

Playing Chess with Churches: Russian Orthodoxy as Re(li)gion

Dmitri Sidorov

Historically and geographically, Orthodox religion has been of utmost importance to the Russian state and society.¹ Thus, in pre-1917 Russia, the numerical growth of churches was steady (Figure 1), with Orthodoxy being the only religion represented locally in all regions of

the late Russian Empire and its successor, the USSR (hereafter the Russian realm).² Thus, buildings of the Russian Orthodox Church (hereafter the ROCh or the Church) used to serve as the most visible landscape identifier of the realm. In dramatic contrast, the Bolsheviks, in their unprecedented crusade for eradication of religion after 1917, closed, reused for secular purposes, or simply destroyed thousands of Orthodox churches.

Although harsh Soviet anti-religious persecutions provoked the emergence of a vast number of works with the prime goal of shedding light on these practices and possibly attracting public attention to them,³ lack of data prevented the emergence of specific works on the property dimension of the campaigns. Generally written with the best intentions and by honest individuals, these works recorded numerous cases and events, often at the expense of analytical quality and accuracy of conclusions, contributing to the emergence of a myth of anti-religious Communist persecution. It is a myth in the sense that it overshadows the pre- and post-Communist religious manipulations. For many post-Soviet politicians in Russia, this myth explicitly requires the restoration of the pre-Soviet status quo. Here space is seen not as a process but as a status that could be restored.

In addition, the contradictory tendencies within the Soviet anti-religious policies are also neglected. A serious challenge to the early monolithic view of Soviet history is the fact that within it there were periods when the state did allow new churches to be opened.⁴ The most recent scholarship is well aware of the inconsistencies of general Soviet religious policies. For example, the period of 1900-65 for Mikhail Odintsov⁵ was not characterized by a continuous policy, but rather by a prevailing, peculiar, and ever-changing mix of elements of three consecutive patterns of religious policy developed, specifically, under the tsarist monarchy (the pattern of Orthodoxy as the state religion), the bourgeois democracy on the eve of the 1917 revolution (religious pluralism), and the Soviet republic (atheism). In contrast, according to Anderson,⁶ in the post-Stalin years (1953-93) state religious policy was characterized by continuing, but gradually easing, anti-religious activity.

Even if scholars disagree with each other, their periodizations are important in advancing the studies of state-church relations (hereafter SCR). The first goal of this paper is to contribute to this body of literature in two respects. First, so far no periodization of any kind has been provided specifically for the property dimensions of the SCR. This paper is to fill this gap by relying on data from previously inaccessible archives in Russia. Second, it is important to put the Soviet campaigns in a larger historical context revealing their predecessors in the tsarist state and its successors in the newly independent republics. To do that, this paper

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ing geographical and political patterns of church property transfers in the USSR, and finally I will look at the continuing legacy of church property distribution for post-Soviet Orthodox internal and external politics.

Church Property before 1917: Backing Russian Imperialism?

Importance and Scope of Church Property

Ritual, or proper service, is of the utmost importance for Orthodox religious life and is not conceivable without a special, physically extant building. Historically, Orthodoxy played a central role in Russian society and the significance of its churches went beyond the mere religious domain.

For example, whereas in modern countries the status of a settlement is usually defined by its population size and functional characteristics, in pre-revolutionary Russia, churches, more than anything else, defined settlement type. There were differences among urban settlements; Moscow was often called the “first-altar city” (*pervoprestol’nyi grad*) because it had the main altar of the Church (Uspenskii Cathedral in the Kremlin). The capital cities of provinces, as opposed to ordinary towns, were expected to have a major church or cathedral. Similarly, until the police reform of 1882 (and even after that), the addresses of people were linked to parish churches (e.g., “Moscow, specific parish, personal name”).⁹ In the same way, all rural settlements were traditionally divided into *derevnia* (churchless village)¹⁰ and *selo* (rural settlement with church) with the intermediate *sel’tso* (small *selo* with estate, perhaps with its home church) and *sloboda* (big industrial settlement near a city).¹¹

Traditional Orthodox dogma requires “one bishop for one city” to avoid internal competition and disobedience. While the rural settlements tended to have just one church, this tradition resulted in the distinction of the so-called “*sobor*,” or cathedral—the primary church of the local bishop in the cities. In the countryside, a priest’s control over his parish varied depending on the size of the settlement. It can be argued that areas with a high ratio of Orthodox population per church provided a greater opportunity for religious disobedience because a lower density of church buildings distances parish adherents from their priests. It is perhaps not a coincidence that sectarian movements were stronger in the southern provinces,¹² which also had the lowest density of churches relative to the Orthodox population. Thus, although it is not immediately visible, property distribution affected the Church, specifically with regard to its internal diversification and possibilities for control of parishioners.

In pre-revolutionary Russia, the ROCh¹³ occupied the dominant position, often merging with the state to form an oppressive political-

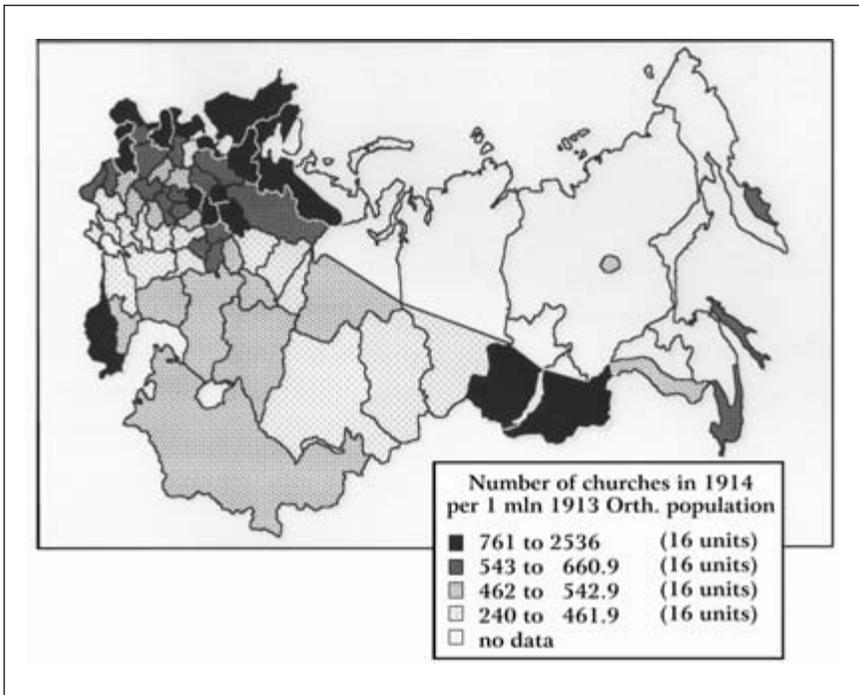
utilizes understudied tsarist reports on the status of the ROCh as well as some current but rare sources from Russia.

There are several explanations for the underestimation of the property topic in studies of SCR. First, as a non-issue in socialist society, the very question of property has been left aside by Soviet scholars themselves. A study of the nationalization of monastic property by Zybkovets stands as a unique endeavor.⁷ Second, to embrace the topic of church property in Russia, one must not only pay attention to the Soviet period of history, but also consider the problems of the pre-Soviet period. Although the state of religion in tsarist Russia has attracted scholarly attention,⁸ it is difficult to cite a comprehensive work on church property that speaks to the Soviet and post-Soviet concerns with the (de)nationalization of property. Thus, conventional historical frameworks for research (such as “Soviet period”) prove to be constraining in the studies of church property and post-Soviet developments. In addition, such modern developments in Russia as the return of church property could justify the previous manipulations of religious places if they ignore their geographical particulars. Finally, the concept of region is usually ignored in the field; until recently, few works have focused on such place-specific topics as study of particular churches or parishes in the context of their history, geography, or politics.

The second goal of this paper is to apply the concept of geographical region to the study of SCR. Whereas historians have scrutinized periods of state manipulation of the Church, regional variations in state anti-religious policies have not attracted their attention. The concept of region, perhaps a geographical equivalent of the historians’ concept of period, remains an underutilized tool in studies of SCR. This paper will show the importance of geographical (regional) reasoning in analysing SCR in the Russian realm. Presumably in such a big and diverse country as the former Russian Empire/USSR, regional discrepancies within the Church did exist and they were and still are significant, both statistically and politically. Different hypotheses explaining these discrepancies shall be tested.

The third goal of this paper is to reveal the prognostic potential of church property statistics. My hypothesis is that the imbalance of church distribution exercises a continuing legacy on other facets of the Church, such as its believers, priests, dogmas, and, even schismatic nationalist aspirations. Whereas most scholars conceptualize the emergence of Orthodox churches in the newly independent republics of the former USSR in terms of state and/or popular nationalisms, this paper suggests that the spatiality of Russian Orthodoxy, as embodied in church buildings, is a factor for understanding Orthodox schisms and conflicts in the newly independent republics.

This paper considers primarily the physical manifestation of the ROCh—its churches. First, I will summarize and analyze statistics on the state of church property in late Imperial Russia, then I will trace the chang-



sparse settlement pattern may have required more affiliated churches than in predominantly Slavic provinces. These areas were also zones of intense congregational transfers; the Church and the state presumably had an interest in keeping all buildings functional, despite declines in membership, and affiliations were a possible solution to such problems.

Monasteries and cemeteries accounted for about 2,000 buildings each. Churches of these types differ from the others because of their longer histories.¹⁷ While average total construction time to build churches of all types was eighty-seven years, an average cemetery church would require 207 years, and a monastery church 180. The geography of monastery churches reflects the fact that many of them were built in a different epoch, in fact, in a state of a different scale (the original fifteenth-century Muscovite Russia had a relatively small territory, not reaching the margins of the Eastern European Plain, e.g. the Volga River, steppe belt, Caucasus). Three concentric circles could be identified: first, the Moscow core; then, an eastern crescent separating the Tatar-dominated Volga area; and finally, Trans-Caucasia, a later frontier. In addition to defense considerations, monasteries were built in remote areas to provide seclusion for the monks and to combat the wilderness—facts that should not be dismissed in

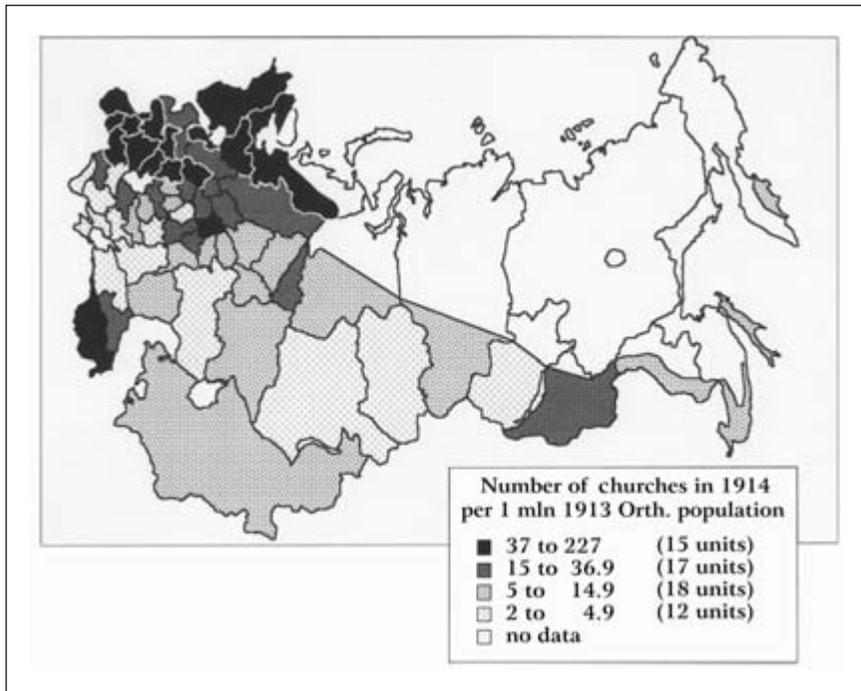
economic system. The Church legitimized the tsarist regime and the state protected the Church from external competition. This state support came primarily through the allocation of wealth. Along with land allocation, property provisions played a crucial role in state policies privileging the main Church.

Annual reports of the Russian Orthodox Church's Holy Synod's over-procurator provide a detailed picture of this dominance. According to the last pre-revolutionary report of 1914, the Church had the following property within the empire.¹⁴ There were about 55,000 Orthodox churches in all. It is noteworthy that only one fifth of this number (11,000) were located in Ukraine. Provinces of the Empire in 1914 could be divided into the following groups according to the density of Orthodox churches (Figure 2). The highest density was in the historic European Russian core, especially in its northern part.¹⁵ While a high density of churches in the western half of Ukraine can be attributed primarily to historical reasons (this area was among the first settled in the Russian realm), in the Baltics, Central Asia, Trans-Caucasia,¹⁶ and parts of Siberia, it is necessary to cite the colonialist aspirations of the Empire as an explanation for the high density of churches in these borderlands. The lowest level of church density characterizes three regions: first, the interior provinces in the area of the Urals; second, the provinces of Omsk and Tomsk in Western Siberia and the province of Semipalatinsk in Kazakhstan; and third, notably, the eastern Ukraine and southern European Russia.

The Geography of Orthodox Property by Type

In addition to over 23,000 chapels, the Church had about 55,000 church buildings of various kinds with parish churches (41,000) constituting the largest component. Their geographical pattern, therefore, largely corresponds to that for all churches (Figure 2). The highest density was in the areas of northern European Russia (especially, Arkhangel'sk province), and the lowest in the southern rural areas (Kuban', eastern Ukraine).

A number of small churches in distant, declining, or priestless settlements were affiliated with a major parish church. Altogether, these "branch" churches accounted for about 5,800 buildings. The geographical prevalence of these "branch" churches also calls to mind the pattern in Figure 2, however, accentuating a north-south gradient formed by these churches. Most of them were located in the sparsely populated areas of the European North, with a gradual decline in prevalence southward. The southernmost (as well as westernmost and easternmost) borderlands show an increased prevalence of these affiliated churches. Perhaps this shows some similarities among these areas; while the European north was sparsely populated for physical-geographical reasons, the borderlands (for Orthodox Russians) were a sociocultural equivalent of the physical desert. Since the Orthodox were minorities in these border areas, their



which might reflect not only their better financing, but also their political importance. Figure 4 shows that most of the home/state churches were located in the borderlands with high religious mobility.

Finally, 541 churches were of Edinoverie affiliation (schismatic Old Belief communities that formally accepted the jurisdiction of the main Church, yet made no changes in their service).

Although many buildings of the Church were erected by money collected in parishes, the state provided significant selective support for church construction. The relatively high density of churches of some kind along the southern flank of the country most likely indicates the imperialist functions of these buildings and certainly the nationalism of ethnic Russian residents there. In contrast, the interior, protected areas of the country had the lowest densities.

The close link between the Church and the state was forged during the very foundation of Russian Orthodoxy based on the Byzantine model. Historically, this connection with the state was mostly fortunate for the Church. Yet at times of change, the church's close association with the state could become its Achilles heel, as in post-tsarist Russia. For the remainder of this paper, it is important to note that, contrary to popular belief, manipulation of the Church's property was not a Communist innovation, but was a common practice in imperial Russia. Peter I, for instance,

discussions of the geographical pattern of monastery churches.

Unlike other types of churches, which are used by different generations, cemetery churches must be built as new cemeteries are developed. Therefore, the geography of cemetery churches reflects not only the current status quo, but also the situation in all previous periods. Figure 3 shows the pattern of cemetery churches in 1914, clearly highlighting areas with a long history of settlement (Belorussia, Western Ukraine, the central European part of Russia, and Trans-Caucasia).¹⁸ A similar pattern characterized the distribution of cathedrals (about 700 in 1914). Their high density in the borderlands can be in part attributed to imperial colonization, but the population settlement pattern should not be dismissed.

The remaining types of churches can be singled out as promoting the Church's territorial expansion. Missionary churches, of course, did this explicitly. Most of them, however, were in central, not eastern, Siberia, as well as some in southern Central Asia (Turkestan). Movable, field churches were also utilized in Turkestan, as well as in Finland. They were most likely army churches or temporary worship houses.

Only one fifth of 23,000 chapels were built of stone (Table 1). Generally, chapels served as expected forerunners of churches in the sparsely populated peripheral areas of the realm. Chapels were most prevalent in the European north, stretching all the way to the Far East. In contrast to the pattern of missionary churches, chapels were not widespread on the non-Russian margins of the Empire.

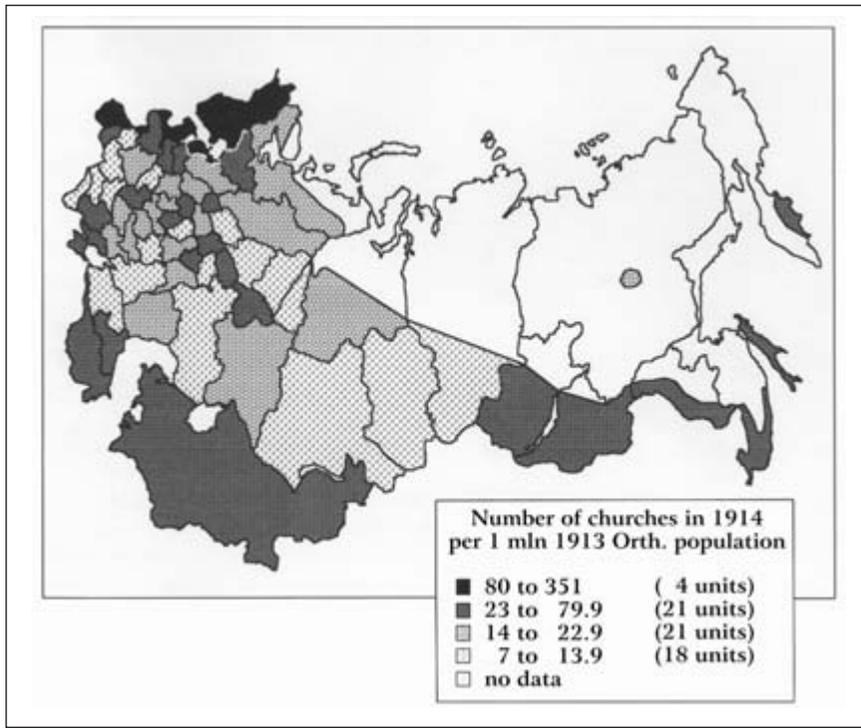
With regard to the role of church buildings in the expansion of the Church and the state, it is important to look at the geographical pattern of home/state churches (Figure 4). Unlike other types of churches, these were not formally part of the ROCh, but were built and owned by private people or the state. State and private churches accounted for about 2,000 buildings in 1914. In late Imperial Russia, they had a relatively short construction time, and a higher proportion were built of stone (Table 1),

Table 1. Time of Church Property Construction, by Type, 1913/1912.

Type	Number in 1913	Built in 1912	Of them, stone (%)	Years
Cathedrals	759	1	100	759
Cemetery	2,067	10	30	207
Monastery	1,985	11	72.7	180
Branch	5,842	45	28.9	130
Edinoverie	541	5	40	108
Parish	40,263	521	48.9	77
Home/state	2,480	33	66	75
Movable	48	--	--	--
Missionary	49	--	--	--
Chapels	23,288	203	21.2	115

Source: Vsepoddanneishii ... 1913, 6-7, 16-19; the author's calculations.

Note: The last column shows the average number of years required for different types of church property to reach their 1913 size at the rate of construction in 1912.



January 23, 1918, separated the Church and the state and nationalized all church property.²¹

Although these legal provisions formally separated religious and civil matters, the state continued its assault on the Church's property. The first major attack on churches started in 1922, its formal goal to find resources to fight the famine. However, analysts argue that this first wave of the church property closures was actually an attack on the ROCh and that the famine was only a convenient excuse.²² The rural churches perhaps were the prime targets, and the eastern and Central Asian, less-urbanized part of the country suffered most (Figure 5).²³

Second Wave (1931-34): Socioeconomic Reasons and Urban Focus

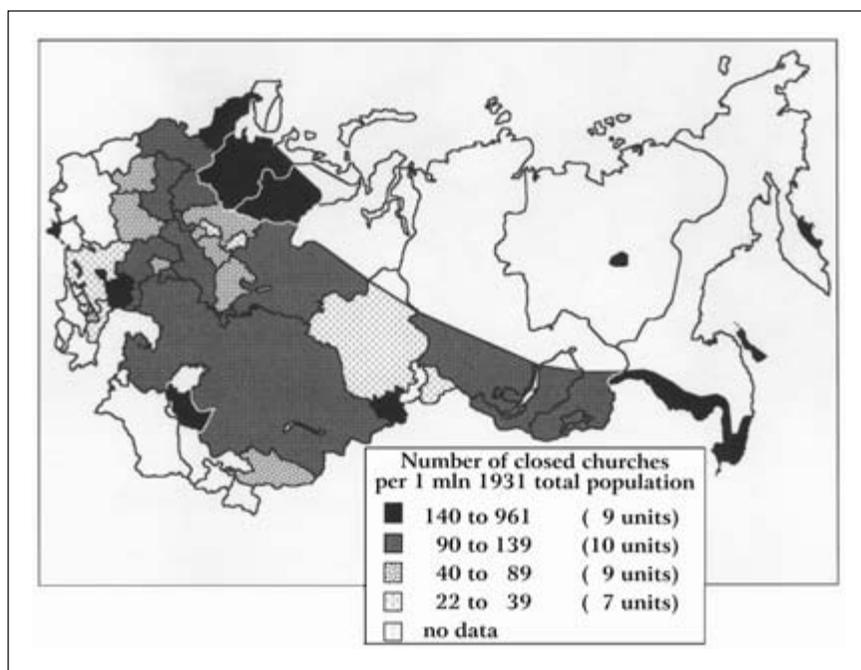
A second wave of church closures was effected in the early 1930s. In contrast to the political objectives of the first wave of church property closures, the second attack had arguably both direct and indirect socio-economic motivations. After the final 1927 declaration of the Church's loyalty to the Soviet state, control over the ROCh was no longer a prime

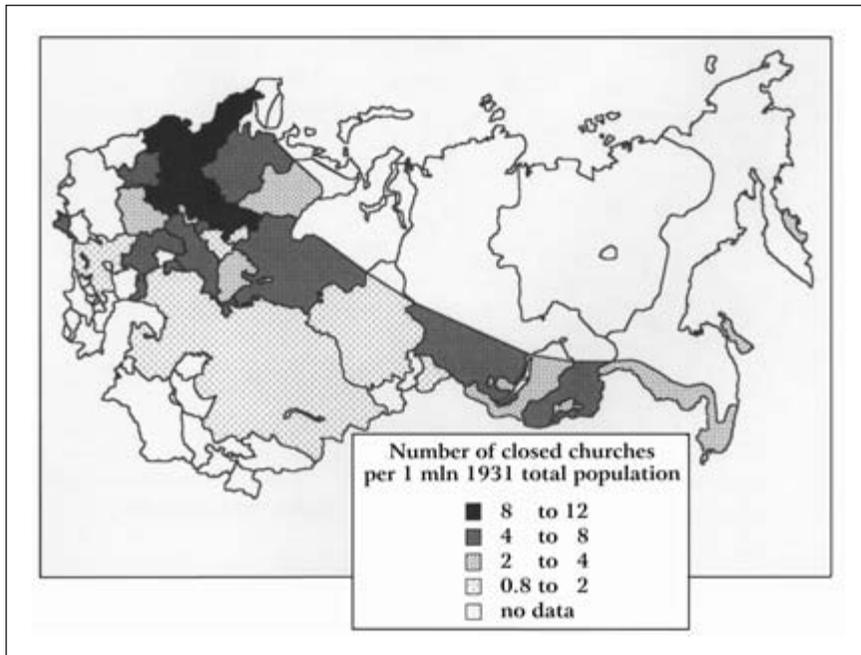
by resolution of the Synod of March 28, 1722, ordered the dismantling of most old chapels in the country and the reutilization of the building construction materials for "other needs" (during the construction of St. Petersburg, he prohibited the use of stone anywhere else). In 1727, Peter II reopened the surviving chapels. Of sixty-two known monasteries on the territory of contemporary Moscow, nineteen (30 percent) were closed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁹

The Soviet Politics of Church Property Transfers²⁰

The First Wave of Church Closures: Political Motivation and Prime Rural Targeting

After the Revolution, the new Bolshevik authorities immediately issued a series of decrees targeting the Church. Lenin's decree of November 8, 1917, nationalizing all land, made it illegal for the Church or parish priests to own land. The decree of December 11, 1917, confiscated all of the Church's educational institutions; those of December 17 and 18, 1917, denied legality to Church marriage; that of January 16, 1918, expelled the clergy from the armed forces; and that of January 20, 1918, canceled state subsidies to the Church. Finally, a decree published on





Unfortunately, I failed to find archival figures similar to those for the RSFSR for other republics to prove my hypothesis. These regional statistics have yet to surface.

Third Wave (1936-38): Totalitarian Motivation and Regional Victims

In any event, in Ukraine the third wave of church closures started earlier and was most harmful. Hryhor Luzhnyts'kyi provides indirect support to my hypothesis. Drawing on data of Mytrophan Yavdas, he states that:

[i]n the years 1934-36, the Soviet government intensified its drive against Ukrainian churches, chapels and monasteries, and other priceless monuments of Ukrainian culture Altogether, the Soviet government destroyed in 1934-36 about 75 to 80 percent of all churches in Ukraine.... According to official statistics compiled by the 'Union of Fighting Atheists,' the number of closed churches in Ukraine was given by years: in 1924-25 - 46 churches closed; 1926 - 28; 1927 - 58; 1928 - 97; 1929 - 136; 1930 - 234; 1931 - 350.³⁰

A state archival source provides the following percentages of all religious buildings existing in 1917 that had been closed by 1936: RSFSR—51 percent, Uzbekistan—61 percent, Ukraine—59 percent, Georgia—79

political issue. The Church, therefore, came to be seen primarily as a potential resource of material goods for building the new world within the country. During the late 1920s, and especially in the early 1930s, the previous rhetoric about a global Soviet Union was replaced by the ideology of the superiority of the USSR in international economic and technological competition. Its domestic implications were industrial modernization, urbanization, collectivization of agriculture, and the accompanying politico-architectural reconstruction of the landscape.

The property transfers that followed (demolitions, closures, recycling, and juridical reallocations) were an important part of these processes. Their effect on churches was devastating. Rare metals from church bells, precious stones and the debris of demolished churches were recycled in new construction; gold and precious stones were exported to finance modernization; and empty buildings were used to house new rural-urban migrants or new enterprises and offices.

Figure 6 shows the percentage of churches closed between 1931 and 1933 in the Russian Federation.²⁴ In this period, in contrast to the first wave of church closures, perhaps urban areas were most affected. These areas—the Moscow-Leningrad core, central Volga, the Urals—were the main urban regions of the USSR. Was this a sign that there were too few churches left in the countryside to continue the closures there?

My hypothesis is that Ukraine initially lagged behind the USSR as a whole in the number of churches closed. Explaining in 1926 the relative lack of success in Ukraine, the main Soviet anti-religious theoretical journal *Antireligioznik* cited several factors.²⁵ According to the journal, Ukraine was one of the central stages of the civil war, and this delayed, until 1920, the beginning of implementation of the laws on separation of state and church. Furthermore, the relative complexity of social, religious, and ethnic composition of Ukraine and resulting tensions until 1924 further delayed anti-religious work. Some other arguments could be added.

First, the Ukrainian dioceses were a potential challenge to the main Church and the state could be interested in using the autocephalous (independent) Ukrainian Church in attempts to weaken the main Church. There are some archival evidences that in 1922 the commission on separation of state and Church had, at least, doubts whether to support autocephalists.²⁶ However, by the 1930s the main Church had already been suppressed, and this hypothesis might be wrong for the second wave of church closures. Hewryk also indicates that in the case of Kiev the assault on church property was conceived in the early 1930s.²⁷ Second, Ukraine was the breadbasket of the USSR. In 1929, the secret Anti-Religious Commission of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks specifically recommended not to close churches in rural areas during harvest season if the associated resistance of peasants would distract them from their work.²⁸ Third, the same commission also recommended to conduct church closures very carefully in the borderland areas of the USSR.²⁹

Despite the disastrously low number of open churches by 1939, on the eve of Hitler's attack in 1941, the number of functioning churches in the USSR had already grown to 4,225. These statistics were released by the Soviet embassy in London to counter criticism of Soviet religious suppression voiced by their newly acquired British allies.³⁵ This seemingly incredible increase was a result of territorial acquisitions of the Soviet Union; over 90 percent of the churches were in the western borderlands annexed in 1939-40 (Ukraine, Moldavia, Belorussia, and the Baltics). As the discussion of pre-revolutionary property distribution has shown, these areas always had a relatively high proportion of churches of many types.

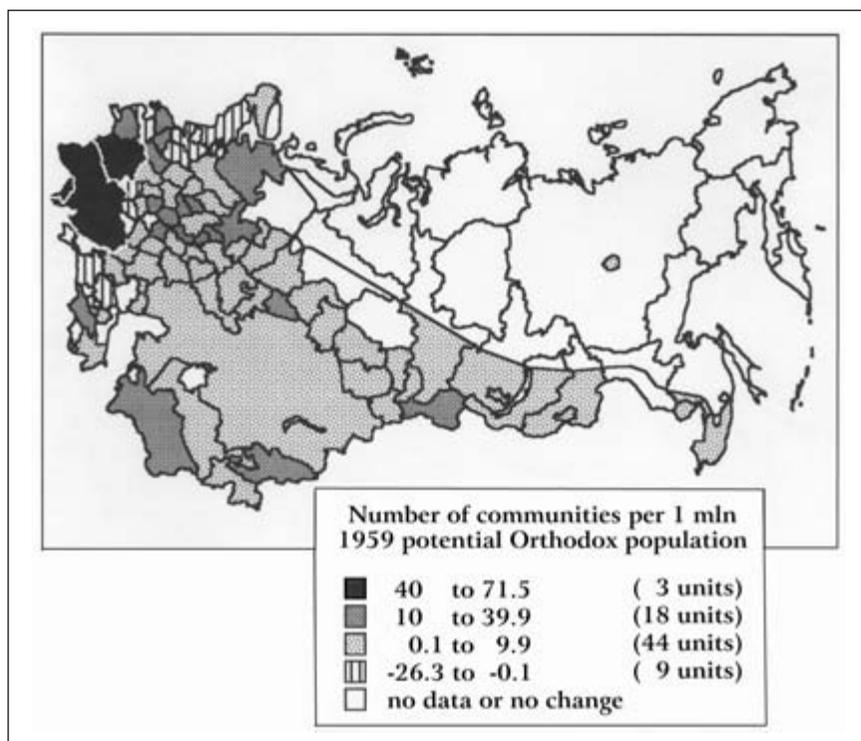
Paradoxically, the ROCh was saved from total extinction by the Germans, who, in 1941, opened their eastern front against the USSR. The new priorities distracted the state's attention from religious matters and anti-religious assaults began to ease. In addition, the new authority allowed an Orthodox revival in the areas of German occupation in the western European part of the country and many closed churches were reopened.³⁶ An inspector for the Council for ROCh Affairs gave the figure of 7,547 churches opened in the occupied territories between 1941 and 1945.³⁷

First Revival in 1943-48

The final impact of the German invasion was Stalin's own decision to regain the support of Orthodox believers. A revival of the Russian Orthodox Church was allowed after 1943. In this year, the formerly occupied areas began to be reincorporated into the USSR and Stalin had to decide how to proceed with the reopened churches there.³⁸

Yurii Degtiarev, in his provocative article "Did Stalin open churches?" notes that the local authorities of the frontier regions started church returns as early as 1941.³⁹ According to Degtiarev, Soviet Government Head Molotov suggested to Chair of the Council for the Affairs of the ROCh Karpov that he rely on "expediency" and "necessity," rather than laws and juridical acts in making decisions about church returns. Degtiarev cites many examples of inconsistencies and contradictions among the actions of national and local authorities; "local authorities in some regions were more active in closing than opening churches." Unfortunately, Degtiarev has not provided geographical particulars, only mentioning that the number of Orthodox communities declined in the Baltics, Moscow, Volyn', Brest, Grodno, and other oblasts.

My archival findings allow a clarification of the geographical pattern of church return in the post-war period. Figure 7 shows the change in church density between 1946 and 1948.⁴⁰ If Stalin's revival of the Church was a reaction to the German invasion, then different trends in the formerly occupied territories should not be overlooked. While Ukraine, Belorussia, and Moldavia had the highest increase in the number of churches in this period, the western Russian lands adjacent to them were



percent, Azerbaijan—86 percent, Kirgizia—62 percent, Armenia—86 percent. Thus, quite rapidly, Ukraine had a larger proportion of closed religious buildings than the Russian Federation. This may mean that many of them were not demolished, but only closed.³¹

The third major wave of church closures between 1936 and 1938 coincided with other great totalitarian purges. What mattered to the state was the extinction of all religion and, since 1936, state statistics had often started to combine not only all strands of Orthodoxy, but also all types of denominations. The year 1939 was the worst in the history of the Church. Some scholars believe that in this year in the entire USSR there were only 200-300 open Orthodox churches.³² In the diocese of Kiev, for instance, of 1,600 churches in 1917 only two were functioning at the time of the German occupation in 1941.³³ Meanwhile, the 1937 population census indicated that no less than 42.3 percent of population in the USSR still considered themselves Orthodox.³⁴

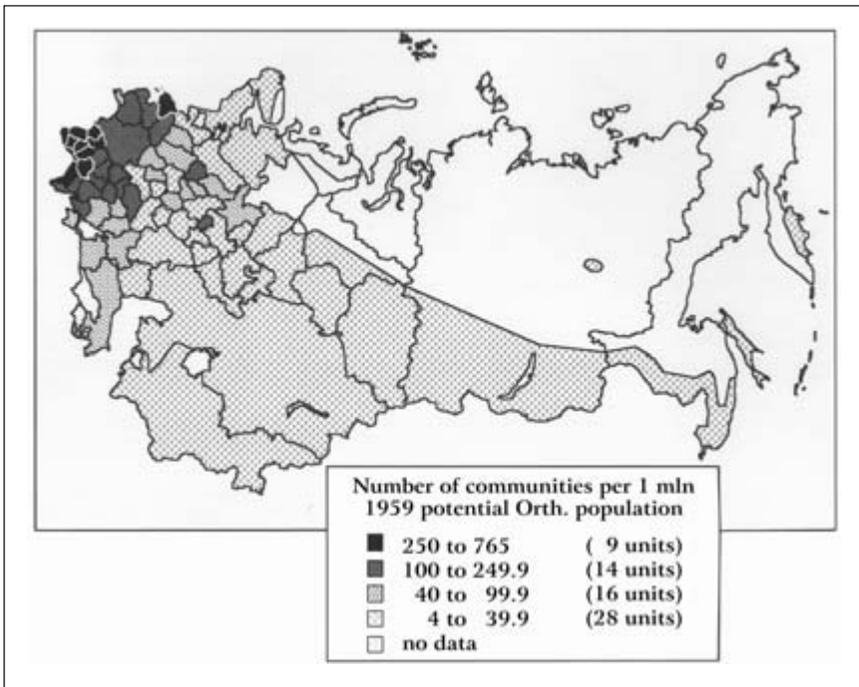
Land Acquisitions, German Invasion, and the Church's Survival (1939-43)

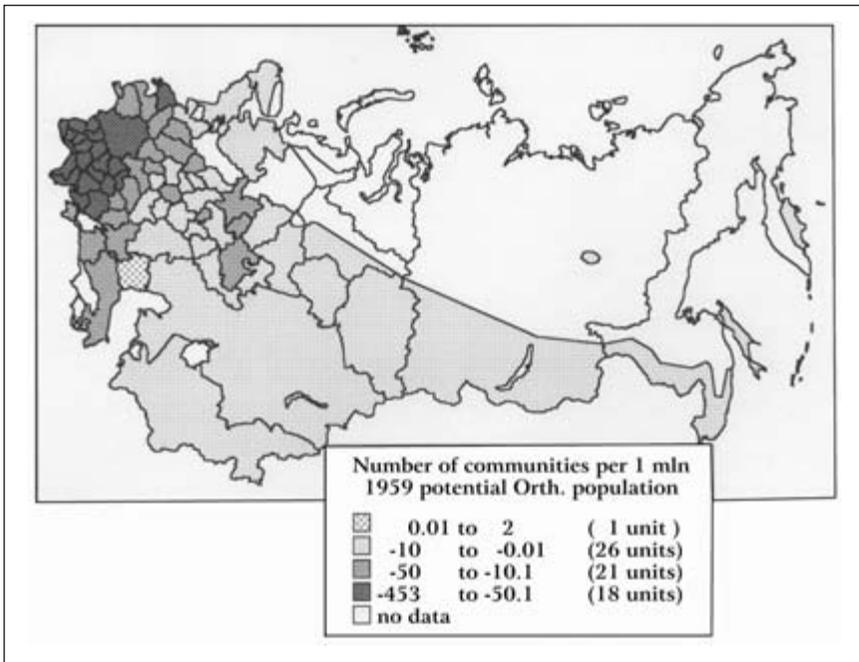
(from 14,457 to 13,381 churches).⁴¹ This trend started when Stalin was still in power and continued after his death in 1953. This time the western republics were losing churches, yet again not in the westernmost areas, which were to be fully incorporated into the Soviet Union with the Russification of their residents.

This decline was minor, however, compared to Khrushchev's 1958-66 assault, when the Church lost about 40 percent of its buildings.⁴² Figure 8 shows the density of churches in 1958, before the attack. Clearly the western areas of Ukraine and Moldova were leaders, as well as Estonia. Although they seemingly were the prime victims of the assault (Figure 9), the western portion of European Russia was also targeted. Nevertheless, in the end, the western areas, including Ukraine, still had the highest church density in 1966 (Figure 10).

1966-86: Period of Stagnant Oppression

In the Brezhnev period of stagnation, this declining trend continued until the beginning of perestroika. Historically, the second lowest total number of churches in the USSR was reached in 1986-88, when there were only about 6,740 registered communities; this figure has almost doubled in the succeeding years, reaching 12,800 in 1994.⁴³ The ter-



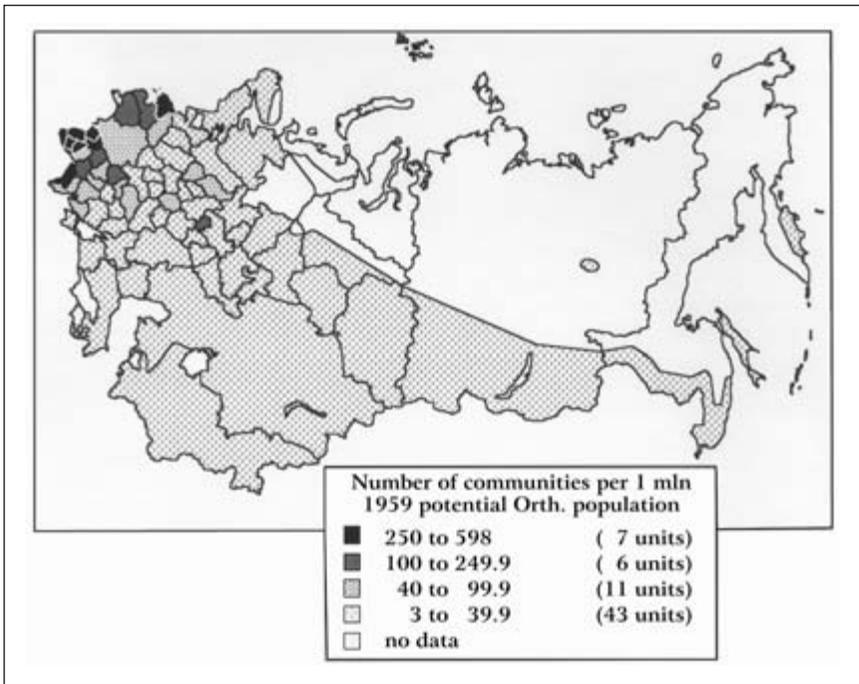


the only areas losing churches. This pattern most likely was a result of the church imbalance on the western margin (it simply had remaining buildings to be reopened); yet the fact that the number of churches in the westernmost Russian regions was not stagnant but declining warrants further investigation into Stalin's religious "revival."

My hypothesis is that this pattern reflects Stalin's ambivalence (Molotov's "expediency" and "necessity"). On the one hand, he needed support especially in the non-Russian republics (and these republics were leaders of the revival, with the exception of Latvia). On the other hand, he still wanted to punish the formerly occupied areas for any cooperation with the Nazis (this was most certainly the case with Latvia). Ukraine was again relatively privileged in this period of "playing chess with churches;" where the adjacent Russian territories were losing churches, Ukraine was gaining them. Certainly this trend had variations at the level of oblasts in Ukraine (in western Ukraine, the growth in church numbers could, in part, be attributed to the forcible incorporation of the Uniate—Greek Catholic—Church into the ROCh in 1946), yet a growing difference between Ukraine and western parts of the Russian Federation is visible.

1949-66: New Assault

In the period 1949-57, the total number of churches declined again



Ukraine, were latecomers to the USSR and escaped the purges of the 1930s (as well as Khrushchev's assault). Perhaps they did not have many "church resources" left for perestroika growth. In addition, some political and personal reasons were important for the perestroika pattern. Whereas nationalism and associated constraints on the development of Orthodox communities were characteristic of the Baltics well before their final independence (in 1991), the ROCh was more fortunate in Lithuania, perhaps, because of the role of the charismatic nature of their bishop, Khrisostomus, and the interest of the local Communist Party leaders in a favorable "religious image." Finally, the relative lagging of such areas as Moscow and the European North (including Leningrad-St. Petersburg) in the process of Orthodox revival during perestroika is remarkable. Most likely it was a result of their somewhat privileged position during the post-war period; they might not have sufficient "church resources" left to exhibit a growth in the number of parishes equal to other areas of the country. On the other hand, the Baykal and Far East dioceses have never had many churches, and for these areas the establishment of new communities meant construction of new churches. Also, their remote position within the country should not be overlooked.

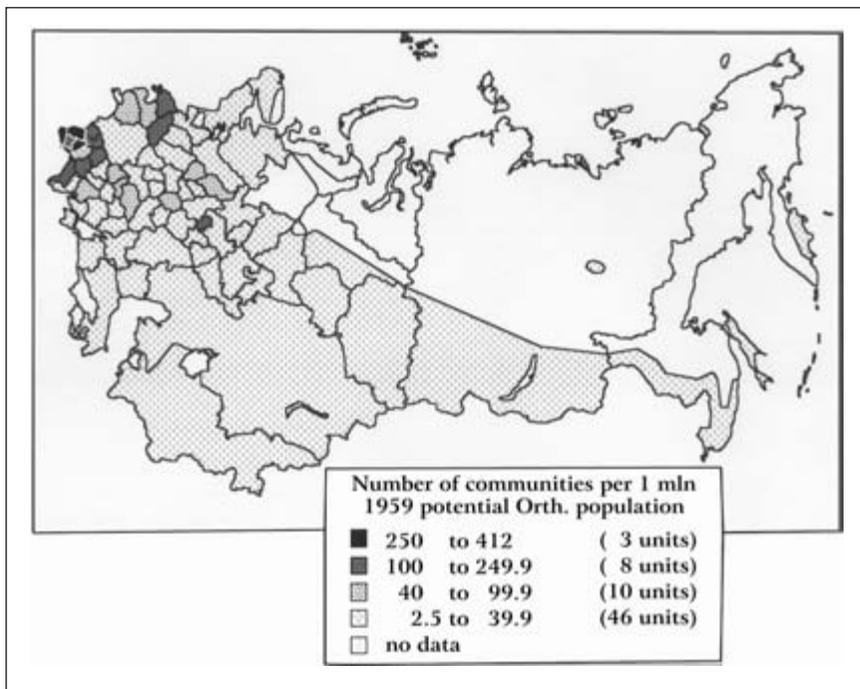
By 1991, the westernmost parts of Ukraine, Moldova, and the Baltics

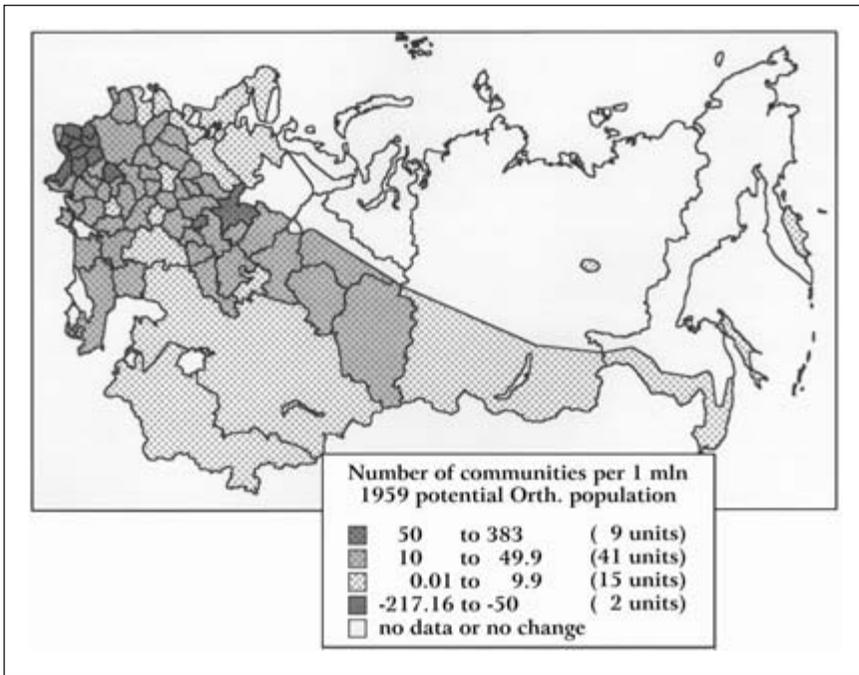
ritorial imbalance in church distribution in favor of the western margin (especially Ukraine) again, paradoxically, allowed it to remain the main victim as well as final winner of the process (Figure 11).

1986 and After: Uneven Revival

With the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev, the growth of parish numbers in 1986-91 was characteristic of most Slav-dominated oblasts of both the Russian Federation and Ukraine (Figure 12). The western parts of Ukraine (and Moldova), again and again, were the leaders, contrasting even with the eastern parts of Ukraine. Clearly it was a legacy of the previous uneven "play with churches."⁴⁴ Despite their relatively high number of parishes in the post-war period, and because of the relatively "mild" nature of Khrushchev's assault on churches (most of them were only closed, not destroyed as in the 1930s), these borderland areas had the greatest potential for growth at the time of perestroika.

It is interesting to note the areas that did not experience the process. Kazakhstan and Central Asia did not have a significant increase in the number of Orthodox churches during this period. The appearance of Estonia and Latvia in the same category is somewhat unexpected. As mentioned earlier, the Baltics, very much like the western parts of





religiosity. Whereas in the Russian Federation most churches had been closed before the war and never reopened with many being simply demolished or decayed, many church closures in Ukraine were a post-war phenomenon still in the memory of living generations. In addition, relatively few churches were demolished after the war, with closed, yet physically extant, churches serving as a constant reminder of the brutalities of the Soviet ("Russian") power. In short, the prevalence of churches could be one of the factors explaining relatively high post-Soviet religiosity and, eventually, nationalism in Ukraine.

The relative surplus of church buildings could also be one of the factors behind the diversity of Orthodox churches in Ukraine (currently, four Orthodox churches function there). First, the majority of Orthodox parishes keeps a juridical affiliation with the ROCh under the auspices of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOCh-MP), which has about 7,000 parishes.⁴⁶ The Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kievan Patriarchate (UOCh-KP) is a second major Church, with 1,300 parishes.⁴⁷ Third is the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCCh), or the Uniate Church (no parish statistics available).⁴⁸ Fourth is the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church with 1,200 parishes.⁴⁹

Because of historical complexity, discussion of religious and political

(with the exception of Latvia) retained their status as the strongholds of the ROCh. In the Russian Federation as well, the western European sectors had relatively more parishes.

The pattern of parish dynamics described for the perestroika period (1986-91) continued in 1991-94, although in an exaggerated form. Areas of loss for the ROCh included not only the Uniate western Ukraine, but also Estonia and Latvia (in notable contrast to growth in the former Communist-governed Lithuania). There was also a decline in the number of parishes in the central European oblasts west of Moscow, a likely result of the registration and check-up of already-existing communities. Yet this pattern warrants further investigation. Another noteworthy development was the leading position in this post-perestroika growth of some Siberian oblasts. The overall density pattern, however, remains the same; the western edge of the former USSR has a higher density than the rest of the country. The legacy of the Soviet "playing chess with churches" is still present within the former Soviet space.

Legacies of the Soviet Re(li)gion

Church property distribution possesses not only a certain geographic inertia, but also has its own power potentialities. Some geographic characteristics of the ROCh regarding its ruling elite and schismatic fractures reveal political legacies of the uneven distribution of church holdings in the realm.

Safronov has compiled data on the areas of origin of the ruling elite (bishops) of the ROCh in 1916 and in 1943-97.⁴⁵ The contrast between the two periods is striking; not dominating before 1917, Ukraine and Belorussia (together with Moscow) formed the three leading source areas of bishops in the ROCh in the Soviet time. The most important change in the Soviet time has been the significant increase in the number of bishops from Western Ukraine. In the 1950s-1970s, the number of bishops from Ukraine as a whole was disproportionately high in the ROCh, constituting 25 percent to 30 percent of the total. Even now the proportion of "Ukrainian" bishops of the ROCh on the territory of the Russian Federation is about 10 percent. Safronov cites three explanations for this dramatic dominance of Ukraine, especially western Ukraine: traditionally high religiosity of people, the forced transfer from the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Church after 1946, and location here of the majority of still open churches in the USSR.

The collapse of the former Soviet Union had important immediate implications for the ROCh; many, if not most, of its parishes turned out to be located abroad—outside of the Russian Federation. Nationalistic dimensions notwithstanding, the relative surplus of churches could be suggested as one of the factors explaining the resurgence of Ukrainian

Table 2. Status of the ROC's Registered Societies in Republics of the USSR, 1944-89 (number and percentage of total).

Republic	1944	%	1948	%	1954	%	1958	%	1964	%	1969	%	1974	%	1979	%	1984	%	1989	
%																				
RSFSR	2,785	22.5	3,205	22.3	2,922	21.8	2,920	21.9	1,995	26.3	1,906	26.1	1,874	26.5	1,865	26.9	1,866	27.4	2,519	24.9
Ukraine	7,040	56.9	9,061	62.9	8,517	63.7	8,468	63.5	4,587	60.5	4,468	61.3	4,291	60.8	4,175	60.3	4,049	59.5	6,110	60.4
Belorussia	1,238	10.0	1,065	7.4	967	7.2	966	7.2	426	5.6	382	5.2	376	5.3	370	5.3	370	5.4	477	4.7
Moldavia	924	7.5	617	4.3	544	4.1	544	4.1	223	2.9	219	3.0	204	2.9	199	2.9	199	2.9	675	6.7
Azerbaijan			4	0.0	4	0.0	4	0.0	4	0.1	4	0.1	4	0.1	4	0.1	4	0.1	4	0.0
Kazakhstan	17	0.1	55	0.4	54	0.4	60	0.5	46	0.6	46	0.6	45	0.6	49	0.7	57	0.8	71	0.7
Kirgizia	11	0.1	33	0.2	32	0.2	32	0.2	22	0.3	21	0.3	21	0.3	21	0.3	21	0.3	23	0.2
Latvia	138	1.1	131	0.9	123	0.9	123	0.9	106	1.4	92	1.3	90	1.3	89	1.3	87	1.3	86	0.9
Litva	65	0.5	60	0.4	54	0.4	55	0.4	45	0.6	42	0.6	42	0.6	41	0.6	41	0.6	43	0.4
Tadjikistan	5	0.0	6	0.0	6	0.0	6	0.0	5	0.1	3	0.0	3	0.0	3	0.0	3	0.0	3	0.0
Turkmenia	2	0.0	5	0.0	5	0.0	5	0.0	4	0.1	4	0.1	4	0.1	4	0.1	4	0.1	5	0.0
Uzbekistan	13	0.1	24	0.2	23	0.2	25	0.2	20	0.3	20	0.3	20	0.3	21	0.3	22	0.3	23	0.2
Estonia	125	1.0	137	1.0	125	0.9	125	0.9	94	1.2	87	1.2	88	1.2	84	1.2	83	1.2	77	0.8
USSR	12,363	100.0	14,403	100.0	13,376	100.0	13,333	100.0	7,577	100.0	7,294	100.0	7,062	100.0	6,925	100.0	6,086	100.0	10,116	100.0

Source: Gosudarstvenno-tserkovnyye otnosheniia v Rossii (opyt proshlogo i sovremennoe sostoinanie) [State-Church Relations in Russia]

differences between these churches is beyond the frame of this study and could be found elsewhere,⁵⁰ yet their geographies are relevant. According to Khmievsky, the competing churches tend to dominate in different areas of Ukraine; the Moscow-affiliated branch in the east, the Greek-Catholics in the west, and the Kievan Patriarchate in between, in Kiev, and southward (separate data for the Autocephalous Orthodox Church are not available).⁵¹ Most likely, this estimation is based on qualitative data. Statistics about churches,⁵² however, do not conform to this model. Contrary to Khmievsky's conclusion, all three churches are dominant in western Ukraine. This pattern is clearly a continuing legacy of the Soviet past, with its extremely uneven church distribution.

The imbalance of church property is also an important factor for international relations within the former USSR. In 1993 and 1994, the Ukrainian part of the ROCh (Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate, or UOCh-MP) was numerically larger than the ROCh (5,701 parishes vs. 5,290 respectively). If other Orthodox churches in Ukraine are added, Orthodoxy in Ukraine would become numerically larger than in any other part of the former USSR (about 60 percent of all Orthodox parishes in the former USSR would be located in Ukraine).

The current numerical lead of Ukrainian Orthodoxy has a long pre-history.⁵³ Throughout the post-Soviet period, the gap between Ukraine and the rest of the country was as significant as it was in 1993 (with minor variations, the proportion of Ukrainian parishes in the former USSR stayed at approximately 60 percent; with a maximum of 63.7 percent in 1953 [Table 2]). This continuity serves, perhaps, as an example of how the territorial dimension of the Church, its building distribution, shapes socio-historical processes.

The imbalance in distribution of church property makes Ukraine a highly important part of the ROCh. In a way, the ROCh's property in Ukraine often serves as a hostage in bilateral politics between Ukraine and Russia. To illustrate this point, it is enough to see the special position that the UOCh-KP occupies among all churches alternative to the ROCh. The UOCh-KP conducts a policy of opening parishes on the territory of Russia, with three bishops currently in Russia. Although not numerous, this Ukrainian alternative to Russian Orthodoxy is significant. The UOCh-KP serves as a last refuge for many alternative priests. For instance, the famous human rights activist Father Gleb Yakunin, expelled from the ROCh, has joined the UOCh-KP. If this trend continues, the UOCh-KP may become an important alternative to the ROCh in Russia. Often backed by the Ukrainian authorities (especially when Leonid Kravchuk was the Ukrainian president), the position of the UOCh-KP is also strengthened by the church imbalance, because the significant property of the ROCh in Ukraine serves as a "hostage" in periods of attacks on the branches of the UOCh-KP in the Russian Federation.

problem,⁵⁴ suggesting the real possibility that the post-Soviet reversal of Communist anti-religious practices could justify previous practices and also produce new injustices.

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Notes

1. Dmitri Sidorov, "Orthodoxy, Difference, and Scale: The Evolving Geopolitics of Russian Orthodox Church(es) in the Twentieth century." Ph.D. diss., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998.
2. The Russian Orthodox Church still is by far the largest organization in the realm with about 50 percent of all organizations registered. In absolute terms, its losses of church property were far greater than those of all other religions in the realm combined. For example, in 1926 in twenty-nine provinces of the Russian Federation, there were 1,003 closed Orthodox churches (or 5.4 percent of the total). For other religions these figures were smaller: Orthodox Old Believers—twenty-seven (2.8 percent), Catholics—six (6.8 percent), Lutherans—six (3.6 percent), Muslims—twenty-nine (3.1 percent), Judaists—ten (4.3 percent), Evangelicals—none closed, Baptists—five (6.4 percent), others—two (1.5 percent) ("Statistics of Religious Organizations," (in Russian) *Antireligioznik* 6 (1926): 61-2). Comprehensive comparative statistics are not available at this point, allowing us to ignore the interconfessional dimension of the topic.
3. See, for example, Serge Bolshakoff, *The Christian Church and the Soviet State* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1942); William C. Fletcher, *A Study in Survival: The Church in Russia, 1927-1943* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1965); Howard L. Parsons, *Christianity in the Soviet Union* (New York: The American Institute for Marxist Studies, 1972); Lev Regel'son, *Tragediia Russkoi Tserkvi 1917-1945* [Tragedy of the Russian Church 1917-1945] (Paris: YMCA Press, 1977); Peter J. Babris, *Silent Churches: Persecution of Religions in the Soviet-Dominated Areas* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Research Publishers, 1978); Michael Bourdeaux and Michael Rowe, eds., *May One Believe in Russia? Violations of Religious Liberty in the Soviet Union* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1980); Trevor Beeson, *Discretion and Valour: Religious Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe* (London: Collins, Fount Paperback, 1982); Michael Bourdeaux, *Patriarch and Prophets: Persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church* (London: Mowbrays, 1975).
4. For the first truly analytical approaches to the study of specifically the anti-religious campaigns, see Dimitry V. Pospelovsky, *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice, and the Believer*, 3 vols. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988).
5. Mikhail I. Odintsov, *Gosudarstvo i Tserkov' v Rossii: XX vek* [State and Church in Russia: The

The Soviet-era pattern of church-density, with the western regions dominating, is being gradually eroded. Since relatively high growth occurred in the last few years in Russia, and not in Ukraine alone, one might expect that the legacy of this density gradient will gradually diminish. At this point, however, the numerical dominance of Ukraine still has an important geopolitical potential, underestimated by analysts. Two poles, the patriarchates of Moscow and Constantinople, determine the current balance of interests in world Orthodoxy. If the Ukrainian churches were united, the number of parishes of all Orthodox churches in Ukraine would make it the leading world Orthodox country.

The legacy of the imbalance of church property distribution is again clearly visible here. These themes certainly require further investigation.

Conclusion

Despite the utmost importance of church buildings for Orthodox life as well as for state religious politics before, during, and after the Soviet era, the issue of church property remains a neglected topic in studies of the Russian Orthodox Church. Despite the dominance of historians in the field, no major summary work is available on state-church relations covering together late Imperial Russia, the Soviet, and post-Soviet periods. This paper contributes to previous historical studies by providing a wider and more detailed periodization of SCR with regard to its property dimension.

As some previous studies have shown, church manipulation by the Soviet state was much more nuanced historically than is widely known. Historically, the Soviet authorities not only closed church buildings but also opened them at certain times. This paper adds a regional dimension to these new findings. At the risk of exaggeration, one may say that throughout much of the post-war period the Church was a regional phenomenon, because the majority of its churches concentrated in the late-acquired, westernmost borderlands of the USSR (Moldova, Ukraine, Belorussia, and the Baltics).

A geographical account of this historical match between religion and region ("re(li)gion") is long overdue. Both closures and returns of churches were affected by the regional political aspirations of the state. The legacy of this territorial imbalance in the geography of remaining church property exercises a continuing, yet not well known, impact on the Church, manifesting itself, for example, in certain regional imbalances existing among the ROCh's elite. Another example is the internal and external religious status of Ukraine, where the imbalance of property distribution contributes to domestic and foreign religious conflicts. This legacy is still alive, even as leaders come and pass away and churches disappear and return. Entanglement with the state remains the Russian Orthodox Church's strongest and weakest feature, its most important unresolved

but to territory, because, as noted, the geography of cemeteries reflects not only the current status quo, but rather the cumulative effects of all previous periods.

19. Yurii N. Burakov, *Pod sen'iu monastyrei moskovskikh* [In the Shadow of Moscow Monasteries] (Moscow: Moskovskii Rabochii, 1991): 16.
20. Unfortunately, no authoritative source of statistics exists for 1917-57. In this paper, this gap is filled by my own findings in the Russian archives. The State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) has several collections of relevant documents (f.5263, op.1; f.6991, op.1-7). As a result, this period is considered in greater detail than the better known period of 1957-91.

In reporting these statistics, it is important to note that church density for the pre-revolutionary years was calculated relative to the regional Orthodox population, and for the Soviet period, due to lack of religious statistics, to the Slavic population (defined as Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, and Moldavians). This gives somewhat distorted figures for areas such as the Baltics or the Volga region. Yet, in a country like Russia, with its enormous territorial, ethnic, and religious discrepancies, it would be a mistake to utilize such common measures of density as per capita of total population or per unit area.

Second, for most of the Soviet period, data on church buildings almost always coincide with registered communities of the Russian Orthodox Church, because availability of a church building was an important pre-condition for a community's registration. Lack of buildings frequently led to communities existing without registration. In perestroika times, this situation has been reversed; many communities are registered without any present building. Still, the "church imperative" (meaning the registration requirement of obtaining a church) is important for Orthodox believers. In general, the Russian Church's glory is its rites, and liturgy in a physically extant church is essential in Orthodoxy.
21. G. Mitrofanov, *Ruskaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' v Rossii i v emigratsii v 1920-e gody: k voprosu o vzaimootnosheniakh Moskovskoi Patriarkhii i russkoi tserkovnoi emigratsii v period 1920-1927 gg.* [The Russian Orthodox Church in Russia and in Emigration in the 1920s: On the Question of a Relationship between the Moscow Patriarchate and Russian Church Emigration in 1920-1927] (St. Petersburg: Noakh, 1995): 5. A full collection of documents pertaining to the separation of the state and the Church can be found in Pavel V. Gidulianov, *Otdelenie Tserkvi ot gosudarstva. Polnyi sbornik dekretov, vedomstvennykh rasporyazhenii i opredelenii Verkhovnogo Suda RSFSR i drugikh Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik* [Separation of the Church and the State. Complete Collection of Decrees, Administrative Decisions and Statements of the Supreme Court of the RSFSR and other Soviet Socialist Republics] (Moscow, 1926).
22. Alexander Nezhnyy, *Komissar d'iavola* [Devil's Commissar] (Moscow: Protestant, 1993).
23. Another indirect result of this first major assault on churches was the rapid initial success of the Communist-backed Renovationist schism in 1922. The main Church was certainly weakened by the attack on its property, although the quick transfer of about 70 percent of all Orthodox churches to the Renovationists could be considered a lesser evil than closure and eventual decay. By 1925 most parishes abandoned Renovationism, and it became a minor branch within the Church. See Sidorov, "Orthodoxy, Difference, and Scale," 284.
24. The RSFSR at that time was significantly larger than its current successor, including such areas in Central Asia as Kazakhstan. Sidorov, "Orthodoxy, Difference, and Scale," 284.
25. V. Livanov, "Anti-religious propaganda in Ukraine," (in Russian) *Antireligioznik* 5 (1926): 39-47.
26. *Rossiiskii Tsentri Khraneniia i Izucheniia Dokumentov Noveishei Istorii* (RTsKhIDNI) f. 17, op.112, d. 443a, l.3 verso.
27. Titus D. Hewryk, *The Lost Architecture of Kiev* (New York: The Ukrainian Museum, 1982): 7.
28. RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op. 113, d. 871, l. 33. Notes of meeting on May 18, 1929.
29. RTsKhIDNI f. 17, op. 113, d. 871, l. 36. Notes of meeting on May 29, 1929.
30. Hryhor H. Luzhnyts'kyi, *Persecution and Destruction of the Ukrainian Church by the Russian Bolsheviks* (New York: The Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, 1960): 41, 43, 44. For further reading, see Metropolitan Vasyl Lypkivsky, *Vidrozhennia tserky v Ukraini* [Of Churches in Ukraine] (Toronto: Dobra Knyzhka, 1959); Lev W. Mydlowsky, *Bolshevist persecution of religion and church in Ukraine, 1917-1957: informative outline* (London: Ukrainian Publishers Ltd., 1962); *First Victims of Communism—White Book on the Religious Persecutions in Ukraine* (Rome: Analecta O.S.B.M., 1953); and B. Mykorskiy, *Razrusheniye kulturno-istoricheskikh pamiatnikov v Kieve v 1934-1936 godakh* [Destruction of Cultural-Historical Monuments in Kiev in 1934-1936] (Munich, 1951).
31. See Odintsov, *Gosudarstvo i Tserkov' v Rossii*; 36; the author's calculations. Odintsov used data from the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF).
32. Nathaniel Davis, *A Long Walk to Church: A Contemporary History of Russian Orthodoxy* (Boulder,

- Twentieth Century] (Moscow: Rossiiskaia Akademiia Upravleniia, 1994).
6. John Anderson, *Religion, the State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
 7. Vladimir F. Zybkovets, *Natsionalizatsiia monastyrskikh imuschestv v Sovetskoi Rossii (1917-1921 gg.)* [Nationalization of Monastery Property in Soviet Russia (1917-1921)] (Moscow: Nauka, 1975).
 8. For example, Igor Smolitsch, *Geschichte der Russischen Kirche, 1700-1917* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964-91).
 9. Petr Palamarchuk, *Sorok sorokov: Kratkaia illiustrirovannaia istoriia vsekh moskovskikh khramov* [Forty by Forty: A Brief Illustrated History of All Moscow Churches.] 1, *Kreml'i monastyri* (Moscow: Kniga i biznes, 1992): 11.
 10. *Slovar' russkogo iazyka, sostavlennyi vtorym otdeleniem imperatorskoi akademii nauk* [Dictionary of Russian language] 3, (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Imperatorskoi akademii nauk, 1895).
 11. B. M. Volin and D. N. Ushakov, eds., *Tolkovyi slovar' russkogo iazyka 4*, [Explanatory Dictionary of Russian Language] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo inostrannykh i natsional'nykh slovarei, 1940): 270; Institut Russkogo iazyka AN SSSR, *Slovar' russkogo iazyka* [Dictionary of the Russian Language] 4, (Moscow: Russkii iazyk, 1984): 73, 138.
 12. Sergey G. Safronov, "Geograficheskie Aspekty Izucheniiia Religioznoy Sfery Rossii" [Geographic Aspects of the Study of the Religious Sphere in Russia], Ph.D. diss., Moscow: Moscow State University, 1998.
 13. For simplicity, the contemporary ROCh is considered here as a successor of the pre-revolutionary Church, although the issue remains subject to contestation among the many Orthodox Churches in post-Soviet Russia. See Sidorov, "Orthodoxy, Difference, and Scale."
 14. *Vsepoddanneishii otchet Ober-Prokurora Sviateishego Sinoda po vedomstvu Pravoslavnogo ispovedaniia za 1914 god* [Report of the Holy Synod's Over-Procurator on Orthodox Faith Department in 1914] (Petrograd: Sinodal'naia Tipografiia, 1916); Sidorov, "Orthodoxy, Difference, and Scale," 282-83.
 15. The density pattern reflects different settlement size. One settlement usually had one church, and the rural settlements in northern European Russia were generally much smaller than those in the south.
 16. The data on Trans-Caucasia does not include Armenian churches.
 17. Sidorov, "Orthodoxy, Difference, and Scale," 282-83.
 18. This map would be more accurate if the churches were related not to current (1913) population,

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