

## ORTHODOX MISSION IN JAPAN AT THE TURN OF XIX - XX CENTURIES

### Abstract

The work of the Orthodox Mission in Japan at the turn of the XIX - XX centuries forever changed map of religions in the Land of the Rising Sun. The National Japanese Orthodox Church was established and all the clergy were elected from among the Japanese themselves. The founder of the mission and its long-standing leader was the Archbishop Nikolai (Kasatkin). The article provides an overview of the main principles the mission was found upon and its activities.

### Keywords

Orthodox Mission in Japan, St. Nicholas of Japan, Orthodox Church of Japan, missionary, local Churches

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### 1. Introduction

The Orthodox mission in Japan at the turn of the XIX - XX centuries has become a truly unique phenomenon not only in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church, but also in the history of Orthodox missionary work in general. The work of a single missionary, the Archbishop Nikolai (Kasatkin), created the National Japanese Orthodox Church. St. Nikolai managed to open the Orthodox faith to the people with deep respect and love to their native land, as a force that does not contradict their national or cultural identity. The works of the Equal-to-the-Apostles Nikolai, the Enlightener of Japan, went down in history not only as a unique deed of preaching Orthodoxy in its modern times, but also as an example of peaceful interaction of representatives of different cultural and historical traditions.

The Equal-to-the-Apostles Nikolai arrived to Japan at the beginning of its "discovery", in 1861. At that time Christians were considered as enemies. After a few decades St. Nikolai became one of the most respected and well-known foreigners in the Land of the Rising Sun. Even Orthodoxy was called "the Faith of Nikolai." There were over 30 thousand members in the established Japan Orthodox Church.

### 2. Methodological Framework

The study used the following methods - comparative analysis, historical interpretation, systemic-structural and retrospective.

With the help of a comparative analysis it became possible to show the main approaches to the organization of the Orthodox mission, which is reflected in various documents and testimonies of contemporaries.

The method of historical interpretation was largely used in the work on the diary records of the Apostle of Japan. They contain many important evidences about the principles of organization of the preaching in the Japanese Orthodox Church, which were not specified during verbal communication. Therefore, special attention in the study was paid to the work on the interpretation of such communication.

The use of the systemic-structural method is justified by the need to describe the structural organization of the Orthodox Mission in Japan on the basis of scattered evidence from different historical sources.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. The main principles of organization of the mission

Created by Archbishop Nikolai, the Orthodox Christian mission in Japan had a clear organizational structure. That allowed, scattered throughout the country communities, not only to preserve its connections with each other, but also to acquire a new members. Preachers were mentors, spiritual leaders for local Christians and missionaries of the Faith among Japanese people. They consisted of Japanese nationals exclusively and were in charge of local communities. Over preachers stood priests, who were in charge of districts, which consisted of several communities. Priests performed sacraments, oversaw the success of the preaching among the people and instructed a newly baptized members on how to be a Christian. Japanese catechists were divided into three categories. Catechists (*saidenkesia*) - experienced and long-served preachers. Followed by catechists' assistants - *fuku-den-kesia*, who preached and led a congregation. Finally, the lowest category was catechetical students - *den-keo-si*. They were beginners, preachers, who just graduated the catechetical school and were under supervision of local catechists (Arhangelov, 1900). At first, catechetical students were promoted to the category of catechetical assistants after a year of service automatically. But, with time, their numbers increased and it became too difficult to monitor their personal qualities and level of training. That's why, in 1888, it was decided to promote catechetical students to the next category only "on the basis of the priests' reports about their work and trustworthiness" (RGIA. F. 796. L. 170. C. 2417).

According to the rules for catechists, developed by the Equal-to-the-Apostles Nicholai, their missionary work was organized in the following way. Preachers had to organize two kinds of meetings. One - for those who already knew the basics of the Faith and were studying the New Testament. The other kind of meetings - for those, who wanted to know what Christianity is about. For them, the catechist was explaining the symbol of the Faith, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments. Each meeting was held twice a week. Discussions were not allowed until explanation was done. Every day, catechist, had actively look for listeners. If among those who are interested, were people who were unable to attend meetings, then catechist would go to their homes. This considered a matter of highest priority, and should have been carried out even to the detriment of the New Testament lessons. If catechist could not explain a certain position or an idea of the teaching, then it was necessary to inquire about it to the priest. It was mandatory to write down all important questions and answers in the notebook for its use in the future. On Sundays, preachers had to meet with local priest and discuss all activities conducted during past week. One of preachers' responsibilities was maintaining church books with an accurate record of all conducted baptisms, weddings, and burials (Cary, 1976). It was a strict obligation.

An important principle of Orthodox missionaries was the voluntary nature of the preaching. They went only to those areas, where people had a desire to listen to them. If, at a certain place, they were not welcomed by locals, they did not attempt to impose Christianity onto anyone by force. By the initiative of the Archbishop, the book of St. Demetrius of Rostov "Mirror of the Orthodox Confession" was selected, as a guide, for spreading Orthodox Christianity among people of Japan (Sergii (Stragorodskii), Archimandrite, 2013).

In order for priests to be able to supervise preachers affectively, preachers were required to keep a logbook of their service. It was mandatory, to write down

what was done for the progress of the ministry, daily. Priests, while visiting the church, had to look through these logbooks, compare its records with the stories of church elders and other Christians, in order to make a correct conclusion about preacher's work. In addition, preachers were required to make short, table-like excerpts on a monthly basis and sent it, in duplicates, to the priest in charge. Priest, after authenticating these records, had to send it to the Mission headquarters (RGIA. F. 796. L. 170. C. 2417).

Due to overload of the head of the Mission with local matters, at the Council in 1883, a dean was elected from Japanese priests. His duty was a reviewal of all churches once a year "for guidance purposes, if it will be found needed, unification activities of priests, catechists, and truthful understanding of the state of the Church, as a whole" (RGIA. F. 796. L. 165. C. 1244).

One of the most important principles that the Japanese Orthodox Church was found on, and practiced by the Equal-to-the-Apostles Nikolai at all levels, was the principle of conciliarity (Sablina, 2000). From the very beginning of his ministry, the Archbishop established an annual conduct of the Cathedral Council of the Japanese Orthodox Church. The range of issues that the cathedral dealt with included selection of catechists and their distribution, drafting or updating rules for the management of catechists, discussion of important issues of church's life, distribution of material resources among churches. All communities sent their requests to the Cathedral Council with their representatives and it was attended by all clergymen. At the beginning the Council, private conversations between the Archbishop and representatives were held. Then, discussions were conducted between priests and catechists only. Some of the decisions made by them were approved by the Archbishop, while, the most important and controversial ones were left for the Cathedral Council review. During the Council, statistical information and reports were presented by all priests and catechists (Sablina, 2006). However, the goal of holding annual Cathedral Councils was not limited to discussions of church's issues only. The Equal-to-the-Apostles Nicholai thought that it was important, during such meetings, for preachers to provide "comfort to each other in mutual love" and support in hard work. In 1887, "due to the expansion of the Church and understandable inconvenience to gather everyone in one place for meetings annually," it was decided to choose different locations for the Cathedral Council. It was agreed to conduct the council for the churches of the north-eastern region of Japan in Tokyo, but next year in Oosaka, for the churches of the south-west region (RGIA. F. 796. L. 169. C. 2283).

The Equal-to-the-Apostles Nicholai firmly adhered to the imperative of conciliarity in the church's affairs. It was especially important to emphasize that clergymen and preachers, who were directly engaged in the spread of Faith among the people, had to be selected by the Christians themselves. Because of this, the Archbishop did not allowed himself to decide solely about the selection of candidates for priests or catechists. For example, when the Christians of Kashiwakubo asked to ordain a local Christian John Mori as a catechist, the Equal-to-the-Apostles, refused to approve their request by his authority only. Despite a local priest's good testimony of him, and the Equal-to-the-Apostles himself knew, that John was a zealous and pious Christian. And yet, he replied decisively: "It cannot be done this way. Let John Mori come to Tokyo during the Cathedral Council, and let the priests to test him in the knowledge of "Osieno-kagami"; if he can interpret this book correctly and clearly, then it is possible to make him "hodze" (The diaries of St. Nicholai of Japan, Vol. 4, 2004). During the tense period of the Russo-Japanese war, when there was not enough clergymen to look after Russian prisoners of war, the Archbishop did not dare to ordain priests without considering opinion others. He initiated an emergency meeting of church ministers. When the Japanese priests did not agree with the opinion of the Equal-to-the-

Apostles, he did not persist, but said: "Disregard to the opinion and advice of all - will be a mistake" (The diaries of St. Nicholai of Japan, Vol. 5, 2004).

However, the principle of conciliarity should not be absolutized. Experience of the Enlightener of Japan testifies, that in missionary work, when church's organism is still quite young, it is necessary, intelligently combine conciliarity with a strict discipline. Especially, when it comes to selecting candidates for priesthood, "importance of the way how selection process is executed should not be overemphasized." Practice has shown that selection "of a well-known person, does not always ensure a good relationships between congregation and the priest" (The diaries of St. Nicholai of Japan, Vol. 2, 2004). The Archbishop also noted that for a long time he "extremely carefully treated Japanese Church, trying not to exert the slightest pressure out of fear that a young impressionability will take the imprint too deeply, and this will cause some kind of morbidity". But at some point "it has to be shown that the Archbishop, through his power alone, without church's approval, can ordain a priest and a deacon himself" (The diaries of St. Nicholai of Japan, Vol. 5, 2004).

At the center of the missionary work, according to the Enlightener of Japan, should be experienced missionaries from the Mother-Church. Their task is to guide and direct the work of local preachers and to observe the compliance with church's doctrines. According to the Archbishop's vision, the center of this organization should look in following way. One missionary must entirely devote himself to the translation of the Holy Scriptures and liturgical texts. By the way, text translation and establishment of the mission should be done simultaneously, at the beginning, "otherwise, protestant's rebellion and disorder will appear in the Church." While, other missionary - should be ordained as the dean of churches. After all, priests from local populous, no matter how good they are, "are so young in church life, that they need a constant leader and a living model in front of their eyes." This minister must constantly visit these churches and monitor the compliance with the church order, instruct and assist local priests. In charge of all schools of the Mission, should be experienced missionaries, who will be entirely devoted to education. Also, special attention should be paid to the most important administrative and cultural centers. It is desirable to have experienced and firm leaders there, selected from missionaries (Report of the Chief of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Japan, 2006).

According to the Enlightener of Japan, an important principle of the missionary work was wide involvement of laymen in the preaching. Actually, preachers - direct ministers of Faith - did not possess an official rank among church's priesthood (however, they could be called clerics). The school for "helpers in the spreading of the Faith" (fukyoin) expanded the limits of the participation for the laymen in the missionary work. They were selected among Christians of a congregation and had a duty to initiate a desire to learn about Christianity "among their relatives, neighbors, and friends, generally speaking, in their own circles." Those who expressed a desire to learn more, were brought to the catechist (RGIA. F. 796. L. 170. C. 2417).

In every congregation of Japanese Church, in addition to prayer meetings, various fellowships were organized. In accordance with the Archbishop's guidance, clear rules for its conduct were established. Any changes and revisions of these rules were considered by the Equal-to-the-Apostles Nicholai "a very important to the Church" (The diaries of St. Nicholai of Japan, Vol. 3, 2004). The Archbishop believed that different fellowships and meetings are useful for strengthening unity among believers, therefore, he blessed their existence. The rules for these fellowships had to be "simple and feasible" (The diaries of St. Nicholai of Japan, Vol. 3, 2004). "Mutual edification, purely ecclesiastical, brotherly love" was considered by the Archbishop, as the main goal of the Christian fellowship (Sergii (Stragorodskii), Archim., 1899).

Here is an example how congregational fellowships for women were organized. All adult women were invited to the fellowship. Their mutual obligation was only a promise to be present. These events were held once a month, on Sunday, or as a part of holiday celebration. For this purpose, two or three Christian women were selected in the previous meeting, who prepared "a spiritual food" in advance. For example, the first one, would talk about something from the Lives of the Saints, the next one would say something about prayers or the Holy Scriptures, and the third, would explain the reason for the holiday, etc. This was the main part of the event, which served to mutual edification and spiritual self-discipline. In the end, they would discuss current church affairs and needs and, according to the guidance of the priest or catechist, made various decisions. These decisions included selecting capable women for serving in the church or among the people. Those who were able to explain the doctrine to the pagan women - were selected to this matter. Among other women - some were chosen to visit Christian homes in order to help the poor, to serve the sick, to assist at the burial ceremony, to restore families, and to take care of the children. Also, some were selected to encourage to return to the Faith, those who left the church. There were no mandatory financial donations. However, there was a cathedral cup, for everyone who wished to donate for the needs of the church. Before Christmas and Easter, Christian women were especially concerned with the charities for the poor Christians and, if possible, Gentiles. For this reason, other local Christians were invited to donate. During fellowships, participants were offered to drink tea together. In the line of order, Christian women were responsible for preparing a tea and it was done in very modest way, as not to embarrass or burden poor Christians (RGIA. F. 796. L. 170. C. 2417).

### 3.2. Orthodox schools in Japan

The Equal-to-the-Apostles Nicholai paid special attention to the Christian education of the Japanese flock, who were closely associated with the pagan world. He believed that it was responsibility of the Christian school, which "a real Christians should leave, without pagan leaven, and who will be able and capable of supporting and spreading Christianity on their own" (Levitsky, 2012).

After he returned from the trip to the homeland, in 1871, the Archimandrite Nicholai, actively engaged in establishing a new schools in Japan (RGIA. F. 796. L. 151. C. 1422a). Influential Japanese officials asked him to open a school and "the school was open two weeks after his arrival - with a lot of people attending it" (GA RF. F. 162. L. 1. C.117). For the needs of the students, the saint compiled a "Russian-Japanese lexicon" (RGIA. F. 796. L. 151. C. 1422a), which became the first full-fledged dictionary in Japanese history (Ishido, 1974). At first, the missionary was forced to use an old Russian newspapers, as teaching aids, due to the lack of education materials. During classes, students would write down the course material (grammar, arithmetic, geography and history), and then studied their notes. In the senior class, for Russian language lesson, available books were torn apart into separate pages and distributed among students (Paichadze, 1995).

As soon, as Japanese government abolished anti-Christian laws in 1873, Archimandrite Nicholai set up a network of Orthodox Christian schools. According to the records of the assistant to the Equal-to-the-Apostles Nicholai, hieromonk Anatoly (Tikhaya), in December 1873, there were 38 students and 14 of whom were girls, in the school for children of Orthodox Japanese in Hakodate (Anatoly (Tihai), Ierom, 1874). In the same city, a catechetical school was opened to teach Orthodoxy preachers from local residents. Thanks to the work of the missionary, as early as 1874, the Mission had 12 catechists and 30 catechism students. There were 60 students in the "school for Christian children" (CSHAK Ukraine. F. 127. L. 679. C. 210). The saint chose 12 most

zealous catechists and sent them to the main cities for the establishment of the Enlightenment Schools (Ishido, 1974).

Theological seminary in Tokyo was opened in 1875. Although, it must be said, that as early as June 1873, Vissarion Sartov, a member of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission, in one of his letters pointed out that the Father Nikolai had up to 60 students in Tokyo (RGADA. F. 1385. L. 1. C. 926). A young people with basic education could be admitted to the seminary. Japanese would enroll there even before baptism. The seminary's education program was a seven years long, with a special pedagogical class for teachers. Education process was done in Japanese language. Initially, Russian missionaries taught at the seminary. The first principal was the Equal-to-the-Apostles Nicholai himself, who for a long time taught dogmatic theology in senior classes (Kolyvanov, 2015). Over time, Japanese nationals, who graduated the seminary, became teachers there. Some of them, received additional education at the Orthodox academies in Russia.

The first women's school was founded in 1873 (Orthodox Church in Japan, 1889). According to many foreigners, it was the best all female school at that time (Krivko, 1994) and was well-respected among the Gentiles, who gladly enrolled their daughters there (Andronik (Nikolsky), Archimandrite, 1904). The Archbishop himself was very happy to hear that the graduates of the Orthodox women's school were invited as teachers to various schools throughout Japan. "Everywhere they are desired and always considered the best," (The diaries of St. Nicholai of Japan, Vol. 4, 2004) the saint noted without hiding his joy. Also, the Mission maintained an Orthodox women's school in Kyoto. Japanese Christian women cared for orphans and the first orphanage was set up in Tokyo (Sablina, 2000).

By 1894, the young Japanese Orthodox Church had a seminary, two schools of catechists and two women's schools in Tokyo (Rynkovoï, 2013).

The Archbishop always underlined that the Mission educates Japanese people to serve the Orthodox Church, however, the breadth and solidity of education made its graduates demanded in different spheres of social life of their country (Suprun, 2011). Orthodox schools enjoyed great prestige and respect among the Gentiles. Thus, in August 1898, a wealthy foreigner sent his son to the seminary, saying: "at the family council it was decided to improve his behavior in this way." (The diaries of St. Nicholai of Japan, Vol. 3, 2004). Even Japanese Foreign Minister Soedzima Tanomi enrolled his son and two nephews in the seminary (Nicholai-before, 2001).

According to the estimates of the Japanese researcher Naganava Mitsuo, about 1000 students passed through the Orthodox schools of the Equal-to-the-Apostles Nicholai (Ivanova, 1996). The Archbishop, by creating the School of Russian literature translators into Japanese language, laid the foundation for Russian cultural studies in Japan (Sablina, 2000).

Among the students of the saint Nicholai were famous Japanese writers, like Goro Amada, the author of the bestseller "Gangster History of Tokay", Takusaburo Goro, who was called the "eternal seeker" and who became the author of the Emperor Meiji's constitution. While Kentaro Oy was a student at seminary, he converted to Orthodoxy and, later, succeeded in political field. Kensu Ando, who once taught at the University of St. Petersburg, later, became mayor of Yokohama. The other famous graduates were Nosoma Nakagawa - who became the governor of Osaka, and Hichisaburo Hirao - was selected for the position of the Minister of Education. All these and many others were students of the Equal-to-the-Apostles Nicholai, who was actively engaged in Japanese political life of that time (Procl Yasuo Ushimaru, 2015).

#### 4. Discussions

Researchers, both American and Japanese (O. Carey, J. Lensen, Kazuo Kasahara), who were looking into the reasons for the conversion of the Japanese people to Orthodoxy at an early stage of the missionary work of the Enlightener of Japan, noted that the people of the Land of the Rising Sun were converted to Orthodoxy (as well as to Christianity in general), rather, for political than religious reasons (Gavrikov, 2015) - gaining access to education, science, etc. This raises the question of how the Equal-to-the-Apostles Nikolai in his sermon used benefits of civilization that could receive the Japanese by adopting Orthodoxy, as a bait.

Japanese researcher Hideo Kizimoto argued that the method of preaching of the Equal-to-the-Apostles Nicholai, was the same, as that of Western missionaries and was based solely on the exploitation of the desire of the Japanese to gain practical knowledge and thereby be useful to their homeland (*Japanese culture in Meiji era*, 1956). However, I.N. Kharin came to the conclusion that the initial wave of Orthodox faith popularity, like other Christian denominations, was associated with the benefits of Western civilization which attracted progressive modernizers, was a very short-lived phenomenon. The main reason for this was rooted in the approach to the preaching of the Equal-to-the-Apostles Nicholai. He was not prepared to encourage such a motivation, but he always strove for a religiously-motivated acceptance of Orthodoxy (*Japanese culture in Meiji era*, 1956).

In general, attention to the heritage of the Enlightener of Japan is steadily growing among church and secular scholars. At the same time, the lack of theoretical comprehension of his heritage and experience, the absence of special studies on certain aspects of the worldview of a missionary, scientist, and enlightener with a world-wide known name, make such scientific works especially relevant.

#### 5. Conclusion

The work of the Orthodox Mission in Japan at the turn of the XIX - XX centuries was quite effective. Its founder, the Archbishop Nikolai (Kasatkin), created a viable system of management and organization of the mission. In the church organization the main principle that the saint adhered to was the principle of conciliarity. This poured a fresh stream of life into the Orthodox community. The second important principle was the national character of the newly formed Japanese Orthodox Church. For its development, the Equal-to-the-Apostles Nicholai founded a number of educational institutions in which young members of the Church were instilled with love for the Orthodox tradition.

#### 6. Recommendations

The materials of this article will be interested to religious scholars, historians of the Orthodox Church, as well as scholars who specialize in the history of Japan in the Meiji period.

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