

EDINBURGH COMPANIONS TO GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

# CHRISTIANITY IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA



Edited by

Kenneth R. Ross, Francis D. Alvarez SJ  
and Todd M. Johnson

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Todd M. Johnson**

EDINBURGH  
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**Paul Marshall** is Wilson Professor of Religious Freedom and Research Professor of Political Science at Baylor University, Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom, and Senior Fellow of the Religious Freedom Institute and member of its South and Southeast Asia Action Team.

*Religious Freedom*

**Ken Christoph Miyamoto** is Professor of Christian Studies at Kobe Shoin Women's University in Kobe, Japan. He received his PhD in Mission and Ecumenics from Princeton Theological Seminary, USA, and is the author of *God's Mission in Asia* (Pickwick, 2007).

*Anglicans*

**Peter C. Phan** is the inaugural holder of the Ignacio Ellacuria Chair of Catholic Social Thought at Georgetown University, Washington, DC. A native of Vietnam, he has obtained three doctorates and authored and edited some 30 books and 300 essays on theology and the history of missions.

*Vietnam*

**Daniel Franklin E. Pilario CM** is Professor at St Vincent School of Theology – Adamson University, Quezon City, the Philippines. He is the author of *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis: Exploring Theological Method with Pierre Bourdieu* (Peeters, 2005). He belongs to the editorial board of *Concilium* and other philosophical and theological journals. As a member of the Congregation of the Mission, he ministers in a garbage dump parish in Manila.

*Catholics*

**David Ro** is Director of the J. Christy Wilson Center for World Missions at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts, USA, and serves as Regional Director for the Lausanne Movement in East Asia.

*Mainland China (House Churches)*

**Kenneth R. Ross** is Professor of Theology at Zomba Theological College, Malawi. His most recent book is *Mission as God's Spiral of Renewal* (Mzuni Press, 2019) and he serves as a Series Editor for the Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity (Edinburgh University Press).

*Brunei*

**Nikolay Samoylov** is Professor and Head of the Department of Theory of Asian and African Social Development at Saint Petersburg State University, Russia, where he also serves as Director of the Center for Chinese Studies. He has published extensively on Russian interactions with China and Japan.

*Orthodox*

**Kang-San Tan** serves as General Director of BMS World Mission – the Baptist Missionary Society. Previously he was Director for Mission Research

# Orthodox

## Nikolay Samoylov and Ambrose-Aristotle Zographos

This chapter comprises a regional survey by Professor Nikolay Samoylov and a case study of Korea by its serving Metropolitan, His Eminence Ambrose-Aristotle Zographos.

### **Orthodoxy in East and Southeast Asia: A Regional Survey, by Nikolay Samoylov**

The Orthodox presence in East and Southeast Asia is numerically small but has a significant history in China, Japan and Korea as well as interesting recent developments in Southeast Asia. In general, it has depended on the influence of Orthodox countries, particularly Russia, but it is marked today by growing numbers of indigenous people embracing the Orthodox faith. In recent years, Orthodoxy began to spread even in countries where it formerly was practically nonexistent, such as Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia. This development adds interest to the question of the prospects for Orthodoxy in this part of the world.

#### *China*

The Chinese Autonomous Orthodox Church was officially established in 1956, but the history of Orthodox Christianity in China goes back more than three centuries. In 1685, the Orthodox priest Maxim Leontiev came to Beijing with a group of Russians captured from the fort of Albazin by Qing military troops, and as a result the first Orthodox chapel was built in the Qing capital. In 1715–16, the first Russian Ecclesiastical Mission, formed according to Peter the Great's edict, arrived in China, headed by Archimandrite Hilarion (Lezhaisky).

The Mission operated in China for about three centuries. Apart from their religious activities, members of the Mission's staff figured prominently in promoting Sino-Russian cultural exchanges in various fields. It is largely owing to the Ecclesiastical Mission in Beijing that Russian Sinology began to emerge. Russian Orthodox missionaries slowly established a small Orthodox Christian community in Beijing and its suburbs. During the first half of the nineteenth century, some members of the Beijing Ecclesiastical Mission became well known Sinologists and made

noticeable contributions to Russian intellectuals' knowledge of Chinese culture, history and language. They acted as interpreters of Chinese culture, and, as its original foreign chroniclers, promoted the Russian formation of what was essentially a new communication mode for socio-cultural interaction.

In 1863, Russia separated the Beijing Ecclesiastical Mission from diplomatic activities. In this new situation, the Russian missionaries who served in the Beijing Mission could focus on guardianship and protection of the Albazin Orthodox community and preach Christianity among the Chinese and Manchu. During the Yihetuan (Boxer) Rebellion of 1898–1900, the Mission was destroyed, and more than 200 Chinese Orthodox Christians were killed. In 1902, Archimandrite Innocent (Figurovsky) was consecrated bishop in Russia and returned as the first Orthodox Bishop of China. He spent much effort working to restore Orthodox churches that had been destroyed or burned during the Boxer Rebellion. The number of Chinese priests increased. Bishop Innocent was pessimistic about the possibility of converting people from the educated strata of Chinese society and decided to focus on the common Chinese and the lower strata of society. By 1915 there were 5,587 baptised Orthodox Chinese.

From 1917, the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in China began to focus on the spiritual care and moral support of a large group of refugees from Soviet Russia. By 1949, parishioners included not only Russians but also approximately 10,000 Chinese converts. The Mission returned to the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate in 1945. The following year the East Asian Exarchate was formed and included Beijing, Harbin, Shanghai, Tianjin and Xinjiang dioceses. After the Communist Party of China came to power in mainland China in 1949, most of the Russian emigrants left China, and the Moscow Patriarchate headed the creation for the Chinese people of the Chinese Autonomous Orthodox Church, in which most of the bishops were Chinese. By 1951, all the Chinese religious organisations established official 'patriotic unions' that included Chinese believers only, and according to the new law they could not be controlled from abroad. The Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church decided in 1954 to abolish the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in China and donated

#### *Orthodox in East and Southeast Asia, 1970*

Region	Total population	Christian population	Orthodox population	% of region Orthodox	% of Christians Orthodox
East Asia	996,425,000	11,456,000	37,900	0.0%	0.3%
Southeast Asia	280,607,000	50,740,000	4,700	0.0%	0.0%
East and Southeast Asia	1,277,032,000	62,196,000	42,600	0.0%	0.1%
Globe	3,700,578,000	1,229,309,000	141,930,000	3.8%	11.5%

Source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo (eds), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill), accessed March 2018.

its territory to the Soviet embassy in Beijing. Chinese authorities agreed to the appointment of the head of the Chinese Orthodox Church, Archimandrite Vasily (Shuang), who was a Chinese citizen. That same year, on 23 November, the Chinese Church received autonomous status from the Moscow Patriarchate. By 1957 more than 100,000 communicants lived in north-eastern China alone, with 200 priests in 60 parishes, several monasteries and a seminary. In other parts of China, there were more than 200,000 Orthodox Christians and 150 parishes.

Unfortunately, many churches were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution – including the famous St Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral in the centre of Harbin – and the number of believers at that time was sharply reduced. In the late 1960s, the Chinese Autonomous Orthodox Church practically ceased to exist, and it has not fully recovered up until now.

After the start of Chinese economic and political reforms following the Cultural Revolution, the official attitude towards religions changed for the better. According to the official sources from the Russian Orthodox Church, about 15,000 Orthodox believers live in China today, and their number is growing, due both to the increasing number of permanent or long-term resident aliens and to growing interest in Orthodoxy among the Chinese. Orthodox believers are concentrated in Heilongjiang Province and in Xinjiang Uyghur and Inner Mongolia Autonomous Regions. Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, paid his first visit to China in 2013 and was well received by Xi Jinping, chairman of the People's Republic of China, as well as by Wang Zuohan, director of the China's State Administration for Religious Affairs. Since then, the activity of the Orthodox Church in China has intensified. In 2016 the Church of the Intercession of the Mother of God in Harbin was reopened, and the Easter service was conducted by the recently ordained Father Alexander Yu Shi, the church's first priest in 15 years.

### *Japan*

The Japanese Orthodox Church is an autonomous church under the omo-phorion of the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1970 the Russian Orthodox Church granted autonomy to the Japanese church while retaining a

### *Orthodox in East and Southeast Asia, 2020*

Region	Total population	Christian population	Orthodox population	% of region Orthodox	% of Christians Orthodox
<i>East Asia</i>	1,663,619,000	128,787,000	47,000	0.0%	0.0%
<i>Southeast Asia</i>	669,016,000	153,102,000	15,200	0.0%	0.0%
<i>East and Southeast Asia</i>	2,332,635,000	281,889,000	62,200	0.0%	0.0%
<i>Globe</i>	7,795,482,000	2,518,834,000	292,132,000	3.7%	11.6%

Source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo (eds), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill), accessed March 2018.

measure of ecclesiastical jurisdiction over it. The election of the head of the Japanese Orthodox Church must be confirmed by the Moscow Patriarchate, but the Japanese Church can elect and ordain its other bishops without such confirmation.

The first Japanese to accept Orthodoxy was Masuda Kosai (Tachibana Kosai), who was baptised in Saint Petersburg in 1858, taking the name of Vladimir and patronymic Iosifovich, after the name of his godfather, Russian diplomat Goshkevich. The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Japan was founded by the Russian missionary Archimandrite (later Archbishop) Nicholas (baptised as Ivan Dmitrievich Kasatkin) (1836–1912), who arrived in Japan in 1861. In 1864 Father Nicholas baptised the first three converts in Japan. By 1870, the Orthodox community numbered more than 4,000. The Orthodox Theological Seminary was opened in 1879 in Tokyo in premises adjacent to the cathedral. It remains active today.

By 1880, the Japanese Orthodox Church had 5,377 members, six Japanese priests and 78 Japanese catechists. The most important event in the life of the Japanese Orthodox community was the construction in Tokyo of the Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ, consecrated on 24 February 1891. This church, erected by St Nicholas of Japan, remains one of the most interesting historical and cultural monuments of the Japanese capital. The Japanese traditionally call it Nikorai-do (Nicholas Temple) in memory of its creator, indicating the popularity of Archbishop Nicholas in Japan. At the time of its completion, it was the tallest building in Tokyo.

After the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Orthodox Church in Japan became virtually self-governing. Japanese parishes, deprived of financial support from Russia, switched to self-financing, which led to a significant curtailment of its missionary and educational work. According to a law passed in Japan in 1939, only those who were born in Japan could lead religious communities. Metropolitan Sergius was forced to retire, transferring the temporary administration of the affairs of the church to the layman Arseniy Iwasawa, who enjoyed the confidence of the Japanese civil and military authorities. Archimandrite Nicholas (Ono) was consecrated as Bishop of Tokyo and Japan on 6 April 1941 by the bishops of the Russian Church Abroad.

*Changes in Orthodox in East and Southeast Asia, 1970–2020, growth rate, % per year*

Region	Total population	Christian population	Orthodox population
<i>East Asia</i>	1.03%	4.96%	0.43%
<i>Southeast Asia</i>	1.75%	2.23%	2.37%
East and Southeast Asia	1.21%	3.07%	0.76%
Globe	1.50%	1.45%	1.45%

Source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo (eds), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill), accessed March 2018.

On 5–6 April 1946, the first post-war Japanese Church Council decided to remove Bishop Nicholas (Ono) from office. In early 1947, Bishop Benjamin (Basalyga) arrived in Japan from the USA. With the support of the civil authorities, he became the head of most of the Japanese Orthodox, as well as of the Korean mission, which in 1955 withdrew from the subordination of the American Metropolia and passed under the omophorion of the Patriarch of Constantinople. A smaller part of the Japanese flock, led by Nicholas (Ono) and Archpriest Anthony Takai, refused to enter American jurisdiction and continued to exist as the Japanese deanery of the Moscow Patriarchate. On 10 December 1967, Hieromonk Nicholas (Sayama) was ordained Bishop of Tokyo and All Japan in Leningrad and declared the head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission, continuing the work of Nicholas of Japan and Metropolitan Sergius.

In 1969, complete reconciliation was reached between the American Metropolia and the Russian Orthodox Church, and the decision was taken to establish an autonomous Japanese church within the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. In 1970, Archbishop Nicholas, the founder of the Orthodox Church in Japan, was canonised by the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia and was recognised as St Nicholas, Equal-to-the-Apostles to Japan.

Since 2000, Metropolitan Daniel (Nusiro) has been Archbishop of Tokyo and Metropolitan of All Japan. The residence and cathedral church is the Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ in Tokyo. Here the church runs the Tokyo Orthodox Seminary and publishes a monthly Japanese-language journal, *Seikyo Jihō*. The Orthodox sisterhood and the society of Orthodox youth are now very active. In 2018, in the town of Ajiro, construction started on the first male monastery in honour of St Nicholas of Japan.

Three dioceses comprise the Japanese Orthodox Church: Tokyo Archdiocese, Eastern Japan Diocese and Western Japan Diocese. It celebrates its liturgy in Japanese though occasionally other languages such as church Slavonic or Greek are used. Many liturgical and biblical texts were first translated into Japanese in the late nineteenth century by Archbishop Nicholas and his Japanese colleague Nakai Tsugumuri. As a result, the language of these texts is heavily influenced by Russian Orthodox usages at that time and sounds archaic today. The Japanese Orthodox Church is active in publishing and its publications include the Japanese Orthodox translation of the New Testament and Psalms as well as liturgical texts.

### *Southeast Asia: an overview*

Today, the number of Orthodox Christians in Southeast Asia is small, the first Orthodox communities having appeared there only in the twentieth century. The Eastern Orthodox Metropolitanate of Hong Kong and

Southeast Asia was set up in November 1996 by the decision of the Holy Great Synod of Constantinople after a visit to Hong Kong by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeos I of Constantinople, the first Patriarch of Constantinople to visit the territory. On 2 December 1996, Archimandrite Nikitas (Loulias) was elected as the first Orthodox Metropolitan of Hong Kong and enthroned the following year, with jurisdiction over Hong Kong, Macau, China, Taiwan, Mongolia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Timor-Leste, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

In 2008, the Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate took the decision to divide the vast area of the Metropolitanate by creating a new Metropolitanate of Singapore and South Asia, with jurisdiction over Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Timor-Leste, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The remaining territory continued to be under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitanate of Hong Kong. Archimandrite Nectarios (Tsilis) was elected and enthroned as the new Metropolitan of Hong Kong. In 2011 the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate elected Archimandrite Konstantinos (Tsilis) as the first Metropolitan, and he was ordained by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople. He resides in Singapore, where there is a small Orthodox congregation made up mainly of Greeks, Russians and Ukrainians.

### *Thailand*

The first Thai baptised in the Orthodox faith was Prince Chakrabongse Bhuvanath (Chakkraphong Phuwanat), a son of King Chulalongkorn. He came to Saint Petersburg in 1898 and studied in Russia for about eight years, under the personal patronage of Emperor Nicholas II. Prince Chakkraphong and his associate Nai Phum received higher humanitarian and military education in Saint Petersburg. In 1906, Prince Chakkraphong married Ekaterina Desnitskaya (Catherine Na Phitsanulok), and for this reason he accepted Orthodoxy. Subsequently, Prince Chakkraphong returned to Buddhism, but his associate, Nai Phum, also accepted Orthodoxy, having married a Russian woman, and then rose to the rank of colonel in the Russian army.

Orthodoxy has become widespread in Thailand only since the end of the twentieth century. Beginning in the mid-1990s, a large number of immigrants from the former USSR began coming to Thailand. At that time, not a single Orthodox church was found in the kingdom. Attempts to organise an Orthodox parish in Thailand were made by the Patriarchate of Constantinople. In 1999–2000, with the blessing of Metropolitan Nikita

(Loulias) of Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, a Greek priest was sent to Bangkok. For lack of their own church, services were held in Catholic churches. The congregation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in Thailand included mainly Greeks, as well as some Romanians.

In response to numerous appeals from Orthodox believers, mainly citizens of the former USSR, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church at its meeting on 28 December 1999 decided to open St Nicholas Parish in Bangkok. By the same decision, Hegumen Oleg (Cherepanin) was appointed the first rector of the newly formed parish. Soon after its appearance, the Russian Orthodox community in Bangkok ceased to be mono-ethnic, as Orthodox Romanians joined it. In addition, the conversion of local Thais to Orthodoxy began. The first of these was Danai Bath (who received the baptismal name Daniel), who wished to become an Orthodox priest and was sent to study at Saint Petersburg Theological Seminary.

In 2001, after reviewing the activities of the St Nicholas Parish in Bangkok, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church decided to open a Representative Office of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in the Kingdom of Thailand. Hegemon Oleg (Cherepanin) became the representative of the Russian Orthodox Church in Thailand and also provided spiritual nourishment for Orthodox believers in Cambodia and Laos.

In early 2008, the Thai authorities, having considered the long-term activities of the Orthodox community in Thailand, recognised it as useful, in line with the interests of the Kingdom and strengthening the moral foundations of society. The Orthodox Christian Church in Thailand was officially registered in July 2008. In addition to the main parish of St Nicholas Cathedral in Bangkok, there are Russian Orthodox communities in significant centres throughout the country. Today, around 1,000 people in Thailand are Orthodox Christians (about 0.002% of the population of the country), not counting Orthodox people who come to the country on holiday (about 1 million Russian tourists per year). Thai translations of the Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom and the Orthodox Book of Prayer have been completed. At the beginning of 2011, construction of the Assumption Monastery in Ratburi Province was completed. A religious school and an Orthodox cemetery were planned for its territory. Among those who wish to become monks are citizens of Russia, Romania, Thailand and Laos. On 21 March 2012, the first issue of the newspaper *Thailand Orthodox* was published.

### *Cambodia*

An Orthodox church in honour of St George the Great Martyr and under the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was built on the territory

of the Bulgarian Embassy in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, in 1993. It was erected in commemoration of Bulgarian peacekeepers who died in Cambodia. However, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church did not send priests for the regular conduct of worship in this church.

In the 2000s, a cleric of the Russian Orthodox Church, Oleg (Cherepanin), with the permission of the hierarchy of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the leadership of the Bulgarian diplomatic mission in Phnom Penh, began to hold services in the St George Church during his trips to Cambodia. However, as he noted, 'it is difficult to organise a capable parish at the temple, which is located on the special territory'.

A constituent assembly of Orthodox believers took place in Phnom Penh in 2012 and unanimously decided to establish an Orthodox parish in Phnom Penh in the name of the Holy Great Martyr George the Victorious under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. The same year a constituent assembly of parishioners took place in Sihanoukville. The Orthodox believers in Sihanoukville also decided to establish an Orthodox parish in the name of the Great Martyr and Healer Panteleimon. With the blessing of the head of the Office for Foreign Institutions of the Moscow Patriarchate, Archbishop Mark of Yegoryevsk (Golovkov), and within the framework of the programme for the development of Orthodoxy in Southeast Asia, the website 'Orthodoxy in Cambodia' was launched, to be run by the Representative Office of the Russian Orthodox Church in Thailand. In 2013, the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church in Thailand, to which Cambodia administratively belongs, received a decree by the minister of cults and religions of Cambodia on the government's favourable decision on state registration as a religious organisation of the Russian Orthodox Church under the name Orthodox Christian Church of Cambodia (Moscow Patriarchate).

At the request of Orthodox believers in Cambodia, in October 2015, the Orthodox Prayer Book was published in the Khmer language. In June 2016, the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom was published in Khmer. In addition to the text of the Liturgy itself, the book also contains prayers for Holy Communion and prayers of thanksgiving after Holy Communion. In addition to the temple in the name of the Great Martyr George the Victorious in Phnom Penh and the temple in the name of the Great Martyr Panteleimon in Sihanoukville, a parish is being developed around the temple of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in Siem Reap.

### *Vietnam*

Orthodox Christianity is the smallest Christian community in Vietnam. It is represented by only one parish of the Russian Orthodox Church in the city of Vung Tau, where several hundred Russians are employees of

Vietsovpetro (the joint Russian–Vietnamese enterprise for oil and gas exploration). The parish was opened in 2002 following the visit to Vietnam of the chairman of the Russian Orthodox Church's Department for External Church Relations, Metropolitan Kirill (since 2009 Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia). Metropolitan Kirill was the first Russian Orthodox hierarch to visit the country.

### *Laos*

Orthodoxy is represented in Laos by employees of the Russian embassy and other state and commercial organisations of the Russian Federation. Orthodox citizens of former Soviet republics also reside in Laos. A small number of indigenous Lao people have converted to Orthodoxy. The total number of the Orthodox community is no more than 200. There is no Orthodox church in the country, so they have to meet in temporary accommodation. In 2016, the first Laotian priest, Hieromonk Micah (Phiasayawong), was ordained. In the same year, he translated the textbook *The Law of God* by Serafim Slobodsky into the Laotian language.

### *Indonesia*

Orthodoxy first appeared on the territory of modern Indonesia in the seventh century. The followers of the non-Chalcedonian Christianity of the Syrian-Antiochian tradition appeared in Sumatra in the Majapahit period. Soon, however, the traces of Orthodoxy in Indonesia disappeared. The revival of Eastern Christianity in Indonesia began in the twentieth century. In 1934, in Batavia (Jakarta) on the island of Java, a Russian Orthodox parish was founded, to which priest Vasily Bystrov was appointed. The parish was subordinate to the Harbin Diocese. Upon his arrival in Java, Father Vasily reorganised an Orthodox parish and established a church in Bandung. At the end of the 1940s, the parish in Java became subordinate to Archbishop Tikhon of San Francisco. In May 1950, Father Vasily reported that many Russian parishioners had left Indonesia and, as a result, the parish had ceased to exist. Today, Eastern Orthodoxy in Indonesia is represented by the Indonesian Orthodox Church, headed by Archimandrite Daniel Bambang Dwi Byantoro. It has 2,000 members, who are spread across Java, Bali, Sumatra, Celebes, Timor and Papua.

### *Conclusion*

For the foreseeable future, Central and Eastern Europe will remain the main centre of Orthodox Christianity, with more than three-quarters of the total number of Orthodox believers living in the region. By contrast, the entire Asia-Pacific region is home to a mere 4% of the global Orthodox population. Yet, today, the number of Orthodox Christians is increasing

in East and Southeast Asia, mainly due to the migration of people from historically Eastern European Orthodox countries (Russians, Greeks, Romanians, Bulgarians, Ukrainians). In recent years, however, interest in Orthodoxy among the local population has also increased, which creates the potential to increase the number of Orthodox believers in these countries. The example of Japan, where the Orthodox Church over many years has occupied a prominent place among religious denominations, demonstrates what is possible.

### **Korea: A Case Study in Orthodoxy, by Ambrose-Aristotle Zographos**

The Orthodox presence in Korea can be traced back to a decision taken in 1897 by the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church of Russia to begin a Russian Orthodox mission to 'serve the religious needs of the Orthodox Russians who lived in Korea and the possible spread of the holy Orthodox Faith among the indigenous pagan population'. Two years later, deacon Nicholas Alexeev (1869–1952) arrived in Seoul. On 17 February 1900, at the Russian consulate in Seoul, the first Divine Liturgy was celebrated and a temporary chapel dedicated to St Nicholas was consecrated. In 1911, John Kang-Tak (1877–1939), who had previously served as a teacher at the mission school, was ordained as deacon. He was the first Korean Orthodox member of the clergy and was ordained to the priesthood the following year.

After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the Holy Synod decided to bring the Orthodox mission in Seoul under the jurisdiction of the Russian Archbishop of Tokyo, Sergii Tikhomirov, who was the nearest Orthodox bishop to Korea. In 1932, the Korean cantor Alexis Kim Yi-Han (1895–1950) was ordained as a deacon by Archbishop Sergii and in 1947 he was ordained to the priesthood. On 9 July 1950, after celebrating the Divine Liturgy, Father Alexis was arrested by North Korean soldiers and was never seen again. Shortly before this, Father Polikarp Priimak, who had served as head of the Orthodox mission from 1936 to 1949, had been arrested and expelled from the country. This marked the end of the first period of the Orthodox mission in Korea under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate.

During the Korean War (1950–3) Orthodox chaplains to the Greek troops provided pastoral ministry to the scattered community of Orthodox Koreans. The political situation after the war made it no longer possible for the Orthodox Church in Korea to come under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1955 it came under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Ecumenical Patriarch ensured that pastoral care was provided to the Orthodox Church in Korea through a succession of arrangements until, on 20 April 2004, the Ecumenical Patriarchate established the Holy Metropolis of Korea. Bishop