SACRED STORIES

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN MODERN RUSSIA

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INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS
Bloomington and Indianapolis

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Written Confessions and the Construction of Sacred Narrative

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Confession has probably captured the imagination of more people, and been interpreted more broadly, than any sacrament in Christianity. Whether it is Jean-Jacques Rousseau writing his "letter to the world" or Protestant polemicists publishing scandalized penny tracts about what goes on between a priest and a woman at the sickbed or in the darkened booth, confession has become a symbol of both intimacy and revelation. Whether one interprets the term broadly, as a metaphor, or narrowly, in the sense of a religious sacrament, confession weighs heavy with connotations of dark secrets clutched closely to one's breast and only finally revealed to another human being who is standing in for God. Confession has been a staple of autobiography, a literary genre, and transformed nearly beyond recognition in the television talk show at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Despite these latest versions of "open" confessions, confession had become something secret after several centuries of Christianity.[1] And although ample numbers of penitentials—the lists of questions used by priests to those coming to them for confession—survive from different periods, and have served many historians as indicators of religious belief and practice, this source suffers from several obvious drawbacks.[2] First, penitentials are prescriptive, not descriptive. Just because a priest had a list of possible questions available does not mean that he stuck to the list or that the people he asked admitted to committing those sins. We have only one side of what was always a dialogue, and we cannot be sure even of that. Second, with the exceptions of confessions involving the mute or the deaf, confessions were oral, not drawn or written. They survived only in the memories of their participants. Finally, the confession was, by definition, secret. For all these reasons, whatever surviving traces of confession we have are necessarily one-sided and inconclusive at best.

Among the only exceptions to the silence of the penitents are the confessions sent to Father Ioann of Kronstadt (1829–1908), a charismatic Russian priest with a reputation for holiness.[3] In a particularly immediate way, they demonstrate the simultaneous internalization and appropriation of religious formulas. Even as people took part in a ritual that most expresses one's submission to the traditional authority of the Church—namely, the confession—they displayed a range of behavior and expression that argues against their biddability. These confessions show that while religion was a dominant force in the worldview of many Russians, its interpretation was more eclectic and personal than has been allowed previously. They illustrate the remarkable theological and liturgical literacy of some Russian Orthodox believers—and also the extent to which this literacy did or did not affect their behavior. The contrast between the confessions of women and men illuminates the extent to which gender could inform religious experience.

Above all, these confessions illustrate one of the central themes of this volume: the nature of narrative in relation to the construction of the sacred. The confession was supposed to follow a familiar script. And, indeed, the similarities in the confessions examined here show just how well people who confessed knew this "master narrative." On the other hand, the confessions also reveal an astonishing ability of their authors to make the template fit their own purposes. These confessions genuinely demonstrate that storytelling and narrative, however ritualized, allowed people to construct their own versions of the sacred, and impose their own vision on the master script.

The confessions sent to Father Ioann pose several methodological problems. Almost all are undated, making it difficult to hazard any assumptions about trends or changes over time. Geographic generalization is even more problematic, as only a few people included their address in the letter. Class identification is also complicated: with the obvious exceptions of women who write about the temptations they encounter as schoolteachers, house maids, or nuns, or such clues as writing paper of good quality, the most precise categories possible in most cases are "highly educated," "passable grammar," or "barely literate."

Quantitative analysis of the confessional letters is difficult as well because of the high degree of individual variation and the relatively small sample size—a total of 163 letters. This makes it hard to determine something as basic as whether the correspondents are typical Orthodox Christians or religious virtuosi, exceptional in every respect. Through a judicious comparison with confessional manuals, popular devotional literature, clerical accounts, and liturgical texts, however, it becomes easier to place these documents in their modern Russian context. Most important, however, is their uniqueness. Except for the recent scandalous taping of confessionals in Italy, until now most of our information

on confessions—whether Orthodox Christian or Roman Catholic—has been secondhand.[4] Simply put, the confessions discussed here are the only examples of contemporary religious confessions that exist, and provide the first concrete material about what was legally required of millions of Russian Orthodox Christians every year.[5] Approached imaginatively and carefully, these confessions can tell us more about religious experience in late imperial Russia.

Preliminary Observations

Any discussion of confession requires us to bear in mind several peculiarities of the Orthodox confession as a genre—the penitentials, the literature, the prayers, the language, and the ritual. The most obvious point is that the Orthodox Church does not have the anonymity of the Roman Catholic confessional. Rather than being separated from the priest by a barrier or from other parishioners by a booth, the confessor was visible and audible not only to the priest but often to others standing in line. Although the Orthodox were accustomed to the relative openness characterizing confession, their choosing to write Father Ioann rather than approach their parish priest suggests a desire for privacy quite apart from having the counsel or absolution of a holy man. "I am too ashamed to tell this to my parish priest" is a common motif in the confessional letters.[6]

There is, then, the matter of confessional formulas. The similarities in these confessions and the repetition of certain formulas clearly indicate that those raised as Orthodox Christians were trained in how to confess. How, then, can one determine how much of the expressed is conventional and how much is personal (albeit using conventional language)? The issue of standardization would have become increasingly prevalent during the nineteenth century, when the Orthodox Church hierarchy, as part of a campaign to educate the laypeople as to their responsibilities (particularly in cities, where it was feared they might lose the moorings of tradition provided by the village), began to circulate the "standard" confession of St. Dimitrii of Rostov so people would have a model against which to measure their lives.[7] The literate pious also had at their disposal a daily confession, which followed the daily evening prayers in the prayer book, reminding them of the general categories of sin.[8] And, in fact, many sins are not specific to class or gender: 90 percent of the writers confess to pride, envy, hatred, anger, despair, miserliness, and bearing a grudge (*zlopamiatstvo*).[9] In a sense, the opposition between conventional and personal is moot. The extent to which conventions influenced the confession itself reveals their interpenetration.

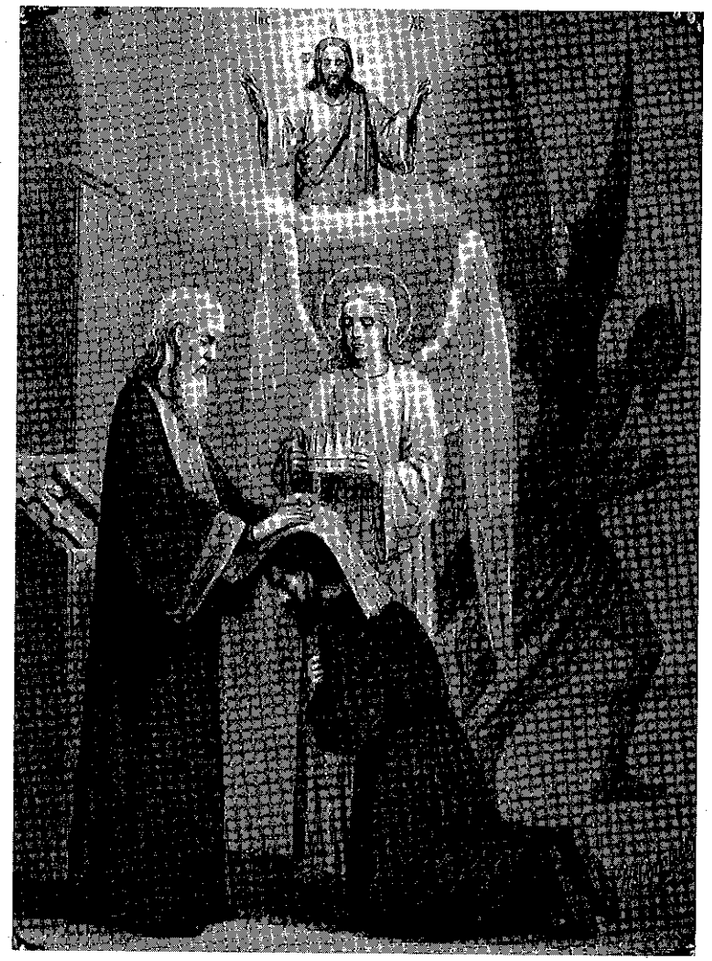

Figure 4.1. "The Devil Flees as the Angel Crowns Penitence." Nineteenth-century engraving. *Spiritual Instructions to the Penitent* (Moscow, 1901).

With these caveats, quantification is useful in noting a basic gender difference. Of the163 letters, 121 came from women and 34 from men (8 letters were either from couples writing as a unit or gender could not be determined). That more women than men wrote their confessions can be attributed to various factors: women were generally more religiously observant; they saw confession as a more congenial religious genre; they were more likely to seek out a celebrated charismatic healer; and they were more apt to put their confessions in writing.

Let us approach each issue in turn. The feminization of piety has been discussed in various historical contexts, but still lacking are the exhaustive local studies necessary to propose such a paradigm for Russia.[10] We can say, however, that, based on both the confessions and other letters sent to Father Ioann, women were indeed more likely to seek out a charismatic priestly figure who emphasized an emotional conversion and a less perfunctory, formal sacramental life—and also provided emotional and practical help. Whether men's religious needs and desires in late imperial Russia were better served in other ways than confession, or whether men were less observant, is not possible to determine based on this sample.

As to whether the confession was a religious genre more congenial to women, there is no evidence to suggest that, before the possibility of visiting Father Ioann or writing him, women confessed their sins with any more enthusiasm or frequency than their male relatives. On the basis of guides for priests concerning confession, such as S. V. Bulgakov's *Nastol'naia Kniga,* it was apparently difficult just to persuade anyone to come more than the requisite once a year.[11] Some priests noted a slightly greater tendency toward compunction on the part of women but no greater frequency.[12] The higher proportion of women writing their confessions to Father Ioann thus appears to have more to do with Father Ioann himself than with confession as a form of religiosity.

But that the confessions were *written* must not pass unnoticed. It is possible, for example, that an equal or perhaps even higher percentage of men than women personally sought out Father Ioann.[13] Crucial here is the question of physical access to Father Ioann, which has two aspects. First, more areas of an Orthodox Church are open to men than to women: virtually any male may pass behind the doors of the iconostasis and enter the altar; almost no laywoman, however holy, may do so. For this reason, the eyewitness accounts of men, ranging from visiting students to lawyers to fellow clergy, describing their encounters with Father Ioann in the altar, safe from the press of the crowds and in relative privacy and comfort, obviously have no female counterparts.[14] Moreover, the physical pressure of people wishing to see and touch Father Ioann often meant that only the strongest and most physically importunate triumphed; some women, particularly desperate to see Father Ioann, were reportedly run over by the wheels of his carriage.[15] On May 17, 1900, during an extraordinarily crowded service in St. Andrew's Cathedral, one woman was crushed to death.[16] Women may therefore have written their confessions to Father Ioann because it was physically difficult to speak to him in person. Finally, almost all available

evidence suggests that men were more likely to be literate than women, so it was not their literacy that drove more women than men to write to Father Ioann.[17] The marked differences in the confessions of women and men are examined in a later section of this essay, but the differences lie less in the kinds of sins mentioned (with obvious exceptions such as going to church while menstruating or having had an abortion) than in the language used to describe those sins. Here I concentrate on elements common to most confessions, on class differences, and, finally, on variations according to gender.

Common Elements

A particularly Orthodox theme is the relation to images, particularly icons. Although this is more characteristic of the less educated, it occurs among the upper classes as well. What the writers perceive as blasphemy actually suggests the important role the images had in their lives. Such actions as cursing, fearing, or defacing images reveal their very potency. Any tension or resentment people felt in their relationship with the divine often expressed itself in direct, physical action. Even an educated and repentant ex-Tolstoyan man was prone to attach an importance to external symbols and their overt defilement. He confesses that,

> I laughed at and abused God's temple, the service, and all religious actions such as prayer and performance of the sacraments, regarding this as delusion on the part of the people.
> I mocked holy books.
> I violated icons.
> I hammered a metal cross into my axe instead of a wedge.
> I spat Holy Communion out of my mouth.
> I shot my revolver at a photo-postcard of you.[18]

Because this man and others like him ascribe their actions to the influence of Lev Tolstoy, such explicit evidence of the connection between Tolstoy's teachings and the violation of revered Orthodox symbols may well have contributed to Father Ioann's animosity toward the novelist. More typical incidents of "blasphemy," however, are those from this peasant woman:

> I was careless toward icons, I venerated the icons while menstruating, I looked closely into icons, I stand disrespectfully in church and laugh, curse, and am adulterously attracted to every man I see.[19]

If the sins were grave enough, and had never been confessed (even if committed during childhood), they were added:

> I found an image of the Savior in a prayer book, and I began to prick it with a needle although I did not know for sure that this was the Lord but my soul ached when I did this and some invisible force made me do this, I could not restrain myself, I was eight years old.[20]

Nor was blasphemy the exclusive preserve of the uneducated. One educated young woman describes her extreme blasphemy as an affliction as well as a sin:

> I am in dismay about my sin, which I could not bring myself to tell to our spiritual father. I have tried to fight it, but nothing helps. When I am in church I constantly have bad thoughts about communion; or when I venerate an image I want to spit at it. Others pray to God; I have ideas about praying to Satan or to a joker. I envision the Chalice or icons fouled in a bad place.[21] I wish God would at least show me why I am afflicted with such a harsh sin.[22]

Sexual Mores

The Russian Orthodox Church strictly limited the periods during which married people could engage in sexual relations. A couple was prohibited from relations on Saturdays and Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays, holidays and the eves of holidays, all the fasts (seven weeks before Easter, six weeks before Christmas, two weeks before the Dormition, and a variable amount of time—from whenever Trinity Sunday fell to June 29—for the apostles Peter and Paul).[23] Thus roughly two-thirds of the year was off-limits to *married* people; *unmarried* people, who were supposed to abstain year-round, felt the burden of their disobedience even more strongly if it fell during a proscribed period.

The difficulty people had in complying with these strictures emerges clearly in their confessions, in which "breaking the fast" in this sense was nearly as common as slander and drunkenness. Educated people were slightly less likely than those who were less educated to confess breaching these restrictions (although it is not clear whether this is because the former regarded such lapses as less sinful, did not know of the prohibitions, or were more conscientious). Most of the people who sent their confessions to Father Ioann, however, took holidays seriously. One woman wrote:

> My mind was occupied only with fornication, *I did not respect holidays,* everyone went off to church while I pretended to be sick so that I could stay home for the sake of fornication. . . . Then I got married. My husband

> was originally like a human being, but I made an animal out of him, even worse than an animal. He imitated me in everything, and I knew no fear, not on holidays and not of communion, we would fornicate immediately *after receiving the Holy Mysteries and on the eve of receiving communion and on Easter and on Annunciation.* In a word, there was no fear of God.[24]

A similar note occurs in the confession of a woman named Vasilisa:

> I sinned against God and before you, Father Sergiev, I committed a fleshly sin with my *kum*[25] and I did not keep the feasts, neither with my *kum* nor with my husband.[26]

The identification of sexual relations with one's spouse on holidays with fornication is evident in the confession of a woman who, after describing how she and her husband "defiled themselves with fornication" on Trinity Sunday, adds that "besides my husband, I fornicated with a pilgrim."[27] And others confessed:

> When I lived with my husband I did not honor God's holy days, defiling them with fornication, even great feasts such as Trinity Sunday and the Protection of the Mother of God [*Pokrov*], I did not honor the Mother of God, and the Bright Resurrection of our Lord I did not keep in purity . . .[28]
>
> . . . On the holiday of the Protection of the Mother of God I engaged in fornication with a man in church, and then went up like to a dog to be anointed with holy oil; I wonder at God's Mercy, how did the Lord not strike me down at that moment . . .[29]
>
> . . . I tempted an administrator on Great and Holy Saturday [the eve of Easter] before the late liturgy, then I went to the neighbors' to get some milk and became completely deaf and then remembered that I had sinned, that people do not even eat bread on a day like this; then, at that very minute, the bells began to ring for the liturgy, and then I guessed how grievously I had sinned. Then once when three holidays fell on one day—Sunday and St. Nicholas and Isaiah[30]—I fornicated during early liturgy and crawled through a window to [meet] an officer.[31]

Thus holidays were not merely occasions when religious events were abstractly commemorated but were palpable presences in the lives of those who confessed to Father Ioann, requiring physical as well as spiritual observance.

The notion of lust (*blud*) as desire (*pokhot', vozhdelenie*) is strikingly rare in the confessions. Instead, there are many variations of the multifarious *blud.* Dictionaries render this as "lechery" or "fornication" but, as the confessions show, its meaning was more fluid and encompassed a greater range of activity than either definition might suggest. The people's use of this term rather than

pokhot' or *vozhdelenie* confirms Eve Levin's suggestion regarding an earlier historical period that the Russian Orthodox Church cared relatively little about what its members *thought* sexually; it was concerned, instead, with what they actually *did.* Still, the easy use of the term *blud* suggests that sometimes individuals themselves identified thought with action.

Their confusion, perhaps deliberate, is not surprising. Many Orthodox prayers, including those recited before having Communion, routinely have the penitent refer to him- or herself as "a fornicator," or to ask God to "cleanse me as thou didst cleanse the adulteress," whether or not he or she has engaged in sexual thought or activity. Fornication is a metaphor for the general, chronic spiritual impurity of physical beings. (Note that angels, to underscore their distinction from humans, are referred to as *bodiless* hosts). The Russian term for the prodigal son is *bludnyi syn.* Nor could the linguistic connection of the verb *bludit'sia* to such words as *zabluzhdat'sia* (to err, to be mistaken) or *zabludit'sia* (to lose one's way, to get lost) have encouraged a rigorously limited use of the verb. Can one really believe a maid from Yaroslavl, for example, when she writes that she "fornicates every minute of every day"[32]—particularly given that she also finds time to steal food from her employers, sing and dance with soldiers in the tavern, and gossip with the other servants?

Another confession from a woman named Minodora suggests the confusion that might emerge:

> Once I sinned against Sunday, spending the whole night in drunkenness, and then drank also with the husbands of others. Then I sensed during the reading of the Gospels[33] that *this means adultery,* and now my heart aches over my sins and with tears I beg you, sweet Father, please pray to my [guardian] angel.[34]

Thus it is exceedingly difficult to generalize about sexual mores based on these confessions. Perhaps the only element one can identify with certainty is the overwhelmingly negative perception of sexual activity, in whatever form. Nowhere in the confessions is there any notion of sex as a benign or even favorable force to channel and even enjoy; men and women alike consider it a fundamental impurity that should be uprooted, or at least struggled against. The perception of sexual activity as unclean emerges from the requirement of washing oneself after sexual relations and before entering a church; hence one woman appears to refer to the physical, rather than spiritual, aspects of impurity, when she mentions that she "dared to approach the Holy Chalice dirty after a man, and, when, in a woman's condition [e.g., during menstruation], often also approached dirty and venerated the holy icons and the cross."[35]

While there is a high degree of specificity, as when one woman writes that she "fornicated with children of the female sex," there is little evidence in the confessions to suggest that—in contrast with Church teaching—the people who wrote regarded sexual activity with children or adults of the same sex as more or less sinful than with those of the opposite sex.[36] The less educated virtually never use such terms as "unnatural," as if they view sexual activity itself as unnatural or at least always sinful. Although the sinfulness of homosexual activity is acknowledged, these confessors apparently do not view it as substantially or inherently worse than illicit heterosexual activity. Consider the language this woman uses regarding her attraction to a girl:

> Please save me from the fornicating enemy and from the sin of Sodom. Batiushka [Father] dear, I love one girl and, if I touch her, the flames of Hades and impurity burn me . . . I wish to be rid of this sin and I want to love with pure, divine love.[37]

While this woman recognizes that her attraction to the girl is sinful, her language is no different than that used by women attracted to men, or men attracted to women. The fact of sexual attraction and activity is the sin, not its object. Another woman, however, expresses an explicit distaste towards attraction between women when she writes of her own attraction for "another maiden":

> I have fallen in love passionately with her; I have fallen into the sin of adultery.[38] I sinned with her through passionate kisses and sinful glances, we satisfied our desires in this way during the time of the Divine Liturgy and at night [and] during your mass confession.[39] Even during Great Lent I spent time with her during your service and during communion when everyone was repenting, I was sinning . . . I had condemned others, saying how could a maiden love another maiden and for my condemnation I fell into the same sin.[40]

Most interesting is that this woman believes that harshly judging or condemning others is worse than any sin for which one might judge them: she believes she was punished with a lesbian attraction specifically because she had condemned it.

There is one area, however, where the object of one's desire matters a great deal. The taboo on sexual relations with either blood or spiritual kinfolk has already been noted. The villagers were clearly aware of it, regularly specifying degrees of relation. This would appear to be part of a general tendency by the less educated to be as specific as possible in detailing their sins (and a countervailing tendency by the more educated to generalize).

Communion

A similar concern with the concrete emerges in the attitude toward communion. Father Ioann's wish to transform the relation of his flock to the Eucharist assumes a new urgency in the context of these letters. While they show profound reverence toward the sacrament, this reverence tends all too easily to slide into literality and great fear.[41] The references to communion in the letters of both the educated and the less educated are striking in their physicality and in the importance attached to the prescriptions surrounding the sacrament. The letters to Father Ioann show that communion, despite being a legal requirement, was far from a formal, empty, or abstract action but was charged with literal, potent significance for many people from all social groups.[42]

One man confessed, for example, that occasionally he had eaten before communion.[43] One educated woman bewailed her distraction and lack of reverence at communion:

> How carelessly, how idly, with what thoughts and with a heart in what a state did I partake of the Holy Mysteries![44]

Such sentiments suggest that communion was seen as a state requiring all one's concentration and dedication. But the exalted emphasis placed on communion could lead to rebelliousness and questioning. Some who wrote Father Ioann, for example, shared his occasional Eucharistic doubts. An educated woman described such an occurrence:

> Having partaken of the Holy Body of Christ, I bit it apart to taste it specifically; I wanted to determine whether this was really Body and not bread, and I also had the effrontery to think, well, if this is not what it is, then go ahead, God, punish me right here where I stand, and if you do not punish me, then it means that You do not even exist, and with these thoughts I left the church and did not go to communion or pray at all for thirteen years.[45]

Whereas the educated tended to confess such "intellectual" sins of doubt or distraction toward the Eucharist, people of the lower class who wrote Father Ioann reported communion-related sins that were almost exclusively physical and external, for example, whether one had previously fasted and abstained from sexual relations or, at most, whether one had approached in a state of due piety. Eating non-Lenten food was also seen as an "unlawful" transgression and a defamation of the sacrament, which was only supposed to enter a body that had been purified through fasting. Even more serious were acts of explicit physical defamation, even accidental ones. Both laity and clergy had a keen

sense of the holiness of the Eucharistic elements and feared "defiling" them in any way. This fear was fostered by elaborate restrictions such as specifying that any garments on which infants might have coughed up communion be burned; if any of it fell on the floor, the carpet or floorboards were to be either scrubbed clean or burned as well.[46] In such a climate, it is not surprising that one person confessed, "I dropped part of the Holy Gifts out of my mouth."[47] Another man described the process of guilt in greater detail:

> I saw how after communion my brother spat it out and I could see the holy blood and body of the Lord, and I shrank from picking it up. I do not remember how old I was but for some reason I also crumbled the Holy Mysteries on the floor.[48]

Partaking of communion in an unworthy state was particularly sinful if that state involved alcohol. One villager confessed:

> Once I had communion while I had a hangover, I partook of the Holy Mysteries without knowing what I was doing: I thought it was *prosphora* and wine, nothing more.[49]

Partaking of communion had effects that extended beyond the short term. The prayers that were read after communion enjoined one to spend the remainder of the day "in sobriety and continence and speaking as little as possible, so that on that day one would honorably contain within oneself the received Christ."[50] Based on the confessions sent to Father Ioann, some people did feel a sense of the divine dwelling within them, if only temporarily. Thus succumbing to temptation soon after having had communion was seen as substantially worse than if one's communion had taken place some time ago. One woman rebuked herself—and Father Ioann—on just such an occasion:

> You gave me communion, Batiushka, and said that the Lord would extinguish all my passions, and when I went to bed the night of the day I had communion the enemy attacked me so fiercely that by morning I fornicated with myself.[51]

Class Differences

Class differences occasionally emerge in predictable vices. Highly educated people mention idleness and overeating much more frequently than the barely literate, for example.[52] But class differences emerge most palpably in the tone of the confession. Educated women are more inclined to treat their confessions as psychological self-analyses, although they continue to use religious language to describe their states, whereas the less educated tend to accept unambiguously

the definitions of the Orthodox Church, calling a sin (in the definition of the Church) a sin and to describe actions committed in as much detail as possible. Better-educated women express their sins in milder terms than their less-educated counterparts. Although the following woman mentions envy, deceit, judging, breaking the fasts, and taking offense in the same language peasant women do, for example, she then changes her tone. The use of the qualifiers "not always" or "sometimes" is also more characteristic of the better educated:

> In prayer I have *tended* to veer toward quantity rather than quality; I *rarely* examine myself spiritually; *sometimes* I have spiritual pride and *do not always* struggle against it . . . I *do not always* sympathize with the poor or with my neighbors . . . I laughed, I was *occasionally* unrestrained in food and drink . . .[53] I was enthusiastic about music and worldly pleasures, I carried out my whims; I was *not always* fair with the servants.[54]

Other concerns and expressions, such as being proud of one's learning or lacking simplicity of heart, are also characteristic of the educated. The educated women who wrote Father Ioann consistently refer to their coldness, or stoniness, which is nearly absent in the confessions of the less educated. The less educated, by contrast, concentrate less on their inner lives and more on their actions. Less-educated men and women alike regarded their sources of amusement as sinful activities, which hardly occurs in the confessions of the educated. They consistently and duly confessed going dancing, singing songs, telling tales, clapping hands while playing games, and going to the theater or masquerades.[55]

On first glance it would appear that any pleasure people took in popular culture was mixed: they appear to have felt guilty about *all* non-Church culture, however universal it was among their contemporaries. One must remember, however, that the clergy had inveighed against popular customs, particularly those accompanying such feasts as Christmas and Theophany, practically since the introduction of Christianity to Russia. While their audience clearly understood their message, as is evident from the dutiful reporting of all forms of revelry in confessions, the clergy's lack of success in changing the behavior of their parishioners is also evident: their sermons inveigh against the same customs in the same terms in the sixteenth and the early twentieth centuries.[56] On the basis of the confessions to Father Ioann, it seems as if the clergy and the people had reached a tacit understanding in which the clergy would accept the behavior of the people as long as the people accepted the judgment of that behavior by the clergy. Different women wrote:

> I am a universal adulteress, in my youth I went to fairs, drank wine and all kinds of drinks with all the men, I sang all kinds of bad songs . . . and in the theaters and at fairs I watched all kinds of comedies with delight . . .[57]

> . . . When I was a nanny in Petrov there was a tavern beneath us and I would go there to amuse myself, to listen to dances and songs, this was a great consolation to me . . .[58]
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> . . . I allowed myself to carouse and have a good time . . . now however the Lord in his mercy has visited me with sorrows, sicknesses . . . I thank the Lord that he has visited me with these sicknesses because of my cursed sins.[59]

Other sins specific to the less educated include cursing the animals and the weather (especially the wind). Attempting to predict the weather is also regarded as sinful.[60] They are more prone to stealing, itemizing all the items: "knives, forks, threads, needles, scissors, linen, featherbeds, a pillow, and one hen which I sold to buy vodka."[61] The less educated also mention more frequently such physical sins as not keeping the fasts or eating holy bread after having eaten ordinary food (holy water and bread that had been blessed in church was supposed to be the first food one ate in the morning, when one was still pure from the night's fast and had not sullied oneself with unsanctified food). The opinion that one should wear one's best clothes to church, or at least "decent" ones, was shared by all classes, but only the poorer people confessed going to church dirty or not going to communion for lack of "decent clothing."

Class differences emerge most palpably, however, in relation to food. The educated writers hardly mention it, while detailed references to stealing food, eating more than one's share, and even the monastic sin of "eating in secret," which acquires a practical meaning in large, poor families unanticipated by the desert fathers, are a staple of the letters from the less educated.[62] One woman writes:

> I have no love at all, when Mother would leave me my little brother to watch I would take his food and eat it or give him the worst bits which he could not eat and this boy died, maybe because of me . . . I will eat something secretly and Mother will ask me about it and I lie and so irritated my mother that she begged God to die rather than to continue to suffer at the hands of her children, but she could not break my stubbornness, and all this through eating in secret [*tainoiadenie*] . . . When our house burned down and one poor little widow took us in for a while, when she went out begging I took the best bits of food from her too.[63]

Houseservants had additional temptations:

> I constantly stole food from my masters and ate secretly to satiety, and also at another employment I stole and ate secretly, I ate to fill . . . I cooked up pastry and licked up half of it in secret . . . When I lived at the Mazaevs', I would steal sweetmeats from the shops and secretly bake them for myself . . . During the fasts I would steal meat and milk and eat them, I engaged in *chrevobesie*.[64]

Nevertheless, some confessions suggest convincingly the caution one must exercise in attempting to attribute class levels. The following account, from a woman who was apparently a merchant or a shopkeeper, illustrates the mixture of worldliness, piety, superstition, and bad grammar that hardly lends itself to easy categorization:

> I went to my marriage wreath while menstruating, defiled myself with my husband . . . I cast spells . . . I do not have children.[65] We defile Sundays and holidays, do not keep the fasts, I took a false oath, I acted evilly in court, I bought myself off . . . I made the help work on Sundays,[66] I accepted stolen goods and made out false promissory notes . . . I went to wizards and to doctors,[67] I believed in the devil and not in God . . . The world has never seen such an adulteress until me, I should not even look up at heaven . . . I took interest from the poor . . . I cannot struggle against sleep the moment I pick up a holy book or stand to prayer.[68] . . . Dear spiritual father, tell me how to struggle against the devil; every night he arouses my desires in my sleep, I cannot save myself.[69]

Barely literate women in particular show an astounding familiarity with religious language. They freely cite phrases from the Psalms, the Gospels, the lives of the saints, and the rituals of the Orthodox Church. In the middle of describing how she gossiped with the maid and the cook, a nanny will sigh, "O Lord, my sins are greater than the sands of the sea and the earth."[70] Another woman quotes Psalm 50 (it is read frequently during Orthodox services and is one people would have been likely to know by heart) so casually one might think she meant it literally: "I was conceived in iniquity and in sins did my mother bear me."[71] Another woman writes, "Like the fruitless fig tree, like the foolish virgins, I do not have the oil of good deeds, I will be left outside the doors of the heavenly bridal chamber."[72] They compare themselves to the saints using the analogies standard for contemporary sermons, saying, "I sinned for many years but offer little repentance, while the saints cried their whole lives over one single sin."[73] The extent to which the psalms in particular were part of many people's ordinary language is evident from the ease with which they interpolate them into the rest of their text:

> In my heart I have the root of all evil, it is like an overgrown swamp, wherein are innumerable things creeping, both small and great beasts.[74]

Curses, Spells, and Incantations

Curses invoking the name of God, the larger category in which blasphemy falls, appear to have been a standard feature of lower-class, especially peasant, life. (It seems to vanish when peasants move to cities.) Why is it omnipresent there and virtually absent among the more educated?[75] The most likely reason may have been the powerlessness of the lower classes to alter their circumstances. The strict limits placed on the peasants' lives, the lack of opportunity to significantly alter their circumstances (particularly in the case of women), created a state of nearly constant anger and frustration. If there was little one could do to address the direct causes of one's rage, one had to vent it nonetheless. Curses and imprecations were among the only ways available to challenge authority (parents, husbands, priests) or to rail at oppressive circumstances (families generally, domestic animals, the elements, children). Just as blasphemy was viewed as rebellion against a God that could not be thrown off,[76] so, too, was cursing seen as rebellion against various elements of a life that could not be thrown off. It would be mistaken, however, to regard cursing someone as a harmless way of venting one's spleen. As the confessions to Father Ioann show, cursing was regarded as a potent action with potentially dire consequences:

> Once in anger I said to my husband, "I could just stab you—" this was not said from the heart, but still I killed him with these words,[77] for he was consumptive . . . After these words of mine he fell sick and died without Christian consolations, without communion or extreme unction.[78]

Invoking the Devil was as dangerous as cursing God: "I said 'Devil's place,' I called the demon to sleep . . . I reviled God."[79]

The relation between parent and child, and especially between mother and child, was the most susceptible to cursing and the most fraught with evil consequences. The high degree of formalized respect and filial piety that was supposed to characterize parent-child relations was evidently a source of great strain for both sides. One tended to curse those who were the closest at hand. Mothers with large extended families and visiting relatives particularly felt the tension. One hapless woman wrote:

> Father Ioann, mentor of all sinners, please pray for my sins. I had six children, the youngest was eight weeks old and then, during Big Lent, when my husband's parents were here, I sinned against Clean Thursday like this: I said, "Oh, I wish at least half of you would just die!"—That night we went to sleep, my husband first, me next, then the little child, and then the rest of the family. When we woke during the night, the child, who had been completely healthy, was not alive. Then I felt such sorrow and grief in my heart.[80]

A similar sense of being trapped by one's family and circumstances emerges in another woman's confession to Father Ioann:

> I cursed my children, saying, "I wish you did not exist," and the Lord heard my prayer, my children Vasili and Anna climbed up onto the stove and never got off, they died at twelve o'clock . . . I was also injured during a fire as a result of which my arms and legs go into spasms . . . Please forgive me, help me, and absolve me.[81]

This confession is striking for its terseness. There is no emotion or any reference to guilt, often considered superfluous. Repentance appears to be implied in the very act of confessing. The writer is interested in release and absolution. She states the facts of the case plainly, without embellishment. Notice, however, the implied link between the injury from the fire and the sins described before it: the injury from the fire is punishment for her sins—hence the need for absolution from a holy man before she can ask for healing.

The casting of spells, as an explicitly magical activity, was regarded as essentially different from cursing. Cursing was done in the heat of the moment and was usually a response to a chronic, rather than particular, affliction; using the tools and methods of male and female witches was premeditated and aimed at a specific result, whether injuring someone's livestock or winning someone's love. Priests, moreover, were particularly concerned with whether people had consulted wizards (*volkhvy*), fortune-tellers or "women repugnant to God" (*baby bogomerzkiia*) and routinely inquired into such activity during confession.[82] People sending in their confessions to Father Ioann would thus have anticipated such queries and addressed them in advance:

> People practiced sorcery for me and I gave them money for this, eleven rubles, and when he was conjuring, the wizard placed seals on my back and on my chest. Then I went to a sorceress who read cards . . .[83]
>
> . . . I spat in what people were to drink so that men would love me, I washed my sick sister with water from a corpse . . .[84]
>
> . . . I foretold the future using cards, I went to soothsayers.[85]

The line between magic and the holy may have been strictly drawn—the writers always sought to distinguish between the two and called them by their respective names—but they coexisted all the same. After describing the sorcery above, for example, the same woman writes that "after all these sins I went to see one *starets* [elder] and he clapped his hands over [my] naked body and said that after this I would not sin any more."[86]

Religious acts could be "inverted," thus summoning the reverse effect. A conventional act of piety was to write down the names of the living or the dead whom one wished the priest to commemorate during the liturgy and pass the list to the altar. In an attempt to do harm to someone still alive, people would include that person on the list of those reposed; one woman did so to make the man she sought love her and pine for her.[87]

Gender Variations

As suggested above, both sexes have most sins in common, but the thirty-four men were more likely than women to repent for drinking, working on holidays, laziness, showing disrespect for or cursing parents and priests, playing cards, and, of course, beating their wives. A higher proportion of men confessed to having venereal disease. One wrote, "I sinned and have been sick with an impure disease from that sin for three years. Doctors cannot help me, only God can; I promise to live by the commandments; please pray for me."[88] Men were also more likely to fear that their souls would perish because they would be driven to suicide.[89]

By contrast, the women who sent their confessions to Father Ioann appear to have internalized the ideas and self-excoriations contained in the standard prayers before communion—particularly the assumption that one is guilty of every sin in existence and more sinful than any other creature—more than the men. One of these, the prayer by Simeon Metaphrastes with its exhaustive litany of wrongs committed and extravagant bemoaning of one's wretched state, reinforced the sense of all-pervading culpability. Such expressions as "What evil have I not committed?" were more than rhetorical; they were internalized and accepted as literal truth by those who read them. The prayer stated, among other things:

> See, Oh Lord, my humility, and forgive all my sins! See how my transgressions have increased more than the hairs of my head. For what evil have I not committed? What sin have I not wrought? What evil have I not imagined within my soul? *I have done the deeds as well:* fornication, adultery, pride, blasphemy, idle talk, unseemly laughter . . . [list of sins continues for a page]. I have defiled my *every* sense and member and was the devil's worker in *all* ways.[90]

Notably one did not have to be literate to be acquainted with such prayers. Priests in many churches regularly assigned a person to read the prayers before communion aloud to fill in the time when the priests took communion at the altar or while parishioners were waiting in large numbers for confession.[91]

Thus people who could not read the prayers in private could still absorb them. Although the prayers themselves are not gender-specific, it was mostly women who echoed them in their letters to Father Ioann, constantly exclaiming, as one woman did, "Is there another such damned, lawless, adulteress on earth as I?"[92] Another woman wrote:

> I crave to be the slave of God, I implore [Him, you] to allow me to be among the number of His children, to accept me as a sheep of his flock . . . I have not had men in my life, but I have sinned against the Lord more than all the rest of the world.[93]

Another educated woman used even more extreme language:

> I am a woman hyena, as I have no love. I am a human animal, attempting to take my own life—my life, which others have so carefully sought to preserve. . . . I am the worst sinner from the creation of the world: I have had no thoughts of God, of sin, of eternity, etc. I am a universal criminal: mother killer, wife killer, the killer of a completely normal, healthy woman, a despairing suicide, the breaker of every word of the Gospels.[94]

Women regularly mention attempting to abort their children or kill them after they are born. Shame is cited as a reason more often than economic problems. Sometimes their attempts to rationalize their actions before Father Ioann and God were quite elaborate:

> It seemed to me that I had forfeited my innocence and I was afraid of rebuke and I asked the Lord if it would be better if I had a dead child, only not to be rebuked, but I did not know what the lot of these dead children was[95] and so I vowed to go to Pochaev or to send ten rubles to the Mother of God anything only to be free of rebuke and there was a miracle of God over me: the Sovereign Mistress saved me from disgrace, and the child was stillborn.[96] Perhaps it might have been possible to revive him,[97] but his nose was flattened; in a word, it was an ugly nose and so I did not attempt to revive him, thinking that they would all laugh at him anyway.[98]

Most striking is that none of the women expresses concern at her lack of knowledge of the Orthodox faith, whereas it is a recurrent concern of the few men who sent their confessions to Father Ioann. One man who repents for cursing his children, eating before communion, not praying or going to church on Sundays and holidays, and earning his mother's curses closes with the words, "Also, dear Batiushka, please pray to God and bless me a sinner so that God would grant me to understand Divine reading and Divine reading in God's temple."[99]

The following letter from Semën, Prince Shcherbatov's cook, is particularly eloquent in expressing the desire for understanding:

March 15, 1908

Confession.

Today I visited you, Batiushka, and received your blessing to send you a written confession.[100] I do not sense any particular or grievous sins in me besides the usual human ones.[101] But I do have a grievous sin, which is that I do not know how to pray consciously and with profound faith.

If my parents taught me from childhood to go to church frequently and to recite my prayers, they were still not able to do so in such a way that I would continue to go now.[102] They never even explained to me what our Orthodox faith actually is, and I still do not know now. They go to church and pray fervently; whereas I—if I go at all—then I mostly listen to the singing, look at the ceremony, but I am utterly far from the prayer I see in others, my thoughts literally wander, I become offended at myself, but I cannot do anything with myself to chase away these thoughts and to pray like everyone else.

And so to go to church is to sin all the more. Not to go is to earn the imprecations of my parents and to be some kind of an unbelieving idol. Which is also bad and sinful. I decided to come to you, Batiushka, to confession, to acknowledge this sin, and to ask you to teach me how to pray the way every religious Orthodox person ought to pray . . .

I want to believe and to pray, but not according to tradition or out of decency, but consciously, with profound understanding, and with an open soul.[103] When my comrades and acquaintances teach me to believe in some new teachings of Tolstoy or others, I would like to be able not only to object to their arguments but bring them to reason as well.

The sinner Semën, the cook of Kn. Shcherbatov.

I fast and have Communion each year.[104]

These confessions show that, although most sinners shared many qualities that illuminated common attitudes, nevertheless differences regarding class and gender persisted. People who wrote their confessions, moreover, varied greatly when it came to the "master narrative" of the oral confession which they clearly knew very well. The individuality of the themes they chose to emphasize, the sins they felt they needed to mention, the way they wrote their stories—all this suggests that the confession, far from being an externally imposed form of control hostile critics felt it to be, could also be a way for people to rethink both their lives and their life stories.

But this happy discovery is less surprising than the very existence of these confessions. In fact, the presence of the confessions in Father Ioann's archive

poses a delicate pastoral question. Written confessions were discouraged in Orthodox practice unless they served as a supplement to a conventional spoken confession. Did written confessions such as these serve as an occasional supplement to the mass confessions Father Ioann instituted? Did they remove the unease people may have felt that perhaps the depth of their sins prevented them from receiving absolution along with everyone else at St. Andrew's in Kronstadt? Were the written confessions simply a function of geographical distance that made it impossible for confessors to travel? And if the confessors were not absolved, and if their aim was not absolution but counsel, then can these confessions even be classified as such?

The only case where late-nineteenth-century Russian pastoral practice had fully approved the use of a written confession was when the confessor was a literate deaf mute who would arrive in church and present the priest with his list of sins.[105] In this case, however, the priest was supposed to burn the written confession in front of the confessor, both to soothe the person's conscience and to avoid the possibility that the confession would fall into someone else's hands. The latter precaution reinforced the emphasis on the secrecy of the confessional, which was constantly reiterated in pastoral practice.[106]

Why did Father Ioann not destroy the confessions he received once he answered them? (The few that could be dated to 1898 remained in his possession for as long as ten years). Whether he used them as a reference or kept them as a reminder of the extent and poignancy of human frailty or simply filed away everything automatically without ever having the chance to go through the files to destroy them remains unknown. He never referred to the confessions in his diaries nor, apparently, in his conversations with those who set down their reminiscences, so one may only guess at his motives. Whatever the motives were, they have made it possible for us to know something of the contents of the hearts and minds of the people in late imperial Russia who would approach a parish priest—albeit a most unusual one—and to know something of what they wished to unburden.

Notes

1. For analyses contemporary with the confessions discussed in this paper, see S. I. Smirnov, *Dukhovnyi otets v drevnei vostochnoi tserkvi. Istoriia dukhovnichestva na vostokie* (Sergiev Posad, 1906); and A. I. Almazov, *Tainaia ispoved' v pravoslavnoi vostochnoi tserkvi: opyt vneshnei istorii*, 3 vols. (Odessa, 1894–1895).

2. The most subtle and imaginative treatment of Orthodox penitentials remains N. Suvorov, "Veroiatnyi sostav drevneishago ispovednago i pokaiannago ustava v vostochnoi tserkvi," *Vizantiiskii vremennik* 8 (1901): 357–434; 9 (1901): 378–417. Eve Levin has attempted to extrapolate conclusions for behavior on the basis of confessional manuals used by priests in *Sex and Society in the World of the Orthodox Slavs, 900–1700* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991). Gregory L. Freeze has analyzed the potential of the confession as a means of enforcing discipline; see his "Wages of Sin: the Decline of Public Penance in Imperial Russia," in *Seeking God: The Recovery of Religious Identity in Orthodox Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia* (De Kalb, Ill., 1993), 53–82. For a valuable comparison, see Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, N.J., 1977).

3. The confessions are in the Central State Historical Archive of Saint Petersburg, TsGIA SPb, f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31.

4. See the discussion of privacy and secrecy in Giordano Bruno Guerri, *Io ti assolvo. Etica, politica, sesso: i confessori di fronte a vecchi e nuovi peccati* (Milan, 1993), 9–13.

5. Although Soviet historians emphasized occasional examples of people not confessing in a given year, statistics for those observing the obligation remained high through the end of the Russian Empire. Cf. B. G. Litvak, "Russkoe pravoslavie v XIX veke," in *Russkoe pravoslavie: vekhi istorii* (Leningrad, 1975), 122–25; and Gregory L. Freeze, *The Parish Clergy in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Princeton, N.J., 1983), xxix. I am not discussing confession as a literary or autobiographical genre here, although I do so in the monograph I am currently preparing on confession in modern Russia.

6. The phenomenon of people preferring to confess sins which they were most loath to admit to any priest other than the one they knew best was not restricted to Russia. Jean Delumeau notes the popularity enjoyed by traveling missionaries in Roman Catholic Europe precisely because they provided a confessional alternative, and even argues that one cause of the Reformation was a reluctance to confess (*Sin and Fear: the Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, 13th–18th centuries* (New York, 1977), 471–75). Several nineteenth-century manuals for priests addressed this problem, stating that if a priest encountered confessants from another parish who were seeking to confess only mild sins to their own parish priest and more serious ones to a priest they did not know, they were to be sent back as attempting to fool God Himself. See Georgii Diachenko, *Voprosy na ispovedanii detei* (Kiev, 1890), 87.

7. Cf. the argument of Gregory L. Freeze, "'Going to the Intelligentsia': The Church in Its Urban Mission in Post-Reform Russia," in Edith W. Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow, and James L. West, eds., *Between Tsar and People* (Princeton, 1991).

8. This standard formula appears in every prayer book published in the nineteenth century. Quoted here from editions contemporary with these confessions: *Molitvoslov* (Kiev, 1881), 44–45; and *Molitvoslov* (Moscow, 1904), 254–55.

9. This sin, which might seem relatively insignificant, was regarded by Russian and Ukrainian laity and clergy alike to be particularly offensive to God. One publication describes it as the most offensive sin: See Evstratii Golovanskii, *Tysiacha dvesti voprosov sel'skikh prikhozhan o raznykh dushepoleznykh predmetakh s otvetami na onye byvshago prikhodskago ikh sviashchennika*, 2nd ed. (Kiev, 1869), 52.

10. For contemporary North America, see Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York, 1977). For contemporary Europe, see Philippe Boutry and Michel Cinquin, *Deux Pèlerinages aux XIXe Siècle, Ars et Paray-le-Monial* (Paris, 1980), 150ff.

11. See the introductory comments to confession in S. V. Bulgakov, *Nastol'naia Kniga*, 1000ff.

12. Ibid., 1002.

13. Eyewitness accounts suggest that the proportion of women to men in St. Andrew's Cathedral was equivalent. For example, see V. M., *Dva dnia v Kronshtadte, iz dnevnika studenta* (Sergiev Posad, 1902), 60–74; I. K. Surskii, *Otets Ioann Kronshtadtskii*, 2 vols. (Belgrade, 1938–1941, reprint, Forestville, Calif., 1979–1980, 1:66–68; Mikhail (Semenov), *Otets Ioann Kronshtadtskii. Polnaia biografiia s illiustratsiiami* (St. Petersburg, 1903), 1:310–18.

14. See the accounts of Konstantin Fofanov, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i isskustva (RGALI), f. 525, op. 1, d. 41, l. 60b.; Surskii, *Otets Ioann Kronshtadtskii*, 1:10–12; Al. Serebrov, *Vremia i Liudi, Vospominaniia* (Moscow, 1960), 30–35; and V. M., *Dva dnia v Kronshtadte*, 61–64.

15. The incident was reported in *Tovarishch* to condemn the "fanaticism" that Father Ioann inspired (*Tovarishch*, no. 16 [April 21/May 4, 1906]: 2).

16. Reported in *Svet*, no. 132 (May 18, 1900); quoted in V. M., *Dva dnia*, 73–74.

17. For a discussion of literacy patterns, see Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861–1917* (Princeton, N.J., 1985), 3–34.

18. TsGIA SPb, f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, l. 32.

19. Ibid., l. 63.

20. Ibid., l. 67. The writers' ability to remember their sins is remarkable.

21. "A bad place" was the expression used in parts of Russia for an outhouse.

22. TsGIA SPb, f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, l. 234.

23. Bulgakov, *Nastol'naia Kniga*, 1005. Marriages were forbidden to take place on Saturdays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, and on the chief holiday and fasting periods also because of the prohibition on sexual relations.

24. TsGIA SPb, f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 67–68.

25. The term *kum* denotes spiritual, as opposed to blood, kin: a *kum* could be the father of one's godchild, the child of one's godparent, and so on. Incest in these cases was more harshly judged than incest among blood relatives.

26. TsGIA SPb, f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 67–68.

27. TsGIA SPb, f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, l. 192ob.

28. Ibid., l. 192.

29. Ibid., l. 212. The use of the simile "like a dog" in this confession is apt as well as colorful. The Russian Orthodox regarded dogs as so unclean that they were generally not even allowed in the house, let alone in church. If a dog did manage to get into a church, the church had to be specially purified by the priest before being used again. The singling out of dogs, as opposed to other animals, comes from the belief that the devil was most likely to assume their guise, or that of black cats. See Linda J. Ivanits, *Russian Folk Belief* (Armonk, N.Y., 1989), 39.

30. All three are mentioned because the sin becomes a "triple" sin: one is insulting Isaiah *and* St. Nicholas *and* the Lord.

31. TsGIA SPb, f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 69ob.–70.

32. Ibid., l. 69.

33. The woman is apparently referring to the phrase rendered in the King James Bible as "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18). In the Church Slavonic translation, however, the phrase is, "Do not get drunk on wine, wherein is fornication [*v nemzhe est' blud*]." Along with the rendering of the prodigal son as *bludnyi syn*, this is an example of the variations of the term *blud* in Church Slavonic and its consequent tendency to be all-encompassing.

34. TsGIA SPb, f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, l. 117ob.

35. Ibid., l. 250ob.

36. Ibid., l. 192. For a discussion of the Orthodox position on homosexuality and bestiality, see the canons of St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, 500–503, and the canons of St. Basil the Great, 383–84, both in *Pravila svv. Otsev s tolkovaniami* (Moscow, 1912).

37. TsGIA SPb, f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, l. 217ob.

38. The following description of what in her mind constitutes "adultery"—some form of sexual activity between two unmarried women—shows again how much care one must exercise in interpreting the expressions in the confessions.

39. The perceived contrast between the holiness of the external occasion and the sinfulness of one's inner activity (lustful thoughts or glances) exacerbates the sense of sin this woman feels.

40. TsGIA SPb, f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 237–237ob.

41. This is not surprising, given that the prayers before communion repeatedly stressed the "dread and terror" one *ought* to feel, and considering that the priest summoned the faithful to the chalice with the words "with *fear of God* and faith draw near" (*Service Book: The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* [Jordanville, N.Y., 1999], 118).

42. The evidence of the confessions is corroborated by other sources. In her memoirs, the aristocratic Galina von Meck, for example, vividly describes the fear of being irresistibly impelled to spit communion out of her mouth (Galina von Meck, *As I Remember Them* [London, 1973], 124).

43. TsGIA SPb, f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, l. 141.

44. Ibid., l. 163.

45. Ibid., ll. 258–59.

46. Bulgakov, *Nastol'naia Kniga,* 987.

47. TsGIA SPb, f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, l. 62.

48. Ibid., l. 680b.

49. Ibid., l. 103.

50. *Pravilo Molitvennoe Gotoviashchimsia ko Sviatomu Prichashcheniiu i ezhednevnoe vechernee i utrennee* (Vladimirova, 1948), 282.

51. TsGIA SPb, f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, l. 2110b.

52. This is not surprising, given the scale of meals indicated for masters relative to servants in the cookbook Bible of the time, that of Elena Molokhovets (translated into English as *Classic Russian Cooking: Elena Molokhovets' "A Gift to Young Housewives,"* trans. Joyce Toomre (Bloomington, Ind., 1993).

53. As opposed to the laconic term "gluttony" (*ob"iadenie*) used by the less educated.

54. TsGIA SPb, f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, l. 96.

55. This may also have been a function of Father Ioann's unusually strong and well-publicized antipathy toward the theater. See, for example, *O svetskoi zhizni: urok blagodatnoi zhizni po rukovodstvu o. Ioanna Kronshtadtskago* (Moscow, 1894), esp. 15ff.

56. See N. V. Rozhdestvenskii, ed., "K istorii bor'by s tserkovnymi bezporiadkami, otgoloskami iazychestva i porokami v russkom bytu XVII v.," Ch OIDR, 1902, no. 2, pt. 4, 1–31.

57. TsGIA SPb, f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, l. 71.

58. Ibid., l. 69.

59. Ibid., l. 113–1130b.

60. Ibid., l. 252a.

61. Ibid., l. 245.

62. Caroline Bynum has argued that food, rather than sex or money, was and remains the central concern in economically strained cultures ("Medieval people often saw gluttony as the major form of lust, fasting as the most painful renunciation, and eating as the most basic and literal way of encountering God.") See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, 1987), 2 and chap. 2.

63. TsGIA SPb f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, l. 65.

64. Like its counterpart, *gortanobesie,* this now obscure sin denoted rolling food around in one's mouth to savor it before swallowing (like wine tasters) (ibid., ll. 69–690b.).

65. This sign of God's disfavor, evoking the Old Testament, is perceived and described as a sin.

66. Obviously only an employer or landowner could confess this sin.

67. Equating these two examples of nonclerical aid (i.e., wizards and doctors), or perceiving that it is sinful to seek aid from a nonclerical source rather than relying on God's mercy, is noteworthy. This attitude should be viewed in the context of the contemporary debate on whether insuring one's property is acceptable from a religious point of view.

68. The reference to being overcome by sleep the instant one begins to pray is common in theological and edifying texts.

69. TsGIA SPb f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, l. 203.

70. Ibid., l. 69. The reference is to the prayer of Manasses, King of Judah, read at Great Compline.

71. Ibid., l. 92a0b.

72. Ibid., l. 224. This reference to the New Testament parables has several possible sources: the three "Bridegroom" services during Holy Week, the Great Canon of Andrew of Crete, or the iconographic treatment of the subject, often used to decorate women's refectories in monasteries.

73. Ibid., l. 2480b.

74. The reference is to Psalm 103, read or sung at the beginning of every Vespers or All-night Vigil service.

75. Educated rural landowners and their families also appear to have been immune: on the basis of the confessions to Father Ioann, elaborate cursing was not a generally rural occurrence but largely a peasant phenomenon.

76. Not easily, at least, and not before 1905. Some priests writing their diocesan reports in 1905–1907 speak with dismay of the evident wonder their parishioners expressed at hearing anti-and nonreligious sentiments for the first time in their lives. See *Otchet Olonetskoi eparkhii za 1905 g.,* no. 2101, 1. 24ob, and *Otchet Orlovskoi eparkhii za 1907* g., no. 2227, 1. 12, quoted in Liubov Emeliakh, *Antiklerikal'noe dvizhenie krestian v period pervoi russkoi revoliutsii* (Leningrad, 1975), 122–25.

77. The notion that one could kill someone symbolically as well as literally was part of confessional language; priests were instructed to pose the question in the section of the confession that pertained to the sixth commandment.

78. TsGIA SPb f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 68–680b.

79. Ibid., l. 630b.

80. Ibid., l. 117.

81. Ibid., l. 121.

82. See S. Smirnov, "Baby bogomerzkiia," in *Sbornik statei, posviashchennykh Vasiliiu Osipovichu Kliuchevskomu . . .* (Moscow, 1909), 221.

83. TsGIA SPb, f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, l. 98.

84. Ibid., l. 1120b.

85. Ibid., l. 193.

86. Ibid., l. 98.

87. Ibid., l. 2040b.

88. Ibid., l. 101.

89. See, for example, ibid., l. 198.

90. *Velikii Chasoslov,* repr. in Ep. Dimitrii, *Domashnii molitvoslov dlia userdstvuiushikh* (Kharbin, 1943), 154–55; emphasis added.

91. Bulgakov, *Nastol'naia Kniga,* 979 n. 3.

92. See, for example, TsGIA SPb, f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, l. 2120b. (Men also compare themselves to the prodigal [*bludnyi*] son, but this is comparatively rare. See ibid., l. 213.)

93. Ibid., ll. 111–120b.

94. Ibid., l. 1090b.

95. Un-christened and stillborn children fell into the category of *zalozhnye pokoiniki.* The problem thus was not only a taxonomic one of how these children ought to be classified but a lurking concern that they might be in the grasp of the evil one. This concern may be one effect of the absence of the Roman Catholic notion of purgatory.

96. Even a sinful act can be miraculous. This underscores the objective sense of miracles or divine intercession.

97. This was not a fanciful notion. There were so many cases of "apparently dead" (*mnimoumershie*) people that both clergy and laity had evolved standard procedures before proceeding with a funeral to determine whether a person was actually dead—burning a part of

the body, inserting a steel needle, tying a finger to test the circulation, and so on. See Bulgakov, *Nastol'naia Kniga,* 1207ff.

98. TsGIA SPb, f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, l. 92. For the canonical position on abortion and those who facilitate it, see canons 2 and 8 of St. Basil the Great, canon 21 of the Council of Ancyra (314), and canon 91 of the Council of Trullo (692).

99. Ibid., l. 130.

100. This is valuable evidence: perhaps others also obtained Father Ioann's blessing before sending their confessions to him, suggesting that it was a form both sides found efficacious.

101. No villager writes anything like this; it may the influence of an aristocratic milieu.

102. This ascription of responsibility to one's parents rather than to oneself is also a departure from the usual confession in which one assumes all blame for one's actions. It is impossible to speculate about how recent such a "psychological" approach to confessions was.

103. Those qualities stressed by the Protestant Reformation, by the Protestant-type Russian sects such as the Pashkovites and the Shtundisty—and by Ioann Kronshtadtskii.

104. Note the identification by *soslovie* (estate)—typical for the lower classes—and the mention of previous fasting and communion, as if in tacit response to the first question a priest would usually ask at confession (TsGIA SPb, f. 2219, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 47–48).

105. Bulgakov, *Nastol'naia Kniga,* 1014.

106. See, for example, the Ecclesiastical Regulation (Supplement, point 9), *Napominanie sviashchennikam,* Zabelin, 208ff. If a priest told the family of a confessant what he had heard at confession, for example, he was supposed to be defrocked (quoted in Bulgakov, *Nastol'naia Kniga,* 1036).