

# Preface

In 2013, I taught an Introduction to Christianity course at the University of St Joseph in Macau. There are many ways to approach this subject. At first I began by using the geographical approach, which was helpful in many ways because it gave the students a sense of Christianity as a global religion. Besides using Todd M. Johnson's and Kenneth Ross' *Atlas of Global Christianity*, which is a wonderful teaching aid, I also found Douglas Jacobsen's *The World's Christians: Who they are, Where they are, and How they got there* an excellent textbook to help students acquire a perspective of Christianity as a growing global phenomenon. Jacobsen divides Christianity into four main traditions: the Orthodox tradition, the Roman Catholic tradition, Protestantism, and the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement. The last tradition, the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement, is the latest and fastest-growing phenomenon and it includes both Protestants and Roman Catholics. I find this inclusion of Protestants and Roman Catholics in one movement rather significant because boundaries are not easy to delineate when it comes to characterizing a particular Christian tradition such as this – the Spirit blows where it wills (John 3:8).

Another interesting feature of Jacobsen's text is that he starts first with the Orthodox tradition because, according to him, it has the longest history and it preserves most of the ancient customs and practices of Christianity. One would think that a religion with such a long history and tradition would be fairly well known. But this is not the case with Orthodox Christianity, especially in Asia. Many people still think of the Orthodox Church as antiquated, not much different from Roman Catholicism, except for its provincialism. In fact, my students did not have the foggiest idea about the Orthodox tradition. We are fortunate that nowadays we have the internet, YouTube, and other media to transmit information and pictorial

representations. Through digital technology, the students were able to get a glimpse of the grandeur and beauty of the Orthodox Church, its worship and its iconography.

Besides these resources, I also needed a supplementary text that went beyond the introductory level. Given my interest in individual theologians, I decided to write a book that I hope will give a better understanding of Orthodox theology based on the writings of eight distinguished Orthodox thinkers. I hope that this book will also serve the needs of the ecumenical movement in their efforts to understand the 'other'. Writing this book has been a great learning experience for me as I have begun to appreciate the beauty and depth of Orthodox worship and also the hardships and sufferings that our separated brethren have undergone to keep their faith alive.

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