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**THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN JAPAN FROM
THE BEGINNING TO PRESENT DAYS**

History, current situation and future perspectives

SUMMARY

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Keywords: Japanese Orthodox Church, St. Nicholas Kasatkin, Nikolai-Do, Archimandrite Anatolie Tihai, Metropolitan Sergei Tikhomirov, Romanian Community in Japan, Russian Community in Japan

This doctoral dissertation entitled „*The Orthodox Church in Japan from the beginning to the present days. History, current situation and future perspectives*” has been written after my long experience as a missionary priest in Japan. Between 2008 – 2013 I have been the priest in charge of the ”Representation of the Romanian Orthodox Church to the Holy Autonomos Orthodox Church in Japan”.

I have started to gather documentation for this dissertation ever since that period of time, characterized by an extremely difficult struggle not only to adapt to new missionary realities, but also to learn the Japanese language, as well as the history and the culture of this remote country. Within this period of time I had to face an acute problem for a young missionary priest: the shortage of information on the history of the Japanese Orthodox Church, written in English or other languages that I know. Basically I was in a country with a very difficult and hardly accessible language for me. Even if there were Orthodox churches in the big cities, it was still very difficult for me to find information about the history of the Japanese Orthodox Community.

As an English, French and Italian speaker, I started to search information in all these languages. Meanwhile I discovered different historians who wrote about various aspects of the history of the Japanese Orthodox Church, including Japanese and Russian ones, and whose writings were translated into the languages that I could understand. Most of these articles are about St. Nicholas Kasatkin`s life and sometimes also about the years that followed his death up to 1945. There is still no paper written in an international language that could offer an overview over the whole history of the Japanese Orthodoxy up to present days.

This paper provides an overview of the first Christian missions in the Land of the Rising Sun, the difficulties faced by missionaries at first, and then focuses on Japanese Orthodoxy, beginning in 1859 and dealing with each distinct era in the history of this church, hard tried over time. The main reason for the difficulties the Orthodox Church has had to endure in Japan was its traditional connection with Russia, through centuries up to now as it is still subordinate to the Russian Orthodox Church.

Even if during the first years of the missionary activity of St. Nicholas Kasatkin this aspect did not matter much, given the special personality of this missionary, later, after his death and the setting up of the Bolshevik regime in Russia, the Orthodox Church ties with Russia were severely criticized by Japanese society. There were attempts of the Japanese Orthodox to sever ties with Russia, and after 1945 this was fulfilled. Thus between 1945 and

1970, the Japanese Orthodox Church was under the auspices of the "Metropolia" of America. In the negotiations aimed at achieving the Autocephaly of „Metropolia” that later became the „Orthodox Church of America” (O.C.A.), it was considered that the Japanese Orthodox Church had to be autonomus under the Russian Orthodox Church. Therefore in 1970 the Russian Orthodox Church granted autonomy to the Japanese Orthodox Church and St. Nicholas Kasatkin was sanctified as: „Equal with the Apostles and Enlighter of Japan”

To accomplish a thesis with such a complexity, I had to do a long research in Japan, in Germany with the Erasmus Scholarship and in Romania, too. The documentation was performed in libraries such as:

1. National Library of the Japanese Diet, Tokyo.
2. Library of the Japanese Orthodox Church, at the Nikolai-Do Cathedral, Tokyo.
3. Meguro Catholic Church Parish Library, Tokyo.
4. The Library of the Ewersbach University, Germany.
5. The Library of the University in Marburg, Germany.
6. National Library of Romania, Bucharest.
7. Library of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Sibiu.
8. Library of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Bucharest.

The paper consists of 20 chapters as follows:

The first three chapters are introductory.

In **the first chapter** I show my gratitude to His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel of the Romanian Orthodox Church for giving me his blessing to study for this PhD, as well as those who guided and supported me in carrying out the work, first of all *V. Rev. Ass. Prof. Dr. Daniel Buda* my coordinating teacher, *V. Rev. Prof. Dr. Aurel Pavel*, *Archdeacon Prof. Dr. Ioan Ică Jr.* and *Lecturer PhD. Habil Ciprian Toroczka* members of the guidance committee. I also show my special gratitude to *Prof. Dr. Andreas Heiser*, Rector of the Theological Seminary in Ewersbach, who was my coordinating teacher durring the Erasmus Scholarship in Germany; *Prof. Dr. Karl Pinggera*, Rector of the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Phillipps University in Marburg, Germany; *His Eminence Daniel Nushiro*, Archbishop of Tokyo and Metropolitan of All Japan; *His Eminence Serafim Noboru Tsujie* Archbishop of Sendai; *Rev. Dimitrie Tanaka* and *Archdeacon Ilya Toru Takei*, the Foreign Relations Department Representatives of the Japanese Orthodox Church. The list of the persons to whom I am grateful is much longer, their names being listed in full in the paper.

In the **second chapter** one can find general information about the country (area, population, etc ...) and the religious context in which Christianity made its presence (types of religion present in Japan at the time, important Christian missionaries such as: St. Francis Xavier and St. Nicholas Kasatkin, and also how Christianity influenced the Japanese society).

In the **third chapter** there is given information about the documentary sources through which this work has been written. A short list of authors like:

- ✓ For English language: Fr. John Bartholomew and his wife Doreen Batholomew, Nicholas Cooke, Alexei Potapov, Michael V. Uspensky, Fr. John Meyendorff, Michael Van Remortel, Dr. Peter Chang and Otis Cary.
- ✓ For French and German languages I turned to authors such as: Sylvie Morishita, Christophe Geffroy, Fr. Olivier Chegaray, Yves Chiron, Pfarrer Hans Haas.
- ✓ For Romanian language some of the authors I focused are: PS. Silvestru (Bălănescu) Piteșteanu, Archimandrite Gheorghe Enăceanu, Fr. Dimitrie Balaur, Velicu Dudu, Fr. Petru Iacubovschi, Fr. Constantin Nazarie, Fr. Sorokovschi Vladimir.
- ✓ For Russian language I studied the Diary of St. Nicholas Kasatkin which details many events in the daily life of the great hierarch and during which Orthodoxy spread widely in Japanese society.
- ✓ For the Japanese language I chose: Kennosuke Nakamura, Yoshikazu Nakamura, Elder Maria Junko Matsushima, Mitsuo Naganawa, Maria Kaneishi.

The **fourth chapter** presents the emergence of Christianity in Japan, starting with the first indications related to the Nestorian Christians in China and their influence on Buddhism brought to the Land of the Rising Sun. Another subchapter deals with the arrival of Catholic missionaries led by St. Francis Xavier in 1549. I have focused on the development of the Catholic mission in the Nagasaki area and the reaction of the shoguns Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu to the Christian presence. The period of persecution is also highlighted, as well as the fact that those who remained among the Christians hid their worship to be taken by Buddhists. After Japan's reopening to foreigners, some 20,000 Japanese Christians who survived underground began to show their public faith again.

In **chapter five** I refer to the first mentioned contacts between the Japanese and the Russians, starting with the Japanese sailor Gabriel Denbei who lived in the early 18th century and was shipwrecked on the Kamchatka Peninsula, to the Russian merchant Vassili Golovin, who was a prisoner in Japan for two years and on his return to Russia he wrote a book about his experience. This book was the basis of St. Nicholas Kasatkin's desire to be a missionary in Japan.

Chapter six has nine subchapters about the beginnings of the Russian Orthodox Mission in Japan; the period of persecution against Christian Orthodoxy; the period of church development; the efforts of St. Nicholas Kasatkin to translate worship books; introduction of church music; organization of Orthodox theological education - Tokyo Seminary. The last three subchapters refer to: the influence of the Russian-Japanese conflict from 1904 - 1905 on Japanese Orthodoxy, the last years of the life of Saint Nicholas Kasatkin and important topics present in his diary.

Chapter seven deals with the work of some of those who were close to St. Nicholas Kasatkin and who gave their contribution to the flourishing development of the Japanese Orthodoxy. Among them I wrote about: Father Pavel Sawabe - the first priest of Japanese origin; Archimandrite Antatolie Tihai - Romanian-speaking Bessarabian missionary who was present in Japan between 1871 and 1893; The composer Iacob Tihai, brother of Archimandrite Anatolie; deacon Dimitrie Livovschi - the third Bessarabian missionary; Irina Rin Yamashita - the first Japanese Orthodox painter; Fr. Simeon Michiro Mii; Pavel Tsugumaro Nakai - Japanese scholar who contributed to the translation of worship books into Japanese; Arsenie Iwasawa Heikichi and Fr. Serghei Suzuki Kyuuhati.

Chapter eight, consisting of three subchapters, shows the Japanese Orthodox Church situation after the death of St. Nicholas Kasatkin in 1912 and until after the Second World War.

The first subchapter is dedicated to Metropolitan Sergei Tikhomirov and the events that took place during his ministry: The Bolshevik Revolution and its influence on the Japanese Orthodox Church; The Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 (during which the Nikolai-Do Cathedral, the Tokyo Seminary and the Metropolitan Center were destroyed); Relations between the Japanese Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia (ROCOR) and the rise of nationalism and militarism in Japan.

The second subchapter deals with the problems in the Japanese Orthodox Church that occurred after the removal of Metropolitan Sergei Tikhomirov from its leadership.

The third subchapter describes the ministry of the Japanese bishop Nicolae Ono (1941 - 1946) until his removal by the American authorities (S.C.A.P) after the occupation of Japan.

Chapter nine refers to the Japanese Orthodox Church under American protection. It has five subchapters basically describing the situation of Japanese Orthodoxy at the end of the Second World War and the work of American bishops who led the Japanese Orthodox Church from 1946 to 1972: His Eminence Veniamin Basalyga, His Eminence Irineu Bekish, His Eminence Nikon de Greve and His Eminence Vladimir Nagosky during which the autonomy of the Japanese Orthodox Church was negotiated.

Chapter ten exposes the negotiations that led to the achievement of the church autonomy under the protection of the Russian Orthodox Church. After gaining autonomy, all the metropolitans who led the Japanese Orthodox Church were of Japanese nationality.

In the first three subchapters of **chapter eleven** I concentrated on the life and work of Japanese metropolitans from 1972 until the present. I mentioned Metropolitan Teodosie Nagashima, who served a period of 27 years and who visited Romania twice; His Eminence Petru Arihara who served only three months and about His Eminence Daniel Nushiro who has been pastoring from 2000 to the present. During his pastorate, His Beatitude Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, appointed me parish priest of the Romanian Orthodox Church of St. George in Tokyo, established on this occasion. I had the mission to organize the Romanian community in Japan. In 2012, St. George Parish was elevated to the rank of Representation of the Romanian Orthodox Church to the Holy Autonomos Orthodox Church in Japan.

In the following three subchapters I added some details about the life and work of the vicar bishops who have been active in Japan from the beginning until now, in the dioceses of Kyoto and Sendai: Holy Martyr Andronik Nikolsky, His Eminence Seraphim Sigris of Sendai and His Eminence Seraphim Tsujie of Sendai.

Chapter twelve deals with the current situation in the Japanese Orthodox Church with references to parish life and some statistics (number of parishes and clergy, evolution of the number of believers in dioceses), and also with some realities of Japanese monastic life and theological education (severely affected by the lack of specialized staff and clerical vocations).

Chapter thirteen consists of three subchapters dedicated to the presentation of the three dioceses (the Archdiocese of Tokyo, the Diocese of Eastern Japan and the Diocese of Western Japan) as well as photos, history and contact details of each parish.

Chapter fourteen presents in three subchapters the ecumenical and inter-Orthodox relationships of the Japanese Orthodox Church. A special relationship existed during the life of St. Nicholas Kasatkin and Metropolitan Sergei Tikhomirov with the Anglican Church. Also in 2012, as a delegate of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Fr. Daniel Buda arrived in Japan with the mission to strengthen the Council's relations with the Japanese Orthodox Church. At the time, the Church was an inactive member of the Council. As a result of the visit undertaken by Fr. Daniel Buda, in 2013 the Japanese Orthodox Church became active and sent delegates to the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan, South Korea.

Chapter fifteen has three subchapters dedicated to Orthodox communities of other nationalities in Japan: The Russian Community is presented with its history, representatives and locations; in the subchapter dedicated to the Romanian community I wrote about the two parishes founded in 2008 - the one in Tokyo where I appointed as the first parish priest and the one in Nagoya and Osaka where Fr. Cristian Gheorghiu was appointed. Since 2013, Fr. Daniel Corîu has been present in Tokyo. He managed to buy a church from the Catholic community in Tokyo, as well as its sanctification in 2020. The third subchapter presents the Ukrainian community in Tokyo, related to the Kiev Patriarchate.

Chapter sixteen presents my mission in the Land of the Rising Sun. It has six subchapters dealing with: the beginning period of the mission; first contacts with the Japanese Orthodox Church; change of location dedicated to services from Ito City in Shizuoka Prefecture to Tokyo; the difficult situation in which the Romanian community found itself caused by the Great Earthquake in Western Japan in 2011; raising the parish of St. George in Tokyo to the rank of Representation of the Romanian Orthodox Church to the Holy Autonomos Orthodox Church in Japan; return to Romania and negotiations on sending a new priest.

In **chapter seventeen** I wrote about the future prospects for the Japanese Orthodox Church. I detailed some aspects that I think are essential for the development of church life in Japan - missionary mentality and theological education. I also mention Hieromonk Nicholas Ono, a servant of the Russian „Podvorîa” in Tokyo, as a possible candidate for the position of bishop in the Japanese Orthodox Church.

In **chapter eighteen** I presented some conclusions which I give in full:

This research is far from being over. There are still many things that can be revealed through more detailed documentation in Japanese and Russian language sources. The Russians have the great merit of being a missionary people. They wrote about the Japanese Orthodox Church, looking at it as the Russian missionary realm, inextricably linked to the Mother Church.

Personally, I have had the boundless joy of witnessing the struggles of the much tried Japanese people, who, although not baptized Christians, are trying to create a just and good society, which keeps them close to evangelical ideals.

This is also the reason why I began this research. I was amazed to see with my own eyes how they, being non-Christians, behave like Christians in many situations. To the Japanese people I can apply the words of the Holy Apostle Paul, who says, “ *For when the Gentiles without the law have a natural desire to do the things in the law, they are a law to themselves; Because the work of the law is seen in their hearts, their sense of right and wrong giving witness to it, while their minds are at one time judging them and at another giving them approval; In the day when God will be a judge of the secrets of men, as it says in the good news of which I am a preacher, through Jesus Christ.* ”¹

Christianity, although a minority in Japan, has managed to impose itself over time, being today a religion respected by the majority of the people. Being a minority, they managed to impose certain changes in Japanese society such as monogamy, in which the family is represented by the communion between a man and a woman or imposing Sunday as a weekly rest day.

Although it is not easy to be a minority in Japan, Christians proved that by their life and work were able to earn the respect of the Japanese people. Thus, they managed to set up primary, secondary and university education units, they laid the foundations of Christian hospitals, with the help of which the love of God is visibly shown in the world. For example, the Catholic Church, although it has only 436,505 members, meaning 0.34% of the population, has 24 hospitals, 524 kindergartens, 286 schools and 19 universities.²

The Orthodox Church stood out educationally through the Tokyo Seminary, which was an elite school of Japanese Orthodoxy. In addition to this seminar, there were also primary schools in Hakkodate (Motomachi School), Tokyo Girls School, Painting School

¹ Romans 2,14-16

² Fr. Olivier. Chegaray. „Un potentiel de la foi”, *La Nef*, no. 289, February 2017, p. 22-23.

and Music School. Protestant cults also stood out through the schools and hospitals they patronized over time

Although numerically, Christianity is clearly inferior to other religions present in the Land of the Rising Sun, such as Shintoism and Buddhism, yet it has made its presence felt, changing certain mentalities and managing to establish points of contact with the people and the Japanese state.

Chapter nineteen is dedicated to the annexes with photographs, portraits, maps, paintings, newspaper pages, interviews and also documents taken from microfilms in the collection of the National Library of the Japanese Diet.

Chapter twenty presents the bibliography and is divided into six subchapters of books, articles, dictionaries and encyclopedias of theology, microfilms, websites, and libraries frequented for the purpose of this paper.

It was a long time research started while I was in Japan and continued systematically during the three and a half years I worked on this doctoral dissertation.