




On Positive Complementarity in the Context of History of Missionary Work in the Chuvash Region

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Abstract: The article explores the reasons why the interaction between Russian and Chuvash culture became possible in the framework of Christian missionary work. *Purpose* of the study is to show that both cultures have positive complementarity.

Methods. Comparative, analytical and descriptive methods were used by the authors. The study is based on the cultural and historical situation, i.e. adoption of Christianity in the Chuvash and Russian culture.

Research results. In the process of research, the authors identified common features that bring the transition to the fold of Christianity in Ancient Russia and the Chuvash culture closer together, despite the thousand-year time distance. In their opinion, the deep assimilation of Christianity by the Chuvash culture is explained by the presence of a certain algorithm that regulated the penetration of the new religion into the pagan environment. The authors define Russian culture as donor culture and Chuvash culture as recipient culture. Christianity became the force thanks to which the Chuvash culture was revived. Before the adoption of Orthodoxy within the framework of its ethnoreligion, it was an immature education that needed to realize its creative potential. The Chuvash culture needed to realize the creative possibilities inherent in it, representing an entity striving to realize itself. Thanks to the Christian enlightenment, the Chuvash culture got this opportunity and successfully implemented it.

Keywords: Chuvash culture, Russian culture, positive complementarity, missionary work, donor culture, recipient culture.

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О положительной комплиментарности в свете истории миссионерства в Чувашском крае

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Резюме: В статье рассматриваются причины, благодаря которым стало возможным взаимодействие русской и чувашской культур в русле христианского миссионерства. *Цель работы* – выявить причины, благодаря которым в обеих культурах сформировалась положительная комплиментарность по отношению друг к другу.

Методы. Авторами были использованы сравнительный, аналитический и описательный методы. Материалом для исследования послужила культурно-историческая ситуация времени принятия христианства в чувашской и русской культуре.

Результаты исследования. В процессе изысканий авторами были выявлены общие черты, сближающие переход в лоно христианства в Древней Руси и чувашской культуре, несмотря на тысячелетнее временное расстояние. По их мнению, глубокое освоение христианства чувашской культурой объясняется наличием некоего алгоритма, регулировавшего проникновение новой религии в языческую среду. В результате христианство стало той основой, благодаря которой чувашская культура пережила второе рождение. До принятия православия в контексте своей этнорелигии она была хотя и осознающей себя самобытной целостностью, но еще незрелым образованием. Чувашская культура нуждалась в актуализации заложенных в ней творческих возможностей, представляя сущность, стремящуюся реализовать себя. Благодаря христианскому просвещению, чувашская культура получила такую возможность и успешно ее реализовала.

Ключевые слова: чувашская культура, русская культура, положительная комплиментарность, миссионерская деятельность, культура-донор, культура-реципиент.

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Introduction

The process of integration of Christianity into Chuvash culture is of great interest from a cultural point of view. The reason is that this process presupposes that the “donor” culture is oriented towards the “recipient” culture. In this regard, it would be appropriate to use L.N. Gumilev’s terminology. Global cultural restructuring processes, them being unavoidable in the framework of a shifting religious worldview, involve, according to this terminology, the existence of positive complementarity within both cultures in regards to one another. By taking this concept into account, we will try to identify some of the reasons for the occurrence of this phenomenon.

Methods

Comparative, analytical and descriptive methods were used by the authors. The work compares the situation with the transition to the bosom of Christianity of Russian and Chuvash cultures.

Results and its discussion

It would be impossible to talk about the positive complementarity of the Russian culture towards the Chuvash culture (as well as the Chuvash culture in relation to the Russian culture) if they both did not feature some similar algorithms of evolution at different levels. So what does this commonality, which initially seems entirely unthinkable (belonging to different language groups, mentality peculiarities, etc.), manifests itself in?

Baptism in the formative stage of ethnic groups was one of the key factors that defined the course of development of both cultures. Russian culture has embraced Orthodox Christianity indirectly through the other – Byzantine – culture. Byzantium itself and Simeonovskaya Bulgaria were the only two direct ways in which Orthodox Christianity could be introduced into society. For us, it is important to point out that according to scientists, the most important way of permeation of Orthodox Christianity into Ancient Rus was a kindred, Slavic way. Conversely, the Chuvash were not baptised through a related ethnic group, but through the people who formed the foundation of the state of which the Chuvash came to be a part.

Another feature that should be pointed out are the two stratum in the culture of Ancient Rus, that emerged due to the adoption of Orthodox Christianity. G. Florovsky figuratively called these stratum the “day” and the “night” culture. The Byzantine-Christian culture was regarded as the “day” culture. Carried by a literary minority, it “...was a culture of spirit and mind”. Despite its significance, it does not exhaust the entire culture due to being only one part of it. A “second culture” is developing in the subsurface levels, creating a new and distinctive syncretism in which local pagan “experiences” are fused with roaming motifs of ancient mythology and Christian imagination. This second life runs hidden and does not often break through to the historical surface... The “night” culture is one of dreams and imagination” [4, p. 5–6].

It may be assumed that with the adoption of Orthodox Christianity, a similar situation arose in the Chuvash culture. It may be related to the fact that the correlation

between dynamic and conservative tendencies varies at different cultural levels. As a rule, the most active part of an ethnic group constitutes an absolute minority in relation to the rest of the group. It may be assumed that with the adoption of Orthodox Christianity, a similar situation arose in the Chuvash culture. It may be related to the fact that the correlation between dynamic and conservative tendencies varies at different cultural levels. The most active part of an ethnic group is as a rule an absolute minority in relation to the rest of the group, which probably maintains the relative stability of the culture during periods of fracture and fundamental change. The quantitative ratio in such cases does not give a complete picture of the situation. Despite its relatively small share compared to the total number of representatives, it is precisely the creative part of the ethnos that becomes the key to the future of national culture. This collision can be seen not just as a parallelism in the nature of changes in the cultures in question, but also as a kind of kinship between these situations.

Another important feature that makes it possible to draw a parallel between the two cultures in the time of their adoption of Orthodox Christianity is the fact that, along with baptism, both cultures acquired writing and literary language. This was not just a formal process of establishing a normalised form of language, but “...its inner conversion to Christianity and churching, transformation of the element itself...of thoughts and words, ...of the very soul of the people...” [4, p. 6]. Consequently, it can be said that, thanks to the inclusion of language in cultural work, baptism becomes a kind of divide in the history of Russian culture, when there is a separation from the previous pagan traditions and their pushing away “into the underground”.

This factor facilitated the polarization of the culture and the emergence of its two branches, which have been figuratively designated as “day” and “night” culture. The same pattern was observed in the Chuvash culture. In both cases, this process contributed to the emergence of a common ethno-cultural and socio-cultural integrity, which manifested itself in a change in the direction of sub-ethnic aspirations from centrifugal to centripetal. In addition, the translation process itself, which involves penetrating into the very essence of what is being translated, served as a prerequisite for the emergence of a new type of mentality, which has elevated cultures to a fundamentally different level.

Another important feature, as we believe, is that traditionally the Russian people are thought of exclusively as part of the Slavic world. At the same time, the Slavic approach does not exhaust all the peculiarities of Russian culture, and therefore there is an understanding that Eastern influences are a serious factor that must be taken into account both by researchers and state officials who hold the fate of the state in their hands.

The first time Russian-Eurasian problem was posed with all its urgency by representatives of Eurasia. For all the ambiguity of the results of practical activity of the Eurasians, their theoretical conclusions and conjectures based on research in the fields of history, geography, ethnography, art criticism, and linguistics, allow us to discuss the solid basis of their concept “Russia – Eurasia”

and use them as a confirmation of the fact that the Eastern orientation of Russian culture has a valid factual basis. And even the opponents of Eurasianism, with all their skepticism, did not deny it the topicality of the addressed issues. Thus, G. Florovsky, who knew Eurasianism from within and departed from it in the second half of the 20s, wrote in his article "Eurasian Temptation": "We cannot keep silent about the Eurasian truth. But it is necessary to say at once and directly – it is the truth of questions, not the truth of answers, the truth of problems, not of solutions. It so happens that the Eurasians were the first to see more than any others, were not as much able to solve but rather raise lively and acute questions of the day" [3, p. 37].

As for the point of view among researchers, according to which missionary work is merely a method of Russification of non-Russian people, such a statement is not groundless, but only considering one condition: Russification is a transient phenomenon that occurs at a certain point in Russian history, which can in no way diminish the importance of the initiation of the Chuvash into the Christian truth. It should not be forgotten that in any historical period, the best of the Apostles of Orthodox Christianity "separated the mission of the universal cause of Christ from the national Russification objectives" [2, p. 127].

The most striking example of apostolic ministry in the early period of Russian history is the missionary feat of Stefan of Perm, son of a choir brother from Veliky Ustyug, and a contemporary of St. Sergius of Radonezh. The fact that this ascetic was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church as a missionary – the Enlightener of the Zyryans, serves as proof that the primary objective was to bring the pagans to the faith of Christ. It is important to point out that Russification tasks were not set by Reverend Stefan in any way. "He did not want to connect the baptism of the pagans with their Russification. Nor did he wish to go to them with a Slavic mass, explained by a sermon in the national language. He did for Zyryans that what Cyril and Methodius had done for all of Slavic people. He translated the divine service and the Holy Scriptures (most likely, a part of it) for them. Prior to that, he had to compile the Zyrian alphabet. And the few preserved samples of ancient Perm writings prove that he did not use the Russian or Greek alphabet, but rather the local runes... retreating in this even from the first teachers of Slovene scripture" [2, p. 121].

In the XVIII century, the state began to take a leading role in missionary work. Now (not without the influence

of the ideas of the Protestant West, of course) the society gradually becomes aware of the importance of the native language for the neophytes to understand the Christian truth. Apparently, there was indeed oblivion (or at the very least weakening) of one's own traditions here, which was reflected in a repeated receipt of one's own idea in a form refracted through Western (Protestant) consciousness. Since then, all endeavors in preaching Christianity to foreigners were inevitably connected to the state initiative. The fruit of the state policy was the deployment of a network of elementary schools, a commitment to bring in foreigners who are able to convey Christian teaching to their countrymen in a language they understand, and the education of future Russian priests in local dialects. In particular, according to the data quoted by L.A. Timasov, by the middle of the XIX century "Chuvash language classes were held in Kazan and Simbirsk spiritual seminaries, in the Cheboksary, Kazan, Alaty, Orenburg and Simbirsk spiritual schools" [1, p. 78]. In addition, according to the same author, in 1850 there were 47 rural schools in the Chuvash region, attended by a total of 1500 students. These schools taught the Law of God, reading, penmanship and the four actions of arithmetic. Teaching, however, was delivered in Russian [1, p. 73].

The missionary work becomes truly efficient in the second half of the XIX century with the emergence and state recognition of the system introduced by N.I. Ilminsky.

Conclusions

Contrary to the prevailing belief that Orthodox Christianity is but a superficial layer artificially propagated by Russian missionaries, alien to the Chuvash culture, the facts indicate support the idea of how deeply Orthodox Christianity is ingrained in its fabric. This process was greatly facilitated not only and not so much by the geopolitical situation, but by the Eurasian character of the donor culture itself, the activity of Orthodox missionaries, as well as the peculiarity of the Russian messianic idea, which provided positive complementarity of Russian culture in relation to the so-called foreigners. Christianity has become the force through which the Chuvash culture has been reborn, so to speak. Prior to the adoption of Orthodoxy within its ethno-religion, it was, though aware of its authentic integrity, an immature entity that needed to actualize its creative potential, being a field ready to grow a plentiful crop, but only provided that the soil is fertilized and sown on time.

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