

ABSTRACT

of the Thesis for the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
in the specialty «6D020600 – Religious Studies»

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«The Mormon Community: a religious analysis»

General characteristics of the thesis

With the acquisition of independence and the formation of a sovereign state in Kazakhstan, radical transformations took place in all spheres of public life. The rejection of the dominant communist ideology and atheistic worldview contributed to the flourishing and spread of religious diversity and pluralistic worldview in the country, which caused profound changes in the spiritual search of both an individual and the whole society. The emerging situation in the spiritual and religious sphere required a revision of the role of the state in regulating religious and confessional relations. The country was going through a stormy period of religious renaissance, Islam and Orthodoxy, which shifted from the periphery of public life to the center of spiritual revival for many citizens. However, along with the traditional ones, new religious trends, previously unknown to our citizens, began to penetrate into Kazakhstan. The Law «On Freedom of Religion and Religious Associations», adopted on January 15, 1992, proclaimed the equality of all religions, approved the principle of world outlook diversity on a legislative basis. The adoption of this law contributed to the widespread legal activity of new religious movements. One such new religious group was The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This dissertation is devoted to the study of the genesis, formation and development of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a scientific analysis of the peculiarities of religious teaching, cult, social organization of the church, identification of the factors and reasons for the spread of this denomination in Kazakhstan, as well as clarification of the motives of the religious conversion of citizens of the Republic into this religious community.

The relevance of the topic of dissertation research. Over the past years of independence, the confessional space of Kazakhstan has significantly changed and replenished with hundreds of new religious movements. If on the eve of independence there were about 700 religious associations in the country, today there are more than 3000. The rapid growth of activity of new religious associations, differentiation of the confessional space of society caused concern, sharp criticism of the activities of the state structures, as well as traditional religious associations. The overwhelming majority of citizens looked with apprehension at the missionary activities of new religious organizations, including the activities of followers of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

There was a concern not only among ordinary citizens, but also among specialists in religious studies that such an active spread of NRMs fraught with a threat to national identity and the security of society and the state. However, at the

same time, there was no scientifically substantiated study of the activities of new religious movements. This dissertation is one of the first attempts of a systematic, comprehensive study of the history of the emergence and spread of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This church has been officially registered in Kazakhstan since 2000. Despite the fact that the number of followers of the Mormon community is growing not only in our country, but throughout the world, the activities of this organization have not become the subject of special religious studies by Kazakhstani scientists.

Unfortunately, by this time the number of publications on history, the basics of the doctrine, cult and extra-cult activities of this church is negligible. Of particular research interest is not only the peculiarities of the doctrine and cult of the Mormon community, but the success story of this denomination, the question of how a small religious community at the beginning has become one of the most influential and popular not only in the United States, but throughout the world. Mormons are no longer considered a religious subculture, they are perceived as successful businessmen, good neighbors, strong families with a healthy lifestyle and traditions. This is not surprising since the church has provided a number of influential politicians, leaders and businessmen in the United States.

Today, such characteristic features of mature democratic Western countries as the ideas of tolerance and religious pluralism, respect for fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual are becoming not alien to the majority of Kazakhstanis. The interest of society in the study of the identity of religious communities is growing, knowledge of the peculiarities of the doctrine and cult develops in the minds of citizens a respectful and tolerant attitude towards other religious traditions, customs and rituals. On the other hand, there is also an understanding of their age-old religious faith and tradition. Through comparison, the Kazakh people realize and perceive themselves as a special integrity, with their historical roots and spiritual experience. All this requires a deep scientific analysis and theoretical generalization of various religious traditions existing today in Kazakhstan, including the characteristics of doctrine and worship, the evolution of the social organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The research overview

Beginning from the first years of its formation, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as a vivid phenomenon of American spiritual and secular culture, attracted the attention of ordinary people, writers and researchers in the United States. J. H. Beadle writes about the crimes of Mormons who moved to the Salt Lake area, M. Twain in his work ridicules the teachings and life of Mormons, C. Dickens writes with great respect that Mormons differ from other immigrants in their organization and fortitude. G. Stansbury writes about the life of the Mormon community in Salt Lake City from the position of a traveler. This interest has continued unabated in the two centuries since the founding of the church, and today it is possible to find many articles and studies in English criticizing Mormon apologists (Tanners J&S, Mauss A.L., Bradford M.J., Dyal D.H., Howsepian A.A., Harrison G.T., Key T., Norwood L.A., Porter L.C., Ostlings R&J, McKeever B., Marguardt M.H. and others).

At the same time, the church itself is actively publishing books on church history. These include “History of the Late Persecution Inflicted by the State of Missouri upon the Mormons” (1840), “Mormonism and the Mormons: A Historical View of the Rise and Progress of the Sect Self-Styled Latter-Day Saints” by D.P. Kidder (1842), “History of the Young Women Society” (1910), “History of the Church” (1989), “History of the Priesthood” (1849), “The House of God”, “Instruction for all with the Symbols of Faith and the Doctrine of the Church of Latter-day Saints” (1837), “Studies of the Book of Mormon” by Roberts B.H., “A Treatise on the Gospel” (1842), “Teachings of Presidents of the Church” by Tullidge E., on family relations – “Woman in Mormonism” (1877), “Marriage instructions” by Talmadge J., “History of polygamy fiction and fact” (1979) by Anderson J. M., about Mormonism and Freemasonry – “The relationship of Mormonism and Freemasonry” (1934) by Ivins A.W., “Mormonism and Freemasonry” (1949) by McGavin Sasil. In 1992 the Church first published the Encyclopedia of Mormonism.

In Russia, the Mormon Church was registered in 1991. In the early 1990s, a number of Russian newspapers and magazines began to publish articles on the history, beliefs and experience of the church, and also published conversations with Russian Mormons (Ustimenko Y. “Visiting the Mormons”, Mikhailusenko I. “Church of Mormons”, Dremova G. “The Mystery of the Gold Sheets”, V. Sokolov “Apostles of Prosperity”, Sinitsyna L. “When the Saints March”, Fedorov V. “Mormons in Russia”).

A number of Russian researchers highlight the main points of dogma, history and modern life of the Church. Among them are studies by Antonenko S.G. “Mormons in Russia, a century-long journey” (1994), O.Yu. Krivosheenko “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a Denominational Phenomenon” (2009). Such studies include the works of foreign researchers such as M. Cowan “In response to the Mormons' statement”, Martin W. “The Kingdom of the cults”, McDowell D. and Stuart D. “The Deceivers”, as well as E. Kaiser “How to Resist the Mormons” and others. However, in these works, the authors do not focus on important aspects of Mormon teachings.

Among the interesting observations of the life of Mormons can be noted the work of “The Life of Mormons in Utah; or the Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism” by J.H. Beadle, written in 1892 (translated into Russian). Works by Russian Orthodox authors are also of great importance for research. Research interest is aroused by the critical analyzes of A.L. Dvorkin, consecrated in the book “Prophets and Gods of Mormons”, O. Kazakov “Cry of the Mormons”, Y.A. Kondratyev “History and doctrine of the sect of Mormons”.

Several publications and dissertations by former members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can be found on the Internet that criticize church organization, missionary work, doctrines, and rules for church life. They were written by Y. Didenko, Y. Kondratyev, A. Tarassyuk, M. Kreonsky.

The study analyzes scientific publications in Russian and foreign languages, materials about the activities of the church published in the media, sacred texts dating back to the founders of the Mormon community, as well as publications by church followers. The Mormons' sacred text along with the Bible “The Book of the

Mormon. Another Testimony of Jesus Christ”, “Teachings and Covenants”, “Pearl of Great Price”, “Teachings of Presidents of the Church”. A deep scientific analysis of these primary sources allows us to understand the originality of the doctrine, the formation of the cult and organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Unfortunately, information and scientific research on this topic in Kazakh is very scarce, the available materials are descriptive and situational. Despite the fact that this religious organization has existed in Kazakhstan for more than twenty years, it has not become the object of close study by the Kazakh religious community. Perhaps the reason lies in its small number and the peculiarities of missionary activity. Nevertheless, there is an increase in the number of its adherents, and perhaps in the future Kazakhstan can be considered as one of the centers of the spread and penetration of this denomination into Central Asia. All this stirs up research interest in this topic.

As a guide to the research trajectory, the applicant relies on the available collective works of such domestic authors as N.Zh. Baytenova, K.A. Zatov, Sh. Rysbekova, K. Borbasova, B.B. Beissenov, A.D. Kurmanaliyeva, B.B. Meirbayev “Religions in Kazakhstan”, “New religious movements in modern Kazakhstan”, “Modern non-traditional religious movements and cults”. The textbooks and study guides of the named authors on religious studies contain brief information about the activities and history of this church. Introductory information about history, doctrine and cult is also contained in encyclopedias and reference brochures, in particular, in the short guide “Religious Associations in Kazakhstan: A Guide” published by the International Center for Religion and Culture of the Committee on Religious Affairs, in the anthology “Religions in Kazakhstan: Reader in 2 parts” edited by I. Artemiev.

Certain issues concerning the history and activities of the church were sanctified in the publications of M.S. Halyk “Mormons in Kazakhstan: history and doctrine”, R. Ishimbetov “Do you know about the Mormon sect?”.

The study widely used materials from Internet resources in English, Russian and Kazakh. Basic information about church teaching and statistics was taken from the church’s official website. The Internet articles of Kazakhstani authors were critically analyzed, in particular, the article by the famous blogger S. Abdrakhmanov “Kazakhs go to Mormons”, published on April 23, 2014; article by A. Abdullah “Missionary who converted to Islam in Kazakhstan”, Phoenix, USA, 2014; an interview given to Radio Azattyk by the representative of the Mormon community M. Gurina in 2011; “Mormon missionary from Kazakhstan”, 2014; “American Mormons in Kazakhstan”, 2016; G. Kulmuratov’s “The Doctrine and Faith of Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: A Religious Analysis” 2019 and others.

Methodological and theoretical basis of the dissertation work. The dissertation research used both general scientific and special disciplinary methods of study: synchronous and diachronic, phenomenological and systemic structural analysis, historical and logical methods of cross and content analysis. Sociological methods (inclusive observation, interviews) made it possible to obtain reliable

information on the contingent, gender, age, and socio-ethnic composition of the believers.

The empirical basis of the study is the direct observations of a doctoral student conducted in the Mormon community of Almaty. The observation results were summarized in the socio-psychological portrait of the Kazakh follower of this community.

The dissertation research is based on such methodological principles of classical religious studies as objectivity and research neutrality.

The purpose of the thesis

Religious analysis of the doctrinal and cult features of the Mormon Church, analysis of the main directions of its activities in the modern world and in Kazakhstan.

The main tasks of the work arising from the purpose of the study:

To achieve the goal of the study, the following ***main tasks*** were identified:

- to carry out a religious analysis of the peculiarities of doctrine and worship, the social organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints;
- to reveal the syncretic nature of archaic, ancient biblical and early Christian elements in the system of religious beliefs based on the analysis of the sacred books and sacred texts of the Mormon community;
- to determine the religious, historical, social, spiritual and cultural prerequisites for the emergence, formation and spread of the Mormon Church;
- to determine the influence of the Mormon church on the formation of the ideology and public consciousness of American society, as well as its reverse influence on the historical evolution of the church;
- socio-religious analysis of the structure of Mormon communities and organizations, the peculiarities of distribution, directions of activity and vectors of development of Mormon churches in the modern world and in Kazakhstan;
- to analyze the ways and methods of missionary work, religious preaching of the Mormon Church and characterize their effectiveness;
- to find out the influence of the Mormon church on religious and spiritual processes in the Republic of Kazakhstan, its place in the confessional space and religious-confessional relations;
- determine the socio-psychological reasons that motivate citizens to join the ranks of this church, and analyze the factors of conversion. Explore the methods and mechanisms used by followers and leaders of the community to increase the attractiveness of the church.
- study the activities of the church on the basis of social observation in order to determine the social, ethnic and gender and age composition of the church, as well as methods of working with these social groups.

The ***object*** of the dissertation research is historical evolution of the Mormon church, its doctrinal and cult characteristics, social structure and main directions of activity.

The ***subject*** of the dissertation research is the trends and methods of missionary activity of the Mormon Church in Kazakhstan.

Scientific novelty of the study

The scientific novelty of the dissertation is determined by the fact that, for the first time in domestic religious studies, an attempt is made to comprehensively study the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as an integral phenomenon, including the study of the doctrine, worship and social institutions of a given church. In the course of the implementation of the goals and objectives of the dissertation, the following scientific achievements were obtained:

- it was possible to find out the relationship between the historical development of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with the idea of Americanism, ie with the ideology of the United States becoming not only a political and economic, but also a cultural and spiritual center of the modern world;

- analysis of the personal portrait of the founder of this church, Joseph Smith, allows us to determine the main vectors of spiritual search and religious revival in the American social environment of the mid-19th and early 20th centuries. The characteristic features of the church are non-traditional religiosity, individual religious search and religious and ideological syncretism;

- analysis of the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints shows that in its religious doctrine, along with revised Christian ideas, there are occult, magical elements and archaic pagan views, all of which are intertwined in a religious complex;

- current trends in development, social communication and ways of adapting the Mormon community to global processes in the world and Kazakhstan were revealed;

- on the basis of structural and functional analysis, the factors of transformation of the social activity of the modern Mormon church have been identified, which allow the social organization of the church to evolve from the “initial community to a global corporation”;

- it was noted that in the global world, personal and social achievements and prospects of community representatives, the social prestige of the church play an important motivating role in the choice of the Mormon Church;

- on the basis of empirical observation and theoretical analysis, the features of the methods and techniques of the missionary activity of the Mormon church were identified and described;

- theoretical modeling of the socio-psychological portrait of a Kazakhstani follower of the Mormon Church will allow us to reveal his value-worldview preferences and priorities.

The theoretical and practical significance of the study

The results of the dissertation research contribute to the development of the theoretical and methodological foundations of religious studies. The formation, development and spread of modern religious organizations, the analysis of communication with the social environment make it possible to formulate general patterns and features characteristic of them. The conclusions drawn from the study of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can be used as theoretical material in various fields of religious studies. The data and materials of the study can be used in the preparation of special courses for university students, in the activities of state structures regulating the activities of religious movements. The research materials

can serve as a theoretical basis for teaching such disciplines as “Non-traditional religious movements and cults” and “New Christian movements and directions” for students specializing in 5B020600-Religious Studies.

The main scientific findings presented for the defense.

1. An analysis of the religious doctrinal foundations and characteristics of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints shows the complexity and versatility of its doctrine. The doctrine of the Church, despite its neo-Protestant orientation, also includes archaic occult-magical elements.

2. The founder of the Church, Joseph Smith, presents himself as a religious reformer who restored the distorted early true teachings of early Christianity, but at the same time he was represented as a follower of the traditions of the Old Testament.

3. In the process of historical development, the Mormon Church, although it has become a denomination, at the same time retains some signs of an entrenched sect, such as the sinlessness of its founders and prophets, faith in living prophets, spiritual elitism, proselytism and religious marketing.

4. The founder of the church, J. Smith and his successor Brigham Young, skillfully combined church doctrine with the political ideology of the United States, which determined the success and popularity of this church in the United States. The proclamation of the United States by the Mormons as a new Zion, a global center for the spiritual salvation of mankind, coincided with the ideology of America, which declared the provision of freedom and human equality as the core of a political goal.

5. The vitality of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is due to the building of a well-organized management system for Brigham Young, which still exists today. One of the main reasons for the growth and spread of the church is its economic policy. The church’s experience in organizing public life made it one of the best functioning market models for both the individual and the church as a whole, which allowed them to achieve a high level of well-being. Mutual economic aid and outreach programs make Mormons look attractive compared to other faith-based organizations in the United States, Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Pacific, not only during times of crisis, but also today.

6. At present, the church seeks to influence public consciousness and attract new adherents, developing the social appeal of the church. The active charity of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, its emphasis on education and upbringing, the promotion of healthy lifestyles and family values – these are the factors that positively affect the image of a Mormon organization in the world.

7. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints strives to carry out missionary activities taking into account customs and traditions, culture in general in the host countries. In this regard, one can distinguish between general and specific aspects of their missionary activity. If the organization of various educational seminars, informal meetings, social assistance and support, English language courses are common missionary approaches of the church, then the organization of the Nauryz holiday, competitions of national musical instruments are unique for our country.

8. The results of social observation carried out in the parish of the city of Almaty make it possible to determine the multi-ethnicity of the Mormon community, as well as the peculiarities and specifics of work with individual social groups within the community. The dynamics of the church shows a slow but gradual trend of growth in the number of church followers.

9. Any society tries to preserve and strengthen its culture, religious tradition and identity. For this, the state should pay more attention to the social sphere and youth affairs, provide social support and education. It is important to consider the possibility of involving young people in scientific, technical, artistic and humanitarian circles, organizing free English language courses, and effective coordination of public-private partnerships in this area will contribute to a positive solution to this problem. Central and local governments should provide grant support to youth leisure organizations.

Approbation of the results of research and publications.

The dissertation was performed at the Department of Religious and Cultural Studies of the Faculty of Philosophy and Political Science of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. The main provisions, results and conclusions of the dissertation were tested at international conferences, published in foreign and domestic journals. The main theoretical provisions of the dissertation are set out in 10 scientific articles of the author, including 3 in scientific journals approved by the Committee for Control in Education and Science of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 1 article published in the scientific journal Bulletin of KazNU “Religious Studies” Series, 5 – in collections of international scientific conferences, 1 – in the journal included in the Scopus database.

The structure of the thesis:

The dissertation work consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, a glossary and an appendix.