

Historical Network Analysis. A Local, Regional, and Global Approach to Soviet Church History

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The article introduces historical network analysis as a fruitful approach for scrutinizing social and other relations in church and religious history. The goal is to broaden the methodology of studying events, dynamics and processes of the past with a new perspective. This concept will shed fresh light on complex confessional relations but will also take into account relevant contexts as well as comparative aspects. The approach is promising for broadening the horizon to find new observations especially for social milieus and arenas of actions. The concept allows to re-evaluate historical sources and to detect silenced spheres and unexpected layers of acting. It can trace hidden contacts, follow personal relations cross borders — local, regional and national —, describe interdenominational ties during the Cold War within the Soviet Union and abroad, the functioning of underground churches, methods and ways of clandestine communication and much more.

Keywords: historical network analysis, confessional networks, catacomb churches, church repression, Cold War history, everyday life in Soviet Union, interdenominational ties, cultural arenas, secret communication.

Relationship and Activities: none.

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Исторический анализ взаимосвязей. Локальный, региональный и глобальный подход к истории Церкви в советский период

Катрин Бёк

Статья предлагает метод исторического анализа взаимосвязей как плодотворный подход к изучению социальных и других отношений в церковной и религиозной истории. Цель состоит в том, чтобы расширить методологию изучения событий, динамики и процессов прошлого с новой точки зрения. Эта концепция прольет новый свет на сложные конфессиональные отношения, но также будет учитывать соответствующие контексты, а также сравнительные аспекты. Предлагаемый подход перспективен для расширения горизонта поиска новых наблюдений, особенно для социальных сред и сфер деятельности. Концепция позволяет пересмотреть исторические источники и выявить замалчиваемые сферы и неожиданные мотивации действия. Она может отслеживать скрытые контакты, следить за личными отношениями через границы — местные, региональные и национальные, — описывать межконфессиональные связи во время холодной войны в Советском Союзе и за рубежом, функционирование подпольных церквей, методы и способы тайной коммуникации и многое другое.

Ключевые слова: исторический анализ взаимосвязей, конфессиональные сети, подпольные церкви, гонения на церкви, история Холодной войны, повседневная жизнь в СССР, связи между христианскими деноминациями, культурные арены, тайная коммуникация.

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The motivation for the following thoughts and theoretical suggestions is the observation, that Soviet church history is somewhere at crossroads. Since a lot of materials have become accessible in the hitherto closed archives during the 1990's and church history became a topic of scientific studies, a lot of white spots in church history have been detected and explained. Aspects of church life and depression, about victimhood and martyrdom, that had never been allowed to be studied and published during communist times, have been analysed and put into the historical context. Mechanisms of repressions became evident and fundamental questions were being addressed. Important archival sources have been published to show the dimensions of church oppression. Perpetrators were traced and named, although they were not punished by law. Thus, to some extent, historical justice is done in the name of the victims, at least in theory, and the fundamental historical knowledge on the desperate situation for churches in the Soviet Union is brought to the fore. The more details became known on the repression of churches in the Soviet Union, the more amazing is the fact, that religion and churches survived the long decades of silencing and destruction of any kind of religious and cultural performance. The overarching question is, how churches, religions and believers were able to re-arise again after the end of the Soviet Union. Which measures, moments and mechanisms made them strong enough to stand the desperate fight against the overmighty enemy, that controlled mostly every part of the public sphere?

The answer to that core question is of utmost complexity and has to take into consideration a multitude of aspects of religious life during the Soviet times. Hitherto, historiography has rightly emphasized the importance of the hierarchies and of the official structures of churches. They were obviously the first target of Bolshevik church repression, and the Soviet regime invested a lot of efforts in destroying them. Alas, with the destruction of the official presence of churches, religion was not dead. Believers did not suddenly lose their faith. On the contrary, whilst priests were forced to leave their parishes and convicted as “sons of kulaks”, as “enemies of the people” and because of “anti-Soviet agency”, laymen became more and more active. While priests and other official “church servants” ended up in labour camps, most of the believers kept their faith, spread it among the younger generation and tried to stick to the traditional religious life and cultural behaviours. So far away from comprehensively answering the question, how religion survived the Soviet repression, historical research should pay more attention to the ordinary believers and to their contribution for keeping religion alive. Very promising is a closer look

at the connections that believers under constraint kept among each other and at the methods, how they supported each other to keep their faith alive. For this approach, the application of a special methodology and research tool, network analysis, will be helping. This method will be introduced in the following lines. Network analysis originally stems from social sciences but is increasingly applied also in humanities¹. Its special meaning for scrutinizing church history will be displayed in three parts. Firstly, the method will be introduced and its advantages and limits will be explored, then its application for some peculiar topics of church history will be explained, and in the end, the added value of this method will be summarized. Admittedly, most of the observations refer to christian churches, but network analysis can of course be applied also to the other religions as well.

Historical Network Analysis

Network analysis focuses on the description of networks as complex relations. Historical facts, processes and events are perceived as effects of certain connections. Of course, there are actors and “real” persons who form the knots of these networks, but it is not only them who are in the centre of the historical narrative. It is much more the relations that the actors maintain between themselves.

The genuine idea of network analysis was to scrutinize social relations, but we can also study political, commercial, personal contacts or whatever. By doing this, we get information on ways of exchanging ideas, products and similar things and on mobility and of trafficking knowledge. The dynamics of a network is defined by certain mechanisms. Network analysis recognizes these mechanisms of building a network, of its structures and of its effects.

For the building of networks, typical questions ask for occasions that lead to networks, for common social backgrounds and for formal structures and cultural models that create contacts. The centre of network analysis is the close examination of the quality of contacts between the actors. The structures of networks are defined by reciprocal social ties, by trends of balancing the configurations within the network and by a preferential attachment of actors to central actors. Effects of networks can be a shorter and quicker way to get useful information, a superior position towards others if it comes to influence certain processes, social pressure, leading to cooperative behaviour and to the exchange of ideas, values and ways of thinking. Furthermore, networks have effects on the creation of social categories and they may lead to a more coordinated manner of acting, especially in dense networks [Fuhse 2016:175].

The places, spaces and locations, where people meet, are interesting for network analysis. This means, that geographical information is important as well, in order to trace back zones of interferences among the actors.

Besides quantitative methods, there are many software tools for network analysis² and also tools for the **visualisation** of data analysis. Pictures like the following³ can visualize the strength of the contacts between certain actors,

¹ Interestingly, network analysis as such is not a new method, as it can be traced back to the 1880's, see: Nitschke, Ch. Die Geschichte der Netzwerkanalyse, in: [Handbuch Historische Netzwerkforschung 2016:11].

² See: Software für Historische Netzwerkforschung, in: [Handbuch Historische Netzwerkforschung 2016:175-179].

³ Düring, M, Cheat Sheet: Social Network Analysis for Humanists (<https://cvcedhlab.hypotheses.org/106>; upload 19.02.2021).

the distance to others, and the main actors in a network⁴:

Alas, the focus of the consideration is not the aesthetic presentation of results, but more than that the result of the analysis of a big set of data, that can be processed by visual analytics.⁵

The production of knowledge is closely related to ways, methods and techniques to present it; visualization and visual history is a helpful tool⁶.

Visualizing effects by diagrams, sociograms and other visualisations can change the picture of a historical process, because not only photographs of persons or of buildings dominate a historical illustration, but also the linkages between them or new dimensions of a certain room or of frontiers between countries, because personal networks cross borders even and also in the time of the Cold War.

Apart from visualization, another approach offers a **qualitative** network analysis. A handbook on the concepts of social networks highlights the observation that qualitative methods have been neglected for a long time in social science but have become more and more important in the last years. It emphasizes the following methods and techniques that are increasingly applied in addition to quantitative methods: Exploration (asking for the relevant actors and contacts), Understanding (interpreting patterns of behaviour, of defining factors of a network and of the meaning of communications), Participating Observation (by getting direct contact within the social structures) and Interviewing, Analysis of Documents and Conversations (interpreting the contents of texts like letters, publications, memos and of oral situations e.g. on the telephone or in conversations face to face)⁷. This last point is common in historical sciences as oral history. Historical network analysis applies practices of critical assessment of historical sources, heuristic methods and the visualization of networks⁸. For historical network analysis, we should add usual historical methods as there are description, framing of the context, comparison, and whatever is still applicable. So especially the combination of network analysis and historiographical approaches promises a dynamic interpretation of processes and structures in history.

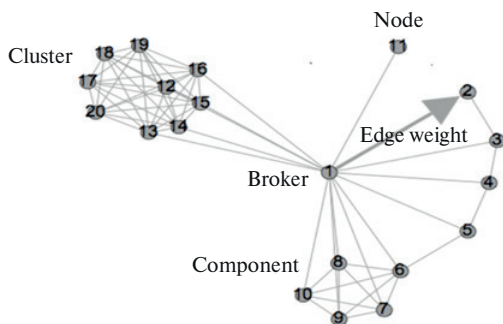


Figure 1. Visualization of a network (Source: Marten Düring, Cheat Sheet: Social Network Analysis for Humanists; <https://cvcedhlab.hypotheses.org/106>; upload 19.02.2021).

⁴ See: Mayer, K. „Imag(in)ing Social Networks“ Zur epistemischen Praxis der Visualisierung Sozialer Netzwerke. Ph.D. U Vienna, http://othes.univie.ac.at/15756/1/2011-06-14_9001861.pdf [Accessed on: 22 February 2021].

⁵ These tools are applied e.g. in visualizing the network of people in resistance to the national-socialist movement in Cologne, see: Eumann, U., März, J. Netzwerke des Widerstands in Köln 1933-1945. Forschungsprojekt. In: (2010). The International Newsletter of Communist Studies Online, XVI, 37-41, <https://incs.ub.rub.de/index.php/INCS/issue/view/51/13> [Accessed on: 15 December 2020].

⁶ See: Mayer, K. „Imag(in)ing Social Networks“ Zur epistemischen Praxis der Visualisierung Sozialer Netzwerke. Ph.D. U Vienna, http://othes.univie.ac.at/15756/1/2011-06-14_9001861.pdf [Accessed on: 22 February 2021].

⁷ [Fuhse 2016:139-157]. Participating Observation is also a classical method in anthropology.

⁸ See: [Handbuch Historische Netzwerkforschung 2016]. A bibliography of historical network analysis in: <http://historicalnetworkresearch.org/bibliography/> [Accessed on: 19 February 2021].

Nevertheless, there are **limitations** in applying network analysis: There are chapters in history, that cannot be declared a network, and there are social relations, that work perfectly without networking. E.g., if we want to get a car or a house or whatever, normally we do not need a network. Money is key here. And institutions like mass media, schools and others distribute knowledge and cultural and socio-cultural practices and formats as well [Fuhse 2016:198].

Concerning the history of religion, network analysis can open new horizons for church history. What is striking here is the special character of contacts among religious people and the different quality of contacts among them compared to contacts between non-religious people. The difference in the reason why they keep contact to each other will be an interesting field to scrutinize. While social networks often base on the calculation, what will be their material use for the single participant, this aspect might appear more sophisticated in terms of confessional networks. Hypothetically, they are more relying on personal values, on cooperation, on confidence and solidarity and the actors will be more prone to decide non-selfishly. Also forms of communication between religious people will be analysed along cultural patterns and patterns within the cult as a special domain of behaviour, that affects language, norms, symbols, etc. The social categories within religious networks will play a less important role in terms of ethnic origin, education, while the category of gender will certainly be a major source of exploration.

Another hypothesis will be mechanisms of exclusion. One result of this analysis might be that religious networks are more exclusive than non-religious networks as they require a distinct and declarative common confession and the acceptance of theological dogmas and rituals. At the same time, networks allow to bridge distances between persons without common social, economic and other background. This can be appropriate especially for confessional and religious networks, that might accelerate personal relations within one group. So, the exclusive and inclusive character of networks requires a flexible approach of the dynamics of a network⁹.

Another aspect that touches confessional networks is the overlapping and entanglement of various networks at the same place, time and context. Thus, the members of a religious community can be connected by the professional institutions. How these double and triple network's function and the dimensions of this phenomenon still needs to be further explored.

The reflection of the stories and identities that form networks will add value to the question of the character of the religious behaviour of the actors, of the political environment, of everyday history and of the history of feelings and other important aspects. So, in 2019, a scientific conference in Freiburg/Germany with the title "Church Relationally" cast a light on social networks within Christian organizations in Germany [Tagungsbericht 2020]. The results brought new insights into institutional processes of de-institutionalization and of the changes that undergo huge organizations like churches. The conference touched questions of social confidence, friendship as networks, and the quality of contacts. Exactly these questions are interesting in the case of church history in Soviet times, despite the fact that here churches have no politically guaranteed position in public life. But

⁹ Marx, Ch. Forschungsüberblick zur Historischen Netzwerkforschung. Zwischen Analysekatgorie und Metapher, in: [Handbuch Historische Netzwerkforschung 2016:68-71].

especially the context of the socialist and communist era can add new information to European church history, as network analysis can offer new layers of agency that are missing in research or still need more attention. Thus, historiography on churches in the west will benefit from the research done on churches in Eastern Europe.

Religious and Confessional Networks in the Soviet Union

Empirical historiographical studies show that network analysis works quite well in combination with “traditional” historiographical approaches like description, comparison, critical interpretation of sources and oral history. In addition to them, network analysis is a quite sensible method to detect silenced spheres and unexpected layers of acting. It fits for all kinds of churches and religious groups under Soviet conditions, as it can trace hidden contacts and follow personal relations across the borders — local, regional and national. Doing that, network analysis is capable to challenge traditional stereotypes on the so called “silent churches” in the USSR. Focussing on religious and confessional actors, it lays emphasis on them and on their doing and with this, churches in the end do not seem to be silent; yet on the contrary. While the Soviet system collapsed and the Soviet Union was dissolved in December 1991, the churches had survived the decades of oppression and began to reorganize themselves. With the help of network analysis, the picture of passive and suffering churches as victims of political strangulation in the Soviet era can gradually change. Of course, the churches and religious communities, their representatives and their members were indeed victims of the Soviet persecution. Alas, at the same time, the religious communities had highly motivated members that looked for possible niches to keep the religious and cultural background alive for generations. And this is certainly one important aspect for answering the question, why and how religion survived the Soviet system.

In the following paragraphs, three aspects of religious life in Soviet times are to present the scientific potential that historical network analysis has to offer for new insights.

Living Under Ground

In the Soviet Union, churches and their members were intentionally driven away from public places, religious buildings were destroyed or repurposed for secular functions like garages, cinemas and office buildings. As a result of the religious persecution, believers fled from the visual world and many of them went into the underground. During the Soviet era, a variety of religious groups existed in a hidden sphere in the catacombs. This tendency became apparent already shortly after the October Revolution in 1917 [*Shkarovskii* 1999:242ff.]. The first secret communities of the Orthodox church in Soviet Russia came into existence, when Lenin decreed the separation of church and state, deprived the church of her property and forbade the teaching of religion in schools. After Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow had excommunicated the Soviet government in January 1918, the arrest and killing of a multitude of clerics followed. These aggressive measures against the church made clear, that the Bolshevik regime did not tolerate religiosity.

To go underground was a double confession for the believers: firstly, it was the sign of loyalty towards their church, and secondly, it was the expression of political discontent and protest against the atheist Soviet government. The examination of

underground networks will not only provide information on the religious background, but also on potential political positions of believers. This is still more important, as the underground church in the USSR is highlighted as a moral authority that was not willing to collaborate with the communists [Bychkov 2006:217, 371, 373, 374].

The circles of believers in the catacombs were bound by loose connections, dependent on the prevailing circumstances. Consequently, the analysis of informal and oppositional networks in the Soviet Union must take into consideration the general political framework as well as the local situation of parishes and the individual living conditions that their members were confronted with. Each of these aspects could vary over the time as did the political repression on churches. A comparison of the early Soviet period with the late 1980's and with the Stalinist time does not only provide information on clandestine networks themselves and their spaces for their cultural life, but on the social conditions as a whole. Different points of view will provide the comparison of centre and periphery in questions relating to churches. It is stated, that during the 1940's, e.g., the regions in the Soviet Union responded differently to the decisions of the Moscow government on anti-religious measures. Some regions even contradicted instructions from the centre [Chumachenko 2002:191]. This might translate into the conditions of the local parishes and the networks of the believers there, which might have endured not that much pressure as in the Soviet capital. The opposite was also possible: in Western Ukraine, a part of the Soviet Union since 1939/1944, the Greek Catholic Church was liquidated by Stalin in 1946. The harsh measures against this church forced many believers into the catacombs. In the largest underground church during Soviet times, several underground seminaries for the education of priests were created and even new monastic communities came into existence [Persecuted for the Truth 2017:81, 98].

Not only traditional churches found their way into the catacombs, but smaller groups that were not recognized and declared "sects". They were in a double opposition: as a religious group against the atheistic regime, and as non-recognized branches against the traditional churches. Thus, their networks had to be still stronger. As an example, we know about the underground activities of the Inochentists and other groups at the Soviet periphery in Moldavia. In lack of common religious spaces for worship, they succeed "in creating an extensive network of underground chapels and safe hiding places, where the transmission of their faith could continue" [Kapaló 2017:239]. As the Orthodox Church in Soviet Moldavia was nearly eliminated by the Soviet authorities, the groups of the Archangelists and Tătuinists were completely separated from the Orthodox Church, so their own cultural life became independent as well. They replaced the traditional iconostasis by their own icons, paintings and images and created "a new distinct visual and spatial religious lifeworld." This example makes clear, that religious networks could develop their own theological and cultural traditions.

The role of women

While the church hierarchies were being destroyed during the 1920's and 1930's, the role of women to support the still living priests must not be underrated. Especially in smaller religious communities that were threatened to be extinguished by state repression, religious women functioned as messengers to keep connections and networks alive. Impressively enough, women often acted on their very own risk, transferring secretly letters to foreign embassies and thus informing "the world" on

the fate of repressed clerics. The story of these female messengers is often forgotten. As an example, in the 1930's Magdalena Frison transferred several times letters from her uncle, the secretly ordained catholic bishop Alexander Frison (1875-1937), from Odessa to Moscow. Both of them were arrested because of anti-Soviet agency, trialled and shot, Alexander Frison in 1937 and his niece in 1938 [*Kniga Pamiati* 2000:173-175, 485].

Another example were two peasant women from the German village Selz (Black Sea), who travelled by train in 1929 to the German embassy in Moscow, desperately seeking information on their arrested priest, Johannes Furch (1890-1930). Their mission failed. They did not get any information about Furch, and they did not succeed in providing him with warm cloths. Furch died of typhus in a labour camp [*Bek* 2017:348]. The apostolic administrator for Moscow, Pie Neveu (1877-1946), was supported in the 1930's by several Russian Dominican sisters [*Boeckh* 2019:359-360], [*Vozliubiv Boga* 1999:291]. They went on journeys by train to bring him information from arrested priests in prisons. Within the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine, active laywomen and members of the Redemptorist tertiaries organized underground liturgies. Generally, without these women, the confessional networks would not have worked. Therefore, their risks, their achievements and their fate should get more attention by historiography on the parishes in the Soviet Union. Indeed, the risk that many of them took, was deadly. In the middle of the 1930's, a group of ten housewives organized common prayers in the German village Klein-Liebental near Odessa, after the local priest had been deported. In 1937, they were put before trial because of "anti-Soviet activities". Eight of them were shot, two of them died in a labour camp shortly after [*Boeckh* 2017:224-225]. In 1982, Maria Sveda, a Greek Catholic laywoman who helped underground priests, was beaten to death in Lvov [*Persecuted for the Truth* 2017:87].

While bishops and priests were in labour camps or physically liquidated in the 1920's and 1930's and men were enrolled in the army during the Second World War and afterwards had to support their families, women overtook subsequently religious duties and cultural tasks for their families, neighbours and parishes. The "feminization of religious activity" [*Kapaló* 2017:246] became more and more apparent during the years after the Second World War and after Stalin's death in 1953. Especially mothers took care of the religious education of their children at home privately, but also in groups of children and in hidden Sunday schools. In evangelical communities of the post-war USSR, women taught children over years to read the Bible, to pray and to familiarise with fundamental cultural and theological content [*Beliakova and Dobson* 2015: 62-63, 65-67]. These meetings in secrecy not only imposed very young children the duty to hide this before their friends in kindergartens and schools, but also reassured them, whom they could trust in a general atheist society. It is highly plausible that they kept these ties when they had become adult. Hence, the roots for the functioning of confessional networking may stem from childhood circles.

In strict Orthodox communities as the Archangelists in Soviet Moldova, women became the centres of religious meetings and prayers, when Orthodox churches and monasteries were shut down and destroyed. They understood themselves as a bridge until the churches would be open one day, so the correct appliance of rituals was necessary [*Kapaló* 2017:242-243]. People began to gather

around women, who called upon believers to stick to their ritual fasting according to the calendar of feasts and holidays, to keep Sundays and to pray in the “right way”.

In some religious groups, especially young women were more capable to disguise their religious actions, being less suspicious for police control. It was easier for them to vanish in a crowd, when arrest was threatening. They functioned as wandering preachers and lived unmarried, challenging both the Orthodox and the political society. There are reports, how they escaped from prison farms and how they by well behaving got the trust of prison guards. In other clandestine communities like the Russian Old Believers, the older women overtook the most important cultural roles [*Kapaló* 2017:246].

Networks among religious prisoners in the GULag

The situation of political prisoners in the GULag deserves a special treatment. Individual religious convictions and belief certainly helped them to cope with the inhuman conditions and to ease physical pain, anxiety and the feeling of hopelessness and of being left alone. But furthermore, the interaction with other religious inmates and the feeling of a secret community was supportive in a desperate living surrounding. The question of religious and confessional networks behind barbed wire should be the focus of network analysis as well.

Some information on the interaction among the prisoners on the islands of Solovki in the White Sea is provided, the first and most important labour camp for clerics. In no other camp, so many prisoners engaged in religious services were interned. The majority were members of the Orthodox church. In 1927, the 119 clerics (three of them women), constituted about one percent of the prisoners [*Liechtenhahn* 2004:115]. They often suffered from especially brutal treatments by the guards [*Kiselev-Gromov* 1936:101-107]. Nevertheless, there are rare reports of clergymen that deviated from their belief, although this would have set them free. Priests refused to declare that they would leave their communities and collaborate with the Soviet authorities, even if this resulted in the prolongation of their imprisonment. Many of them were charged again, a major part fell prey to the Stalinist terror.

Research questions for network analysis will have to deal with religious activities in camps and prisons generally — a topic, that as such requires still more historiographical attention. While recent databases with names and individual fates and a huge number of memories written by former prisoners allow close insights in their individual fates, a general overarching scientific study on religious life in the GULag is still missing. Part of that should also be devoted to the networks that clerics and believers cultivated among themselves during their imprisonment. How did they manage to be together as close as possible in camp units? How did they follow their cultural traditions? In some memories, it is especially the celebration of Easter and of Christmas, that believers committed beyond their confessional borders. How did they organize their religious life, when a priest was among them? Did they find a way to celebrate the holy mass?

The imprisoned Orthodox bishops on Solovki managed to send several official letters, where they elaborated on their political position. In at least two memoranda they addressed to the Soviet government and to Metropolitan Sergii in 1926 and 1927 and declared, that they subdued to the Soviet state,

but brusquely rejected its materialistic conviction¹⁰. They condemned Sergii's declaration of loyalty towards the Soviet regime in 1927. Although some doubts have been risen on the originality of the memoranda, they may show that at least the bishops in the 1920's did not give up their tasks to care about their spiritual duty. In relation to network analysis, the question is how the bishops transferred their messages to the world of the other side of the prison fence, and if letters like these affected the believers outside. The question, if actions like these happened on other occasions, would be interesting for the functioning of religious networks.

Religious networks have a broader dimension. Although prisoners were deprived of their contact to their relatives and receiving letters was strictly limited, if not forbidden, their families outside sent them food, money and clothes. Priests were supplied by parcels that members of their former parishes sent them. The Soviet Red Cross acted as intermediary for sending them parcels. There was a wider circle of people that tried to stay in contact with the priests and clerics in the labour camps. Network analysis will have to deal also with these supportive persons and their role to stay in touch with the religious prisoners.

Moreover, information on the repression on clerics in the USSR was a matter for international diplomacy as well, either because emigration in western countries was lacking information on their relatives, or priests with Polish, German, Lithuanian and other origins were imprisoned, too. Especially the Polish embassy was active in establishing indirect links to prisoners, but also the Italian, French, German and Austrian embassies engaged in exchanging lists of names of prisoners or in gaining any sort of information on camp inmates [Tokareva 2016:236, 379-384]. Generally, the diplomats of most Catholic countries in the Soviet Union helped to transfer letters, religious objects and money to believers and church representatives in the USSR. News about the latest trials of priests reached other countries via diplomatic connections. Pie Neveu wrote nearly weekly reports to the Commission Pro Russia in the Vatican. For this, he used the diplomatic mail of the French embassy and transmitted more information on the general situation of the churches in the Soviet Union than any other priest of his time.

Conclusion

To summarize, establishing networks were one decisive factor for the survival of the churches in the Soviet Union. Religious networks nurtured the feeling of community and the value of the individual faith. They constituted a peaceful and practical reaction to the atheistic Soviet state and a way to preserve one's faith and dignity. They helped the believers to strengthen their spiritual and moral confidence and they were a sign for the indestructibility of the religious spirit. Combined with other historiographical approaches, historical network analysis shows enough potential to proof these dimensions. Especially the following effects of network analysis will advance the study of the history of churches in the Soviet Union:

— Network analysis opens a new transnational dimension neglecting state borders and even closed borders, as confessional and religious networks in the USSR did not only stretch within the country, but also abroad.

¹⁰ Address of the Orthodox bishops to the Soviet government, May 1926, in: [Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' 196:206-217]; Address of the "archbishops" of Solovki to Metropolitan Sergii, 14/27 September 1927, *ibid.*, 232-234.

— Network analysis brings persons to the fore that have been hitherto neglected or underestimated in historiography. Especially the importance of laywomen and layman for the infrastructure of churches might appear in a new light.

— Network analysis explains mechanisms of historical activities or events as it shows hidden structures of agency at least for the underground churches.

— In the end, network analysis proposes new questions. It can challenge existing interpretations and stereotypes in church history and the picture of churches in society. That means, churches are not only victims, but they are also actors in the shadow of state control and repression. This is surely not trivial for the historiography of churches. Network analysis might thus enhance the study of structures and lead to explanations for complex phenomena that might be hidden by an overwhelming political cover.

Relationship and Activities: none.

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