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THE "LONG" CHURCH COUNCIL OF 1917–1918: Institutional Crisis, Intellectual Capital¹

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The Russian Church Council (*Pomestnyi sobor*)² of 1917–1918 – the first such council since the late seventeenth century³ – forms a watershed in the modern history of the Orthodox Church. The Sobor could hardly have convened under more adverse conditions: it opened just as the Provisional Government was rapidly disintegrating and radicalism was sweeping through the popular classes. And conditions only continued to deteriorate: after 25 October the Sobor had to operate in the face of an atheist, antireligious regime of Bolsheviks. Yet the Sobor managed to hold three sessions: the first session from 15 August to 9 December 1917 (65 meetings), the second from 20 January to 7 April 1918 (64 meetings), and the third from 6 July to 7 September 1918 (41 meetings).⁴ As a *Pomestnyi sobor*, the council had full authority to address fundamental, even canonical questions. It could also claim to represent the entire Church, not just prelates and priests; its 564 participants included 80 bishops, 20 monks, 165 parish clergy (archpriests, priests, deacons, and psalmists), and 299 laymen (the latter comprising 53 percent of the Council). During its 170 meetings the Council deliberated a broad spectrum of critical issues and adopted a host of far-reaching resolutions. *Inter alia* the Sobor reestablished the patriarchate, constructed a new system of ecclesiastical administration (at central and diocesan levels), adopted a new parish statute, issued appeals and proclamations, sought to upgrade the status of women in the Church, and tackled a plethora of other issues.

The Sobor has long been the subject of scholarly research. Much of the initial scholarship appeared in the West, including not only due attention in general accounts, like that by A. Wuyts,⁵ but specialized monographs,

¹ This research was supported by grant N 1-18-00119 from the Russian Science Foundation.

² The word "council" can be used to indicate *cozem* as well as *sobor*, so throughout the terms "Church Council" and "Sobor" will be used interchangeably. Also the upper-case "Church" refers to the institutional Church, whereas the lower-case "church" denotes the local parish church – an important distinction as power shifted in 1917 from the former to the latter.

³ Scholars traditionally date the last sobor as 1681–1682, but recent research has identified further councils in 1690 and 1698: Т.Г. Судаи, Московские соборы эпохи падения Московского патриаршества в XVII веке (Санкт-Петербург: Издательский проект "Quadrivium", 2015).

⁴ Günther Schulz, Das Landeskonzil der Orthodoxen Kirche in Rußland 1917–1918: Ein unbekanntes Reformpotential. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995, 29.

⁵ A. Wuyts, Le Patriarcat russe au concile de Moscou de 1917–1918 (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 129) (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1941).

such as Methodius Prichodjko's 1947 study of the parish question at the Council,⁶ Franz Jockwig's 1971 book on "laicization" of the Council,⁷ and Peter Shesko's 1972 Canadian dissertation on theological questions at the Council.⁸ In Russia itself, the antireligious mandate of the Soviet regime meant that scholars simply ignored the Church and the Sobor, or at most indulged in antireligious polemics.⁹ Since the late 1980s, however, scholarship has increased exponentially, partly because dismantling of the USSR unleashed pent-up interest in Orthodoxy, partly because the "religious turn" in the West disposed historians to take a new interest in the Orthodox Church. The result has been a growing wave of serious scholarship on the Church, including the Church Council of 1917–1918.¹⁰ Researchers have also significantly enhanced the source base, filling gaps in the printed records by tapping into previously closed archival materials, including the Council's own files in the central repositories of Moscow and St. Petersburg.¹¹ That effort has culminated in a monumental project

⁶ M. Prichodjko, *Die Pfarrei in der neueren Gesetzgebung der russischen Kirche*. Brixen: A. Weger, 1947.

⁷ F. Jockwig, *Der Weg der Laien auf das Landeskonzil der Russischen Orthodoxen Kirche, Moskau 1917/18; Werden und Verwirklichung einer demokratischen Idee in der Russischen Kirche*. Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1971.

⁸ Peter Shesko, *The Russian Orthodox Church Council of Moscow of 1917–1918: Some Ecclesiastical Considerations*. Ph.D. diss. St. Paul University, 1972. See also: P. Shesko, *The Moscow Synod 1917–1918*, in: *Analecta Ordinis S. Basilii Magni*, Series II, Vol. 8, Fasc. 1–4 (Rome, 1973): 161–240; Vol. 10, Fasc. 1–4 (Rome, 1979) 229–363.

⁹ After decades of antireligious publications (such as Б.П. Кандидов, *Контрреволюционная деятельность церкви в дни Октябрьской социалистической революции*, in: *Антирелигиозник*, 1937, №10, 26–34), less polemical but still biased treatments appeared in the post-Stalin decades, such as: Е.С. Осунова, *Поместный собор православной церкви 1917–1918 гг.*, in: *Вопросы научного атеизма* 3 (1967) 204–224.

¹⁰ The pioneering work, Schulz, *Das Landeskonzil der Orthodoxen Kirche*, was followed by many other works, most of which draw heavily on newly accessible archival files. For inclusive bibliography, see the recent English translation of a work that first appeared in French: H. Destivelle, *The Moscow Council (1917–1918): The Creation of the Conciliar Institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church*. South Bend: University of Notre Dame, 2015. See also George T. Kosar, *Russian Orthodoxy in Crisis and Revolution: the Church Council of 1917–1918*. Ph.D. diss. Brandeis University, 2004. For examples of early studies in Russian historiography, see: М.И. Одицов, *Всероссийский Поместный Собор 1917–1918 гг.: споры о церковных реформах, основные решения, взаимоотношения с властью*, in: *Церковно-исторический вестник*, 2001, № 8, 121–138; В. Цытин, *Вопрос о епархиальном управлении на Поместном соборе 1917–1918 годов*, in: *Церковно-исторический вестник*, 2003, №1 (22), 156–167.

¹¹ See А.С. Ионов, С.Г. Руневич и судьба архивных материалов Поместного собора Православной Русской Церкви 1917–1918 годов, in: *Архивы Русской Православной Церкви: пути из прошлого в настоящее* (Москва: РГГУ, 2005), 337–341.

to publish a massive collection of documents in thirty-four volumes, some of which have already appeared.¹²

Even as the corpus of monographs and source collections mounts, it is important to reconsider two of the prevailing assumptions in the historiography: the dominance of the "Bolshevik factor" and the "1917 caesura" in periodization. By the "Bolshevik factor" I refer to the tendency to explain much of the Council's activities, decisions, and shortcomings by the intervention and repression of the Bolshevik regime. Given the decades of Soviet oppression and coercion, the "church-state" paradigm offers a natural, seemingly sufficient explanation for what happened to the Sobor (and to the Church more generally). The "1917 caesura" refers to the tendency of historians to divide modern Russian history into "prerevolutionary" and "Soviet periods," separated by the fateful year of 1917. While that periodization seems logical enough, it tends to obscure continuities – that is, the long-term dynamics that transcend political events, even those like 1917 that are so dramatic and documentable.

This essay proposes to reconsider both of those premises. Doing so does not at all denigrate, but rather enhances the achievements and significance of the Sobor, underscoring – and explaining – how it managed to accomplish so much under such adverse conditions (and not just Bolshevik persecution) on the 265 days that it convened, deliberated, and decided. The argument here is twofold:

1. The Council not only had to contend first with an unsympathetic Provisional Government and then with the antireligious Bolshevik regime, but to function despite the "cumulative historical collapse" of Church administration. Partly because of structural deficiencies, partly because of parish assertiveness, the Church – as a macro-institution, at the central and diocesan level – had lost much of its functional capacity by the time the Sobor convened. Thus, even before the Bolshevik assault, Church authorities were unable to perform basic administrative functions and to provide financial support, administrative assistance, research services, and press to publicize the Sobor's work and decisions.

2. Under those dire and deteriorating circumstances, how did the Council nonetheless manage to accomplish so much? The answer is the "intellectual capital" accumulated earlier, chiefly since the 1905 Revolu-

¹² А.И. Мраморнов и др., ред., *Документы Священного Собора Православной Российской Церкви 1917–1918 годов*. Москва: Издательство Новоспасского монастыря, 2012-. For project plans for publication, see the «информационный буклет на 2016 год»: *Священный Собор Православной Российской Церкви 1917–1918 гг. Полное научное издание документов. Проект Новоспасского монастыря к 100-летию юбилею Собора (период реализации 2012–2020)*. Москва: Издательство Новоспасского монастыря, 2016.

tion. During those dozen years, the ecclesiastical intelligentsia (scholars, lay and clerical) produced fundamental research (on canon law, Russian church history, and comparative studies of Western churches) and amassed that capital in a series of pre-sobor commissions.¹³ All this produced a library of historical data, analyses, options, and draft texts that, despite the administrative breakdown of the Church in 1917–1918, enabled the Sobor to proceed expeditiously to final editing and adoption. The prerevolutionary work was the Council's "virtual chancellery", providing the data and deliberations, the *spravki* and *proekty* that served to facilitate and accelerate decision-making at the Council. Indeed, it would not be amiss to re-periodize the Council: just as historians now think in terms of the "long nineteenth century", by extrapolation one might also speak of the "long Church Sobor of 1906–1918." Advocates of Church reform bitterly castigated the tsarist government for refusing to convene the sobor, either in the heat of the Revolution of 1905–1907 or in the ensuing decade. While that criticism is certainly merited, one should not overlook the positive, if unintended, effect: the "long Sobor" provided an opportunity to collect data, weigh options, draft proposals, and engaged in a public discourse that informed decision-making at the "short" Sobor of 1917–1918.

The Sobor and Church Crisis

The Church Council of 1917–1918 obviously encountered grave, mounting difficulties. One indicator of its difficulties was the plummeting level of attendance, far short of the 564 members formally invited. Best attended was the first session (which boasted a peak attendance of 478 on 24 August – 84.8 percent), but by late November those present had dropped below 300 delegates. The average for Session I was just 361.4 (64.1 percent), but this indicator for Session II fell to 244.9 members (43.4 percent), and then in Session III dropped to 161.4 members (28.6 percent). Indeed, in that last session, not a single meeting had the requisite 188 for a valid quorum as stipulated by Council's own rules.¹⁴ A second indicator of difficulties at the Sobor is the very absence of a consolidated, orderly archive; the

¹³ More broadly, a range of intellectuals – inside and outside the Church – became heavily engaged in theological and religious questions. See: *Jutta Scherrer*, *Die Petersburger religiös-philosophischen Vereinigungen: die Entwicklung des religiösen Selbstverständnisses ihrer Intelligencija-Mitglieder (1901–1917)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1973); *Kristiane Burchardi*, *Die Moskauer „Religiös-Philosophische Vladimir-Solov'ev-Gesellschaft“ (1905–1918)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998); *Christopher Stroop*, *Providential Empire: Russia's Religious Intelligentsia and the First World War*. Ph.D. diss. Stanford University, 2012.

¹⁴ *А.Г. Красецкий – Г. Шульц*, *Священный Собор Православной Церкви 1917–1918 гг.*, 3 тома. Москва: Крутицкое патриаршее подворье, 2000.

extant documentation is incomplete and dispersed among several central repositories,¹⁵ with various documents (especially delegates' papers) scattered all over kingdom come. Nor was the Sobor even able to publish a full set of stenographic protocols or resolutions; despite heroic efforts, the Council's staff managed to publish only some of these documents.¹⁶ Various materials did appear in the official *Tserkovnyye vedomosti*, but financial problems forced the Synod to cut its frequency in half and altogether terminate publication after 1 July 1918.¹⁷ As a result, the Sobor was able to publish only a fraction of its deliberations and decisions, whether in an official series or in the contemporary church press.¹⁸

The Bolshevik regime, to be sure, had a hand in disorganizing and silencing the Sobor, but really began to do so only in January 1918. Roughly concurrent with the famous Decree on the Separation of Church and State and Church from School, the government – penniless and desperate for funds – confiscated the Synod's assets, typographies, and real estate. That led directly, for example, to the closing of *Vserossiiskii tserkovno-obshchestvennyi vestnik*, which the Sobor had designated as its official organ and authorized to publish reports and documents from its sessions. Once its official outlet closed, the Sobor only had access to the downsized *Tserkovnyye vedomosti* and to a dwindling collection of diocesan papers (*eparkhial'nye vedomosti*).¹⁹ Over the succeeding months the Orthodox press gradually disappeared from view, partly because of Bolshevik repression, but also because of insufficient funding and because of the breakdown in the post and transportation that made dissemination impossible.

Important as all that may have been, the principal problem facing the Sobor was the disintegration of ecclesiastical governance that began in the spring 1917 – long before the October Revolution. In part, it was due to

¹⁵ The main фонды are in Государственный архив Российской Федерации (ГАРФ) and Российский Государственный Исторический Архив (РГИА). See the discussion in *Ионов*, «С.Г. Рункевич», 337–341.

¹⁶ *Деяния Священного Собора Православной Российской Церкви 1917–1918 гг.* 11 томов. Москва, Петроград, 1918; *Священный Собор Православной Церкви. Собрание постановлений и распоряжений*. 4 вып. Москва, 1918. On the incomplete status of the Sobor archives and publications, see *Schulz*, *Landeskonzil*, 33–34.

¹⁷ In its very last issue the journal informed readers that the failure to receive issues was due mainly to "circumstances that completely depend not on the publisher," and referred to the «крайнее растройство в настоящее время почтовых сообщений, в связи с общим разрывом транспорта». There is also evidence that some local commissars forbade delivery of church papers «как вредные для народа». Прибавления к Церковным ведомостям, 1918, № 23/24 (1.07): 713–14.

¹⁸ In the first half of 1918 the main Church periodical, *Церковные ведомости*, contained a limited amount of Sobor materials, and in August 1917 the Synod sharply reduced the frequency of this journal.

¹⁹ Previously, most diocesan gazettes were called «епархиальные ведомости», but in 1917 – reflecting the revolutionary spirit of the day – many added «церковно-общественные» to their name.

the general assertion of authority (embodied in the new language of *demokratiia*), and that new sense of popular empowerment applied not only to the secular domain, but also to the Church. That lay empowerment was not new to 1917, however; rather, it had roots in the late Imperial period, when Church authorities endeavored to enhance the parishioners' role and responsibility (whether to combat unbelief or to mobilize needed funding). Still, lay assertiveness sharply increased after the February Revolution. As one prelate (Andrei Ukhtomskii) wrote in June 1917: "Earlier we had a single Rasputin... Now we are experiencing a whole popular calamity – massive *Rasputinstvo*."²⁰ Indeed, in the spring and summer of 1917 up to twenty bishops were unceremoniously deposed, others were driven into involuntary retirement, and still more were cowed into submission by the rebellion of white clergy and parishioners.²¹

No less important was the steady breakdown in Church administration: central and diocesan organs suffered a sharp decline in "administrative capacity" – that is, the ability to perform core tasks. The collapse was cumulative and structural, going back to the post-reform era: Church administration was overtasked and underfunded, a problem that had been long in making but that intensified rapidly during the war.²² It was "overtasked" partly because of hyper-centralization, which required superior authorities (ultimately the Synod) to review and confirm a plethora of matters, even the most mundane.²³ But the "straw that broke the camel's back" was an exponential increase in the volume of marriage and divorce cases, a sphere that Imperial Russia assigned to each confession with re-

²⁰ П.Г. Рогозний, Церковная революция 1917 года (Санктпетербург 2008), 42. On the change in popular attitudes toward the clergy and Church, see: Т.Г. Леонтьева, Духовенство и сельский мир 1905–1922, in: Академик П.В. Волобуев, Неопубликованные работы, воспоминания, статьи (Москва: Наука, 2000), 279–299.

²¹ Т.Г. Фруменкова, Высшее православное духовенство России в 1917 г., in: Из глубины времени, 1995, № 5, 74–94. For the typical files of bishops removed in Orel and Vladimir, see: РГИА, ф. 796, оп. 445, д. 745, лл. 1–3; оп. 204, отд. 1, ст. 5, д. 113; д. 102. As Archbishop Anastasii of Kishinev complained: «Растет озлобление, не только жидочки но и русские кричат, что церковей нам не надо». РГИА, ф. 797, оп. 86, 3 отд., 5 ст., д. 12, л. 80–80 об. See also: П.Г. Рогозний, Церковная революция и выборы архиереев, in: Исторические записки 7/125 (2004), 275–322; П.Г. Рогозний, Церковная смута в Орловской епархии в 1917 г., in: Рюрик, 2004, № 4, 17–33.

²² Even by the late nineteenth century multiple inspections confirmed that diocesan administration was ever less capable of handling the ever increasing workload. See, for example, the study of the diocesan consistory of Kostroma: P.A. Komissarov, Канцелярское делопроизводство Костромской духовной консистории в конце XIX – начале XX веков, in: Вестник Костромского государственного университета им. Н.А. Некрасова, том 19, 2013, № 1, 155–160.

²³ The cumulative overload, increasingly debilitating, was not unique to the Church. See Peter Liessem, Verwaltungserichtbarkeit im späteren Zarenreich (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1996), 82–87.

spect to its own adherents. In the case of the Orthodox Church, this meant responsibility for more than two-thirds of the entire population in the realm.²⁴ What is most important, however, is the fact that this responsibility increased exponentially in the early twentieth century, as the number of divorce cases skyrocketed and, indeed, came to constitute the bulk of the Synod's swollen workload. The Petersburg diocesan gazette provided this graphic description in 1912: "Divorce cases are totally tying up administrative work in the Synod, where they constitute almost half of all the cases coming before the full assembly of the Synod."²⁵ Matters were still worse at the diocesan level, where church authorities not only granted divorces (for Synodal review and confirmation) but had to contend with a far larger mass of suits that lacked legal grounds or requisite documentation, yet still had to be investigated, processed, deliberated, and rejected. The result was an ever growing backlog of unfinished files; the Petersburg consistory, the best staffed, resolved 86.7 percent of the divorce cases in 1905 (475 of 548), but only 53.5 percent in 1915 (591 of 1105).²⁶ War and revolution precipitated a tremendous increase in the volume and complexity of divorce cases. On the one hand, the prolonged service at the front eroded family ties and thus led to a higher incidence of marital breakdown; on the other hand, processing – for example, obtaining depositions from soldiers at the front, not to mention those "missing in action" – became an insuperable obstacle, disrupting the obligatory legal procedures.²⁷ The result was a plethora of new and unfinished divorce suits, and that only fueled growing popular fury at the consistory's failure to process divorce applications. As the ober-prokurator reported to the Synod on 27 June 1917: "In the Petrograd and Moscow consistories one is particularly struck by the extraordinary increase in the number of divorce cases. These cases, which concern the most painful aspects of family and social life, elicit complaints and censure because of the consistory's slow

²⁴ For the divorce issue, see: G.L. Freeze, Мирские нарративы о священном таинстве: брак и развод в поздней имперской России, in: Православие: конфессия, институты, религиозность (XVII–XX вв.), под ред. М. Долбилова и П. Рогознова (СПб: Еврейский университет, 2009), 122–175. See also E.V. Белякова, Церковный суд и проблемы церковной жизни. Москва, 2004, 195–322. For a recent study of the canon law discussions during this period, see: J. Heikkilä, Canonical Development through Dialogue: Marriage and Divorce in the Pre-Conciliar Period and in the All-Russian Church Council of 1917–1918. Ph.D. diss., Helsinki 2015.

²⁵ «Церковно-общественная жизнь» Известия по С.-Петербургской епархии, 1912, № 17/18 (15 сент.): 28.

²⁶ РГИА, ф. 797, оп. 96, д. 271, лл. 1–6 об.

²⁷ See: G.L. Freeze, L'ortodossia russa e la crisi della famiglia. Il divorzio in Russia tra la rivoluzione e la guerra (1917–1921), in: L'Autunno della Santa Russia, 1917–1945, ed. A. Mainardi (Magnano: Qiqajon, 1999), 79–117.

processing of such cases.”²⁸ By 1917 matters had grown significantly worse. Thus, in October 1917, Metropolitan (and future Patriarch) Tikhon [Belavin] reported that the divorce cases in Moscow diocese had doubled in 1916 and had multiplied at an even higher rate in the current year.²⁹

The Church administration was not only overtasked but underfunded: its budget and staffing failed to keep pace with its workload. The problem was cumulative, becoming worse over time and especially in later decades. In the case of diocesan administration, the budget and staffing had not increased since 1869, despite the enormous upsurge in the volume of files and incoming paper. Central authorities could document but not solve the problem. In 1906, for example, a Synod official (Kh. F. Popov) reported that the 1869 budget allocated just 11,000 rubles to each diocese, but that the typical diocese needed at least 15,000 to 20,000 rubles to employ sufficient staff to process the current level of paperwork (up to 25,000 documents per year).³⁰ That judgment was made in 1906 – just as the workload (especially divorce cases) mushroomed.³¹ Thereafter the workload, but not the budget and staffing, dramatically increased; the result, by 1914, was a precipitous decline in the Church’s capacity to govern (“administrative capacity”). The war severely exacerbated those problems. One factor was the conscription of administrative staff; Vladimir diocese, for example, reported that the army had drafted 9 of its 17 consistory employees.³² Moreover, the war economy turned underfunding into quasi-bankruptcy. Pitiful as the prewar budget had been, wartime inflation vitiated its real value: 1913 prices had increased 221 percent by the end of 1916, and 512 percent by the end of 1917.³³ Given the war and its impact

²⁸ РГИА, ф. 796, оп. 445, л. 242, лл. 2–3 об.

²⁹ РГИА, ф. 796, оп. 445, л. 242, лл. 9–11. Frustrated by the inability (not to mention disinclination) of diocesan administration to grant divorce, many believers even welcomed the Bolshevik decree in December 1917 establishing secular control over marriage and divorce. As Bishop Feofan (Tuliakov) reported to the Synod on 1 February 1918, many believers called the divorce decree «самый дельный декрет большевиков» (ГАРФ, ф. Р-3431, оп. 1, л. 264, лл. 8–14). The following spring Bishop Feofan complained about the «обилие» of divorce suits from believers, who still insisted upon Church recognition of the divorce as a precondition for a church re-marriage. *Ibid.*, л. 32–32 об. (Феофан – Тихону, 12.5.1918).

³⁰ Журналы, 1: 484. Zaozerskii likewise noted that the consistory had multiple shortcomings, but «первый и главный – это недостаточные штаты» (*ibid.*, 1:548).

³¹ The whole question of the Church budget became embroiled in Duma politics (with many deputies inclined to deny additional funding or eager to use budget requests as leverage to exert pressure on the Church). A further complication was the chaos in the Church budget, making calculations difficult and reinforcing Duma distrust. See: А.В. Соколов, *Временное правительство и Русская православная церковь: 1917 год* (Санкт-Петербург 2002), 5.

³² РГИА, ф. 796, оп. 202, л. 1736, л. 65.

³³ The inflation rates are cited in: M. Hildermeier, *Geschichte der Sowjetunion*. München: Beck Verlag, 1998, 60.

on the state budget, there was virtually nothing that central authorities could do. In 1916 the Synod did propose to increase the total diocesan budget of 2,153,172 rubles by 26,926 rubles – a paltry 1.3 percent, an imperceptible dent in the massive wartime inflation.³⁴

To compensate for the lack of funds, bishops had no choice but to impose special levies on parishes, a measure that predictably fueled popular resentment and resistance. Parishioners took particular exception to the levies to support diocesan seminaries, which functioned mainly to provide free education for the parish clergy’s sons, the majority of whom no longer even entered church service. Nor were parishioners happy to contribute additional funds for the diocesan consistories that worked so slowly and that seemed so antipathetic to divorce applications. Parishioner opposition to diocesan levies was widely known. In 1906, for example, a prominent archpriest criticized a proposal to levy new assessments to finance more dioceses and bishops: “Peasants do not fulfill their resolutions to support [their local] priests, whom they need far more than bishops.”³⁵ Resistance to diocesan levies rose during the war, as the calamitous economic conditions left parishioners in no mood to provide more funding for the unpopular consistory and seminary.³⁶ In an “Explanatory Note” appended to its 1917 budget, the Synod confirmed that the consistory budget was woefully inadequate, but warned that additional parish assessments would be a “great burden on the economy of [parish] churches”.³⁷ By the spring of 1917 the “parish tax revolt” was in full bloom, triggering a baleful warning from the Synod on 20 June 1917 that the Church had no other source of support, that the parish refusal to provide funds would doom the Church’s institutions and essential activi-

³⁴ Объяснительная записка к смете доходов и расходов ведомства Святейшего Синода на 1917 год. Петроград: Синодальная типография, 1916, 35.

³⁵ Журналы, 1:482. On the ecclesiastical levies imposed on the parish in the prewar period (from 18 to 35 percent of the latter’s income, depending on the parish), see: А.Л. Беглов, *Православный приход Российской империи как объект фискальной политики светских и церковных властей в конце XIX – начале XX в.*, in: *Вестник ПСТГУ, II: История русской православной церкви*, 2014, 2 (57), 56–81.

³⁶ That intense opposition of parishioners was ubiquitous in 1917, no longer constrained by pressure from above. At the diocesan assembly in Tambov, for example, the proposal to impose new assessments on behalf of the local seminary unleashed a storm of protest: «В обсуждение этого предложения миряне внесли такую страстность, что шум и крики не смолкали в продолжение почти часа. В шуме и криках можно было разобрать одно: миряне имеют определенный наказ с мест освободить церкви от всяких налогов. Один мирянин по поводу сборов с церковью выразился так: «Платим-платим, а конца все не видно. Прямо провальная яма какая-то. Не давать больше!»

³⁷ <http://www.tambovdoc.ru/?p=1204> (accessed 1 June 2017).
Объяснительная записка к смете доходов и расходов, 41.

ties.³⁸ The decrease in real income for consistories, as the ober-prokuror wrote on 27 June 1917, left consistory employees in an utterly abject situation: "Of course, there cannot be any doubt that the budgets for diocesan consistories, which have existed since 1869 ([*Polnoe sobranie zakonov*], no. 46899), are absolutely obsolete: they not only do not correspond to the conditions of the difficult time that we are now experiencing, but even in peacetime do not provide any kind of tolerable existence for the staff."³⁹

Not surprisingly, the Church's financial crisis in the summer of 1917 weighed heavily on plans to convene the Sobor. Indeed, this very question was the focus of Section VII at the Pre-conciliar Soviet (*Predsobornyi sovet*), which the Synod convened to make final preparations for the Sobor that was to assemble on 15 August 1917. A key figure in Section VII was A.A. Osetskii, a lay official in the Synod's Finance Office (*Khoziaistvennoe upravlenie*), who was charged with answering an obvious question: how was the Church, given its structural financial problems (compounded by the war-time inflation), to finance the long-awaited Church Council? After all, the Sobor inevitably entailed huge additional expenditures – funds for travel and per diem support of delegates in Moscow, money to renovate buildings to serve the Sobor's needs, and allocations to cover ancillary administrative and chancellery costs. According to Osetskii's initial calculations, the Sobor – if it were to last 10 months – would cost 9.4 million rubles. That was a huge sum: nineteen times the annual budget of the Synod itself, four times the total budgetary allocation for diocesan administration. Indeed, Osetskii's projection was ultimately nine times what the Synod eventually authorized. Given these harsh economic realities, Osetskii proposed to shorten the Sobor from the projected ten months and to make a corresponding reduction in its agenda: "It is necessary to reduce the Council's program. The first council should be limited in its work: reform of administration, judiciary, and parish, and establishment of economic conditions for the Church in a new order."⁴⁰ As the Synod's Chief Financial Officer, Osetskii listed *finance* itself as one of the four critical issues that this abbreviated Sobor should address. His proposal for a truncated Sobor won support from people as varied as the dedicated Orthodox layman General A.A. Kireev⁴¹ and Archbishop Evlogii (Georgievskii), with the latter even proposing that the Sobor be limited to just

³⁸ «Указ из Св. Правительствующего Синода» Владимирские епархиальные ведомости, 1917, № 26 (8 июля), 249.

³⁹ РГИА, ф. 796, оп. 445, д. 242, лл. 2–3 об.

⁴⁰ Мраморнов, *Документы*, том 1, ч. 2, 733.

⁴¹ А.А. Киреев, *Сочинения* 2 тома. Санктпетербург 1914.

five months. When put to a vote, the proposal to shorten the Council won unanimous approval.⁴²

These premonitions that the Church would find itself in dire economic straits were prescient: the Church was rapidly becoming insolvent, forcing staff to resign and seek alternative employment, with the inevitable result that ecclesiastical administration was grinding to a standstill. By September 1917, for example, the bishop of Ekaterinburg complained of the "terrible inflation," reported a threatened strike by chancellery staff, and warned of an impending collapse in diocesan administration.⁴³ The crisis impacted the Church at every level, including its schools; on the day the Bolsheviks came to power, the staff at the ecclesiastical school in Kashinsk sent this telegram: "We request supplementary funding. The condition of the teachers is critical. We urgently beseech you [to help]."⁴⁴ The fiscal crisis forced the Synod to reduce the academic year in the seminary to just four months (1 November – 1 March).⁴⁵ The fiscal crisis soon impacted virtually every facet of Church operations – in September 1917 even the Moscow choirboys went on strike.⁴⁶ Workers in the factories that produced votive candles proved a more serious problem: in November church officials in Moscow held negotiations with striking workers,⁴⁷ and the next month the Church was still trying to resolve labor disputes at these factories – a critical source of income.⁴⁸ The Synod chancellery itself was not immune to employee unrest and also began to generate threats of a "general strike of lay officials."⁴⁹ The crisis only worsened in the ensuing months, and by January 1918 the central Church administration was but a shadow of its former self.⁵⁰ In late January the Synod's Finance Office drew a horrific picture of conditions in central Church administration: "The members of the Holy Synod and the chancellery employees are not

⁴² Мраморнов, *Документы*, том 1, ч. 2, с. 737–750. Later calculations offered different projections, from 5.4 million to a lean 1.9 million, but even the latter was still twice what the Synod eventually was able to provide (*ibid.*, 754–755).

⁴³ РГИА, ф. 796, оп. 445, д. 24, лл. 2–3 (Серафим, 9.8.1917).

⁴⁴ Quoted in Т.Г. Леонтьева, *Тверская епархия в 1917–1918 гг.: испытание революцией*, in: *Вестник Тверского Государственного Университета*, Серия: история, 2012, вып. 4, 27.

⁴⁵ Леонтьева, *Тверская епархия*, 27.

⁴⁶ РГИА, ф. 796, оп. 445, д. 25, л. 2.

⁴⁷ А.Н. Казакевич (сост.), *Православная Москва в 1917–1921 годах. Сборник документов и материалов* (Москва 2004), 137.

⁴⁸ Казакевич, *Православная Москва*, с. 137 (reprinted from *Московский листок*, 1 дек. 1917).

⁴⁹ РГИА, ф. 796, оп. 445, д. 246, лл. 17–18 об.

⁵⁰ For a general overview, see: А.Н. Кашеваров, *Финансово-экономическое положение Русской Православной Церкви в условиях революционных потрясений и гражданской войны*, in: *Ежегодная богословская конференция Свято-Тихоновского Богословского Института*, 17/1 (2007), 213–218.

receiving the prescribed funding and find themselves in an extremely difficult material situation, so that in some cases they are forced to resort to the sale of objects from their home, but in the future are doomed to all the horrors of a starvation existence." The Synodal staff had already sold off much of the office furniture and begged the Synod to secure material support; otherwise, they warned, the Church would face "the departure of these officials from service and, consequently, the disruption of the work of those institutions in which they serve."⁵¹ On 22 January the Finance Department informed the Synod that "with each passing day the financial position of the domain of the Orthodox Church is becoming ever more critical and hopeless."⁵² At this point the Bolsheviks – now masters of a bankrupt failed state – dealt the *coup de grâce*: the Petrograd commissar arrived at the Synodal offices and ordered it to cease operations.⁵³ The regime also sequestered all the Church's physical assets, including its buildings, archives, typography, and candle factories.⁵⁴ On 28 January the regime (itself desperate for funds) confiscated all the liquid assets in the Economic Office, but was doubtless disheartened to learn that this yielded a mere 1,581 rubles in cash, 50 rubles in gold, and 46.5 million rubles of worthless securities.⁵⁵ It was hardly the vast treasure that the anticlerical Bolsheviks had imagined. The Church press also gradually fell silent as well – not so much because of brutal Bolshevik censorship as brutal economic reality. Thus by January 1918 many church journals and gazettes had scaled back their publishing activities or altogether ceased to operate because of the high cost of paper and the "exorbitant demands of typography workers."⁵⁶ And the ecclesiastical schools proved no less vulnerable; even an elite institution like the Petrograd Spiritual Academy was complaining in March 1918 of a "material crisis."⁵⁷

In short, by January 1918 as the Sobor gathered for its Second Session, the Church was bankrupt and divested, having lost its few (very few) remaining assets to Bolshevik nationalization. Deprived of its annual state funding and all other assets, the Synod could no longer provide the Sobor with funds, personnel, or typographical services; the original allocation of

⁵¹ РГИА, ф. 796, оп. 445, д. 29, лл. 1–2.

⁵² РГИА, ф. 796, оп. 445, д. 29, л. 4.

⁵³ РГИА, ф. 796, оп. 445, д. 792, л. 11.

⁵⁴ РГИА, ф. 831, оп. 1, д. 19, л. 7–7 об. On the nationalization of the Moscow candle factory in February 1918, see: А.Н. Кашиеваров, Высшее Церковное Управление в 1918–1922 гг., in: История Русской православной церкви в XX веке (1917–1933 гг.). Материалы конференции (Мюнхен: Изд-во Обители Преп. Иова Почаевского, 2002), 29. On the Sobor archives, see: Ионов, С.Г. Рункевич, 337–341.

⁵⁵ РГИА, ф. 831, оп. 1, д. 28, л. 1.

⁵⁶ «Духовная периодическая печать в наступившем году», Церковные ведомости, 1918, № 3/4 (31 января), 163.

⁵⁷ РГИА, ф. 831, оп. 1, д. 50, л. 34.

one million rubles was gone and new attempts to superimpose a special levy on church candles, contributions, and diocesan self-funding yielded minimal support – and all this was certainly no substitute for the Synod's funding, service staff, archives, and the ecclesiastical press that had existed under the ancien régime.⁵⁸

Intellectual Capital

Fortunately, the Church had amassed a rich reservoir of data, proposals, and experts that served as a critical substitute for the Church apparatus which had all but disappeared in the course of 1917. This asset was an important development new to late Imperial Russia; only in the post-reform period did the Russian Orthodoxy acquire a growing corps of academics, lay as well as clerical, with expertise in a broad range of fields and subjects critical to deliberations about Church reform. Indeed, when the Church first raised the question of a Sobor and other ecclesiastical reforms in the 1850s and 1860s, it had only begun to build a class of canon lawyers and professional historians.⁵⁹ In the following decades, however, the Church acquired an ecclesiastical intelligentsia that was actively producing a large volume of sophisticated research on the Early Church, on the sobor in medieval Russia, on various Orthodox canons and Russian ecclesiastical customs, and on parallel institutions and practices in the Western Churches.⁶⁰ That "intellectual capital" was apparent in 1905, when the Synodal chancellery prepared its first "Research Note on the Questions of Desired Transformations in the Structure of our Orthodox Church," with extracts from the published works of N.A. Zaozerskii, T.V. Barsov, A.A. Papkov, and others.⁶¹ Their publications proved to be an invaluable asset as the Church undertook to summon the first Church Council in more than two centuries.

⁵⁸ Собрание постановлений и распоряжений, том 2, с. 29 (2 дек. 1917).

⁵⁹ See, for example, the 1868 memorandum by Metropolitan Makarii in: Ф.И. Тумов, Записка о русских поместных соборах и проект православной академии в Вильно Макария Булгакова, бывш. Митрополита московского» in: Труды Киевской духовной академии, 1906, № 2, 301–316. On Makarii's collaboration with ober-prokurator D.A. Tolstoi, see the former's letter in РГИА, ф. 797, оп. 87, д. 232, л. 1 (12 дек. 1868). An earlier memorandum, evidently emanating from the St. Petersburg Ecclesiastical Academy, also raised the question of a *pomestnyi sobor*. See: РГИА, ф. 797, оп. 96, д. 28, лл. 1–5 об.

⁶⁰ W. Winogradow, In orthodoxer Schau. Drei Vorträge (München 1958), 5–22; M. Köhler-Baur, Die Geistlichen Akademien in Rußland im 19. Jahrhundert (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997); H. Destivelle, La réforme des académies ecclésiastiques et l'enseignement de la théologie orthodoxe en Russie au début du XXe siècle (Paris 2008).

⁶¹ «Справка к вопросам о желательных преобразованиях о постройке у нас Православной Церкви». РГИА, ф. 797, оп. 75, отд. 2, ст. 3, д. 75, лл. 56–91.

Plans for a sobor were a direct result of the revolution of 1905–1907, when the “liberation movement” in society gave rise to parallel unrest and initiatives in the Orthodox Church. The “Orthodox movement” was highly diverse, with contradictory currents that ranged from conservatives (seeking to free the Church from state tutelage and, especially, the onerous domination of the ober-prokuror, K.P. Pobedonostsev) to radical renovationists (seeking a veritable reformation in Orthodoxy, from its administrative structure to its liturgical practices).⁶² The Church also had its own “Bloody Sunday” – the decree of 17 April 1905 granting freedom of religious conscience, which decriminalized “apostasy” and permitted several hundred thousand nominal church members to convert from Orthodoxy to other confessions. That meant not only an immediate mass defection to other faiths, but also raised the specter of future conversions, especially to the Old Belief and sectarian groups that had already proven effective proselytizers and had become a major cause of concern for Orthodox loyalists. The movement for Church reform in 1905 also gained momentum from the widespread strikes in seminaries and then from resolutions adopted by diocesan assemblies and by local parishes. All this formed the background to the famous episcopal “responses” (*Otzyvy*), submitted and published in late 1905 and early 1906, revealing that the majority of bishops likewise supported reform, including greater participation of parish clergy and laity in Church governance.⁶³ That was but the beginning of institutional and intellectual preparation which would ultimately culminate in the Church Council of 1917–18 and make its work possible and productive, despite the crisis in the Church’s administration and finances.

Apart from the spiraling mass of publications (some scholarly, some for a more general readership), the institutional dynamo of the pre-Sobor preparations was a series of three official convocations: the Pre-sobor Commission (*Predsobornoe prisutstvie*, March–December 1906), the Pre-

⁶² For the renovationist movement (bibliography and documentary history), see: Ю.В. Балакишина, Братство ревнителей церковного обновления (группа «32-х» петербургских священников), 1903–1907. 2-е изд. Москва: Свято-Филаретовский православно-христианский институт, 2015.

⁶³ The bishops’ «отзывы» (“responses”) were published almost immediately (in the main church journal and as self-standing volumes) and have been recently reprinted: Отзывы епархиальных архиереев по вопросу о церковной реформе. 2 тома (Москва: Изд-во Крутицкого подворья, 2004). For an overview of their response, see: С. Фирсов, Русская Церковь накануне перемен (конец 1890-х – 1918 гг.) Москва: Круглый стол по религиозному образованию и дьяконии, 2002, 193–215; E.P. Immekus, Die russisch-orthodoxe Landpfarrei zu Beginn des XX. Jahrhunderts nach den Gutachten der Diözesanbischöfe. Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1978; Белякова, Церковный суд, 109–127.

sobor Committee (*Predsobornoe soveshchanie*, March 1912–February 1917), and the Pre-sobor Soviet (*Predsobornyi soviet*, June–July 1917).

The most important of these convocations was the first – the Pre-sobor Commission, which laid the theoretical, empirical, textual, and practical foundations for the Church Council of 1917–1918.⁶⁴ Convened with the emperor’s approval, the Commission met from 8 March 1906 to 15 December 1906 (with a recess of 4.5 months, from 13 June to 1 November). Altogether, the Commission held 34 plenary meetings, along with the 165 meetings in its seven sections; its members produced 158 reports, commentaries, dissenting opinions, and draft proposals (to count only those which were separately entered as such into the official record). The sheer magnitude of production is staggering: in published form the journals and protocols are massive, appearing as 3,424 pages (in the 2014 reprint)⁶⁵ with more than 1.5 million words and representing an authoritative statement of the Church’s key problems and possible solutions. Although these sessions did not cover all questions (it gave only intermittent attention to monasticism,⁶⁶ the status of female believers,⁶⁷ and even national-religious movements⁶⁸), the commission did engage most of the central

⁶⁴ Ф. Суев, О Высочайше утвержденном при Св. Синоде Особом присутствии для разработки вопросов, подлежащих рассмотрению Всероссийского Собора (Юрьев: Тип. Т. Маттисена, 1911); С.П. Сахаров, О предсоборном присутствии. 2 ч. (Юрьев 1910–15); И. Смолич, Предсоборное присутствие 1906 года, in: Путь, 38 (Май 1933): 65–75; Г. Ореханов, На пути к собору. Церковные реформы и первая русская революция. Москва 2002; Фирсов, Русская церковь, 216–250; J.W. Cunningham, A Vanquished Hope; the Movement for Church Renewal in Russia, 1905–1906. Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1981, 205–312; Белякова, Церковный суд, 127–144.

⁶⁵ Журналы и протоколы заседаний высочайше учрежденного предсоборного присутствия. 4 тома. Москва: Изд-во Новоспасского монастыря, 2014.

⁶⁶ To be sure, the throng of «поповичи» did not leave monasticism unscathed. Zaozerskii, for example, criticized the excessive role assigned to monks in his proposal to elect bishops and invoked canons that forbade them from participating in secular matters (Журналы, 1:462).

⁶⁷ Among the scattered references to women, Section IV did propose the «восстановление звания диаконисса», which later proved a controversial issue. For the proposal here, see Журналы, 2:913–914. See also: Е.В. Белякова, Обсуждение вопроса о диакисах в Поместном соборе, in: Церковно-исторический вестник, 2001, № 8, 139–161 (with a detailed pre-history of the question). At this point, however, references to the women’s question were rare and conservative; the majority, for example, was only willing to admit the women who were head of a household to parish assemblies. See Белякова, Церковный суд, 430–431.

⁶⁸ Georgia naturally elicited attention (given the fervent and long-standing demands to restore its autonomy if not autocephaly); see, for example, the discussion and references in Журналы, 3:185–199, 274–290. F.I. Titov, popovich and professor at the Kiev Academy, argued that the metropolitan districts would help combat separatism and specifically cited the case of Georgia: «Например, если взять в настоящее время движение в Грузии, то можно усомниться, располагает ли Святейший Синод какими-либо средствами в борьбе с ним, а при деятель-

issues facing the Church – relationship to the state, church governance, the parish and its status, ecclesiastical schools, and missions in the new era of freedom of conscience. It also provided unvarnished commentary on the real conditions in the Church, especially the shortcomings in ecclesiastical administration and the issue of conferring more rights and prerogatives on parish clergy and believers.

The Commission was extraordinarily diverse in both its composition and its views. Altogether, its members (85) included 12 hierarchs, 27 archpriests and priests (including 4 holding professorships and 3 serving as missionaries), and 46 laymen (28 lay professors, 5 lay Church officials, and 14 other laymen, including 1 parish church elder). Thus the laity comprised over half (54 percent) of the Commission; the clergy consisted of the 12 prelates (14 percent) and members of the white clergy (32 percent). The scale of participation varied considerably: some members rarely appeared, while others were usually present but silent; by contrast, a hard core appeared unfailingly, spoke frequently and at length, and sometimes even served on multiple sections. Whatever the status and level of participation, the Commission represented the clerical and lay elite in the Church: leading hierarchs (with the St. Petersburg Metropolitan Antonii [Vadkovskii] as chair), distinguished professors of history and canon law (although one famous designee, V.O. Kliuchevskii, declined to participate), and prominent lay activists and theologians (such as A.A. Kireev, A.A. Papkov, N. P. Kuznetsov, and N. P. Aksakov). That composition was hardly to the liking of Bishop Antonii (Khrapovitskii) of Volhynia diocese, an archconservative (of noble origins) who chaired one section (on dissenters), but derided the profile of the Commission's membership:

ности местных соборов положение Грузинской Церкви, ее нужды и стремления могли бы быть своевременно выяснены и своевременно местное течение направлено было бы в надлежащее русло не административными мерами, а братолюбивым воздействием Соборов». Журналы, 1:441. However, members did allude to the broader problem of ecclesiastical separatism in other borderlands as well. For example, in the discussion of metropolitan districts, Suvorov openly addressed the issue of "separatism" in non-Russian areas: "One must consider, for example, areas where the spirit of separatism is active, where [clerical] figures are local and indigenous. And it is here, despite the fact that the Church should not engage in politics, that it must do so." Zhurnaly, 1:440. Sokolov likewise concurred that a regional sobor could avert separatism: «Что касается затем, в частности, устройства Грузинской Церкви, то образование из нее особого округа не представляет никакой опасности для Церкви; совершенно верно, что Соборы, организованные в округе, наилучше оградят Грузию от крайностей сепаратического движения и помогут укреплению в сознании населения того представления, что только в тесном единстве с Русской Церковью заключается здравая церковная политика Грузии» (ibid., 1:441–442). Although Ukraine attracted little attention and gave relatively little cause for concern in the Revolution of 1905–7, Professor Archpriest Titov argued that the institution of the sobor would have the same salutary effect there as well (ibid., 1:442).

I grieve over the "priestly [*popovskii*, a pejorative] and professorial" composition of the commission: (1) Why does it not have learned monks, such as Archimandrite Mikhail? (2) There are outright atheists (Kliuchevskii, Mashanov) and protestantizers (Golubinskii, Svetlov, Rozhdestvenskii), a lot of fools, a great many hopeless drunkards (Kliuchevskii, Mashanov, Ivanov, Chistiakov, Zaozerskii, Glubokovskii, Golubev, Butkevich), but most important, (3) all of them – whether they are conservatives or liberals – come from the hereditary clerical caste. This not a sobor commission, but a caste commission (*soslovnaia komissiiia*).⁶⁹

What Antonii decried as a defect in fact proved a critical asset: the Commission not only assembled a rich library of facts but formulated a spectrum of opinion and options grounded in personal, real-life experiences. That diversity of views was apparent in the individual speeches and written statements, and also in the votes on controversial issues, such as the participation of lay representatives in diocesan administration. For example, in a vote on 2 May (in the II Section), opinion was almost evenly split – five voted in favor of lay participation, seven against.⁷⁰

The Pre-sobor Commission made four contributions to the council-preparation process: (1) formulation of canon law and Russian historical precedents, which served as the basis for corresponding recommendations and options; (2) practical, grassroots commentary on current practices and problems; (3) extensive attention to the question of parish empowerment; and (4) inclusion of a transnational, transconfessional perspective as a further framework for assessing problems and seeking solutions.

1. Canon law and Russian historical precedents. While it was natural to invite so many specialists in canon law, it was surprising how much they disagreed.⁷¹ Section I (*Otdel 1*) focused on the central questions of Orthodox governance – the Sobor and its makeup, ecclesiastical administration, and the Church's relationship to the state. As the protocols demonstrate, the members were unanimous on the need for a Church Council, but differed sharply in their visions of the new order it was to produce. What is important to emphasize here is that they exhaustively debated recent scholarship on critical questions, such as the participation of parish clergy and laity in the Sobor and in Church governance. Thus, on the conservative side, one university professor (Berdnikov) invoked his scholarly

⁶⁹ «В церковных кругах перед революцией», Красный архив 6/31 (1928), 209.

⁷⁰ Журналы, 1:559. In a plenary session on 17 November 1906, the majority voted in favor of lay participation: 20 were opposed (3 bishops, 5 archpriests, 1 priest, and 11 laymen), but 29 in favor (3 metropolitans, 4 archbishops, 1 bishop, 7 archpriests, 13 professors, 1 deputy chief procurator). Журналы, 2:754–755.

⁷¹ On the problem of canon law and its applicability, see: *Белякова*, Церковный суд, 38–67.

expertise to insist on a bishop-only Sobor: "I assert that in the ancient canons a council is a council of bishops, and nowhere is there any reference to a sobor with a different composition."⁷² Other canonists promptly challenged that view, offering their own references to canon law to demonstrate the ambiguity and obscurity in this same corpus of texts. Given the contested readings of canon law, others emphasized either Russian historical precedents (which could suggest a more inclusive definition of sobor membership) or emphasized the need to take modern realities into account. The academics played a salient role, invoking scholarly expertise to establish their authority, even in the face of strong opposition from archconservative prelates like Antonii (Khrapovitskii). For example, at a session on 22 March Archpriest Fedor Ivanovich Titov, a professor at the Kiev Ecclesiastical Academy and well-published scholar, invoked the example of a little-known 1685 sobor to justify a more inclusive formula for the Sobor's composition.⁷³ Two months later the same archpriest-professor presented a detailed survey of Russian history to demonstrate the "abnormality" of Church-state relations since 1700 and the need for a fundamental transformation.⁷⁴ A lay theologian, Nikolai Petrovich Aksakov, from a famous slavophile clan, held a doctorate in philosophy from Giessen University and earned recognition for his research on history and church law.⁷⁵ He spoke frequently at the Commission and used his expertise to argue for the election of clergy and laity to the Sobor, indeed, without any episcopal control over their selection.⁷⁶ The journals also reflect, in speeches and reports, close familiarity with the contemporary public debate about church reform⁷⁷ and made frequent references to recent scholarship, such as that of N.A. Zaozerskii (himself an active participant and currently a professor at the Moscow Ecclesiastical Academy).⁷⁸ Zaozerskii likewise prioritized contemporary needs over tradition and Greek precedents. In the discussions of metropolitan districts, for instance, Zaozerskii stressed that "there is no need, when establishing the districts, to copy the order in the Greek Church: in this case one must take into account the needs of our time."⁷⁹ Prioritizing contemporaneity over canon

⁷² Журналы, 1:51.

⁷³ Журналы, 1:82.

⁷⁴ Журналы, 1:385–390.

⁷⁵ Н.П. Аксаков, Патриаршество и каноны. Санктпетербург 1906.

⁷⁶ Журналы, 1:83.

⁷⁷ For example, in a report on the problems afflicting the consistory, Butkevich (Журналы, 1:530–532) cited the critique offered more than two decades earlier in Николай Елагин, Чего надо желать для нашей Церкви. Санктпетербург: Общественная польза, 1885.

⁷⁸ See, for instance, the reference to Н.П. Аксаков, О церковной власти (Сергиев Посад 1894), in: Журналы, 1:535–537.

⁷⁹ Журналы, 1:438.

also inspired V.Z. Zavitnevich to argue for the direct participation of parish clergy in district-level sobors: "Here will be decided vital questions in which the parish priest can prove to have greater competence than a bishop, for example, in the question of the struggle against the schism [Old Belief]"⁸⁰

2. Priority of the normal, not normative. The Commission's participants drew not only on canon law and scholarly monographs, but also their personal experience and knowledge of everyday ecclesiastical administration and parish life. Bishop Antonii (Khrapovitskii) complained bitterly about the *popovich* composition of the Commission, but precisely for that very reason they had an excellent understanding of what Church life was really like, regardless of how it might be prescribed in ancient canons or idealized by conservative prelates. For example, the son of a lowly psalmist in Viatka, Ivan Stepanovich Berdnikov, had risen to become a prominent professor of canon law at Kazan University,⁸¹ but he invoked his personal experience to inform the analysis in his paper "On the Bishop as the Governor of a Diocese". To support far-reaching change in diocesan administration, Berdnikov emphasized that a key problem in diocesan administration was the "remoteness of the bishop from his flock and his poor knowledge of [subordinate] clergy," a failing that he attributed not only to the "vast size of the dioceses as they now exist," but also to the "custom of the frequent transfer of bishops from one diocese to another as a form of promotion."⁸² A.I. Almazov, a university professor who came from the family of a deacon in Tambov diocese, not only drew upon his expertise in liturgical and canonical matters, but also displayed his keen awareness that finances posed a major obstacle to fundamental reform. When others reasonably recommended increasing the number of dioceses (to bring bishops closer to the parish clergy and laity), Almazov supported the goal but bluntly questioned its feasibility: "The lack of means will be a major obstacle to increasing the number of dioceses."⁸³

3. Parish revival and empowerment. Hardly any issue attracted more attention – and inspired more hope – than the revival of the parish, widely seen as the single most critical step toward strengthening lay piety.⁸⁴ The

⁸⁰ Журналы, 1:467.

⁸¹ И.С. Бердников, К вопросу о реформе церковного управления и суда (Казань 1906).

⁸² «О епископе как управителе епархии». Журналы, 1:476–90 (здесь: 1:475, 477).

⁸³ Журналы, 1:482. Е.Е. Golubinskii, another *popovich* and professor-emeritus at the Moscow Theological Academy, likewise welcomed an increase in the diocesan network, but warned as well about the «недостаток средств». Ibid., 1:427.

⁸⁴ For an overview and references, see G.L. Freeze, All Power to the Parish? The Problem and Politics of Church Reform in Late Imperial Russia, in: Social Identities in Revolutionary Russia, ed. M.K. Palat (London: Macmillan, 2001), 174–208.

parish question was the specific focus of the IV Section, which came down firmly in favor of parish reform: "The good order of the parish, in the opinion of the Section, must be directed toward reviving the parish as a church community, united around its parish chapel and pastor and inspired by the common spiritual interests and religious-moral cooperation of all its members for the purposes of raising and reanimating church and religious life in our fatherland." That required, in the opinion of the Section, steps to restore the ancient foundations of the parish and to increase the activism of its parish staff. Specifically, the IV Section proposed: (a) the parish must be accorded the status of a juridical entity (bestowing the autonomous right to acquire real estate and other assets, along with the authority to dispose of its church sums at its own discretion); (b) the parish must have the right to choose its priest and his subordinates; and (c) the self-governing status and the parishioners' authority over their local church must be significantly enhanced.⁸⁵

4. Transnational, transconfessional perspective. The Pre-sobor Commission also gave attention to the policies and practices of Churches outside the Russian Empire. That was predictable in the case of Orthodox Churches in Greece, Rumania, and the Balkans,⁸⁶ and participants showed a strong interest in the past and present order in those Churches. Significantly, however, the Commission also showed an interest in the Catholic and especially Protestant Churches, reflecting the "transnational, transconfessional" dynamics abetted by the age of "Globalization II" (1870–1914).⁸⁷ During those same decades the Orthodox Church strengthened its official connections and intellectual interaction with the Western Churches, a development that was reflected in library acquisitions, in the content of ecclesiastical journals,⁸⁸ and in the academic publications of the

⁸⁵ Журналы, 1:768–769.

⁸⁶ See, for example, Glubovskii's reference to a Russian monograph on the legal status of the Orthodox Church in Greece (Ф.А. Курганов, Устройство управления в церкви королевства греческого. Казань 1871). This was but one of multiple references to the Orthodox Church abroad. See, for example, the following: Berdnikov's citation of scholarship on the Greek Church: И. Соколов, Очерки истории Греко-Восточной Церкви в XIX в. (Санкт-Петербург 1902) (Журналы, 1:432); on the Rumanian Orthodox Church in Bucharest, see 2:25. See also the citation of И.С. Пальмов, О духовно-учебных заведениях в православных славянских землях (Журналы, 2:84–98).

⁸⁷ See G.L. Freeze, Globalization and Orthodoxy in Imperial Russia, in: Вестник С.-Петербургского Университета, Серия 2: История, 2017, № 1, 4–17.

⁸⁸ For the case of Богословский вестник (published by Moscow Ecclesiastical Academy), see B. Geffert, The Era of Bogoslovskii vestnik, in: St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly 41 (1997) 273–336. For a typical expression of interest in the Protestant West, see: Н. Писаревский, Религиозное состояние протестантского запада, in: Богословский вестник, 1902, № 6, с. 271–292. More generally, see J. Wasmuth, Der Protestantismus und die russische Theologie. Zur Rezeption und Kritik des Prote-

ecclesiastical professoriate (for example, in works on pastoral theology).⁸⁹ References, whether positive or negative or neutral, vary in frequency from one section to the next, but altogether show a keen interest in learning how the Western churches defined and addressed their challenges, whether it be a secularizing state or dechristianizing folk. The journals contain an abundance of transconfessional references (644 to Protestantism, 276 to Catholicism) and transnational references (139 to Germany, 59 to England, and 50 to France). For example, in Section I on church governance, Aleksandr Ivanovich Brilliantov (a priest's son from Novgorod diocese and prominent historian at the St. Petersburg Spiritual Academy) urged fellow members to look to the Anglican Church for a model electoral system because, while based on the episcopal principle, it nonetheless allows for broad participation by the laity.⁹⁰ Another leading "comparativist" was Archpriest Aleksei Petrovich Mal'tsev – a priest's son from Iaroslavl diocese, who had served at the church of the Russian embassy in Berlin since 1886 and who had translated and published a plethora of Orthodox liturgical works for the benefit of German readers.⁹¹ In Section IV, for example, Mal'tsev presented a lengthy paper on the Evangelical-Lutheran Church's "inner mission" and its founder, Johann Wichern, arguing that this German model could provide a valuable guide for the Russian Church, including ways to include the parish in missionary work.⁹² In Section V (on seminary reform) Mal'tsev presented another paper on theological education in Germany, England, and America to offer a transconfessional, transnational perspective on how the Orthodox Church might more effectively prepare seminarians for pastoral service.⁹³ And moderate conservatives like Berdnikov used the German comparative to support his view on how church-state relations should be configured. At the end of a lengthy report, he explained: "We have presented this research note (справка) on German legislation about the juridical

stantismus in den Zeitschriften der Geistlichen Akademien an der Wende vom 19. zum 20. Jahrhundert. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007. See also M. Köhler-Baur, Die Geistlichen Akademien in Rußland im 19. Jahrhundert. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997.

⁸⁹ Иннокентий (Пустынский), Пастырское богословие в России за XIX в., Сергиев Посад 1899, cites an array of Western works, such as T. Harnack, Praktische Theologie (Erlangen: Delchert, 1877) and J.M. Hoppin, Pastoral Theology (London: Funk & Wagnalis, 1884).

⁹⁰ Журналы, 1:81.

⁹¹ A. Maltzew, Die göttlichen Liturgien. Berlin 1890, and many other works as well. He also displayed a strong comparative inclination, reflected in his Германия в церковно-религиозном отношении с подробным описанием православных русских церквей. Санктпетербург 1903.

⁹² Журналы, 1:809–816: А.П. Мальцев, Внутренняя миссия (Die innere Mission).

⁹³ Журналы, 2:101–108: А.П. Мальцев, О постановке богословского образования в Германии и отчасти в Англии и Америке.

status of religious organizations with the goal of showing graphically how in Western Europe one understands the “autonomous status” of religious organizations that is based on freedom of confession. This note should serve us well in meeting our objective in this question.”⁹⁴ N.D. Kuznetsov, a professor of canon law at the Moscow Academy, was skeptical of blindly following Western models for church-state relations but underlined the need to have the Catholic and Protestant situation in mind: “Catholicism and Protestantism are two striking examples that one must keep in mind in order to more correctly regulate the mutual relations of the Church and state.”⁹⁵ While some members invoked the Western Church as a negative example or for rhetorical effect,⁹⁶ it is striking how easily and effectively the members looked to other confessions, not just canons, in their search for answers to the Church’s problems.

Not all the participants reveled in the erudition exhibited at the Pre-Sobor Commission. Nikolai Nikolaevich Glubokovskii (a priest’s son from Vologda who rose to become a full professor of the New Testament at the St. Petersburg Spiritual Academy) showed his impatience and frustration when he made this vexed declaration at the end of one meeting that dragged on for four and a half hours: “I will not comment on the substance of the long discourses presented by various orators (often containing repetitions from their own published books and brochures), although many points would deserve a fresh review and sometimes substantial re-assessment. I think that our *practical* goal receives little clarification and almost no resolution through academic treatises and theoretical constructions.”⁹⁷ Although enduring those debates and dissertations must indeed have been wearisome, the protocols and appended memoranda unquestionably represented a massive compilation of research, wide-ranging

⁹⁴ Журналы, 1:343. Berdnikov also invoked the example of episcopal assemblies that the Catholic Church convened as an effective tool for dealing with regional problems (*ibid.*, 1:436).

⁹⁵ Журналы, 1:371. Kuznetsov immediately warned against a blind imitation of the Western model: «Но руководствоваться в положительном смысле по этому поводу примерами Западной Европы нам нельзя. Западу все время приходилось иметь дело с Церквями, отдельными от Православной, и устанавливать свои к ним отношения под влиянием особенностей тех церквей» (*ibid.*, 371–372).

⁹⁶ To refute conservatives who opposed lay participation in the Sobor, Brilliantov offered this provocative comment: «При соборных решениях нельзя не обращать внимания на паствы. Это основной принцип православия, в отличие от католического взгляда о непогрешимости иерархии.» Журналы, 1:190. Wounded by Brilliantov’s sarcasm, his rhetorical target – Glubokovskii – voiced a furious protest: «Не могу принять упреков в ‘католичности’ моих суждений, как и вообще считаю недопустимым, чтобы на друг друга наклеивались конфессиональные ярлыки» (1:191).

⁹⁷ Журналы, 1:394.

perspectives, and draft texts for the resolutions and legislation that would later flow from the Church Council of 1917–1918.

Although the government of Nicholas II soon refused to convoke the Council (citing the turbulent times, but also fearing a loss of control over the Church), the momentum – and public discourse – for holding the sobor did not cease. In 1912 a new chief procurator, V.K. Sabler, acted to resume pre-conciliar preparations, evidently in an effort to win favor in reformist and especially clerical circles.⁹⁸ On 28 February 1912 the Synod established a new and smaller organ of seven members, the Pre-sobor Committee (Предсоборное совещание), with the charge to review the initial proposals of the Pre-sobor Commission of 1906 and to take into account what had changed in the country’s social and political order in the intervening years.⁹⁹ This new body met intermittently from 1912 right up to the eve of the February Revolution and produced its own compendium of deliberations.¹⁰⁰ In contrast to the Pre-sobor Commission, however, its work received only intermittent coverage in the contemporary press.¹⁰¹ The Committee also worked at a leisurely pace; it held only eight meetings in its first three months. With no expectation of an early convening of the Church Council, it was far less ambitious than the Commission, subcontracted some tasks to special committees, and by the fall of 1916 had much yet to do (for example, by September 1916 it had completed only two-thirds of a “church law code” that constituted the core of its plan for the reform of ecclesiastical courts).

The Pre-sobor Committee was not, however, the only venue for reform deliberation and planning; during the inter-revolutionary years the Church also launched multiple initiatives to address a number of other central problems. The result was a complex of special commissions and assemblies that compiled data, polled diocesan authorities for opinions, and drafted proposals for reform. Several were of particular significance:

⁹⁸ Фирсов, Русская церковь, 414–417.

⁹⁹ РГИА, ф. 796, оп. 194, д. 1155, лл. 1–1 об., 2–2 об.

¹⁰⁰ For the archival files, see: РГИА, ф. 796, оп. 194, д. 1161; д. 1155; д. 1157; д. 1156 (includes meetings from 16 January 1916 to 22 February 1917). Some recent dissertations cite Святейший Правительствующий Синод, Предсоборное совещание. 5 томов. Санктпетербург: Синодальная типография, 1912–1916. See, for example, two candidate dissertations: С.С. Бячков, Православная российская церковь и императорская власть, 1900–1917 гг. Канд. дисс. Москва 2002; and А.А. Соловьев, Интеллигенция и Православная Церковь в социокультурном развитии российского общества в конце XIX – начале XX в. Канд. дисс. Иваново 2009. That title, however, does not appear in the principal research libraries of Russia (e.g., Russian State Library in Moscow or the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg) or in Western libraries.

¹⁰¹ The conservative newspaper Новое время, for example, provided little coverage, mostly emphasizing the lack of significant progress, even on core issues. See: Вечерняя хроника, Новое время, 13 дек. 2012 (№ 13204).

the Special Commission on the Parish,¹⁰² a Special Commission on the Reform of Ecclesiastical Schools, and a complex of congresses and commissions on the inner mission (the Special Commission on the internal mission in 1908,¹⁰³ the Missionary Congress in Kiev in 1908,¹⁰⁴ and the Missionary Congress in Kazan¹⁰⁵ in 1909). The journals, proposals, and draft statutes that these commissions and congresses generated would jump start deliberations at the Church Council in 1917.

The third preparatory organ was the Pre-sobor Soviet (*Предсоборный совет*), established by a Synodal resolution on 29 April 1917 – simultaneously with the announcement of plans to convoke the long-deferred Sobor. The Soviet consisted of 60 formal members but later added another 33 participants, for a total of 93; the participants included 12 bishops (13 percent), 31 members of the white clergy (33 percent), and 50 laymen (54 percent) – roughly the same proportions as in the Pre-sobor Commission of 1906. The Pre-sobor Soviet convened from mid-June to late July, and its ten sections (*отделы*) dealt essentially with the same issues as the Commission of 1906 (with two significant additions: Section VII on church finances and Section IX on monasticism).¹⁰⁶ In the short span of approximately six weeks, it produced a “third redaction” of the pre-sobor deliberations, documentation, and draft proposals. Faced with the 15 August deadline set for the opening of the Church Council, the Pre-sobor Soviet functioned as a “main editorial commission,” endorsing, revising, and enhancing the documentation from earlier pre-sobor commission and committee.¹⁰⁷ But the Pre-sobor Soviet also drew on the products of other Synodal initiatives, such as the special commissions on the parish¹⁰⁸ and

¹⁰² See: А.Л. Беглов, Особое совещание для выработки проекта о православном приходе 1907 г., in: Вестник ПСТГУ, II: История Русской Православной Церкви, 2012, вып. 5 (48), 39–61.

¹⁰³ РГИА, ф. 796, оп. 190, г. 1909, отд. 6, ст. 3, д. 51, лл. 1–278; ф. 797, оп. 78, отд. 2, ст. 3, д. 54, лл. 1–27; ф. 797, оп. 80, отд. 2, ст. 3, д. 330, лл. 1–9; ф. 796, оп. 190, ч. 2, отд. 6, ст. 3, д. 51а, лл. 1–97.

¹⁰⁴ РГИА, ф. 796, оп. 190, отд. 6, ст. 3, д. 58, лл. 1–741.

¹⁰⁵ РГИА, ф. 796, оп. 190, г. 1909, д. 99b, лл. 1–320; Фирсов, Русская церковь, 401–405, F. McCarthy, The Kazan Missionary Congress, in: Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique 14 (1973) 308–332; H. Coleman, Defining Heresy: The Fourth Missionary Congress and the Problem of Cultural Power after 1905 in Russia, in: Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas NF 52 (2004) 70–91.

¹⁰⁶ For the journals and supportive material of the Predsobornyi soviet, see: Мраморнов, Документы, том 1, ч. 1–2.

¹⁰⁷ Мраморнов, Документы, том 1, ч. 1, 428.

¹⁰⁸ Мраморнов, Документы, том 1, ч. 1, 526. Perhaps because of the preoccupation with the issues of Church governance and Church-state relations, the Pre-sobor Soviet gave remarkably little attention to the parish question: that issue – by the summer of 1917 the central issue – occupied only five meetings over eleven days (15–26 June), with the relevant journals comprising only 15 pages in the printed text (526–541).

reform of ecclesiastical schools.¹⁰⁹ Significantly, the Pre-sobor Soviet also gave considerable attention to the resolutions of the All-Russian Congress of Clergy and Laity, a left-liberal conclave that met in the first half of June and articulated the views of priests, parishioners, and ethnic minorities (notably, Ukrainians and Rumanians, not just Georgians).¹¹⁰ By the conclusion of its work, the Pre-sobor Soviet had prepared a systematic collection of documents, research notes, and draft resolutions to facilitate the work of the Church Council that convened on 15 August 1917.

The intellectual capital thus amassed served to compensate for the dearth of administrative and financial resources available once the Church Council convened. As the Church and its administration (like the state) disintegrated, with its “governance capacity” rapidly disintegrating, the Council drew on this earlier complex of materials – which served as a kind of intellectual savings account. Despite all the hardships wrought by a failed state and economic collapse, exacerbated by Bolshevik antireligious repression, the Council managed – in 170 sessions, with plummeting attendance, eventually even without the requisite quorum – to review and promulgate what had been amassed in the preceding dozen years.

Conclusions

This article has suggested two main theses. First, without denying the Bolsheviks’ hostile intent, one should not overestimate their capacity in the first year of rule – a period characterized less as *Marxismus* and better as *Dekretismus*. Far more important in dictating the limits, and undermining the institutional capacity of the Church and Sobor, was the intra-Church crisis, structurally mounting over the last decades of the ancien régime and then exacerbated by the years of war and revolution. If the Sobor was underfunded and understaffed, it was because of problems that preceded the October Revolution. In that sense, one might do well to “de-bolshevize” accounts of the Church Council and pay more heed to the crisis in the Church itself and attribute less weight to the Bolsheviks’ limited power in its first phase. Second, if the Church faced profound institutional and financial crises, it also had accumulated significant intellectual capital – in the form of prodigious scholarship by the church intelligentsia that included an array of sophisticated research, voluminous publications, and active participation in the various pre-sobor organizations. All that, despite the institutional crisis of 1917, enabled the Sobor to address a plethora of critical issues and lay the foundations for a new church order.

¹⁰⁹ Мраморнов, Документы, том 1, ч. 2, 963.

¹¹⁰ Мраморнов, Документы, том 1, ч. 1, 441–450. The documents from this assembly are in NIOR RGB, f. 60.