

RELIGIOUS CONVERSION AND THE PROBLEM OF COMMITMENT IN LIVLAND PROVINCE, 1850s–1860s

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In the decades following the episode of mass conversion to the Orthodox Church (1845–48) that rocked the Baltic province of Livland, educated elites in the Russian Empire engaged in a contentious debate about the place of Orthodoxy in the Baltic region and about converts' supposed attitude toward the Empire's dominant official faith.¹ Since the conversions took place amid a period of rumours about the purported social and material benefits of taking the “tsar's faith”, a wide-ranging number of commentators held that the conversions had been insincere, and therefore that the neophyte Orthodox flock remained weakly committed to the Orthodox faith.² Not surprisingly, Baltic Germans remained the most vocal proponents of this pessimistic view of Orthodoxy in the region. Nonetheless, a significant stratum of educated Russian society, including tsarist officials, Orthodox clergy, and influential publicists, especially Slavophiles such as M. N. Katkov, Iu. F. Samarin, and I. S. Aksakov, remained convinced that peasants were favourably disposed towards the Orthodox faith, and held that, if anything, peasants' dissatisfaction arose due to negative external factors – primarily religious persecution and widespread destitution, the products of local authorities' supposed arbitrary rule.³

¹ On the conversions and their aftermath, see Hans Kruus, *Talurahvakäärimine Lõuna-Eestis XIX sajandi 40-ndail aastail* (Tartu, 1930); A.V. Gavrilin, *Ocherki istorii Rizhskoi Eparkhii. 19 vek* (Riga, 1999); Patriarch Aleksii II, *Pravoslavie v Estonii* (Moscow, 1999); *Talurahvaliikumine Eestis aastail 1845–1848*, toim. V. Naaber, A. Traat, 1–2 (Tallinn, 1991); Anu Raudsepp, *Riia Vaimulik Seminar, 1846–1918* (Tartu, 1998); Urmas Klaas, *Õigeusu kirik Lõuna-Eestis 1848–1917. Halduskorraldus ja preesterkond* (unpublished MA thesis, Tartu University, 1998); on religious conversions in historical Estonia in a broader context, see Jaanus Plaata, *Usuliikumised, kirikud, ja vabakogudused Lääne- ja Hiiumaal* (Tartu, 2001).

² Adolf von Harless, *Geschichtsbilder aus der lutherischen Kirche Livlands vom 1845 an*. (Leipzig, 1860), 42–43; H. G. von Jannau, *Wenne-Õigeusu tulekust Lõuna Eestist, 1845–1846 a.*, ed. and trans. by Hans Kruus (Tartu, 1927).

³ Iurii Samarin, *Sochineniia Iu. F. Samarina*. ed. by D. Samarin, 12 vols. (Moscow, 1877–1911), vol. 7, 141–142, 147; vol. 8, 13; vol. 9, 442; M. P. Pogodin, *Ostzeiskii vopros* (Moscow, 1869), 103, 106; I. S. Aksakov, *Sochineniia* (Moscow, 1880–1887), vol. 6, 9–10;

By the 1860s, the problem of religious commitment received a great deal more attention due to the flowering of print media within the Russian Empire and a more open political climate. By then, contention about the place of the Orthodox Church in the region came to centre on a range of social and political issues, as defenders of the Orthodox Church called for thorough-going reforms in the region. For a number of reasons, critics of Baltic social and political difference (often termed Baltic “particularism”) stood convinced that protecting Orthodox parishioners remained a crucial goal in the region, and that the defence of Orthodoxy required swift and sure state intervention into social, legal, and institutional spheres.

It is remarkable that defenders of Orthodoxy in the Baltic became even more vocal after 1864, following the most spectacular display of religious dissatisfaction in the region, when thousands of Orthodox peasants appeared before Lutheran pastors to “sign up” to revert to their former faith. Rumours had recurred throughout the 1850s and 1860s that the Tsar would allow recent converts and/or their children to revert to the Lutheran faith,⁴ but in 1864 that speculation apparently engendered explicit petitions within a mass movement. When Major General and Count V. A. Bobrinskii travelled through Pärnu and Viljandi districts to ascertain the reasons for the rumours and the apparent dissatisfaction, he reported that scarcely one out of ten parishioners “truly professes the Orthodox faith”.⁵ While Bobrinskii’s assessment offered a bleak picture of Orthodoxy in the region, Slavophile commentators, clergy, and certain state officials remained convinced that other factors inhibited religious commitment beyond narrow matters of faith, doctrine, and religious practice. In fact, while Bobrinskii gathered information from peasants about their putative dissatisfaction with the Orthodox faith, Bishop Platon (Gorodetskii), Bishop of Riga, and later of Riga and Mitau, 1848–67, reported that landlords had forced parishioners to complain about their religious status on threat of eviction and corporal (or other) punishment.⁶

While it is often assumed that pro-Orthodox views stemmed from an inherent ideological bias, there is reason to believe that views in certain

M. N. Katkov, *Sobranie peredovykh statei, Moskovskikh Vedomostei 1865 god* (Moscow, 1897), 97–99.

⁴ Imperial law prohibited reversion from the Orthodox faith and bound parents of mixed Orthodox-Lutheran faith to raise children born of such unions within Orthodoxy.

⁵ Gavrilin, *Ocherki istorii Rizhskoi Eparkhii*, 233.

⁶ Gavrilin, *Ocherki istorii Rizhskoi Eparkhii*, 236–237.

quarters, especially those closest to the situation in rural Livland – above all clergy – were also shaped to a large extent through the course of everyday practices and interactions, ranging from record keeping to bureaucratic exchange. In fact, the encounter between Orthodox clergy and neophyte parishioners, and bureaucratic communications between levels of the Church hierarchy played a crucial role in shaping perceptions of the Baltic countryside on the eve of the Great Reforms. Priests were often charged with tracking peasant moods, and with explaining factors that supposedly inhibited or weakened commitment to Orthodoxy. Forthcoming reports formed an important core of the bureaucratic “knowledge” about the Orthodox Church in the region.

Clergy responded to requests from above about the state of Orthodoxy, but they also reported on events independently – without directives from above. For example, parish priests often detailed noteworthy phenomena ranging from conversions, to miraculous healings, to Lutheran dalliances with Orthodoxy. Such reports reached the Bishop in Riga, who often sought to inquire as to whether similar phenomena were to be found in other parishes. While the Bishop’s motivation for reporting such events surely derived from motivations to procure evidence of popular attraction and commitment to Orthodoxy, the effect of the inquiries, which detailed events in only particular locales, also served to communicate to other clergy positive (if anecdotal) information about religious life in the Diocese. Likewise, when peasant complaints about persecution or unfair treatment reached the Bishop, this information was often re-transmitted to distant parishes as hierarchs sought to investigate the extent to which such phenomena arose elsewhere. In other words, priests’ engagement with their flocks, and their communications with the diocesan centre in Riga helped to shape priests’ and hierarchs’ interpretation of the larger situation. We can observe a recursive process of communication between parishes and the Diocese that aided the construction of a particular interpretation of the state of Orthodoxy in Livland. In other words, institutional knowledge was shaped by reciprocal interaction between levels of the Church hierarchy in the See of Riga.

Sources

Church sources used in this study are primarily drawn from the central diocesan consistory in Riga and its subordinate district superintendents (*blagochinnye*) in Saaremaa, Viljandi, and Pärnu districts in the northwest-

tern parts of Livland province (today, southwestern Estonia). These sources are useful for gaining a sense of how the Church confronted the problem of religious obligation, including what many clergy saw as the social, political, and even economic contingencies of religious commitment.

The structures of communication within the Church Bureaucracy are essential for understanding how priests and their superiors gained information about the religious, social, and political situation in Livland province. Parish priests stood at the lowest level of the Church bureaucracy, but played an indispensable role in providing information to diocesan officials who were overseen by the Bishop of Riga and Mitau.⁷ They engaged in regular record-keeping activities (reporting on the vital statistics of their parishioners, the state of the parish, etc.), and also reported on noteworthy incidents that they deemed merited the attention of their superiors. In addition, they also responded to inquiries from the diocesan administration, which frequently requested that priests gather information about specific developments in the countryside. Church superintendents mediated interactions between the parish and central-diocesan level, sending directives to parish priests and compiling their subordinates' reports to send to the diocesan administration.

While information generally flowed upward, diocesan officials also redirected information when issuing directives to priests to gather information that likely played an important role in shaping perspectives about the social, political, and religious situation in the province. The superintendents' reports are interesting not just because they offer up valuable information about subordinate parishes, clerical activity, and noteworthy events, but also because of what they demonstrate about bureaucratic communication between various levels of the church hierarchy. In fact, even quite unique and isolated occurrences gained widespread fame among priests when diocesan officials sought to ascertain whether other priests had observed similar phenomena in their parishes. In other words, directives from above requesting information contained basic narratives about events and circumstances in other parts of the diocese in order to specify the nature of the inquiry. For the purposes of this paper, these lines of communication are crucial for understanding why clergy in general attributed signs of parishioners' religious ambivalence to external factors (institutional weakness, proselytization, and persecution). On the one hand, priests received "good news" about developments in distant par-

⁷ The Riga Vicarage became an independent eparchy in 1850, serving Livland as well as Kurland province. See Klaas, *Õigeusu kirik*, 44.

ishes, while on the other they also learned of putative Lutheran machinations when instructed to gather information or compile data.

Tracking commitment

Conversion to Orthodoxy signalled an immutable change in status in imperial Russia. While the Tsarist Empire promised “religious tolerance” to various religious minorities, it never promised absolute freedom of conscience.⁸ While religious minorities could convert freely to Orthodoxy, they could never revert to their former status. Further, children born of mixed Orthodox-minority marriages were obliged to the Orthodox Church.⁹ To some extent, from a bureaucratic perspective, “religious commitment” simply entailed gaining a minimal level of commitment to fulfil basic religious obligations.

From the perspective of the Orthodox Church, “commitment” had several important meanings during the 1850s and 1860s. First, clergy understood “commitment” as part of an enforceable set of obligations. Since parishioners were legally bound to confess and take communion each year and to raise their children according to the Orthodox faith, priests could call on civil officials in seeking to compel the wayward to remain within the fold, though they seldom did. Neither Church nor state was well-equipped to forcibly compel large numbers of recusants to appear for confession and communion, and it is quite likely that neither party wished to engage extensively coercive practices. Second, Church officials frequently emphasized the importance of pastoral care. While directives from Riga might call upon priests to ensure that parishioners fulfilled their religious obligations, this did not usually direct clergy to employ aggressive tactics at the outset. Rather, priests were instructed to travel around their parishes frequently, and to demonstrate concern for their flock.¹⁰ Third, clergy at all levels of the Diocese frequently made reference to perceived external interference that decreased the likelihood that obli-

⁸ On the limits of religious toleration in Russia, see *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, ed. by Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky (Ithaca, 2001), especially 7–8; Peter Waldron, “Religious Tolerance in Late Imperial Russia”, *Civil Rights in Imperial Russia*, ed. by Olga Crisp and Linda Edmonson (Oxford and New York, 1989), 103–119.

⁹ Edward C. Thaden, *Russia’s Western Borderlands, 1710–1870* (Princeton, 1984), 172, 176–77.

¹⁰ Eesti Ajalooarhiiv (Estonian Historical Archives, EAA), f. 5256, n. 1, s. 153 (June 25, 1849, un-numbered document).

gations would be fulfilled – i.e., illegal acts of persecution and proselytization. Nonetheless, suspicions about Lutheran plots did not entirely free parishioners from their religious responsibilities.

Orthodox officials could only monitor their parishioners and encourage commitment to the extent that they managed to compile accurate records. The Church used a variety of registers to keep track of parishioners in Livland. First, it compiled lists of prospective converts, who formally declared their wish to accept the Orthodox faith by signing declarations attesting to their intentions. After January 1846, rural Livonians had to endure a six-month waiting period to convert, a measure that was specifically instituted to ensure “sincerity” amid rumours about material gains. Converts’ names were recorded on specific lists and added to metrical books (*metricheskie knigi*), which were used to record vital information (births, deaths, marriages, divorces, conversions). Such records were essential for identifying which parishioners would belong to various newly-opened parishes, and were therefore instrumental in allowing parish clergy to track their flocks. Priests tracked parishioners’ religious obligations by recording the dates of confession and communion on confessional registers (*ispovednye rospisi*), which in turn were used to compile lists of those fulfilling or neglecting their spiritual obligations. From these, clergy could compile lists of those absent for certain periods, which they were sometimes asked to do.¹¹ Concerns about “deviation” (*uklonenie*) and “falling away” (*otpadenie*) were not unique to Livland province, but were part of the Church’s routine accounting practices.¹² However, mass conversion and the dominant presence of Lutheranism in the region likely made concerns about reversion and apostasy more acute, and the Church began to inquire among priests about such occurrences already during the 1840s.¹³

Early attempts to ensure parishioners’ participation in Orthodox Church life foundered due to the chaotic circumstances that mass conversions created. Prior to the conversions, Orthodox churches were, with a few exceptions, limited to the provincial capital, Riga, and district towns, and existed primarily to serve Russian civil and military officials, garri-

¹¹ EAA, f. 5256, n. 1, s. 140, 11.

¹² Regarding religious conversion and subsequent deviation in other parts of the Empire see Paul W. Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics in Russia’s Volga-Kama Region, 1827–1905* (Ithaca, 2002), especially ch. 6; *Opisanie doumentov arhiva zapadno-russkikh uniatskikh mitropolitov*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1897–1907).

¹³ EAA, f. 5256, n. 1, s. 153 (October 18, 1849).

sons of troops, and merchants. In 1844, there were 20 Orthodox Churches in the province; in 1848 there were 98.¹⁴ By 1850, there were 108 parishes, and 117 churches, and at least ten additional parishes were founded in the northern half of the province (i.e., present-day Estonia) by 1855.¹⁵ Thus, the conversion of more than 100,000 peasants put a great strain on civil and Church officials, who collaborated to find suitable locations for churches – the earliest were often temporarily housed in buildings rented out by local landlords until more permanent accommodations could be located.¹⁶

For the purposes of this discussion, the creation of new parishes, and the transfer of parishioners between them created a variety of bureaucratic difficulties. The Church faced many practical problems that required extensive collaboration with Lutheran Church officials and local authorities in order to reconcile converts to parish lists, to collate vital statistics on parishioners, and to verify the physical location of peasants who joined and left the parish.¹⁷ Another problem hindering the Church arose due to unusually frequent clerical transfers, which surely disrupted bureaucratic continuity, not to mention relations between priests and their flocks. To cite but three typical examples, Karula parish had nine different priests from 1846–62; Kihnu parish, seven priests from 1848–63; and Kavilda, nine priests from 1846–65.¹⁸ In fact, while the Church sought to monitor and enforce parishioners' religious obligations, it was ill-equipped to achieve both of these aims with consistent uniformity across the province.

Diocesan administrators issued fairly regular directives requesting information about recusants and giving instructions intended to ensure regular fulfilment of confession and communion. For example, Church

¹⁴ On the Church in Livland province before the 1840s, see Gavrilin, *Ocherki istorii Rizhskoi Eparkhii*, especially chapter 2; Klaas, *Õigeusu kirik*, 41, 207–237.

¹⁵ Klaas, *Õigeusu kirik*, 41–42, 52.

¹⁶ See EAA, f. 291, n. 8, s. 815; Urmas Klaas also has a useful appendix detailing aspects of parish history (Klaas, *Õigeusu kirik*, 128–175).

¹⁷ For example, priests relied upon communal court officials to report births, deaths, physical movement to and from manors. Also, pastors aided in the compilation of other church records, sharing data regarding their former parishioners. For their part, Orthodox priests also provided the office of the District Magistrate (*Ordnungsgericht*) with vital statistics on the number of births and deaths, conversions from sectarian and schismatic faiths, and provided dates of communion for individuals involved in criminal proceedings. For Laiuse parish, see EAA, f. 1944, n. 1, s. 181.

¹⁸ See August Kaljukosk's unpublished handbook *Õigeusu kirikutes (kogudustes) teeninud vaimulikkude nimekiri* (1975), available in the Estonian Historical Archives; Klaas provides short biographies of priests' careers in his appendix; see Klaas, *Õigeusu kirik*, 206–238.

officials issued at least two sets of instructions regarding spiritual neglect in 1849. The office of the Riga Bishopric instructed church superintendents to inquire of their subordinates, “are there any Orthodox within your parish who deviate into the Lutheran faith, and if there are, what are their names?”¹⁹ An *ukaz* prefaced by the more alarmist observation, “some priests have disclosed that some of their parishioners have not taken communion for some time and that others have never at all, and now wish to revert to Lutheranism (*i khotiat teper sovratitsia v liuteranstvo*)”, ordered priests to watch carefully over parishioners; to be sure that no one would remain without sacraments in the coming year; to convince those long absent to attend; and to travel around their parishes frequently.²⁰

While parish records seem to have been mostly consolidated by 1850–51, occasional problems arose that had implications for effective bureaucratic operations.

For example, in 1858, the newly-appointed priest of Iamsk parish notified his superiors of problems he had verifying his list of parishioners due to the lax response of a particular communal government to his request for information about the place of residence of a mixed-faith family that had moved to a different manor. He maintained that the family’s daughter had converted to Orthodoxy and taken communion from 1847–52, after which she fell away from the faith. Conversely, the family claimed she was Lutheran.²¹

Church officials relied upon local civil officials’ collaboration for accurate accounting in a period when peasants were increasingly mobile. Yet, short-term absences too caused a problem for clergy. For example, the Riga Consistory issued instructions in September 1855 in an attempt to improve monitoring of absentee residents’ religious obligations. The Consistory complained that some individuals listed on the confessional registers did not belong to those parishes on whose records their names appeared, while actual members were often missing from records altogether. Thus, priests were instructed to only enter names of those individuals belonging to their parish; to clearly explain why each person did not appear for confession and communion and what measures were undertaken against them; and to require a certificate (*sviditelstvo*) from another priest for any peasant claiming to have fulfilled religious obligations elsewhere before making an entry in the register. Otherwise, priests were

¹⁹ EAA, f. 5256, n. 1, s. 153 (October 18, 1849).

²⁰ EAA, f. 5256, n. 1, s. 153 (June 25, 1849).

²¹ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 3362 (December 13, 1858).

instructed to state that they did not know whether the religious requirements had been fulfilled.²²

Enforcing religious obligations

The fact that Orthodox clergy mostly discussed parishioners' religious practices in terms of fulfilling "debt" (*khristianskii dolg*) and "obligation" (*khristianskie obiazannosti*) is suggestive of the claims the Church made against its members. Yet, in reality, obligations often went unfulfilled, debts unpaid, and responsibilities unanswered. While priests could call upon civil authorities to bring wayward parishioners before them, they rarely did so, preferring to apply more subtle means. In part, priests' leniency derived from assumptions that could explain away various aspects of dissatisfaction (the weak church, putative acts of Lutheran proselytism, persecution). In fact, instances of refusal in some way or another suggested institutional, social, or political problems.

Early on, recusants tended to claim that they had not actually converted – that they had been incorrectly included in Church documents due to bureaucratic errors, and that they had only declared their intention to convert.²³ Yet the bureaucratic power at priests' disposal could easily undermine peasants' denials of their Orthodox status. Clergy could point to signed and dated testaments declaring the intention to convert, to metrical books attesting to chrismation, to lists of converts, to parish registers, and to lists of communicants. Indeed, some wayward parishioners were listed as having taken communion, even when they claimed they had not converted.²⁴ Such cases suggest a degree of passivity to the early refusals: peasants did not directly refuse their religious obligations, but primarily challenged the validity of their religious status through Lutheran Church officials. Peasants' reliance on pastors' advocacy served to encourage further acrimony between competing religious authorities, especially as Orthodox clergy insisted that their Lutheran counterparts were actively interfering in Orthodox affairs.

The problem of peasant refusals led priests to devise novel strategies to enforce other kinds of obligations. The priest of Vana-Antsla parish, Ilia Solovskii, sought to provide basic instruction for parish children in 1851, but found that parents refused to bring their children in for Sunday

²² EAA, f. 5256, n. 1, s. 140, l. 6.

²³ See EAA, f. 291, n. 8, s. 925, 1392, 1556, 1600, 1604, 1649.

²⁴ See EAA, f. 291, n. 8, s. 1604, 1649; f. 1655, n. 2, s. 3362.

instruction. His solution consisted of a simple ultimatum: that if parents would not bring their children to study – to learn the Ten Commandments, to learn to read and write, and to recite the necessary prayers – then he would refuse to wed them when they reached adulthood. He concluded, “then the parents obeyed and now [...] the children have begun the alphabet, and some of them read prayers decently”. The Bishop fully endorsed the methods and lauded Solovskii’s success, writing to Church superintendents that he had conveyed his blessing to Solovskii for his good work in religious education, and requested that all priests in the Diocese be informed of his success.²⁵ In this case, coercive “encouragement” intertwined with pastoral care, as the priest threatened to withhold a socially important sacrament to encourage parents to bring their children in for Orthodox instruction. Solovskii’s “successes” were meant to serve as an indication that religious commitment did not remain elusive in cases where priests took proper initiative.

While coercion was one means of encouraging religious commitment, Church officials clearly saw the need for additional pastoral care. In September 1860, the Spiritual Consistory of Riga sent the following missive to all Church superintendents: “In one of the rural parishes of Riga Diocese, two peasants, without a doubt belonging to the Orthodox Church (which they do not even deny) got it into their heads to return to the Lutheran Church. As a consequence of this, His Grace, Platon, Bishop of Riga and Mitau, ordered the local superintendent to summon the peasants to him and to convince them not to deviate (*ubedit ikh ne ukloniatsia*) from the Orthodox Church.”

Reporting on the extreme obstinacy of these peasants and their reluctance to belong to the Orthodox Church, the Bishop allowed that the Church too had obligations to its parishioners, noting that the wayward Orthodox proclaimed: “we know nothing [...] and have heard nothing about the Orthodox Church! No one looks after our education; they don’t call us into school, and we don’t even have schools. We are raised like cattle with regard to faith!” The Bishop thereby instructed all subordinate priests to look after the spiritual education of their flock, and to open schools for children wherever necessary.²⁶ Such forms of refusal pointed not to dissatisfaction with the Orthodox Church itself, but with the liabilities of the supposed inadequacy of the Church’s institutional presence in the region.

²⁵ EAA, f. 5256, n. 1, s. 4.

²⁶ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 3362 (September 5, 1860).

In March 1855 Bishop Platon warned his subordinates about problems priests had experienced in getting peasants to fulfil religious obligations centring upon parishioners' refusal to sign confessional registers: "Three priests of Latvian Churches reported to me at various times that when their parishioners come for confession and communion, they don't want to place crosses besides their name on the list, as I instructed to be done on October 21 last year in all churches, while others even grumbled at the order to mark the crosses, and left the church not having taken communion. [...] I suggest that this comes from the fact that priests are unable to explain well and prudently the purpose for which their parishioners are to place the crosses on the given list. [...] If it should be necessary, explain to them that they need to sign crosses next to their names so that priests and authorities can accurately know who among them took communion so they will not confuse them with those who did not, for whom it is necessary to compel toward the fulfilment of Christian obligations according to law."²⁷

In this instance, the Bishop decided that a measure designed to improve commitment – to attest to the fulfilment of one's own religious obligations by signing the register – was far less important than getting parishioners' to take communion. It is worth noting that the Bishop signals to his subordinates that they could be clear about the reasons for requesting signatures: to aid Church authorities in enforcing obligations. Parishioners' apparent reticence to engage bureaucratic practices suggests their circumspection about the uses of records and a clear understanding of their role as tools of domination. It could be suggested that the case above shares a common thread with converts' claims to have been wrongly listed on conversion rolls – both instances articulate opposition to bureaucratic practices.

The Orthodox Church found fault with the Lutheran Church for its perceived interference with civil officials and sometimes with its own clergy (for not communicating well with their parishioners, for example). The Bishop brought complaints about lax civil authorities and meddling pastors to the Governor General, chastened priests to be vigilant and meticulous, and adjusted bureaucratic procedures according to arising situations. In fact, the Church was most concerned with claiming the obligations its parishioners owed, and would quickly abandon new methods (such as gathering signatures on confessional registries) if they appeared to hamper their fulfilment. Larger-scale refusals and the hint

²⁷ EAA, f. 5256, n. 1, s. 140 (March 19, 1855).

of mass defections presented a much more serious problem for Church authorities.

Bureaucratic communication and the contingencies of commitment

During the 1850s, Orthodox clergy encountered quite disparate evidence about the state of Orthodoxy in the rural parts of the Bishopric. For example, if we examine evidence the Pärnu superintendent compiled regarding fulfilment of confession and communion in his subordinate parishes for 1856, we are confronted with extremely contradictory data about reasons for non-fulfilment of these religious obligations. Since there were several reasons why parishioners might not fulfil obligations – absence from the parish, illness or infirmity, and minor-age status – the primary category of non-fulfilment that concerned the Church was that of “omission” or “neglect” (po opushcheniiu). Three parishes recorded no such cases; three reported five or fewer; two reported eleven each; four reported between thirty and sixty; and two reported 293 and 247, respectively.²⁸ Thus, Church officials at the superintendent- and diocesan-levels would have seen a body of apparently contradictory evidence about religious commitment in the countryside. Further, Church authorities and parish priests encountered conflicting signals in numerous other phenomena as well. On the one hand, rumours regularly spread throughout the decade that the Tsar would permit reversion to the Lutheran faith, that mixed-faith parents could themselves decide the religious status of their children, or less concretely that “new laws” were imminent. On the other hand, occasionally exciting news travelled through the Church bureaucracy regarding new conversions, miracles, clerical “successes” among parishioners, and so on. Whether or not priests experienced similar instances first-hand, they certainly learned about them through their superintendents, who forwarded instructions from the diocesan administration or Bishop Platon.

For example, when the priest Fasanov reported a case of miraculous healing in his parish in 1851, diocesan officials sought to inquire among church superintendents whether there had been any such instances in their subordinate parishes: “On the occasion [...] of the Golgofsk priest Fasanov’s report of the miraculous healing of the Orthodox peasant Andrei Garais due to his belief in the salvific power of prayer, His Grace Platon [...] has directed his consistory to order all priests, through their Super-

²⁸ EAA, f. 5256, n. 1, s. 140.

intendents to report immediately to His Holiness if similar wondrous acts of Divine blessing should occur in their parishes.”²⁹

While the inquiry’s ostensible goal was to gain information about past or newly arising cases of miraculous healing, it simultaneously served to inform all priests about a single incident in Southern Livland (i.e., present-day Latvia). The lack of salvific healing in the rest of the diocese was not reported back to priests, after all.

Likewise, concerns about negative developments took on additional significance due to the channels of bureaucratic communication within the Church. Speculative talk about the possibility of reverting to the Lutheran faith did not simply predate the rumours of 1864 – it was pervasive and recurrent throughout the 1850s, and occurred as early as the late 1840s.³⁰ Upon receiving even isolated reports about such fictions, the Consistory redirected the news, by way of inquiry, to its subordinates in seeking to learn whether other parish priests knew of similar occurrences. For example, after the Stakenbergi priest relayed information about his parish, in spring 1851, church superintendents were soon charged with investigating their locales through their subordinate priests.³¹ Throughout the period under study, the Riga Consistory requested that superintendents instruct priests to report on rumours after receiving information about loose talk from other parishes. Reports about rumours recurred in 1852, 1853, 1855, 1858, and most notably in 1864.³²

Orthodox clergy were not merely interested in tracking the spread of rumours in order to guard their seemingly vulnerable parishioners: they sought to find the malicious sources of the dangerous talk. Suspicion primarily fell upon Lutheran pastors whose alleged culpability had become so axiomatic that civil officials took steps to prevent any further interference. For example, in early 1856, Baltic Governor General A. A. Suvorov instructed the Livonian governor’s office to make an announcement “on the cessation of such rumours” and to inform the Evangelical Lutheran Consistory to warn its subordinates – pastors – of the consequences of spreading such empty talk. In so doing, civil authorities confirmed Orthodox clergy’s suspicions of Lutheran plots against the Church. While the pastors’ censure was an internal matter to be communicated through the administrative channels of the Lutheran Church, in January 1856 the

²⁹ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 3452, l. 3.

³⁰ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1412, l. 9–10; 1417 (February 18, 1856); 3362 (June 16, 1851).

³¹ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1411, l. 51.

³² EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 3362 (June 16, 1851), l. 102. Rumours were also reported in November of that year, EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1417 (November 29, 1855).

Orthodox Church notified its superintendents that the action had been taken,³³ thereby providing word that Lutheran pastors had indeed been sanctioned.

Nearly a year later, the Riga Consistory sent word to priests that the Helme pastor had somehow “caused” rumours by allegedly inquiring whether Orthodox peasants had been misled to convert with promises of material gains.³⁴ (Again, the ostensible purpose of this communiqué was to inquire whether priests had encountered such instances in their parishes). Somehow, the reasoning went, this inquiry had led peasants to believe that reconversion would be permitted. While the Helme pastor and his colleagues may have had nothing to do with peasant speculation about policy changes, Orthodox clergy remained convinced that they had everything to do with it. It is highly likely that, in many instances, Orthodox officials attributed malicious deeds to pastors based upon rumours they took too literally – after all, speculative talk generally features attribution to “credible sources”. Ironically, it was Orthodox priests whom pastors cited as the source of rumours during the conversions of the 1840s – and in fact many popular reports frequently cited priests and other persons of prestige as the putative source of information about the benefits converts could expect to receive.³⁵

While popular reports about returning to the Lutheran faith and signs of religious dissatisfaction – “falling away” from the fold – suggest that Orthodoxy was losing its grip in the region, in reality the situation was far more ambiguous. Suspicions about the source(s) of rumours, signs of religious commitment in many parishes, and renewed Lutheran dalliances with Orthodoxy may have engendered a more cautiously optimistic assessment about the prognosis for Orthodoxy in the Baltic region – at least during the 1850s and early 1860s.

In February 1853, Bishop Platon noted that 1200 Lutherans had recently approached priests requesting prayer services for various reasons, primarily in Ruijena and Jēkabpils parishes. He notified his subordinates of this, sending a directive to district superintendents and instructing them to order their subordinate clergy to be particularly careful about their comportment in such cases – to behave irreproachably, to treat everyone amiably, and to perform the liturgy with “deep reverence”. From the fact of the numerous requests, Bishop Platon concluded that “among the foreign

³³ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 3362, l. 103.

³⁴ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 3362, l. 46–47.

³⁵ *Talurahvaliikumine*, 111–112, 182; EAA, f. 291, n. 8, s. 872, l. 5.

faith (*v inovernykh*) residents of this region there is awakening an inclination towards the Orthodox Church and faith”.³⁶ The Riga Consistory even stipulated the need to record such instances, including dates, names and residences of the Lutherans, and then the circumstances prompting the request, i.e., “as a consequence of an optical disease”.³⁷

While conversions declined noticeably after 1847 – the peak year of the mass conversion phenomenon – small numbers continued to accept the Orthodox faith during the 1850s. Orthodox clergy as yet had no misgivings about accepting more Lutherans into the fold in spite of rumours about reconversion and signs of spiritual neglect. In fact, when the Bishop inquired in 1853 as to the priests’ opinions about eliminating the mandatory six-month waiting period required for conversion,³⁸ all but one priest of the Pärnumaa deanery endorsed the idea.³⁹ For example, Jaagupi priest V. Karzov – and several others – cited the problem of manorial retribution, writing that peasants would not sign up, fearing to provoke the “landlords’ displeasure”. Several priests noted that peasants would immediately change their minds upon hearing of the waiting period, while others noted that prospective converts changed their minds over the course of the term.⁴⁰ The waiting period originally had been implemented in part to ensure that converts would have sincere motivations. Yet by the 1850s, priests expressed more concern over the apparent lost opportunities than over prospective converts’ motivations. Likewise, some attributed prospective converts’ change of heart to malicious Lutherans.

According to the reports of the Pärnu religious superintendent, few clergy understood their parishioners’ religious orientation as an inherent problem for the Church. Instead clergy often emphasized external, social and political factors and explained much of parishioners’ apparent dissatisfaction in terms of persecution, oppression, and illegal proselytization. Priests and their superiors took such purported incidents very seriously, which meant that external factors frequently played into numerous explanations about the religious unrest of the 1850s and 1860s. On the other hand, civil authorities at the provincial level and higher tended to criticize priests for accepting complaints. Even though Bishop Platon conveyed civil authorities’ warnings and rebukes to his subordinates, priests continued to accept oral grievances and even written petitions. Bishop

³⁶ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1411, l. 57–58.

³⁷ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1411, l. 69–70.

³⁸ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1411, l. 72.

³⁹ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1411, l. 72–80, 80–84.

⁴⁰ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1411, l. 77–80.

Platon accepted such evidence and selectively directed some cases to the Governor General Suvorov, who sometimes reminded him of the earlier warnings, but also occasionally initiated investigations.

The appointment of A. A. Suvorov as the Governor General of the Baltic Provinces in the spring of 1848 marked a significant change in the enforcement of policies regarding complaints. Between 1845 and 1848, priests accepted numerous oral grievances, wrote them down, and reported them to their superiors.⁴¹ Bishop Filaret readily notified Governor General E. A. Golovin, who tended to take the reports seriously and often dispatched high officials to investigate, circumventing district magistrates and other local authorities in seeking to get an accurate assessment. While the Ministry of the Interior and the Holy Synod had both issued warnings about the illegality of priests' actions, Golovin nonetheless continued to accept and investigate many claims. Almost immediately upon beginning his tenure, Suvorov reversed this course, issued stern warnings, and ceased to accept complaints almost altogether in 1848.

While Bishop Platon proved more cautious than his predecessor, he nonetheless accepted complaints from his subordinates, though he readily chastened them at the request of civil authorities as well. In December 1849, Platon communicated the following to the *blagochinnye*: "it has come to my attention that certain deacons (*prichetniki*) and even priests set into motion peasants' requests regarding various occurrences. Recognizing this to be unseemly for priests. [...] I make you responsible to impress upon all priests not to compose or write any petitions on behalf of peasants." Yet, he added, "if their parishioners have any kind of request for me they [priests] not only may, but should bring it to me with a detailed explanation of the matter".⁴² If Bishop Platon sought to establish a difference between "complaints" or "petitions", and "requests" (*prosby*), it is not entirely clear how he distinguished between them. Such contradictory signals were a sure invitation for priests to continue forwarding complaints, at least until more stern directives ordered them to cease.

Occasionally, the Bishop would forward what appeared to be novel or particularly troublesome sorts of grievances to the Governor General, who despite his reticence, nonetheless sometimes initiated civil investigations. In spite of his sporadic flexibility – his willingness to countenance certain claims – Suvorov became intolerant when confronted with

⁴¹ Daniel Ryan, "Rumor, Belief, and Contestation amid the Conversion Movement to Orthodoxy in Northern Livonia, 1845–1848", *Folklore*, 28 (2004), 11–17.

⁴² EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1411 (December 24, 1849).

apparently baseless complaints. Such was the case in February 1851, when brothers Adam and Grigorii Born of Töstamaa parish protested their punishment for not labouring during a holiday period (*tsarskie dni*) in 1847 (some four years earlier!). In retrospect, the newly appointed priest Vasilii Karzov unwisely accepted the complaint, which the district magistrate eventually took up. The *Ordnungsrichter* corresponded with the manorial administration, seeking an explanation for the punishment. He was informed that the matter had already been resolved in April 1848, when a previous investigation found that the brothers had not been punished for refusing to work during the holiday, but for refusing to perform labour duties in general in spite of the exhortations of the overseer. Had Karzov served in the parish longer, he could have saved himself much grief by refusing the stale claim, which the brothers apparently pushed forward amidst the opportunity presented by clerical turnover. The Governor General responded to the news about the case by requesting that Bishop Platon transfer the priest as punishment for his interference; Platon honoured the request, and sent Karzov to Iakovelvsk parish (he was replaced by Aleksei Troitskii, formerly of Iakovelvsk, who appeared to have done nothing wrong). For their part, the complainants faced corporal punishment.⁴³ While Suvorov accepted fewer complaints, required more accountability from priests, and issued more directives denouncing the practice than his predecessor, he still occasionally responded to cases of alleged persecution against the Orthodox. In part, the problem lay in the fact that there were cases where landlords appeared to have been acting improperly,⁴⁴ or where local officials were ill-equipped to adjudicate the conflicting claims of religious and local, secular authorities. For example, pastoral obligations presented an intractable problem since they were paid by households, which were often religiously heterogeneous and complex entities where “head” families apportioned obligations to hired hands and their families. Moreover, some landlords maintained that the pastoral obligation was an integral part of peasants’ rental contracts.⁴⁵ Thus, the Governor General relaxed certain policies against complaints in seeking to satisfy Church claims. In other words, civil officials too encountered contradictory information about the state of affairs in the Baltic countryside in the reports that they received.

⁴³ EAA, f. 291, n. 8, s. 1629, l. 1–7, 17.

⁴⁴ For example, on one manor the landlord apparently *was unaware* of a holiday. See EAA, f. 291, n. 8, s. 1695.

⁴⁵ EAA, f. 291, n. 8, s. 961.

A report from Bishop Platon to Governor General Suvorov in August 1850 provides a lengthy summary of how far-reaching the problem of pastoral obligations remained. Based upon information supplied from his subordinates, Bishop Platon gave an overview of various problems citing thirty parishes where this or that problem occurred on a given manor, or even on “all manors” of the parish. For example, a priest reported of Orthodox farm heads (*khoziaeva*) on the manor Puiatu “from them the same amount of grain is gathered as from Lutherans for the Church, pastor, *köster*, and schoolmasters [...] no matter how many Orthodox or Lutherans might be in their household”.⁴⁶ From Madliena parish, at all manors “monetary collections are the same for Orthodox and Lutherans”, with a certain amount of grain and money given to the pastor and schoolmaster. In order for Platon to compile such a report, he had to give priests sanction to pursue independent investigations and to inquire among the local Orthodox population about illegal collections. Investigations into specific cases proved contradictory: most were found to be baseless – “no such dues were demanded from Orthodox peasants” – while a handful of cases of wrongly collected obligations were returned.⁴⁷ Yet the peasant critique above, that dues were collected irrespective of household composition, likely fuelled recurrent protests articulated before priests.⁴⁸ The problem of pastoral obligations persisted and commanded the attention of Church and secular officials for at least the next two decades.⁴⁹

So the pattern went: a new problem, or a particularly serious allegation arose; a priest accepted it, notified his superiors; the Bishop requested that the Governor General take action; he requested that the civil governor contact the local magistrate, who finally took up the matter. Yet, complaints arose from different quarters as well: from landlords who felt wronged by meddlesome priests. They had recourse to request the intervention of high authorities, which led the Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod and the Minister of the Interior to ask that Bishop Platon chasten the clergy at all levels in the diocese and to cease collecting complaints.

The Riga consistory issued one such corrective *ukaz* to the *blagochinnye* in April 1851, citing the concerns of the Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod, N.A. Protasov, that “under the pretext of sincerity to Orthodoxy, peasants of the Baltic Provinces sometimes appear before Ortho-

⁴⁶ EAA, f. 291, n. 8, s. 961, l. 150.

⁴⁷ EAA, f. 291, n. 8, s. 961, l. 200–203.

⁴⁸ For another example of this phenomenon, see EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1950.

⁴⁹ EAA, f. 291, n. 8, s. 961; also see Gavrilin, *Ocherki istorii Rizhskoi Eparkhii*, especially chapter 7.

dox priests with various complaints". The consistory's instructions reiterated previous communiqués from the Ministry of the Interior issued to Bishop Filaret (3 November 1845; 2 May 1846) requesting that priests cease to accept complaints, and an *ukaz* of the Holy Synod (27 March 1847), ordering priests to send aggrieved peasants to local civil courts and under no circumstances to accept complaints. Yet, the new instructions that followed nonetheless ultimately granted priests limited authority to accept complaints. The order was even issued at the behest of the Synod, which had previously criticized clergy's interference in local affairs. First, it acknowledged the possibility that pastoral dues were sometimes unfairly assessed upon Orthodox converts:

"Regarding the incorrect collection of various dues from Orthodox peasants by manorial administrations and bringing this to the attention of the Governor General, His Grace responds that he proposed that the Civil Governor of Livland undertake appropriate measures towards the cessation of wrongful collections from Orthodox peasants in those parishes where it occurs, and in the future, upon hearing such complaints, to be ever ready to demonstrate the same pressing concern."⁵⁰

While the measure went on to remind clergy to stay out of secular affairs and to avoid taking complaints, they were nonetheless authorized to accept grievances about pastoral obligations under several conditions. First, peasants had to take their cases before the appropriate local court. If they received no satisfaction, priests were instructed to judge the merits of the claims. Only if the case had a sound basis could clergy refer the matter to their superiors. Moreover, they were strictly warned not to confront local authorities under any circumstances.⁵¹ The Riga consistory reiterated parts of these earlier instructions in 1852 and 1853, due to violations among priests, and reemphasized that peasants were first to take complaints to courts, and that only cases of merit – and priests had no access to manorial records! – were to be reported to diocesan officials.⁵²

Grievances about pastoral obligations ebbed and flowed during the 1850s, apparently winding down following investigations and renewed calls for priests to be cautious in accepting complaints from peasants.

⁵⁰ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1950 (April 21, 1851); EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1410, l. 14–17; f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1950. The Riga consistory reiterated parts of these earlier instructions in 1852 and 1853, due to violations among priests, and reemphasized that peasants were first to take complaints to courts and that only meritorious cases were to be reported to diocesan officials.

⁵¹ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1410, l. 14–17; f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1950.

⁵² EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1950.

Nonetheless, individual clergy continued to report such alleged incidents to their superiors, leading to general inquiries about whether priests in other parishes had encountered similar offences against the Orthodox Church and its flock. Such instances recurred frequently from 1858–64, and came to centre not simply on the collection of pastoral obligations, but on the threats of eviction and corporal punishment allegedly designed to ensure compliance.⁵³ For example, according to a report from February 1858, “Last week on the manor Abja money for the Lutheran pastor was gathered from all Orthodox landholders through the communal government and the bailiff.” It was alleged that Orthodox peasants were threatened with corporal punishment at the hands of the communal government.⁵⁴ While not every such report led the Bishop to request an inquiry from priests, he did ask for additional information in September of that year, noting that “from the report of one Deanery, I learned that certain landlords threaten to deprive Orthodox peasants of their homesteads or plots” for not paying pastoral dues, and requested reports from other *blagochinnyi*.⁵⁵

Redefining commitment: 1864 and the “reconversion” phenomenon

If there had been sporadic signs of religious discontentment here and persistent signs there during the 1850s and early 1860s, the events of 1864 suggested a much deeper problem to many observers. Instances where peasants attempted to act on rumours and to sign up for conversion – reversion! – to the Lutheran faith arose in several parishes, and created a truly alarming situation for Church and secular authorities.

One of the earliest reports about unrest from 1864 was sent by the Tõstamaa priest on 20 March. The priest’s missive was framed as a complaint against the local pastor, whom the priest implicated as the source of peasant expectations:

“Throughout the parish, [the pastor] proclaims that it is presently possible to convert from Orthodoxy to Lutheranism, and that to do this it is

⁵³ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1950 (January 11, 1858; February 4, 1858; March 3, 1858); f. 5256, n. 1, s. 515 (October 13, 1858); f. 5256, n. 1, s. 515 (October 13, 1858); similar phenomena recurred during 1860 though several priests noted not hearing any talk about pastoral obligations in Viljandi district; see EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1950, documents for August and September.

⁵⁴ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1950 (February 4, 1858).

⁵⁵ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1422 (September 25, 1858).

only necessary to sign up with him to the list of those wishing Lutheranism. He is convincing the peasants (*narod*) to renounce Orthodoxy.”

The priest also alleged that the pastor had advised mixed-faith couples to live without formally wedding. Additionally, three local peasants were implicated as ring-leaders, allegedly spreading similar “lies” about the Orthodox Church, including a Lutheran lay pastor and two deviating Orthodox peasants.⁵⁶ The Jõõpre priest noted the same phenomenon in his parish in a report filed with his superior on 23 March. The local pastor also accepted peasants seeking to leave their names on re-conversion lists. Among the “very many” who did so was the head of the local communal government, Endrik Taddo, and his two daughters.⁵⁷ Such scenes repeated again and again in northwest Livland province during that spring.⁵⁸

The Church’s immediate response was to investigate issues centering upon the fulfilment of religious obligations, about peasants’ religious orientation, and, as always, about social, economic, and political matters that may have made parishioners ambivalent about their faith. The first of these arose in late April, when Bishop Platon asked his superintendents to have their priests answer the following questions:

1) How many Orthodox males and females are in your parish? 2) How many of these have foreign faith spouses? 3) How many of them have been absent from confession and communion for a long time, and have not taken communion in an Orthodox Church during the last quarter [year]? 4) Are there any among them who, according to the view of parish priests, wish to convert or have already deviated into the Lutheran faith? 5) How many parishioners would remain in the Orthodox faith, in the opinion of priests, if they were permitted to convert?⁵⁹

The information requested was clearly designed to demonstrate the levels of dissatisfaction in the countryside, and, to my mind, represents a fundamental shift – the hierarchy never had previously inquired about the *wishes* of its flock. While the Church was still interested in whether peasants had fulfilled their obligations, the events of 1864 opened up a new set of questions altogether. Inquiries about the “genuine mood” during 1864 were likely the outgrowth of secretive inquiries related to the state’s decision to relax its stance about Orthodox parishioners, which in 1865 per-

⁵⁶ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1430 (March 20, 1864).

⁵⁷ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1431 (March 23, 1864).

⁵⁸ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1432, 1436, 1950.

⁵⁹ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1432 (April 22, 1864).

mitted the informal return of parishioners to the Lutheran faith.⁶⁰ While the government's decision signalled a change of course in the Baltic, clergy (and the Slavophile public) increasingly emphasized the need to encourage commitment to Orthodoxy through various reforms and palliative measures.⁶¹

Priests' responses showed a heterogeneous picture: many noted that great numbers of peasants would likely defect if given the choice, but others were not convinced of this. For example, the Audru priest noted that of 1923 parishioners 1439 wished to convert to the Lutheran faith. Among these, he wrote, "there are quite many who always fulfilled their Christian duty twice a year, and likewise many have fulfilled their Christian obligation during *this* year [my emphasis]."⁶² The Vändra priest wrote that "few" would remain Orthodox given the choice;⁶³ while the Mihkli priest suggested "not one would remain".⁶⁴ Yet, the Jõõpre priest only pointed to three persons desiring reversion (or already deviating).⁶⁵ Likewise, the Kihnu priest suggested "all parishioners, without any doubt, would remain in Orthodoxy".⁶⁶ Still others took it upon themselves to offer unsolicited information. For example, the Mihkli priest noted that few "deviate", but instead of answering what numbers might convert given the choice, he suggested that all would remain if given unspecified "advantages" (*Igoty*).⁶⁷ He also suggested that peasants would continue to obey the law if not given any choice about their religious affiliation!⁶⁸ Finally, it should be noted as well that the Kergu priest also made an unsolicited reference to "benefits" in his report.⁶⁹

⁶⁰ Alexander II issued secret instructions lifting the requirement that compelled parents of mixed faith to raise their offspring within the Orthodox Church. See Gavrilin, *Ocherki istorii Rizhskoi Eparkhii*, 222–223.

⁶¹ Samarín advocated thorough-going reforms in the Baltic, for example, see Samarín, *Sochineniia Iu. F. Samarina*, vol. 7, 159–160. By the mid-1860s, Slavophiles spoke openly about "civic sins" relating to the lack of support for the Orthodox Church in the region, see Pogodin, *Ostzeiskii vopros*, 106.

⁶² EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1432 (May 16, 1864).

⁶³ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1432 (May 7, 1864).

⁶⁴ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1432 (May 13, 1864).

⁶⁵ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1432 (May 5, 1864).

⁶⁶ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1432 (May 15, 1864).

⁶⁷ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1432 (May 13, 1864).

⁶⁸ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1432 (May 13, 1864).

⁶⁹ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1432 (May 18, 1864).

Conclusion: commitment and reform

If Orthodox clergy had formerly focused on “negative” factors such as Lutherans’ alleged persecution and proselytization as the causes of the apparent dissatisfaction, rumours, and the stunted conversion rates of the 1850s and 1860s, they had begun to posit the need for new “positive” benefits to preserve their flocks. In fact, during the spring of 1864 (amid the first signs of the so-called “reconversion movement”) Bishop Platon even initiated an inquiry among his subordinates about whether there was any available arable land on nearby state manors, which could be given to meritorious Orthodox peasants who lacked their own landholdings, or who had been deprived of theirs.⁷⁰ In September of that year the Bishop solicited investigations into the religious status of household heads between 1845-7 and 1864 – obviously seeking to uncover evidence of persecutory evictions to make a more forceful case for redistributing state lands.⁷¹ Two responses to Platon’s inquiry, above – about the need for benefits – and additional reports from the period show that many clergy did not distinguish between social, political, economic, and religious affairs. To put it another way, they viewed improved material and social conditions as the prerequisite for gaining religious commitment beyond the perfunctory fulfilment of minimal obligations. After all, many apparently dissatisfied parishioners nonetheless fulfilled their obligations – how would they feel once freed from misery and persecution?

Bobrinskii’s bleak assessment of Orthodoxy in the Baltic did not resound in all quarters. Peasants had not uniformly renounced the Orthodox faith, though many had articulated dissatisfaction in various ways. Orthodox clergy were not yet willing to abandon their flocks in any sense, and instead sought to confront a range of problems upon which they posited commitment was contingent. While conversions to Orthodoxy had largely ceased after the 1840s, they continued to present numerous social and political problems in the region in the following decades, giving rise to conflicts between Lutheran and Orthodox clergy, between secular and religious authority, between local and imperial law, among religiously diverse communities, and between Orthodox peasants, the Church, and the state. But most of all, they were significant because they muddied further the distinction between secular and religious affairs. From the point of view of many clergy, nearly everything secular touched upon Church

⁷⁰ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 3362 (April 8, 1864).

⁷¹ EAA, f. 1655, n. 2, s. 1950 (September 22, 1864).

prerogatives in the Baltic. Such views became increasingly prominent in educated Russian circles during and after the 1860s – in the era leading up to the period of Russification.

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KOKKUVÕTE: Usuvahetus ja õigeusu kiriku liikmete pühendumuse probleem Liivimaal 1850.-1860. aastail

Artikkel käsitleb Vene õigeusust taganemist Liivimaal 1850.-1860. aastail. Muretsedes õigeusu kiriku püsijäämist ja seisundi pärast Baltikumis, pöörasid kirikuvõimud tähelepanu põhiliselt provintsi sotsiaalsetele ja poliitilistele oludele. Artikli huvikeskmes on küsimus, kuidas liikus info kiriku struktuuride vahel ning kuidas nägid ja mõistsid kohalikke olusid vene õigeusu kiriku valitsemisorganid. Samuti uuritakse, kuidas põhjendasid preestrid, kellelt nõuti talurahva meeleolude väljaselgitamist, üha tugevnevat usulist rahuolematust, s.o luteri usku tagasipöördumise soovi. Käsitlus rajaneb Riia vaimuliku konsistooriumi ja praostkondade fondides leiduvaile allikaile. Preestrite raportid kõrgemalseisvaile organeile kujundasid võimude teadmised ja nägemuse õigeusu kiriku positsioonist. Nad püüdsid avada õigeusu kiriku liikmeks olemise nagu ka õigeusust taganemise sotsiaalseid, poliitilisi ja majanduslikke tagamaid. Vaimulikkond ja mõjukad Vene publitsistid süüdistasid luteri kirikut (eeskätt pastoreid ja mõisnikke) koguduse liikmete usulises “ambivalentuses”. Ilmneb, et õigeusu vaimulike ja uute koguduse liikmete omavahelised kokkupuuted ning ka bürokraatlike reeglite kohaselt kulgenud infovahetus kiriku hierarhia eri tasemete vahel kujundasid oluliselt võimude ettekujutust Balti provintside talurahva olukorrast vahetult enne nn suurte reformide algust.