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Towards an African orthodoxy: A Call for Inculturation

Introduction

This article will focus on inculturation from an African Orthodox perspective. The main objective is to bring into account, and especially from a missiological point of view, an argument proving the need to have an “African Orthodox Church”. To have an African Orthodox Church means having Orthodox faith imbued within the African worldview and lifestyle. In order to achieve this, this article attests to the inculturation of Orthodox faith as it grows and spreads in sub-Saharan Africa.

This article will focus on the Orthodox faith as understood and practiced in the Eastern Orthodox Churches under the jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa. Currently, the world is experiencing enormous Christian growth and especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. This phenomenon, where global Christianity is shifting to the global south, is also being experienced in the Orthodox Church. For example, in East Africa, from 1958 to 1974 there was only one Archbishopric, then known as the Archbishopric of Irinoupolis¹, which covered Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Today there are three (3) Metropolis and three (3) dioceses in east Africa and twentyone (21) metropolises and five (5) dioceses respectively in the rest of the African continent.² The growth is experienced in three main areas; membership or numbers, (for example in Kenya alone, it is estimated that one million members served by three (3) bishops and two hundred and fifty-two (252)³ priests; development in terms of properties, such as church sponsored institutions; and spirituality. As the church grows in Sub-Saharan Africa, there is a need to contextualize Orthodox faith so that it becomes an Africanized faith in order for the African people to understand and live it as their own faith. This is because Orthodoxy appears foreign to many Africans, despite the fact that there are many similarities between Orthodox faith and African religiosity. This need motivates the call in this article for inculturation

of Orthodoxy, because through inculturation the Orthodox faith will dialogue with African religious realities.

Africa is a religious continent. This means that the African people have different religious systems with a set of beliefs and practices that actually determine their worldviews, lifestyle and connection to the deity (God). According to John S. Mbiti, all African cultures and societies are deeply religious, whether traditional (pre-colonial) and contemporary (post-colonial), across the continent and regardless of differences in national origin, language, or ethnicity. This is why religion permeates all aspects of their lives. Thus, it is not easy or possible to isolate it. In this case, dialogue with these religious systems is therefore a dialogue with the African peoples themselves in all the complexities of traditional and modern ways of life⁴. Given the centrality of religious beliefs and practices in Africa, inculturation is essential, for it will facilitate the African people ability to live the Orthodox faith as their own African way of life.

In this paper, the term “inculturation” will be used to denote a process through which Christian faith already embodied in a given culture encounters another culture⁵. In the context of this paper, the Orthodox faith which has already been embodied in Hellenistic culture encounters African culture(s). The term “Orthodoxy” will be used to mean the Orthodox faith as outlined and practiced worldwide. “Africa” will be used to mean the African continent and “African” will denote African-ness.

Historical survey of the Orthodox Church in Africa

Although this article focuses on the call for inculturation of the Orthodox faith in Africa, it is of paramount importance to give a brief historical survey of Orthodoxy in Africa. This will help in understanding how Orthodoxy came into Africa and why there is a need for inculturation.

Orthodoxy in Africa is represented by three main churches: the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. This article limits itself to the Orthodox churches under the jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa has its headquarters in Alexandria, Egypt and its ecclesiastical jurisdiction extends to all of Africa. It serves the Eastern Orthodox churches which

comprise Greek-speaking and Russian-speaking Orthodox faithful, most of whom live and work in major African cities, as well as the native African orthodox communities. Most native Orthodox Christians are in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and the Congo, while a significant number of Greek and Russian Orthodox Communities are in South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa is ecclesiastically in communion with all Eastern Orthodox patriarchates, autocephalous churches and autonomous churches in the world. It is a member of the World Council of Churches, the All Africa Conference of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches.⁶

According to the history of Eusebius (AD 320) and according to tradition well kept by both the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and the Coptic Orthodox Church, St. Mark the Evangelist evangelized Alexandria between AD43-63.⁷ The *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius records that John Mark established churches in the city of Alexandria.⁸ This statement can be supported by the fact that St. Mark was a missionary companion of St. Peter, the apostle to the Jews (Gal 2:8). Therefore, Alexandria being a home of the largest Jewish community in the diaspora, it was very possible for Peter to have sent Mark his spiritual son (1 Pet 5:13) to evangelise in Alexandria. Consequently, Alexandria became a source of the gospel of Christ for not only the rest of North Africa but also other places such as Ephesus and Sub-Saharan Africa. The Acts of Apostles (Acts 18:24; 1Cor 3:4-7) attests that a Christian Jew from Alexandria by the name of Apollos was evangelising in Ephesus at the time of St. Paul.

Throughout history, the Alexandrian church has been known for; a) its involvement in the ecumenical councils and its great contribution to the formation of Christian doctrine through its bishops such as Athanasius the Great (AD 298-373); b) formation of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and Christian doctrines such as the Incarnation, c) the allegorical method of interpreting the Holy Scriptures through its famous catechetical school, through which the first Christian thinkers such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen successfully explained the biblical faith philosophically and systematically; d) monasticism, whereby ordinary Christians such as Antony the Great (251-356) committed themselves totally to following Christ (Mk 19:17-21) and fled to the desert to live a life of asceticism and contemplation. Monasticism inspired many people, such as St. Pachomius (292-346) who developed the cenobitic 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 to the Gospel of Christ as one united church, the results of the Fourth Ecumenical Council (AD451) and that of the Arab Conquest (AD 640) have affected the unity and success of the Alexandrian church in inculturation of orthodox faith in Africa.⁹ According to John Baur (2005), the Arab Conquest marked a turning point in the history of the church in Egypt¹⁰ because the implementation of Islamic policy discriminated against the minority who opted to remain Christians. These kinds of legislative policies also affected the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, and because of persecutions the Patriarch and a large number of Christians fled Egypt. However, after the Turks took Egypt in 1517, and the persecutions ended, the patriarchate re-opened with a few Greek-speaking followers.

The decline in the numbers of Orthodox Christians in Egypt caused the patriarchate to look beyond Egypt to other Orthodox Christians living in Africa. These other Orthodox Christians were mostly in the Greek communities who had settled in major African cities for trade. They had come to Africa after they fled Greece during the Turkish occupation. The first such community in sub-Saharan Africa settled in Beira, Mozambique in 1899 where they built an Orthodox Church and school. In most cases, these Greek communities had their own churches, cultural centres and schools.¹¹ Although for years these communities were not open to the native Africans, their presence attracted a very few Africans, either because of intermarriage or interest in becoming Orthodox Christians. Those who showed serious interest were allowed to join the Greek schools and learn the Orthodox faith, Greek language and culture. The best example is the Ugandan students who joined a Greek school in Moshi Tanzania. This school belonged to a Greek community of sisal farmers and they had a Greek priest by the name of Fr. Nikodemos Sarikas, who cooperated with Fr. Ruben Mukasa Spartas, the founder of the Orthodox Church in Uganda.¹²

Over the years, both the Greek and Russian communities have opened up and more interaction with the native African Christians is much more visible. The best example is in Nairobi, in which the Greek community worship together with the native Orthodox Christians living in Nairobi. Moreover, the

liturgy is celebrated mostly in English and Kiswahili and even the priest in charge is a Kenyan from the St. Makarios Seminary.

Apart from the Greek and Russian communities, there is a vibrant and rapidly growing native African church, which actually is the future of the Greek Patriarchate of Alexandria. The native African Orthodox Church came into being through the initiatives of Africans themselves. The best examples are the church in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Ghana. Native African Christians searched for the Orthodox faith after they protested against the Protestant churches' missionaries in the 1930's. The Orthodox faith in these countries has grown since they came under the authority of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa in 1946. From that moment, the Orthodox Church in Uganda and Kenya grew rapidly but after a few years it was slowed by the political upheavals of 1952-1963. This period can be termed the "dark age" of the Orthodox Church in East Africa. It was a "dark age" because the colonial program of arrests and detention did not spare the leaders and the members of the African Orthodox Church. For example, Fr. George Arthur Gathuna, by then the only priest in the African Orthodox Church of Kenya (AOCK), was arrested and detained from 1st June 1953 to 1961. The detention of Fr. Gathuna and other church officials of the Orthodox Church left the 309 Orthodox Church communities, spread throughout Kenya with a membership of about 30,000 followers, without a spiritual leader. Apparently, the few women who survived the arrests could no longer gather for prayers. They feared being killed by the colonial authority, which suspected they were gathering to take an oath or planning how to feed the MauMau men fighting in the bush. Only by 1956/7, when the emergency surveillance relaxed, did few women start meeting in different homes for prayers. They used to call themselves "*Mwaki* or *Utheri*" which means "light" in Kikuyu language. They called themselves the "*Mwaki*" of a given place so as not to be suspected by the authorities of being an oath-taking gathering. They also wanted to maintain the light of Christ in whom they believed and and Who they understood was forever with them in those difficult times.

Meanwhile, in 1958 the Patriarchate of Alexandria appointed a Metropolitan of Irinoupolis (Dar es Salaam) to pastor Orthodox Christians in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. The creation of the Archbishopric of Irinoupolis brought, on the one hand, a more articulated means through which Africans could engage and know the Orthodox faith, while on the other opened ways through which African Orthodox Christians could connect to the rest of the

world. For example:

1. Fr. Spartas of the Orthodox Church in Uganda visited Greece in 1959. His visit had a very strong impact on the Greek Church and as a result of this visit Ugandan students were granted scholarships by the Greek government to study theology in Athens and in Thessaloniki. As a result of the presence of African students in Greece, mission awareness and teaching started to become more interesting in the Greek Church and Greek people started volunteering themselves as missionaries in Africa. Among such early volunteers were, for example, Fr. Chrysostomos Papasarantopoulos and Mrs. Stavrista Zachariou (among many others).¹³ A department of mission studies was created at the University of Athens. Also, missionary organizations such as the Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece, formally «Πορευθέντες» (Go Ye Mat 28:19)¹⁴ under the leadership of the present Archbishop Anastasios of Albania, and the Orthodox Missionary Fraternity of Thessaloniki (formerly known as: Οί Φίλοι τῆς Ούγκαντα Βορείου Ἑλλάδος, translated as Friends of Uganda of Northern Greece) were formed.
2. Fr. Theodore Nankyamas extended his connections to America in 1965 and later to Finland, where he influenced many parishes, with youth groups pledging themselves to prayer and financial help. For several years, Abbess Marina and other Finnish nuns stayed in Kenya, stationed at Muguga from where they did mission work. At the present time the Orthodox Church of Finland (through its international missions, aid and development agency Filantropia) is actively involved in mission work in Kenya and Bukoba (Tanzania), respectively. Through Fr. Nankyamas' appeal the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC) in the United States was formed. Up to the present day, the OCMC has continued to send American missionaries to Africa and offers scholarships to African Orthodox students to study theology at Holy Cross Greek Theological Seminary in Boston. It is through such means that some of the African Orthodox bishops, priests and theologians have acquired their theological training.
3. During his state visit to Kenya in 1970, the later president and

Archbishop Makarios of Cyprus told a Cypriot newspaper: "...What especially moved me is the fact that in the Eastern region of Africa there are thousands of Africans who follow the Orthodox faith... During my three-day stay in Kenya, I conducted mass baptism of some 5,000 natives in two towns (Waithaka and Nyeri). It can be said that there has been no similar event since the Christianization of the Slavs..."¹⁵ this visit caused the church of Cyprus to become very active in missionary work, especially in Kenya.

Since the visit of Archbishop Makarios of Cyprus to Kenya and opening of the Orthodox seminary in Riruta, Orthodox Church growth in Africa (although with some challenges) has happened. This is an indication that the seminary school in Nairobi is playing a key role in training priests and catechists, who later, after graduation, return to their respective countries to serve.

Inculturation Process within the Orthodox Church in Africa

From a missiological perspective, the term inculturation is used as a concept that denotes the procedural patterns in which the Christian faith manifests itself in a given context, in a given time and place.¹⁶ Inculturation, when understood as a process, demonstrates that manifestation of planting of the Christian faith and the gospel of Jesus Christ, in the soil of the African context.¹⁷ In the process of inculturation, the energies of the Holy Spirit transform culture and people involved in it, into a new creation. The condition for transformation in the process inculturation is the willingness of the local community to give up those cultural elements that are not compatible with the Gospel. This happens when the unending dialogical process of inculturation balances culture (in the anthropological sense of the word) and the divine transforming work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ This dialogue should take place as a platform for interaction of the faith and culture, through mutual critique and affirmation.

According to Laurenti Magesa, inculturation is a process whereby faith already embodied in one culture encounters another culture.¹⁹ The aim of this encounter is to have the faith become part and parcel of a "new culture". As far as the Eastern Orthodox Church is concerned, the Orthodox faith has already spread beyond the traditional, Orthodox cultures (Hellenic, Syriac,

Slavonic, Ethiopian and Coptic) into Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Alaska and the Americas, where Orthodox theology and ethos need to be embodied in these “new” cultural contexts. This raises the important question of how Orthodoxy is to be embodied in these “new” cultural contexts. This task calls Orthodox theologians and missiologists to creatively come up with an authentic method to be applied in the process of inculturation. An authentic method is necessary because inculturation entails acceptance or rejection, giving up or receiving thought forms, symbolic and linguistic expressions, attitudes and practices between the faith and new culture.

Concerning the Orthodox Church in Sub-Saharan Africa, the process of inculturation may not require a systematic planning and arrangement but will require critical study and theological direction. This is why it is crucial to go back to the biblical, liturgical practices and theologies that articulate inculturation, for example that of the *local church* (according to John Zizioulas). Zizioulas argues that to be local means that the church has taken root in a given place with all its cultural, natural, social, and any other characteristics that constitute the life, values and thought of the people involved.²⁰ The process of becoming an “African local church” will easily facilitate the transformation of Orthodox theological thought to meet the African social-psychological-religious ethos. Consequently, enabling the Africans to uphold Orthodoxy as their way of life and living it, Orthodoxy will become meaningful by its response to their day-to-day life concerns. In order for this to happen in the Orthodox Church in Sub-Saharan Africa, key areas of Orthodox life must be considered. These areas include (but are not limited to) worship, sacraments and church leadership.

The current situation of Orthodox Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa calls for a new mission paradigm that facilitates inculturation. However, in order for this to happen, Orthodox theology of mission has to develop and, moreover, identify crucial areas for inculturation. This proposes a dialogical process between an African religious way of life and the Orthodox theology. This process would result in the Orthodox theological ethos being incarnated within the African way of life.

Inculturation of the Orthodox Church in Sub-Saharan Africa is a necessity, a mission and a call. Looking back to the history of the Orthodox Church in East Africa, this call began in 1930s, when the African Independent Churches broke away from the “Mission Churches”. The breaking away from the mission churches was because of cultural imperialism, evangelising

methodologies and the collaboration of the mission churches with the colonial authorities.²¹ The founding of African Independent Churches (AICs) or the so-called African Instituted Churches or African Initiatives in Christianity²² has to be understood as a call towards a mission of inculturation within the churches in East Africa. This quest for inculturation was initially understood as a problem for the mission of the church by the Western European and North American mission churches.²³ However, the emergence of the AICs can be seen primarily as an extension of the need to inculturate mission Christianity to fit into the African spiritual realities. The AICs aspired to an “African Christianity” that would contextualize the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be good news for Africa and, in addition, contribute to world Christianity.

The need for a contextualized African Christianity caused such Africans as Reuben Mukasa Spartas (who by then had broken with the Anglican Church of Uganda) to search for Orthodoxy. Spartas was searching for a true faith that would satisfy the social-religious and economic-political dissatisfaction his people experienced in their former mission churches. This brings into account the fact that inculturation is also a process seeking to regain and reaffirm peoples’ identity lost during Christianization by the Protestant Missionaries. For Africans, and especially in the AICs, both cultural and ecclesial identities were paramount. They wanted to remain true African Christians, something that was denied them in their former mission churches. For one to be regarded a true Christian, one had to adopt a western lifestyle as practiced in the mission stations. The search for cultural and ecclesial identities is one of the key aspects of the inculturation process. This search addresses the peculiarities of a particular culture and how those peculiarities can be incompatible with Christian faith, which carries with it an identity in and of itself. This is why Spartas sought affiliation with the African Orthodox Church in America (AOCA). In 1925 he wrote to Archbishop George Alexander McGuire, the Primate of the AOCA²⁴, requesting admission to the AOCA and instructions on how to read the bible and how to preach.²⁵ In answering Spartas, McGuire put him into contact with Archbishop Daniel William Alexander, who was in charge of the AOCA in South Africa. Archbishop William Daniel Alexander extended his mission to Uganda in 1931 – 1932, where he ordained Reuben Spartas and Obadiah Kabanda Basajakitalo to the priesthood. He also extended his mission to Kenya, where he trained and ordained Arthur Gatung’u Gathuna of the Kikuyu Karing’a Education Association (KKEA), which later became the Orthodox Church of Kenya. It can be concluded that by training

and being affiliated to AOCA, the AICs in Kenya and Uganda received an ecclesial identity that enabled them to profess that they are Orthodox in faith. Having received this identity, the Orthodox Church in East Africa spread rapidly. For example, from the period 1937-1952 there came to be 309 Orthodox Church communities spread throughout Kenya, with a membership of about 30,000 followers.²⁶ This rapid growth is a clear indication of the inculturation process, in which there is the keeping of one's cultural identity and values on the one hand and professing the true Christian faith, on the other. The same need for identity caused Fr. Spartas to seek affiliation with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria when he realized that the AOCA was not a canonical Orthodox Church. Some of the things that Fr. Spartas questioned about the AOCA were: first, the apostolic succession of Archbishop George Alexander McGuire, who had ordained Daniel William Alexander; and second, the liturgical rites of the AOCA. For example, analysis of the text and comparison of it with other classic Christian liturgies, one sees that the formal structure of the AOCA rites is that of Roman Catholicism, with a mixture of prayers borrowed from the Anglican tradition, and its rituals taken from Oriental Orthodox rites.²⁷

In the inculturation process, the issue of keeping one's cultural identity and at the same time professing Christianity can bring confusion. Thus, a mechanism for balancing the two is paramount. For example, when the Orthodox Church began in Kenya, members of this church were referred to as the "*Agikūyū Karīng'a*" meaning "pure Kikuyu": those who never wanted to abandon their cultural values and substitute them with the Christian lifestyle as taught by the protestant missionaries. As a mechanism for balancing one's identity, the *Agikūyū Karīng'a* maintained that they never said that they would have nothing to do with God; rather, they were anti-western lifestyle, not anti-God or Christianity. They stated that they were Christians and no way would they be termed heathen simply because they were Kikuyu. They justified themselves with the several similarities and parallelisms drawn from the Bible, newly translated into Kikuyu. First, and in general, the Kikuyu never had a different concept of *Ngai* (God) than that of the Biblical God. Neither did the missionaries who translated the word of the Biblical God as *Ngai* in the Kikuyu language. The Kikuyu concept of God is monotheistic, just as it is in the Hebrew Bible. Further, the *Agikūyū Karīng'a* argued that being Kikuyu Christians did not justify the Protestant Church missionaries denying them Holy Communion due to their practicing such cultural

practices as circumcision, because St. Paul states that circumcision is nothing and no circumcision is nothing but obeying the commandment of God is everything (1 Cor 7:19, Gal 6:15). Rather, in the inculturation process, this is a clear test of how far faith in Jesus Christ should replace the Kikuyu traditional customs and practices. This test forms a beginning for the most appropriate way of incarnating Christianity, thus facilitating a dialogue between biblical Christianity and African cosmologies.

Drawing similarities and parallels from the Bible and Christian tradition and imbuing them with cultural meaning and significance in light of cultural practices becomes one of the authentic measures of the inculturation process. Such authentic measures resulted in bringing assurance to the adherents of the Orthodox Church in East Africa. From this assurance they began to draw new meaning and self-understanding from within the faith. When the AICs began, these churches understood themselves as “New communities of faith” who drew their beliefs and practices from the Bible, while at the same time functioning structurally like a traditional African family or homestead. Such self-understanding occurs because faith does not exist in a vacuum of space and time, but maintains cultural systems expressed in the rituals and symbols of a given cultural context. Specifically, when the Orthodox Church started in Kenya, the Kikuyu people understood the church as a family. This is based on the principle of common kinship, whereby the Kikuyu people are one big family tied and united together by the family norms and values of *Gikuyu* and *Mumbi* their ancestors. In this understanding, a transformed African family would perfectly image the new family of God that brings together those who are born again in water and in Spirit (John 3:5). According to St. Paul this family becomes a household of God (Gal 6:10, 1 Tim 3:15). Today in the inculturation process, Christian baptism can adopt the African notion of being born into a family, which demonstrates strongly the sense of belonging, which Christian understanding means belonging to a community of believers i.e. *the Church*.

Inculturation facilitates contextualized reading and interpretation of the word of God. Contextualized reading and interpretation of the scriptures enables adherents of a given culture to understand the Gospel of Christ (*Evangelion*) and its meaning for them. For example, the AICs interpreted the biblical stories, and especially the Old Testament, as reflecting the experiences of the colonial era, schism with the mission churches and cultural-religious orientations of African Christians. Interestingly, the Africans’ being under

the colonial powers was interpreted as being in slavery. This metaphor was understood to be similar to the Israelites' slavery in Egypt (Exodus 1-18). The story of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt became very popular. Many similarities to the Exodus narrative were drawn. For example, leaders in the AICs were acknowledged as "*Moses*" who would lead God's people out of slavery to freedom. The hardships encountered both in colonial slavery and in the process of forming the African Orthodox Church were very similar. Such experiences by then were: internal conflicts, hunger, diseases and alienation from ancestral lands (Lam 5:1-5). The hope of a new land was the formation of an African Church that would liberate its members and deliver them into "Canaan" (the Kingdom of God) through faith in Jesus.

During the early years of Christianity in Africa, the collaboration of the mission churches with the colonial government gave the impression that the western culture and lifestyle is a Christian culture. This impression limited the possibilities of facilitating dialogue between the gospel and the African culture and lifestyle. There is a great disconnect between biblical culture and Western European culture and lifestyle. For example, during colonial times western missionaries distorted the concept of the "*Lord or Master*" which was negative to the Africans. In the process of inculturation, the native African Christians opted for the use of the titles "*Savior*" or "*Liberator*" instead. This proves that inculturation process facilitates reading of the Bible as one's own story and at the same time answering problems and challenges people experience. Apparently, as the native people read the newly-translated Bible, their stories became even more close to the social- political and cultural-religious notions of the Hebrew Bible, especially with regard to religious ritualism and symbolism, sacrifice and offerings, prophesy and healing, circumcision, marriage and family.

Inculturation enables the gospel and its truth to be meaningful for African needs, life-view and lifestyle. This meaningfulness is experienced in worship. Worship in an African understanding brings an acute consciousness of the unity between humanity and the visible and invisible universe.²⁸ For most Africans, art and music accompanied by instruments and rhythms in worship brings forth a wonderful concentration of both the psyche and body, energizing the persons involved to communicate with God.²⁹ In this case, however, Orthodox liturgical worship as the center of Orthodox life has to be communicated through the African linguistic framework and thought, symbolism and color, dances and lyrics. Abbess Marina, a Finnish missionary

in Kenya once observed:

For the Kikuyu, it was very easy to accept the Orthodox Christianity because in some respects, it is very close to his own traditional religion. For Example, when an Orthodox priest lifts up the Holy Gifts in the Holy Eucharist, the African who belongs to the Kikuyu tribe remembers at once the way his forefathers, the tribe's priest, offered the lamb to their own god.³⁰

For African Orthodox Christians to enjoy Eucharistic celebrations introduction of African rhythms, dances, drums and clapping is necessary. So far this has not been done, and it appears that what happens in most Orthodox churches is that African songs and dances, clapping and dancing take place after the Divine Liturgy. This phenomenon shows the need to inculturate Orthodox liturgy so that it becomes part of the African way of worship.

This need and call for inculturation of orthodoxy in Sub-Saharan Africa have continued since 1947, when Orthodox communities in Kenya and Uganda were affiliated to the Greek Patriarchate of Alexandria. This affiliation has been essential for both the African church and the entire Orthodox Church worldwide. Despite many unprecedented mission shortcomings, the meeting of Orthodox missionaries and the Orthodox Church in East Africa created a platform for dialogue between Orthodoxy and African religiosity. This dialogue can be done in the spirit of witness, which guides us into the whole truth (John 16:12-14). Guidance to the whole truth applies to the totality of African life: social, economic, political and spiritual. In the African traditional religion, there are no indications where religion ends and where the social, cultural and political aspects of life begin. This characteristic can also be observed in the early religion of ancient Greece. Today, the relation between religion and polity in Orthodox Christianity has its roots in ancient Greece, where religion was as well understood as the cultic life of the polis, never conceivable outside it.³¹ Therefore, the coming and acceptance of Christianity, especially within the AICs, was not viewed practically as something separate from the social, political organization of the society. This was rather a call to all of Christianity in Africa to facilitate inculturation of African religious values such as communal life. This could cause African Christianity to be deeply rooted in everyday life.

Traditional Orthodox circles may consider inculturation new and strange. However for two thousand year Christianity has undergone “cultural surgeries”: it has been inculturated in different world cultural contexts. For example, Jesus Christ became incarnate and grew within Jewish culture; The Apostle Paul preached to the Gentiles; the Cappadocian Fathers integrated the Gospel of Christ and communicated it to their followers in images and symbols of Hellenism; Cyril and Methodius inculturated Orthodoxy in Slavic culture, while St. Herman and St. Innocent (Veniaminov) of Alaska brought Orthodoxy too close to the native customs and beliefs of the Aleut people.³² In this regard, it has come time for the Greek Patriarchate of Alexandria, as the fountain head of Orthodoxy in Africa, to unwrap its “Greek-centered cultural monism” and open more towards communities in Africa.³³ This “unwrapping” will start by initiating the process of inculturation, starting with the leadership and especially by having more native African bishops.³⁴ Then, theological education will guide the process of the localization of the Orthodox Church in Africa. To be local means that the church has taken root in a given place with all its cultural, natural, social, and any other characteristics constituting the life, values and thoughts of the people involved. This is well justified in Orthodox Eucharistic worship, where people offer to God as the body of Christ all that is “His Own”, (*Your own of your own we offer to you*). Therefore, the Alexandrian church must become a truly African church by absorbing and using those local characteristics of Africa that are compatible with the Gospel.

In order to achieve this goal, the Orthodox Seminary in Nairobi must deepen its theological training and seek new theological and hermeneutical approaches to interpreting and translating the Orthodox ethos into African contexts. This will aim at stabilizing Orthodoxy among Africans and will create a platform from which the Orthodox faith can provide answers to social problems that are affecting African society today. Africa is home to diverse religious practices; and it is therefore important for the Orthodox seminary and schools to introduce African religious and cultural studies into their curricula. Such studies would equip graduates with knowledge of African culture and skills in order to be able to constructively engage in the dialogical process of inculturation.

Conclusion

According to this study, right from the beginning the AICs, inspired to an Africanized Christianity. Native Africans such as Fr. Spartas of Uganda searched for an ecclesial identity, a search that eventuated in his becoming Orthodox. To be African Christians was to happen through inculturation. This is why Africans read the biblical stories as their own stories, drawing similarities and parallels in order to have an ecclesial identity on one hand and on the other hand maintain their African cultural values.

Given the phenomenal growth of Orthodoxy in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Africanization of the Orthodox faith is necessary. In order to Africanize Orthodoxy it is important to ask how the Orthodox faith will be embodied into African cultural contexts. This question calls upon Orthodox theologians and missiologists to creatively formulate an authentic method to be applied in the process of inculturation. An authentic method is needed because inculturation entails acceptance or rejection, giving up or receiving thought forms, symbolic and linguistic expressions, attitudes and practices between the faith and new culture. Concerning the Orthodox Church in Sub-Saharan Africa, the process of inculturation might not require systematic planning and arrangement. But it will require critical study, theological direction and dialogue between the Orthodox ethos and African religiosity.

The process of becoming an “African local church” will easily facilitate the transformation of Orthodox theological thought in order to meet the African social-psychological-religious ethos. Consequently, it will assist Africans in upholding Orthodoxy as their way of life, in living it and will help Orthodoxy become meaningful by responding to their everyday life concerns. In order for this to happen in the Orthodox Church in Sub-Saharan Africa, key areas of Orthodox life must be urgently considered. These areas include (but are not limited to) worship, sacraments and church leadership. Because Orthodox liturgical worship is the center of Orthodox life, it is necessary to introduce African rhythms, dances, drums and clapping into Orthodox liturgical services. This would result to Africanization of the Orthodox liturgical services.

Notes

- ¹ Translated from Greek as “city of peace,” likewise taken from Dar es Salam (capital city of Tanzania) which in Arabic means the city of peace.
- ² *Tillyridis* (Metropolitan Makarios of Kenya), 2014, 74-78.
- ³ *Tillyridis* (Metropolitan Makarios of Kenya) 2014, 93-100.
- ⁴ *Mbiti* 1969, 1.
- ⁵ *Magesa* 2004, 5.
- ⁶ *Njoroge* 2014, 327.
- ⁷ *Baur* 2005, 21.
- ⁸ *Groves* 1964, 35.
- ⁹ *Njoroge* 2014, 328.
- ¹⁰ *Baur* 2005, 25.
- ¹¹ *Njoroge* 2013, 292.
- ¹² *Welbourn* 1966, 88; *Tillyrides* 2002, 152.
- ¹³ See related articles « Οί Φίλοι της Ούγκαντα Βορείου Ελλάδος» (which later changed its name to Orthodox Mission Abroad) no.42, January- March 1974.
- ¹⁴ *Papathanasiou*, 2004, 302.
- ¹⁵ *Tillyrides* (Metropolitan Makarios of Kenya) article, *Makarios Legacy in Kenya*. Last accessed on 21st Feb 2016. Available at http://www.Orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/articles/church_history/makarios_tillyrides_makarios_legacy.htm.
- ¹⁶ *Sauca* 1996, 3.
- ¹⁷ *Bosch* 1991, 447.
- ¹⁸ *Njoroge* 2011, 406.
- ¹⁹ *Magesa* 2004, 5.
- ²⁰ *Zizioulas* 2002, 254.
- ²¹ *Njoroge* 2011, 408
- ²² *Pobee & Ositelu* 1998, 3.
- ²³ Hayes, Orthodox Mission in Tropical Africa. Last accessed 21st Feb 2016. Available at <http://www.josephpatterson.wordpress.com/2008/08/19/orthodox-mission-in-tropical-africa>.
- ²⁴ *Alexander*, address to the first annual synod of the Uganda Diocese of the African Orthodox Church on April the 23rd 1932. This Address is found in the Archives of the African Orthodox Church of America in the Pitts Theological Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.
- ²⁵ *Ibid*.
- ²⁶ *Githieya* 1997,104.
- ²⁷ See the original liturgical text of the African Orthodox Church in America Liturgy found at Pitts Theological Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia. *Natsoulas* 1981, 81-104.
- ²⁸ *Magesa* 2004, 203.
- ²⁹ *Mbiti* 2000, 17.
- ³⁰ See article by *Abbess Marina* (Igumenia) Lintula Convent: “*Mission and Diakonia*:

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³¹ *Vassiliadis 2016.*

³² *Ware 1997*, 181.

³³ *Papathanasiou 2004*, 306.

³⁴ So far, the current Patriarch Theodore II has ordained four native African Bishops (H.E. Ieronimos, Metropolitan of Mwanza, H.G. Innocentios Bishop of Rwanda and Burundi, H.G. Neophytos, Bishop of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya and H.G. Athanasios, Bishop of Kisumu and Western Kenya).

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Tiivistelmä

John Njoroge, Kohti afrikkalaista ortodoksisuutta: inkulturaation vaatimus

Artikkelissa käsitellään inkulturaation kysymystä afrikkalaisen ortodoksisuuden näkökulmasta. Inkulturaatiolla tarkoitetaan tässä yhteydessä prosessia, jossa kristillisyyttä jo edustava kulttuuri kohtaa toisen kulttuurin.

Afrikka on uskonnollinen manner, jossa suhde jumaluuteen määrittelee lukuisiin etnisiin, kielellisiin ja kansallisiin ryhmiin kuuluvien ja eri uskontoja kannattavien yhteisöjen katsomuksia ja elämänjärjestystä. Afrikkalainen ortodoksisuus ulottuu historiallisilta juuriltaan kristinuskon ensimmäisille vuosisadoille. Nykyisin Afrikassa on kolme ortodoksista pääkirkkoa: Aleksandrian kreikkalais-ortodoksinen patriarkaatti, Koptilainen ortodoksinen kirkko ja Etiopian ortodoksinen kirkko. Artikkelissa keskitytään Aleksandrian patriarkaatin alaisen kirkon elämään.

Kristinuskon globaalien painopisteen siirtyminen eteläiselle pallonpuoliskolle näkyy myös afrikkalaisen ortodoksisuuden voimistumisena. Ortodoksisuuden leviäminen ja kasvu etenkin Saharan eteläpuolisilla alueilla on tehnyt tarpeelliseksi pohtia ortodoksisuuden afrikkalaistamista, jotta paikallisen väestö voisi kokea sen omaksi uskonnokseen. Teologeilta ja lähetystyöntekijöiltä vaaditaan luovuutta kehittää luontevia menetelmiä inkulturaatioprosessin palvelukseen. Kohdatakseen afrikkalaisen sosiaalisen, psykologisen ja uskonnollisen eetoksen, ortodoksisen uskon tulee olla merkityksellinen ihmisten arkisen elämän tasolla. Samalla tavalla ortodoksista uskoa ja eetosta on istutettu ”uusiin” kulttuuriin konteksteihin esimerkiksi Aasiassa ja Alaskassa.

Ortodoksisen kirkon inkulturaatio on välttämättömyys, johon afrikkalaisen kristillisyyden historia velvoittaa. 1930-luvulla afrikkalaiset kirkot alkoivat vapautua imperialististen ja kolonialististen lähetyskirkkojen otteesta. Itsenäisyyspyrkimykset antoivat pontta riippumattomien ja itsenäisten kirkkojen järjestäytymiselle (African Independent Churches), joille oli tärkeää olla kulttuurisesti afrikkalaisia. Kulttuurisen ja kirkollisen identiteetin löytäminen on keskeinen tekijä inkulturaatioprosessissa. Ortodoksinen kirkko on tarjonnut vastauksen joillekin afrikkalaisen kirkollisen identiteetin etsijöille. 1930-luvulla ortodoksinen kirkko järjestäytyi alkuun epäkanonisen Yhdysvaltain Afrikan ortodoksisen kirkon avulla (African Orthodox Church in America) Itä-

Afrikassa ja sai siten pysyvän jalansijan Keniassa ja Ugandassa.

Kenian kikujut tarjoavat esimerkin inkulturaatiosta. He korostavat perheen merkitystä ja katsovat kuuluvansa kaikki samaan suureen perheeseen. Kristillinen kasteopetus voi uskovien yhteisöön eli kirkkoon kuulumisen merkitystä selittäessään hyödyntää kikujujen vahvaa yhteisöllisyyttä ilmentävää käsitystä perheestä.

Jumalanpalveluksella on afrikkalaisessa uskonnollisuudessa keskeinen merkitys. Jumalanpalvelus synnyttää kokemuksen yhteydestä ihmisten sekä näkyvän ja näkymättömän maailman kesken. Useimmille afrikkalaisille soittimin säestetty ja rytmikäs jumalanpalvelus on muoto, jolla sielu ja ruumis luontevimmin kohottautuvat yhteyteen Jumalan kanssa. Toistaiseksi rytmejä, tansseja, rummutusta ja taputtamista ei kuitenkaan ole otettu liturgian yhteyteen vaan niiden aika on liturgian toimittamisen jälkeen.

Traditionaalisen ortodoksisuuden näkökulmasta inkulturaation vaatimus voi kuulostaa uudelta ja oudolta. On syytä muistaa, että kahden vuosituhannen aikana kristinusko on istutettu monenlaisiin konteksteihin. Aleksandrian kreikkalainen patriarkaatti on osoittanut voivansa riisua yltään kreikkalaiskeskeisen kulttuurimonismin ja kykenevänsä avautua afrikkalaisten yhteisöjen tarpeille. Tässä avautumisessa on tärkeää, että myös afrikkalaiset toimivat kirkon johdossa ja piispoina. Tarvitaan myös omaa teologista koulutusta.

Ollakseen aidosti paikallinen, kirkon on oltava juurtunut paikkaan tavalla, joka sulkee piiriinsä ihmisten elämän täyteen. Tämä ilmaistaan oivallisesti eukaristisessa liturgiassa, jossa kansa uhraa Kristuksen ruumiin tietoisena siitä, että kaikki on "Hänen omaansa".