

Protestant Churches in the Primorsky Territory During the First Post-Soviet Decade

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Abstract: The post-soviet history of the protestant churches in the Primorsky territory can be divided into two phases. The first of them covers the period from 1990-2000 while the second one deals with the time from 2000 to the present day (Dudarebok, Serduk). The first missionary organizations in the USSR appeared in early 1990s. The “Light of Gospel” mission was registered in the town of Rovno as one of the first. It started to send missionaries to Russia, especially to the areas where there had not been any evangelical churches at all or the evangelical tradition had been broken by repressions. The Primorsky territory was one of such regions.

Key words: Protestant churches, the primorsky territory, first post-soviet decade, Rovno, USSR

INTRODUCTION

The first missionaries arrived to Primoriye in early 1990s from the Ukraine, the Urals and the central regions of Russia and Yakutia. Their activities in Primoriy stimulated establishment of the schools where all comers could study the Bible. The first Sunday school for adults who wanted to study the Bible was started by the “Merciful Samaritan” mission on 10 November, 1990, in Vladivostok. The mission aimed to make the people familiar with the Bible to tell about the Christianity and its history, the Christian life in families at work and at home (Dudarebok, and Serduk, 2014).

Protestant churches emerged not only in Vladivostok but in the other settlements of the territory as well. For instance, in 1991-1992 an unregistered fellowship of the Pentecostals appeared in Nakhodka. In 1993 the fellowship starts its activities in the confinement institutions 29, 35 (for juvenile criminals), 27, 22 of the Bolshoy Kamen and in the orphanages of Nakhodka. New churches established by the missionaries of the “Light of Gospel” (later these missionaries were supported by the “Hope for People” mission) realized the importance of solidarity and mutual support and started to form centralized organizations. Thus, the Primoriye association of the Evangelical Christian Missionary Churches (the PAECMC, headed by Y.M. Morokhovets) and the North-Eastern League of Evangelical Christian Churches (NELECC, headed by P.Y. Timchenko) were established (Omelyanchuk, 2003a, b). In 1990s another centralized organization appeared in Primoriye. It was The association

of Churches “The Home of Life”. In 2003 this association included 6 churches and 3 religious groups (Morokhovets 2001a, b).

Literature review: The PAECMC’s main objective was to spread the evangelical word and to set up new churches. Within the 10 year from 1990-2000 the missionaries of this organization established 11 communities and 12 religious groups of evangelical Christians in the Primorsky territory (Dudarenok *et al.*, 2010). Each of the churches had their own view on the missionary work and actively promoted the evangelical word. In 2000 the PAECMC organized an educational exhibition of world-famous artist’s masterpieces reproductions united by the topic “Jesus Christ’s Life”. The attendants of the local churches were pleased to participate in the project working as the guides. During 3 year the exhibition was attended by >15,000 citizens of the Primorsky territory.

The believers of the local PAECMC churches organized spiritual and educational events in which they used videos promoting marriage and family. Also, the members of the churches performed annual Easter and Christmas concerts for schools and orphanages. In 1995 PAECMC established the Primorskaya Bible Seminary for training future missionaries. During seven years of researcher 50 missionaries graduated from the Seminary and started their activities in the churches. In the same 1995 a Bible school was set up under the North-Eastern League of Evangelical Christian Churches. In 1990s the Primoriye churches of the League conducted active missionary work as well. The League took an active part in training future

missioners through short-term missionary courses arranged by the missions of Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and other countries. The graduates of such courses went to small settlements and villages of the Amur region, the Khabarovsk territory and set up new communities and religious groups there (Morokhovets, 2001a, b).

In late 1990s and early 2000s the Vladivostok Evangelical Christian Church (rector A.V. Vysotskaya) conducted missionary work among native and small peoples. The church was especially active in the village of Krasny Yar of the Pozharsky district.

In 1990s a significant contribution into the development of the vangelical movement was made by the South Korean missionaries. The first of them arrives to the towns of Artyom and Nakhodka in 1991, to Vladivostok in 1992. The total number of the South Korean missionaries during the period of 1991-2000 was 36 people. They set up 31 communities which involved 2,300 believers by early 2000s.

The churches established by the South Korean missionaries did not only satisfy the believer's religious needs but they also carried out various religious and non-religious activities, e.g., patronage of orphanages, visits to homes for the elderly and hospitals, researcher with prisoners, organizing seminars for rectors, providing financial aid to gifted and talented children and small peoples of the Primoriye (Omelyanchuk, 2003a, b). The Korean missionaries established the Christian Protestant Church for the Deaf and non-state children charity centre.

In 1990s the group of Korean missionaries who conducted service in the Promorsky territory was headed by the rector of Presbyterian church Pak Kvan Be. From the first days of his service in the Primorsky territory Pak Kvan Be wrote the "Preachment" rubric for the local newspaper "Nakhodkinsky Rabochiy" ("The Worker of Nakhodka"). "What and Who Do You Believe?", "Caught in the Act", "The True God" and other topics of the rubric were aimed at spiritual and moral education of the readers.

The churches of the Korean missionaries as well as the churches established by the "Light of Gospel" and the "Hope for People" missions started to unite and actively cooperate with other denominations. In 1990s the Association of the Korean Missioners arranged annual youth rallies which were attended by >300 boys and girls (Omelyanchuk, 2003a, b).

With the financial aid from believers of the Republic of Korea the Korean missionaries built a number of prayer houses in 1990s. The house built in 1997 in Nakhodka was awarded by a territorial building society for its wonderful architecture. In 1990s the Korean missionaries established

two seminaries in the Primorsky territory. The first one was set up in the Sedanka station and it provided full-time education while the second seminary was located in Vladivostok and conducted evening classes (Choi, 2001).

In late 1990s the attendants of Ussuriysk evangelical churches carried out missionary work in China. They received several thousand Bibles in the Chinese language. They organized the Bible courses for the Chinese believers to train missionaries who would be able to conduct missionary work in their Motherland (Morokhovets, 2001a, b).

The Adventist churches of the Primorsky territory carried out missionary activity in 1990s, too. The most successful of them was the Seventh-day Adventist's community 1 of Vladivostok. During the period of 1994-1997 the number of the community members increased more than two and a half times and in 1997 there were more than 400 people.

In 1990s the local Adventist missionaries received significant aid from their foreign coreligionists and missionaries from the central regions of Russia. For example, on 23 January, 1997 an Adventist evangelical group went on a train trip from Moscow to Vladivostok. It included John Carter and his wife Beverly, three American video camera men, the Presedent of the Volgo-Vyatskaya conference of the 7th-day Adventist Church Alexander Antonyuk and his wife, rectors Norman Matiyko, Boris Belko and Igor Pospexhin. The purpose of the trip was multifaceted: to see the life of the Russian people to find out how the law on the freedom of conscience is enforced in the country, to meet the Russian Adventists to present them with the Bibles, to bring the records of J. Carter's preaching, to bring some medicines and vitamins.

J. Carter's team arrived to Vladivostok on 31, January, 1997 and conducted evening worship in the local church. On Saturday all the three local communities gathered in the "Vladivostok" cinema where the American evangelist performed a sermon. After lunch J. Carter started an evangelical campaign. He performed a workshop for the Vladivostok rectors who continued the evangelical campaign later. Then J. Carter left Vladivostok for the Republic of Korea (Yunak, 2002).

In late 1990s the evangelical programs in the form of free public lectures were performed by the attendants of the Vladivostok Seventh-day Adventist church every day at 6 p.m. except Saturday. They used the cimenas "Moscow", "Chaika", "Vladivostok" as the venue. Kirill Avramovich Movilyan was in charge of holding these programs. The main topics of the lectures were "Harmful effects of smoking, alcohol and drug abuse", "Healthy life style", "How to cure without medicines", "The Bible and

the third millennium”, etc., (Current Archive of the Federal Registration Service Administration in the Primorsky territory, f.2511010150). The free lectures were attended by nearly 1,000 people and later some of them were christened in the 7th-day Adventist church. The biggest evangelical event which was of great significance for the revival of the Protestant religious tradition in the Primoriye was the arrival of the ship “Dollas” into the Vladivostok port in June, 1992. The ship’s crew was international.

It was an incredible missionary program. “The White Ship” as it was called by the believers, brought spiritual literature, the Bibles and the New Testaments as well as humanitarian aid collected by the Christians of different countries. Every Sunday there were parties on the pier near the ship-the so-called “Dollas-fiestas”. There were international cafes on board the ship where the residents of Vladivostok and the Primorsky territory had the opportunity to get acquainted with the believers from England, Hungary, New Zealand, the Philippines, Germany, India, the USA and other countries, to learn how they had come to the God, to hear the crew sing the Christian hymns, to see the national costumes and to enjoy the dances of different peoples of the world.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Every day on board the “Dollas” there were various conferences and seminars for the believers where they could hear well-known missionaries from different countries of the world. During the “Dollas’s” stay in Vladivostok young believers of the Protestant communities could participate in the evangelical programs in the streets of the city. They handed out the spiritual literature, invited to the meetings held both on board the ship and in their communities, volunteered on the ship (as sellers on the book exhibition, kitchen assistants, cleaners, porters, they also helped in repairs and preventive maintenance of the ship equipment). Those who knew English worked as interpreters for the crew and the believers and those who had personal automobiles brought the humanitarian aid to churches.

The experience of the missionary work that the believers had obtained on the ship was later used in their evangelical programs. Thus, in August, 1992 24 attendants of the “Evangel” church of Vladivostok went on their first evangelical trip. In 5 days they travelled all over the Khasansky district. The believers performed concerts in the villages of Slavyanka, Kraskino andreevka and on the Khasan frontier post. The concerts included the Christian songs, the evidence of how people had come to the God, poems written by the community

members and the texts from the Holy Scripture. At the end of the concerts all the people present were presented with the Gospel and a brochure “4 Spiritual laws”.

One of the most significant events for the Christians of the Primorsky territory in 1994 was participation in the First Global March for Jesus. The believers of several local churches gathered on the Korabelnaya embankment. To prepare for the participation in the March and to coordinate the place of different Protestant churches in it the rectors of the churches had to arrange a number of interconfessional meetings. During these meetings the rectors shared their problems and suggested various versions of the March scenario. While preparing for the March for Jesus the rectors made the first steps to the cooperation with each other which later led to creating an interconfessional organization-the Alliance of the Evangelical Churches of the Primorsky territory.

In 1995 the Second Global March for Jesus took place. It started with the procession along the Svetlanskaya street and finished with the holiday concert on the Fighters for the Soviet Power Square directly in front of the building of the territorial administration. The March was also preceded by a number of rector’s meetings where they had discussed the issues devoted to the participation in the March and the program of the event.

The third March for Jesus was held in 1996. The major part in preparing and holding the March belonged to A.V. Mishchenko, the bishop of the charismatic churches of “Live God” of the Primorsky territory. Though the procession did not go along the central street in order not to hinder the traffic it was still rather numerous and colorful. The March finished with the holiday concert on the embankment. By 1996 the communication between the rectors of different Protestant churches became stronger and the relations between the churches deepened. On 18 May, 1997 the Protestant churches held the Festival for Jesus together.

The adoption of the Federal law “On the Freedom of conscience and the religious associations” in 1997 was accepted by the rectors and the believers of the Protestant communities of the Primorsky territory rather uneasily. To register as a local religious organization a group or a local church had to present a documental evidence of its activities and existence in the area for >15 year or to be part of a registered centralized religious organization.

The rectors of the Primoriye Protestant churches considered this provision of the Law to be discriminative and decided to work out a unanimous attitude towards it and to find an appropriate way out of this situation. The

first interconfessional meeting of the rectors was held in the end of October, 1997. They discussed the federal law "On the Freedom of Conscience and the Religious Associations". All the other meetings of the rectors took place in the Vladivostok Methodist Church where the rector Anatoliy Kim kindly provided the venue for the meetings.

When the situation calmed down a significant number of the protestant communities reregistered in accordance with the requirements of the new federal law "On the freedom of conscience and the religious associations" using the archive data to prove that the evangelical tradition in the Primorsky territory has a long history, that the evangelical Christians, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Presbyterians appeared in the Primorsky territory before the Revolution and the Methodists conduct their activity since the Civil War and the foreign intervention. The other Protestant churches which were established in 1990s started to look for a centralized organization with the religion similar to that of theirs. Many churches found such a centralized religious organization in the Union of the Christians of the Evangelical Faith (the Pentecostals in Russia). As part of this process in 1998-1999 a number of Korean Presbyterian churches which accepted the faith of the Union of CEF and several Christian churches of David Yonga Chow and the "Grace" mission joined the Union. The branches of the Pentecostals' church and close religious entities are the Church of Full Gospel and numerous charismatic churches.

The Churches of the Full Gospel accept the doctrine that each believer should somehow repeat the life of Jesus Christ in his or her life and spiritual experience. According to the followers of these churches the concept of "Full Gospel" includes four major propositions: the birth from above, the christening by the Holy Spirit, faith healing (including the laying on the hands) and belief in the premillennial coming of Christ. The latter theological proposition is devoted to the doctrine that the millennial reign of Christ will precede the apocalypse.

The charismatic churches are close to the Pentecostals in their emphasis on the doctrine about the God's gifts and the ecstatic character of the prayers. They do not have any hierarchy, the communities are autonomous and independent, many of them have neither clear theological grounds nor uniform cult practice nor organizational structure. Mainly Christian charismatic churches appeared in 1990s and they were the ones to face the most difficult situation after the adoption of the federal law "On the Freedom of Conscience and the Religious Associations". At present most of these churches are part of the Russia Church of the Christians of Evangelical Faith (RCCEF).

From the moment of their creation the protestant churches of Primoriye took an active part in the social service to the society, they made their feasible contribution into charity activity. In 1990s sufficient social work was conducted by Primoriye Association of Missionary Churches of Evangelical Christians, North-Eastern League of the Evangelical Christian Churches, the Church of the "Live God", the Church "Home of Life", the Vladivostok Evangelical Christian Church, etc. They worked in hospitals providing medicines and medical equipment, performing spiritual concerts, providing psychological and spiritual aid to the patients. They collected humanitarian aid, helped the disabled and elderly people, worked with alcohol and drug abusers and prisoners.

The protestant churches paid great attention to work with children and young people including those from problem families. They organized christian youth camps, worked with the women who needed spiritual support. Together with the catholic church they worked in the support centre for women where they provided assistance to the needy women and the women in critical situation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In 1990s a substantial contribution into the social service was made by the foreign missionaries and especially the Korean ones. Having a great experience in social work they became a good example for the Primoriye Christians of how they could and should serve the society. On arrival to the Primorsky territory they set up churches and started to provide feasible social aid in the nearby area. In 1996 several missionaries established the primoriye missionary charity association which cooperated with the territorial fund of social support for the population as well as with the social aid department of the primorsky territory. The churches founded by the South Korean missionaries handed out bread, food and clothes, organized free lunches, provided hairdresser's services to the needy people of vladivostok. They provided aid to the Vladivostok Babies' home, the artyom town boarding school for blind children, the ussuriysk orphanage, lazovsky boarding school, the red cross society, the association of the deaf and dumb, the tuberculosis hospital, the primoriye department of the russia children's fund, the society of the disabled, orphanages, hospitals and other institutions.

In 1990s the Protestant churches became a base for rehabilitation centres for drug and alcohol abusers. The centres were established in the several districts of the Primorsky territory: on the Ugolnaya station (Vladivostok), in the villages of Yuzhno-Morskoy,

Filaretovka, Beiko and in the town of Lesozavodsk. Moreover, the believers served in the orphanages (Nadezhdinskiy Children's Home, Yuzno-Morskoy Children's Home, the Stekolnikov's Family Children's Home) and in hospitals (tuberculosis hospital). The believers helped to take care of children, to repair the buildings and conduct different events.

The merciful and charitable activity of the Protestant churches would have been more productive in those hard times if they had been supported by the local authorities. Sometimes the churches could not get customs clearance for the humanitarian aid or get the permission to visit orphanages or homes for the elderly.

In 1990s the relations between the protestant churches and the authorities were constructive. The chief specialist of the territorial administration for interaction with the religious and public organizations A.V.Dmitrenko had regular meetings with the rectors of the churches and solved their everyday needs, helped in organizing social service, told the attendants when and where they could provide material aid. The cases of violating the right for freedom of conscience were single.

In 1990s the Protestant mass media came to the Primorsky territory. Among them were the "Pokrovsky Vestnik", "Lubov Khrista" (Christ's Love), "Syostriy" (Sisters), "Kolodez Iakovlev" (Iakov's Well), "Deyaniya" (Deeds), "Prinyat zhizn" (To Accept Life), "Sotnik Kornily", "Khristianstvo Primoriya" (Christianity of Primoriye), etc. The total number of the Christian newspapers was 15. The most popular was the "Khristianstvo Primoriya" published by the Association of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists of the Primorsky territory and the Association of Korean Missioners. Some of the Protestant mass media of the 1990s existed for a short time due to the financial and other problems and the other newspapers are still operating. In 2001 a correspondents' courses "To Be a Christian" was established to train journalists and in 2003 more than 1,000 people were attending the courses (Omelyanchuk, 2003a, b).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it should be noted that in 1990s the life of the Protestant communities of the Primorsky territory was rather active and besides religious activity they contributed into solving social problems of the region providing financial aid and supporting the most undefended levels of the population.

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