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Conversion of the Czechs to Orthodoxy in Omsk: Spirituality, Ideology, Everyday Life: 1916–19

Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of the phenomenon of mass organized adoption of Orthodoxy by the Czechs previously professing Catholicism, who stayed in Omsk during the First World War as prisoners of war. It cites the factors that jointly influenced, at first, mass group conversion of the Czechs to Orthodoxy in 1916–17, and later their indifference to the common

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Slavic idea and prompted their nationalism and “political egoism” during the Civil War in Russia. The study is based on the analysis of a complex of sources that have not yet been introduced into scientific use. These are the records from the Omsk Orthodox churches metric books (fairly well preserved in the Historical Archive of the Omsk Region) and materials from the official periodical Omsk Diocesan Vedomosti. The high relevance of the publication springs from poor coverage of religious life of the prisoners of World War I in Western Siberia in historiography. Taking into account the specifics of the study, the authors have used integrated methodological approach based on a combination of theory of social adaptation and anthropological approach, as well as statistical, biographical, and problem-chronological methods. This theoretical complex permits to study and quite reasonably interpret the phenomenon, linking its appearance with concrete historical situation and personalities. The authors contend that during the First World War proselytism was a cover for geopolitical interests of the Russian Empire, and spiritual aspiration of most Czechs to Orthodoxy was a propaganda myth created by the Russian Orthodox Church. The publication may be of interest to researchers of the peoples of Eastern Europe, military and social history, national and religious politics.



Keywords

Historical sources, Czechs, missionary work, proselytism, Russian Orthodox Church, World War I of 1914–18, Civil War in Russia, prisoners of war, Omsk.

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