the dissenting religious movement that rivalled and disputed the State Church's claim to represent true Russian Orthodoxy.[17] It is my contention that these responses were connected. Despite the excellent recent work on the empire's diverse peoples, the tendency to examine them through their relationship with the state, with a particular focus on non-Russian elites, has resulted in a literature that overlooks the importance of interethnic interactions at a local level.[18] This has often led to the conclusion that the general population was indifferent to what we might think

[16] Werth, *Margins*, 147.

[17] On the seventeenth-century origins and development of Old Belief, see Georg B. Michels, *At War with the Church: Religious Dissent in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (Stanford, CA, 1999), and Robert O. Crummey, *The Old Believers and the World of Antichrist: The Vyg Community and the Russian State, 1694–1855* (Madison, WI, 1970).

[18] On the lack of attention so far given to interethnic interaction, see Willard Sunderland, 'An Empire of Peasants: Empire-Building, Interethnic Interaction, and Ethnic Stereotyping in the Rural World of the Russian Empire, 1800–1850s', in Jane Burbank and David L. Ransel (eds.), *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire* (Bloomington, IN, 1998). The historiography of Central Asia and the Caucasus has seen far more attention given to local tensions in the context of Russian settlement. See Jeff Sahadeo, 'Epidemic and Empire: Ethnicity, Class, and "Civilization" in the 1892 Tashkent Cholera Riot', *Slavic Review*, lxiv, no. 1 (2005); Nicholas B. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca, NY, 2005); Alexander Morrison, 'Peasant Settlers and the "Civilizing Mission" in Russian Turkestan, 1865–1917', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, xliii, no. 3 (2015).

of as ethnic difference — as something separate from religious difference — until the category of nationality was imposed from above.[19] In fact, the impact of confessionalization, and its complicated coexistence with the contradictory policies of toleration and governance by difference, made the Orthodox parish the site of cultural diversity and, increasingly, of tensions that encouraged the development of ethnic identities from below.

My findings in this respect build upon those adumbrated by Aileen Friesen in her recent work on the colonization of the Siberian steppe. Friesen argues for the centrality of the parish to the life of peasant settlers, for it offered a 'familiar structure that could replicate the village culture of European Russia'.[20] When this familiarity was threatened by the emergence of 'composite communities' — in Friesen's example these are parishes containing Ukrainian and Great Russian settlers — hostilities emerged that undermined people's adherence to the Orthodox Church. In consequence, non-Russians apostatized to the faiths of their ancestors, and Russians left the Church for religious dissenting movements.[21] This article aims to draw out the significance of these phenomena in greater depth. Given the recent work on the non-Russian population, it takes as its starting point the less thoroughly studied apostasy of Russians to Old Belief, examining the correlation of these cases with cultural difference at a parish level in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Starting from an empire-wide perspective, it focuses in on a provincial and then district level to explore the dynamics of the interaction of the diverse peoples of the parishes of Kazan Province. While the police and Church files of central and regional archives provide a glimpse into patterns of religious apostasy at a state and provincial level, the existence of a uniquely thorough statistical survey into the parish life of Mamadysh district has allowed these interactions to be mapped in detail in the final section of this article.[22]

[19] Steinwedel, *Threads of Empire*, 196–201; Dowler, *Schooling*, 229–40. On the general point that religion was a more important category of identification than nationality, see Kivelson and Suny, *Russia's Empires*, 26, 54–8.

[20] Friesen, *Colonizing*, 59.

[21] *Ibid.*, 105–10, 121–3.

[22] *Istoriko-statisticheskoe opisanie tserkvei i prikhodov Kazanskoi eparkhii. Vypusk 6: g. Mamadysh i Mamadyshskii uezd* [A Historical-Statistical Description of the Churches and Parishes of Kazan Diocese, Part 6: The Town of Mamadysh and Mamadysh District] (Kazan, 1904).

The Volga-Kama region, in which Kazan Province lay, is especially suitable for exploring the relationship between religious tension and ethnic consciousness: first, because the population was probably more diverse here than anywhere else in the empire, and because it was here that conversion campaigns were pursued most energetically, leading to a very high proportion of mixed parishes; and second, because the region was envisaged as part of the imperial core. The success of the Romanovs' empire- and nation-building endeavours depended upon their ability to culturally assimilate the population in spaces like this, which were neither homogenously Russian nor clearly foreign and peripheral. Indicative evidence suggests that what was happening in Kazan Province was occurring elsewhere in similar liminal spaces. Showing how these empire- and nation-building policies came undone in the face of local tensions thus shines a new light on the religious background to the empire's demise. More than this, considering the parish as an associational unit, one that preserved communal memories for mobile populations that stretched far beyond the local, provides an insight into how ethnic identities and imagined communities could emerge from below.[23]

II

Muscovy's expansion into a multi-ethnic empire began with the acquisition of the Volga-Kama and Ural regions after the defeat of the Tatar Khanate of Kazan by Ivan IV in 1552.[24] Over the next three centuries this huge area, populated by Muslim Tatars and Bashkirs, and a variety of Finno-Ugric and Turkic tribes whose ethno-religion was animist, was colonized by Russian

[23] Associational culture has been seen as being of crucial importance in the emergence of ethnic identities among the educated elite; see Gary B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861–1914* (Princeton, NJ, 1981); Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848–1948* (Princeton, NJ, 2005); Till van Rahden, *Jews and Other Germans: Civil Society, Religious Diversity and Urban Politics in Breslau, 1860–1925*, trans. Marcus Brainard (Madison, WI, 2008), 64. On imagined communities, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 2016).

[24] For the idea that the Kazan conquest was the beginning of the Russian Empire, see Steinwedel, *Threads of Empire*, 18.

settlers, a process that was primarily led by the Church.[25] The first settlements were monastic in character, but the monasteries brought with them dependent peasant populations from the interior provinces, supplemented by peasants from the royal estates. These populations then spread out to form their own villages under the patronage of their Church masters. They sought defensive locations, which might secure them against the incursions of the hostile peoples who surrounded them, and they built village churches that retained a connection to, and identified them with, their mother monasteries.[26] The Muslim population, meanwhile, faced severe pressures to convert to Orthodoxy after the conquest, and many were driven further east as mosques were attacked and burned in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[27] However, although some Tatars were Christianized at this time, the majority resisted.

Confessionalization was thus in its infancy at this point. For the most part the inseparability between religion and ethnicity remained intact, and Russian Orthodox communities, while encountering different cultures and religions, retained the sacred connection between social memory and faith in their churches. This connection was disrupted between the mid-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries by two processes that constituted the key components of the Russian confessional project. The first was the attempt to bring ritual and dogmatic uniformity to the Church. Patriarch Nikon's reforms of the 1650s, which changed or corrected liturgical books and practices, were often brutally enforced, but the schism that resulted was pervasive and persistent. Old Belief became a dissenting religious movement that was embraced by a large proportion of the Russian population, as it offered a model of sacrality in which the link

[25] On the Church's role in colonization, see Friesen, *Colonizing*, 1–10.

[26] A. Rittikh, *Materialy dlia etnografii rossii: Kazanskaia guberniia* [Material for the Ethnography of Russia: Kazan Province], 1 (Kazan, 1870), 101–2. On the importance of these monasteries in the early Christianization of the Russian people, which it has been suggested took place no earlier than the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, see V. G. Vlasov, 'The Christianization of the Russian Peasants', in Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer (ed.), *Russian Traditional Culture: Religion, Gender and Customary Law* (New York, 1992), 16–22.

[27] Rittikh, *Materialy*, i, 105.

between social memory and faith apparently remained intact.[28] The second process, which likewise caused lasting social cleavages and required the constant disciplining of the state, was the attempt to bring together the empire's multiple cultures under the Orthodox Church. Mass conversions, brought about by force, took off in the Volga-Kama region between the 1740s and 1760s when a large proportion of the animist population, along with a minority of Muslims, were nominally brought into the Orthodox Church, thereby beginning to break the connection between ethnicity and religion.[29]

Perhaps the policy of forced conversion might have enjoyed more success had it not been followed so swiftly by the pronouncement of religious toleration, decreed by Catherine II in 1773.[30] From this point on, toleration came to be presented as one of the chief and famed virtues of Romanov rule, perhaps even overshadowing its Orthodoxy.[31] The idea was easily accepted by the population of the Volga-Kama region. A natural tolerance appears to have prevailed in this multicultural

[28] The importance of Old Belief in the development of Russian nationalism has been remarked on by a number of influential scholars. See Michael Cherniavsky, 'The Old Believers and the New Religion', *Slavic Review*, xxv, no. 1 (1966); Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford, 2003), 16, 35, 184–5. On the failure of the Orthodox Church's 'institutionalization' and 'confessionalization' due to its remove from popular custom, see Gregory L. Freeze, 'Institutionalizing Piety: The Church and Popular Religion, 1750–1850', in Burbank and Ransel (eds.), *Imperial Russia*.

[29] Lepekhin, Haxthausen [fon Gakstgauzen] and Georgi cite 1743 as the beginning of mass conversions among the Chuvash peoples, and the 1760s among the Mari. Ivan Lepekhin, *Dnevnyia zapiski puteshestviia doktora i akademii nauk ad'iunkta Ivana Lepekhina po raznym provintsiiam Rossiiskago gosudarstva* [Travel Journal of Doctor and Academician of Science Adjutant Ivan Lepekhin Around Various Provinces of the Russian State], 4 vols. (St Petersburg, 1771), i, 168; A. fon Gakstgauzen, *Issledovaniia vnutrennykh otnoshenii narodnoi zhizni i osobennosti sel'skikh uchrezhdenii Rossii* [Research into the Internal Relations of Popular Life and the Particularities of Village Institutions of Russia], 2 vols. (Moscow, 1870), i, 313; Iogann Gotlib Georgi, *Opisanie vsekh obitaiushchikh v Rossiiskom gosudarstve narodov* [A Description of All the Peoples Living in the Russian State], 4 vols. (St Petersburg, 1799), i, 34–5. On the forced nature of these conversions, see Michael Khodarkovsky, '"Not by Word Alone"', 283–6.

[30] See Werth, *Tsar's Foreign Faiths*, 38–9.

[31] *Ibid.*, 105–27.

and multi-confessional environment.[32] Although each ethno-religious group preferred to maintain a separate settlement (even if these were only separated by a few hundred yards), interaction was part of daily life.[33] Linguistic interpolations and cultural borrowings were common.[34] These were not only an unavoidable consequence of socio-economic coexistence, but also cause for celebration. The perennial condition of curiosity and the lure of entertainment made confessionally shaded festivities a source of multi-ethnic enjoyment. The 'pagan' Chuvash and Mari participated in Christian festivals with the Russians and in Muslim festivals with the Tatars.[35] Similarly, the Russian Orthodox watched and took part in Tatar festivals or consulted Tatar sorcerers.[36] Miracle-working icons were waited on impatiently by Muslims and animists, and in Mamadysh district it was tradition at Easter, when Russians, Votiaki and Tatars went on processions together, to sing the troparion 'The Zealous Intercessor' in the Tatar language.[37]

While syncretism was common when it came to immanentist and festive religious practices, it was much rarer when it came to practices relating to transcendental matters.[38] Indeed, popular

[32] On the way in which diversity was seen as natural and division was viewed with indifference, see Kivelson and Suny, *Russia's Empires*, 26. See, also, B. N. Mironov, *Sotsial'naia istoriia rossii perioda imperii (XVIII–nachalo XX v.)* [A Social History of Russia in the Imperial Period (Eighteenth to Early Nineteenth Century)], 2 vols. (St Petersburg, 2003), i, 34.

[33] G. F. Miller, *Opisanie zhivushchikh v Kazanskoi gubernii Iazycheskikh narodov* [A Description of the Pagan Peoples Living in Kazan Province] (St Petersburg, 1791), 6, 11; Lepekhin, *Dnevnyia zapiski*, i, 120, 137; Nikolai Rychkov, *Zhurnal ili dnevnyia zapiski puteshestviia kapitana Rychkova po raznym provintsiiam Rossiiskago gosudarstva, 1769 i 1770 godu* [The Journal or Daily Notes of the Travels of Captain Rychkov Around Various Provinces of the Russian State, 1769 and 1770] (St Petersburg, 1770), 1, 30; Gakstgauzen, *Issledovaniia*, 295–301.

[34] See, for example, Lepekhin, *Dnevnyia zapiski*,i, 137, 174; Miller, *Opisanie zhivushchikh*, 27, 66.

[35] Miller, *Opisanie zhivushchikh*, 40–42.

[36] Lepekhin, *Dnevnyia zapiski*, i, 167; Gakstgauzen, *Issledovaniia*, 313; Rychkov, *Zhurnal*, 17; *Mamadysh i Mamadyshskii uezd*, 281.

[37] *Mamadysh i Mamadyshskii uezd*, 281, 257, 376, 414.

[38] Although the animist religion was primarily immanentist, the religious notion it held of the community might be seen as transcendental. Although they regularly mixed with different ethnic groups, the Mari were said to hide the names they gave their settlements from outsiders in order to preserve their sacred character. See, for example, Miller, *Opisanie zhivushchikh*, 44–6; Gakstgauzen, *Issledovaniia*,

(cont. on p. 11)

ideologies of toleration focused on the importance of separation for salvation. The church, mosque or *keremet* remained the sacred vessel of the original community.[39] In 1827, a 'ridiculous' opinion was reported to be spreading among the population of Perm Province. This held that there were seventy-seven faiths in the world, and that the followers of all of these could achieve salvation if they did good deeds in their lives. Suffering worse than hellfire, however, awaited those who fell from their 'old faith'.[40] Popular toleration thus relied on a prescription for the fixedly inherited character of religion that made conversion in these regions particularly problematic. Christianized Tatars referred to Orthodoxy as the 'Russian faith' and awaited permission to leave it.[41] Finno-Ugric peoples who became Muslims did not talk in terms of religious conversion, but rather of 'going to the Tatars'.[42] That religions were defined by their ethnicity and not the other way round is supported by the words of the Kazan peasant who said: 'The Chuvash should keep to the Chuvash faith, the Russians to the Russian, and the Tatars to the Tatar'.[43] Indeed, among the rumours of decrees of religious freedom that circulated in the reform era came one of positive compulsion: that the tsar had ordered all non-Russians to convert to Islam and all Russians to Orthodoxy so that there would be only two faiths, ethnically divided.[44]

(n. 38 cont.)
295–301. On the distinction between immanentist and transcendental religions, see Alan Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*: *Religious and Political Change in World History* (Cambridge, 2019), 7 and *passim*.

[39] The word *keremet* was used by the Mari, Chuvash and Votiaki peoples to denote both the close-knit community and the sacred grove or place of worship.

[40] From a government investigation into religious dissent in Perm Province. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv [Russian State Historical Archive] (hereafter RGIA), f. 1473, op. 1, d. 3, l. 336. Paul Werth also found evidence of this belief in Kazan Province, demonstrating that it must have been widespread in the region; Werth, *Margins*, 30.

[41] *Mamadysh i Mamadyshskii uezd*, 96, 268.

[42] S. A. Bagin, *Ob otpadenii v magometanstvo kreshchenykh inorodtsev Kazanskoi eparkhii i o prichinakh etogo pechal'nogo iavleniia* [About the Apostasy to Islam of the Christened Non-Russian Peoples of Kazan Diocese and about the Reasons for This Sad Phenomenon] (Kazan, 1910), 4.

[43] Quoted in Sunderland, 'Empire of Peasants', 174. On the 'overlapping' of religious and ethnic categories, see Khodarkovsky, '"Not by Word Alone"', 270.

[44] Bagin, *Ob otpadenii*, 13.

In some respects, popular and official notions of toleration were aligned. Imperial policies dictated that toleration of a 'conquered foreign people' was a 'necessity' if they were to be integrated into the empire.[45] Faith was a category to which one belonged from birth, not one determined by personal beliefs and practices, and conversion in any direction other than to Orthodoxy was prohibited.[46] Even Old Belief was sucked into this imperial paradigm, for only descendants of those Old Believers who had been registered as such for fiscal reasons before Catherine's reign were permitted to practise freely.[47] This limited toleration encouraged the conflation of religion and ethnicity that existed at a local level.[48] Nonetheless, such expectations were constantly being confounded. Those who had been converted by force in the middle decades of the eighteenth century had no pathway back to their own sense of ancestral belonging. Instead, bound to a faith to which they did not feel they belonged — while the official policy of toleration seemed to suggest that all could follow his or her own religion — they were left in limbo, objects of suspicion for Russians and non-Russians alike.[49] It was therefore in relation to the Orthodox Church's privileged position in imperial religious politics — which was the main reason why conversion from Orthodoxy could not be allowed — that popular and official conceptions of toleration began to diverge.

This divergence might have mattered less had it remained a problem of imperial governance, but in the early decades of the nineteenth century it became a key battleground at the inception of Russification.[50] As Alexei Miller has argued, the

[45] Government report of 1837. RGIA, f. 1284, op. 197, g. 1837, d. 98, ll. 112–112^{ob}.

[46] Paul Werth describes this model of religious belonging as 'ascription'; see Paul W. Werth, 'Orthodoxy as Ascription (and Beyond): Religious Identity on the Edges of the Orthodox Community, 1740–1917', in Valerie A. Kivelson and Robert H. Greene (eds.), *Orthodox Russia: Belief and Practice Under the Tsars* (University Park, PA, 2003), 240–42.

[47] They were registered in order that they could be charged a double poll tax.

[48] On the official conflation of ethnicity and religion, see Werth, *Tsar's Foreign Faiths*, 149 and *passim*.

[49] On the nominal nature of these conversions, see Khodarkovsky, '"Not by Word Alone"', 269.

[50] Purposeful Russification is often dated to the second half of the nineteenth century, but in fact it existed in the minds of Russian officials much earlier than this. See the justification for resettling non-Russian Christians in E. A. Malov, *Prikhody starokreshchennykh i novokreshchennykh tatar v Kazanskoi eparkhii* [The Parishes of the Old-Christened and New-Christened Tatars in Kazan Diocese] (Kazan, 1866), 11–13.

idea of a nation state was not incompatible with the maintenance of empire, but it involved reimagining it along the lines of the British Empire, with a defined core and periphery. Some parts of the empire, notably the Polish and Baltic provinces, and much of the Caucasus, where Russian settlement had made little headway, remained clearly peripheral. The ancient princedoms that had made up Muscovy were largely culturally homogenous and clearly belonged to the core. The fate of Russification as a nation-building project therefore rested on its success in those liminal spaces, which were envisaged as 'part of the Russian national space' but in which Great Russians made up only a proportion of the diverse population.[51] Most importantly, these included the provinces of modern-day Ukraine and Belarus, and the Volga-Kama and Ural regions. Increasingly, then, the state strengthened its hold over the converts, persuaded by arguments that stressed ethnic assimilation rather than the need to protect the Church.[52] Those who abandoned the Orthodox Church for the foreign faiths (which were legal and institutionalized) were treated with greater harshness than those who abandoned it for Russian Old Belief (which was illegal and un-institutionalized).[53] They were guilty of a double desertion: ethnic and religious. In the 1830s, it became policy to resettle baptized Tatars and Finno-Ugric peoples to Russian settlements, where assimilation might be aided by the favourable influence of the local population.[54]

In general, the policy of forcibly restraining within the Orthodox Church those who had been converted to it, at a time when toleration gave an example of an alternative, was a failure. There were certainly cases when conversion led to, or resulted from, intermarriage and full assimilation into the Russian population.[55] For over a century, however, the common refrain of

[51] Miller, *Romanov Empire and Nationalism*, 161–80, 175.

[52] By the 1830s, the central powers were predicting the disappearance of those groups who had been christened into Orthodoxy. See 1838 report quoted in Gakstgauzen, *Issledovaniia*, 315.

[53] For example, when Tatars refused to return to the Church, their children were forcibly removed from them and placed into the care of Orthodox families, but this law was not intended for Old Believers. Natsional'nyi arkhiv Respubliki Tatarstan (hereafter NART) [The National Archive of the Republic of Tatarstan], f. 1, op. 2, d. 1117, ll. 1–14.

[54] Malov, *Prikhody*, 11–13. See also Dowler, *Schooling*, 26–31.

[55] See, for example, *Mamadysh i Mamadyshskii uezd*, 32, 64, 201, 246.

observers was that the animist peoples had wholly failed to assimilate the Christian message and remained in practice and belief 'pagan', while more recent converts from Islam were said to have converted for self-interest alone.[56] The sacred connection between social memory and faith was being broken down, and the imperative to restore it grew greater as parishes became increasingly mixed. This was partly because church construction could not keep pace with the growth in population, and partly because the policy of resettlement created diverse parishes.[57] The resultant disruption of the division between the homogenous immediate community, which had been celebrated in the space of the church, mosque or *keremet*, and the heterogenous profane extended community undermined the sacrality of the Orthodox Church, and prevented it from becoming a means of assimilation.

There developed a movement from below to reclaim the sacred sphere. This movement gathered serious momentum with the advent of the emancipation of the serfs. The peasants' famous notion of *volia* (freedom) included religious freedom.[58] Forged manifestos appeared proclaiming religious freedom, just as they did proclaiming the 'real freedom' that had been

[56] Miller, *Opisanie zhivushchikh*, 12–13, 38–9; Lepekhin, *Dnevnyia zapiski*, i, 168; Georgi, *Opisanie*, 34–5; Gakstgauzen, *Issledovaniia*, 300, 302–3, 313, 328.

[57] In Kazan Province, for example, the population doubled between 1781 and 1858, from 763,300 to 1,502,895. Church construction could not keep pace with this growth; in 1782 the province had 419 churches, and in 1861 it had 450. See K. Arsen'ev, *Statisticheskie ocherki rossii* [Statistical Essays about Russia] (St Petersburg, 1848), 120; M. Laptev, *Materialy dlia geografii i statistiki rossii sobrannye ofitserami general'nago shtaba, kazanskaya guberniya* [Materials for the Geography and Statistics of Russia Collected by Officers of the General Staff, Kazan Province] (St Petersburg, 1861), 153, 463; and I. Pokrovskii, *Russkie eparkhii v XVI–XIX vv, ikh otkrytie, sostav, i predely* [Russian Dioceses in the Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries, Their Foundation, Composition and Limits], 2 vols. (Kazan, 1913), i, appendix, 15.

[58] On the concept of *volia*, see David Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia* (London, 2001), 88–93. That both peasants and officials made this link can be seen by investigations into the growth of religious dissent in these years; see RGIA, f. 1284, op. 217, g. 1862, d. 63, ll. 1–1^{ob}; NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1108, ll. 39–48; NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 297, l. 465^{ob}; RGIA, f. 1284, op. 218, g. 1868, d. 44, ll. 2^{ob}, 3^{ob}; RGIA, f. 1284, op. 219, g. 1862, d. 81, ll. 70–71.

obscured by the emancipation edict of 1861.[59] In the 1860s, parishioners deserted Orthodox parishes for ethnically exclusive places of worship: baptized Tatars returned to Islam; the Chuvash, Mari, Mordva and Votiaki to animism; and Russians flocked to Old Believer churches. So significant was the exodus of non-Russians from the Church at this time that Paul Werth has called it the 'Great Apostasy'.[60] In fact, the movement of Russians was almost as impressive. In some districts on the Volga it was reported that in the five years since the emancipation edict, peasants announcing themselves to be Old Believers had reached numbers that 'doubled or even tripled' the number of dissenters.[61] Even in Western Siberia, where serfdom had not existed, the number of registered Old Believers nearly doubled between 1861 and 1868.[62]

III

In many instances Turkic, Slavic and Finno-Ugric apostasy were occurring in the same parishes and even villages, and clearly influenced each other.[63] Prompted by false rumours

[59] For example, the false *ukaz* (proclamation) of the Ruling Senate of 20 May 1859 found in Kazan Province, which declared that 'his Imperial Majesty found that [the Old Believers] are inspired by the spirit of the Old and New Testament', and so should be granted religious freedom. NART, f. 10, op. 5, d. 70, ll. 96–100^{ob}. A very similar false *ukaz* dated 20 May 1859 was found in Tomsk Province in 1862. RGIA, f. 1284, op. 217, g. 1862, d. 109, ll. 1–73. On the forged manifestos that concerned true emancipation, see Moon, *Abolition*, 92–3.

[60] On the apostasies of non-Russians, see Dowler, *Schooling*, 22, 64; Werth, *Margins*, 147–76.

[61] RGIA, f. 1284, op. 219, g. 1862, d. 81, ll. 70–71. In Vasil'skii district, the number rose from 782 in 1861 to 1,848 in 1866, in Kniaginskii district from 639 to 2,394 and in Balakhinskii district from 9,000 to 11,712.

[62] From 14,671 to 28,325; RGIA, f. 1284, op. 217, g. 1868, d. 60 ll. 11^{ob}–12.

[63] So, for example, in the village of Siukeevo in Tetiushi district, the apostasy of christened Tatars back to 'Mohammedism' was reported in 1855, and the apostasy of converted Old Believers back to the *raskol* was reported in 1856. NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1109, l. 25; NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1213, ll. 1–11. About the concern of the MVD (Ministerstvo vnutrennykh del [Ministry of Internal Affairs]) about general apostasy in Tetiushi district in 1860, see NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1629, l. 39. Petitions referred to the tolerance supposed to have been granted to other apostatizing groups to bolster pleas for clemency and recognition; see Werth, *Margins*, 167–8 and Thomas Marsden, 'Imperial Loyalty between Law, Religion, and Nation: Old Believers' Appeals to the Russian State', *Ab Imperio*, ii (2022).

that complete religious freedom had been proclaimed, apostates began to complete their preferred rituals openly, and many signed mass statements expressing their desire to be removed from the Orthodox confessional lists. Investigations by Church and secular authorities uncovered near-identical narratives: the apostates claimed that neither they, nor their parents, had ever been truly Orthodox, and that they had been registered as such arbitrarily by the local authorities. In many cases this was likely true. There was advantage to be had for clergy in the fiction that they had expanded their flocks, and the previous two decades had seen widespread coercive measures applied in affairs of faith.[64] Yet we should not discount dissimulation on the part of the peasantry. They were aware that tolerance was only granted to those who had been non-Orthodox 'from birth', and that if they admitted they had recently converted they would expose their 'corruptors' to draconian punishment.[65] It is my contention that such dissimulation was common. This desertion of the Church was not simply an unmasking of the hitherto secretly non-Orthodox, but a reaction against the increasing diversity of parish life. This can be demonstrated by examining the apostasies of Russians in the 1860s in some depth.

Although cases of apostasy were occurring throughout the empire, it is possible to get an impression of where they were concentrated by looking at those most prominent cases that reached the central authorities. In the ten years following the emancipation of the serfs, the Chancellery of the Holy Synod examined eighty-three cases from across the Russian Empire concerning the recreancy of thousands of Russian peasants who were registered as Orthodox, but now declared themselves to be Old Believers. The majority (fifty-two) occurred between 1863 and 1865, immediately after the terms of the emancipation decree had begun to be implemented.[66] The central Russian provinces

[64] On the development of coercive measures against the Old Believers at this time, see Thomas Marsden, *The Crisis of Religious Toleration in Imperial Russia: Bibikov's System for the Old Believers, 1841–1855* (Oxford, 2015).

[65] These laws can be found in *Svod zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii* [Digest of Laws of the Russian Empire], 15 vols. (St Petersburg, 1857), xiv, section III, articles 60–91.

[66] RGIA, f. 796, op. 142, g. 1861, d. 100, 192, 1462, 2204, 1692, 2101, 1108, 1200, 1770, 2143; RGIA, f. 796, op. 143, g. 1862, d. 525, 715, 748, 958, 1009, 1053, 1092, 1989, 2071, 2094, 2448; RGIA, f. 796, op. 144, g. 1863, d. 5, 118, 170, 236, 275, 398, 419, 607, 907, 1010, 1064, 1139, 1171, 1222, 1271, 1492, 1518,

(cont. on p. 17)

are almost unrepresented in these cases, which occur largely within a U-shape: from north-east of the Urals, down along the Kama and Volga rivers and up again through the western provinces of present-day Ukraine and Belarus. Thus they took place in those liminal areas where the success of Russification would be determined. While these provinces contained areas of ethnic homogeneity as well as diversity, an investigation of where the cases occurred at parish level suggests a correlation between diversity and apostasy.[67] As the Figure 1 below shows, of the eighty-three cases that reached the Chancellery of the Holy Synod in the ten years from 1861 to 1870, the majority (53 per cent) took place in parishes that were likely to be ethnically diverse given their location. Only 12 per cent took place in areas where it was unlikely that the peasant recreants had any regular contact with different ethnic communities.[68]

(n. 66 cont.)

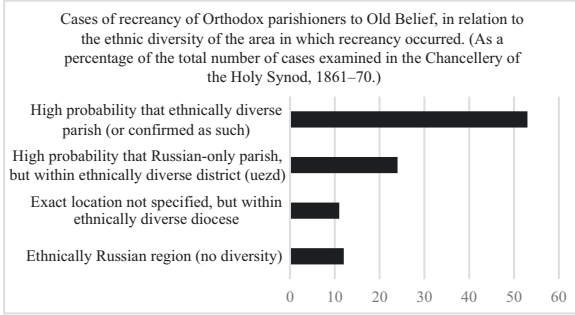
1520, 1908, 1938; RGIA, f. 796, op. 145, g. 1864, d. 514, 789, 819, 934, 938, 1085, 1092, 1189, 1231, 1307, 1309, 1503, 1788, 1897, 2151, 2387, 2400; RGIA, f. 796, op. 146, g. 1865, d. 287, 544, 595, 684, 705, 746, 1121, 1158, 1186, 1284, 1373, 1385, 1638, 1736, 1973; RGIA, f. 796, op. 147, g. 1866, d. 67, 622, 724, 940, 1257, 1287; RGIA, f. 796, op. 149, g. 1868, d. 816; RGIA, f. 796, op. 150, g. 1869, d. 1035, 1615; RGIA, f. 796, op. 151, g. 1870, d. 624.

[67] I have used different methods to try to ascertain the parishes in which apostasy occurred and the ethnic composition of these parishes. Usually the village and province — and often the district — in which the apostasy occurred are indicated in the register of the case files of the Chancellery of the Holy Synod. For the provinces of Kazan and Penza, there are published works that detail the composition of each parish (N. N. Vecheslav (ed.), *Estestvennoe prirashchenie sel'skogo naseleniia Kazanskoi gubernii po prikhodam, c oboznacheniem plemennogo ego sostava i otnoshenii mezhdu polami* [The Natural Increase of the Rural Population of Kazan Province According to Parish with an Indication of Tribal Constitution and Relations between the Sexes] (Kazan, 1875); A. E. Popov, *Tserkvi, prichtyi prikhody Penzenskoi eparkhii* [Churches and Parish Clergy of Penza Diocese] (Penza, 1896)). Where there are no such sources, I have located the village in question on a detailed map of the province or district, and compared the location to Rittikh's ethnographic map. A. Rittikh, *Etnograficheskaya karta Evropeiskoi Rossii: Sostavil po porucheniiu Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva* [An Ethnographic Map of European Russia: Composed According to the Instructions of the Imperial Geographic Society] (St Petersburg, 1875).

[68] This evidence is far from conclusive. It was to the historic peripheries of the empire that the Old Believers had fled to escape persecution, and registered Old Believers were more concentrated in these areas. Recent statistical expeditions carried out in the early 1850s had, however, suggested that the number of

(cont. on p. 18)

FIGURE 1
CASES OF RECREANCY OF ORTHODOX PARISHIONERS TO OLD BELIEF, IN RELATION TO THE ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF THE AREA IN WHICH RECREANCY OCCURRED (AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES EXAMINED IN THE CHANCELLERY OF THE HOLY SYNOD, 1861–70)



The suggestion of a connection between ethnic diversity and religious apostasy is still stronger when we descend to a provincial level. Kazan Province provides a good case study, as it was the site not only of pronounced ethnic diversity and high levels of non-Russian conversion, but also high levels of Russian apostasy.[69] For the duration of the nineteenth century, Kazan Province consisted of twelve districts. At least nine of these experienced mass movements of Russians from Orthodoxy to Old Belief in the two decades surrounding the emancipation decree. With the exception of Kazan district, these deviations

(n. 68 cont.)
unregistered Old Believers was highest in the central Russian provinces, and so, if the post-1861 apostasies did merely indicate long-time 'secret schismatics' seeking legal recognition, then I would expect these provinces to be more highly represented. I. A. Kirillov, *Statistika Staroobriadchestva* [Statistics of Old Belief] (Moscow, 1913), 13–14. For the expeditions of the 1850s, see Marsden, *Crisis of Religious Toleration*, 83–119.

[69] In 1868, 41.76 per cent of the population of 1,671,291 was identified as Russian, 28.9 per cent Tatar, 21.46 per cent Chuvash and 6.1 per cent Mari. At the same time, 72 per cent of the population was Orthodox Christian: 100 per cent of the Russians, 96 per cent of the Mari and 98 per cent of the Chuvash, but only 7 per cent of the Tatars. The vast majority of the remaining 28 per cent of the population were Muslim Tatars. Rittikh, *Materialy*, i, 113–114.

took place in parishes with ethnically mixed flocks.[70] The clearest indication that these mid-century apostasies represented a fundamental realignment of the fault lines of the schism comes from looking at where the spread of dissent was most dynamic. In 1855, the top three districts in the Table below — those with the highest proportion of Russian-only parishes — together accounted for 77 per cent of the registered dissenters in the province.[71] Yet, it was those districts with relatively small dissenting populations but with the highest proportion of mixed parishes, Tetiushi and Tsivilsk, that were identified by the ecclesiastical and civil authorities in the 1850s and 1860s as the areas in which Old Belief was spreading most rapidly.[72] The number of those claiming to be Old Believers in 1865, for example, would have increased the number of Old Believers in Tsivilsk district by 65 per cent, and the number in Tetiushi district by 101 per cent.[73]

[70] For example, in 1853 investigations were initiated into the deviation of over 1,000 people from eleven villages in Laishev district. Over 60 per cent of those implicated came from the parish of Urakhcha. Although Laishev was an overwhelmingly Russian district, Urakhcha parish contained a mixture of Russians and christened Tatars. Likewise in Spassk district, where 69 per cent of parishes were Russian only, the mixed village of Rysovaia Polina in Iukhmachi parish was the centre of the spread of dissent. NART, f. 1 op. 2, d. 1108, ll. 18–20. Vecheslav (ed.), *Estestvennoe prirashchenie*, i, 284–5; 306–37; NART, f. 1 op. 2, d. 2100, ll. 4–5.

[71] See the statistics for the number of registered *raskol'niki* in Kazan Province for 1855. NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1106.

[72] About the concern of the MVD about general apostasy in Tetiushi district in 1860, see NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1629, l. 39. And for the often-reported fear that whole parishes in Tsivilsk district were turning from Orthodoxy to dissent, see NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 63, ll. 1–40, 86–9, 119, 254–5, 284–7, 462–7, 528–49. In 1855, the lists of the crimes committed by *raskol'niki* shows that the Kazan criminal court was dominated by cases from these two districts: 13 cases from each district. NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1108, ll. 39–48.

[73] NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1629, l. 39; NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 2100, ll. 4–5, 18, 30; NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 63, ll. 86–9.

ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF PARISHES BY DISTRICT IN KAZAN PROVINCE IN RELATION TO APOSTASIES TO OLD BELIEF*

District	Percentage of parishes with Russian-only population	Percentage of parishes with Russians and other ethnicities	Percentage of parishes with no Russians	Parish with largest movement of Russian Orthodox to Old Belief (1850–70)	Ethnic constitution of parish
Kazan	76	22	2	Voskresenskoe (1865)	Russian
Laishev	73	27	0	Urakhcha (1853)	Russian/ Tatar
Sviiazhsk	71	29	0	Nizhnii Uslon (1866)	Russian/ Tatar
Spassk	69	31	0	Iukhmachi (1865)	Rus/ Chuv/ Mor/Tat
Chistopol	35	63	2	Vershina (1865)	Russian/ Chuvash
Cheboksari	34	52	14	Sundyr (1855)	Chuvash/ Russian
Tetiushi	28	72	0	Siukeevo (1856)	Russian/ Tatar
Mamadysh	21	70	9	Iukachi (1863)	Tat/Rus/ Vot/Mari/
Tsivilsk	0	96	4	Mozharovo (1855)	Chuvash/ Russian

* Source: For the number and ethnic composition of parishes in each district, see Vecheslav (ed.), *Estestvennoe prirashchenie*. For the cases of apostasy, see NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1108, ll. 13–15; NART, f. 1 op. 2, d. 1108, ll. 18–20; NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1108, ll. 39–48; NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 297, l. 465^{ob}; NART, f. 1 op. 2, d. 2100, ll. 4–5; NART, f. 1 op. 2, d. 2100, l. 32; NART, f. 1, op. 3, d. 840, l1.28–30; NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1213, l. 107; NART, f. 1, op. 3, d. 840, l1. 28–30.
Note. Rus = Russian; Tat = Tatar; Chuv = Chuvash; Mor = Mordva; Vot = Votiaki

In Tetiushi and Tsivilsk districts, reports about the spread of dissent are orientated primarily around three settlements, each of them parish centres with ethnically mixed populations: Siukeevo, on the banks of the Volga, on the eastern periphery of Tetiushi district; Frolovo, on the southern periphery of the same

district; and Mozharovo, in the eastern part of Tsivilsk district. Each of these villages had an established Old Believer population, but in the 1840s, when persecutory measures were at their height, some of these Old Believers had given a signature, bearing legal force, that they would convert to Orthodoxy.[74] Investigations into the spread of dissent began in the mid-1850s, when a handful of those who had given their signatures clearly reneged on their promises.[75] Faced with accusations of indulgence from the side of the Church and of religious persecution from the side of the dissenters, the civil authorities tended to let cases drag on undecided such that they were concluded in the stalemate of clerical 'exhortation': the recognition of the priests' right to regularly visit his dissenting parishioners and use polemic or persuasion to bring them back to the Church. Without a timely and forceful resolution from the side of the civil authorities, the recreants approached their interactions with the clergy with an increasingly open and confident animosity. One peasant answered the Siukeevo parish priest with 'swearing and cursing', saying he was 'permitted by the tsar to live as he wanted'.[76] Another said he had the copy of a royal *ukaz* that granted him religious freedom, and therefore warned the priest in Frolovo not to 'dare to come to us'.[77] A peasant in Mozharovo plainly asked the priest 'not to bother his family'.[78]

There can be little doubt that these stubborn dissenters were Old Believers born and bred. At least two of them appeared in the parish records as *raskol'niki* (schismatics) going back to the 1820s, and the dates of their signed conversions to Orthodoxy, often made under great pressure (while in prison), were recorded.[79] They were identified by their fellow villagers as Old Believers and eventually, after years of prevarication, the civil authorities

[74] For Siukeevo, see NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 207, ll. 353–8. For Mozharovo, see NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 63, ll.1–40.

[75] NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1213, ll. 4, 10, 12–13, 27–8; NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 63, ll. 343–4; NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 82, ll. 14–22^{ob}.

[76] NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1375, l. 1.

[77] NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 82, ll. 48–50.

[78] NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 63, ll. 343–4.

[79] NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 82, l. 51; NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 63, l. 119; NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1213, ll. 4, 72.

tended to conclude that they were, indeed, what they claimed to be.[80] Yet, the open stubbornness of these individuals gave weight to the growing sense that one could now choose to live as one wanted when it came to matters of faith.[81] At roughly the same time that these individuals were openly returning to the faiths of their fathers, hundreds of other Russian peasants began to show their dissent, apparently for the first time. In Siukeevo, forty-four people fell from Orthodoxy in 1856, and from here dissent spread north up the Volga to Bogorodskoe, where twenty-three peasants announced themselves to be Old Believers. The strong spreading of the 'schism' was reported in Frolovo in 1864, from where it spread east to Malaia Shemiakina in the neighbouring parish. In Tsivilsk district, most of the peasants from Mozharovo (a total of 1,500 people) were said by the priest to no longer be Orthodox, and by 1864, 400 people of the neighbouring parish to the west, in Shakulovo, seem to have followed their example.[82]

In these latter cases, the peasants' claims that they had always been Old Believers are less convincing. In Bogorodskoe, twenty of the twenty-three peasants had been born and christened in Orthodoxy and had often attended communion and confession up to 1856.[83] There was no record of any previous dissent in Malaia Shemiakina.[84] Parish records might be falsified by an unscrupulous priest, and Old Believers often used the church 'by necessity' for key rites of passage; however, the fellow-parishioners of the dissenters themselves were perhaps more reliable witnesses. After the mass drop-off in Siukeevo, sixty-three Orthodox parishioners all reported that there were only thirteen born Old Believers in the village, and that any others were recent converts.[85] Those in Shakulovo claimed that their 'ancestors' had secretly kept the old faith; but tellingly, they gave just as much weight to their contemporary connections with Mozharovo and

[80] NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1213, ll. 111, 130; NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 82, l. 51.

[81] Priests were certainly concerned about the public nature of these dissenters' opposition. NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1375, l. 1.

[82] The paths of 'infection' come across clearly from the archival documents. NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 63, ll. 528–49; NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1213, ll. 7–8, 114; NART, f. 4, op. 96, d. 11, ll. 12–14.

[83] NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1213, ll. 72–3.

[84] NART, f. 4, op. 96, d. 11, l. 31.

[85] NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1213, l. 111.

the towns of the province.[86] The fact that these newly revealed Old Believers appeared to have little knowledge of the faith to which they belonged, and that they switched readily between branches of Old Belief, supports the idea that these were recent converts in a society experiencing dynamic religious flux.[87]

These peasants became converts because they had already lost their belief in the sacred character of their parish church. The pre-existence of prejudices against the Orthodox Church is attested to by priests across the affected areas of Tsivilsk and Tetiushi districts. Their parishioners did not attend church with enthusiasm. They preferred to visit cell-dwelling holy women.[88] They looked doubtfully upon their church's sacred objects, and venerated popularly produced 'simple and crude' copper icons, rather than those that adorned its walls.[89] They listened eagerly when Old Believers told them that what they saw in the church were not icons but simply wooden boards, and were persuaded not to receive the priest in their houses when he carried such icons in procession.[90] From this situation it was a shorter step to gathering in a peasant's house for prayers, burying their dead in the forest and christening their children themselves.[91] Most of all, however, priests suggested that the disgruntled Orthodox were alienated by the Church's manner of making the sign of the cross. The priest led his flock with a gesture he made with three fingers, held in a 'pinch', but this differed from the popular custom of making the gesture with two fingers.[92] It was the Old Believers' veneration of the two-fingered method of making the cross and their denial of the sacrality of the 'pinch' that made their dissent most persuasive. Their condemnation of the

[86] NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 63, l. 531[ob].

[87] There were cases of those who had recently announced themselves to be Old Believers switching between branches soon after; see NART, f. 4, op. 96, d. 11, l. 36; NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 2100, l. 30.

[88] As occurred in Siukeevo; see NART, f. 1, op. 3, d. 848, ll. 1–3.

[89] As observed in Mozharovo; NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 63, l. 467.

[90] In Frolovo and in Gogolikho (in Spassk district). NART, f. 1, op. 3, d. 855, l. 6; NART, f. 1, op. 3, d. 856, l. 1.

[91] As Orthodox peasants were reported to have started to do in both districts. NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 63, l. 528[ob]; NART, f. 1, op. 3, d. 848, l. 3.

[92] See the behaviour of peasants in Malaia Shemiakina, Mozharovo and Shakulovo. NART, f. 4, op. 96, d. 11, l. 14; NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 63, l. 467.

'pinch' provided an explanation for feelings of alienation from the Church and an alternative pathway to salvation.

For although the act of crossing oneself with two fingers has long been associated with Old Belief, in fact, throughout the nineteenth century, vast swathes of the Russian population maintained this practice without ever dissenting from Orthodoxy.[93] This ritualistic divergence from official Orthodox practice only became outright dissent when it was accompanied by ritualistic divisions in the Church itself, something that was brought about by the increasing diversity of parish life. The vast majority of Finno-Ugric and Tatar people converted to Orthodox Christianity not only under duress, but after the reforms of the seventeenth century had altered its ritualized bodily practices. Most importantly, the converted non-Russians were taught to cross themselves with three fingers. Divergence in ritual between a flock and a priest might be tolerable. Priests were, in any case, outsiders, who belonged to a more formalized ritualistic world. Even so, priests were often under intense pressure to conform to the heterodox practices of their flocks, whether these be Russian or non-Russian.[94] What was even less tolerable was ritualistic division among the faithful. This demonstrated the absence of a shared social memory, and so broke the sacred connection between worship and the imagined continuity of a primordial community.[95]

Alienation from the Church might just as easily lead to non-observance as to apostasy and conversion to Old Belief.

[93] Evidence for this can be found in the Volga-Kama region (see *Mamadysh i Mamadyshskii uezd*, 413) and in the central Russian provinces in the reports of the expeditions of 1852 from Iaroslavl and Kostroma; see V. Kel'siev (ed.), *Sbornik pravitel'stvennykh svednii o raskol'nikakh* [Collection of Government Information about the Schismatics], 4 vols. (London, 1861), ii, 1–27.

[94] Examples of this can be found among both Russians and non-Russians; see Tiunin's account of Orthodox priests struggling to engage with christened Tatars. N. N. Tiunin, *Pis'ma po raskolu* [Letters about the Schism], 2 vols. (Ufa, 1889), i, 389–403. On this phenomenon and priests reinforcing 'localised religious traditions', see Friesen, *Colonizing*, 109–14, and Gregory L. Freeze, *The Parish Clergy in Nineteenth-Century Russia: Crisis, Reform, Counter-Reform* (Princeton, NJ, 1983), 59–61.

[95] Gestures, according to Paul Connerton, are performances that have 'sustained and conveyed' a 'recollected knowledge of the past', and so are essential to the existence of social groups. Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 3.

In Alaty, in Kazan district, the priest suspected his flock had fallen to the schism. They denied it, and given that there were no centres of Old Belief in the surrounding area, there is reason to believe them.[96] In response to his exhortation, they answered:

> We have not withdrawn from the Church of God, but we don't want to go into it to pray because in it pray pinchers [those who make the sign of the cross with three fingers], the clean-shaven, tobacco-users, baptized Tatars, and Cheremis [Mari], and we don't want to mix our cross with their cross.[97]

Where, however, Old Believers provided an example of how to live outside of the Church, as they did in the years around 1861 in Siukeevo, Frolovo and Mozharovo, they could find new converts from among Russians in ethnically diverse parishes. When mapping the spread of Old Belief from these parish centres, its movement to those areas where alienation from the Church was most keenly felt was in the direction of greater ethnic diversity, to places where Russians constituted a smaller proportion of Orthodox parishioners.[98] Priests recognized the ethnic dimension of this spread. Describing the threat of the Frolovo dissenters to the Orthodoxy of the parishioners of Malaia Shemiakina in 1864, the local priest warned that 'the *Russians* may soon honour the schism rather than Orthodoxy since the religious customs and rituals fulfilled by them are for the greater part [the same as] those [used in the] schism'.[99] In 1861, the priest of Mozharovo explained the appeal of Old Belief in his parish and beyond by noting that 'all *Russian* peasants look with prejudice upon the rituals of the Orthodox Church'.[100] Both clergymen presided over parishes that contained Russians and baptized Chuvash.

[96] In 1875 there is still no indication of Old Belief in the area. Vecheslav (ed.), *Estestvennoe prirashchenie*, i, 20–21.

[97] Investigation from 1848. NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 207, ll. 481–98.

[98] To the north of Siukeevo, Kirel'skoe contained a Mordva minority, and Bogorodskoe *volost* contained a large population of apostatized christened Tatars. In Shemiakino, Russians comprised a thin majority over the Chuvash, and in Shakulovo, Russians constituted a small minority within an overwhelmingly Chuvash population. Vecheslav (ed.), *Estestvennoe prirashchenie*, i, 110, 348, 350, 362–6.

[99] My italics. NART, f. 4, op. 96, d. 11, l. 14.

[100] My italics. NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 63, l. 465^{ob}.

This process of alienation was dynamic, caused by an increase in the number of mixed parishes, which had been brought about by population growth and the policy of resettlement. While recent converts usually dissimulated and claimed their long-lasting adherence to Old Belief, every so often in moments of stress or anger the façade was dropped. In 1867, a peasant from Frolovo named Makarov, who had long been avoiding exhortation, was suddenly confronted by the priest and the following conversation ensued:

> Priest: Why don't you agree to go to church?
> Makarov: Because there is no zeal.
> Priest: And why is that?
> Makarov: I don't want to.
> Priest: Not long ago you went to church and were zealous in it?
> Makarov: If I went previously that was because I understood nothing, and now I see that I ought not to go to church.
> Priest: Why is it so? Surely you know that out of the church there is no salvation.
> Makarov: It is so, but now in the church, as I said to you before, all is changed.
> Priest: What is changed?
> Makarov: You know yourself.[101]

Frolovo was home to a population of newly baptized Tatars.[102] The forced resettlement of baptized Tatars in the district from the 1830s onwards makes it likely that the parish had experienced a change in its ethnic make-up within the previous three decades.[103]

The connection between ethnic diversity, ritualistic alienation and religious dissent was made most clearly by the peasants of Mozharovo. In 1861, the parish priest reported that those who had been corrupted into Old Belief refused to listen to his exhortations. Instead they answered him:

> Here you persecute us, revile us, call us *raskol'niki* [schismatics] and order us to go to church, where Chuvash smoke their pipes [and] sniff tobacco, they gorge themselves with it, they stuff it and pack it into

[101] NART, f. 4, op. 96, d. 11, l. 36.

[102] E. A. Malov, *Statisticheskie svedeniia o kreshchennykh tatarakh Kazanskoi i nekotorykh drugikh eparkhii v Volzhskom basseine* [Statistical Information about the Christened Tatars of Kazan and a Few Other Dioceses in the Volga Basin] (Kazan, 1866), 26.

[103] Malov, *Prikhody*, 12–18.

> their snouts, and then go into church and start to pinch [make the sign of the cross with three fingers] and pray to God... we would not go to pray with them if you dragged us on a rope... They are the most cursed people and we are true Christians. Why then do you hate us and persecute us, but true Christians will always be persecuted... You say what you want to us but we don't trust you. We are true Old Believers and we will not pray with the Chuvash and with the pinchers.[104]

IV

The apostasies of the 1860s occurred at a critical juncture in the relationship between Church and state. The clergy were the subject of intense criticism and scrutiny from secular officials and the press.[105] They were excluded from policy discussions that concerned the Church's interests, and the reforms of that decade, which sought to make the Church more economically viable by mobilizing the piety of the laity, consolidating the number of parishes and reducing ecclesiastical positions, were initiated by the Minister of Internal Affairs.[106] The failure of these reforms to improve the status or material condition of the clergy resulted in deep demoralization.[107] The era of counter-reform, beginning in the 1870s, saw an attempt to reenergize both the Church and its flocks by bringing them closer together, both physically and spiritually. In this period, the trends of the 1860s were reversed. Orthodoxy returned to political prominence, as the supposed guarantor of a loyal national community, and in measures associated with the staunchly conservative Over-Procurator of the Holy Synod, Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the number of parishes and clergy was increased, and there was an 'exponential growth' in parish schools.[108]

In the imperial context, these trends were bound together with both the attempt to combat apostasy and an increasing preoccupation with Russification. The apostasies of the Turkic

[104] NART, f. 4, op. 80, d. 63, ll. 463–463[ob].

[105] Freeze, *Parish Clergy*, 37–84.

[106] For example, in 1858 the Church was excluded from the new Committee to discuss changing policy towards the Old Believers; see RGIA, f. 1473, op. 1, d. 36. On Valuev initiating Church reform, see Freeze, *Parish Clergy*, 240–47.

[107] Freeze, *Parish Clergy*, 403–7.

[108] Gregory L. Freeze, 'Konstantin Pobedonostsev: Chief Procurator as Chief Parishioner', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, lxi, no. 3 (2019), 269–70.

and Finno-Ugric peoples of the Volga-Kama region demonstrated the purely nominal nature of their Orthodoxy; however, mobilizing piety meant developing a conscious, rather than purely external, faith among parishioners.[109] This concern gave prominence to the ideas of the Kazan-based orientalist and lay missionary, Nikolai Il'minskii, who proposed strengthening the faith of non-Russians through the provision of education and religion in their native languages. By 1870, upon his initiative, the first non-Russian priests were approved for ordination, and the 'Il'minskii method' in schooling had been spread to provinces in the south and east of the empire.[110] Il'minskii's influence persisted into the era of counter-reform. For Pobedonostsev, the spread of Islam was a political as much as a religious problem, and strengthening the non-Russians in their Orthodoxy, despite the concessions it meant making to native languages, was valued as a form of defensive Russification.[111] Il'minskii's ideas thus helped to determine where new parishes might be formed to strengthen the wavering population in their faith.

One constant aim in the period of reform and counter-reform was to encourage the involvement of the laity. Success was limited, but where it occurred, a split between institutional Orthodoxy and the faithful — between Church and church — has been discerned. Gregory Freeze writes of a growing parish assertiveness: an attempt to wrest lay control over local sacred affairs away from the embattled clergy.[112] The modest success of the Il'minskii method seems to have come at a similar price.[113] The rate of apostasy was curbed, and Il'minskii supposedly saved over a hundred thousand souls for the Orthodox Church.[114] Paul Werth has argued, however, that where his interventions

[109] This is the argument of Elena Campbell; see Campbell, *Muslim Question*, 42.

[110] Dowler, *Schooling*, 62–84; Campbell, *Muslim Question*, 43.

[111] Campbell, *Muslim Question*, 46–7.

[112] Gregory L. Freeze, 'From Dechristianization to Laicization: State, Church and Believers in Russia', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, lvii, nos.1 –2 (2015), 8.

[113] For example, leading figures of the Mari Orthodox movement in the Archangel Michael monastery in Kazan Province opposed the Church's attempt to install Russian clerics in the monastery to exert control. Werth, 'Orthodoxy as Ascription', 248.

[114] On the success of Il'minskii, see Werth, 'Orthodoxy as Ascription', 246; Dowler, *Schooling*, 229–40.

worked, non-Russians embraced Orthodoxy to maintain 'ethnic and cultural particularity' in the face of Russification and rejected the interference of the Church, thereby 'negat[ing] the equation between conversion and assimilation'.[115] The reasons for this emerging 'conflict between church and Church' in the late imperial period have not been fully explored or placed in the context of cultural diversity at the level of the parish.[116] Werth's association of the embrace of Orthodoxy and ethnic identity is suggestive, as is evidence from Freeze's work that parish mobilization was most effective in areas of cultural diversity — it was here that parishioners felt the most urgent need to claim control over the sacred.[117]

In the final section of this article, I hope to explore where the conflict between church and Church became manifest over the period of reform and counter-reform by showing the dynamics of religious life within a single district of Kazan Province. Such a study is made possible by a detailed 1904 survey of the parishes of Mamadysh district.[118] Mamadysh was probably the most ethnically and confessionally diverse district in Kazan Province.[119] As elsewhere in the province, its parishes were rocked by cases of mass apostasy between the 1860s and 1880s that saw multi-ethnic Orthodoxy rejected in favour of ethnically exclusive religiosity. The survey of 1904 suggests that the Church, under the influence of Il'minskii, had some success in halting the movements of recreancy thereafter. However, this short-term success was primarily religious, and was only achieved in ways that ultimately undermined the Russifying potential of the ruling faith and the Church as a tool of imperial

[115] Werth, 'Orthodoxy as Ascription', 240, 248.

[116] The phrase is borrowed from Freeze, 'Dechristianization to Laicization', 7.

[117] The attempt to set up parish councils was most successful in Kazan and Samara; see Freeze, *Parish Clergy*, 293.

[118] *Mamadysh i Mamadyshskii uezd*. A multivolume work was clearly planned, but only one appeared in print.

[119] Of a population of 162,000: 56 per cent were Tatar and Muslim; 30 per cent Russian and Orthodox (including Old Believers); 8 per cent christened Tatars; 3 per cent christened Votiaki; 1 per cent pagan Votiaki; 1 per cent christened Mari; and 0.5 per cent pagan Mari. Rittikh, *Materialy*, i, 113–114. It should be noted that ethnicity was often in the eye of the beholder.

and national cohesion. In this respect, Il'minskii was only helping to facilitate a movement that came from below: a popular attempt to reclaim the sacred sphere, which, generally opposed by religious institutions, took the form of ethnicization. When the Bolsheviks settled the conflict between church and Church in the interests of the former, they thus removed a cause of developing ethnic tensions and paved the way for a popular de-Churched religious revival.[120]

The pattern in Mamadysh district (see Map below) backs up the idea that increasing ethnic mixing caused by population movement and population growth led to apostasy. In 1805, there were only fifteen Orthodox parishes in the district. Of these, ten were purely Russian and five contained mixed populations.[121] By 1875 there were twenty-one parishes, six having been organized since 1861. Of these, only five were ethnically homogenous.[122] It was Russians who led the way in leaving the Church. In the early 1860s, mass apostasies to Old Belief occurred in Iukachi, Abdi and Omary parishes. Iukachi was one of the first mixed parishes of Mamadysh district, and remained among the most diverse. Baptized Tatars predominated among the parishioners, who also consisted of Votiaki and Mari.[123] Abdi and Omary had been purely Russian parishes, but the forced resettlement of Tatars meant that they were mixed by the mid-century.[124] The Russian movements in Iukachi and Abdi were followed by mass desertions from the Church of almost the entire baptized

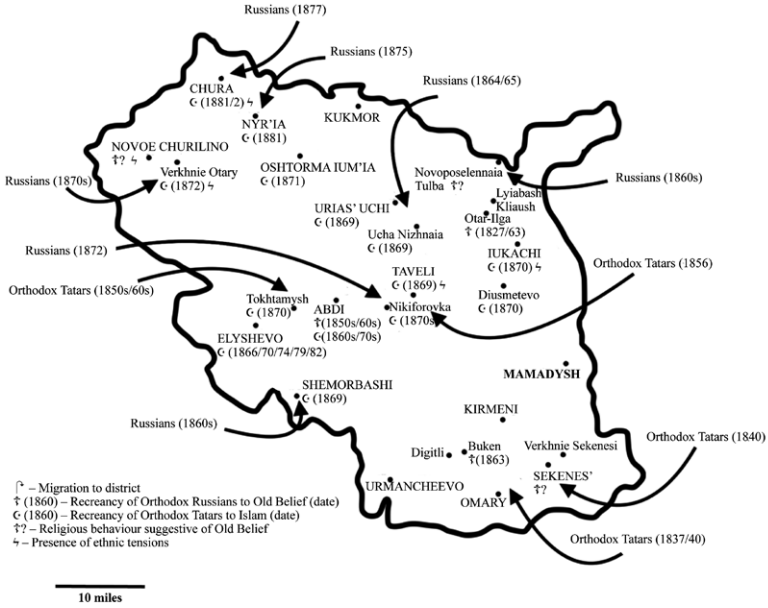
[120] On the religious revival of the 1920s, see Freeze, 'Dechristianization to Laicization', 7, 12–13.

[121] *Mamadysh i Mamadyshskii uezd*, p. xvi.

[122] Vecheslav (ed.), *Estestvennoe prirashchenie*, i, 184–220.

[123] *Mamadysh i Mamadyshskii uezd*, p. xvi, 92–8, 151, 398; Vecheslav (ed.), *Estestvennoe prirashchenie*, i, 196–200.

[124] *Mamadysh i Mamadyshskii uezd*, 35, 81–8, 196; Vecheslav (ed.), *Estestvennoe prirashchenie*, i, 188–90, 192; Malov, *Prikhody*, 16. Similar cases can be found throughout Kazan Province. For example, in Chistopol district: in 1856, newbaptized Tatars were resettled in Toyabi. By 1865, a large number of the Russian villagers had secretly deviated to Old Belief. NART, f. 1, op. 2, d. 2100, l. 32; Malov, *Prikhody*, 31.



POPULATION MOVEMENT, RELIGIOUS APOSTASY, AND ETHNIC TENSIONS IN MAMADYSH DISTRICT*

* Source: Adapted by the author from <http://www.etomesto.ru/map/base/16/mamadyshskiy-uezd-1895.jpg>. Also see *Mamadysh i Mamadyshskii uezd*, 159, 182, 334, 356, 375, 384, 416; Vecheslav (ed.), *Estestvennoe prirashchenie*, i, 194–200; and Rittikh, *Etnograficheskaya karta*.

Tatar and Mari populations of these parishes.[125] This tended to be blamed on Muslim propaganda, but the influence of the Russian population, either by positive example or by eliciting a negative reaction, should not be discounted. The latter seems particularly persuasive in relation to the mass Tatar apostasies in the northern half of Mamadysh district. This had primarily been the domain of Tatar and Finno-Ugric peoples; however, the emancipation opened up the area to Russian migrants, whose arrival was followed by Tatar apostasies. This sequence of events occurred in nearly every parish containing baptized Tatars in the northern and central parts of the district.[126]

The mass apostasies occasioned an energetic response from the Orthodox Church. Missions, parish reorganization and the founding of schools, often on Il'minskii's initiative, were all part of this effort, which seems — from the perspective of 1904 — to have been moderately successful. From Abdi parish, the threat of Old Belief had apparently been banished by the mid-1870s.[127] Many of those who belonged to Iukachi parish, and who had joined the Old Believers in 1863, were persuaded back to the Church in the 1870s and 1880s.[128] In Buken, by 1904, Russian dissenters constituted barely 2.5 per cent of parishioners. There was no such success among the 'fallen' Tatars, who for the most part seemed to have remained alienated from the Church, but by the 1890s 'improvement' was noted among those of Diusmetevo (previously of Iukachi parish), of Arniash (previously of Abdi parish) and of Oshtorma-Ium'ia, and there do not seem to have been any further mass apostasies after 1882.[129] However,

[125] *Mamadysh i Mamadyshskii uezd*, p. xvi, 24–45, 92–8, 101–10, 151, 398; Vecheslav (ed.), *Estestvennoe prirashchenie*, i, 194–200. For the ethnic composition of Achi, see Rittikh, *Etnograficheskaya karta*. While there were three major cases of Russians turning towards Old Belief in this period, the cases of Tatars announcing their wish to return to Islam were more widespread. This is not surprising, given that baptized Tatars were nearly everywhere surrounded by unchristened Tatars who worshipped freely. Old Believers were few and far between in Mamadysh district.

[126] Of course, this was not the only factor: baptized Tatars in one parish would have been aware of the behaviour of baptized Tatars in another parish, and this also had an important impact. For the role of Tatar 'cultural imperialism', see Dowler, *Schooling*, 16–17. For the dates of apostasy indicated on the map, see *Mamadysh i Mamadyshskii uezd*, 159, 182, 334, 356, 375, 384, 416.

[127] *Mamadysh i Mamadyshskii uezd*, 33.

[128] *Ibid.*, 153.

[129] *Ibid.*, 53, 98, 233. Il'minskii's schools saved an estimated 90,000 baptized Tatars. Dowler, *Schooling*, 177.

this shoring up of the Church's position appears to have been achieved by sacrificing most of its Russifying potential. What is notable about the parish reorganization that followed the apostasies, whether initiated from above or below, is that it tended to create more ethnically homogenous religious communities. In 1864, Buken was included in the new, and purely Russian, Digitli parish. The centre of Orthodox religious dissent in Iukachi parish, a village called Otar-Ilga, was included in the parish of Lyiabash-Kliaush, which was established in 1872 following a petition from peasants of five Russian villages who wished to leave Iukachi. The exclusively Tatar parish of Diusmetevo broke off from Iukachi the following decade.[130] Given the extent of the Tatar apostasy, Abdi had become overwhelmingly Russian by default by the 1870s, but it was split up still more along ethnic lines: Bol'shie Savrushi, a purely Tatar parish; Nyrty, a purely Russian parish; and although Staraia Ikshurma and Arniash were mixed, church services were divided by language.[131]

In most parish reports from the 1904 survey, the various ethnic groups, who shared villages as well as parishes, were said to get along well. They toiled together, traded together and entertained together.[132] The picture looks very different when we turn to Christian religious practices: the burial of the dead, the regular observance of public prayer and the Christian ceremonies of confession and communion. In the many ethnically mixed parishes of Mamadysh district, these should have provided opportunities for assimilation. Yet what becomes clear from the survey of 1904 is that where multi-ethnic Orthodoxy worked, it worked because the various ethnic groups were kept separate. Tatars and Finno-Ugric peoples took communion and confession because the ceremonies were conducted not in the parish church but in their village.[133] They buried their dead in different cemeteries or, where multiple cemeteries were not available, in clearly demarcated sections of the same cemetery.[134] They

[130] *Mamadysh i Mamadyshskii uezd*, 92–4, 151.
[131] *Ibid.*, 28, 53, 118, 262, 266.
[132] For example in Shemorbashi, Ucha Nizhniaia, Po Rechke Siner', Kukmor and Gorokhovoe Pole. *Ibid.*, 79, 142, 259, 357, 384.
[133] *Ibid.*, 357, 398, 414.
[134] *Ibid.*, 65, 121, 271, 401.

attended services when they were conducted separately by language, or, if the priests could not offer this, they separated from each other in church.[135] The most religiously observant parishes were those that were ethnically homogenous.[136] By the twentieth century it seems that the local clergy had by and large given up their hope in religion as a means to Russification. They placed their faith almost exclusively in education.[137]

That education was now spreading gave them cause for cautious optimism. So did the fact that more clergy could now provide multilingual services. Perhaps most promising of all was that, in the previous decade, church-building had gathered pace. Of the twenty-one parishes in the district in 1875, less than a quarter had been ethnically homogenous. No new parishes were established until the 1890s, but then a frenzy of reorganization meant that there were thirty-eight parishes in Mamadysh district by 1902. The striking result of this was a large rise in the number, and proportion, of those parishes that were purely Russian or Tatar: from five to twenty, or from under one quarter to over one half.[138]

Although the ecclesiastical authorities, and Il'minskii's suggestions, were behind the division of the larger mixed parishes of Mamadysh district, the parishioners themselves often played the decisive role in demanding an ethnically exclusive parish life. Il'minskii had envisaged Diusmetevo as a parish for both baptized Tatars and Mari, but the Mari refused to join the new parish. Notably, the new boundaries would have divided them from the other baptized Mari of Iukachi.[139] The purely

[135] The mixing of Russians and *inorodtsy* in church in Ucha Nizhniaia parish is remarked upon as exceptional, in comparison to the separation that happened elsewhere. *Ibid.*, 53, 185, 357, 385.

[136] See, for example, the parishes of Ershovka, Kirmeni, Krasnaia Gorka, Kukmor, Pen'ki, Sokol'i Gory and Usa-Malmyzhka. The parish of Kukmor is especially interesting in this respect. Its purely Russian parishioners were praised for their particular zeal in religious observance. Kukmor was, however, situated in an area of notable ethnic diversity, and, outside of their religious life, the Russians mixed frequently with those of other faiths. *Ibid.*, 116–117, 124, 134, 145, 246, 294, 349.

[137] *Ibid.*, 98, 110, 153, 259, 357, 398, 414.

[138] *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

[139] *Ibid.*, 94; Vecheslav (ed.), *Estestvennoe prirashchenie*, i, 196.

Russian parish of Verkhnie Sekenesi divided from the mixed Sekenes following an initiative of local peasants.[140] The only significant purely Russian settlement in Urias Uchi parish, Novoposelennaia Tulba, became an independent parish in 1902 after local peasants managed to secure a donation from a St Petersburg merchant.[141]

But such division was not always possible. In many areas the population was so mixed that the problem of ethnically diverse sacred spaces could not be solved by the redrawing of parish boundaries, while the provision of clergy proficient in Turkic or Finno-Ugric languages, despite Il'minskii's efforts, remained rare. It is striking that those parishes in which such solutions were not available, and in which the non-Russian population continued to frequent Orthodox services, are marked by either heterodox religious practices on the part of the Russian peasantry or the noted presence of ethnic tensions. In the significantly downsized Iukachi parish, Russians were said not to communicate at all with the non-Russians and to view them with contempt.[142] In Taveli, where Tatars and Russians inhabited the same villages but had nothing to do with one another, both groups were negligent in fulfilling their religious rites.[143] To the north of the district in Novoe Churilino, the parishioners crossed themselves like Old Believers and made excuses to avoid visiting church, while they considered it a sin to commune with Tatars.[144] To the south, in Sekenes, where Russians shared their church with Christianized Tatars, they preferred to consult with female hermits rather than the Orthodox clergy, but the parishioners of neighbouring Verkhnie Sekenesi were only Russian, and they exhibited no such heterodox behaviours.[145]

V

The dynamics of parish life in Mamadysh district are testament to the failure of Orthodoxy to fulfil the dual role which had been

[140] *Mamadysh i Mamadyshskii uezd*, 287.
[141] *Ibid.*, 331–5; Vecheslav (ed.), *Estestvennoe prirashchenie*, i, 202–4.
[142] *Mamadysh i Mamadyshskii uezd*, 398.
[143] *Ibid.*, 324–5.
[144] *Ibid.*, 413–414.
[145] *Ibid.*, 282–3, 290.

assigned to it in the late imperial period: to assimilate a diverse population into a Russian core, and to provide a national bond between state and society.[146] Instead, the Orthodox Church became an ambiguous and alienating institution. For non-Russians it was the Russian faith, but for Russians, it was the faith of the imperial state rather than the community. As has been seen, Russian peasants in Kazan Province expressed this openly, and they were still doing so on the eve of the twentieth century. In 1898 in Spassk District, an Old Believer peasant openly mocked an Orthodox Easter procession: 'They are carrying [the icon] to the Tatar village Ulgar, and the people go after it as though after a bear'.[147] The quantitative evidence suggests that similar tensions were emerging throughout the crucial liminal regions of the Russian Empire, and this is supported by fragmentary accounts. Sidor Vostriakov, who was born an Old Believer in Serdobsk district of Saratov Province in 1862, recalled that it was said in his region that to visit the Orthodox Church was 'to go *po-tatarski*'.[148] In Viatka Province, Orthodoxy was referred to as the faith of the pagans.[149] In Ufa Province, the clergy complained that 'christened non-Russians (*inorodtsy*) fall to Islam by the village, [while] the native Russian population go over to the schism in masses'.[150] In the western regions of the empire, in Chernigov Province, Russians apparently complained of the 'innovations' in their parish that permitted Ukrainians to enter the church for common prayer, a clash that was repeated when Russian and Ukrainian settlers shared Orthodox parishes in western Siberia.[151] That Orthodoxy thus fell between two

[146] On this role being envisaged for the Church, see Konstantin Pobedonostsev, *Reflections of a Russian Statesman*, trans. Robert Long (Ann Arbor, MI, 1965), 1–16.

[147] RGIA, f. 1574, op. 2, d. 59, ll. 22–22[ob].

[148] 'Krest'ianina Sidora Ivanova Vostriakova razskaz o zhizni v raskole i perekhode iz raskola v tserkov' [The Story of Peasant Sidor Ivanov Vostriakov about His Life in the Schism and His Conversion from the Schism to the Church], *Bratskoe Slovo*, No. 4 (1884), 174.

[149] Reported in Viatka Province in 1836. RGIA, f. 1473, op. 1, d. 13, l. 360.

[150] An article from Ufa printed in the newspaper *Russkii Kur'er* in May 1882. Quoted in Tiunin, *Pis'ma*, i, 405.

[151] This was reported in Chernigov Province in relation to Raduli *edinoverie* church in 1845. RGIA, f. 797, op. 15, d. 35668, l. 183[ob]. For the clashes in western Siberia see Friesen, *Colonizing*, 105–10.

stools explains why it did not unify the population of the empire behind the autocratic regime.[152] Rather than its providing social cohesion, parish tensions and animosities became increasingly socially disruptive.

The roots of this failure lay deep. Given the extent of religious persecution from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, it may seem perverse to accuse the Orthodox Church and Russian state of insufficient discipline, but this does seem to have been part of the problem. The catastrophic liturgical reforms of the seventeenth century made the Church uniquely ill-equipped to integrate new converts. These reforms not only led to the emergence of an alternative Orthodoxy in Old Belief, but also did not enforce common practice within churches. Those who converted were often outsiders not only through the language of their speech, but also the language of their ritual. Their outsider status was enforced through the empire's own policies of limited toleration. Coming so soon after the enforced conversions of the 1740s–1760s, the notion of toleration undermined the possibility of holding onto or absorbing these converts. As an imperial policy of integration, it affirmed the popular expectation that ethnicity and religion were one, but it coincided with the fierce persecution of anyone who sought to return to the faith of their ancestors. Compulsion coexisted with the expectation that return would be allowed, and so made the non-Russian Orthodox appear temporary, contingent and reluctant.[153] In the first half of the nineteenth century, population expansion and movement, including that caused by the state's own Russifying policies, made these problems tangible in the increasing phenomenon of mixed parishes.

The result was that when expectations of true religious freedom peaked, around the emancipation of 1861, Orthodoxy fragmented along ethnic lines. Imperial policies inadvertently promoted ethnicization from below, even before the state began to turn increasing attention to nationality as a category. The words of peasants about their hatred of sharing their churches with ethnic others and the coincidence of apostasy with diversity

[152] In this respect it appears to support Hosking's influential argument that the Russian nation was sacrificed for the empire. Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552–1917* (London, 1998).

[153] On the contempt with which converts were viewed, see Werth, *Margins*, 83.

demonstrate that ethnicity and religion had become somewhat separated in the minds of the population. What has been presented here challenges the often-expressed notion that religious identity had more meaning than ethnic identity to the illiterate peasant masses. At the least, the two seem too closely intertwined to have been separable for much of Russian imperial history. When forced conversions divided these two identities, this brought attention to ethnic difference as something separate to religious difference, and turned religious consciousness into ethnic consciousness. For many, the desire to find a space for ethnic exclusivity prevailed. Religion not only failed to assimilate the diverse population of the region, but as Il'minskii's relative success shows, dealing with religious tensions required giving increased space to independent ethnic expression.

As I have suggested, the circumstances that lay behind the failure of the Russian Empire's project of confessionalization rested on the unique coincidence of imperial expansion, religious schism, forced conversion and the coming of religious toleration, but the failure has wider implications for considering the relationship between religion and ethnicity from a social anthropological perspective. In the imperial context, where there is a profound degree of cultural diversity in the larger complex of everyday interactions, the social-functional role of religion in retaining a sense of primordial group identity is intensified. In a world of difference, the church or the temple was sacred because it was the space in which a bygone social unity was recollected, reified, worshipped and reaffirmed. This interpretation of religion is, of course, indebted to Durkheim, and it was Durkheim too who drew attention to the function of religious ritual in binding society together.[154] Yet, as has been seen, religious rituals only retained this function if they corresponded with and transmitted social memory.[155] Paul Connerton has argued that in non-literate societies the memories imparted by

[154] W. S. F. Pickering (ed.), *Durkheim on Religion* (Atlanta, GA, 1975), 74–99.

[155] Paul Connerton's argument that social groups exist only to the extent that they can draw upon shared memories has helped me to conceptualize this dynamic. Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 3.

such 'incorporating practices' are the defining, and essential, features of all social groups.[156] Drawing on both Durkheim and Connerton, we might say that religion, the idea of the sacred, is the formalized ritual that has grown up to safeguard the 'incorporating practices' that transmit social memory and so enable social unity. The intensified role of the Church in maintaining a sense of primordial identity, the correspondence between religious ritual and shared social memory, and the affirmation of this link through distinctive bodily performance would, then, all help to explain why ethnic and religious identity were almost indistinguishable in the diverse cultural context of empire.

Ethnicization in this context means the separation of ethnicity from religion, and places of worship possess characteristics, most importantly the performance of a communal historical memory, that can make them a key site of ethnic boundary formation. In bringing attention to this feature of religious practice, I am following Barth's and, after him, Brubaker's call for an 'eventful' perspective on the development of ethnic consciousness.[157] In the examples examined here, that consciousness was associated with specific changes in parish culture and religious practice. Ethnicity, rather than being a category imposed from above or propagated by educated nationalists, emerged out of religious tensions at a local level. Examining these religious roots of ethnic consciousness might, then, provide future avenues for exploring the development of nationalism from below.[158] Theorists of nationalism who have given attention to religion's role in the origin of nations have tended to see it in terms of its

[156] Connerton distinguishes between everyday 'incorporating practices' and the formalized ritual of a church service; however, he admits the line is blurred. *Ibid.*, 73–9.

[157] Fredrik Barth, 'Introduction', in Fredrik Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Long Grove, IL, 1998), 17–19; Rogers Brubaker, 'Ethnicity without Groups', *European Journal of Sociology*, xliii, no. 2 (2002), 167–8.

[158] Old Believers in regions of ethnic diversity seem to have developed a sense of nationalism earlier than other groups; see my study of nationalist content in Old Believer petitions, Marsden, 'Imperial Loyalty', 143. For Old Believers' role in patriotic politics, see Steinwedel, *Threads of Empire*, 185.

utility to educated elites, in building vernacular communities or providing a ready-made framework for mobilizing the masses.[159] In both these cases, nationalism appears as a corollary of secularization that repurposes religion to other ends. In the imperial Russian context examined here, ethnicization seems to emerge directly from religion; not as a result of secularization but, in its attempt to restore social memory, as a form of re-sacralization.

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[159] Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1997); Smith, *Chosen Peoples*. Hastings's focus on vernacular literacy suggests that nations are essentially the business of the elite, whereas, although Smith is concerned with the symbiosis between nationalism and popular sentiments, the overriding impression is of an elite ideology that, parasite-like, feeds on the popular power of religion for the sake of mobilization.

ABSTRACT

The Russian Empire collapsed because it failed to assimilate non-Russian minorities, and did not provide a coherent national narrative to unite the Russian population. Its religious policies were key contributors to these failures, and this article examines their impact in order to shine a new light on the religious background to the empire's demise. The Orthodox Church was supposed to provide the means to assimilate non-Russians and offer up the core cultural component for a Russian national consciousness. Its inability to do so became clear in the 1860s–1880s when, in the liminal regions of the empire, Orthodoxy fragmented along ethnic lines. Russians deserted churches for the dissenting Old Believer movement, and non-Russians returned to their ancestral faiths of animism and Islam. This was partly down to an inconsistency in government, which meant that religious repression overlapped with the principle of toleration; however, an exploration of the dynamics of apostasy at a parish level shows that where Russians and non-Russians were compelled to worship together, religious tensions emerged and churches lost their sacred character. As well as providing new insights into how the empire alienated its subjects at a local level, this exploration reveals pathways to ethnic consciousness from below. Ethnicization was the process that separated ethnicity from religion, and places of worship possessed characteristics, most importantly the performance of communal historical memory, that made them into key sites of ethnic boundary formation.