

Saint Nicholas of Japan

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Life

St. Nicholas (Kasatkin), Equal to the Apostles, founder and first hierarch of the Japanese Church, was an outstanding Russian missionary of the 20th century. He passed away in 1912 and was canonized sixty years after his death (March 31, 1970).

This selfless missionary devoted his entire life and all his strength to preaching the Gospel and sowing the Word of God in the Land of the Rising Sun, and his labors, worthy of the apostles, bore abundant fruit. Mitsuo Nagana writes: “He left behind a cathedral, 8 chapels, 175 churches, and 276 parishes; he trained one bishop, 34 priests, 8 deacons, and 115 preachers. The total number of Orthodox believers reached 34,110...”

Archpriest I. Vostorgov, who visited Japan, wrote: “There was no one in Japan, apart from the emperor, who enjoyed such fame in the country.” In the Japanese capital, there was no need to ask where the Russian Orthodox mission was; it was enough to say the single word ‘Nikolai,’ and literally every rickshaw driver immediately knew where to take a guest of the mission. The Orthodox church was called ‘Nikolai,’ the mission’s location was also ‘Nikolai,’ and even Orthodoxy itself was referred to by the name ‘Nikolai.’ Traveling through the country dressed as a Russian priest, we were always and everywhere met with kind glances, and in the words of greeting and conversation about us, we would catch, amid the incomprehensible words and expressions of an unfamiliar language, one familiar and dear word: “Nikolai”...”

1The renowned Orientalist D. M. Pozdneev, who knew the saint well, recalls: “Along with his gentleness, he was a man of iron will who knew no obstacles, a practical mind and an administrator who knew how to find a way out of any difficult situation. Along with his amiability, he possessed the ability to be cold, unyielding, and sharp with people whom he deemed necessary to discipline through strict measures, to punish for something, or to stop. Along with his sociability, he possessed a great deal of reserve, acquired through long experience and bitter trials, and it took a great deal of time and effort to

earn his trust and candor. Alongside a certain childlike naivety characteristic of a cheerful conversationalist, he possessed the broad ideals of a great statesman, boundless love for his homeland, and a deep empathy for its sufferings and torments... Broad and holy ideals, an iron will, and inexhaustible diligence—this is the essence of Archbishop Nicholas.”

One cannot help but agree with A. Platonova, the author of one of the saint’s biographies, who wrote: “It is the duty of every Russian to know about him in greater detail, because people like Archbishop Nicholas are the pride and glory of their country.”

His work was fraught with many hardships. Archbishop Nicholas was hounded from both sides: by the Japanese—as a Russian political agent, spy, and agitator sowing treason and sympathy for treacherous, predatory Russia on Japanese soil; and by the Russians—as a figure who was revealing to Japan things about Russia that it did not need to know... The archbishop’s work was thus declared not only useless but also harmful, and many in Russia viewed him as an eccentric gripped by a strange obsession. Archbishop Nicholas was sustained in his mission by two ideas that guided him throughout his life: the first—the idea of apostolic ministry, the noble task of spreading Orthodoxy among the pagans; the second—the fervent conviction that his work must remain entirely separate from politics.” And elsewhere: “He was imbued with the realization that what he cherished within himself was not for earthly purposes.”

Calling

Ivan Dmitrievich Kasatkin was born on August 1, 1836, in the village of Bereza in the Velsky District of the Smolensk Governorate.¹ His father, Dmitry Ivanovich Kasatkin, served as a deacon in the village church.² The child was named Ioann in honor of the glorious Prophet, Forerunner, and Baptist of the Lord. His mother, Ksenia Alekseyevna, died at the age of 34, when he was only five years old.

Despite extreme poverty, the boy was sent to study first at the Velsky Theological School and then at the Smolensk Seminary. S. Nedachin writes: “In the absence of railroads, the young man had to trudge through the dreadful—and still existing—slums of Velsky to the provincial city of Smolensk to receive an education at the theological seminary. By no means did all seminarians of that time travel to school on horseback. Many of them—the poorest, among whom was the boy Kasatkin—had to walk more than 150 versts to reach the seminary.”

In 1856, he graduated with distinction from the seminary and was sent at the state’s expense to the St. Petersburg Theological Academy, where he studied until 1860.

Parishioners of the Moscow Church of the Ascension on Nikitinskaya Street determined that the site of this village is now occupied by the village of Bereza in the Mostovsky Rural District of the Oleninsky District, Tver Region. In 1836, the village of Bereza was the center of the Berezovskaya volost in the Velsky District and had 5 households (7 men and 6 women). Not a single house remains of the village. The village church was destroyed during the Great Patriotic War.

The saint cared for his father until the very end of his life, giving him a portion of his salary every month.

The young man showed exceptional abilities; it was expected that he would remain at the academy to prepare for a career as a professor, but his decision to go to Japan completely changed his fate.

The decision came as a complete surprise. According to Saint Nicholas himself, the idea of monastic life had never even crossed his mind until then. One day, however, while walking through the academy's halls, Ivan Dmitrievich noticed a notice in one of the "recreation rooms" offering a position to one of the academy's graduates to go to Japan as rector of the embassy church in Hakodate. Several of Kasatkin's friends had already expressed a desire to go to Japan as priests. This invitation did not make a particular impression on the young man, even though Golovnin's recollections of Japan had once deeply impressed him. He calmly went to the All-Night Vigil. And then, during the service, he suddenly decided that he must go to Japan. Returning from the All-Night Vigil, he went, deeply moved, to the rector of the academy, His Eminence Nektarios, and declared his desire to go to Japan—not as a married priest, but as a monk. The rector of the academy was very sympathetic to the young man's impulse and reported his wish to the metropolitan. In no time at all, the fate of Ivan Dmitrievich Kasatkin was decided.

On June 21, 1860, the young man was tonsured a monk and given the name Nicholas. On June 29, the feast day of Saints Peter and Paul, the First-Called Apostles, he was ordained a hierodeacon, and the following day, on the feast of the Synaxis of the Twelve Apostles (the patronal feast of the academy's church), he was ordained a hieromonk. Bishop Nektarios, who tonsured the young man as a monk, named him Nicholas and said: "It is not in a monastery that you are to lead a life of asceticism. You must leave your homeland itself and go to serve the Lord in a distant and unbelieving land. Along with the cross of an ascetic, you must take up the pilgrim's staff; alongside the ascetic life, apostolic labors await you."

At the end of June, Hieromonk Nicholas left St. Petersburg and spent three days with his family in the village. After bidding them farewell, he set out on his long journey. He took with him the Smolensk Icon of the Mother of God, which he kept with him throughout his life.⁴

The journey to Japan was long and arduous. Hieromonk Nicholas spent the winter in Nikolayevsk-on-Amur. There he met with Saint Innocent, the Enlightener of Siberia (at that time the Bishop of Kamchatka). The latter blessed him for his upcoming labors and advised him to devote himself wholeheartedly to studying the Japanese language. Seeing the hieromonk's shabby cassock, Bishop Innocent bought some fine velvet and personally cut out a cassock for Father Nicholas from it. He also placed on Father Nicholas a bronze pectoral cross he had received for his participation in the Crimean War.

On June 14 (2), 1861, Hieromonk Nicholas arrived at the Japanese port of Hakodate aboard the military transport ship "Amur."

Hakodate

Iosif Antonovich Goshkevich (1814–1875), a remarkable figure in many respects, was appointed the first Russian consul in Hakodate.⁵ He arrived in Hakodate in the third decade of September 1858, accompanied by his family, a naval officer, a doctor, a priest (the latter returned to his homeland due to illness in the year the consulate was established), four male servants, and two female servants.

Even before Hieromonk Nicholas's arrival in Japan, the Russian consulate had managed to build the Church of the Resurrection of Christ in Hakodate (later, during the Great Hakodate Fire, this church

burned down, and a stone church was built in its place). Father Vasily Makhov built and consecrated the church. Illness forced him to leave Japan and return to his homeland just one year later, after which I. A. Goshkevich appealed to the Synod to send a priest with the highest level of theological education.

It should be noted that at that time, the Japanese attitude toward foreigners was quite hostile. The “peace” treaties imposed by Western countries caused extreme dissatisfaction among the samurai, who regarded foreigners as “barbarians” and advocated for their complete expulsion. Consequently, the opening of the country and the arrival of foreigners contributed to the development of extreme xenophobia, which at times manifested itself in open violence. For example, six foreigners were killed during the first half of 1861. Armed attacks on Christians—whom the Japanese viewed as virtually their chief enemies—took place in Kyoto, Edo, and Yokohama. In Hakodate, there were no incidents of this kind; however, the Japanese regarded the Russians with no less—and perhaps even greater—suspicion than they did other foreigners. Unrest, and with it anti-Shogunate sentiment, intensified. In 1862, a full-scale civil war began, ending in 1868 with the shogun’s resignation and the establishment of an imperial government. By a twist of fate, Hakodate—occupied by Enomoto’s fleet—became the shogun’s last stronghold. However, this fleet was defeated by imperial forces as early as May 1869. The emperor moved to Edo, which was subsequently renamed Tokyo, or “the eastern capital.” The Meiji era—the era of “Enlightened Rule”—began.

“God alone knows how much torment I had to endure during those early years. All three enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil—rose up against me with all their might and followed close on my heels, seeking to bring me down at the very first dark, narrow place; and these temptations

appeared perfectly legitimate: “Am I not, like every other person, created for family life? Can you not serve God and your neighbor brilliantly in the world? Finally, aren’t people needed more for Russia now than for Japan? “And so on. Thousands of temptations pour into your ears—every day and every hour, both in waking life and in your dreams, both at home in your cell and while praying in church. It takes great spiritual strength and a profound deepening of religious feeling to overcome all this.”

Preaching was out of the question, for “the Japanese of that time viewed foreigners as beasts and Christianity as a wicked sect to which only notorious villains and sorcerers could belong.” Moreover, the young missionary did not know the Japanese language and was unfamiliar with Japanese religion, history, and culture. “Upon arriving in Japan, I began to study the local language to the best of my ability. It took a great deal of time and effort before I managed to get a handle on this barbaric language, undoubtedly the most difficult in the world, since it consists of two languages—native Japanese and Chinese—intermingled but by no means fused into one. <...> I finally managed to learn to speak Japanese and mastered the simplest and easiest method of writing used for original and translated scholarly works.” At first, he was taught Japanese by the translator of the Hakodate governor. On the latter’s recommendation, Hieromonk Nicholas began attending a private school run by Kimura Kensai, who was known for his extraordinary erudition. There he also studied Japanese history and literature, as well as Buddhism, Shintoism, and Confucianism. In addition to Kimura Kensai, his mentors included Saga Juen and Nijima Shime. His studies took eight years. For practically the entire time, he studied 14 hours a day. During this period, he also began attending literary gatherings and Shinto shrines. D. M. Pozdnev⁶ writes: “Through constant reading of Japanese literature and regular interaction with Japanese people,

Father Nikolai attained an astonishing command of both spoken and written Japanese. He had a strong foreign accent, but this did not prevent him from being understood by all Japanese people, young and old alike; the richness of his vocabulary and the ease with which he constructed sentences gave his speech a power that delighted all Japanese people... His phrases were concise, his turns of phrase most unexpected, yet extraordinarily vivid and powerful.”

“I first endeavored to study Japanese history, religion, and the spirit of the Japanese people, in order to determine to what extent hopes for the country’s enlightenment through the preaching of the Gospel were feasible there; and the more I became acquainted with the country, the more convinced I became that the time was very near when the word of the Gospel would resound loudly and spread rapidly from one end of the empire to the other.”

Early Successes

The first Japanese person to convert to Orthodox Christianity was Takuma **Sawabe** (1835–1913), a former samurai of the Tosa clan and a priest at an old Shinto shrine in Hakodate. Sawabe was a member of a secret society whose goal was to expel all foreigners from Japan, and he was known as an excellent fencer. It was in this capacity, as a fencing instructor, that he came to the home of the son of the Russian consul, I. A. Goshkevich. He had once traveled throughout Japan, earning a living by giving fencing lessons. Upon arriving in Hakodate, he married the daughter of a Shinto shrine priest and took not only his surname, Sawabe, but also his father-in-law’s hereditary priestly rank and position.

“Sawabe lived peacefully and serenely among the pagans. As the priest of the city’s oldest shrine, he enjoyed the respect of the people, earned a substantial income, and knew nothing but contentment and happiness.

His family consisted of a beautiful young wife, a young son, and his wife's mother. He was proud of his homeland and the faith of his ancestors, and therefore despised foreigners and hated their faith, about which he had the most unfounded notions."

A detailed account of the conversion of this stern Japanese man, which took place in 1864, is given in A. Platonova's book.

Sawabe frequently ran into Hieromonk Nicholas at the consul's residence and always looked at him with such hatred that one day the latter could no longer bear it and asked:

"Why are you so angry with me?" The reply was quite unequivocal:

"All of you foreigners should be killed. You've come to spy on our land. And you, with your preaching, will do Japan the most harm of all."

"Are you already familiar with my teachings?"

"No," the Japanese man replied, flustered.

"Is it fair to judge—let alone condemn—someone without listening to them first? Is it fair to slander what you don't know? First listen and learn, and then judge. If my teachings are bad, then drive us away from here. Then you'll be being fair."

"Well, speak!"

The words of Hieromonk Nicholas shook the samurai. He asked permission to meet with the hieromonk again and continue their conversation. Some time later, Father Nicholas wrote to Metropolitan Isidore: "A priest of the ancient religion comes to me to study our faith. If he does not lose his zeal or perish (from the death penalty for converting to Christianity), then much can be expected of him."

In a letter dated April 20, 1865, Hieromonk Nicholas writes: “The priest eagerly awaits baptism from me. He is well-educated, intelligent, eloquent, and devoted to Christianity with all his soul. The sole purpose of his life now is to serve his homeland by spreading Christianity, and I have to constantly put a stop to his requests for fear that he might lose his head before he has a chance to do anything toward that end.”

The following account of Sawabe’s gives an idea of the danger of his situation: “I could not read this book [the Gospel] openly, but I wanted to read it. So I came up with the idea of reading it while performing services in my miya [i.e., in the pagan shrine]. I would place the Gospel in front of me instead of the pagan service book, and read it while beating the usual drum. No one even suspected that I was reading foreign ‘heresy.’”

Soon, Sawabe brought his friend, the physician Sakai Atsunori, to Hieromonk Nicholas. After some time, a third friend—the physician Urano—joined them. The Japanese began conducting catechism sessions on their own, and by the spring of 1868, there were already up to 20 people ready to be baptized.

At that time, persecution of Catholics resumed in Nagasaki, while a new official arrived in Hakodate. In April 1868, Hieromonk Nicholas secretly baptized the three friends in his study, after which they left Hakodate. They were Paul Sawabe, John Sakai, and James Uranō. It was then, five months before the dawn of the Meiji era, that the Japanese Orthodox Church was founded.⁷

Severe trials immediately befell Sawabe. His wife went mad and, a few months later, in a fit of madness, burned down their own home. Sawabe was unable to find refuge and soon returned to Hakodate. Now he had neither the means to support himself nor a place to live. Around the same time, in 1868, he was imprisoned. Saint Nicholas wrote: “Before my very eyes, the process of a man’s birth into a new life through God’s grace took place, while behind my eyes another process was already beginning—the process of testing and strengthening the resolve of the newly born Paul.” His eight-year-old son, by right of inheritance, became a priest at the same pagan temple, which provided him with the means to support himself and his ailing mother. Later, Paul Sawabe found

comfort in seeing his son become a Christian as well. These trials only strengthened Paul's zeal, and in 1875 he was ordained a priest.

“The second Christian among us was Mr. **Sakai Ioann**. He was a local doctor and a close friend of Mr. Sawabe, who had converted to Christianity. Sawabe tried to persuade his friend to do the same, but Sakai was skilled in dialectics, and it was difficult to win him over; so Mr. Sawabe began inviting him to my home more often, and the two of us worked together to persuade him. Finally, Mr. Sakai was baptized and even ordained as a priest, a position in which he soon passed away due to illness. The third Christian was Mr. Urano Jacob, also a former physician. He was baptized in Hakodate by the present Father John Ono, and subsequently several others were baptized as well. But these individuals were the foremost among our first Christians. After that, the number of those receiving Holy Baptism increased more and more, and the possibility of systematically spreading the Christian faith in Japan began to emerge. With this very goal in mind—to obtain official authorization for this—I traveled to Russia for a time and, having received permission and the blessing of the Holy Synod there, returned to Japan. Shortly after my arrival, Mr. Sawabe visited me and, among other things, told me about the strange behavior of Mr. Sakai during my absence from Japan. Mr. Sakai had spent all his time concerned with extracting as much money as possible from his business dealings, whereas the other Christians, on the contrary, had been striving to share everything with their brothers. Upon hearing this, I was about to rebuke Mr. Sakai, but when he arrived, the matter was immediately clarified. When he came to see me, Mr. Sakai presented the 100, s (about 200 rubles) he had collected, which he wished to use for the work of the Church. This cleared up Mr. Sawabe's confusion regarding Mr. Sakai's seemingly strange behavior.

Another incident, similarly strange on the surface, occurred with Mr. **Tomi Peter**. At one point, everyone noticed his sudden disappearance. No one knew where he had gone. I asked his wife, but she did not know either, although her face showed neither grief nor even particular concern. All of this was quite mysterious and went on

for quite a long time. But then, 11 days later, one evening around eleven o'clock, Mr. Tomi Petr came to see me, accompanied by Mr. Sakai. I saw that he had become incredibly thin; his bones protruded sharply from his face, which had completely changed color; it was simply pitiful to look at him. When I asked him where he had been and why he had lost so much weight, he replied that he had spent all that time abstaining from sleep and food and praying for the swift enlightenment of his pagan brothers by the light of truth, which he himself had recently been granted. Hearing all this, I was greatly astonished by such a moving display of fervent devotion to the faith. Nevertheless, I had to point out to him that such actions must henceforth be carried out in accordance with the Church's regulations, for otherwise one could cause serious harm to one's health."

Help from Russia

At the end of 1869, Hieromonk Nicholas, having requested leave, set out for Russia to petition the Holy Synod for permission to open a Russian missionary station in Japan.

Hieromonk Nicholas arrived in Russia in February 1870. His petition was granted on April 6, 1870, when Alexander II imperially approved the decision of the Holy Synod to establish a Russian missionary mission in Japan, consisting of a mission director, three missionary hieromonks, and a lay minister. Half of the projected expenses were covered by the Treasury, while the other half was allocated from the printing fund of the Ecclesiastical Department. In total, the mission was allocated 6,000 rubles annually and a one-time grant of 10,000 rubles. The mission's centers were located in Tokyo, Kyoto, Nagasaki, and Hakodate. Hieromonk Nicholas was appointed head of the mission and elevated to the rank of archimandrite. The mission was under the jurisdiction of the Kamchatka Diocese. The missionaries' duties were set forth in the "Instructions for the Mission," presented by Hieromonk Nicholas and approved by the Synod.

Archimandrite Nicholas himself wrote in 1879: “It is characteristic of Orthodox Japan that the Orthodox mission, which had existed for only eight years, with just two missionaries during that time and without any definite material resources, already had twice as many Christians as the Catholic and all Protestant missions combined.”

Before leaving for Japan, Archimandrite Nicholas was able to see his elderly father.

He returned to Hakodate in March 1871. The preaching of the Gospel had continued even in his absence. At the end of the year, Archimandrite Nicholas baptized eleven people in Sendai.

In 1872, Hieromonk Anatoly (Tikhai), a candidate at the Kiev Theological Academy,⁸ arrived in Hakodate. Archimandrite Nicholas spoke of him as follows: “I could not have wished for better assistants!” He entrusted the Hakodate church to Fr. Anatoly and moved to Tokyo on February 4, 1872.

Translations of the Holy Scriptures and Other Essential Books

The saint’s primary undertaking, begun while he was still in Hakodate, was the translation of the Holy Scriptures and liturgical books into Japanese. As early as 1869, Saint Nicholas wrote: “From all that has been said so far, it seems possible to conclude that in Japan, at least in the near future, the harvest is plentiful. Yet there is not a single worker on our side, if one does not count my own, entirely private, efforts... Even if I were to continue my work in the same direction, the efforts of a single person here are almost like a drop in the ocean. A single translation of the New Testament, if done accurately (and how could it be done otherwise?), will take at least another two years of exclusive labor. Then a translation of the Old Testament is also necessary; moreover, if we are to have even the smallest Christian church, it is absolutely essential to conduct services in Japanese; and what about other books, such as Sacred History, Church History, Liturgy, and Theology? All of these are also matters of urgent necessity. And all of this, and other similar works, must be translated into “Japanese”—a

language about which it is still unknown whether a foreigner will ever be able to master it to the point of writing in it even half as easily and quickly as a foreigner usually writes in his own language.” Much later, he writes that the work of translation “encapsulates the very essence of the mission.” At present, the work of a mission, in any country whatsoever, cannot be limited to oral preaching alone. The days of Francis Xavier, who ran through the streets with a bell and thus summoned listeners, are long past. In Japan, however, given the population’s love of reading and the growing respect for the printed word, believers and catechumens must first and foremost be given a book written in their native language, written in good prose and published with care, beautifully, and affordably. Of particular importance to us are books that clarify doctrinal differences with Catholicism and Protestantism.”

11. The church was designed by St. Petersburg architect Mikhail Arefievich Shchurupov. The iconostasis, which was destroyed during the 1923 earthquake, was painted by St. Petersburg iconographer Vasily Makarovitch Poshehonov. Donations for the construction of the church came from all over Russia. Moscow alone donated 200,000 rubles, which accounted for up to 40 percent of the total cost of the work.

12. The visit to Japan by the heir to the Russian throne was also timed to coincide with this event; however, following the incident in Otsu, the Tsarevich left Japan.

In Hakodate, due to the lack of a translator, the service was conducted in Church Slavonic, while only “Lord, Have Mercy,” “Holy God,” “I Believe,” and “Our Father” were sung and read in Japanese. When translating the prayer “Lord, Have Mercy,” the question arose as to how the word “have mercy” should be rendered, since it is often perceived as showing mercy to a criminal. Bishop Nicholas said: “We do not have such a relationship with our God. We will use the word ‘avarema.’ Just as a mother ‘shows mercy’ to a child, ‘has compassion’ in the original Old Russian sense.” There, in Hakodate, Saint Nicholas began translating Scripture from Chinese; however, he soon became convinced of the inadequacy of the Chinese translations and switched to translating the New Testament from Church Slavonic, which he considered more accurate than the Russian version. Each verse

was cross-checked against the Vulgate, the Septuagint, and an English translation. In difficult passages, the saint relied on the interpretations of St. John Chrysostom. In 4–5 hours of work, he managed to translate no more than 15 verses. After the saint completed his work on translating the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles (his first draft), these texts also began to be read in Japanese. Among other works, the Epistles of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, as well as half of the Epistle to the Romans, were translated in Hakodate. At the same time, a brief prayer book (from Chinese), the rites of baptism and the reception of converts, “The Orthodox Creed” by Saint Demetrius of Rostov, a catechism for catechumens, a summary of the Old Testament, Bishop Michael’s “Expository Gospel,” and Metropolitan Plato’s “Moral Theology.”

13. During the 1923 Canton earthquake, the dome collapsed, and all the cathedral’s furnishings and the iconostasis were destroyed in a fire. The mission’s library, which contained up to 30,000 volumes, was also burned. Even the bells, which had melted from the intense heat, were lost. At an emergency synod on October 20, 1923, it was decided to restore the cathedral. On December 15, 1929, the cathedral was consecrated following its restoration. The Japanese architect Shinichi Okada, who rebuilt the cathedral, did not alter the building’s overall proportions but gave the dome a barely noticeable curve, borrowed from Buddhist temple architecture and symbolizing a bird soaring or flying upward.

After moving to Tokyo, Saint Nicholas first translated the Octoechos, then the Lenten and Festal Triods, while simultaneously working on a new translation of the Gospel. He translated all the parts of the Old Testament necessary for the annual cycle of divine services. He did not trust the less meticulous translations of Catholics and Protestants and therefore tried not even to read them, fearing he might be influenced by them or unwittingly borrow from them. The saint’s cherished dream was to translate the entire Bible. In 1910, he stated that, according to his calculations, he would need another five years to complete this work.

“It is not the translation of the Gospel and the liturgical texts that should be lowered to the level of the masses, but rather, believers must elevate themselves to an understanding of the Gospel and liturgical texts. Vulgar language in the Gospel is unacceptable. If I encounter two completely identical characters or expressions, and both are equally noble to the Japanese ear and eye, then I will, of course, give preference to the more widely used one, but I never make concessions to ignorance and do not allow even the slightest compromise regarding the accuracy of translations, even if it means I have to use a Chinese character that is very little known in Japan. I myself feel that sometimes my translation requires a great deal of effort on the part of Japanese readers to understand. But this is largely due to the fact that Orthodoxy itself is new to them...”

A number of difficulties and risks in the translation also stemmed from the fact that many of the characters had been used for centuries by Buddhists and Shintoists, which gave them a very specific connotation that made their use in an Orthodox context either impossible or risky¹⁴. In a number of cases, the bishop would send a translation of a particular verse or concept to the parishes, asking the clergy and laity to comment on it.

For thirty years, at exactly six o'clock in the evening, his regular translation assistant, Pavel Nakai—a man of excellent education, extraordinary diligence, and complete devotion to the Orthodox faith—would enter the bishop's cell. He would sit on a low stool next to the bishop and begin writing as the bishop dictated. The work usually lasted four hours and ended at 10:00 p.m.

“Before me lie the Slavonic and Greek texts of the divine service, with reference books at hand to aid in their correct understanding. My assistant has Chinese and Japanese dictionaries and grammars at his disposal, and before us is also the Chinese text of the divine service, which we obtained from our Mission in Beijing. Looking at the Slavonic text and checking it against the Greek, I dictate the translation, striving to convey the meaning with literal accuracy; my colleague writes it down in Chinese characters interspersed with Japanese alphabetic characters. The difficulties of translation at this stage lie in the fact that Japanese grammar is the opposite of ours;

that is, in Japanese, the subject must come first, and everything in the translation—no matter how many subordinate and introductory clauses there are—must be placed between the subject and the predicate; all of them must come before the main predicate; and in every subordinate and introductory clause, the parts must follow the same order.

Once a song or prayer has been dictated and the syntactic relationships between its parts have been established, the process of refining the text begins; my primary concern is to ensure that the meaning of the text is not deviated from even in the slightest, while my colleague works with no less care to ensure the correctness and elegance of the grammatical and stylistic structure of the text. This part of the work is the most difficult and painstaking. This is where expertise in both Chinese and Japanese is particularly necessary, because, first, one must clearly understand the meaning of each Chinese character in order to select the most commonly used and understandable one from among many homophonic characters; second, one must decide whether to retain the Chinese pronunciation of a character or assign it a Japanese one, because when the characters were introduced from China to Japan, they brought with them a Chinese monosyllabic reading that remains associated with them to this day—a reading that is fully accessible only to deeply learned scholars, but which, gradually becoming abbreviated and spreading downward, has to a significant extent permeated even the lowest strata of the population; at the same time, almost every character has been translated into Japanese and has its own Japanese reading. Which should we follow? It would seem that we should adhere strictly to Japanese usage, but it is quite common to find that the Japanese reading of a character is less understandable even to uneducated people than the Chinese one. Third, we must also consider whether to leave the characters without Japanese phonetic transcription or, due to the characters' difficulty or ambiguity, to provide it—and to what extent. In short, we must decide which language to adopt for the translation. When considering the importance of what we are translating, the most venerable scholarly language is most appealing to us—one that is not constrained by the

number of characters or their pronunciation and requires no transcription whatsoever; but this language would be inconvenient even for those of moderate learning, and completely incomprehensible to those with little education. When we consider that what we translate must be accessible to everyone—and that this, precisely, should be its chief merit—we are drawn to the language of the masses, the vernacular; but then our translation would become so vulgar that it would be immediately disregarded by anyone who is not of the common people. We have decided to use a middle-of-the-road language. We strive to adhere to this, although, due to the vagueness of the criteria and the blurred boundaries, there is ample room here for endless disputes, in which I do my utmost to advocate for the greatest possible clarity, while my colleague strives to avoid vulgarisms and maintain the elegance of the language. When all these difficulties have finally been resolved, the translation text has been finalized, and the entire book has been translated, we go through it again, carefully comparing it with the original text, ensuring that the same translated characters and readings are used throughout the book for the same original words and expressions.”

A whole team of translators was formed from former seminary students, who worked on translating not only Russian theological works but also Russian fiction (initially, the translation department consisted only of individuals who had received a theological education in Russia; later, Japanese nationals also began working there). Among them were the seminary’s rector, Ivan Senuma, and his wife, Anna Lukinichna Senuma; Konishi Masutaro, a professor of philosophy and theology at the seminary who had spent 10 years in Russia (and later converted to Protestantism); and the renowned translator and scholar Nobori Shōmu. The saint wrote: “Let them translate and read. Once you get to know Russian literature—Pushkin, Lermontov, the Tolstoyes, and Dostoevsky—you cannot help but love Russia.”

The War

Starting in 1900, anti-Russian sentiments intensified once again, which inevitably affected attitudes toward the church. D. M. Pozdneev quotes a characteristic excerpt from the newspaper *Nihon*: “The Orthodox Church is a malevolent place from which curses rain down upon Japan and where prayers are offered for its defeat. It has always been the central agency for spies in the service of Russia. The Japanese detest the dome of the Russian cathedral, which, towering over the entire city, seems to send a message of contempt to the Imperial Palace itself; they detest the church bell, which every Sunday morning disturbs the peaceful sleep of the residents with its clanging.”

After the alliance between Japan and Great Britain was concluded in 1902, it became clear that war between Japan and Russia was inevitable. At the 1903 synod, Bishop Nicholas was forced to address a question that deeply troubled Japanese Orthodox Christians: whether they should participate in the war against Russia. He replied that they would have to fulfill their duty to their homeland alongside the entire nation. Should war break out, they would have to regard Russia as an enemy, but “fighting enemies does not mean hating them, but only defending one’s homeland.”

On February 5, 1904, Japan severed diplomatic relations with Russia. The two clergymen who were serving at the mission at that time returned home. The clergy and laity of the Japanese church appealed to their bishop to ask him to remain in Japan. Bishop Nicholas replied that he had already made a decision before God to remain in Japan, in his small apartment next to the cathedral. “I hope that the declaration of war will not bring about any change in the activities of our church. The catechists will continue to preach the Gospel of the Savior, the students will continue to attend the mission school, and I myself will devote myself entirely to the translation of our liturgical books...”

Today, as is customary, I am serving at the cathedral, but from now on I will no longer participate in our church's public worship services... Until now, I have prayed for the prosperity and peace of the Japanese Empire. Now, however, since war has been declared between Japan and my homeland, I, as a Russian subject, cannot pray for Japan's victory over my own country. I also have obligations to my homeland, and that is precisely why I will be happy to see you fulfill your duty toward your country." A "Circular Letter" was sent to all parishes of the Japanese Orthodox Church, which were alarmed by the declaration of war against Russia. In it, the bishop blessed Japanese Christians to fulfill their duty as loyal subjects, but reminded them: "Those of you who must go into battle, risking your lives, fight—not out of hatred for the enemy, but out of love for your fellow countrymen... Love for one's homeland is a sacred feeling... But besides our earthly homeland, we also have a heavenly homeland... This homeland of ours is the Church, of which we are all members and through which the children of the Heavenly Father truly form one family... And let us together fulfill our duty toward our heavenly homeland, each according to his or her calling... And at the same time, let us pray fervently that the Lord may restore the broken peace as soon as possible..."

The saint ceased all correspondence with Russia and devoted himself entirely to translation work.

When Russian prisoners of war began arriving in Japan (their total number reached 73,000), Saint Nicholas, with the consent of the Japanese government, established the Society for the Spiritual Comfort of Prisoners of War. Five priests fluent in Russian were selected to minister to the prisoners. The Japanese Church blessed every prisoner who arrived in Japan with a silver cross. The prisoners were provided with icons and books. The bishop himself wrote to them on numerous occasions.

Bishop Nicholas's activities during the war were highly praised not only in Japan but also in Russia. Emperor Nicholas II wrote to Bishop Nicholas in late 1905: "...You have shown to all that the Orthodox Church of Christ, free from worldly dominion and all tribal enmity, embraces all tribes and languages equally. <...> In

accordance with Christ's commandment, you did not abandon the flock entrusted to you, and the grace of love and faith gave you the strength to endure the fiery trial of war and, in the midst of the hostilities, to preserve peace, faith, and prayer in the church you built through your labors."

The rare tact and wisdom displayed by Saint Nicholas during the war years further enhanced his prestige in the eyes of Japanese society once the war ended. The saint's prestige helped to quickly overcome the psychological aftermath of the war and paved the way for a rapprochement between Russia and Japan, which continued until 1917.

The postwar period brought new trials. The flow of donations from Russia to the Orthodox mission in Japan had almost ceased. As a result, the mission was forced to lay off 30 catechists and close the catechist school.

In 1908, Bishop Sergius (Tikhomirov)¹⁵ arrived at the See of Kyoto. He quickly mastered the Japanese language and engaged in active missionary work, traveling throughout Japan. His arrival greatly comforted Archbishop Nicholas, who wrote: "Now I can die in peace, confident that the mission's work is in good hands," and also: "...we still need two more such zealous missionaries. We pray to God for this and turn our eyes to Russia."

The Final Years of His Life and His Death

In July 1911, the fiftieth anniversary of Father Nicholas's ministry in Japan was solemnly celebrated. Bishop Sergius (Tikhomirov) wrote: "Priests and catechists began to gather from all corners of Japan... There were over 120 of them alone, and many Christians from the provinces also made the effort to attend. And so, the 75-year-old elder sat in his room every day from early morning until late at night, listening to the priests' reports on the state of their parishes, the catechists' accounts of their preaching within their respective jurisdictions, or engaging in friendly conversation with some elderly woman who had come from distant regions. The council

began... And wasn't there plenty to do and plenty of excitement there? The anniversary celebration... In the course of a single day: the Liturgy, a prayer service, lunch at a hotel with distinguished guests, and a musical evening. That was the end of it for us young people. But the 75-year-old elder was invited to a gathering of former students of the Surugadai School. And he went. And he didn't so much listen as speak and offer guidance. One had to marvel at how His Eminence managed to endure such a day... And tomorrow didn't promise any rest either. A long, four-hour reading of congratulatory messages. And in the evening, a dinner in the mission courtyard, with hundreds of Christians... But it seems to me that even this day would have passed relatively smoothly for the late bishop, had it not been for the final moment... Inspired by the speeches, the bishop stood up, jerked his head back with extraordinary energy, and in a voice that carried across the entire vast square filled with hundreds of Christians having dinner, proposed singing the Japanese national anthem in honor of His Majesty, the Emperor of Japan, thanks to whose religious tolerance Christianity had been able not only to spread but also to enjoy, if not patronage, then at least complete prosperity. One had to see the bishop's extraordinary excitement, his face flushed with color. One had to hear how the bishop not only began singing the hymn first, but also sang it all the way through... One had to see that youthful fire in a body that was no longer so young. And then it would have been clear to everyone that this moment could not pass without leaving a mark on the bishop's troubled heart..."

The nervous strain and exhaustion of those days exacerbated the cardiac asthma from which His Grace suffered. His strength began to wane rapidly.

Shortly before his death, the bishop said to Bishop Sergius: "...Our role is no greater than that of a plow. A farmer plows the field, and the plow wears out. So he discards it. I, too, have worn out. And I, too, will be discarded. A new plow will begin to plow. So keep at it, plow! Plow honestly! Plow tirelessly! May God's work grow! And yet it is gratifying that God plowed through you. That means you haven't grown rusty either. It means

that, through your work in God's field, your soul has been somewhat purified, and for this we will always give thanks to God."

Archbishop Nicholas celebrated his last service on the first day of Christmas 1912. A few days later, he was admitted to St. Luke's Hospital in Tsukiji. However, on February 5, His Eminence, eager to finish his affairs, insisted on being taken back to Surugadai, where he resumed his translation work. On February 13, he drafted his final report to the Synod on the state of affairs at the mission.

On February 15, the bishop demanded that the choir rehearsals—which usually took place in the neighboring room but had been canceled on the doctors' recommendation—be resumed, and he asked that his favorite hymn, "By the Rivers of Babylon," be performed.

That night, he began to delirium, during which the dying man uttered the word "Resurrection" several times. On February 16, at a quarter to eight, the large church bell rang, announcing the passing of Saint Nicholas.

15. Metropolitan Sergius (Tikhomirov) was arrested in April 1945 as a "Russian spy." He died on August 10 of that same year.

Bishop Sergius writes: "The bishop is no longer groaning. The nurse is no longer giving him injections. Only the quiet reading of the Word of Christ—to whose service His Eminence devoted his entire holy life—breaks the mystery of death, so evident at his bedside, where just yesterday he was still conversing animatedly and drawing up plans for ten years of work. <...>

The body of His Eminence the Archbishop lay in the Church of the Cross... On Saturday, February 4 [Old Style], in the morning and in the evening after the All-Night Vigil; on Sunday after the Liturgy and in the evening; and on Monday, February 6, in the morning and in the evening, solemn memorial services were held here, always in a packed church. His Eminence was not yet in a coffin, for the coffin was not ready. I witnessed a remarkable

custom during those days, for the first time in my ministry in Japan! A well-known group of Christians, by mutual agreement, would come to the body of the deceased in the evening and keep vigil until morning, listening to the reading of the Gospel.

The bishop's body was anointed with holy oil from the relics of Saint Joasaph of Belgorod. With funds donated by A. P. Sinelnikova, a small plot of land was purchased at the Yanaka Cemetery (Ueno district), where his burial took place on February 22.

In the morning, four Liturgies for the repose of Archbishop Nicholas's soul were celebrated at four altars. At 11:00 a.m., the funeral service began at the Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ, conducted primarily in Japanese. Among the other wreaths, one from the Emperor of Japan stood out—a honor rarely bestowed upon foreigners. After the funeral service, the coffin was carried around the cathedral and placed on a hearse. The funeral procession, stretching ten kilometers, made its way to the cemetery. “The wind is tearing at our banners furiously. We had to carry them at half-mast. The male and female students are walking. All in identical uniforms. Everyone holds palm branches, a symbol of faith in the success of the bishop's mission in Japan. Countless flowers, hundreds of wreaths. Holy icons, crosses. Priests and deacons in sacred vestments... Many catechists in sticharsia. The bishop, in full vestments, with a staff in his hands. The bishop's orders. All the regalia of the episcopal office worn by the bishop. Finally, a chariot with a precious coffin, and a representative of Russia in a court uniform embroidered with gold. And a procession, an endless procession of Christians...”

St. Nicholas Cathedral

To carry out the plan to build the cathedral, substantial funds and public support were needed. To raise funds, Archimandrite Nicholas traveled to Russia. In 1879–1880, he visited St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kazan, Kyiv, and Odessa, collecting voluntary donations.

In Russia, the mission always received strong support from the Minister of Public Education—and later a member of the State Council—Count Efimiy Vasilyevich Putyatin. In 1853, Vice Admiral Putyatin, aboard the flagship frigate **Pallada**, “discovered Japan” for the Russian fleet; he also established diplomatic relations between the two countries and signed the first official treaty of friendship between Japan and Russia. An influential figure in St. Petersburg’s social and political circles, Putyatin treated Nicholas as his own son and lovingly cared for the mission’s needs. The admiral’s daughter, Olga, was also close friends with Father Nicholas, and in 1884 she came to Japan as a nun to assist him in his missionary work.

Seeing the mission’s success in Japan, the Holy Synod decided to appoint a bishop there. It was impossible to imagine any candidate other than Nicholas himself. On March 30, 1880, he was consecrated at the Alexander Nevsky Lavra. Returning to his second homeland aboard the steamship *Dobrovolno* of the fleet, His Eminence Nicholas visited Palestine, venerated the Holy Sepulcher, and brought a palm branch back to Japan.

Initially, the design for the future church was developed by St. Petersburg architect Professor A. Shurupov. The building’s floor plan resembled a Greek cross, and the domes were designed in the Byzantine style. Nicholas purchased a plot of land at the top of Suruga-dai Hill in the Kanda district, where a medieval fire watchtower once stood, which also served as a lighthouse for ships entering the port of Edo (old Tokyo). Construction was led by the English architect Joshua Conder, who, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, built more than 50 buildings in Tokyo, including the Imperial Palace. Seven years later, in 1891, Conder presented Bishop Nicholas with the keys to the Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ. The consecration was attended by 19 Japanese priests and more than 4,000 Christians. The Orthodox church, popularly known as “Nikolai-do” (literally, “St. Nicholas Church”), soon became a landmark of the Japanese capital. Russian sailors recognized in its silhouette the image of the Russian Navy’s main church—the Naval Cathedral of St. Nicholas in Kronstadt. Until the devastating 1923 earthquake that struck Tokyo—after which high-rise construction began—the well-situated Orthodox cathedral

was one of the tallest buildings in the city. This drew criticism: “It is disrespectful for the cathedral to tower over the Imperial Palace,” “This is a display of Russian arbitrariness.”

However, the scale of the construction and the place the cathedral occupied in the Japanese capital were commensurate with the stature of Nikolai himself and the role he had come to play by that time in Japanese society. The bishop was held in the highest regard, with many admirers in both Russia and Japan. His authority was sought on a very wide range of issues, from articles on Oriental studies to interstate relations. Bishop Nicholas’s diplomatic skills were particularly evident in resolving the conflict over the famous “Otsu Incident,” when an assassination attempt was made on the heir to the Russian throne, Nicholas Alexandrovich.

This was an unprecedented incident. The Russian Tsarevich, who was visiting Japan at the invitation of the Japanese Emperor—and whose safety had been guaranteed by the latter—was attacked by a police officer from his own security detail. Japan found itself facing a scandalous diplomatic failure—and even a threat to national security—since at that time, the seven Russian warships accompanying the heir to the throne could easily have destroyed the entire Japanese fleet. The Russians’ anger was evident in their refusal to accept the services of Japanese doctors sent by the emperor, even though the wound was minor. The emperor himself hastened to visit Nikolai Alexandrovich in person, escorted him to the port, and even boarded the Russian warship—an act unthinkable for a reigning Japanese monarch. The Russian envoy Shevich and Bishop Nicholas intervened in the events. Nicholas was particularly zealous and, in particular, urged his namesake more than anyone else not to let the matter escalate into a war with Japan. The Tsarevich accepted the Japanese emperor’s apology. The incident was resolved peacefully.

In 1910, the 50th anniversary of Nicholas’s ministry in Japan was solemnly celebrated. The Holy Synod elevated him to the rank of archbishop. Nicholas received congratulations from the Japanese emperor, the governor of Tokyo, the Japanese press, and foreign missions. The Tokyo governor’s speech included the

following words: “...It seems to me that the services rendered to our state by the venerable teacher Nicholas are not limited to the achievements of a single missionary, but also lie in the fact that he contributed to the civilization of our country...”

Other foreigners in Japan spoke enthusiastically about the Russian mission. From an English report: “Alongside the Anglican Church of Japan stands the magnificent Russian Mission under the leadership of the finest Christian in Japan, Archbishop Nikolai...”

The bishop himself spoke of his own merits as follows: “Does the plow with which a peasant plowed the field have any merit of its own? Can it boast, ‘Look, Orthodox believers, at what I’ve accomplished!...’ Our role is no greater than that of the plow. The peasant plowed the field; the plow wore out. He discarded it. I, too, have worn out. And I, too, will be cast aside. A new plow will begin to plow. So go ahead, plow! Plow honestly! Plow tirelessly! May God’s work grow!

And yet it is gratifying that God plowed with you specifically. It means you haven’t grown rusty. It means that, through your work in God’s field, your soul has been somewhat purified. And for this, let us always give thanks to God.”

Words and Instructions of Nicholas of Japan

Prepare Your Soul for Temptation

A Sermon by St. Nicholas of Japan at the Council of the Japanese Church in July 1887

It is written in Holy Scripture: “My son! If you set out to serve the Lord God, prepare your soul for temptation: control your heart and be steadfast, and do not be dismayed during times of trial; cling to Him and do not turn away, so that you may be exalted in the end. Whatever befalls you, accept it willingly, and in the vicissitudes of your humiliation, be long-suffering” (Sir. 2:1–3). All of us here have, of course, set out to work for God, and thus we know well that serving God means compelling ourselves to labor. But we also know that great joy is found in this service. For the all-seeing God not only sees those who labor for Him but also helps them, and in His mercy, He loves them. However, the path of laboring for God is fraught with dangers and stumbling blocks, weaknesses and falls; that is why Holy Scripture teaches us that if you wish to serve the Lord God, you must prepare your soul for temptations.

There are two kinds of temptations: the first kind consists of trials that come from above; the second consists of temptations from below. Regarding temptations from above, Scripture tells us the following: *“As gold and silver are tested by fire, so God tests the heart of man”* (Prov. 17:3). Gold can be pure, it can be mixed with impurities, and it can also be counterfeit. When tested by fire, pure gold suffers no damage but, on the contrary, becomes even more beautiful; the pure part is separated from gold containing foreign impurities; and counterfeit gold ultimately turns into something of no value whatsoever. In the same way, a person’s virtues can be genuine, they can be mixed with conceit and pride or other passions, or they can be entirely counterfeit and insincere, as was the case with the hypocritical Pharisees. Thus, trials that come from above determine the quality of a person’s virtues. God knows the human heart from the very beginning; therefore, temptations are not sent so that God may learn what our virtues are, but for the person’s own sake, so that, if they see in them an admixture of falsehood and pretense, they may repent and turn to what is good. May we not be deprived of such temptations that come from above.

But, in addition to this, there is another kind of temptation, namely, temptations coming from the devil, who instills darkness into a person's thoughts, pours various kinds of impurity into his heart, leads him into confusion, and thus leads him to evil deeds with the aim of turning away from God the souls of those who serve Him.

We who have set out to serve God must always remember that we are in the midst of these temptations and enticements. Scripture says: *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour"* (1 Pet. 5:8–9). All catechists and priests are under the close scrutiny of the devil, who, desiring to defeat them, fires a multitude of fiery arrows. The most harmful of these arrows is self-satisfaction and pride. For many catechists begin preaching while still very young, and people already call them teachers and mentors. It is no surprise that the devil, taking advantage of this, easily instills pride in them; and how many ministers of the Church have already been struck down by this arrow! Every year I train many catechists, but quite a few of them fall away. What is the reason for this? It is all due to complacency and pride. If any Christian tries to admonish them, they, on the contrary, become angry. The devil has many other fiery arrows with which he strikes down those who cannot resist him. Such are, without exception, all those who have been removed from the list of catechists. And how many, brothers, are there who set out to serve God but failed to withstand the temptations and fell? How sorrowful this is!

Therefore, it is very important that we always prepare ourselves for temptations, for this is the foundation of our strength. If we do not prepare ourselves, we will always be overcome by temptations. The devil will strike such people with his arrows and kill them. Now, before the start of the Council, as I reflect on the past and contemplate the future, I have decided that all this must be said to you as the most essential and important matter.

Scripture clearly tells us what methods we must use to prepare ourselves for temptations.

First, “*prepare your heart*” (Sirach 2:2)—that is, guard your heart, set your affairs in order, and acquire virtues; in this way, you will avoid falling into temptation. Just as a ship, if it is well watched over and well steered, will fear neither storms nor raging waves, but if it is not well watched over, there is a danger that it will be wrecked; and just as a horse, if not properly guided, may run wild and eventually overturn or fall into a pit, so too is the human heart: if it is not well guided, what will become of it? Nothing other than this: the devil, approaching us, will plant various evil designs in our thoughts and throw our hearts and our deeds into disorder.

Second, “*be patient*.” Man is naturally inclined toward evil; therefore, in order to overcome temptations, one must willingly endure various kinds of hardships and sorrows, restrain oneself, and direct one’s heart toward the truth. If we do not endure hardships and sorrows, we will not be able to overcome anything, for without hardships and sorrows, who can defeat the enemy?

Third, “*cling to God and do not turn away from Him*” (Sir. 2:3). By clinging to God, we will be safe from any temptation, just as a ship that has reached the harbor no longer fears storms.

These are the words I wished to share with you, brothers, before the start of the Council, and I want you to take these words to heart and keep them there.

From a letter to Metropolitan Makarii (Nevsky)¹

I received your dear letter dated November 4 of last year on December 30. I thank you for the news, however sad it may be. A series of defeats in the foreign war, ceaseless unrest and bloodshed at home—it seems that God has forsaken Russia, or rather, that the hand of God never tires of chastising our poor Fatherland! But,

¹ Saint Macarius (Nevsky), Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna (1835–1926). Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna (1912–1917), Metropolitan of Altai (from 1920), an outstanding missionary and educator of the peoples of Altai.

of course, we firmly believe that this is the chastening right hand of a loving Father, correcting His child who has become mired in lawlessness. This faith is our only consolation in these dark days, when a cloud still hangs over Russia, apparently fraught with many flashes of lightning and claps of thunder. “Now we can envy you,” you write. Yes, there is no revolution here, all is calm; yet there is perhaps even more inner turmoil here than there is with you: these thoughts are all the more tormenting because there is no one with whom to share them or talk them through.

As for the Church here, thank God, all is well. Sermons are much more lively than they were during the war, since the priests who ministered to prisoners of war have returned to their congregations. Moreover, along with the smoke of war, the prejudices against Orthodoxy coming from Russia—the notion that it is merely a plot to conquer Japan and the like—have vanished into thin air. Several young catechists were drafted into the war; upon their return, they immediately asked to resume their church service and are zealously continuing it. There are people eager to learn the faith everywhere, and priests frequently report on baptisms that have been performed. Our synod this year will be particularly large and, God willing, will breathe new life into the Church even now. In short, everything here is encouraging. The only thing is, I have no assistant. I have grown old—I have one foot in the grave—70 years old, and all alone; there will be no one to whom I can entrust the Church; this is my constant sorrow. And yet there is one consolation: the work of the Church is not our own, but a common one; we are servants; whatever the Master chooses to do, so be it!

Asking for your archpastoral blessing and your holy prayers for this Church and the local Mission, with true devotion of heart and deep gratitude for your kind and benevolent toward the local Mission and the Church, I have the honor of being Your Eminence’s most humble servant and devotee, the head of the Russian Spiritual Mission in Japan

Nicholas, Bishop of Revel

Tokyo, April 14, 1906

*** *** ***

Your Eminence, most gracious archpastor and father!

I received your dear letter and your precious gift—two books—some time ago. For both, I offer Your Eminence my deepest gratitude. The books have been read, bound, and cataloged in the Mission's library, as a lasting memorial to the donor and for the benefit of readers. In response to your letter, I would first of all like to express my heartfelt gratitude for your fraternal greetings regarding my long service and my archiepiscopal rank, which I am entirely unworthy of. As my successor, I am expecting Archimandrite Andronikos [Nikolsky]², who had already served here but fell ill with neurasthenia and left. He is now the rector of the Ufa Seminary and appears to have fully recovered from his illness. The Holy Synod seems likely to send him here as a vicar, which will please me greatly, as Archimandrite Andronik possesses, in ample measure, the spiritual qualities necessary for a good missionary. I am always glad that you have come to love the Japanese and speak so highly of them; and how encouraged and flattered I am by your kind words that you “would go to serve as a missionary in Japan!”... Those words alone are enough for me not to consider my life entirely wasted.

The second half of your letter is disheartening, all the more so because, since it was written, there has been no glimmer of hope, and the darkness over our poor Fatherland is growing ever thicker. The newspaper always slips from my hands when I reach the section on murders, robberies, strikes, the idleness of students, the wild behavior of seminarians, and so on and so forth. The Council will likely be postponed until things have calmed

² Andronikos (Nikolsky) (1870–1918), Archbishop of Perm and Kungur, holy martyr.

down somewhat; otherwise, even the best decisions will be misinterpreted, and the improvements undertaken will be either glorified or distorted.

Here at the Mission and the Church, thank God, all is well and proceeding as usual. I am primarily occupied with translating the Divine Liturgy. We are currently in the 4th tone of the Octoechos; everything in the Slavonic text is being translated in its entirety. And it is precisely here that one sees how necessary it is to translate the Divine Liturgy into Russian or, at the very least, to render the Slavonic text into an easily understandable form. Sometimes you'll spend half an hour or more on a single verse just to grasp its meaning, and it happens that, no matter how hard you try, you simply won't understand it at all and will replace the incomprehensible part with your own invention, whatever God may inspire at that moment. One of the Council's most urgent tasks must be the appointment of a commission to revise the liturgical text—but not a commission that drags on for a hundred years.

Not wishing to remain in your debt for the books, in response to the two you sent, I am sending Your Eminence two from here: an illustrated account of our Council, published for the edification of the local churches, and a Psalter in Japanese. Please forgive me; we are happy to share what we have.

Asking for your archpastoral blessing and holy prayers for myself and the entire local Church, with true reverence, sincere heartfelt devotion, and brotherly love, I have the honor of being Your Excellency's most humble servant and devotee, the head of the Russian Spiritual Mission in Japan

Nicholas, Bishop of Revel. Tokyo, September 18, 1906

Conclusion

The primary credit for enlightening Japan with the light of Orthodoxy belongs to the outstanding Russian missionary—the “Apostle of Japan,” Archbishop Nicholas—who began his ministry of evangelism in the Land

of the Rising Sun in the mid-19th century. Saint Nicholas of Japan spared no effort or time in studying the language and way of life of the people among whom his half-century of tireless activity subsequently unfolded; the results were impressive: from a lone missionary and ascetic, he became the head of a Church with dozens of Japanese pastors and tens of thousands of parishioners. Today, the Autonomous Church of Japan exists in the complex world of post-industrial Japan, with its multi-denominational traditions, the science-centered attitudes of the intelligentsia, and the aggressiveness of neo-religious sects and societies.

There is no one in the history of Christian preaching in this country who deserves this title more than Saint Nicholas, the Equal-to-the-Apostles Archbishop.

Saint Nicholas, Equal-to-the-Apostles, pray to God for us!

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