

Charitable activities of the Orthodox spiritual mission in the context of the culture of a cross-border region

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Abstract. The article reveals the ideological foundations of the Christian charity in the activities of the Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission in the territory of Gorny Altai in the 19th and early 20th centuries on the basis of studying the archival sources available.

Keywords: charity, Christians, mission, church, missionary church

1. Introduction

The idea of “Christian charity” was introduced by the missionaries with a wise gradualness taking into account the moral growth of the neophytes. The first step in this direction was the introduction of selling wax candles at missionary churches in 1867. The innovation was very quickly caught: the newly baptized before saw the Orthodox Christians lighting candles before the sacred icons while coming to the Russian villages, and they began to buy candles willingly and put them in the missionary churches. The missionaries, for their part, explained to them the importance and significance of that pious custom.

The fact of the assistance provided is notable in the second half of the 1870s by the inhabitants of the Altai Mountains to the suffering coreligionists of the mountains of Bosnia and Herzegovina during the uprising of the Slavs and the Russo-Turkish War. The Chief of the Mission Archimandrite Vladimir with missionaries in Ulala reported to his congregation about mournful and joyful news about the situation of the Orthodox brethren in the Balkan Peninsula, the successes and work of Russian soldiers, and the fate of wounded soldiers. He awakened the Christian and patriotic feelings in foreigners with these stories. The newly baptized showed their willingness to sacrifice what they could in favor of those who suffered [1, p. 14]. The establishment of a special mug for benefits of the “future fellows” in the first 1876 justified its existence. By the end of the year, it contained many offerings of the newly baptized in amount of 332,5 rubles, which was sent by the Chief of the Mission to the St. Petersburg and Moscow Slavic Committees. After that, there were donations for the benefit of wounded Russian soldiers.

All the above facts confirm the relevance of studying the role of charitable activities of the Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission in the formation of Christian qualities of the newly baptized population in Gorny Altai in the 19th – early 20th centuries.

2. Materials and Methods

The authors applied a number of general scientific and special research methods. In particular, the historical method allowed considering the stages in the evolution of the Orthodox Ecclesiastical

Mission in the development of charitable activities. The method of concrete situations was applied to analyze concrete examples illustrating the provisions of theoretical character in this paper. The chronological fixation of events and facts allowed us to trace the evolution of the missionary activities of the Russian Orthodox Church through the development of charity activity in the territory of Gorny Altai in the 19th – early 20th centuries.

3. Results

The first guardianship was created in 1877 in the Ulalian camp by Archimandrite Vladimir (Petrov). At the end of 1876, the Ulala residents had the idea of creating a parish guardianship, but its implementation was suspended due to the death of the Tomsk Bishop. On the proposal of the Mission Chief, the conviction of the Ulala residents was already approved by the blessing of His Grace Peter Bishop of Tomsk in 1876 [2, p. 76]. Upon arrival at the chair of Right Reverend Vladimir in spring of 1877, the locals made a new social verdict, according to which the position of the Chairman was unanimously offered to the Head of the Mission Archimandrite Vladimir, and to his assistant Hegumen Macarius in case of his refusal. The Ulalian missionary priest John Smolyanikov was determined as a clerk [3, p. 304; 13].

The money collected by the locals was sent as material assistance to the newly baptized “foreigners.” This significantly depleted the budget of the missionary camps. At the same time, the donors knew well those to whom funds were transferred, which made it possible to control the expenditure of funds. No less important was the moral influence of guardianships on the newly baptized, as an example of fraternal mutual help. In baptism, the poor were given underwear, necessary clothes, a few measures of barley for food, a house. They even received sometimes a horse, a cow, all necessary agricultural implements and seeds for their initial crops.

From the very beginning of the guardianship existence in Ulala, its members not only distributed funds of the Mission allocated to charity, but they also made voluntary contributions. In 1877, 100 rubles were collected, and 177.92 rubles in the following year. At first, assistance was provided free of charge (purchasing a horse, a cow, seeds for sowing, sometimes meat) to the most needed people. Later, the Mission began to lend, and the experience had taught that such benefits were more valuable than the unconditionally given alms. The repayment of loans was accurate; moreover, the repaying people would add from themselves some contribution to benefit the others, mostly in strong need [4, p. 14]. From the first year of its existence, the guardianship began to care not only for the material but also for the spiritual well-being of its wards.

In 1884, the rural guardianship in Ulala was transformed into the parish one. At the general parish meeting, in the presence of the local missionary and village elders of all settlements, local missionary priest Victor Rossov was elected as the Chairman of the branch and the head of the Parish guardianship. The parishioners residing in most of the villages of the branch were elected as the members of the guardianship for three years: from Ulala – 21 persons, from Biryulya – 5, from Alexandrovka – 3, from Sylganda – 3, from Karasuk – 3, from Paspaul – 4, from Tashta – 4, from Kabyzhak – 4, from Uzhlep – 1 and from Seulta – 2. The share of each village was determined by the number of its population [5]. The members of the guardianship donated in favor of the guardianship various contributions: for the holidays of Christmas, Easter, Ascension, to the day of memory of the founder of the Mission Father Archimandrite Macarius, and to feed travelers. Of course, the number of permanent members of the guardianship was not so great. By 1881, it was only 20 people, although over time it was constantly growing, 24 people were in the guardianship by 1886, already 30 by 1888, and 46 people were in the guardianship’s lists by the end of the 19th century. The turmoil of the first decade of the 20th century led to the deterioration of the financial situation of many guardians, and their number was only 16 people by 1915, and they amounted to 27 persons in 1916 [6].

The constant activities of the guardianship were manifested mainly in loans for the newly baptized in cash or in kind for sowing bread crops. After a brief thought, the members of the guardianship considered this form of the activities to be the most useful. The newly baptized foreigners engaged in arable farming needed nothing more than loans for planting, because they were often unable to

preserve their own bread to spring (not having long-term experience of farming), because borrowing loans from the local *kulaks* on their proposed conditions was extremely disadvantageous [7, p. 17]. The distribution of food supplies to the poor before the great holidays and a monthly help to the poorest persons and families were also practiced.

By the early 20th century, in the whole Mission in the parish guardianships for the charity affairs was held the amount of 5 thousand rubles, which, according to the missionary fathers, “testified to their assimilation of the gospel law of love for neighbors” [8, pp. 7, 13]. In Alexandrovka, a poor village of the newly baptized of the Ulalian branch, a new magnificent church began to be built on the means of the newly baptized in 1901.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Ulalian guardianship directly manifested itself in the case of school charity. In 1901, a new building of the girls’ school was opened in Ulala. In 1902, another school for boys was built in Ulala. In appearance, this school was considered to be the best in the Mission.

Both schools were built by the Ulalian parish guardianship, spending about 10,000 rubles on these facilities. The guardianship received for this purpose a subsidy from the Diocesan School Council in the amount of 1,000 rubles and 500 rubles from the Mission. The rest of the money necessary was found on the spot. The former assistant of the Chief of the Mission Father Hegumen Alexius was the first who spoke about the construction of new schools, and he personally laid the school for girls. But Father Hegumen died at the end of 1900. The work of building schools could dye with his death because of lack of funds, if it would not have passed into the hands of the parish guardianship. The latter was raising money, and a Chairman of the Ulalian parish guardianship Alexey Matveevich Sitnikov constructed schools using his own resources, and carried on care and responsibility for that matter for two years without a master builder [9, pp. 40, 41].

4. Discussion

By the end of the 1870s, the work of charity changed its external form, taking into account requirements for the new conditions of life of the newly baptized and due to the expansion of the Mission’s tasks. The distribution of material assistance came under the direction of parish guardianships. The Mission’s leadership focused on the organization of special charitable institutions: orphanages, hospitals and boarding houses [10, pp. 39, 40].

In 1870, on donations collected by Archpriest Nikolai Lavrov, a shelter for orphan girls was established in Ulala. It was housed in a monastery building at the mouth of Ulala. The shelter was run by three sisters of the Ulalian convent, of whom one bore general responsibility for the shelter, another one was engaged in teaching children to read and write in the school for girls, and the third one was entrusted with the care of little kids. Two more sisters, sent in turn from the convent, performed obedience in the kitchen and other economic needs.

In the early years of its existence, the Ulalian shelter was in particular need of its own space for children to live and study. The leadership of the Mission decided to build a new building to co-locate a shelter and a hospital. By that time, most of the missionaries treated themselves both their parishioners and unbaptized foreigners from nearby for various diseases with homeopathic and allopathic means. With the expansion of the territory under the control of the Mission, it became necessary to get a separate paramedic who would travel around to all newly baptized settlements to provide medical assistance, as well as to open the central hospital of the Mission to provide appropriate inpatient care. In 1875, the building of the shelter-hospital was built. Perhaps, the Mission’s hospital-shelter was the first pharmacy opened in Gorny Altai in 1882.

Before transferring the hospital to a separate room, a number of charity girls was even less than the planned number: 6 girls and 3 boys were brought up in the shelter in 1880, and 3 boys and 7 girls in 1881 [11, p. 212]. However, it was in these years when the third-party provision of pupils was initiated. In 1880, a Tyumen merchant P.I. Matyagin sent to the Chief of the Mission 1,200 rubles for investments at his discretion in credit institutions in the inviolable capital in perpetuity, so that interest should be used for the education of a young newly baptized foreigner, in memory of deceased

Dominika Yakovlevna Shchetinina. The Mission for that amount purchased 5% of the state notes in the amount of 1,300 rubles [12, p. 277]. In subsequent years, the shelter used both funds provided by the third-party benefactors and received help of local guardianship. By the mid-1880s, a number of children in the shelter already reached the maximum allowable by floor area in the residential parts. In 1886, 32 people lived in the shelter, 8 boys and 24 girls. In the early 20th century, the Ulalian shelter was combined with the conventual one.

5. Conclusion

The charity affairs began to bear fruit stemming from mercy, which could bring together entire nations. The germ of Christian love, which was roused in the hearts of the newly baptized Altaians by the beginning of the 20th century, sprouted and blossomed. Inspired by external examples, the local population established its own charitable centers. The Ulalian guardianship, which became the first sprout of local public charity, facilitated the work of the Mission's serving by caring for the poor of the local church. Where before it was necessary to give shelter and food from the funds of the Mission to almost everyone who came to be baptized, later it became an exception to the rule. There were a lot of good Christians in the camps of the Mission, caring for the homeless, feeding and clothing the elderly in the name of Christ. The maintenance of the churches and prayer houses, their repair, significantly depleting the Mission's funds before, almost in all the camps were attributed to the account of the local Christian congregation. This made it possible for the Mission to give more funds for the affairs of general charity (specially-charitable institutions). Under guidance of Mission's sisters, the Altai children found their ways in life. The boys entered the board school of the Catechism school; the girls got married or became teachers in missionary schools later. In any case, they further contributed to the spread of those Christian values.

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