

Topical Issues of Religious Educational Work of Orthodox Spiritual Mission in Altai In Early 1900s

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Abstract

The paper refers to archive sources to reconstruct the record of the Altai Spiritual Mission and explores the social and political factors that hindered the organization's missionary causes in Altai in the early 1900ies. Ideals and beliefs at the core of Burkanism and the aspects of their establishment across Gorny Altai are outlined. Problems of material procurement of the Altai Mission are addressed based on the analysis of income structure. A breakdown of the 1910-1911 spending calculation points at a considerable positive budget trend of the Altai Mission. The paper identifies the role of the Orthodox Missionary Society and philanthropists in providing funding for the mission and draws a conclusion that in absence of direct state support for religious education of the native peoples of Siberia the possibility emerged for the formation of non-state religious educational structures.

Keywords: Russian Orthodox Church, Altai Spiritual Mission, Burkhanism, missionary schools, religious educational work, charity.

Temas de actualidad del trabajo educativo religioso de la misión espiritual ortodoxa en Altai a principios del siglo XX

Resumen

El documento hace referencia a fuentes de archivo para reconstruir el registro de la Misión Espiritual de Altai y explora los factores sociales y políticos que obstaculizaron las causas misioneras de la organización en Altai a principios de 1900. Se describen los ideales y creencias en el núcleo del burkanismo y los aspectos de su establecimiento en Gorny Altai. Los problemas de adquisición de material de la Misión de Altai se abordan en función del análisis de la estructura de ingresos.

El documento identifica el papel de la Sociedad Misionera Ortodoxa y los filántropos para proporcionar fondos para la misión y llega a la conclusión de que, en ausencia de un apoyo estatal directo para la educación religiosa de los pueblos nativos de Siberia, surgió la posibilidad de la formación de educación religiosa no estatal estructuras

Palabras clave: Iglesia Ortodoxa Rusa, Misión Espiritual Altai, Burkhanism, escuelas misioneras, trabajo educativo religioso, caridad.

1. Introduction

The beginning of the 20th century marked a sharp watershed in many social and political processes in the Russian Empire. Military, political, and economic challenges facing the state in the early 1900ies inevitably influenced the social conditions. Minor and major social disruptions followed, bringing in new influences in the life of peoples and in some cases destroying previously established patterns and structures. Major political and social shifts had become prevalent much earlier, while freethinking and the resulting intellectual ferment came to be felt all along the 19th century. Adverse processes were observed across the country, from Moscow to Vladivostok, and affected various aspects of Russian social life. Problems also emerged with popular religious sentiment.

In various periods, historical studies have approached and discussed various angles of this problem (Kreydun, Nekhvyadovich, 2018). However, there have been no examples in Russian and international historiography where the challenges of the educational work of the Orthodox Christian mission in Altai in the early 1900ies made the subject of dedicated academic research (Nekhvyadovich, Chernyaeva, 2016; Stepankaya et al., 2016; Popov, 2012; Nekhvyadovich et al., 2018).

2. Methods

Alongside general methods, including the system approach, progression from abstract to concrete, historical and logical analysis, and the analogy method, specific historical research methods were applied (the problem-oriented, chronological, retrospective and situation-based approaches).

3. Preconditions and background of the religious educational work of the Orthodox Spiritual Mission in Altai in the early 20th century

By the early 20th century, the Altai Spiritual Mission had constituted a quite accomplished structure, counting numerous churches and places of worship, schools and care homes, missionary stations and monasteries. The Mission's scope was 70,000 baptised Christians in Altai, including 46,729 residents in 434 missionary settlements. While the Altai mission of several stations in 1830-1840 relied predominantly on voluntary funding, and disruptions in funding only affected the wellbeing of the small number of missionaries' families, however, in the 20th century, the missionary network could not exist without planned funding coming from the Holy Synod and the Orthodox Missionary Society (established in 1865). A reduction by half in funding for the Altai mission pushed the latter to the brink. Many missionary programs were cut. The mission leadership was struggling to solve the funding deficit between 1904 and 1909.

The law on freedom of faith signed by Emperor Nicholas II in 1905 was in many ways due to political reasons. However, the perception of the decree was often biased among population in the peripheral territories. In correspondence with the leadership, some missionaries pointed at misapprehension of the said decree in terms of religious indifference and confessional irresponsibility. Even though there was no mass outflow from Orthodoxy, the Mission's opponents in several divisions revived their efforts to discredit missionaries. Their ranks were mostly made of affluent "non-Russians". In 1903, a Kalmyk pagan, Sapysh Tyuktenev, was nominated to the post of the indigenous tribal leader of the 1st Altai dyuchina, which included the Chemalsky and several other divisions. The Tyuktenevs' family in those years showed a sharply negative attitude to Christianity. This fact, amid the observed political developments, was quite remarkable, given that since the third quarter of the 19th century and through the Mission's authority, predominantly Christian "non-Russians" had been nominated to the posts of community leaders, zaisans, and their assistants called demichs. This was also true about the half-Christian 1st dyuchina. A missionary from the Chemalsky division, priest Timothy Petrov, initiated a petition to the governor from the head of the Mission, Bishop of Biysk Macarius, calling to revert the approval of the pagan Tyuktenev as the zaisan (State Archive of Altai Krai, Fund 164, Catalog 2, File 142, Sheet 44 back). Eventually, the governor dismissed the candidacy of Tyuktenev.

4. Burkhanism

Another source of religious tensions back then in Gorny Altai is to be seen in the preaching of Chet Chelpanov, the founder of Altaian Burkanism.

The movement had at least two foundations: the ideological and belief core, Mongolian Lamaism, and the political core, the aspirations of mythical independence and expectations of arrival of legendary Oirat Khan. Burkhanists predominantly preached to pagan populations, smashing the pagan beliefs of Altaians, however, attempts were also known to approach Christians. The very first year of preaching showed interest in Burkhanism among more than half of pagans. The interest in the new movement among the indigenous people exploded. The reason, on the one hand, was that Altaians by that time were sufficiently prepared to adopt a more developed belief system representing monotheism in its core; on the other hand, the new religious movement as an alternative to Orthodoxy was supported by the affluent part of the population. According to the missionary Timothy Petrov, “Altaians (...) say nothing about their dreams regarding Oiroi Khan, but to be sure, they await him as the one to restore the Altai kingdom and to remove Russians from the territory of Altai” (State Archive of Altai Krai, Fund 164, Catalog 2, File 42, Sheet 12-17). However, non-fulfillment of Chelpanov’s fantasies of an imminent punishment of the Russians and Christian Altaians caused the preacher’s credibility to fall quickly. Awaiting Burkhan, some Altaians in 1904 would not sow grain nor make hay for the winter. The outcome was clear from the records of the Chemalsky missionary for 1905: “Chet’s followers were bitterly defeated in their hopes: instead of manna, deep snow fell, accompanied by freeze, making some of the rich poor. Christian non-Russians were not tempted into Chet’s deception; remembering the commandment of God, “by the sweat of your face you will eat bread”, they would plough, sow and make hay, and thus avoided the fate of Burkhanists” (State Archive of Altai Krai, Fund 164, Catalog 2, File 42, Sheet 60). By the outbreak of the World War I, the followers of Burkhanism constituted no more than a third of the non-Christian population of Gorny Altai. Anyway, adversity was obvious rather between Burkhanists and shamanists than between Burkhanists and Christians.

Religious fluctuations of the indigenous people were usually local by nature. Burkhanism was popular only in some divisions of the Mission, predominantly in Myyutinsky, Abaysky, and Ust-Kansky. Thus, these challenges in the Mission’s work had only local implications.

The morally corrupt influence of some Russian settlers in Altai caused the spreading of sins like debauchery and drunkenness. This also weakened confidence in the missionary teachings among Christian neophytes vulnerable to temptation. According to the missionaries’ accounts, “Where in

a village there were Russians beside non-Russians, mass festivities were held, lasting for days, with binge drinking, dancing, singing, swearing, fights and other disgraceful things” (State Archive of Altai Krai, Fund 164, Catalog 2, File 27, Sheet 12, 16). However, in no way should one over-emphasize the prevalence of such phenomena across Altai. Missionaries still retained great authority and influence over people. Settled Christian neophytes tended toward more developed forms of households. Instead of making products for distillation of arrack, some indigenous people got accustomed to sending milk to butter-making plant, “which never used to be that way and was considered shameful”. Literacy was also rising among the Christian neophytes.

5. Social and political factors

Political woes happening in Central Russia also had other, much more adverse effects for the Mission. They not only worsened the missionaries’ financial standing, but also directly influenced social and religious aspects of life for Altaians, causing great disturbances among them. To some extent, these disturbances affected the whole population of Altai. While, for example, people in Chemal met Nicholas II’s manifesto of October 17, 1905, on religious freedoms mostly calmly: “The Tsar gave liberty, just do what you want whoever you are” (State Archive of Altai Krai, Fund 164, Catalog 2, File 42, Sheet 17), yet in Uznez, this document caused much struggling even among Christian Altaians. Some would even confer that as long as “freedom of faith” was declared, they could step away from Christian canons and not abide by them, and this was also true not only about neophytes, but Russian settlers as well. After the declaration of freedom of conscience and religion, according to a report by a Chemalsky missionary, parishioners, especially Russians, felt less enthusiasm about the church and its ministers. “The missionary’s word ceased to be law, as it used to be before the October 17 manifesto. They say: now, we have freedom, I can do what I want, and no one will dictate me. Anyone wearing a coat and high boots with gumshoes believes he knows it all and is not obliged to obey the church’s priest” (State Archive of Altai Krai, Fund 164, Catalog 2, File 42, Sheet 17). In the Chemalsky division, the situation was exacerbated by considerable seasonal tides of arriving “dacha dwellers”, mostly representing the intellectual strata considerably prone to freethinking sentiments. According to a local missionary, they “preached to the less educated that they should not pray to God” nor obey priests, and this resulted in the emergence of atheists among local population, like the merchant

Vassily Volosnikov and Stepan Mizonov in Elikmonar or the non-Russian Sergey Tozyyakov in Choposh. “They clearly preached that God was nonexistent, neither heaven nor hell (...) they cried that he, the salesman, much as he cheated with weights, and cash, and measurements, was never punished by God; and Mizonov and Tozyyakov, much as they were drinking alcohol, stealing, and deceiving people, were tolerated by God and avoided punishment. And they alternatively construed God’s forbearance as God’s nonexistence. They need God not in the tender sweeping of the wind, but in thunder and storm, smashing mountains and rocks. It is for a reason the Russian saying has it [literally], “Unless thunder strikes, a man won’t cross himself” (State Archive of Altai Krai, Fund 164, Catalog 2, File 42, Sheet 16 back).

The influence of the recreational crowds in the times of the declared “freedom” would inevitably affect the souls of the non-established Christian neophytes. Enthusiasm was also declining among local population toward charitable causes. A report by the missionary Timothy Petrov suggested that locals would be less sympathetic about this good cause. “The proceedings collected by the local trust were depleted by the locals for loans and were not repaid, and donors refrained from new donations due to the misuse of their funds” (State Archive of Altai Krai, Fund 164, Catalog 2, File 27, Sheet 61). The depletion of parish coffers happened amid the considerable decline in funding for the missionary work from the Orthodox Missionary Society.

6. Procurement of the Altai Spiritual Mission

This is how another objective problem of the Mission shaped in the early 20th century, i.e., the considerable weakening of its economic standing. The missionary work was affected by the reduced spending on travel allowances for missionaries and catechists, i.e. the funding provided for hiring horses and carts for missionary trips. While in 1905 and 1906, such items of spending were covered in the amount of 3 thousand rubles (State Archive of Altai Krai, Fund 164, Catalog 2, File 31, Sheet 51 back), nothing was spent from the Mission’s budget on travel allowances in 1907. In the same year, the employees’ remuneration fell amid 10-percent inflation, causing not only worsening of the missionaries’ financial standing, but also a significant outflow of employees and a decline in the grade of staff (Kreydun, Modorov, 2011: 29). According to the Mission Head bishop Innokenty, “the best students of the Biysk Catechetical School would strive to get a place in a diocesan office and would only take a post with

the mission if they failed to get better opportunity (...). A decline in the already scarce remuneration will produce a devastating effect on the latter and can result in the outflow of the best talent from the Mission ranks” (State Archive of Altai Krai, Fund 164, Catalog 2, File 31, Sheet 52 back). In 1908, the Council at the Orthodox Missionary Society cut by third the spending calculation for the Altai mission again. Moreover, a recommendation was made to present to the Council even tighter calculations. Such financial outlook led the Mission leadership to an idea to gradually close some stations, “as its calculation-based funding would not support its existence going further” (State Archive of Altai Krai, Fund, 164, Catalog.2, File 38, Sheet 96 back).

Apart from the remuneration cuts, the Mission continued to struggle with delays in payment, which were due to the lack of regular mail service in most part of the mission divisions. The allowances were paid quarterly or even more rarely. Advance payments were extremely rare. As a result, the missionaries had to spend more time to support their families, maintain the household, etc., meanwhile paying less attention to the congregation. The lower-paid employees, like psalm readers and teachers, ended up in even more critical circumstances. And the price of food placed Altai above many other locations in Tomsk Governate: “wheat flour used to cost 40-50 kopecks per pood [approx. 16 kg, or two stone], now it is 1 ruble 50 kopecks; meat is 3-4 rubles instead of 1 ruble per pood; horse rent costs 10-12 rubles per month instead of 1 ruble” (State Archive of Altai Krai, Fund 164, Catalog 2, File 27, Sheet 60).

The circumstances were somewhat better for the missionaries whose divisions were getting public funding (from the Synod’s resources).

Back at the beginning of the 20th century, the bishops of Biysk and Tomsk, aware of the Mission’s poor financial conditions, filed a petition to the Holy Synod to recognize the Altai Mission as one of the “poorest and peripheral parishes of the diocese” and for that reason to make it eligible under the “Highest Grace on maintenance of the clergy of parishes from the State Treasury” while leaving it under the Altai Mission (Report on the Altai Spiritual Mission for 1902, 1903, p. 7). The annual pay for the parish clergy should amount to 800 rubles. Since 1902, the Mission divisions’ clergy were gradually rearranged to rely on public funding, which partially solved the Mission’s financial problems. In 1908, the public funding was arranged for the staff of the Chemalsky, Kebezensky, Suzopsky, and Mrassky divisions. Their allowances under the budget of the Orthodox Missionary Society were transferred to the Aleksandrovsky, Paspaulsky,

Makaryevsky, and Turochaksky divisions (State Archive of Altai Krai, Fund 164, Catalog 2, File 38, sheet 96 back). In the summer of 1909, a decree of the Holy Synod was issued on the realignment of all stations of the Mission to receive public funding “in avoidance of the inevitable contraction, due to the depletion of funding, of the Mission’s activities, which contraction might do unrecoverable damage to the causes of Orthodoxy in the krai.” (State Archive of Altai Krai, Fund 164, Catalog 2, File 18, Sheet 70 back). The degree of relief felt by the missionaries was obvious from the address of January 19, 1910, of the fraternal missionary convention to Archbishop Macarius (Nevsky), then-Head of the Tomsk diocese. It was his petitions to Synod and probably other government bodies that helped to positively resolve the problem of funding for the missionary stations. The issues of maintaining missionary buildings, schools and infrastructure were yet to be resolved. Remarkable material support still came from philanthropists from Moscow and other big Russian cities (Kreydun, 2011: 124). However, to keep the Mission going in full, systemic consistent support was needed.

It is worth noting that only by that time, eighty years after its establishment, government officials had started to pay attention to the significance of the Altai Mission’s activity. The Tomsk Governor N.V. Gondatti presented his recommendations to the Synod and Government following his first-hand acquaintance with Altai. The Governor’s report to His Imperial Majesty referred to the Altai Mission as “an outpost on the distant fringe neighboring with mysterious and populous China, an outpost of not only Orthodoxy, but Russian citizenship as well” (Report on the Altai Spiritual Mission for 1902, 1903, p. 441-443). As a result, attention was attracted to financing the Mission’s educational institutions, as well as the development of postal infrastructure in Gorny Altai. Already by the end of 1909, financing had been significantly increased to maintain schools by the Diocesan School Council. After a while, all missionary schools were transferred under the Council after they had received stable funding.

An analysis of the 1910-1911 spending calculation suggests there was a significant improvement in the budget of the Altai Mission and its economic standing. Particularly, there was an item of 1,753 rubles 20 kopecks to compensate for the underpaid remuneration to the Mission staff for the 1907/8 calculation year. This compensated for the 10-percent decline of the missionaries’ salary in the said years. Moreover, the same spending calculation also came in with another important change: in line with the real inflation of transport costs in Tomsk Governate, travel allowance for

the missionaries and catechists was doubled. The total amount for this purpose stood at 1,400 rubles (State Archive of Altai Krai, Fund 164, Catalog 2, File 18, Sheet 152). And most of all, for the first time in five years, the calculation comprised the repair item for missionary buildings at 1,500 rubles at the lower range per identified facility. The 25 stations of the Mission then had quite a few structures needing to be renovated.

That is how the most acute problem was solved in the financing of missionary work in Altai and neighboring regions at the turn of the first and second decades of the 20th century. Meanwhile, voluntary donations remained important. The most important role during that period was played by the proceedings collected by Metropolitan Macarius (archbishop of Tomsk until 1912). For instance, he transferred more than 80,000 rubles to Altai over 1912-1914 (Tomsk diocesan statements, 1915: 500-501). This funding was spent only on the development of educational and charitable institutions of the Mission. Particularly, a top class second-grade school was built in a shelter community in the Chemalsky district (Kreydun, 2004: 139). In this school, students were not only provided home and primary education, but also the qualification of a teacher, which considerably eased the challenge of finding a job at the certain age.

Thus, the condition of the Altai Spiritual Mission in the first years of the 20th century was extremely unstable. Political crises, social instability related to religious freedoms and failures in voluntary fundraising had pushed the missionary structures in the West Siberian south to the brink of elimination. A resolution of the critical circumstances became possible only through the rearrangement of funding from voluntary (unstable) sources toward public (direct) funding.

7. Conclusion

The identified aspects of material procurement of the missionary activity in Siberia suggest that over the 19th and early 20th century, the government of the Russian Empire failed to adequately support the work of Orthodox missions. Their establishment and development were to a great extent owed to voluntary donors and the exquisite loyalty of representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Mission existed not by the order of the state bodies, as it was argued by some Soviet and post-Soviet historians, but through the personal realization of the Church people who strived to implement Jesus Christ's call, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." (Mark 16:15). This may offer an explanation why, with the state's political will in place but in absence of direct state support for the

religious education of the indigenous peoples of Siberia, there emerged the possibility for the creation of such significant non-governmental structures like spiritual missions in Altai, Transbaikal, Kamchatka and other territories, which performed colossal work for closer cultural and civilizational links of small peoples with the dominant ethnic group of Russia.

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