

УДК 27–76(571.51)

## **Missionary Activity of the Russian Orthodox Church in Siberia: Historical and Legal Aspect**

**Valentina Yu. Smorgunova,  
Aleksandra A. Dorskaia and Evgenii D. Protsenko**  
*The Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia  
48 Moyka Embankment, St. Petersburg, 191186, Russia*

Received 14.05.2019, received in revised form 27.05.2019, accepted 03.06.2019

---

*The article deals with the evolution of state and legal regulation of missionary activity of the Russian Orthodox Church from 17<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries on the example of the Siberian region. The research bases on the R. Horton's theory of conversion which allows weighing benefits and drawbacks of converting Siberian indigenous peoples to orthodoxy and the legal consequences of such conversion. The article analyses the reasons for no sustainable results from missionary activity during the imperial period. Besides, it reveals the fundamental distinction of pre-revolutionary and modern approaches to the legal regulation of missionary activity.*

*Keywords: decrees, missionary activity, Russian Orthodox Church, Siberia, Most Holy Synod, orthodox mission, indigenous peoples.*

*Research area: law.*

---

Citation: Smorgunova, V. Yu., Dorskaia, A.A., Protsenko, E.D. (2019). Missionary activity of the Russian Orthodox Church in Siberia: historical and legal aspect. J. Sib. Fed. Univ. Humanit. soc. sci., 12(6), 939–945. DOI: 10.17516/1997–1370–0432.

---

### **Introduction**

Missionary activity has always been an overarching and complex issue. On the one hand, religion and church carry moral standards, culture, education. On the other hand, there is always a possibility of propagation and violence, erosion of identity if not destruction. This issue is relevant because the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church lately accepted concepts dedicated to Missionary Activity based on the pre-revolutionary experience of state and church interaction.

---

© Siberian Federal University. All rights reserved

\* Corresponding author E-mail address: faler2007@yandex.ru

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0).

### **Theoretical framework**

Over the last years, the studies of Russian indigenous peoples changing their traditional beliefs to Christianity have used Horton's theory of conversion (Horton, 1971). This concept is based on the "typical traditional cosmology" with microcosm (the world inside a community where "small spirits" are responsible for what is happening) and macrocosm (the world outside a community which is under control of a "supreme being"). As a result, the further a man steps over the bounds of a community and overcomes large distances to trade, the more important the "supreme being" becomes, so Christianity and Islam as world religions turn out to be catalysts pushing the community for changes.

Application of this concept to missionary activity in Siberia is supposed to help to answer the following question: did Siberian peoples see orthodoxy as a part of a higher order which includes education, management, trade, industry and other spheres of life, or did they not?

### **Statement of the problem**

Both positive and negative experience from missionary activity of the Russian Orthodox Church in the pre-revolutionary period can be applied to modern time. Religious organizations in partnership with the state can use missionary activity to deal with separate ethnic groups searching for their cultural identity, to support vulnerable social groups and oppose media aggression of the modern world. However, the state with such constitutionally enshrined characteristic as secularism has to control this process.

### **Methods**

Due to historical and legal nature of the research chronological method allowed reviewing laws and regulations governing missionary activity of the Russian Orthodox Church in Siberia. Descriptive method was used in explaining Horton's theory of conversion currently applied to determine the attitude of peoples and ethnic groups towards missionary activity. Formal legal method helped to analyse the content of Russian laws and regulations in the late 17<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries concerning launching missionary expeditions, establishing missionary organizations, etc. The comparative legal method was used to trace the evolution of state and legal approaches to missionary activity. Conclusion on possibilities of application of pre-revolutionary Russian experience to modern law-making process in terms of freedom of conscience could be drawn on the basis of legal modelling method.

## Discussion

Christianity started spreading among Siberian peoples at the Time of Troubles. In 1600, Vasilii, the Obdorskii prince (*knyaz*) got christened and had a church in the name of Saint Basil the Great built. Then churches appeared in Verkhoturys, which was considered as a gate to Siberia, as well as in Kode, Mangazeya and other localities. However, missionary activity of the Russian Orthodox Church became constant only in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In 1681, tsar Fedor Alekseevich issued the Decree “On signing of estates and districts (*votchinas*) over from Murzas and Tatars and on benefits which are provided to those who got christened” aimed at christening all peoples living in the Volga region. In spite of the fact that Siberian peoples were not referred to in this decree, the metropolitan of Siberia and Tobolsk Pavel (1678–1692) took it as a call for action. As a result, Moscow started receiving complaints from Siberian Tatars (Sofronov, 2005), so on 5 April 1685 another decree was issued: “On christening of non-Christians only at their will without any coercion, on decent behaviour of non-christened Tatars and other non-Christians during crucessions and on non-converting of the newly christened to previous evil beliefs”. Therefore, on the one hand, non-Christian teachings were perceived as “evil”, while on the other hand, authorities tried to put no pressure to adherents to other denominations, although they still showed the advantages of changing to Christianity. It was in 1685 when all schismatics were ordered “to whip and put to death” and that is why metropolitan Pavel set the fight against schism as one of the main tasks for the missionary (Kharina, 2016: 106).

In 1702, Filofei (Leshchinskii) became the new metropolitan of Siberia and Tobolsk, and Peter I assigned him to spread orthodoxy not only within his metropolia but also in cross-border regions, including the Chinese Empire. Therefore, missionary activity was growing both internally and externally.

In 1706 a decree was issued which ordered church authorities to christen pagans on a large scale as well as to construct churches and chapels. Notably, if at first Peter I supposed that after the christening of local aristocracy the general public would get christened voluntarily, then, receiving no understanding, he started talking about full Christianization of Siberian peoples (Sofronov, 2005).

Under Catherine II ruling, in 1789 the Governing Senate issued a special decree which suspended missionary activity on almost the entire territory of the Russian Empire due to rumours on preparations for forced Christianization of peoples of North-Western Siberia (Poberezhnikov, 1995).

In 1802 decrees of the Most Holy Synod were organized by date and field and included into the Set of Regulations. In that way, the accumulated experience of missionary activity was summarised (Os'makova, 2015: 42).

On 22 June 1822 Alexander I approved the whole set of laws and regulations regarding Siberian peoples. These reforms prepared by M.M. Speransky helped to include missionary activity into the range of interests on a legal basis and clearly determine its place in the national policy of the Russian Empire (Sofronov, 2007).

In the 19th century, the state tried to use new forms of missionary activity because it acknowledged that most of the newly christened had become members of the Orthodox Church only in name (Tsys', 2017: 159).

First, orthodox missions such as Obdorskaia mission, Altai mission, and others were created. However, this experience turned out rather negative and Obdorskaia mission, in particular, was closed in 1836 having christened not more than 20 people. The Altai mission was more effective working from 1830 to 1917. (Ovchinnikov, 2010: 87).

Second, great importance was attached to periodical publications. Particularly, since 1874 the Orthodox missionary society in Moscow had been publishing the "Missionary" (*Missioner*) magazine on a weekly basis, and since 1893 it had been publishing the "Orthodox evangelist" (*Pravoslavnyi blagovestnik*) magazine twice a month. Besides, there were local publications.

Third, the missionary was supposed to influence Siberian indigenous peoples and educate them about orthodoxy and also to prevent Orthodox Christians from turning to shamanic spells which appeared to be widespread.

Notably, the Russian Orthodox Church exclusively got the support of its missionary activity from the state.

Around the early 20<sup>th</sup> century a vast amount of new religious formations appeared which was considered as a serious threat to the state, the church and the society itself among the missionary society. Missionary activity became focused on old believers and sectarians. Along with this, missionary was not so successful among adherents to other denominations. For instance, in 1905–1905 there was a mass turn away from orthodoxy among Buriats (Shatuev, 2006: 16).

## **Conclusion**

Our analysis shows that missionary activity of the Russian Orthodox Church in Siberia, in fact, began in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Even at the Time of Troubles the state

and the church paid attention to the construction of temples. However, legal regulation of missionary activity developed only in the second half of 17<sup>th</sup> century showing the lack of uniform missionary legislation for the entire Russian territory, and the adoption of laws and regulations that governed missionary specifics on particular territories rather than individual aspects of missionary activity.

Horton's theory of conversion, according to which Siberian peoples perceived orthodoxy as a way to transfer to a higher order, showed that, on the one hand, orthodoxy was indeed perceived that way and was first and foremost used by the aristocratic circles of indigenous peoples to further strengthen their position, and, on the other hand, orthodoxy was constantly causing discontent among local population that continued to perform pagan rituals even after christening.

### References

Horton, R. (1971). African Conversion. In: *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 41 (2), 85–108.

Kharina, N.S. (2016). Nachalo khristianizatsii korennykh narodov Obskogo Severa [Beginning of Christianization of Native Peoples of the Ob' North]. In: *Istoricheskaiia i sotsial'no-obrazovatel'naia mysl'* [Historical and Social Educational Thought], 8 (6/1), 105–110.

Os'makova, O.N. (2015). Obshchaia kharakteristika normativno-pravovogo regulirovaniia missionerskoi deiatel'nosti Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi [General Description of Legal Regulation of Missionary Activity of the Russian Orthodox Church]. In: *Aktual'nye problemy gumanitarnykh i estestvennykh nauk* [Current Issues of Humanitarian and Natural Sciences], 1–2, 41–44.

Ovchinnikov, V.A. (2010). Sravnitel'nyi analiz metodik raboty Altaiskoi dukhovnoi missii na iuge Zapadnoi Sibiri i katolicheskoi missii vo vnutrennei Mongolii (vtoraia polovina XIX — nachalo XX v.) [Comparative Analysis of Methods of Work of the Altai Spiritual Mission in the South of Western Siberia and the Catholic Mission in Inner Mongolia (the Second Half of 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> cent.)]. In: *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* [Bulletin of Tomsk State University], 330, 87–92.

Poberezhnikov, I.V. (1995). Materialy po istorii rasprostraneniia slukhov o nasil'stvennoi khristianizatsii sredi korennykh narodov Vostoka Rossii (18–19 vv.) [Materials on the History of Spread of Rumors on Forced Christianization among Native Peoples of the East of Russia (18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> cent.)]. In: *Problemy administrativno-gosudarstvennogo regulirovaniia mezhnatsional'nykh otnoshenii*

v *Tiumenskom regione: istoricheskii opyt i sovremennost'*: *Materialy Vserossiiskoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii, mart 1995 g.* [Problems of Administrative and State Regulation of Interethnic Relations in the Tiumen Region: Historical Experience and Modernity: Proceedings of the All-Russian Scientific and Practical Conference, March 1995]. Tobolsk, 89–93.

Shatuev, N.V. (2006). *Gosudarstvenno-pravovoe regulirovanie religioznykh otnoshenii v Zabaikal'e vo vtoroi polovine XVII — nachale XX vv. Avtoreferat dis. ... kand. iurid. nauk* [State and Legal Regulation of Religious Relations in Transbaikal in the Second Half of 17<sup>th</sup> to Early 20<sup>th</sup> Cent. Synopsis of the Candidate of Law dissertation]. Moscow, 25 p.

Sofronov, V. Iu. (2005). *Missionerskaia i dukhovno-prosvetitel'skaia deiatel'nost' Russkoi Pravoslavnoi tserkvi v Zapadnoi Sibiri (konets XVII — nachalo XX vv.). Chast' I* [Missionary and Spiritual Educational Activity of the Russian Orthodox Church in Western Siberia (Late 17<sup>th</sup> to Early 20<sup>th</sup> Cent.). Part I]. Tobolsk, GOU VPO "Tobol'skii gosudarstvennyi pedagogicheskii institut imeni D.I. Mendeleeva", 144 p.

Sofronov, V. Iu. (2007). Gosudarstvennoe zakonodatel'stvo Rossii po konfessional'nym voprosam i pravoslavnoe missionerstvo v kontse 17 — nachale 20 v. [State Legislation of Russia on Denominational Issues and Orthodox Missionary Activity in Late 17<sup>th</sup> to Early 20<sup>th</sup> cent.]. In: *Izvestiia Altaiskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* [The Bulletin of Altai State University], 4–2 (56), 138–144.

Tsys', O.P. (2017). K istorii sozdaniia i uprazhneniia Obdorskoii missii v 20–30 gg. XIX veka [On History of Creation and Abolition of the Obdorskaia Mission in the 20–30s of the 19<sup>th</sup> cent.]. In: *Vestnik ugrovedeniia* [The Bulletin of Ugrian Studies], 7 (4), 158–167.

## **Миссионерская деятельность Русской Православной Церкви в Сибири: историко-правовой аспект**

**В.Ю. Сморгунова, А.А. Дорская, Е.Д. Проценко**  
*Российский государственный педагогический  
университет им. А.И. Герцена*  
*Россия, 191186, Санкт-Петербург, набережная реки Мойки, 48*

---

*В статье на примере Сибирского региона рассматривается эволюция государственно-правового регулирования миссионерской деятельности Русской Православной Церкви с XVII до начала XX в. Концептуально работа построена на применении теории конверсии Р. Хортонa, позволяющей оценить плюсы и минусы присоединения представителей коренных народов Сибири к православию, его правовые последствия. Показаны формы, используемые миссионерами в Российской империи для привлечения «инородцев» Сибири в православную веру. Проанализированы причины отсутствия стойкого результата от миссионерской деятельности в имперский период. Выявлены принципиальные различия дореволюционных и современных подходов к правовому регулированию миссионерской деятельности, отражающие разницу в статусе религиозных организаций в условиях «первенствующей и господствующей» Русской Православной Церкви и при партнерских отношениях государства с конфессиями.*

*Ключевые слова: указы, миссионерская деятельность, Русская Православная Церковь, Сибирь, Святейший Синод, православная миссия, инородцы.*

*Научная специальность: 12.00.00 – юридические науки.*

---