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**FROM “KAZAN’S NEWLY CONVERTED”  
TO “ORTHODOX *INORODTSY*”:  
THE HISTORICAL STAGES OF THE  
AFFIRMATION OF CHRISTIANITY  
IN THE MIDDLE VOLGA REGION**

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INTRODUCTION

Due to its long lasting significance for the understanding of many historic, ethno-political, and ethno-cultural issues, the spread of Christianity in multiethnic regions and ethnics occupies a special place in historic and ethnographic studies. From the establishment of Moscow’s control over the multinational middle Volga region and the subsequent establishment of the Eparchy of Kazan in 1555, the conversion of *inovertsy* (adherents of a different faith) to Orthodoxy became not only a task for the church missionary, but also an important element of Russia’s ambitious policies on the empire’s eastern borders. Kazan became not only a “Window on the East,” as Robert Geraci has written,<sup>1</sup> but also a gate, the opening of which led tsarism into the broad expanses of Asia and started it down the historical path toward the building of a multinational Eurasian empire. The peoples of the middle Volga region became the first national minorities of Russia.<sup>2</sup>

The entire multi-century history of non-Russian nations living within tsarist Russia was accompanied by some attempts at unifying the multi-confessional population on the basis of Christian (i.e., Russian Orthodox) values. The church’s approach to Christianizing the middle

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<sup>1</sup> Robert P. Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, London, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Andreas Kappeler, *Russlands erste Nationalitäten. Des Zarenreich und die Völker der Mittleren Wolga vom 16 bis 19 Jahrhundert* (Köln, Wien, 1982).

Volga was conducted on an experimental basis in which it could try out different methods of conducting missionary work that were later applied far and wide in spreading Orthodoxy and Russian culture to the country's eastern border regions and beyond. The need to evaluate the historical experience of the establishment of Orthodoxy in the middle Volga has grown with the 450th anniversary of the Eparchy of Kazan. Study of the complex ethno-religious processes that took place under the influence of Christianity are of current interest given the contemporary religious renaissance and the continued coexistence and interaction of Orthodoxy, Islam, and paganism in the middle Volga region.

Researchers have always been interested in the topic of the spread of Christianity in the middle Volga. There are three main periods in the development of Russian historiography on the subject: the pre-revolutionary period (up until 1917), in which missionary, church-state, church-historic, and historic-ethnographic studies dominated; the Soviet period (1917 through 1991) that had a clearly dominant atheistic literature that covered historical-ethnographical, socio-philosophical, and ethno-religious works; and contemporary studies (from 1991 to the present) that are characterized by a departure from the atheistic ideology of Soviet times and by a broad spectrum of new theoretical and methodological approaches. One of my previous works provided a thorough analysis of the existing literature on the subject,<sup>3</sup> which, therefore, will not be repeated here. The region's ethno-religious and ethno-political processes have also received significant attention in historiographic works by foreign researchers.<sup>4</sup> Based on the analysis of existing literature as

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<sup>3</sup> L. A. Taimasov, *Pravoslavnaiia tserkov' i khristianskoe prosveshchenie narodov Srednego Povolzh'ia vo vtoroi polovine XIX – nachale XX veka* (Cheboksary, 2004), pp. 9-30.

<sup>4</sup> Andreas Kappeler, *Russlands erste Nationalitäten*; idem, *Russland als Vielvölkerreich. Entstehung – Geschichte – Zerfall* (München, 1993; in Russian translation: *Rossia kak mnogonatsional'naia imperiia. Vozniknovenie, istoriia, raspad*. Moscow, 1997); Paul W. Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics in Russia's Volga-Kama Region, 1827-1905* (Ithaca, 2002); Alexandre Bennigsen, "The Muslims of European Russia and the Caucasus," *Russia and Asia. Essays on the Influence of Russia on the Asian Peoples*, ed. Wayne S. Vucinich (Stanford, 1972); F. Brain-Bennigsen, "Missionerskie organizatsii v Povolzh'e," *Islamo-khristianskoe pogranich'e: itogi i perspektivy izucheniia* (Kazan, 1994), pp. 116-123; S. Lullukka, *Vostochno-finskie narody Rossii. Analiz etnodemograficheskikh protsessov* (St. Petersburg, 1997); J. Clazik, *Die Islammision der Russisch – orthodoxen Kirche* (München, 1959); Christian Noack, *Musulmanischer Nationalismus im Russischen Reich. Nationsbildung und Nationbewegung bei Tataren und Baschkiren, 1861-1917* (Stuttgart, 2000); *Of Region and*

well as the results of archival research, the current article provides theoretical generalizations about the historic periodization of the spread of Orthodoxy and Russian citizenship.

ON THE UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIANIZATION  
AND PERIODIZATION OF THE ESTABLISHMENT  
OF ORTHODOXY IN THE MIDDLE VOLGA

A number of possible variants exist for the periodization of the Christianization of the region's various nationalities. In pre-revolutionary historiography, the accent was placed on missionary work, dividing history into periods based on the activity of significant bishops or the reigns of certain Russian monarchs.<sup>5</sup> Soviet historiography approached the study of religious questions from the position of Marxist-Leninist methodology and utilized a formational approach.<sup>6</sup> A purely chronological approach also existed during both pre-revolutionary and Soviet historiography. Despite insignificant differences in the works of individual authors, the Christianization of the peoples of the middle Volga is usually divided in current Russian historiography into the following four stages: 1) the second half of the sixteenth century to the beginning of the eighteenth century, 2) the beginning of the eighteenth century to the end of the eighteenth century, 3) the end of the eighteenth century

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*Empire. Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, ed. Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky (Ithaca, 2001); *Vesna narodov: etnicheskaia istoriia Volgo-Ural'skogo regiona* (Sapporo, 2002); *Novaia volna v izuchenii etnopoliticheskoi istorii Volgo-Ural'skogo regiona* (Sapporo, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> A. Mozharovskii, *Izlozhenie khoda missionerskogo dela po prosveshcheniiu kazanskikh inorodtsev s 1551 po 1867 gg.* (Moscow, 1880); A. G. Khrustalev, "Ocherk rasprostraneniia khristianstva mezhdru inorodtsami Kazanskogo kraia," *Missionerskii protivomusul'manskii sbornik* 5 (Kazan, 1874).

<sup>6</sup> A. N. Grigor'ev, "Khristianizatsiia nerusskikh narodnostei kak odin iz metodov natsional'no-kolonial'noi politiki tsarizma v Tatarii (s poloviny XVI v. po fevral' 1917 g.)," *Materialy po istorii Tatarii* 1 (Kazan, 1948); V. D. Dimitriev, "Rasprostranenie khristianstva i chuvashskie narodnye massy v period feodalizma (seredina XVI v. — 1861)," *Trudy Chuvashskogo nauchno-issledovatel'skogo instituta* 86 (Cheboksary, 1978), pp. 81-119.

to the middle of the nineteenth century, and 4) the second half of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century.

Although the term “Christianization” is widely used in historic and ethnographic literature, it is in need of clarification. The term came into academic use during Soviet times, apparently as part of a fashion for such neologisms as “collectivization” and “industrialization.” Many authors use the term to refer to all stages of the spread and confirmation of Orthodoxy in non-Russian regions, often using the phrase “policy of Christianization.” When speaking of various government and church measures taken to firmly establish Orthodoxy between the middle of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, it is impossible to find a holistic, dominant system that could be called a single “policy.” For example, there was no government agency dedicated to the affairs of the newly converted people. These people were handled by educational and administrative institutions in the capital and the affected localities. More often than not, the legal and administrative documentation dealing with religious questions was no more than government reactions to concrete events. Such documents usually reflect different measures taken to suppress anti-church and anti-clerical attitudes and actions.

The church was primarily responsible for converting and establishing the Russian Orthodox way of life among *inovertsy*. State institutions were interested in guaranteeing the civic loyalty of *inovertsy* and were therefore interested in the ethno-confessional unification of the empire’s subjects. They, therefore, provided all types of support to the church and created a legal basis for missionary work. The government’s periodic cooperation with the church has created an image of a holistic church-state policy, which, at least until the official confirmation of the missionary style educational system of N. I. Il’minskii in 1870, would be hard to identify as such. Furthermore, the term “Christianization” can hardly be used in the broadest sense to describe events between the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, because significant groups among the converted nationalities already considered themselves to be fully Orthodox. If the “policy of Christianization” is taken to refer only to government activities, then the introduction of elements of Christianity through other channels – such as through the cultural interaction of non-Russian people with Orthodox

Russians or other Christians — is completely neglected. In this regard, one must ask oneself what can be considered as constituting Christianization. Is it church and government actions to convert *inovertsy* and legal support for confessional transformation? Or is Christianization a complex process leading to the gradual conversion of the region’s various nationalities over many centuries?

Converted Tatars, Chuvash, Mari, Mordvins, and Udmurts had different relations with Orthodoxy during different historical periods and their confessional orientation was not always determined by the same historical factors. For example, while a significant portion of Mordvins were already oriented toward Orthodoxy in the eighteenth or first half of the nineteenth centuries, the Chuvash, Udmurts, and plains Mari remained faithful to their pagan gods for a long time. Meanwhile, many baptized Tatars attempted to return to Islam. This begs the following question: how correct is the use of the term “Christianization” for all of the above-listed nationalities at different points in their historical development? How can one “Christianize” a people that already considers themselves Orthodox? If one understands “Christianization” as elimination of pagan remnants, then one can also write about the “Christianization” of the Russians.

There is still another question that needs to be addressed. Do we speak of Christianizing whom or Christianizing what? Specialist literature often speaks of the Christianization of peoples of Russia. In this connection, the use of the term “ethnic Christianization” seems justified. However, right up until the 1730s, conversions of non-Orthodox subjects of the Russian crown were individual affairs and the Kazan region’s “new converts” accounted for only a small portion of the non-Russian population. At the same time, the church and the tsarist government actively pushed for the establishment of Orthodoxy in the Kazan region through the colonization of Russian Orthodox settlers. The vast majority of churches and monasteries during this time were built in the cities and other locations with compact Russian populations. It is therefore very problematic to speak of any “ethnic Christianization” before the beginning of the eighteenth century. I introduced the term “territorial Christianization”<sup>7</sup> in a previous work, an idea that caused a series of

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<sup>7</sup>L. A. Taimasov, “Mezhkonfessional’nye otnosheniia na nachal’nom etape khristianizatsii

critical responses from specialists who thought that the term Christianization could not be given territorial connotations. The idea, however, is not originally mine, though original formulations had a somewhat different focus. For example, compare “territorial Christianization” with the “baptizing of Rus’,” the “Christianizing of Rus’,” or other, similar formulations. Such terms refer precisely to the *territory* of Rus’. It is exactly on the *territory* of the middle Volga region, where paganism and Islam had previously held sway, that the dominance of Orthodoxy was established. For this reason, in regard to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is more plausible to speak of the Christianization of the Kazan region and not of its non-Russian ethnic groups. From the second half of the nineteenth century, the term “Christianization” can only be used conditionally in as much as the majority of the converted nationalities, with the exception of newly christened Tatars, already considered themselves Christians. Because the term “Christianization” has become so firmly established in historic and ethnographic literature, there is no need to completely reject it, but rather its different meanings at different historical periods should be remembered for the term to be used correctly.

Taking into account the multitude of factors affecting the region’s ethno-religious development, this chapter will argue in favor of the following periodization: (1) the establishment of Orthodoxy through the Russian Orthodox colonization of the Kazan region (1552 to 1731); (2) forced conversion of the middle Volga’s various national groups (1731–1775); (3) the adoption of a Orthodox way of life among the newly Christianized nations (1775–1870); and (4) the Christian enlightenment and confessional choosing of Orthodoxy by the majority of *inovertsy* (1870–1917). This periodization does not include earlier penetration of Christianity among the region’s national groups as well as events that took place during Soviet and post-Soviet times, which are beyond the scope of this chapter, the rest of which will explain the characteristics of each of the above mentioned stages in greater detail.

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narodov Kazanskogo kraia (vtoraia polovina XVI-XVII vv.),” *Die Geschichte Russlands in 16. und 17. Jahrhundert aus der Perspektive seiner Regionen*. Hg. Von Andreas Kappeler (Berlin, 2004; Forschungen zur osteuropischen Geschichte. Bd. 63), pp. 322-341.

ESTABLISHMENT OF ORTHODOXY  
VIA RUSSIAN ORTHODOX COLONIZATION  
OF THE KAZAN REGION (1552 TO 1731)

Many researchers consider the founding of the Kazan Eparchy as the beginning of the church and governmental efforts to Christianize the peoples of the middle Volga. This is completely understandable and seems a natural starting point. However, the ethno-confessional situation in the region began to change right after the Russian capture of Kazan (1552), when Ivan IV, with his own hands, raised a cross on the battlefield that was soaked with Russian and Tatar blood. Moscow’s military victory was understood as a Christian victory over Islam and paganism. The successful conclusion of the campaign against Kazan strengthened the Tsar’s resolve to unify the multi-confessional inhabitants of the conquered territory under the banner of Orthodoxy. Addressing senior clergy in Moscow after returning from the successful campaign, Ivan IV’s speech notably called for the church and state to share the task of Christianizing “Kazan’s *inovertsy*.”<sup>8</sup> The church hierarchy declared their complete solidarity with the Tsar, expressed in Metropolitan Makarii’s response to the Tsar’s speech.<sup>9</sup> The spread of Orthodoxy to the middle Volga was viewed as one of the most important aims of official policy, necessary for cementing Moscow’s complete control over the region.<sup>10</sup> However, the realization of these intentions during this period met with a number of serious military, political, economic, national, and geographic problems. Anti-Moscow uprisings among the empire’s new subjects during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries forced the government to find a way to ensure a confessional victory over the *inovertsy*. Ivan IV’s mandate to the first Archbishop of Kazan, Guriy (Rogatin), already spoke about the need to realize missionary activities.<sup>11</sup>

The ethnic Christianization of the Kazan region is well covered in the historiographic literature while almost nothing is said about its

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<sup>8</sup> *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei*, tom 13 (St. Peterburg, 1841), pp. 223-224.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>10</sup> A.F. Mozharovskii, *Izlozhenie khoda missionerskogo dela po prosveshcheniiu kazanskikh inorodtsev s 1552 po 1867 god* (Moscow, 1880), pp. 6-9.

<sup>11</sup> *Akty arkheologicheskoi ekspeditsii 1* (St. Petersburg, 1836), p. 259.

“territorial Christianization.” For this reason, an incorrect opinion has formed that Church policies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were not effective. In my opinion, the church did not at that point make serious attempts at baptizing non-Russians, because they lacked the material, economic, social, and human resources to carry out large-scale Christianization of all *inovertsy*, who, for their part, were actively resisting church and state efforts at assimilation. The government paid the greatest attention to liquidating the military-feudal social classes among the native peoples by adopting harsh economic and religious coercions. Many of the local elites converted to Orthodoxy and were incorporated into the Russian nobility, as a result of which the majority became Russianized. The result of such government actions was the social homogenization of non-Russian subjects, who became *iasak*-payers and, from the time of Peter the Great, became state peasants. Among them representatives of one or another former social group were few and insignificant. The church actively helped the state in this process and in this way also successfully fulfilled its main task – the creation of a strong church structure. The Eparchy of Kazan became one of the empire’s leading episcopates by the eighteenth century.

Analysis of historical sources and literature provides justification for the suggestion that the government and the church jointly agreed on actions to be taken in furthering colonization. The cities that had already formed on the territory of Kazan region by the middle of the sixteenth century (Cheboksary, Alatyr’, Tetiushi, Tsivil’sk, Kokshaisk, Tsarevokokshaisk, Urzhum, Sanchursk, and others) became not only military, political, and administrative centers, but also outposts for Orthodoxy. Under the protection of army garrisons, churches and monasteries were rapidly built in and around city-fortresses that were, in the first place, built for Russian Orthodox populations. Colonization by way of the founding of monasteries grew during this time. The government provided assistance in all areas for the strengthening of church-monastery ownership. By analyzing the *pistsovie* books, basically census and harvest registers, and *dozornie* books, post-emergency reports, historians have been able to study the growth in monasteries’ landownership in the Kazan region. This growth came at a time when the growth in monastery holdings had already begun to slow



in traditionally Russian lands.<sup>12</sup> Alongside church and monastery-led colonization, the amount of land controlled by the nobility and court grew. All forms of agrarian colonization, on the one hand, promoted the strengthening of Russian feudal landownership and, on the other hand, sped the settlement of Russians in the territory of the former Khanate of Kazan. The growth of the Russian ethnic element did not take place simultaneously everywhere in the Kazan region. If the intensive settlement of Russians around Sviazhsk and Kazan began already in the second half of the sixteenth century, then their settlement of lands of the Mari and the Chuvash belongs primarily to the seventeenth century, when the construction of new fortresses and defense lines made the Russian population's settlement relatively safe.<sup>13</sup> This in turn led to an increase in the tempo of the spread and establishment of Orthodoxy in the different parts of the region. The Russian population of the Kazan region continued to grow at a quick pace in the second half of the seventeenth century. Referring to data generated by the 1678 census, V. M. Kabuzan suggested that “the natives constituted about 50% and Russians another 50% of the population in the 27 *uezdy* that formerly belonged to the Kazan khanate.”<sup>14</sup>

The results of Russian colonization had very direct consequences for the new ethno-confessional map of the region. Orthodoxy was territorially strengthened through its firm establishment in places of compact Russian settlement. The “Russian faith” became a neighbor of Islam and paganism. Contact zones were born where Russians lived together with other national groups or were at least close neighbors. Followers of different confessions began to interact with each other on economic and cultural matters. After the appearance of large groups of Russian

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<sup>12</sup> G. Peretiatkovich, *Povolzh'e v XV-XVI vv.* (Moscow, 1877), pp. 248-250; S.N. Kashtanov, *Khronologicheskii perechen' immunitetnykh gramot XVI v. Chast' vtoraiia, "Arheograficheskii eghogodnik sa 1960 god* (Moscow, 1962), p. 167; idem, “Zemel'no-immunitetnaia politika russkogo pravitel'stva v Kazanskom krae v 50-kh godakh XVI v. (Po aktovomu materialu),” *Iz istorii Tatarii* (Kazan, 1970), Ser. 4, p. 165.

<sup>13</sup> Many researchers noted the relatively late settlement of Russians on the territory of the current Republics of Chuvashia and Marii El: S. Kh. Alishev, op. cit., p. 93; M. N. Tikhomirov, *Rossia v XVI stoletii* (Moscow, 1962), pp. 491-503; V. D. Dimitriev, *Istoriia Chuvashii v XVIII v.* (Cheboksary, 1959), p. 34.

<sup>14</sup> V. M. Kabuzan, *Naselenie Privolzhskogo federal'nogo okruga Rossiiskoi Federatsii v XVI-XX vv. v ego so vremennykh granitsakh* (Moscow, 2002), p. 7.

settlers in the region, a lingering animosity initially remained between them and the Tatars, Chuvash, and other national groups. Eventually, however, Russian and non-Russian peasants were drawn together by a similar world view, common economic interests, and their repressed social status. Their religious affiliations became of secondary importance. The historical sources of the time witness that peasants stood together in opposition to the government regardless of their national or confessional identity in the social movements of the seventeenth century.<sup>15</sup> The Christianization of the local population was not very effective in the second half of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries due to the unstable political situation and a rather weak missionary organization.

The social and ethnic meaning of the term “newly converted” has a direct impact on the explanation of the problems covered in this section. This term first began to appear as early as the 1650s. There is usually not much controversy around the term’s etymology – it was used to identify non-Russian peoples who were baptized. It is a bit more difficult to determine the social and ethnic nature of these “newly converted.” Historical sources from the second half of the sixteenth century and seventeenth century use the term to denote a specific social group, sometimes substituting it with “service newly converted,” which may bear witness to a certain proximity between the “newly converted” and the “service classes” (nobilities), though the term “newly converted” was used for farmers as well. Analysis of the sources demonstrates that in the second half of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries the term “newly converted” was more often used to refer to social categories than to confessional categories. Many were, possibly, christened as a means to raise their social status and to gain some kind of privileges. This term steadily changed its meaning. The newly converted, accepting Orthodoxy, officially lost their ethnic identity; therefore, it is extremely difficult to determine what ethnic affiliations might be hidden behind the term, even though the converted themselves often continued to identify themselves with their previous ethnic group, be they originally Tatar, Chuvash, Mari, or other. Many researchers tend to believe that Tatars made up the majority of the sixteenth century’s “newly converted.” In

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<sup>15</sup> *Akty istoricheskie* 2 (St. Petersburg, 1841-42), pp. 168-170, 325-327; *Akty arkheograficheskoi ekspeditsii* 2 (St. Petersburg, 1836), pp. 204-205.

actual fact, a significant portion of christened Tatars eventually became known as a separate ethno-confessional group, the “*kriashen*” (simply the christened) or the “old converted Tatars” as they were later called in order to not be confused with the “newly converted” of the eighteenth century. In the minds of sixteenth-century government and church officials, the term “newly converted” was a temporary classification, a marker on the road to the full Russification of Christianized non-Russians. In the understanding of that age, confessional affiliation was the main component of ethnic identity. The Russians had the “Russian faith,” the Tatars had the “Tartar” faith, the Chuvash had the “Chuvash” faith. Evidently, state and church officials therefore supposed that the baptizing of representatives of non-Russian groups would eventually lead to their Russification.<sup>16</sup>

The terminology of the “newly converted” underwent significant changes during the reforms of Peter the Great, when the category of the service class was abolished and, later, with the reclassification of *iasak*-paying peasants into the ranks of the state peasantry. In the years of mass Christianization of non-Russian peoples, the term “newly converted” was usually given a clarifying ethnic determinant – “newly converted” Tatars, “newly converted” Cheremis, for example – which can be explained by the change in status of the “newly converted” and the essential and large differences between individuals of different ethnicities who had been recently Christianized. Occasionally the term “newly converted pagan” appears in official documents, which in all likelihood more fully expressed the religious condition of non-Russian congregations, not only in their form, but also in their internal content.<sup>17</sup> Apparently, the lack of a clearly defined ethnic classification for the “newly converted” created various difficulties for government and church officials. More will be said about the “newly converted” nationalities later in the article.

In this manner, Kazan region was *territorially*, rather than ethnically, Christianized in the second half of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Orthodox Church’s presence in the region was transformed,

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<sup>16</sup> Taimasov, “Mezhkonfessional’nye otnosheniia...,” pp. 322-341.

<sup>17</sup> P. N. Luppov, *Materialy dlia istorii khristianstva u votiakov v pervoi polovine XIX veka* (Viatka, 1911), p. 42.

with the assistance from the state, into the region's dominant religious structure with significant economic potential and a rich base of human resources that it could draw upon. The episcopate of Kazan became one of the largest in the Russian Orthodox Church and its eparchy was able to influence Russian politics at the national level. Kazan gave birth to a religious relic that gained all-Russian significance, the miracle-working icon of the Mother of God of Kazan. The icon became one of the symbols of the future Eurasian ethno-confessional community. At this time, Kazan's "newly converted" was more a social group, part of the service class, than a confessional group. The "newly converted," having accepted Orthodoxy and altered their traditional lifestyles, apparently, supplemented various Russian estate groups, while those that continued to live as *inovertsy* remained faithful to the religions of their forefathers. During this stage, the incorporation of elements of Christianity by the nationalities of the middle Volga was mostly due to ethno-cultural contact with the Russian Orthodox population; that is, as a result of "popular (everyday) missionary activities." Similar examples were evident among certain sections of the Mordvin and northern Udmurt populations. An insignificant number of the Mari and Chuvash were Christianized during this period. Special attention was given to the Tatar military and feudal elites and the service class of the region's other national groups.

THE MASS CONVERSION OF THE PEOPLES  
OF THE MIDDLE VOLGA REGION (1731 – 1775):  
ETHNIC CHRISTIANIZATION

Peter the Great undertook an attempt to renew missionary activities at the beginning of the eighteenth century, but measures taken to Christianize the Mari (the Cheremis) were local in character and had little effect. Given this, dating a new stage of Christianization from the beginning of the century, as some researchers do, can hardly be justified. This chapter will argue that the establishment of special agencies dedicated to the mass Christianization of *inovertsy* significantly changed the ethno-confessional situation in the region.

The vast majority of the non-Russian population was Christianized during the period when the Commission and Office for the Affairs of New Converts was active (1731-1764). Already in 1742, the head of the Conversion Office, D. Sechenov, reported to the Synod that “different nations of *inovertsy*...were enlightened by holy baptism by the village and district, and by the hundreds down to the individual” in 1741.<sup>18</sup> The mass baptizing of the non-Russian population of the middle Volga region took place in the 1750s and 1760s. Documents from a second inspection allows the composition of the non-Russian population to be reconstructed, which, according to instructions from 1746, was divided into the following groups: (1) newly converted or christened “non-believers;” (2) non-Christianized “non-believers;” (3) *iasak*-payers; and (4) those Tatars, Chuvash, and Cheremish levied for shipbuilding.<sup>19</sup> In 1847, the existence of 33,482 male individuals and 297,869 “non-believers” (including 112,031 Tatars) were documented in Kazan *guberniia*.<sup>20</sup> The more detailed data of the second inspection counted 228,699 Christened non-believer males, 164,092 non-Christianized (including 69,411 individuals registered to the Admiralty and 180,787 *iasak*-payers).<sup>21</sup> The percent of Christened did not noticeably change after the closing of the Office for the Affairs of New Converts in 1764.

The mass Christianization of *inovertsy* led to an even greater amount of heterogeneity in what was already a multi-ethnic society. The actions of the missionaries disrupted the traditional lifestyle of the non-Russian nationalities, bringing a certain discomfort to their spiritual and religious cultures. Christianization *de facto* divided single ethnic groups into separate confessional groups. Although the majority of the newly christened remained the same pagans or Muslims as they had always been, they became legally Orthodox with all of the consequences involved. Many were christened under pressure from church and state structures, not fully realizing the consequences involved. At the same time, the privi-

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<sup>18</sup> Mozharovskii, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>19</sup> *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii (PSZ)*, tom 12 (St. Petersburg, 1830), No. 9273.

<sup>20</sup> V. M. Kabuzan, *Narody Rossii v XVIII veke. Chislennost' i etnicheskii sostav* (Moscow, 1990), p. 26. This chapter translates modern *guberniia* into province, but leaves pre-modern, large *guberniia* as it is.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

leges and gifts awarded to new converts, without a doubt, stimulated peasants to seek at least nominal conversion.<sup>22</sup>

Baptism led to intra- and inter-ethnic conflict. To a large degree, Christianization targeted pagans. The non-Christianized treated their Christianized compatriots as traitors to their ethnic identity and the faith of their shared forefathers. Deficits resulting from privileges granted to the newly converted, such as the freeing of new converts from the pole tax for three years, from recruitment into the army, and other duties and taxes, were made up by demanding more from non-converts.<sup>23</sup> The more individuals who Christianized, the more difficult became the burden placed on the remaining pagans and Muslims. This sometimes led to conflict between confessional groups.<sup>24</sup> Relations between the Christianized and the non-Christianized became more peaceful after the cancellation of special privileges and the equalizing of their legal conditions. However, animosity between pagans and the “newly converted” remained all the way up to the beginning of the twentieth century. They steadily began to segregate and sought to settle away from each other, either forming separate villages or settling different ends of shared villages. The non-converted considered the converts to have been spoiled by a “foreign” faith. Every nationality in the region has its own terminology denoting their faithfulness to their group’s ethno-cultural values: for example, “*chi mari*” (“real Mari”), “*chan Chavash*” (“real Chuvash”).

The Muslims turned out to be better able to resist Christianizing policies due to their stronger religious convictions, historical memories of past greatness, greater solidarity and organization.<sup>25</sup> Only a small portion of the Tatar Muslim population was baptized and converted. Missionary pressures exerted by the government on the non-Russian population led to a destabilization in the ethno-confessional situation and a growth in anti-church protests. The revolt of the Tatars and Bashkirs under the leadership of Batyrsh in 1755 was a vivid example of the staying power of their faiths and the self-sufficiency of their national cultures. This forced the church and state to soften the methods

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<sup>22</sup> PSZ, tom 11 (St. Petersburg, 1830), No. 8236.

<sup>23</sup> N.V. Nikol'skii, *Khristianstvo sredi chuvash Srednego Povolzh'ia* (Kazan, 1912), p. 105.

<sup>24</sup> Mozharovskii, op. cit., p. 85.

<sup>25</sup> F.G. Islaev, *Pravoslavnye missionery v Povolzh'e* (Kazan, 1999), p. 78.

of their missionary work not only among Muslims, but also among pagan groups.<sup>26</sup>

The stubborn resistance of non-Russians to policies of forced Christianization and the growth of social tension led the government to seek new ways to stabilize society. The need to change religious policies became obvious. After reviewing an address of the newly converted of Kazan *guberniia* to the Senate, the Empress abolished the Office for the Affairs of New Converts in 1746. The baptizing of *inovertsy* and the confirmation of the newly converted in Christian beliefs was to be left to the local clergy in the future. Missionaries were sent to provide assistance to these converts.<sup>27</sup> This decree factually made the rights of the newly converted peasants equal to those of other state peasants of all religions in terms of the collection of taxes and duties. The hope that ethno-religious problems would be solved through the commissions designed to re-categorize society on the basis of the collective legal codex of 1649 was not realized.<sup>28</sup>

Catherine the Great ended the policy of forcing the confessional unification of multi-ethnic, multi-confessional Russian society. The Empress understood that further missionary pressure could cause a powerful social explosion and that changes in faith required time and patience. However, the government's hopes to stabilize the religious situation by declaring religious tolerance in 1773 proved illusory – as later events were to demonstrate. The converted, suffering under the weight of church taxes and duties, became increasingly active participants in anti-church and anti-feudal movements. The crude actions of Orthodox missionaries in the second half of the eighteenth century led the region's non-Russian nationalities to actively protest forced Christianization, which took on its most radical form in the years of Pugachev's rebellion (1773–1775). The legal formulation of confessional affiliation did not change the religious world view of the region's nationalities. The government relegated the affirmation of Orthodoxy among the newly Christianized nations to the local clergy. The ill-considered actions of missionaries led to the strengthening of anti-church and anti-govern-

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68-75.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>28</sup> *PSZ*, tom 18 (St. Petersburg, 1830), No. 12949.

ment attitudes rather than to the affirmation of Orthodoxy and Russian citizenship.

THE SPREADING OF AN ORTHODOX LIFESTYLE  
AMONG THE NEWLY CONVERTED NATIONS  
(1775 – 1870)

A relaxing of missionary pressure from the Orthodox Church and the government at the end of the eighteenth century led to a situation where newly Christianized individuals began to return to Islam and paganism. Because Russian law forbid christened Orthodox from changing faiths, the government was sooner or later bound to take harsh actions against this return movement. The impossibility of changing their beliefs legally led many newly Christianized subjects to secretly return to their traditional faiths. Christianized Tartars formed an especially well developed movement to return to the faith of their forefathers, and they took the most decisive action in reaching their goals. A mass appeal by Christianized Tatars in Nizhegorod *guberniia* to the tsar in 1802 requesting permission to return to the practice of Islam forced the government to make a serious study of the ethno-confessional situation in the Volga region and to step up its missionary efforts. The investigation documented the “apostasy” of Christianized Tatars and showed that the reason for their retreat from Orthodoxy was not only due to the weakening of the Church’s missionary efforts, but also had to do with the ethno-cultural and confessional environment in which these converts lived. When accepting Christian names, they had not received any instruction about their new faith and continued to live as before. Muslim Tatars, with whom they lived as neighbors and with whom they were often related, were constantly trying to return their Christianized fellow Tatars to their original faiths. The number of clergy supporting an expanded network of Christian educational establishments grew,<sup>29</sup> but such educational measures were undertaken without any coordinated system, were epi-

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<sup>29</sup> N. I. Il’minskii, *Opyty perelozheniia khristianskikh verouchitel’nykh knig na tatarskii i drugie inorodcheskie iazyki v nachale tekushchego stoletii* (Kazan, 1883), pp. 23-24.



sodic, and did not bring any noticeable results. This left it to the state to rely on coercive measures using state laws and institution.

Clergy active in areas with new converts were given responsibility for strengthening the hold of Orthodoxy among their congregations, but were not prepared for such active missionary work. The priests often knew neither the language or culture of their parishioners and a significant portion of them at the beginning of the nineteenth century were either illiterate or close to it.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, the construction of churches, payments for the conducting of religious rites, and fees to pay for the maintenance of the clergy amounted to significant expenses for the typical peasant's budget, leading to highly troubled relations between the Christianized peoples and the clergy. Priests were viewed more as government officials than as religious leaders.

The Christianized nationalities felt a spiritual discomfort that forced them to constantly reconsider their faith and analyze their confessional situation. The newly converted, with little or no understanding of Orthodox services and the tenets of Orthodoxy, found the faith of their forefathers more attractive because traditional ways of living more completely satisfied the needs of their religious and everyday lives. They compared “their” faith with the “Russian” faith mostly on a ritual level. Complex Orthodox rituals conducted during services held in Old Church Slavonic or Russian remained incomprehensible to new converts. Non-Russian Orthodox parishes were as a rule more geographically dispersed than Russian parishes and typically consisted of a number of villages that could be located dozens of kilometers from the church supposedly serving them. Given wide-spread illiteracy and the lack of positive motivation, Russian Orthodoxy was considered “foreign” by most of the non-Russian population and was seen as a threat to their ethno-cultural unity. The desire to retain national traditions and identity caused people to defend the faith of their forefathers from external religious expansionism.

Broad-based “apostasy” renegade movements among the newly Christianized peoples of the middle Volga region reached a climax in 1827 when a few thousand supposedly converted Tatars appealed to the

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<sup>30</sup> L. A. Taimasov, *Khristianizatsiia chuvashchikogo naroda v pervoi polovine XIX veka* (Cheboksary, 1992), pp. 35-36.

emperor to let them return to the “faith of their fathers.”<sup>31</sup> The appellants stressed the fact that they felt they were being left outside of any organized religion. The Church and the government were not ready for such activism from newly converted parishioners.<sup>32</sup> The Synod suggested sending the “apostates” copies of the New Testament translated into Tatar and to send reliable priests capable of conducting missionary work to newly Christianized parishes.<sup>33</sup> The Synod’s decree turned out to be impossible to implement: there was no demand for their translation of the New Testament because of problems with the translation and low levels of literacy among the new converts.

Movements away from Christianity were also widespread among the former pagans. The sources contain many examples of the religious life of christened Chuvash, Mari, Mordvins, and Udmurts. Baptism did not cause the majority of Christianized pagans to waver in their fundamental beliefs. The most vivid examples of traditional pagan opposition to the Orthodox Church are events that took place in 1827 and are known in specialist literature as the “Praying of All the Mari,” which called forth the greatest resonance in Church and government circles.<sup>34</sup> One of the investigators of this affair, Archpriest A. Albinskii, who had long served a parish in Mari and spoke the local language, noted in a report to the Kazan Consistory dated March 2, 1828 that pagan *zhretsy* (priests) had a “strong, secret opposition” to Christian missionaries and clergy.<sup>35</sup> Here it should be noted that some of the organizers of the praying were from the baptized Mari. A. Albinskii’s comments that Orthodox priests had no sway over their parishioners, because of the distance of the churches from the villages and because they did not speak the language of their parishioners, were justified.

In the government’s opinion, the christened should be isolated from contact with those that remained pagans or Muslims. For this reason, the newly converted were often resettled in Russian areas. This did not,

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<sup>31</sup> Mozharovskii, op. cit., pp. 117-118.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>34</sup> A. G. Ivanov, “Vsemariiskoe iazycheskoe molenie 1827 goda i deistviia vlastei,” *Mariiskii arkhograficheskii vestnik* 8 (1998), p. 50.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

however, have a positive effect. Large-scale public praying movements were also recorded in those years among other nations: the Chuvash, the Mordvins, and the Udmurts. At this point in history, the tenets of Christianity remained largely incomprehensible to the nominally newly converted population. The main function of any religion is, first and foremost, its psychological effect on a person, who should develop a belief in its supernatural, miraculous possibilities. Baptized non-Russian perceptions of Orthodox dogmatism could be formed either through close, everyday contact with followers of this faith (popular or everyday missionary work) or through Christian education (official missionary work). History offers examples of when Orthodoxy infiltrated mass consciousness through everyday communication, steadily taking on the characteristics of the traditional national religion.<sup>36</sup> “Popular missionary work” functioned differently in multi-ethnic contact zones. Only after lengthy contact did the neighboring nations begin to have notions of “the other’s” belief. This can be easily noticed in the establishment of Orthodoxy among certain portions of the Mordvins, the northern Udmurts, and the mountain Mari.<sup>37</sup> However, the true conversion of the main masses of the newly baptized – that is, their confessional re-orientation away from traditional faiths toward Orthodoxy – could only be realized through official missionary activities.

All baptized individuals are referred to as Orthodox in official documents. However, the level of acceptance of the Christian faith differed significantly among every concrete ethnos and even each separate ethnic sub-group. Of all of the baptized nationalities from the middle Volga, only a portion of the Mordvins could be truthfully referred to as belonging to Orthodoxy by the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>38</sup> V. M. Kabuzan used statistics to track the assimilation of the Mordvin

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<sup>36</sup> As is well known, the Russian peasants themselves became acquainted with Christian teachings not through books or schools, but as a result of continuous contact with Orthodox fellow countrymen, which lowered the ethno-cultural barriers between Christianized and non-Christianized proto-Russians and created fertile conditions for religious “syncretism” with the dominance of Orthodoxy.

<sup>37</sup> See: P. N. Lupov, *Khristianstvo u votiakov so vremeni pervykh istoricheskikh izvestii o nikh do XIX veka* (Izhevsk, 1899); N. F. Mokshin, *Religioznye veroovaniia mordovy* (Saransk, 1969); N. S. Popov, *Pravoslavie v Mariiskom krae* (Ioshkar-Ola, 1987).

<sup>38</sup> V. A. Iurchenkov, “Mordovskii etnos v imperskom sotsume,” *Novaiia volna v izuchenii etnopoliticheskoi istorii Volgo-Ural'skogo regiona* (Sapporo, 2003), p. 194.

population in a number of districts in Nizhegorod, Saratov, and Tambov provinces.<sup>39</sup> However, one must take into consideration the fact that the territory populated by Mordvins had long since belonged to the political and economic sphere of influence of the Riazan and Nizhegorod principalities – and later that of Moscow's rulers – between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. This led to earlier and closer ethno-cultural relations between Mordvins and Russians.<sup>40</sup> Thanks to these factors, the Mordvins moved more quickly toward cultural integration and were incorporated into the sphere of Russian social consciousness earlier than the region's other nationalities.<sup>41</sup> Unlike the Mordvins, the majority of the Chuvash, Mari, and Urdmurts lived in compact settlements far removed from Russian settlement and had few direct contacts with Orthodoxy.

On the other hand, territorial and cultural closeness alone could not be determinant factors in their Christianization. Their acceptance and internalization of the main tenets of Christianity were fostered through the Orthodox Church's missionary and educational work. The fruits of these efforts – still far from ripe – begin to appear in the middle of the nineteenth century in the example of an Orthodox religious movement among the mountain Mari.<sup>42</sup> Detailing reasons for the increased Orthodox inclinations of the mountain Mari, Paul Werth paid special attention to the geographic conditions of their settlement.<sup>43</sup> Without denying the importance of geographic factors, I contend that the influence of missionaries on the mountain Mari cannot be denied.<sup>44</sup> By the middle

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<sup>39</sup> Kabuzan, *Narody Rossii...*, pp. 173-175.

<sup>40</sup> *Povolzhskie finny. Kratkii ocherk istorii i razvitiia mordovskogo naroda* (Moscow, 1991), pp. 20-39.

<sup>41</sup> Iurchenkov, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-175.

<sup>42</sup> L.A. Taimasov, "Nerusskie monastyri Kazanskogo kraia: orientiry konfessional'nogo obnovleniia," *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 21 (2004), pp. 88-115.

<sup>43</sup> Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy*, pp. 200-223. Like the Mordvins, the mountain Mari were brought into the Russian zone of influence earlier than their co-nationals from the plains. From the beginning of Russian colonization, Orthodox populations began to settle in areas neighboring the settlements of the mountain Mari.

<sup>44</sup> See: I. A. Iznoskov, *Materialy dlia istorii khristianskogo prosveshcheniia inorodstev Kazanskogo kraia 1* (Moscow, 1893), pp. 1-5; P. V. Znamenskii, "Religioznoe sostoiianie cheremis Koz'modem'ianskogo uezda," *Pravoslavnoe obozrenie* 21 (Kazan, 1866), pp. 61-79; P. Rufimskii, *Cheremisskii Mikhailo-Arkhangel'skii muzhskoi obshchezhitel'nyi monastyr' Kazanskoi gubernii, Kozmodem'ianskogo uezda (istoricheskoe ego opisanie i sovremennoe sostoiianie)* (Kazan,

of the nineteenth century, the religious situation among the mountain and plains Mari was completely different. Orthodoxy established itself more dynamically among the first group, while the second group did not experience intense Orthodox missionary efforts and retained the pagan basis of their beliefs.

Thus, the government could not attain great success in the establishment of Orthodoxy among baptized "non-Russians" until the incorporation of N. I. Il'minskii's educational system into missionary practice. A. Fuks, an ethnographer, provides a fairly accurate description of the situation among the Chuvash and Mari in the middle of the nineteenth century: "Of them it can be said that they had tired of their own religion, but were not yet attracted to our religion."<sup>45</sup> The sources from and literature on this period contain a number of indications of a certain duplicity in the religious conceptions of the newly Christianized that brought together a number of pagan and Christian elements. Some researchers refer to this duplicity in their religious views as a "dual religion." However, I believe that this term can only be used conditionally, because an individual can only have one true belief. If believers revered both Christian and Muslim holy images, then they associated these religious images with their own ideas of religious and spiritual belief. The fusion of religious rituals from different faiths bears witness not to the newly baptized having two or more religions, but to the deformation of their world view and the formation of a synthetic religiosity, which still retained the traditional basis of their previous beliefs.

The Chuvash, living in areas that neighbored Muslim Tatar areas, caused a special unease among the government authorities. Many missionaries considered the closeness of the Chuvash to the Tatars in language and culture to be the main reason for the conversion of a number of Chuvash to Islam. Without a doubt, similarities in the fate of the Turkic nations influenced the formation of their religious values. However, the majority of the Chuvash population remained strangers to Islam. Only those living in contact zones with Muslims experienced Islamic influence. Conversion to Islam ultimately led to Tatarization, because conversion to Islam under the conditions of Russian dominance could hardly take on a

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1897), pp. 4-9; Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy*, pp. 200-223.

<sup>45</sup> A. Fuks, *Zapiski o chuvashakh i cheremisakh Kazanskoi gubernii* (Kazan, 1840), p. 49.

mass character. Meanwhile, Christianity eventually became internalized among the Chuvash primarily through education.

Church agencies were not at this time ready to undertake large-scale missionary and educational work. The multiethnic congregations, which can be divided into four basic confessional groups based upon their *de facto* religious orientations, were similarly not ready to fully accept Christian teachings. Russians belonged to the first group, for the majority of whom Orthodoxy was one of the main elements of their national identification. A significant portion of the Mordvins and mountain Mari can be relegated to the second group, those that accepted the basic teachings of Christianity, but still had not made a final break with their traditional beliefs. The third group consisted of the majority of newly Christianized Chuvash, Mari, and Udmurts as well as the previously baptized Tatars who accepted only certain symbolic, ritual aspects of the Orthodox cult, but did not have even an initial understanding of basic Christian dogmatism. And, finally, newly christened Tatars made up the fourth group, which in fact remained Muslim and, to a much lesser degree, pagan. A growth in the abandonment of Orthodoxy for certain sects caused great alarm among the representatives of civil and religious power. Orthodox ideologists were forced to take the region's ethno-cultural patterns into account.<sup>46</sup>

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION  
AND CONFESSIONAL CHOICE OF ORTHODOXY  
AMONG THE NEWLY CONVERTED NATIONS  
(1870–1917)

Bourgeois modernization and the adoption of N. I. Il'minskiĭ's missionary educational system as the official program for spreading Orthodoxy among non-Russian nationalities led, on the one hand, to the significant deformation of national cultures and, on the other hand, to an awakening of the national self-consciousness. Together with efforts

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<sup>46</sup> L. A. Taimasov, "Etnokonfessional'naia situatsiia v Kazanskoĭ eparkhii nakanune burzhuaznykh reform," *Novaiia volna v izuchenii etnopoliticheskoi istorii...*, pp. 106-136.

to retain traditional national traits, the Christianized nationalities also experienced significant changes in their cultures. Orthodox missionaries concentrated their main efforts at this stage on Christian education, guessing that the amount of religious feeling among the population depended in part on the intellectual level of the Christianized population.<sup>47</sup> The large-scale re-education of the non-Russian nationalities resulted in the birth of national movements, as parishioners redefined their identities with greater knowledge of the wider world around them. N. I. Il'minskii wrote in an article in *Pravoslavnoe obozrenie* [Orthodox Review] in 1864 that a thirst for education had awoken among christened Tatars and needed to be utilized to “direct [the Tatar] to our side, demonstrating via experience the superiority of our education and our religiosity.”<sup>48</sup> This required new missionary schools prepared to provide a religious and educational influence on christened populations.

N. I. Il'minskii's pro-educational ideas found fertile ground in the intellects of the Christianized peoples' best representatives. The first wave of national intelligentsia formed under their influence. As the famous Chuvash educator, I. Ia. Iakovlev, later admitted, his missionary and educational activities began after an encounter with N. I. Il'minskii. “I took from him the view that the missionary's only true and expedient path ran through the national school, the program of which should be permeated with the spirit of the Christian [Orthodox] religion,” Iakovlev wrote.<sup>49</sup> N. I. Il'minskii laconically explained the main feature of his system in a widely known tirade contained in a letter he wrote to K. P. Pobedonostsev. “My ammunition is non-Russian books, church services held in non-Russian languages, and non-Russian clergy lead by a priest.”<sup>50</sup>

A change in the local population's confessional orientation away from paganism toward Orthodoxy resulted from missionary measures that combined education in the local language at church, at school, and

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<sup>47</sup> [N. V. Nikol'skii], *Naibolee vazhnye statisticheskie svedeniia ob inorodtsakh Vostochnoi Rossii i Zapadnoi Sibiri, podverzhennykh ovlivaniuu islama* (Kazan, 1913), pp. LIV-LVII.

<sup>48</sup> “Eshche o shkole dlia pervonachal'nogo obucheniia detei kreshchenykh tatar,” *Pravoslavnoe obozrenie* 16 (Kazan, 1865), p. 89.

<sup>49</sup> I. Ia. Iakovlev, *Moia zhizn': vospominaniia* (Moscow, 1997), pp. 183-185.

<sup>50</sup> N. I. Il'minskii, *Pis'ma k Ober-Prokuroru Sv. Sinoda K. P. Pobedonostsevu* (Kazan, 1895), p. 178.



in the publishing of books with the winning over of most progressive leaders from among the local Christianized populations to the missionary cause. Christianized individuals began to visit the church more often; they celebrated church holidays, and carried out church rituals. Religious movements in support of the founding of monasteries reflect a confessional renewal that originally included the mountain Mari, but later also included the Chuvash. By the beginning of the twentieth century, as many as seven Orthodox monasteries with non-Russian inhabitants existed in Kazan province alone, though the authorities rejected other petitions to open new monastery communities. Pilgrimages to holy sights was another new phenomenon among the recently Christianized non-Russian nations. Many Chuvash believers traveled to distant monasteries to pray. They could be met in Sarov, Kiev, and even in Jerusalem and Mount Aphon in Greece.<sup>51</sup> They understood that one did not necessarily have to become Russian in order to be Orthodox. Many of the national awakeners, raised on the ideas of N. I. Il'minskii, saw possibilities for national development through Christian education. However, education could not be kept within the framework of the Holy Word. Once literate, the population gained access to an entire world of knowledge, from which each had to choose according to his or her own interests.

The use of non-Russian languages presented special problems, because the government believed that education would lead to the awakening of national movements and was afraid of the appearance of separatist attitudes. N. I. Il'minskii and his followers had to work hard to convince religious and governmental officials of the need to develop primary education in non-Russian languages. The number of Il'minskii's critics and the vocal criticism of his system grew in the tense socio-political situation at the beginning of the twentieth century as did the number of public objections to church and educational use of the native languages of non-Russian peoples. Il'minskii's students refuted their opponents' conclusions, contending that Christianity did not foster separatism, but, just the opposite, brought the empire's Russian and non-Russian peoples closer together. In N. V. Nikol'skii's opinion, only the solid internalization of Orthodoxy with the help of native language made possible the further spiritual Russianization of the Chuvash.

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<sup>51</sup> N. V. Nikol'skii, *Rodnoi iazyk kak orudie prosveshcheniia inorodtsev* (Kazan, 1904), p. 26.



“Language, customs, traditions and similar national habits are important to non-Russians as external markers, as the embodiment of their belief and faith. But because the latter will soon pass away as unification in religion and faith with the Russians takes place in the near future, there will no longer be any barriers to external unification in language as well as in everything else.”<sup>52</sup>

Bourgeois modernization, the monetarization of the economy, and the migration of peasants to Russia’s large industrial centers had a large influence in this period on ethno-religious processes. Life itself taught the smaller nations the benefits of learning Russian and adapting to Russian culture. “Russianized non-Russians” were able to achieve a higher socio-cultural standing than their co-nationals – and, indeed, higher than that of many Russians. For this reason, Christianized non-Russian’s desire to “Russify” was viewed as a progressive tendency. By 1917, almost all Mordvins and a significant portion of the Chuvash, Udmurts, the Mari, and previously converted Tatars came to consider themselves to be Orthodox.

The epoch of Christian education witnessed the formation of the national intelligentsia and the professional culture of the Volga’s Christianized nations. Certain accusations directed at the missionary educators and the statements of some authors regarding the Russianization of these Christianized nations are, in my opinion, incorrect. Orthodox missionaries were given the task of Russianizing these peoples, but Christian education did not necessarily lead to Russianization. National leaders quickly understood the new possibilities for developing the cultures of the Christianized peoples and spoke of a spiritual Russianization that meant they would nonetheless maintain their ethnic self-consciousness. The foundations of these nations’ professional cultures were established in the second half of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century and continue to be renewed and develop to this day. Christian education together with economic and cultural transformation brought the non-Russian peoples into Russian structures and strengthened their commitment and participation through Russian Orthodox values.

Despite the success of Christian education during this period, traditional forms of belief remained and cases of the re-conversion to Islam

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

and “Tatarization” of nominally Christianized Tatars, Chuvash, Mari, and Udmurts were also recorded.<sup>53</sup> The missionaries argued that these cases constituted a Muslim threat that could lead to the unavoidable Islamicization of non-Russian areas, if the Church and government did not take action. Such a problem did exist in contact zones where christened peoples neighbored and lived in daily contact with Muslims. At different historical periods, many pagans and even Christianized persons accepted Islam and became Tatars. However, the influence of Islam should not be overly exaggerated. Islam was not allowed to pursue its own official missionary activities. Not only did Christianized persons *not* experience any type of religious pressure when they lived in areas removed from Muslim populations, but they were completely unacquainted with and did not understand the tenets of Islam. In fortunate cases, they may have heard their priests’ criticism of Islam. For example, only 2,500 Chuvash converted to Islam after the declaration of religious tolerance in 1905 and almost all of these were from communities with mixed Tatar and Muslim populations.<sup>54</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The establishment of Christianity in the Middle Volga took a number of centuries and can be divided into four periods. The first period chronologically includes the years from 1552 to 1731 when an Orthodox Russian population came to dominate the region through Russian Orthodox colonization. Under the influence of the Tsar, the Eparchy of Kazan became one of the largest and most important bishoprics in the Russian Orthodox Church. Newly converted non-Russians constituted only a very minor portion of the population and predominantly consisted of Tatars and the service class of the region’s other nationalities, who slowly, but surely Russified. During the second stage of Christianization, which stretched from 1731 to 1775, agencies for the affairs of the newly converted, relying on legal and financial aid from the state, baptized the majority of pagans as well as a number of Muslims. Christianization was

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<sup>53</sup> V. D. Dimitriev, *Prosvetitel' chuvashskogo naroda I. Ia. Iakovlev* (Cheboksary, 2002), p. 87.

<sup>54</sup> [Nicol'skii], *Naibolee vazhnye statisticheskie svedeniia...*, pp. LIV-LVII.

accompanied by external, primarily forceful or violent, measures. The interests and opinions of the subject peoples were completely ignored and their representatives did not participate in the Church's missionary work. Attempts to prepare clergymen from among the non-Russian peoples through schools for the newly christened did not have the desired result. Forced Christianization strengthened social protest movements among the multinational peasantry. In the following period, dating from 1775 to 1870, The Orthodox way of life gradually permeated the lifestyle of the newly christened nationalities. Educational methods were adopted that in the end had little effect because of the serious lack of schools, literature, educators, and the widespread illiteracy among the population. Russian clergymen often sought the assistance of governmental authorities to settle the conflicts that continuously arose. However, the religious beliefs of the target populations steadily broke down under Orthodoxy's influence. The newly christened populations began to demonstrate an increased knowledge of Church rituals, even as they, on the whole, continued to stick to the beliefs and rituals of their forefathers.

The fourth and final period lasted from 1870 to 1917 and was the most significant period for the firm establishment of Orthodoxy in this multiethnic environment. Under the influence of Christian education, the majority of those christened made an active choice in favor of Orthodoxy. Real zealots of the "Russian faith" from among the local population could even be called "Orthodox proselytizers." Many of them cut their connections with their previous religious communities, left the gods and spirits of their nature cults, and became literate in Russian. Two tendencies were obvious among these individuals. One group pushed for the development of their national cultures on the basis of Christianity and Russian Orthodoxy. The second group gave up their national roots and completely Russianized. A further group of the non-Russian Orthodox flock would include persons who were educated at missionary schools and who gained an understanding of the basic tenets of Christianity. These were primarily people who lived in villages and settlements close to Orthodox churches as well as populations living in primarily Russian areas. These persons identified themselves as Orthodox and did not take part in pagan rituals, but still retained some elements of their original beliefs. They can be considered "solid Orthodox," while a significant portion of the christened non-Russians should be considered "waver-

ing Orthodox." They did not have any solid religious orientation and participated in Church rituals not due to the strength of their belief, but out of fear of falling on the wrong side of the government. At the same time, they held true to traditional beliefs. It is during this last period that a Russian consciousness formed in relation to the level of establishment of Orthodox belief among the nominally Christianized nations.

Over the course of a number of centuries of missionary influence, the pagan nationalities of the middle Volga traveled the difficult path from being "newly converted" to becoming "Orthodox Russians." Not all of them followed the "path to the church." Many remained before their "holy glens," while others turned from the path and took different directions altogether. But the church doubtlessly became an important spiritual power nonetheless, uniting "Russians" with different backgrounds in a single Orthodox societal space.