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**Проповеди о покаянии русских иерархов XVIII–XIX веков в их социальном и политическом контексте**

**Russian Bishops' Sermons on Penance from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries in Their Social and Political Context**

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**Abstract.** Russian Orthodox bishops' sermons on confession in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries reflect the intersection and balancing of different simultaneous goals: teaching eternal verities, engaging the contemporary flock's actual moral state, and incorporating the aims of Russian rulers, such as those expressed in the *Spiritual Regulation* of Peter I. The homilies of Metropolitan Dimitriy (Tuptalo) of Rostov linked the sacrament of penance to liturgy; Platon (Levshin) and Tikhon of Zadonsk emphasized repentance as a life-long activity rather than an annual rite. Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century censorship limited more daring theological explorations of confession, such as those of Ignatiy (Brianchaninov). As the focus shifted to a broader audience after the emancipation of the serfs, more overtly disciplinary confession-related sermons by Archbishops Innokentiy (Borisov), Filaret (Gumilevskiy), and Feofan (Govorov, aka the Recluse) brought listeners and readers back to making a good annual fasting throughout Lent. Bishops consistently chose to focus on the eternal verities of penance and salvation rather than engaging with contemporary issues, which they did only rarely. This may have been a way of subtly resisting rulers' encroachments, maintaining the high ground and their unique calling far from politics. Their conservatism also meant, however, that the practice of annual (rather than more frequent) confession and communion would remain entrenched.

**Keywords:** Russian Orthodox Church, bishops, theology, sermon, sacrament of repentance, confession, sacrament of communion, flock.

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*Full text of the article in Russian and references in English are available below.*

**Аннотация.** Проповеди русских православных иерархов в XVIII–XIX вв., посвященные теме исповеди, отражают пересечение и одновременно сочетание нескольких различных целей: проповедование вечных ценностей, обращение к проблеме морального состояния паствы в ту или иную эпоху, а также принятие во внимание целей, преследуемых российскими правителями, например тех, что были изложены в «Духовном регламенте» Петра I. Митрополит Ростовский Димитрий (Туптало) в своих проповедях увязывал таинство покаяния с литургией; Платон (Левшин) и Тихон Задонский подчеркивали, что покаяние должно считаться делом всей жизни, а не просто ежегодно отправляемым обрядом. В середине XIX в. цензура препятствовала изложению более смелых богословских размышлений об исповеди, например, в проповедях Игнатия (Брянчанинова). После отмены

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крепостного права, когда фокус постепенно смещался в сторону более широкой аудитории, архиепископы Иннокентий (Борисов), Филарет (Гумилевский) и Феофан (Говоров) в своих проповедях, имевших заметно более дисциплинирующую направленность, напоминали читателям и слушателям о необходимости добросовестного отношения к ежегодному великопостному говению. Иерархи неизменно предпочитали фокусироваться на теме вечных ценностей покаяния и спасения, довольно редко обращаясь к актуальным вопросам современности. В этом можно усмотреть едва заметное сопротивление посягательствам со стороны властей, сохранение своей ведущей роли и уникальной миссии, далекой от политики. Их консерватизм также означал, что практика ежегодного (не чаще) исповедания и причащения сохранится и в дальнейшем.

**Ключевые слова:** Русская православная церковь, архиереи, богословие, проповедь, таинство покаяния, исповедь, таинство причащения, паства.

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At the start of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Russian Orthodox bishops found themselves in a curious position. On the one hand, ‘*rightly teaching the word of [God]s truth*’ («право правящих слово твоея истины») as declared at the anaphora of every liturgy) was their primary, unique responsibility.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, they also had to be good pastors. They had to address their flocks as they actually were, not as the bishops would have liked them to be. Finally, this tension between ‘the word of God’s truth’ and the lived reality of Orthodox Christians did not exist in a vacuum. Russian rulers had their own goals for their Orthodox Christian population, religious and otherwise.<sup>2</sup> The sacrament of repentance was one area in imperial Russia where these goals collided. When, for example, tsars like Aleksei Mihailovich worried that Siberian Christians ‘lived without father confessors and died without repentance,’ or, like Peter I, wanted to use confession as a tool of discipline, education, and policing, bishops had to take note of these aims – which did not necessarily mean incorporating those aims into their sermons.<sup>3</sup> What Russian bishops preached and wrote about confession over the course of two centuries reflects this intersection, and balancing, of different simultaneous goals.

Metropolitan Dimitrii (Tuptalo) of Rostov’s sermons on confession for every important day in Lent began this process. The word ‘began’ is key. For, written before Peter I started to show an interest in using confession as an instrument of politics, they are more innovative than they might seem. A quarter-century earlier, Simeon Polotskii had written his own collection of homilies for every Sunday of the year, with a special section for the Sundays of the Lenten Triodion.<sup>4</sup> Still, while Polotskii had treated Lenten themes and although he discussed the need for repentance generally, he did not emphasize confession as a crucial element of penance. Rather the opposite: it was tears and above all almsgiving that ‘rescued one from every sin and from death’ (милостыня от всякаго греха и от смерти избавит). Polotskii explicitly mentioned confession only twice in his homilies, and – remarkably – *not* as part of the Lenten cycle. Confession appeared only twice: as the fifth most necessary aspect of the upbringing of children (‘instill upon them that, through the mystery of holy repentance, through sincere confession of their sins, they frequently cleanse their souls’), and in the context of the feast of Theophany (occurring on August 6 during the Dormition

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<sup>1</sup> See the anaphoras of St John Chrysostom and St Basil the Great, [https://lib.pravmir.ru/library/readbook/1860#part\\_22427](https://lib.pravmir.ru/library/readbook/1860#part_22427); Чин священныя и божественныя литургии иже во святых отца нашего Иоанна Златоустаго. Джорданвилль: тип. преп. Иова Почаевского, 1954. Л. 53–53 об.; Чин священныя и божественная Литургии иже во святых отца нашего Василия Великаго. Джорданвилль: тип. преп. Иова Почаевского, 1954. Л. 61.

<sup>2</sup> Strickland J. The Making of Holy Russia: The Orthodox Church and Russian Nationalism Before the Revolution. Jordanville, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Письмо Алексея Михайловича к воеводе Василию Кокореву, № 140 // Собрание государственных грамот и договоров, хран. в государственной коллегии иностранных дел. Ч. 3. М., 1822. С. 458–460; Духовный регламент // Полное собрание постановлений и распоряжений по ведомству православного исповедания Российской империи. Т. 2. 1722–1872. № 453. СПб., 1907. С. 99–103.

<sup>4</sup> Симеон Полоцкий. Обед душевный. М., 1681. С. 576–684.

fast, a fasting period during which the Orthodox devout occasionally timed a second period of fasting, church attendance, confession, and communion)<sup>5</sup>.

Metropolitan Dmitrii, then, seems to have been the first East Slavic Orthodox hierarch to pen something that would in future centuries become a staple: a series of sermons linking the theme of every pre-Lenten, Lenten, and (this was a real innovation, given that anyone who went to confession tried to go during a fasting period) even *post*-Paschal sermon to the necessity of repentance and specifically of confessing one's sins. His comments offer valuable evidence for how the early 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian flock approached both sin and repentance. On the Sunday of the Dread Judgment, for example, he noted that just as the fornicator sought to commit his sin in private out of shame, so '*even at holy confession he does not want to tell the truth before his spiritual father and conceals it out of shame.*'<sup>6</sup> He also acknowledged existing attitudes by rebuking them. For example, he urges his listeners not to delay their repentance and their confession for when they are old, as they are wont to do, as they may not have the chance to do so later.

Some do not want to partake of the Mysteries frequently. But what am I talking about – frequently? Why, they don't even want to partake *rarely*: not once a year, not twice, not three times a year. Some have not partaken of communion in ten years, some in twenty years, and some have gone their entire lives without having partaken of communion, save for when they were brought up as infants once upon their baptisms<sup>7</sup>.

Metropolitan Dimitrii did not hesitate to invert predictable assumptions to bring people to confession. On the Saturday of the Akathist of the Mother of God, for example, Dimitrii did not portray Mary conventionally as a merciful intercessor, but warned his listeners that every time they sinned, they trampled upon Her Son and pierced Him in the heart, so they should expect no more mercy from Her than they would from a mother whose child they killed before her eyes. Thus, he called his listeners to *first* make their peace with God at confession: then and only then would they find mercy with the Mother of God<sup>8</sup>. On Palm Sunday, he continued the urging to confession. Even on the Paschal feast, when liturgical texts abandoned all references to penance in favor of joy, Dimitrii again reminded his listeners to resurrect themselves from spiritual death 'that is, repent for sins...just as Christ does not die again after His resurrection, so let us not return to our previous sins after our repentance.'<sup>9</sup> In explicitly linking confession to the Lenten Triodion, Dimitrii was not maintaining an *existing* practice of confession during Lent: he appears rather to have been seeking to get his flock to go to confession during Lent, and also seeking to get them to identify with the Triodion's themes. That is, although earlier hierarchs may have called their flocks to go to confession and communion during Lent, Dimitrii's sermons show that this practice had not yet become widespread. In urging his flock to make good confessions during Lent, he was both trying to impress upon his flock the thematic richness of the Triodion, and to link observance to liturgy.

In eulogies at the funerals of noblemen, Dimitrii also stressed how important it was to prepare for death by repenting of sins in a timely fashion, and for survivors to commemorate the departed: '*In this way they will obtain forgiveness of sins.*'<sup>10</sup> Dimitrii shows his debt to earlier attitudes by

<sup>5</sup> The Theophany text read: Егда кто по лютюм в согрешеніи паденіи, кається истинно о гресех своих, исповедається их смиренно, и сердцем смиренным мерзится злобми: сицевая милостивно приемлет Господь, и некосненно прощает им согрешенія. См.: *Симеон Полоцкий. Обед душевный...* С. 701–702.

<sup>6</sup> This and all subsequent emphases in quotations are mine, not that of the original authors.

<sup>7</sup> *Димитрий, митрополит Ростовский. Сочинения святого Димитрия, Митрополита Ростовскаго. Ч. 2. Изд. 7-е. М.: В Синодальной типографии, 1848. С. 425.*

<sup>8</sup> Будем помнить это хорошо и прежде всего примиримся с Богом; тогда мы умилим и Богородицу. St. Dimitrii's contemporary, Archbishop Feofilakt Lopatynsky, would use even more bellicose imagery for Mary in his Poltava service, comparing her to Judith, Deborah, and Jael. See: *Kizenko N. The Battle of Poltava in Imperial Liturgy...* P. 227–269.

<sup>9</sup> Творения Святителя Димитрия Ростовского в трех томах. Т. 1. М., 2005. URL: [https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Dmitrij\\_Rostovskij/poucheniya-i-propovedi/](https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Dmitrij_Rostovskij/poucheniya-i-propovedi/) (дата обращения: 10.01.2022).

<sup>10</sup> See the graveside sermons for Okol'nichii Timofei Borisovich Iushkov in 1705 and Ioann Semenovich Griboiedov in 1706, in *Димитрий, митрополит Ростовский. Сочинения святого Димитрия, Митрополита Ростовскаго. Ч. 2. Изд. 7-е. М.: в Синодальной типографии, 1848. С. 561–578.* For commemoration of the dead, see: *Miller D.B. Motives for Donations to the Trinity-Sergius Monastery, 1392–1605: Gender Matters // Essays in Medieval Studies.*

continuing to emphasize tears and compunction as well as confession, and to contemporary Roman Catholic ones by noting that the highest degree leading one to perfect salvation is satisfaction (*udovletvorenie*) for sins. Even as Dimitrii emphasized sin and repentance within the liturgical cycle and the sacramental rite of confession, however, he also urged a general constant awareness of sinfulness rather than trying to recall as many sins as possible on the rare occasions one did confess.<sup>11</sup>

Three texts most clearly demonstrated this approach. One that most approached earlier penitentials was *A Short Moral Teaching to the Christian*.<sup>12</sup> This work was explicitly aimed at the “simplest” members of Dimitrii’s flock, consisting of the format perhaps most familiar to them: nineteen commandments describing common virtues and vices. What is new here is that the lists of sins or questions pertaining to sins familiar from earlier penitentials and *ponovleniia* have vanished. Instead, as A.O. Krylov has noted, the goal is to formulate a positive ideal rather than to emphasize how concretely one has sinned against God: the emphasis is on the Christian’s inner spiritual life, and any concrete sins one has committed are largely a consequence of what has happened within.<sup>13</sup>

Two other texts stressed confession, and repentance broadly speaking, as part of an inner turn and inner prayer. Indeed, one was explicitly called *The Inner Man Withdrawn into the Cage of His Heart*.<sup>14</sup> They called the penitent to an intimate, immediate relationship to God. For Dimitrii, the crucial thing was daily self-examination, repentance, and confession before God –and God alone. His *Prayer of Daily Confession to God (Molitva povsednevnago k Bogu ispovedaniia)* focused not on exhaustively naming individual sins, but on awakening a sense of the destructive nature of sin as such.<sup>15</sup> He summed up this ideal daily confession with the following: “1) I confess all my sins to God, 2) I judge myself to be unworthy of His mercy, but of eternal torment, 3) However, I do not despair, 4) I humbly beg forgiveness, 5) I propose the intention of improving my life, 6) I believe doubtlessly that my sins are forgiven.”<sup>16</sup>

Dimitrii does not completely explain his leap between “I judge myself to be worthy of eternal torment” and “However, I do not despair,” to “I believe without doubt that my sins are forgiven.” After all, it was precisely making that leap from keen awareness of one’s guilt and sinfulness (fostered by Lenten services and sermons like his own) to not despairing and believing that one’s sins were forgiven without the absolution of a priest that would torment penitents later in the century. Finally, even as Dimitrii may not demand a minute listing of individual sins, he is certainly not inclined to go easy on sinners. One of his harshest texts, *On unrepentant sinners*, makes this clear. Not only must one confess one’s sins to a priest, but one must also “iron them out by labors of repentance, and moreover such labors that would not only be equivalent to the sins we have committed, but would exceed them”. “Tender sorrow and brief heartfelt compunction are not enough without true repentance, and it consists not only in regretting and weeping over sins, but to

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Vol. 14. 1997. For changes in commemorating the dead through donations, see: *Vovelle M. Piété baroque et déchristianisation en Provence au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris, 1978; *Chaunu P. La mort à Paris, XVIe, XVIIe, XVIIIe siècles*. Paris, 1978.

<sup>11</sup> Димитрий, митрополит Ростовский. Сочинения святого Димитрия, Митрополита Ростовского. Ч. 3. ... С. 3, 588–592.

<sup>12</sup> See also the penitential texts in his: *Летопись келейной: преосвященного Димитрия митрополита Ростовского и Ярославского от начала миробытия до Рождества Христова: сей начаться писати в лето 1709 генваря 22 дня* (Рукопись 65.1. Собрание библиотеки МДА, Троице-Сергиева Лавра. Рукописные собрания).

<sup>13</sup> Крылов А.О. Святитель Димитрий Ростовский и понимание греха в русском обществе рубежа XVII–XVIII вв. // *История и культура в русском обществе рубежа XVII–XVIII вв.* Ростов, 2013. С. 196.

<sup>14</sup> *Димитрий Ростовский. Сочинения*. Т. 1. М., 1840. С. 147–158.

<sup>15</sup> First published in the journal *Drievniaya rossiyskaya vivliofika* (December 1774. Vol. 6. P. 315–408). The second edition edited by N.N. Bantysh-Kamenskiy («Дневные записки святого чудотворца Димитрия, митрополита Ростовского» (2-е изд. М., 1781)) was removed for its connection to Novikov and not republished for several decades.

<sup>16</sup> *Димитрий Ростовский. Сочинения*. Т. 1. М., 1840. С. 137–146. Note that he does not call the Christian to name the sins.

*not return to them*, and for those sins which have already been committed to bear labors of repentance". At such moments Dimitrii does not sound very far from Archpriest Avvakum:

Vain is the repentance of the person who wants via brief restraint from food and one day of fasting to cover his manifold gluttony and drunkenness!

Useless is the repentance of the one who thinks with a brief and small version of mortification of the flesh to cleanse grave, mortal sins of many years!

Unrighteous is the repentance of the one who wishes with a few sighs and a few taps on the breast to expiate his many lies!

Doubtful is the forgiveness of the sins of the person who thinks with a few tears without the labors and ascetic efforts characteristic to true repentance to cleanse his many iniquities and impurities and thereby to free himself from eternal torments!

Thus, in moving toward an inner mood of constant repentance rather than occasional detailed listing, Dimitrii was actually demanding more rigor of his flock rather than less. For Dimitrii, "The root of repentance is *the good intention of confessing sins*; the leaves are *the actual confession of sins to God before the spiritual father* and a promise to improve, and the fruits of repentance are a virtuous life and repentant labors. It is by these fruits that true repentance is known.<sup>17</sup> For all his calls for a daily private confession to God, for constantly maintaining a lively sense of oneself before the face of God, for leading a moral life, and his downplaying of minutely itemizing one's sins, at no point does St. Dimitrii think one can do without the root and the leaves – the intent to confess and the actual sacramental confession.

Metropolitan Dimitrii's late eighteenth-century successors took up his theme of emphasizing repentance broadly speaking rather than the rite of confession, while retaining a link to liturgy. Metropolitan Platon (Levshin)'s 1779 sermon on the feast of the Transfiguration, for example, told sinners that through repentance and improvement they could recover their lost goodness and, unlike a clay vessel which could not be put back together, they could become transfigured vessels of gold and silver.<sup>18</sup> But he does not explicitly suggest, as did Simeon Polotskii and Dimitrii, that his flock effect this change by confessing and communing in the remainder of the Dormition fast. Any decision regarding sacramental confession he leaves at the discretion of his educated flock. Platon also silently passes by the Spiritual Regulation's attempt to use confession as a means of determining political loyalty.<sup>19</sup>

Tikhon, Archbishop of Zadonsk (1724–1783, canonized 1861), developed the notion of repentance in greater theological detail. He focused on sacramental confession only in his earliest texts, and in publications meant for clerics rather than for laypeople. For laypeople, Tikhon set himself a different goal. At first he, like Dimitrii, tried to urge people to the sacraments. His 1765 *Remarks from Holy Scripture Rousing the Sinner from Sinful Sleep and Calling to Repentance* urged readers to repent by showing them how God punished sinners in the Bible, and also had them read the *Chetii Minei* for examples of penitent sinners.<sup>20</sup> He emphasized that 'true repentance, as is evident from Holy Scripture and the holy fathers, consists of the following points: to leave behind one's previous sins, and to confess them to one's father confessor.'<sup>21</sup> But Tikhon quickly came to understand all too well that for most Russian Orthodox Christians, sacramental confession was at best an annual milestone where one fulfilled one's legal obligation. He acknowledged that many Russians put off repentance (as expressed in confession and communion) till their old age, but noted that in old age one lacked the physical well-being to undertake real labors of penitence (112, Jeremiah

<sup>17</sup> *Димитрий, митрополит Ростовский. О нераскаянных грешниках.* Ростов-на-Дону: Изд-во Ростовской-на-Дону епархии, 2007. С. 29–31.

<sup>18</sup> *Платон (Левшин).* Поучительные слова при высочайшем дворе е.и.в. государыни Екатерины Алексеевны: в 20 т. М., 1779–1806. Т. 5. С. 35–43 (6 August 1779).

<sup>19</sup> *Wirschafter E.K. Religion and Enlightenment in Catherinian Russia: The Teachings of Metropolitan Platon.* DeKalb, 2013. P. 20–31.

<sup>20</sup> Deut 32:1–2, 5–6 et al.

<sup>21</sup> *Тихон (Соколов).* Примечания некая из св. Писания выбранная, возбуждающая грешника от сна греховнаго и к покаянию призывающая // Творения иже во святых отца нашего Тихона Задонского. 5-е изд. М., 1889. Т. I. С. 111.

13:23). Because of his, he, like Dimitrii, decided that changing people's attitudes to repentance year-round was perhaps more important than annually confessing their sins. Tikhon sought to foster a perpetual mood of mindful compunction:

Repentance is indeed a second Baptism. Through knowing and confessing his sins a person has the opportunity to begin a new life, to change bad morals for good, to live by the spirit and not the flesh. *But true repentance is not a momentary or a periodic remembering and compunction for one's sins*, but an ascetic effort that lasts one's whole life, it is a constant spiritual set of mind that occupies an exceptionally important place in the work of salvation for every Christian.<sup>22</sup>

Tikhon's 'Confession and Thanksgiving to Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the World,' is fascinating. Although this text calls itself a confession and urges the sinner to the Eucharist, there is neither self-examination along the commandments nor any list of questions like those encountered in earlier penitentials. The crucial thing is not to remember one's sins in exhaustive detail, or *even to confess them before a priest* ('All your sins and transgressions and numbered and written down with Me'). What saves is true repentance – faith in the Redeemer and leaving behind one's previous sins, secure in the knowledge that only Christ's Divine blood washes away all sin. The penitent sinner must therefore: 1) be consoled in God's mercy, 2) read Christian books and learn what sin and virtue are so as to flee from the one and strive for the other, 3) pray often for God to preserve one from every sin, 4) to tread carefully so as not to be ensnared by Satan. In a text called *Confession*, there is *no mention* of confessing one's sins to a priest. The emphasis is change of heart and change of life without an explicit step-by-step analysis of one's sins and transgressions.<sup>23</sup>

The confession-related writings of both Tikhon and Platon thus seem to bypass the controlling, state-oriented aims of the Spiritual Regulation. Neither, moreover, seems to have encountered particular resistance from religious censorship. Their theological writing on confession seems to have evolved independently. (As Gary Hamburg has noted, "Russia's path toward enlightenment proved generally friendly to the established Church."<sup>24</sup>) Paradoxically, then, at a period when the state's and the Synod's aims were most aimed at controlling the population through confession, bishops' sermons show no trace of this. This studied ignoring of politics would continue through the early years of the reign of Alexander I.<sup>25</sup>

In the reign of Nicholas I, the atmosphere changed. Even so irreproachable a hierarch as Ignatii Brianchaninov had to resort to intrigues to try to get non-standard homilies on confession published. In a letter sent between 1851 and 1854 to a laywoman, Ignatii wrote that his *Preparatory homily for the sacrament of confession* could, as she had suggested, be published by the editor of Library for Reading as a gift to subscribers in a separate booklet. "But I must tell you," he warned her, "This homily – an emulation of the mystagogical homilies of St. Cyril of Jerusalem – will seem very new in our days to our religious censors." He spent the rest of the letter suggesting individuals to enlist in the publication's support. "But," he concluded, "If the Homily is to be distorted by emendations and rhetoric and brought down from the anthological genre in which it is written, then I do not give my consent to its printing."<sup>26</sup> This is one of the rare indications that even purely theological content had to undergo scrutiny. It may also explain why three of Ignatii's contemporaries turned back to familiar models, linking their confession sermons to Lenten liturgy and holy Scripture.

The works of Archbishop Innokentii (Borisov) (1800–1857), known as the Russian Chrysostom for his accessible eloquence and for his development of homiletics in modern Russian, bring us

<sup>22</sup> Иоанн (Маслов), схиарх. Тихон Задонский и его учение о спасении. М., 1995. С. 272.

<sup>23</sup> «Письмо седьмое» in: Иоанн (Маслов), схиарх. Тихон Задонский и его учение о спасении. М., 1995. С. 266–269. The closest to such lists of guided questions is «Письмо девятое». But the only exhortation after each such directed question is: 'Be attentive to yourself' (*vnimai sebie*): 'Remember it [this phrase], ponder and be attentive to yourself, so that you will be saved' (Творения... С. 273–277).

<sup>24</sup> Hamburg G.M. Russia's Path toward Enlightenment. Faith, Politics, and Reason, 1500–1801. New Haven, 2016. P. 530–563, 742.

<sup>25</sup> Вишленкова Е. Заботясь о душах подданных: религиозная политика в России первой четверти XIX века. Саратов, 2002. С. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Игнатий Брянчанинов. Творения. Т. 6 (Письма). М., 2002. С. 556.

back to the style of Metropolitan Dimitrii of Rostov. Innokentii, too, followed the Lenten calendar, composing homilies for each of the days of Great Lent when people would have been in church preparing for confession. As with Dimitrii's homilies in the early 1700s, Innokentii's homilies are notable for addressing aspects of contemporary practice. Some of them – for example, the conviction that not enough people are going to confession, the suspicion that when people do go, they resist saying everything – remain much the same as earlier periods. However, Innokentii introduced some changes revealing actual confession practice in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Unlike Dimitrii, who focused mostly on Lenten Sundays, Innokentii devoted several homilies Lenten weekdays as well. Of these, the first is 'Clean' Thursday of the first week of Great Lent. This suggests that St. Innokentii's audience had attended the previous services of that week and was now about to go to confession. The Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete, read from Monday through Thursday, had ended that evening, so the most penitential services of the week had just ended. One homily is labeled specifically, "At Matins. On Confession." The reference to Matins suggests that, since only the priest could read the Great Canon, no confessions were heard during Great Compline. In comparison, Matins was less liturgically stirring and gave the priest almost uninterrupted opportunities to hear confessions. Because Innokentii timed a homily for precisely that interval, we may suppose that this in fact occurred, and he was addressing people waiting their turn while someone else read Matins.

The "On Confession" homily began with a quote from Isaiah 43:24–26 which St. Innokentii then makes the focus of his homily:

...thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. Put me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified.

The rest of the homily uses this text to liken the penitent waiting in line for confession to the whole house of Israel. Although the all-knowing God clearly knew all the sins of Israel and had decided to forgive Israel, He still demanded Israel to confess its sins aloud, and the Church therefore asked not only inner repentance, but also outer confession of sins before the servants of the altar. Innokentii wants to affirm his flock in the action they are about to undertake. He traces the entire history of confession beginning with the Old Testament: the voice of God to Adam and Eve in Heaven was meant "to dispose them to confess their sins, to beseech and to get forgiveness." But "we [that is, all humanity] hid, and responded not with a sincere acknowledgment of sin, but a criminal attempt to excuse it (Genesis 3:12–13." When Adam blamed his wife (which God gave him) and Eve the serpent, "so we completed, or, rather, perverted *our very first confession!*"

Innokentii went on to illustrate the behavior of God as the ideal father-confessor and of Cain as all-too-familiar bad penitent ("How did the Lord [the priest] begin the confession of the fratricide? Not with threats, not with condemnations, but with a fatherly question"). Noah called people to repentance and confession for 120 years – they resisted ("When it became obvious that no one would show up to confession, the flood's waves swept the unrepentant tribe from the face of the earth"). There was no confession before the dispersal of all around the Tower of Babel and the destruction of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah "not because of a lack of those who would hear people's confessions, but because of the utter absence of penitents." Thus bad confession should be blamed not on the priest, but on the unwilling flock. When God concentrated his revelations in one tribe, many penitent confessors came before the Ark "bringing sacrifices for their sins and confessing those sins...and received remission of their sins" (Leviticus 4:29). Every year on the day of atonement and purification the great high priest carried out the mystical confession of all of Israel (Leviticus 16:5–28).<sup>27</sup> In extraordinary circumstances extraordinary individuals appeared to hear confessions: for example, the prophet Nathan heard Daniel's confession and gave him absolution; Ahab confessed and repented before Elijah.

However, because Israel gradually became unworthy despite all its public and private confessions, God sent the Forerunner John, whose entire service consisted of calling people to repentance

<sup>27</sup> For a detailed consideration of this argument, see: *Stökl Ben Ezra, D. The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity. Tübingen, 2003.*

and hearing people's confessions. Finally, "the Lamb of God who takes upon himself the sin of the world," who did not want a single one of his flock to perish, brought peace to everyone who came to Him to repent. He left behind the sacrament of confession as a boon for humanity, and the early Church saw fervent public confessions, which gradually discomfited so many that Church fathers "hastened to channel this fervor into suitable limits, changing confession to something private".

Thus, having sketched his summary history of confession, Innokentii then responded to his flock's possible objections: why could not confession occur within one's heart, before God alone? Why could not one's conscience be one's judge? Why could one not turn to someone close and trusted who was not one's parish priest? Why not, finally, make do with a general confession to the priest and a general absolution from him? Perhaps surprisingly, Innokentii did not engage the priest's unique power of the keys (Matthew 16:18–19). Although he accepted that confession to a priest did not exclude private confessions to friends ("confess your sins to one another, that ye may be healed"), he thought that mutual confession between friends led only to temptation and sin. By contrast, self-examination and self-confession before God was also the "best and indispensable preparation" for confessing sins before a priest.

Innokentii devoted a separate sermon for the same day during the Hours, after Matins, to a key side aspect of confession – the assignment of penances. He noted two "common, widespread misapprehensions" about penances: "some regard penances as something unnecessary and excessive; others base just about their entire reconciliation with God upon it." St. Innokentii sought to explain the 'golden mean' between these two extremes, explaining why priests assigned such penances as prostrations, fasting, the reading of various prayers, visiting holy places, various forms of charity, and so on. Clearly it was not for 'satisfaction' – only Christ's death on the cross redeemed people. But penances did perform an important spiritual function: they gave penitents a chance to express their post-confession desire to change their lives: "[an assigned penance] saves us from frivolity...aimed as it is at our specific spiritual failing, it, just as does medicine, heals us from our ailment...it keeps forgiveness at confession from seeming too automatic or too easy." Finally, one forgot nothing as quickly as one did one's sins after confession: a penance was a way of recalling one's previous parlous state and fostering humility. But penitents could help the priest, their spiritual doctor, in assigning truly useful spiritual remedies: they should disclose "as faithfully as possible their situation, their conscience, their character, their relations, their thoughts and feelings." If one did all this and still wondered at the penance one was assigned, St. Innokentii assured one that the choice of medicine was up to the doctor, not the patient; that revulsion at a particular penance tended to mean that it had in fact hit the mark, and indeed that denying one's own will was the chief remedy for just about everything.<sup>28</sup>

These sermons, evocative of the questions posed both by the twelfth-century monk Kirik to his bishop and contemporary Ukrainian peasants to their priests, offer a valuable guide to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Russian imperial confession practice.<sup>29</sup> Confession happened first as part of *govienie* during the first week of Lent (though some murmured at it), during the services of Clean Thursday and Clean Friday, and penances were still assigned (though some murmured at them). Innokentii's homily "before confession on the Friday of the Fifth Week of Great Lent" is especially illustrative of mid 19<sup>th</sup> century practice.<sup>30</sup> First, it shows that enough people came to confession on that day that it could warrant a separate homily – with the exception of the first week of Lent, none of the other Lenten Fridays in his collection warrants such a sermon. Second, it shows that, while those who had not gone to confession in the first week of Great Lent put off confession till the end, some did not wait till the service-filled last Passion Week. Instead, they opted for a day that they would likely have been in church anyway – the so-called 'Praise of the Mother of God,' with the beloved

<sup>28</sup> *Инокентий (Борисов)*. Сочинения в шести томах. Т. 4. 2-е изд. СПб., 1908. С. 357–367.

<sup>29</sup> For the latter, see: *Евстратий Голованский, иером.* 1200 вопросов сельских прихожан о разных душеполезных предметах, с ответами на оные бывшего приходского их священника. 2-е изд. Киев, 1869.

<sup>30</sup> *Инокентий (Борисов)*. Сочинения в шести томах. Т. 4. 2-е изд. СПб., 1908. С. 295–298.

akathist to Mary read that evening – and could go to communion the next morning without being distracted from the distribution of pussy-willows and opportunity to eat fish on that Sunday.<sup>31</sup>

In this homily, Innokentii focused on those who had stopped committing a sin they were ashamed to confess, but still could not bring themselves to tell it to the priest. Clearly this was widespread enough that it warranted comment, and by reminding listeners of it at the end of Lent, Innokentii was giving even those who had confessed at the start of Lent another chance to make a better confession. Citing Proverbs 18:21 (“Death and life are in the power of the tongue”), Innokentii noted that the “current days of fasting and confession” most illustrated them. You got eternal life when you “humbly confessed your sins before God and accepted forgiveness for them from the mouth of the servant of the Church.” By contrast, you got eternal death when “you keep quiet before the father-confessor of whatever shameful action of yours, and therefore leave unpardoned and unabsolved.” Unfortunately, Innokentii continued,

There are more than a few, *even among those who come to confession*, who do not make use of the boon that is confession... they do not want to move their tongue to pronounce their own salvation. Such people know their sin; they even understand that it is foul before the Lord... but they cannot muster sufficient strength to resolve upon confessing it before the servant of the altar of Christ. Some even approach the holy table intending not to conceal their transgression any longer – but still return not having fully revealed it.

Your hands and feet have already freed themselves from the snares of the enemy because you no longer go to the counsel of the wicked... but your neck is bound; the enemy still holds it in his hands and does not let you open your mouth to confess your sin before the priest, for he knows that *with confession and absolution he will lose all his rights to you*.

This use of the tongue imagery from Proverbs and the neck from Isaiah 52:2 (“loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion”), are the most original aspects of Innokentii’s argument. The others – that even those who come to confession are likely holding back the worst, that one was not ashamed to show one’s wounds to a *medical* doctor no matter how repugnant they looked, and yet one was ashamed to show one’s spiritual wounds to one’s *spiritual* doctor, that confession worked like vomiting up whatever disturbed one’s innards, that not confessing the worst things full enough put one in the grip of the enemy, that the shame one felt upon confessing would restrain one from repeating the same sin – were familiar from Dimitrii and other prelates. Precisely because this homily was set at the end of Lent, rather than at the beginning, it served as the equivalent of the “last call,” and so Innokentii’s tone was more urgent. His parting words express a gloomy sentiment that generations of penitents would internalize:

Well, beloved, it is up to you – but we must decisively tell you that if you come to confession intending to conceal some sins, then it would be better not to approach the *analoï* at all... Your father-confessor, not seeing what is in your soul, will give you absolution, but the Lord who knows the heart will not, and you will leave even more trapped than you were when you arrived, from which God save you!<sup>32</sup>

Thus, even as Innokentii threatens his public with the consequences of not disclosing everything, he is forced to admit that the choice is the penitent’s (“впрочем, как хотите”): however confessors might encourage candor, they could not compel it.

In timing his homilies on confession for the various days of the Lenten Triodion, Innokentii tended to stick to the time of year when most of his listeners would be doing – during Great Lent – and on the days when they would have been most likely to go. He links his flock’s behavior to Lenten liturgy, and to liturgy in general. In his Palm Sunday homilies, published in a collection of holiday sermons, he noted at All-Night Vigil that his flock’s “our annual *govienie* during Great Lent, our repentance and confession, our communion of the Holy Mysteries – what is all this but

<sup>31</sup> The Laudation feast established in Byzantium in the 9<sup>th</sup> century enlisted the divine in the service of the Orthodox (Robert S. Nelson. ‘“And So, With the Help of God”: The Byzantine Art of War in the Tenth Century,’ *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 65/66 (2011–2012), 169–192). For its veneration among East Slavs, see Innokentii’s other sermon on the occasion and Filaret, Metropolitan of Moscow (Творения. М., 1994. С. 357).

<sup>32</sup> *Инокентий (Борисов)*. Сочинения в шести томах. Т. 4. 2-е изд. СПб., 1908. С. 295–298.

our own solemn greeting of our Lord and Savior, who has come to our soul as he went today to perishing Jerusalem?” Innokentii, however, also criticizes the way his flock seems to ignore the lessons of repentance. Just as the adoring crowd turned on Jesus, ...do we remain faithful to our vows for long? A few days go by, and we are the same as ever: once again our familiar sins, our familiar passions, the same lack of concern for our soul and our conscience...One might think then that we repent and confess not sincerely, but hypocritically. But that is not it. We truly would wish our salvation, and every time we approach confession and communion we hope to become better. So what happens? ...We do not undertake the work of firming up the holy work of repentance, we do not take measures against our previous sinful inclinations; we make do with several days of *govienie* and stop only at the external aspect of the sacrament – and the good that we began, unsupported, starved, crushed – weakens, withers, disappears. And how many times the same hapless thing happens! The Israelites showed themselves to be fickle and careless before the Savior only once, on the day of His entry into Jerusalem, but we do the same thing every year, and many will likely keep doing the same thing to the end of their lives...<sup>33</sup>

Innokentii might, as did Dimitrii and Tikhon, want his flock to maintain a constant mood of repentance and to work on themselves, but he is more focused on criticizing their lessening of tension after confession and communion than on encouraging the minute daily work of self-control outside of Lent.

Palm Sunday remained an occasion for criticism, as when Innokentii focused on Jesus’ weeping over Jerusalem. He urged his listeners to combine their own tears for their own sins with those of the Savior. Jesus wept, he told his listeners, because Jerusalem itself did not weep over its sins. This meant *you*, he told “the freethinking son who mocked his pious parents”; it meant *you*, “employer and serfowner, who forgot humanity’s common nature and wore down employees and serfs, as if they were made not for the glory of God and their own salvation, but for the hard labor of satisfying your whims”; it meant “*you*, unworthy pastor who instead of being an intercessor stood like a wall between his flock and Heaven.” Notably, Innokentii took for granted that his listeners were not going to communion on Palm Sunday, but, as was more typical for adult Russians, had gone the previous morning.<sup>34</sup>

Other hierarchs’ sermons, and model sermons for rural priests, would also discuss their flocks’ confession mostly in Lenten sermons. This suggests, and Consistory cases confirm, that the entrenched pattern of Lenten *govienie* remained the communal norm, with confession and *govienie* during the other fasting periods as something exceptional and individual.<sup>35</sup> It also suggests that Innokentii was successful partly because he was a supremely practical preacher who stuck to the patterns with which his flock was familiar even as he expressed them in a fresh way.

However, Innokentii also shook up homiletic conventions. He also engaged confession *outside* Lent – and did not invariably engage confession *during* Lent. For example, he published a series of homilies for each Wednesday and Friday of Lent, the days on which the Presanctified Liturgy was served, on the familiar Lenten prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian. Given that this was the best-known and most frequently repeated Lenten prayer, it is striking how relatively infrequently confession comes up in that discussion. (Note that Innokentii did not include Thursdays here because most people did not go to confession at those liturgies, but went on the evening before.) In the first homily, a general discussion of the prayer, he exhorts his listeners not to stop at a “superficial cleaning of our soul through confession of only some, obvious evil deeds.” Instead, he encourages them to prepare for confession by descending into the depths of their soul. On Wednesday of the second week, he focuses on the first verse (“give me not a spirit of despondency,” noting that nothing chases away despondency as effectively as confession and communion. On Wednesday of

<sup>33</sup> *Инокентий (Борисов)*. Слово в неделю вайи на всенощном бдении // Сочинения Иннокентия, архиепископа Херсонскаго и Таврическаго. Т. 1. Слова и беседы на праздники Господни. СПб., 1869. С. 391–392.

<sup>34</sup> “You, who despite your many sins and all the impurity of your previous life, were made worthy yesterday of communion of the Holy Mysteries...” См.: Слово в неделю Вайии... С. 398–411.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, bishops’ annual reports to the Holy Synod on confession and communion rates in their dioceses, as in RGIA, f. 796, op. 442, d. 105, ll. 25–7 (1861).

the Fifth Week (when many people would be preparing for confession), he expounds on the word “give,” linking it (unusually) to the message of love in 1 Corinthians. Innokentii engages confession most directly on Friday of the Fifth Week when he discusses “let me see my own transgressions and not judge my brother.” Here he addresses serfs and servants directly, giving them a chance to show spiritual agency:

This advice might seem impossible for those who do not have the right to dispose of their own time. But there is no one who has no time for himself at all. Even if you cannot manage your own time, you can manage your thoughts: that no one can take away from you. For example, say you are a domestic servant and have to be ready to fulfill your master’s hours at every hour of the day, but, even as you fulfill them, you have no little opportunity to examine yourself, your life, your sins. If you pursued this holy activity you could fill many idle moments in which you don’t know what to do with yourself...

Finally, on the last Wednesday of Lent, Great Wednesday, Innokentii took stock of all he had said before. If the spirit of prayer and counsel ended there, “it was useless for me to come out here and talk to you, and useless it was for you to gather *in such large numbers* and *stand for so long in such crowds* listening to us.”<sup>36</sup> He saved special ire for sinners who misused the example of the Good Thief and kept putting off their confessions “imagining that they, having spent their entire lives in sin, will be able to at the last minute win an entire eternity of bliss for a minute of repentance:” while many peasants thought confession and communion were ideally done as close to death as possible and, honestly, only really needed to be done then, Innokentii argued otherwise.<sup>37</sup>

The relatively straightforward nature of the sermons, and the continued success of the writing of both Tikhon and Dimitrii, suggests that, even before the Great Reforms, a reading and listening public for didactic and devotional literature already existed.<sup>38</sup> Innokentii also incorporated confession into places where one might not expect it. In a life of St. Cyprian of Carthage he wrote in the 1820s, he expounded on the baneful consequences of granting too-hasty written absolutions to fallen Christians who did not want to avoid strict canonical penalties and penances. In a series of homilies on nature and the seasons, he illustrated the different fates of repentant and unrepentant sinners: those who had nourished themselves through confession and communion would come alive at the Resurrection, just as living trees and branches came alive in Spring, while spiritually dead Christians who had not partaken of the sacraments would remain as dead as branches had seemed in the winter. Or: when one heard thunder in summer, one should remember God’s judgment on unrepentant sinners. Or: in an akathist to Christ’s passion, Innokentii suggested that, after his flock had been cleansed by their Lenten confession, they might approach Christ with “a soul as clean as a burial-shroud.” However, confession and absolution were not the only means of finding forgiveness and salvation, nor were they quite enough: although his flock had had their confession, precisely because they had had their confession and communion, they needed to build on it, and so should also seek “forgiveness of sins and renewal of sinful life” in Christ’s tomb. Indeed, in a prayer to the Risen Christ at the akathist’s end, in the name of each Christian who had just had confession and communion, Innokentii calls Jesus to “release me who is bound by many sins.” And, in an akathist to the Protection of the Mother of God, Innokentii lauds Mary “for establishing the beginning of sinners’ repentance” and “the unknown correction of unrepentant sinners.” As in Roman Catholic teaching, Mary, “as the Mother of God, received the gift of forgiveness of sins.” So confession and communion were crucial for forgiveness and salvation, but Christ’s tomb and

<sup>36</sup> *Инокентий (Борисов)*. Поучения на св. четыредесятницу из сочинений Иннокентия, арх. Херсонского и Таврического на молитву св. Ефрема Сирина. Одесса, 1900. С. 10, 29–30, 64, 85, 94–96, 100–103, 105–111.

<sup>37</sup> *Инокентий (Борисов)*. Взгляд на покаявшегося на кресте разбойника // Сочинения в шести томах. Т. 5. С. 367. For late 19<sup>th</sup> century peasant attitudes, see *Макарова В.* Недароимцы, манипуляторы и на одре лежащие: к вопросу об особенностях крестьянского отношения к исповеди и причастию [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <http://www.bogoslov.ru/text/1910434.html> (дата обращения: 10.01.2022).

<sup>38</sup> *Brooks J.* When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861–1917. Princeton, 1985.

Mary's protective veil could serve either as emergency work-arounds, or additional support.<sup>39</sup> In his continued drawing on earlier patterns and practices Innokentii is not so innovative after all.

The sermons of Archbishop Filaret (Gumilevskii) (1805–66) pointed in a different direction. Filaret did not link confession to the days in Lent when it would most likely have occurred, nor did he focus on repentance and preparation for sacramental through private prayer. In fact, like Tikhon, he did not focus on confession at all. Instead, he chose to focus on a close Biblical reading of Jesus's last days verse by verse, and to approach the sacrament obliquely, through his *Homilies on the Sufferings of Our Lord Jesus Christ*.<sup>40</sup> This is unusual for several reasons. The emphasis on the daily life and historical details of Jesus' life reflects a new concern with Biblical historicity Archbishop Filaret shared both with Innokentii and Archpriest Pavskii.<sup>41</sup> But what is truly unusual is linking the Passion to people's sacramental lives. Thus in focusing on Christ's Passion not as a private meditation (Dimitrii of Rostov had done that in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century), or only as a way of drawing his 1850s readers closer to the Gospel text (though that *was* new), even as he began by telling his listeners that *only* the sufferings of Jesus Christ save them from eternal torment, and assuring them that if they only cried out 'Son of God! Save me, a poor sinner!, yea, verily, they would be saved,' Archbishop Filaret was very subtly suggesting that participating in confession and communion was the *best* way of drawing closer to the Savior, and indeed the *least* they could do.

The message is not heavy-handed. Filaret was not so literal as to spell out to people that they should emulate the Savior's disciples by taking part in the Eucharist. The first two hundred pages of the book – the entire first volume – are focused only on Jesus and His disciples. In the context of the disciples' asking whether they would be the ones to betray Jesus, Filaret does mention the importance of "holy self-examination" and of acknowledging sins and inclination to sin. He reminds his listeners that confession and the Eucharist are not merely rites. He reproaches listeners who shun the chalice. He speaks of confession as balm for the sin-stung soul.<sup>42</sup>

Filaret is most specific, however, when he follows Christ into Gethsemane. The Savior's soul was heavy not because of his own impending death, but because He was gazing at the "fearful sins of all humanity." "Sinners!" he exclaimed,

Do we think often, do we think at *all*, what the Son of God is suffering for in Gethsemane? How insensible we are, loving sins that so torment the Son of God?... O, Son of God! If even You, clothed in the rags that are my sins, cast yourself on the ground as one worthy to talk to Your Father face to face, how can my sinful soul, covered with the foulness of sins, dare to be insensible before this boundless holiness? *Even when it confesses its sins before its father-confessor*, my soul stands as cold as a stone, and as immobile as a lifeless corpse. We do not understand what sin is, we do not feel it...

With even more fervor, Filaret described St. Peter's remorse. Peter did not repent till God's Goodness shone upon him. Therefore, left to his own devices, even the best man falls. The best thing a weak person can do is open himself up to the Savior's grace-filled gaze, to repent over his fall. Like Innokentii, Filaret reproaches contemporary priests, comparing them to the Sannhedrin. When he compares contemporary judges to Pilate, he reminds them of how important it is to do the right thing, and to defend innocence against powerful villains, especially when one is "pressured by threats from people rich in wealth, name, connections." The best way of doing so is to examine one's own sins of thought, imagination, desire, intent, speech, sight, hearing, and touch. In describing the pitiful picture of Christ before Pilate, Filaret exclaims:

Unfortunately, some people spend half their lives thinking about other things. Others know that He suffered for our sins, and yet they remain cold, distracted, as if it were not their business,

<sup>39</sup> *Innokentii*. "Zhitie sviashchennomuchenika Kipriana," "Besedy o prirode," "Akafist Bozhestvennym strastiam khristovym," "Akafist Pokrovu presv. Bogoroditsy," in: *Инокентий (Борисов)*. Сочинения в шести томах. Т. 5. С. 529–536, 588–595, 641, 665, 678–681, 707.

<sup>40</sup> *Филарет (Гумилевский)*. Беседы о страданиях Господа нашего Иисуса Христа. 3-е изд. Ч. 1. СПб., 1884.

<sup>41</sup> For contemporary concern with the historical Jesus, see: *Gatrall J.* "Polenov, Merezhkovsky, Ainalov: Archeology of the Christ Image," in Gatrall and Douglas M. Greenfield, eds., *Alter Icons: The Russian Icon and Modernity*. College Park, PA, 2010. P. 145–158.

<sup>42</sup> *Филарет*. Беседы... С. 33–34, 39–40, 44, 75, 113–114.

they are as pitiless to the Savior as were the Judeans – they count as nothing His torments, and continue to live carelessly in their sins... He endured beating so that the members of our bodies would no longer be instruments of sin. Behold the man! – Look, sinner, how He is tortured for you! Why, *with your lack of repentance*, do you want to add to His wounds? Come to your senses: how long before your coldness, your ingratitude, your lack of repentance will call down Heaven’s judgment? ... Christ Jesus! Let us recognize and feel the horror of our lack of feeling at how used we are to sin... *what sins we have to answer for!*”.

Filaret went on at particularly great length comparing his contemporaries to the daughters of Jerusalem, denouncing (like Innokentii) parents for caring only about their children’s worldly success rather than encouraging them to live morally and partake of the Church’s sacraments. In comparing his contemporaries to Pilate, drugged by worldly cares, he cries,

Wake up, unhappy soul! Come to, lost daughter of heaven! ... Gather your distracted thoughts to think about yourself, your situation, your lot... Your situation is like that of the prodigal son. Come, then, to your Father... He is waiting for you, He will take you in... The Savior has satisfied God’s Justice for sinners of all ages, but we must internalize his justification with compunction and living faith. “Repent so that ye may be cleansed of your sins!” (Acts 3:19) From youth to the grave we are all sinners.

Finally, Filaret is preoccupied with the question of justification. In itself, confession neither saves or redeems: “It is not labors of repentance that save us, but living faith in our Intercessor: however many or how awful your sins might, be fall down with a broken heart before the crucified Christ, and you will be forgiven by the power of His prayer... There is no sin He will not cover, *so long as the sinner does not conceal it from Him.*”<sup>43</sup> But confess we must while we can: in the future, “Christ will come not to cleanse sins, but to those who await salvation from Him” (Hebrews 9:28). On the one hand confession does not magically wipe out sin altogether; on the other it is an indispensable way for the Christian to come closer to repentance and improvement (and communion). Thus, although Filaret reproached authority figures like priests and judges (his sermons were written before the judicial reforms of Alexander II), those reproaches were ultimately ahistorical and might almost have been written by John Chrysostom. Paradoxically, it is in linking personal penance directly to Jesus’s last days that most place his work in the time in which they were written.

The last bishop formed in the pre-reform era to engage confession was the celebrated Bishop Feofan (the Recluse) (1815–1894). His *On Repentance, Communion of Christ’s Holy Mysteries, and Improving One’s Life* homilies, originally delivered before and during the Great Lents from 1861 to 1865, appeared in print soon after their original delivery, and were reprinted at least six times before 1917<sup>44</sup>. His is perhaps the most pragmatic confession collection.<sup>45</sup> It is valuable for its accurate depiction of confession practice, if not other aspects of everyday life: although he draws on such real-life parallels as those who go to spas (6), or compares the coarsening heart of someone who gives himself over to passion and sin to the coarseness of an unskilled laborer (83), for example, Feofan says nothing about such specific events as the emancipation of the serfs on the day it happens (February 19, 1861). Instead, he on that momentous day, he urges his listeners to return mentally to the previous year’s *govienie*, confession, and communion, lyrically describing their then-happy state.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *Филарет (Гумилевский)*. Беседы о страданиях Господа нашего Иисуса Христа. 3-е изд. Ч. 1. СПб., 1884. С. 238, 247, 281–282, 291–292, 305–306, 317–320, 326–329, 353–355, 363, 377–378, 419.

<sup>44</sup> The second edition was «О покаянии, исповеди, причащении святых Христовых тайн и исправлении жизни. Слова преосвященнаго Феофана во святую четыредесятницу и пригготовительныя к ней недели» (СПб., 1869). It was reprinted in 1991 with a print run of 100,000. The edition used here was *Феофан (Вышенский), ep.* О покаянии, исповеди, причащении святых Христовых тайн и исправлении жизни. Слова преосвященнаго Феофана во святую четыредесятницу и пригготовительныя к ней недели. 5-е из. М., 1896).

<sup>45</sup> “The enclosed homilies have been selected with the goal of giving those preparing for confession spiritual reading adapted for their mood and needs, and to pastors who strive to edify those preparing for confession to always have handy something that can be used for their own sermons, if they do not have the time to prepare their own” (О покаянии... С. 9).

<sup>46</sup> Feofan, “On the Week of the Prodigal Son,” February 19, 1861, 22–24.

Feofan constantly appeals to common knowledge and Lenten penitential practice. On the Publican and the Pharisee: “*This is not the first time you are greeting this time of year; more than once you have heard an explanation of the meaning of these days and indications for what you should draw from them... It is enough to say: Do what you already know how to do.*” On the Prodigal Son: “*All this you know already. You have already experienced the sweetness of rising from a fall, its comfort and its consoling fruits.*”<sup>47</sup> Similarly familiar for him is the dilemma in which Russian penitents found themselves: “It’s hard for us both ways,” Feofan noted. “If you don’t commune, you won’t have life; if you commune unworthily, you do so in judgment of yourself.” After terrifying his listeners with the perils of an unworthy communion, Feofan then pivots and condemns them for feeling precisely the same fear he has provoked: “The Lord is insulted not only if someone unprepared approaches the chalice boldly, but also if someone indiscriminately tortures himself with confused/disorderly timorousness.” The only solution was “to prepare yourself the way you are supposed to” (103, 105).

Perhaps the strongest indicator of mid-nineteenth century practice, and of the conflict between ‘worthiness’ attained through thorough preparation versus more frequent communion, is how Feofan describes the practice of annual *govienie*. Clearly, most people do the once-a-year minimum (something affirmed by Consistory statistics across the entire empire). More surprising is that, even as the Church decries that minimal cyclicity, it also reinforces it. As Feofan wrote on Cheesefare Sunday in 1864:

*Somehow it has become established among us that it is only during Lent that we slightly steady down, only during Lent that we think about our salvation. During the rest of the time we allow ourselves liberties, sometimes very large ones indeed...It is only during Lent that concern for the ‘one thing needful,’ like a frightened child, timorously presents its requests...And if we just let Lent slip away, why, then there is no point in expecting us to occupy ourselves with the work of our salvation any other time. If during Lent, when everything is adapted/contrived to pursue salvation – and not only Church, but also worldly customs – we do not do this, how will manage to do this work after Lent? There we will go again, living in our usual fecklessness in the same sinful habits and passions until the next Fast.*”<sup>48</sup>

Only once, in 1865 (in pondering John 6:53’s declaration that “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you”), does Feofan allow himself to ask:

Why don’t we go to communion often? I was looking a book the other day that contained exhortation for those who partake of communion often. There, I thought, was a blessed time, when such homilies were appropriate! Whereas if you say to our people – partake of communion some other fast besides Great Lent, it would seem strange, strict, and even inappropriate.

This is the key moment. The preparatory *govienie* requirements for communion were so stringent, and so connected to the congenial services of Great Lent, that even the other fasting periods of the Orthodox Church were not favorite choices for most penitents to ‘fulfill their Christian duty.’ Moreover, priests were required to keep *govienie* records for Great Lent, not for any other fast. Either lessening *govienie* requirements or more explicitly engaging the year-round penance recommended by Dimitrii and Tikhon would have been too great a shock to the status quo – at least before the Great Reforms climate reached the Orthodox Church (as it indeed did by the 1850s).<sup>49</sup> Feofan understood this. With an all-but-palpable sigh, he leaves the structure in place, and leaves his flock to their own devices:

*However, it is not my intent today to convince you to partake of communion often, but rather this...Most of us partake of holy communion once a year. So, if we don’t want to commune often, can we not at least extend the force of this solitary communion for as long as possible, to remain in*

<sup>47</sup> Феофан. О покаянии... С. 5.

<sup>48</sup> Там же. С. 66–67.

<sup>49</sup> The St. Petersburg Diocesan Administration in 1862 recommended measures “consisting exclusively of admonishment and instruction via priests and Deans” (RGIA, f. 796, op. 442, d. 110, ll. 12–13 (1862)). See also Metropolitan Filaret’s suggestions for lessening requirements to the Synod, November 3, 1859, RGIA, f. 796, op. 137, d. 1013, ll. 26–27ob.

a state of communion from one communion to the next? Impossible, you say? Why, it is necessary. Do it any way you want, but act always as if you had just gone to communion (261).

But given the exhaustive injunctions to maintaining absolute purity, reverence, and focus, ‘acting always as if you had just gone to communion’ was nearly impossible.

#### Conclusion

Metropolitan Dimitrii’s initial attempt to link confession to repentance and Lenten liturgy took a while to sink in. Most of the texts on repentance produced in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries emphasized repentance as a life-long activity rather than on confession as a Lenten activity, a unique sacrament, and the necessity of absolution as such. This perhaps made it possible for the elites to reconcile the annual Lenten confession requirement with an increasingly sophisticated inner life drawing on a variety of sources: their hierarchs were part of the same enlightened European intellectual climate, and understood what their flocks needed to hear. For most people, however, penance remained firmly linked to the annual *govienie* requirement. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, censorship limited more daring theological sermons, sending bishops back to the relatively safe area of Lenten liturgy. As the focus shifted to a broader audience after the emancipation of the serfs, more overtly disciplinary confession-related sermons brought listeners and readers back to making a good annual Lenten *govienie*.

Strikingly missing in the bishops’ homilies on confession is penance as part of civil loyalty. Although Russian rulers sought to instrumentalize confession – from Peter I’s 1722 Spiritual Regulation to Nicholas I’s confession pressure on Pushkin, on Major Martynov (for his killing Lermontov in a duel), and on Mikhail Bakunin<sup>50</sup> – Russian bishops chose to ignore those external constraints, focusing almost exclusively on overarching Lenten themes. Although their sermons on other occasions explicitly emphasized loyalty,<sup>51</sup> although priests and devotional pamphlets introduced more topicality, and although individual priests like Father Ioann of Kronstadt and Father Valentin Amfiteatrov experimented with different forms of confession, Russian bishops consistently chose to focus on what they saw as the eternal verities of penance and salvation. This may have been a way of subtly resisting rulers’ encroachments, maintaining the high ground and their unique calling far from politics. It also meant, however, that the practice of annual (rather than more frequent) confession and communion would remain entrenched. It would take the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 to move bishops’ sermons – and their public – to both more explicitly engaging current events and allowing for more latitude in confession practice.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Bujalski N. Narrating Political Imprisonment in Tsarist Russia: Bakunin, Goethe, Hegel // *Modern Intellectual History*. 2020. No. 18 (3). P. 1–27.

<sup>51</sup> For civically oriented sermons, see prot. Василий Бажанов, прот. Поучительные слова и речи. 2-е изд. СПб., 1837. С. 231–238. For an overview, see Freeze G.L. A Social Mission for Russian Orthodoxy: The Kazan Requiem of 1861 // *Imperial Russia, 1700–1917: State, Society, Opposition*, Ed. Marshall Shatz and Ezra Mendelsohn. DeKalb, 1988. P. 115–135.

<sup>52</sup> Киценко Н. Роль исповеди в Российской империи до и после 1917 года // *Российское православие от модерна к современному дню (конец XIX – конец XX вв.): проекции Великой русской революции в историю и историографии*. М., 2018. С. 6–18.

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