

## HISTORY AND FACTORS OF MISSIONARY MOVEMENTS IN WORLD RELIGIONS

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### ABSTRACT:

**This article analyzes historical, theoretical and scriptural bases of missionary work in Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, which are classified as World Religions. In particular, significance of early Buddhist missions, social, and political factors that influenced the spread of classical Buddhism and its modern forms as Lamaism and Zen Buddhism throughout the world is examined. Also, it is stated that Christianity is considered as most active missionary religion, has passed through seven stages in its history. In addition, it is argued that Islamic missionary or da'wah happened in parallel of Islamic conquests, activity of Muslim traders and hermits (sufis).**

**Keywords: missionary, proselytism, religion, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Dharma Bhanak, missionary institutions.**

### INTRODUCTION:

Missionary and proselytism are specific to almost all religions, with the exception of national religions (e.g., Judaism) or ethno-local forms of the world religions (e.g., the Armenian Apostolic Church). Max Müller, the founder of modern religious studies, divided religions into "missionary" and "non-missionary" categories, including Buddhism, Christianity and Islam in the first category, and Judaism, Brahmanism and Zoroastrianism in the second group [Learman L., 12].

Proceeding from Max Müller's definition, this article analyzes the attitude to missionary work in Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, which are classified as the World Religions, and the social, historical, and political factors that influenced this process.

The rise of missionary activity in **Buddhism**, one of the oldest religions in the world, is associated with the activities of Emperor Ashoka (304-232) of the Mauryan dynasty, who ruled India in the 3rd century BC [Wangu M.B., 36-38].

The first Buddhist missionaries were called Dharma Bhanaks. In some sources, the eternal wheel of Buddhism - dharmachakra - is also interpreted to mean missionary work. According to it, the wheel symbolically means carrying the message of Buddha all over the world [Wangu M.B., 39-40].

In the 18<sup>th</sup> year of his reign (250 BC), Ashoka formed a group of 9 missionaries to propagate Buddhism and sent them to areas bordering his empire. In particular, to the island of Sri Lanka he mobilized own son Makhinda [Wangu M.B., 40]. At the same time, Madjhantik was sent to Kashmir and Gandhara, Mahadeva to Makhisa-mandala, Rakhita to Vanavasi, Dhammarakhit to Greece and Aparantak (western India), Maha-dhamma-rakhit to Maharashtra, Madjhima to Himalayas, Sosa and Uttar to Suvabadhumi (modern Burma and Thailand) [Wangu M.B., 40].

As a result of these efforts, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC Buddhism spread to territories of modern Pakistan, Kashmir, Afghanistan,

eastern Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, through the efforts of the famous monk Kasyapa Matanga, this religion entered China. By the end of the Tang Dynasty, Buddhism was recognized by rulers and scholars throughout China. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Buddhism invaded the Korean Peninsula, and in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Japan.

Today, most people associate Buddhism with Tibet. However, the arrival of Buddhism in this area is relatively late - in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

In general, in the process of studying the sources, it can be observed that missionary work in Buddhism has historically developed mainly as a result of the call of monks and the efforts of rulers who adopted this religion.

It can be said that the spread of Tibetan Buddhism – Lamaism and Japanese Buddhism – Zen Buddhism played an important role in the development of Buddhism in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries and its popularization in the West.

The conquest of Tibet by the Chinese communist government in 1950 and the departure of the Dalai Lama and his followers in 1959 to India and a number of European countries allowed the Western world to become closely acquainted with this doctrine [Cantwell C., 91].

Since the 1960s, many lama monasteries and centers have opened in Europe and North America. Today, these centers are run by non-Tibetan, or local convert Lamaists [Berzin A.].

Europeans only became acquainted with Japanese culture by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. First scientific acquaintance of the West with Zen Buddhism began in 1913, with the publication of Kayten Nukaria's book *The Samurai Religion* [Batalov E., 234-249].

The next stage in the spread of Zen Buddhism in the West was associated with the work of Professor Deysetsu Suzuki (1870-1966), who had a great influence on the

popularity of Zen Buddhism, especially among intellectuals.

Suzuki and his students created the necessary conditions for the Zen Revolution that took place among Western youth and intellectuals in the 1960s. Suzuki succeeded in interpreting Eastern teachings in a language understandable to European readers, with a good understanding of its theoretical and practical aspects [Safronova E., 147-166]. The first Western author to write about Zen was Alan Watts, whose book was called *The Spirit of Zen*.

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the total number of Zen groups in 14 countries of Western Europe was 452. In particular, there are more than 60 Zen communities in Germany, 30 to 60 in France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Great Britain, Switzerland, Italy, 15 to 30 in Austria, Poland and Spain, and about 10 in Sweden, Denmark, Portugal and Norway [Alioune K., 139-161].

In **Christianity**, it is believed that missionary work was started by Jesus Christ and his apostles. This doctrine is reflected in the New Testament, which includes the following instructions:

**<sup>15</sup> He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. <sup>16</sup>Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.** (Chapter 16 of the Gospel of Mark)

Such a call can also be found in the Gospel of Matthew:

**<sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end**

**of the age.** (Chapter 28 of the Gospel of Matthew)

The Gospel of Luke describes how Jesus sent his disciples to various villages, including:

**<sup>1</sup>When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, <sup>2</sup>and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick...**

**... <sup>6</sup>So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.** (Chapter 9 of the Gospel of Luke)

Today, all Christian missionary organizations, and in general all churches, organize their activities in accordance with the above principles.

According to Turkish researcher Zeki Arslanturk, Christian missionary has gone through seven stages in its history. These are:

1. The Age of Apostles (33-100)
2. The period of the formation of churches (100-800)
3. The Middle Ages (800-1500)
4. The Reformation period (1500-1650)
5. Post-Reformation period (1650-1793)
6. Modern period (1793-1965)
7. The period of dialogues (1965-...) [Arslantürk Z., 384]

After the death of Jesus Christ, persecuted Christians began to spread their religion throughout Judea and Samaria. These events are mentioned in the book of Acts, which is part of the New Testament:

**<sup>1</sup>On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria...**

**... <sup>4</sup>Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.**

The deacons of the Church of Jerusalem separated from their administrative affairs and became skilled evangelists. The most famous of

these is the deacon Philip, known as the Father of Missionaries. It was he who operated in the land of Samaria, in his capital Sebasta, who converted many people to Christianity and baptized them en masse [Renan E., 118].

Deacon Philip and many other evangelists like him, as mentioned above, preached mainly among the Jews. According to the early Christians, the teachings of Jesus Christ applied only to the Jews [Renan E., 117].

Proof of this can be seen in the following words in the Bible:

**<sup>5</sup>These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. <sup>6</sup>Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. <sup>7</sup>As you go, proclaim this message: "The kingdom of heaven has come near.** (Chapter 10 of the Gospel of Matthew)

Historians attribute the missions' departure from Jerusalem to the persecution of Christians in 137. The apostle Paul played a key role in the mission's focus on non-Jewish nations. Despite strong opposition from other apostles, he was the first to baptize non-Jews. Early Christian missionaries gradually penetrated the Apennine Peninsula across the Mediterranean. Although they were treated negatively in the Roman Empire, they continued to migrate to the central regions and capital of the empire.

By the fourth century, as a result of missionary activity, Christianity had become the state religion of the Roman Empire. This event was the first step in the use of missionary work for political purposes. Christian missionaries gradually entered the northern regions of Europe. Throughout the vast territory of the Roman Empire, Christianity triumphed over the old religions.

Missionaries often traveled with Roman armies and carried out missionary work among the people of the occupied territories. Among the most famous missionaries who contributed

much to the spread of Christianity in Europe were St. Patrick, St. Boniface, San Jose, and St. Jean de Brebeff.

As a result of the activities of the missionaries, Christianity was firmly established in Africa in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, even there were Christian kingdoms that were much powerful for their time. The most famous of these was the Abyssinian Empire. This kingdom conquered large areas, even the south of the Arabian Peninsula. In order to convert the Arabs to Christianity, they wanted to destroy Mecca, which was still a holy place at that time.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Gregory the Great, under the leadership of Augustine Canterbury, sent missionaries to Britain.

During the period of great geographical discoveries, Roman Church sent a number of preachers to newly discovered lands, such as the Augustists, Franciscans, Dominicans, to evangelize new nations.

The main purpose of so-called "Crusades" was mainly missionary. Through the slogan of the liberation of the "Holy Land", the priests were able to mobilize Christians of all Europe, and each Christian considered it an honor to participate in these marches.

In 1054, the Orthodox Church was separated from the Roman Church. In Western Europe, where the influence of Catholicism was strong, they could not carry out their teachings, so they focused their activities on the newly converted peoples, especially the Byzantines, Slavs, Armenians, Georgians, and others.

In 988 the the Rus kingdom was massively baptized [Mitropolit Kievski, 24]. In 11<sup>th</sup> century as a result of missionary activity in the Balkans the Serbian Orthodox Church was formed. In the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries, Orthodox churches were also established in Estonia. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, missionaries of the Russian Orthodox Church, under the leadership of Nikolai Ilminsky, carried out propaganda work in Estonia, Moldova, Finland, Belarus, and

Latvia. One of the most famous Orthodox missionaries, St. Nicholas, preached Orthodoxy in Japan and St. German in Alaska.

By the sixteenth century, new thinkers began to appear among Christians. The Catholic Church was losing its prestige among the people as a result of the Inquisitions, the Crusades, and the indulgence trade. In such a situation, in October 1517, Martin Luther, a local priest from Wittenberg, hung his theses on the gates of the city cathedral criticizing the sale of indulgences. This day was the prelude to the emergence of the Protestant movement [Solovev E., 104].

Sources say that among the Protestant denominations, the Hernguters were the first to engage in missionary work. The community originated in 1772 in the German town of Herngut, founded by Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf. It was Zinzendorf who, after many years of missionary work in the Netherlands, England, and North America, was able to form a large community [Protestantism, 87].

The rise of Protestant missionary activity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was due to the colonial policy of England and the rise of pietism movements in Europe. In 1795, the Congregationists, Presbyterians, and Anglicans founded the London Missionary Society.

By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Protestant missionary organizations were active in Belgium, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Finland, France, Switzerland, Sweden, and other European countries.

Dozens of Protestant missionary communities also operated in North America during this period. Active missionary work was practiced by the widespread biblical communities and organizations specializing in the distribution of Christian literature at that time.

Missionary activity peaked in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the colonial Western empires and missionaries worked hand in hand. The colonial empires saw the Christianization of the

citizens of the occupied countries as the quickest way to achieve their political and commercial goals.

The missionaries and the administrators of the colonial state worked together and they emphasized that it was in the interests of the people of this region that the undeveloped regions be under Western control. The transition to Christianity is presented as westernization.

During this period, the direct or indirect influence of missionary activity always went beyond religion. Politically, geographically, socially, economically, and culturally, they have had beneficial consequences for the countries they were sent from and harmful consequences for the countries they came to.

Missionary institutions took an active part in the policy of their countries, taking control of large amounts of capital and land. They monopolized such spheres as education, medical care and strengthened the propaganda of Christianity [Uzbek Sovet Ensiklopediyasi, 201].

In **Islam**, missionary work is reflected in the da'wah movements. Da'wah (دعوة) is an Arabic word translated as "to invite", "to call". In Uzbek lexicology, the word is taken to mean "propaganda".

The first caller to Islam was Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Historical data states that the da'wah in the time of Muhammad (pbuh) took place in three stages:

- 1) Private stage - 3 years (610-613);
- 2) The stage of revealing the call to the people of Makkah - the period from the fourth year of the Prophethood to the migration to Medina (614-622);
- 3) The phase of the Da'wah spreading beyond Mecca - from the end of the tenth year of the Prophethood, including the period of Madinah, to the end of the life of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) (613-632) [Mubarakfuri, 56].

During the period of the secret call, Muhammad (pbuh) invited to Islam only his closest relatives, that is, his family members and friends. During this period, Khadija, Ali and Abu Bakr (r.a.) were among the first to convert to Islam. Later, as a result of Abu Bakr's (r.a.) missionary work, the most famous Companions, such as Uthman ibn Affan, Zubayr ibn Awwam, Abdurrahman ibn Awf, Sa'd ibn Abu Waqqas and Talha ibn Ubaydullah, converted to Islam [Mubarakfuri, 57-58].

From this information, it can be concluded that Abu Bakr (r.a.) was the second person after Muhammad (pbuh) to carry out Islamic missionary work.

According to Islamic sources [Mubarakfuri, 59], the beginning of the public call was connected with the revelation of the Qur'anic verse "**And warn, [O Muḥammad], your closest kindred**" in Surat al-Shu'ara.

When this verse was revealed, Muhammad (pbuh) first gathered the leaders of the Banu Hashim tribe, his closest relatives. About 45 people attended the meeting. Not obtaining sufficient support from relatives, Prophet climbed the hill of Safa near Ka'bah and made his first public call. This event is described in details in Imam Bukhari's Sahih collection:

Ibn 'Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated: When the verse "**And warn, [O Muḥammad], your closest kindred. And lower your wing [i.e., show kindness] to those who follow you of the believers**" the messenger of allāh [pbuh] ascended mount as-safa and started to call: "o bani fahr! o bani 'adi (two septs of quraish)." many people gathered and those who couldn't, sent somebody to report to them. abu lahab was also present. the prophet [pbuh] said: "you see, if i were to tell you that there were some horsemen in the valley planning to raid you, will you believe me?" they said: "yes, we have never experienced any lie from you." he said: "i am a warner to you before a severe torment." abu lahab promptly

replied: "perish you all the day! have you summoned us for such a thing?".

This call was strongly opposed by the Quraysh tribes, and various slanders and insults were uttered in address of Muhammad (pbuh). In this context, the verse of Surat al-Hijr, "**Then declare what you are commanded and turn away from the polytheists**" ordering to preach all pagans to Islam was revealed.

After the Hijra (622), Muslims were confronted not only by pagans but also by Jews and Christians, that is, the People of the Book. In this context, the following verse from Surat al-Ma'ida was revealed: "**O Messenger, announce that which has been revealed to you from your Lord, and if you do not, then you have not conveyed His message. And Allah will protect you from the people. Indeed, Allah does not guide the disbelieving people**".

Commenting on this verse, Imam al-Tabari stated that the purpose of "...**announce that which has been revealed to you from your Lord...**" is to call Jews and Christians to Islam [Tabari, 467].

The first religious mission sent out of Mecca by Muhammad (pbuh) was sent to Yathrib (Madinah) in 621, when the famous Companion Mus'ab ibn Umayr was tasked with preaching Islam to the people of Medina [Idris, 55-59].

During the time of Medina, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) sent envoys to various tribes to spread Islam. In particular, in 4/625, 10 Companions were mobilized to the Banu Lahyan tribe and 70 to the Banu Amir tribe to propagate Islam. Those two incidents, called in Islamic history as the tragedy of Raji and Bir Ma'una, resulted in the ambush and tragic death of the representatives sent for the da'wah [Mubarakfuri, 231-233].

In 7-8/628-629, the Prophet sent letters through ambassadors to the Byzantine emperor Irakli, the king of Iran Khusrav II, the Najashi of Abyssinia, the emir of the Ghassans, the ruler of

Egypt Muqawqis, the malik of Oman, the malik of Yemen, and the governors of Bahrain and Yamama. When Muhammad (pbuh) was told that these rulers would only read the sealed letters, a silver ring was made and words "Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah" were inscribed in the middle of it.

According to Arabic sources, ambassadors and letters they delivered were treated differently. For example, the Emir of Bahrain converted to Islam in response to the call of Muhammad (pbuh). Although most of the governors welcomed the ambassadors, they did not accept the religion. The king of Iran, Khusraw II, became furious with the letter of Muhammad (pbuh) and tore it up. Then he sent a letter to his vassal deputy Bozon in Yemen, ordering him to capture and bring to him the man who had appeared in the Hijaz. But Bozon converted to Islam as soon as he became associated with Muhammad (pbuh) [Hasanov A., 298].

After the death of Muhammad (pbuh) in 10/632, during the reign of the Rashid caliphs, Islam spread to North Africa, Spain (Andalusia), Iran and Khorasan. During the so-called "Golden Age" of Islam (622-1258), Islam became the cradle of world civilization.

The following factors were of great importance in Islamic missionary work in the following period:

1. The colonial policy of the Muslim states served as the main catalyst for the spread of Islam. In particular, as a result of the occupation of large areas by Rashid caliphs, Umeiyyads and Abbasids, Ghaznavids, Khorezmshakhs, Mamluks, Timurids, Seljuks and Ottomans and the implementation of Islamic rules, Islam entered North Africa, Eastern Europe and the Iberian Peninsula, India and China.
2. The emergence of Sufi traditions has played an important role in the growth of Islamic missionary activity. The mystical sheikhs, together with their disciples, traveled from

town to town, from village to village, preaching Islam. In particular, mystical sheikhs played an important role in the conversion to Islam of the Mongol invaders in the 13th century, who threatened the entire Islamic world and destroyed the holy cities of Bukhara, Samarkand, Merv, Nishapur and Baghdad.

For example, Berke Khan, the first Mongol khan to become a Muslim, was converted to Islam by the efforts of pir Sayfiddin Darvesh from Khorezm [Walker T., 192].

3. The activities of Muslim traders played a decisive role in the spread of Islam in South, Southeast and East Asia. In particular, through traders, Islam entered India in the 7th century, Malaysia in the 12th century, and Indonesia in the 13th century [Nizomiddinov N., 340-341]. The merits of the merchants were also great in the penetration of Islam into China (7th century), Korea (11th century), and Japan (18th century) [Nizomiddinov N., 378-379].

Indeed, with the advent of Islam, the Arabs became a world-renowned cultural power. Arab traders and merchants became carriers of the new religion and promoted it wherever they went [Randathani H.].

The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century ushered in a unique new era in Islamic missionary work. It is safe to say that this was mainly due to the discovery of hydrocarbon deposits in the Gulf states and the enrichment of countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE.

As a result, the wealthy sheikhs of these countries began to pay more attention to the spread of Islam in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas, the construction of mosques, Islamic centers, the establishment of Islamic TV channels, Islamic sources, and especially the translation and publication of the Qur'an.

As an example, the Saudi government has spent about \$ 45 billion to finance mosques, Islamic schools and cultural centers abroad. According to a 2002 report by the kingdom's

influential newspaper, Ayn al-Yaqeen, Saudi funds have contributed to the construction of about 1,500 mosques and about 2,000 Islamic centers around the world [David E.].

In short, missionary work which is mainly specific to so called World religions that are cosmopolitan in nature, went through many stages from the emergence of religions to modern era.

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