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(24) EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES IN AFRICA

John Ngige Njoroge

Introduction

This article will focus on the Eastern Orthodox Churches in Africa. Before that however, it is important to clarify the meaning of the Eastern Orthodox Churches' and how it will be used in this article. The phrase 'Eastern Orthodox Churches' means those Orthodox Churches that agreed to the resolutions of the fourth ecumenical council held in Chalcedon in AD 451. These churches are the Patriarchate of Constantinople, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch and Rome. This distinguishes the named churches from the non-Chalcedonian or Oriental Orthodox Churches who decided not to follow the Chalcedon Council on the two natures of Christ, thus on how the divine and the human natures are united in the person of Jesus Christ. It is at this juncture that the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church belonging to the Alexandrian church did not agree with the resolutions of the council, and for centuries these two churches have remained separate from the Greek Patriarchate of Alexandria. However, through the encountering of both the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox families in the World Council of Churches (WCC), they have managed to hold a series of four unofficial conversations after 1,500 years of being separate. As a result of these consultations, a solid Christological agreement was reached.¹ Therefore, the phrase 'Eastern Orthodox Churches' will refer to Orthodox Churches under the jurisdiction of the Greek Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa. According to the administrative structures of the Orthodox Churches under the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa, churches in Africa are grouped as either Archdiocese or Diocese. Currently, there are twenty-one archdioceses and five dioceses. An Archdiocese is under the leadership of an archbishop and a diocese under a bishop.

All Eastern Orthodox Churches in Africa are under the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa. The headquarters are in Alexandria, Egypt and the current Patriarch is Pope Theodoros II. It serves the Eastern Orthodox Churches, which consists of Greek- and Russian-speaking Orthodox faithful, mainly living and working in major African cities as well as native African Orthodox communities. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa is ecclesiastically in communion with all Eastern Orthodox Patriarchates, as well as with autocephalous and autonomous churches in the world. It is a member of the World Council of Churches, All Africa Conference of Churches and Middle East Council of Churches.²

Eastern Orthodox Churches in Africa can be categorized into three main categories. This is mainly because of their sources of origin.

Orthodox Churches in Northern Africa

The Orthodox Churches in the northern part of Africa includes both the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches. The origin of the Orthodox Church in Alexandria is from the evangelization of Apostle and Evangelist Mark. According to Eusebius 'Church History' (AD 320) and keeping with the tradition of both

¹ See the resolutions of a meeting held at Ana Bishop monastery in Egypt in 1989 and in Chambéry 1993 respectively. Also see Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), 859-61.

² Njoroge John, Article: *The Ecumenical Dialogue in the Perspective of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria All Africa* in the Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism Resources for Theological Education (Volos: Volos Academy Publications in cooperation with WCC publication and Regnum Books International, 2014), 327-332.

the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and all Africa and the Coptic-based Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, St Mark the Evangelist, a missionary companion of St Peter, the apostle to the Jew (Gal. 2:8), evangelized Alexandria between AD 43-63 and after him Anianos took over this See serving between AD 62-82.³ Alexandria being a home of the largest Jewish community in diaspora, made it possible for Peter to have sent Mark his spiritual son (1 Peter 5:13) to visit Alexandria. It could be true that Alexandria had been evangelized by AD 53 because of a story of a Christian Jew from Alexandria by the name of Apollos, who was evangelizing in Ephesus (Acts 18:24; 1 Cor. 3:4-7) at the time of St Paul. As noted above, the Alexandrian church has continuously confessed St Mark the Evangelist as its founder and from the fourth century AD, the See of Alexandria has been called *Cathedra Marci* ('the throne of Mark'). His symbol is a lion, an emblem used on the flag of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa. His feast day is 25th April when a liturgical rite attributed to him is supposed to be celebrated in the churches of Alexandria.⁴

After the establishment of the church in Alexandria, Christianity spread in the region and beyond where it continued with its apostolic mission of witnessing to the world the gospel of Jesus Christ so that the world may believe (John 17:21). Throughout history, the Orthodox Church in Northern Africa has been known for its active involvement with and contribution to world Christianity. First and foremost, the Alexandrian church did not only participate in the ecumenical councils but greatly contributed to the formation of the Christian doctrines through its bishops like Athanasius the Great (AD 298-373). The formation of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed and Christian doctrines like that of the incarnation has offered to the ecumenical church solutions to the heresies of the time.⁵ Secondly the Alexandrian church has given to world Christianity the profound allegorical method of interpreting the Holy Scriptures through its famous catechetical school. One can argue that the Alexandrian catechetical school produced the first Christian thinkers like Clement of Alexandria and Origen who successfully explained the biblical faith philosophically and systematically. Thirdly, the Alexandrian church is known for its monasticism. Ordinary Christians like Antony the Great (251-356), the father of monasticism, took a total commitment to the following of Christ by enacting Matt. 19:17-21 and took to the desert to live a life of asceticism and contemplation. Monasticism inspired many people like St Pachomius (292-346) who developed the cenobitical or communal monastic way of life. The flourishing of monasticism in the Egyptian desert brought pilgrims from all over the world and at the same time the desert became the place of encounter between the Christian monks and the Nubian traders along the river Nile. Apparently, through this encounter, the historical kingdom of Nubia became Christian.

Although right from the beginning, the Alexandrian church witnessed the gospel of Christ as one united church, the fourth ecumenical council AD 451 and the AD 640 Arabic conquest have affected the unity, growth and prosperity of this church. During the fourth ecumenical council, the Alexandrian church encountered a division between the 'non-Chalcedonian' churches or the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Chalcedonian Churches or the Eastern Orthodox Churches. It is at this juncture that the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church belonging to the Alexandrian church did not agree with the resolutions of the Chalcedonian council on the two natures of Christ, thus on how the divine and human natures are united in the person of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, what is now the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria remained faithful to the Chalcedonian family together with the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Jerusalem, Antioch and Rome who fully participated in the next three ecumenical councils.

³ Baur, John, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications) 21. Also see Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa office website "Previous Patriarchs" available at www.patriarchateofalexandria.com. Lastly accessed 1/01/15.

⁴ Groves C.P., *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, Vol. 1 (London: Lutterworth Press, 1964) 35.

⁵ Heresies such as Arianism that was introduced by Arius; a Christian priest of Alexandria, Egypt, whose teachings affirmed the created, finite nature of Christ.

For centuries, these two Orthodox families have remained in separation, and only recently through WCC initiatives have they entered into informal and formal theological dialogues.⁶

The Arabic conquest in AD 640 marked a turning point in the history of the church in Egypt.⁷ For many Egyptians, the coming of the Arabs was liberation from the Roman yoke. However, the implementation of Islamic policy was discriminative to the minority who opted to remain Christians. These kinds of legislative policies affected also the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa, and because of persecutions, the Patriarch and a large number of members fled Egypt and went either back to Greece or to other parts of the world. However, after the immigration of Turks reached Egypt in 1517, a new era dawned for the Egyptian Christians. Persecutions were over and the Patriarchate re-opened with only a few Greek-speaking followers.

The Greek-speaking communities are mainly in the cities of Alexandria and Cairo although there are a few Greek-speaking communities in other cities in North African countries. The communities are found in the following archdioceses: i) The Holy Archdiocese of Ermoupolis with its headquarters in Tanta, Egypt; ii) The Holy Archdiocese of Cyrene which includes in its jurisdiction the area of Marsa and Matrouh in Egypt; iii) The Holy Archdiocese of Ptolemais includes in its jurisdiction the area of Upper Egypt, Luxor, Aswan, Minia, Fayum, Assiut and Beni Suef with its headquarters in Minia, Egypt; iv) The Holy Archdiocese of Leontopolis has in its jurisdiction the areas of Ismailia, Suez and Zagzik in Egypt with its headquarters in Ismailia, Egypt; v) The Holy Archdiocese of Carthage which was established by Patriarchal and Synodal Decree in 1931 and includes in its jurisdiction the countries of Tunisia, Algeria, Mauritania and Morocco. Its headquarters are in Tunis, Tunisia; vi) The Holy Archdiocese of Tripoli which was established by Patriarchal and Synodal Decree in 1866. In 1959 it was joined to the Holy Metropolis of Carthage. On 27th October 2004, it was re-organized again by Patriarchal and Synodal Decree and its jurisdictional areas include the country of Libya. Its headquarters are in Tripoli, Libya; and vii) The Holy Archdiocese of Aksum which has in its jurisdiction the areas Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia. It has its headquarters in Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia.⁸

Under the spiritual authority of the Patriarch of Alexandria are the St Athanasios catechetical school and the monasteries of St George in Old Cairo, St Savvas in Alexandria, the patriarchal library and the patriarchal printing house.

Greek, Russian and other Immigrant Orthodox Communities

As already mentioned, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa extends its jurisdiction all over Africa. Its extension started in 1921 when the Patriarchate of Constantinople renounced all claims to jurisdiction in any part of Africa.⁹ This means that all Greek- and Russian-speaking communities who had settled in Africa as immigrants or traders automatically fell under the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa. Initially, these communities were under the Patriarchate of Constantinople which was responsible for those Orthodox Christians who were beyond any other Orthodox jurisdiction.¹⁰

⁶ *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), 859-61.

⁷ Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 25.

⁸ See the official website of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa. www.patriarchateofalexandria.com/index.php?module=content&cid=004001. Also see A. Tillyridis (Archbishop Makarios of Kenya) article, *The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa offices* (Yearbook and Review 2012) 74-78.

⁹ A. Tillyridis (Archbishop Makarios of Kenya) article, *Chronology in the Yearbook and Review 2012*, 48.

¹⁰ See Hayes Stephen article: *A History of the Orthodox Mission in Tropical Africa*; (originally published in *Missionalia*, the journal of the Southern African Missiological Society) available at:

Before the Greek and Russian communities were received in the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa, they had already organized themselves to meet their cultural, educational and spiritual needs. They had constructed schools, cultural centres and churches. For example, the first Greek community to sub-Saharan Africa settled in Mozambique in 1899 where they built a church and school in Beira.¹¹ These communities were receiving clergy to minister to them either directly from their countries of origin or from the Patriarchate of Constantinople. For example in 1908 such a priest, Father Nicodemus Sarikas, was sent to a Greek community of immigrants in Johannesburg, South Africa.¹²

For years, these communities have been closed to themselves, meaning they were reluctant to open up to African societies as well as to the mission of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa. This is so for a number of reasons. As a matter of fact, these communities and especially the immigrants fostered a situation that favours social connection and cultural cohesion amongst themselves and their countries of origin. As a result, their schools were meant only for their children and even teachers were sent and funded from Greece. Churches served as places for spiritual nourishment as well as places for preservation of cultural and national heritage. This promoted a strong sense of belonging and togetherness of immigrants who shared the same story and ambitions being far away from home. This is the reason why the Greek language was used in schools and churches. Currently, there are strong Greek Orthodox Communities in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. There are also a few Greek communities in other major cities in Africa. The largest Russian speaking communities are found in Mozambique and South Africa. In recent years these communities have flourished and enjoyed assistance from their respective governments back home through the embassies and consulates.

Over the decades a very slow movement towards more integration of these communities and the rest of African society can be observed. This has made the Orthodox faith in Africa look as if it is only a faith of immigrants. One could argue that the time these communities have been in Africa was not sufficient to witness the Orthodox faith to native African communities. However, this being the case in many parts of Africa, other cases can be identified where individuals from some of these communities have opened up and created deliberate interest in order to evangelize African native communities. This has taken place in two ways: i) through intermarriage between Greeks and Africans as well as Russians and Africans: through intermarriage, some Africans have been introduced to the Orthodox faith. ii). A Greek priest by the name of Fr Nikodemos Sarikas co-operated with Fr Ruben Mukasa Spartas of Uganda and enabled Ugandan students to join a Greek school belonging to a community of sisal farmers in Moshi, Tanzania. Later, some of these students went to Greece to study theology either in the university of Athens or Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Their presence in Greek churches caused enthusiasm for Greek church mission in Africa. In fact, their presence rekindled a forgotten or inactive aspect of Orthodox missionary work.¹³

In recent years, the Greek and Russian communities have on the one hand tried not to stay in isolation while on the other hand they are declining in numbers for different reasons. One recommendable thing as far as these communities are concerned is that they have remained united under the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa. This means that they are not divided according to national lines and attached to churches abroad in the country of origin like Greece, Romania, Serbia and Russia as witnessed in West Europe or America. This has made the pastoral and missionary work of the patriarchate simple and focused. This has also contributed to creating interest among individual Africans for joining the

www.orthodoxytz.com/OrthodoxMission.asp lastly accessed 20th January 2015.

¹¹ Njoroge John article; *Theological Training and Formation in the Eastern Orthodox Churches in Africa at the Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*: Regnum Books International for South Africa 292.

¹² See Hayes Stephen article: *A History of the Orthodox Mission in Tropical Africa*; (originally published in *Missionalia*, the journal of the Southern African Missiological Society) available at:

www.orthodoxytz.com/OrthodoxMission.asp lastly accessed 20th January 2015.

¹³ Kallistos Timothy Ware (Metropolitan of Diokleia), *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 190.

Orthodox Church and therefore opening mission opportunities for the patriarchate. Such cases are witnessed in Zambia, Malawi, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. For example, in South Africa, the church of St Nicholas of Japan has become a mission church where services are done in English language. This church is served by a Kenyan priest named Fr Athanasius Akunda and a South African deacon named Stephen, who are also in charge of reaching out to mission communities within the Archdiocese. In the Archbishopric of Zambia there is a growing native Orthodox community in Malawi being evangelized by Fr Ermolaos Iatrou.

Finally, it should also be mentioned that on the African continent there are other Balkan and Middle Eastern Orthodox Christian Communities such as from Romania, Bulgaria, Syria, Lebanon and elsewhere who do not speak Greek or Russian and who created joint or separate Orthodox communities.

Native African Orthodox Communities

Apart from the Northern African and Greek and Russian Orthodox communities, there are vibrant and rapidly growing native African Eastern Orthodox communities. The origin of these churches is through the initiatives of the Africans themselves. According to Bishop Timothy Ware, the Orthodox Church in East Africa, for example, was originated through the search by the native peoples and not through missionary preaching from the traditional Orthodox lands.¹⁴ This came about when native communities disagreed with the protestant missions and their evangelizing methodologies and colonization patterns. The disagreements brought about the African Independent Churches (AICs) some of which later became Orthodox Churches.¹⁵ The best examples are the Orthodox churches in East Africa and Ghana.

There is, for instance, the example of Kenya and Uganda where the birth, rising and spread of the Orthodox Church was contextual, based on the presence of Christian mission churches and the colonial upheavals of the 1920s to the 1960s. The rhythms of political, economic and cultural-religious changes, and mostly enhanced by the colonial government, settlers and Christian missionaries affected local communities. The forces of colonization, land alienation, forced labour and hut taxation, paternalism and devaluing of African culture and ethos met fierce resistance from the native peoples. Consequently, the native peoples started demanding independent churches and schools.¹⁶ For example in Kenya the church led by Arthur George Gathuna, refused to pledge their loyalty to the mission rejecting female initiation and membership to Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) and formed their own schools and Churches.¹⁷ Within a few years they started looking for ecclesial identity. The quest for such identity was to authenticate their self-understanding as a new community of faith, a new people of God who wanted to have the gospel of Christ incarnated to reflect the African worldview and lifestyle. This made the leaders of these communities look for affiliation with churches that were not involved in colonization.

¹⁴ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 189.

¹⁵ Njoroge John, Article, *The Orthodox Church in Kenya and the Quest Enculturation: A Challenging mission Paradigm in Today's Orthodoxy*, St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly Vol. 55 N0.4, 2011, 405-438.

¹⁶ When members of Kikuyu community left Church Scottish Mission (CSM) at in 1930, they referred to themselves as Kikuyu Karinga, which in kikuyu language means pure or orthodox. Traditionally, this term was used with the kikuyu initiation guild to stand for cultural purity and identity. After breaking from the missionaries, it took a political and religious implication, to implying those kikuyu people who opposed the missions and colonial authorities. See also Wentink D. E., "The Orthodox Church in East Africa", *The Ecumenical Review* Vol.20 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1968, 33.

¹⁷ Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) was a political party that opposed the missionaries on abolition of the Kikuyu customs, championed Kikuyu cultural patriotism and continuously presented Kikuyu's grievances on the issues pertaining to land, labour and oppression by the settlers. Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, the first President of Kenya was its secretary representing KCA in London in 1946. Almost of the Karing'a members were party supporters.

At first they were affiliated with the African Orthodox Church. This church had come to Africa through Archbishop Daniel William Alexander a primate of the African Orthodox Church in America in the Province of South Africa.¹⁸ The African Orthodox Church in America (AOC) is an Afro-American denomination which had been started by Archbishop George Alexander McGuire in 1922. He formed the African Orthodox Church in America due to social segregation and racial discrimination he had experienced as a priest in the Protestant Episcopal Church (PEC).¹⁹ Daniel William Alexander and a number of clergymen had broken from the Anglican Church in South Africa and joined the Independent African Church. Being dissatisfied with the administration of the Independent African Church, they established an independent church for Black Christians that would be more responsive to their own social-religious needs and to those of their parishioners. In due course, William Alexander connected to the African Orthodox Church in America. An article outlining the beginning of the Orthodox Church in South Africa reads:

On 6th October 1924, the Rev. D.W. Alexander organised an African Orthodox church in Beaconsfield, and on affiliating with the mother church in America on 25th September 1925, he (D.W. Alexander) was appointed by the Most Rev. Alexander McGuire, Archbishop and Primate of the AOC, and endorsed by Metropolitan-Archbishop Vilatte, Vicar Apostolic for the province of South Africa.²⁰

After Alexander was consecrated bishop he returned to Kimberley and his parish church of St Augustine of Hippo. This parish became the centre of African Orthodox Church activity in South Africa although with full contact with the Orthodox Church in America till he received a letter informing him of McGuire's death in 1935. At Kimberley, Alexander organised a seminary to educate his priests and annual synod meetings to discuss church issues. At the same place, he organized mission activities of the African Orthodox Church, which extended to Rhodesia, Kenya and Uganda where he was invited by the locals and where he trained priests and baptized communicants.²¹

In 1934, Archbishop Daniel William Alexander went to Kenya, following an invitation by members of the Kikuyu Independent School Association (KISA).²² This invitation had materialized after Mr James Beuttah, one of the KISA adherents working in Mombasa and Parmenas Githendu Mukeri of the KCA had the chance to meet Archbishop William Daniel Alexander in 1932, while on his way back to South Africa coming from Uganda where he had ordained Reuben Mukasa Spartas and Obadiah Kabanda Basajakitalo, the founders of the Orthodox Church in Uganda into the priesthood.²³ During his time in Kenya, Archbishop William Daniel Alexander baptised, consecrated churches and trained and ordained priests. One of those whom he trained and ordained into the priesthood was Fr George Arthur Gatungu Gathuna of *Agikūyū Karing'a* who initiated the growth and spreading of the Orthodox Church in Kenya.

¹⁸ See an article outlining the beginning and the Apostolic Succession of the African Orthodox Church in South Africa found in the archives of the African Orthodox Church in Pitts Theological Library U.S.A

¹⁹ JSTOR: *Journal of the Negro History*: Vol. 57 No.1 , 38-39.

²⁰ See an article outlining the beginning and the Apostolic Succession of the African Orthodox Church in South Africa found in the archives of the African Orthodox Church in Pitts Theological Library U.S.A.

²¹ Fr. Stephen Hayes article on Gabellah, Elliot Mdtshwa 1923 to 1988 African Orthodox Church / The Gospel of God Church South Africa / Zimbabwe found at: [http://: www. Elliot Mdtshwa Gabellah, South Africa Zimbabwe, African Orthodox Church the Gospel of God Church.html](http://www.ElliotMdtshwaGabellah,SouthAfricaZimbabwe,AfricanOrthodoxChurchtheGospelofGodChurch.html). Lastly accessed 20/1/15.

²² Kikuyu Independent School Association (KISA) was one of the formal bodies that were created in 1933 to formulate policies on education, facilitate independent's schools interests and objectives as well as seeking government support.

²³ J.R. Kigogno Dam-Tibajjwa, Article on the Life of Archpriest Reverend Father Spartas R.S. Ssebanja Mukasa, Founder of The African Orthodox Church in Uganda, Politician and Educationalist.

Affiliation with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

The search for building up Eastern Orthodoxy in East Africa was the result of relentless efforts of Reuben Mukasa Spartas and Obadiah Kabanda Basajakitalo of Uganda, George Arthur Gatungu Gathuna of Kenya, Nikodemos Sarikas of Greece and Danie William Alexander of South Africa. Reuben Mukasa Spartas and Obadiah Kabanda Basajakitalo had separated from the Anglican Church of Uganda and progressively had formed a Christian community free from mission control and paternalism. Just as in the independent churches in Kenya, Africans such as Spartas and Basajakitalo had to quench their thirst for bringing Christianity 'home', meaning to play its saving and liberating role for the Africans and by the Africans. For the two Ugandan's inspirations to turn into reality, they had to search for a church that would satisfy their people's needs to overcome social-religious and economic-political dissatisfaction experienced in their former mission churches. As a head teacher and a librarian at the Bishop's school library, Spartas had ample opportunity to access information regarding different Christian denominations. It is from here that Spartas came across church history where he learned about the Orthodox Church. In 1925 Spartas contacted Archbishop George Alexander McGuire the primate of AOC who in reply in 1928 connected him (Spartas) to the then newly consecrated Archbishop Daniel William Alexander of the AOC in South Africa. In 1932 the Orthodox Church in Uganda was established under the leadership of Reuben Mukasa Spartas and Obadiah Kabanda Basajakitalo who were then ordained into the priesthood by Archbishop William Daniel Alexander as mentioned above.

The tremendous growth of the Orthodox Church in Kenya at the time of Fr George Gathuna and that of Fr Reuben Spartas and Fr Obadiah Basajakitalo in Uganda demanded an ecclesiastical recognition that would enable the communities to appear as authentic local Eastern Orthodox Churches. This has to be understood from the point of view that Archbishop William Alexander had left these churches without any clear ecclesial identity. Likewise he had practised a liturgical service which was not actually Eastern Orthodox.²⁴ This made Fr Spartas continue searching for the Eastern Orthodox faith. As a result of his searching, he met Fr Nicodemus Sarikas of the Greek community in Moshi, Tanzania.²⁵ Consequently, Fr Nicodemus Sarikas advised Fr Spartas to connect to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa.

Fr Spartas communicated with Patriarch Meletios, who in return donated English liturgical books to the Ugandan Orthodox community. Receiving books in English made it easier for Fr Spartas to translate the liturgy of St John Chrysostom into the Luganda language. The liturgical books to be printed in Luganda through the efforts of Fr Spartas appeared in May 1935.²⁶ Following this development, Fr Spartas decided to give his community a new name – the African Greek Orthodox Church (AGOC). This was an indication that it was no longer an African Orthodox Church under the leadership of Archbishop William Daniel Alexander. Henceforth, Fr Sparta kept his relationship with Fr Sarikas who was offering catechetical training to young Ugandan boys who were later sent for theological training in Alexandria. Some of those who went to Alexandria were offered chances to further their studies in Athens and Thessaloniki respectively.

²⁴ See a copy of Liturgical Service that was written by Alexandra McGuire of the Africa Orthodox Church in America in 1922. The copy is found in the archives of the African Orthodox Church in Pitts Theological Library Emory University U.S.A.

²⁵ A. Tillyrides Makarios (Archbishop); *Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa*; Orthodox Archbishopric of Kenya and Irinoupolis (Year Book Review 2002) p. 152. Also see Kigogno, Article on The Life of Archpriest Reverend Father Spartas R.S. Ssebanja Mukasa, and founder of The African Orthodox Church in Uganda, Politician and Educationalist.

²⁶ Kigogno, Article on The Life of Archpriest Reverend Father Spartas R.S. Ssebanja Mukasa, and founder of The African Orthodox Church in Uganda, Politician and Educationalist.

In 1937, the newly-elected Patriarch Nicolaos was ambitious for Christian mission and he started a process of recognizing Fr Spartas' community by bringing it fully under the spiritual leadership of the Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa. Fr Spartas extended Patriarch Nicolaos' mission intentions to Kenya. Fr Spartas visited Fr George Gathuna with whom he discussed the necessity of joining the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria. The relationship between the two churches was enhanced in 1939 when the two leaders signed a merger and got a new church constitution. Due to that merger, there has been a very close relationship between the two churches. For example, after the decree of the Emergency Regulation in 1952, a period in which Fr Gathuna was also detained, and so was unable to tend his flock. His Ugandan comrades were forced to send a replacement for Fr Gathuna and Fr Obadiah Kabanda Basajakitalo of Uganda, who only managed to serve the western part of Kenya due to the liberation war there, allowing him to spiritually lead the 119 Orthodox congregations.²⁷

The Alexandrian mission to accept Orthodox communities in East Africa was enhanced when Patriarch Christophoros II assigned Metropolitan Nicolaos of Axoum (Ethiopia) to visit Uganda and report his findings to the Holy Synod. Metropolitan Nicolaos started his mission in 1942 and he compiled a report that was reported to the synod in March 1943. Fr Spartas characterized the presence of Metropolitan Nicolaos in Uganda after 14 years of waiting as having the key of salvation, opening the door and ushering them into the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. It was the metropolitan's duty to bring to the pen the lost one and present it as a clean sacrifice to God.²⁸ In his conclusion, Metropolitan Nicholaos observed and reported:

There is a field of action for our church mainly in Uganda and secondly in Kenya, if our church ever wishes to extend her action in Africa beyond the limit and formal servicing of the religious needs for her Greek children who are spread there. This field exists... the natives' persistence, however, is irreversible. Therefore we do not have an organization that is formed within its own traditions and views, which is seeking to adjust to our own through unification. On the contrary, we are observing a movement towards our church, which, without any dogmatic or administrative conditions, is asking to enter into the bosom of our church and only nourishes the hope that under her protection it will realize its prospects and create a formally organized 'Orthodox Eastern African Church', as Spartas' organisation is called today, with its own hierarchy and clergy.²⁹

Consequently, in 1946, the Holy Synod officially recognized the Orthodox communities both in Uganda and Kenya. Fr Spartas was invited to the synod where he received the title of the Patriarchal Vicar General to AGOC.³⁰ Fr Spartas continued to minister in Uganda and together with Fr Obadiah they opened new communities extending to the town of Bukoba in Tanzania, and to western Kenya among the Luhya and Nandi peoples.

During the Kenyan emergency, 1952-1958, the expansion of the Orthodox Church was brought to a standstill. Orthodox Churches and schools were banned by the colonial government for having been involved in fighting for freedom, giving refuge to the Mau Mau and supporting the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA). Most of its members and priests, including Fr George Gathuna, were persecuted and detained.³¹ D.E. Wentink reports that members of the Orthodox Church were involved in the struggle for

²⁷ Wentink, "The Orthodox Church in East Africa", *The Ecumenical Review* Vol.20 p.35.

²⁸ Mission report written by His Eminence metropolitan Nicolaos of Axoum to His Beatitude Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria Christophoros.

²⁹ His Eminence Metropolitan Nicolaos of Axoum, Mission report to His Beatitude Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria Christophoros and to the Holy Synod.

³⁰ Kigogno, Article on *The Life of Archpriest Reverend Father Spartas R.S. Ssebanja Mukasa*, and founder of The African Orthodox Church in Uganda, Politician and Educationalist.

³¹ Njoro John, *The Orthodox Church in Africa and the Quest for Enculturation: A Challenging Mission paradigm in Today's Orthodoxy*, St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly Journal Vol.55 No.4, 2011, 423.

independence for Kenya and have paid with their lives for the independence of the country.³² Fortunately, the Orthodox Church in Kenya reopened in 1965 within the Holy Archbishopric of Kenya and Irinopolis established by the patriarchal and synodal decree of 1958. This archbishopric served Orthodox churches in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Over a period of time, the latter two have been separated from the former and now they are under the Holy Archdioceses of Kampala and Irinopolis respectively, while Kenya gave birth to Bukoba, now Archdiocese of Mwanza in Eastern Tanzania.

The situation in West Africa, and especially in Ghana and Nigeria, was almost the same as in East Africa. According to Stephen Hayes, in Ghana there were some independent non-canonical Orthodox Churches. These churches traced their origin to the *episcopus vagans* Rene Joseph Vilatte who introduced the Orthodox faith to the Ghanaian group leader, Bressi-Ando whom he met in Europe.³³ It happened that, in 1974, there was a World Council of Churches meeting being held in the University of Ghana in Accra, and Joseph Kwame Labi and Gottfried Mantey, leaders of the Orthodox Youth Organization (OYO), decided to go and meet the Orthodox representatives. They met Fr John Meyendorff, Fr Thomas Hopko, and Professor Nicolas Lossky, all from St Vladimir Orthodox Seminary in New York, and Alexandrian Patriarchate representative Dr Parthelus. As a result of this meeting, Joseph Kwame Labi was granted a scholarship to study at St Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary. He was later ordained, worked in the World Council of Churches and is now serving as a priest in Ghana. In 1982 in a town called Larteh, Archbishop Irenaeus of the Greek Patriarchate of Alexandria officially received the Ghanaian Orthodox communities of about 1,500 faithful into canonical Orthodoxy through Holy Baptism and Chrismation. During the same occasion, he ordained into priesthood the Revs Kyriakos Edonu, Gregory Labi, Samuel Adjei-Kumi and Joseph Kwame Labi and into office of a deacon, Fr Daniel Aidoo, Fr Jacob Sey and Fr Emmanuel Bruce. Archbishop Irenaeus continued performing more baptisms in other locations bringing the total of Ghanaians received into the Orthodox Church to nearly 3,000 after several years.³⁴ Currently, the Orthodox Church in Ghana is under the Holy Archdiocese of Ghana which was established by the Patriarchal Synod in 1997. In its jurisdiction it includes the countries of Ghana, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso and Mali. Its headquarters are in Accra, Ghana.³⁵

In Nigeria, there was a well-established community calling itself the 'Greek Orthodox Church'. According to Stephen Hayes, it was started by an American by the name Abuna Abraim and it was officially received in the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa by Archbishop Irenaeus in 1985.³⁶ Currently, the Orthodox Church in Nigeria is under the Holy Archdiocese of Nigeria which was established by the Patriarchal Synod in 1997. In its jurisdiction it includes the countries of Nigeria, Benin, Togo and Niger. Its headquarters are in Lagos, Nigeria.³⁷ Statistically, there are 29 local churches and nine communities served by 22 priests and two deacons.³⁸

³² Wentink "The Orthodox Church in East Africa", 37.

³³ see Hayes Stephen article: *A History of the Orthodox Mission in Tropical Africa*; (originally published in *Missionalia*, the journal of the Southern African Missiological Society) available at: www.orthodoxytz.com/OrthodoxMission.asp. Lastly accessed 20th January 2015.

³⁴ Andrew J. Anderson, project on Orthodox Church in Ghana, available at: www.orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/articles/church_history/anderson_ghana.htm. Lastly accessed 20th January 2015.

³⁵ See the official website of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa. www.patriarchateofalexandria.com/index.php?module=content&cid=004001. Lastly accessed 20th January 2015.

³⁶ See Hayes Stephen article: *A History of the Orthodox Mission in Tropical Africa*; (originally published in *Missionalia*, the journal of the Southern African Missiological Society) available at: www.orthodoxytz.com/OrthodoxMission.asp. Lastly accessed 20th January 2015.

³⁷ See the official website of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa. www.patriarchateofalexandria.com/index.php?module=content&cid=004001. Lastly accessed 20th January 2015.

³⁸ See the official website of the Holy Archbishopric of Nigeria available at: www.orthodoxnigeria.org/. lastly accessed 20th January 2015.

Mission Engagements

The acceptance of the native African Orthodox communities into the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa is a sign of how the patriarchate was ready to rekindle, seemingly, the forgotten active mission aspect of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic church. Receiving the native African communities led by Fr Reuben Mukasa of Uganda and Fr George Gathuna of Kenya, had a tremendous impact on the entire Orthodox world. After East African countries attained independence, and once-banned Orthodox churches re-opened with enthusiasm, the churches of Greece, Cyprus, America, Finland and Australia have been engaged in missionary work in Africa. Through the blessings of the primates of the Alexandrian church, these churches sent missionary personnel into Africa. The best examples of such persons are Fr Chrysostomos Papsarantopoulos from Greece, Fr Johannes Eko from Finland, Mrs Stavrita Zachariou from America and Fr Cosmas Grigoriatis from Mt Athos Greece. The four are just an example of many individual Orthodox missionaries who have sacrificed themselves to work with the Africans unceasingly in terms of building churches and supporting the local priests and finally, leaving their bones buried in the missionary field.

The presence of the Orthodox churches in East Africa has resulted in the opening of mission organizations and fraternities in traditional Orthodox countries. These organizations and fraternities have enhanced mission awareness among the faithful, who in return have become engaged in praying for mission and offering financial support. For example, in Greece, missionary organizations such as the Apostolic Diakonia of the church of Greece, formally Πορευθέντες, and the Orthodox Missionary Fraternity of Thessaloniki (formerly known as ΟίΦίλοιτης Ούγκαντα Βορείου Ελλάδος, translated as ‘Friends of Uganda, Northern Greece’) were formed. Following the visits of Fr Theodore Nankyamas of Uganda to America in 1965 and later to Finland many parishes and more of the youth groups were motivated for pledging themselves to prayer and financial help. It is through his appeal that the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC) in the USA and the mission desk of the Church of Finland were formed.

The presence of Orthodox churches in East Africa has also resulted in the opening of an Orthodox theological seminary, by the name of Orthodox Patriarchal Ecclesiastical School: Archbishop Makarios III of Cyprus, in Nairobi, donated by the Archbishop and President of Cyprus, Makarios, during his three-day official church visit in 1971. Archbishop Makarios of Cyprus stated:

The seminary will greatly contribute, I believe, to the promotion of the missionary work in East Africa. The seminary will cater for the African youth, who once educated in the Orthodox religion, will subsequently serve as priests and missionaries on the African continent and the existence of a very wide field for Christians in Africa is also evidenced by the fact that Africans have joined the Orthodox Church in large numbers.³⁹

Since then, the seminary has remained as the spiritual and training centre for Orthodox priests and catechist for the whole African continent. Currently, there are seventy students who are studying Orthodox theology in Nairobi with the aim that, after returning to their respective countries, they will be able to enhance the Orthodox faith through their priesthood and also teaching in minor seminaries in their respective countries.

Following the coming of the Greek missionaries to Kenya and Uganda, more Orthodox churches have opened up in other parts of Africa. The best examples are in Central Africa, Madagascar and Sierra Leone. In today’s Congo there is a very vibrant and rapidly growing Orthodox church. The mission was started by Fr Chrysostom Papsarantopoulos, a Greek missionary, who had previously worked in Kenya and Uganda for more than ten years. Later, Fr Chrysostom was joined by Fr Cosmas Grigoriatis, from the Monastery of

³⁹ A. Tillyrides (Metropolitan Makarios), article, *Makarios Legacy in Kenya*. Available at www.Orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/articles/church_history/makarios_tillyrides_makarios_legacy.htm, lastly accessed 20th January 2015.

St Gregory in Mount Athos, Greece.⁴⁰ Since the death of Fr Cosmas in 1989, his monastery has continued to support his mission in Congo. A mission office was also opened in Thessaloniki dedicated to Fr Cosmas and the faithful are donating money and offering prayers to assist in the continuation of mission work in Zaïre and beyond. Today, the mission is located within the Holy Diocese of Katanga which was established by the Patriarchal and Synodal decree on 1st November 2006, originally called the Holy Diocese of Kolwezi; its name was changed on 9th October 2009 to Diocese of Katanga. Its jurisdiction includes the great area of Katanga in the Congo. Its headquarters are in Lubumbashi, Congo.

Following the rapid growth of the Orthodox Church in East Africa, the Orthodox Church in Australia has so far sent two missionaries to Africa. One is Archimandrite Nectarios Kellis who started evangelizing in Madagascar in 1994. The mission there is under the Holy Archdiocese of Madagascar which was established by Patriarchal and Synodal Decree on 23rd September 1997 as the Diocese of Madagascar but later became an Archdiocese. It includes in its jurisdiction Madagascar and the Islands of Mauritius, Réunion, Comores and Maillot. Its headquarters are in Antananarivo, Madagascar. The second missionary from Australia is Archimandrite Themistoclis Adamopoulos, who worked for several years in Kenya before going to Freetown, Sierra Leone. The mission there is under the Holy Archdiocese of Guinea which was established by Patriarchal Synodal Decree on 10 October 2010; originally it was the Holy Diocese of Sierra Leone. On 21st November 2012 it was elevated to the Archdiocese of Guinea, and includes in its jurisdiction the countries of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Gambia, Senegal and Cape Verde. Its headquarters are in Conakry, Guinea.

As the Eastern Orthodox Church continues to grow in Africa, the Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa has continued to open new dioceses. The most recent dioceses are the Holy Dioceses of Burundi and Rwanda established 2009, Botswana established 2010 and Brazzaville and Gabon established 2010.

Conclusion

Out of missionary work of the worldwide Orthodox Church, the Eastern Orthodox churches in Africa have received theological training and ordinations of local priests, translation of liturgical and spiritual books, church buildings, schools, orphanages and hospitals. This is a ground prepared for a crucial and constructive dialogue between Orthodoxy and African cultures. This means imbuing the Orthodox faith with an African ethos, in order to transform African society. This would be possible if the Orthodox Church and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa strengthens its presence in Africa and lets its rich liturgical tradition, theology and spirituality give answers to social, economic and even political problems that are affecting African people. This can be achieved through an integrated theological training, and the Orthodox seminary in Nairobi can play this role. This suggests that much more is waiting to be done as far as Orthodoxy in Africa is concerned. First, a comprehensive study is recommended that will bring out a clear statistical number of Orthodox adherents in Africa. This can be done by archdiocese or diocese. Second, it is necessary for graduates from either universities and/or theological schools to undertake research and identify areas where Orthodoxy can connect with African lifestyle and worldview. This is an area of importance because most of the Orthodox churches in East Africa started as a means of searching for and quenching the African thirst for having the gospel of Christ enculturated in order to reflect the African worldview and lifestyle. Third, African Christianity has widely spread but it is often only shallow theologically, causing imbalances in African society. Therefore, Orthodox churches in Africa need to venture into methods of mission and evangelism that will facilitate the deepening of Christian faith in Africa. Fourth, Africa is a home of many religions and different Christian

⁴⁰ Aslanidis Demetrios and Damascene Grigoratis, *Apostle to Zaire; The Life and Legacy of Blessed Cosmos of Grigoriou* (Thessaloniki: UNCUT Mountain Press 2001) 34-105.

denominations, and it is therefore important for the Orthodox churches to continue engaging in ecumenism. To facilitate this better, ecumenical studies can be introduced into the Orthodox seminary schools' curriculum.

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