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Call for ecclesial recognition of Bishop George Arthur Gatungu Gathuna. The founding father of the African Orthodox Church of Kenya



Introduction: Conflicting views on Bishop George and his legacy

The African Orthodox Church of Kenya (AOCK), owes its formation and development to one Gikuyu man who later became an Orthodox priest and bishop. This man is Bishop George Arthur Gatungu Gathuna, considered and highly regarded by many locals as the father of Orthodoxy in Kenya, and an elder that impacted on many Kenyans who joined Orthodoxy in the 20th century or who became priests and church leaders from his mentorship, leaving a legacy worth studying. On the other hand, Bishop George is considered a controversial leader by some of his fellow hierarchs and clergy. Such acclaimed controversies in his life led to his defrocking in 1979, causing a devastating schism in the AOCK, which was mainly resolved in 2004, leaving a few clergy and faithful still outside the canonical church of the ancient See of Saint Mark to this very day.¹

The schism created two groups, the Alexandrian divide, which originally had more clergy and less parishes and congregants, and on the other hand the Bishop George's divide which had less clergy and more parishes and also lay people. This schism has highly determined how Bishop George has been regarded in Kenya, elsewhere and in past studies, and up to the present there has not been much consensus. The question still remains, is Bishop George a controversial figure or a person worthy of ecclesial recognition to the extent

¹ cf. Orthodox Archbishopric of Nairobi / Kenya, 2004–2005.

of entering the order of Orthodox saints? Such tension exists in the life of the hierarchy who is the main focus of this study.

The life of Bishop George Arthur Gatungu Gathuna has not for several reasons been documented comprehensively in the past. Some writers have focused on the AOCK contributions to non-religious matters like freedom fighting and the first independent schools in Kenya, and thus mentioned him only briefly. Those who have been focused on ecclesial matters seems to have either left out or been ignorant of Bishop George's contribution to the formation of the Orthodox Church in Kenya, if not highly biased towards his contributions. At the same time, most of these writers have not been interested in the local missionaries, either, but rather in the external ones. Thus, the existing studies about the AOCK by prominent missiologists, historians and theologians have mainly mentioned Bishop George in brief or completely failed to recognize his fundamental place in it, a reality in the works of locals² and missionaries,³ with some only describing him as a controversial figure.⁴

The other reason for not featuring Bishop George in such studies could be the noted tension between his purported sainthood and controversial life. Such inclination on the question of whether Bishop George was an important figure in the history of this church or not, and what kind of a person he was, is even today debatable and dependent on what side of the divide of the 1979 schism the writers or those interviewed are. Unfortunately, most of the past studies done on the AOCK were written by people or on the basis of information provided by people who worked under the Alexandrian divide and none in Bishop George's divide. The hierarchs who have served Kenya mainly from Greece and Cyprus, with the exception of the current Metropolitan of Nairobi, have underrated or even forgotten the positive contribution of Bishop George in the formation and development of the AOCK. Furthermore, most of these past studies were mainly done before the church of Kenya was reunited in 2004 to end the stalemate after the 1979 schism.

After the substantial healing of the AOCK schism in 2004,⁵ it has

² Akunda 2010; Papatthanasious 2004, 301–311; Njoroge 2011a; 2011b; 2013a; 2013b; 2014; 2017.

³ Marina 2004; Yannoulatos 2015; Yannoulatos 2010; Tillyrides 2004–2011; Makris 2010, 245–267; Stamoolis 1986, 44–47; Orthodox Archdiocese of Nairobi/Kenya 1991–2018; Hayes 2010, 286–303; 1996, 383–398; 1998.

⁴ Welbourn 1961, 144–161; Yannoulatos 2015, 121–167.

⁵ The schism is still ongoing to this day with five other Orthodox jurisdictions existing alongside the Patriarchate of Alexandria in Kenya.

become clear that those formerly in Bishop George's camp brushed off the controversial aspects of his life, while those in the Alexandrian camp could not write or say any good thing about Bishop George, both groups avoiding to give advantage to their opposing side. A few examples today tell it all. Interviewing some of the same personalities interviewed by researchers before the unity, among them Rev. John Ngethe and Rev. Peter Michara, who previously gave the negative life of Bishop George that led to his defrocking, gives a completely different positive view of the same Bishop. The Orthodox Patriarchal Seminary, which was not teaching about Bishop George before the unity of the AOCK in 2004, has now incorporated the significant place and contribution of this bishop in their missiology and history courses.

The current Metropolitan of Nairobi, Elder Makarios Tillyrides, who is also the current General Dean, and professor of history and missiology in the Orthodox Patriarchal Seminary in Nairobi from 1982, teaches parts of these added aspects in his courses from the year 2004, a thing he could not do previously, considering the ecclesial divide in Kenya then. In his addresses during the annual memorial services of Bishop George at his tomb in Thogoto, Metropolitan Makarios has continuously pointed out the erroneous action of the Africans who misled the local Metropolitan who proposed the defrocking of Bishop George, whom he personally knew from 1977 and considered a humble, visionary, great, monumental leader and father of the Orthodox Church not only in Kenya but also in Africa.⁶ In his address on 21st July 2019 at the memorial service of Bishop George at the tomb of this hierarch at Saints Raphael, Nicholas and Irene in Thogoto, Metropolitan Makarios called Bishop George "the uncanonized saint of our time." The reality is, much has changed since the unity of the AOCK, with most of the personalities who said or would have said something negative about Bishop George now saying only the positive, which is a complete turn of events.

The problem with the existing studies mentioning Bishop George is that they focus on his negative contribution, while the current contextual inclinations focus on his positive contribution. With the passing of the generation that knew Bishop George personally, and because of the fact that the Bishop George's divide of the 1979 schism did not write about him, there is an urgency to document his life, especially for the positive parts which are clearly missing. Documenting his life will give those Kenyans and non-

⁶ cf. his July addresses in the Orthodox Archbishopric of Nairobi/Kenya 2004–2019.

Kenyans who only knew of his negative side a chance to learn of the other side. The AOCK, which Bishop George initiated, having turned out to be the largest Orthodox Church of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa to this day, will need to stipulate who such a figure is to them. Thus, this study seeks to present a comprehensive past and current understanding and interpretation of the life of Bishop George by the Orthodox faithful in Kenya, highlighting both the positive contribution and the negative aspects of his life as well as his contribution to Orthodox missiology. Using these, the study will then ask what kind of a person Bishop George was, and whether he is worthy of an ecclesial recognition or not. While this study seeks to unveil the unwritten parts of the life and contribution of Bishop George, and thus focus on most of what was not covered in previous studies, this study does not overlook or underestimate the work and contributions of previous scholars.

Study focus

The fundamental question this study seeks to answer is, could Bishop George be given some form of ecclesial recognition or even considered for local or universal glorification (canonization) in the Orthodox Church or not? If he deserves such recognition, what form would such follow? Would it follow the already existing categories of saints or would his case necessitate a new category for him and his contemporaries, like the Patriarchate of Moscow in year 2000 created a new category for their last Tsar and his family calling them the Holy Passion-Bearers?⁷ Is the role of Bishop George in the formation and development of the Orthodox Church in Kenya a reason enough to have him formally recognized? What role will his controversial life play in this recognition? What does the interplay of the past and the current understanding of the AOCK adherents and their attestation of Bishop George as a local spiritual hero and leader in one end, and a diving element in the other, mean for such recognition?

The sources used in this study feature journals, books, and dissertations that have focused on the African Orthodox Church of Kenya, oral history interviews from people who knew the late Bishop George, and the biography of

⁷ Shargunov 2019.

Bishop George as printed in his burial program. Because ecclesial recognition is informed by the biography and the historical contribution of an individual,⁸ this study will seek to present the life history of Bishop George from birth and his later contributions to the formation of the AOCK and Orthodox Mission in Kenya.

Ecclesial recognition and glorification of saints in the Orthodox Church

The church has a responsibility of producing saints out of her adherents.⁹ The act of recognizing one as a saint in the Orthodox Church is termed as glorification, rather than the more widely used Roman Catholic term of canonization.¹⁰ This act only confirms the attainment of an identifiable level of sainthood from the local church's perspective. It is decided upon with different methods, depending on the local church and the type of the saint involved. The Orthodox Church has no specific consensus on how a saint is confirmed as glorified; rather, each saint is taken on a case-by-case basis, although some local churches have even formulated a methodology of how to conduct it.¹¹ The one thing that is common in all forms of glorification is that the story of the person who is proposed for glorification is always identified.

One major source of church history, highly recognized by Orthodox missiology, are the individuals who planted and evangelized or helped spiritually develop, protect or rejuvenate the faith of a region.¹² Thus, in order to understand the formation, development, and mission of a church, it is important to understand who were involved in the laying of its foundation. The Orthodox Church has a practice to glorify (canonize) such persons that have made notable contributions to local churches. Such have included persons who instituted or were instrumental in the formation and development of the church in new areas. In order to ascertain such persons and their contributions, a thorough study is done on their life, spirituality, as well as contribution, before they are declared saints of a certain category.

⁸ cf. Applegate, 2015, 1–34.

⁹ Salapatas 2014, 25–27; Staniloae 2005.

¹⁰ Pomazansky 1996, 29.

¹¹ Golder 2005; Orthodox Church of America 1970.

¹² Rommen 2017, 168–174.

Examples are found both in scripture, the early church tradition and the contemporary church.

Biblically, we have many individuals who were directly involved in the life of Christ, including the Apostles and the myrrh-bearing women, who are today recognized as saints. We also have others who joined Christianity after Christ ascended, who are mainly seen after Pentecost as witnessed in the Acts of the Apostles and the New Testament Epistles. Some of them were not entirely very well received personalities, but after meeting Christ changed to be highly respected figures. Individuals like Photini – the Samaritan woman – are described as having been the ones that brought faith in their villages (John 4:1–42), while Saint Paul became the Apostle to “the Gentiles and their kings” (Acts 9:10–16), after his encounter with Christ on his way to Damascus (Acts 9:1ff).

There also exist some other biblical figures that are considered saints from the first century not only because of their involvement in the early church, but also because tradition considers them as the founders of different local churches. It is through such figures that the local churches and the autonomous or autocephalous churches they subsequently initiate are considered to have a direct and continuous apostolic succession to this very day. Such include Saint Andrew the Apostle for the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Saint Mark the Evangelist for the Patriarchate of Alexandria, Saint Peter the Apostle for the Patriarchate of Antioch, Saint James the Apostle for the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Saint Barnabas the Apostle for the Church of Cyprus, Saint Paul the Apostle for the Church of Greece, among others.¹³ The same saints are considered the patron saints of those local churches.

The early church featured other highly regarded personalities who made contributions to the status of Christianity. Constantine the Great, an esteemed Greco-Roman emperor, and his mother Helen are considered equal to the Apostles because they helped among others elevate and offer Christianity the platform to be not just the imperially favored religion but also a universal religion. This they did by ending state-sanctioned Christian persecutions, initiating the toleration and legalization of Christianity, funding Christian officers and establishments, from AD 325 forming what became the methodology of calling for ecumenical councils, reinforcing the conciliar credibility, and forming guided religious policies and administration

¹³ Orthodox Archbishopric of Nairobi 2018, 76–78.

techniques, among others. By so doing, these two helped the church flourish in the Greco-Roman empire in the 4th century and beyond.¹⁴ Emperor Constantine's life was not necessarily smooth,¹⁵ but his contribution surpassed such making him, together with his mother Helen, one of the most respected saints in the Orthodox Church. Saints Cyril and Methodios, the two 9th-century brothers, are considered the missionaries to the Slavs for having taken Christianity to Rus and even formed an alphabet to assist them in writing and reading scripture, liturgical and theological texts. These two are today considered the Apostles and enlighteners of Eastern Europe.¹⁶

In our contemporary times, we have Saints Herman and Innocent of Alaska who are considered the Patron and Apostle to America respectively, for their contribution in the formation of Eastern Christianity from Russia to Alaska in the 18th century, and since then Orthodoxy spread to the Americas.¹⁷ Saint Nicholas is considered the enlightener of Japan for his contribution in the planting and spreading of Orthodoxy in the Far East through Japan in the 19th century, thus given the title, Equal to the Apostle.¹⁸

Thus, the question arises why the Orthodox pioneers in East Africa, Bishop Christophoros Spartas of Uganda, Fr Obadiah Basajjakitalo of Uganda, Bishop George Gathuna of Kenya and Archimandrite Nicodemos Sarikas who served in Tanzania have not been glorified (canonized) as the Apostles/Enlighteners of East Africa? Maybe this could not have been possible with Bishop George having been defrocked, but since his defrockation was lifted, the Church of East Africa should have seen some form of consideration on this issue. There have been some indications that the Greek priest Archimandrite Nicodemos Sarikas could be glorified (canonized), but no one has spoken of the three Africans. This study will seek to show the contribution of one of them, mentioning the others only in the course of the formation and development of the Orthodox faith in East Africa. At the end, this study will discuss why the Orthodox Church in the five East African states is the largest and fastest growing in the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa, with Kenya taking the lead. From this foundation, the question will be

¹⁴ Jones 1978.

¹⁵ Lee 2000, 80–93.

¹⁶ Tachiaos 2001.

¹⁷ Golder 2005; Korsun & Black 2012; Garrett 1979; Cowie 2005.

¹⁸ Saint Nikolai Kasatkin 2003.

raised if ecclesial recognition will be appropriate and deserved in the case of Bishop George and his East African contemporaries.

Christianity in Kenya

Christianity came to the coast of Kenya through European Christians in the late 15th century.¹⁹ The first to arrive were Roman Catholic missionaries, including the group with Vasco da Gama who came to Mombasa in 1498 and that of Francis Xavier who passed through Malindi heading to India in 1542.²⁰ The other team of missionaries came through the British-based Church Missionary Society who sent Johann Ludwig Krapf in 1844 and Johann Rebmann in 1847.²¹ These European missionaries went mainly along the Coast of Kenya and would come to mainland Kenya only between 1897–1901, during and after the construction of the railway line that arrived in Nairobi in 1899, and headed for Uganda where the Europeans had picked as the capital of the East African region.²²

The central region of Kenya, where the Orthodox Church was initiated, received Christianity between 1897 and 1910.²³ The first missionaries who had contact with the Agikuyus, the main tribe of this region, were established within Kikuyu town. These missionaries were in the beginning very conscious of the Agikuyu people and their culture, but by the 1920s they had come to demonize the African culture and way of life, while the colonial government took the fertile Agikuyu highlands.²⁴ The colonial ideologies borrowing from the theories of social evolution, which only accepted one supreme culture and civilization – the European culture for this case–, while belittling all the rest and insisting that others must conform to the supreme one, mainly led the initiatives of these missionaries and their British colonial government counterparts.²⁵

¹⁹ Baur 2009.

²⁰ Baur 2009, 40–98; Kendall 1978, 16–25.

²¹ Baur 2009, 101–240; Kenyan Churches Handbook 1973, 29–39; History of Christianity in Asia, Africa, and Latin America 2007, 196.

²² Kenyan Churches Handbook 1973, 21–28.

²³ Paas 2016, 365.

²⁴ Mbiti 1991, 2–10; cf. Kenyatta 1965.

²⁵ General History of Africa 1990, 221–222; Reese 2010, 1–18.

It is within this situation that some Agikuyus initiated a liberation movement that would liberate them from the biased form of British Christianity, schooling system and government. They thus sorted to form their own churches, schools and national government. They joined Orthodoxy through the African Orthodox Church founded in America in the 1920s through the movement of the blacks led by Marcus Garvey, through which Archbishop Daniel William Alexander of South Africa came to Kenya, taught and ordained some Kenyans.²⁶ This form of Christianity would later become the AOCK, with their independent and *Karing'a* schools, while their governmental formation initiatives led to the *Mau Mau* liberation movement that culminated with the independency of Kenya in 1963.²⁷ This Kenyan-based tradition would later join the Greek Orthodox tradition through the efforts of Bishop George and his contemporaries.

Historical methodology

In order to unveil and understand who Bishop George was in the formation and development of the AOCK, a qualitative historical methodology is used, seeking to unveil his personal, public as well as spiritual life and related contributions. The historical research used here will help appreciate and understand the life of Bishop George in the fulfillment of his mission in Kenya, with the understanding that “as the Christian faith is historical, the Christian testimony is also historical.”²⁸ This study will involve two branches of church history, the History of Christian Mission (concerned with the development and spread of a church) and the History of Christian Life (concerned with the human spirituality and contributions to church and society), among the seven branches noted by Paas.²⁹

Commenting on African Christianity and its need for objectivity and the elimination of biasness, Kalu (quoting Marou) reminds us that a church historian is a “missionary dispatched to the past to strike a hyphen between the past and the present,” and thus lead people to the “truth of their condition in a scientific manner, not violated by cant or propaganda.”³⁰ Nevertheless,

²⁶ Thiani 2018.

²⁷ Sandgren 2000; Tignor 1979.

²⁸ Elliston 2011, 139.

²⁹ Paas 2016, 32–34.

³⁰ Kalu 2005, 1.

for Kalu, church history is a unique genre, different from other histories due to its goal that contains “a theological meaning and deep concern for people” that are actively living the same faith being researched on and which gives meaning to their past, present and the future.³¹

African Church histories have been written in different ways in the past. Most of the writers have thought that mission histories only entail “the story of the role of white missionaries in cross-cultural mission,” not understanding that “the church is not the denominations transferred from Europe to Africa” but rather that African church history is the study of the past and present experiences of the local people with the gospel, both during and at the end of the [Global North] missionary period.”³² According to Kalu, there are several categories of writing African historiographies, each with its major characterization that includes,³³

1. Histories of missions written by persons who are still serving – usually full of propaganda.
2. Recollections of persons that served in a mission land – usually full of anecdotes and personal views.
3. Works of non-participants – they miss out the finer details beyond what they are studying.
4. General histories of mission – usually too broad to cover much and which ignore the African agents because they mainly emphasize on the work done by Western missionaries.
5. Official denominational histories – usually full of bias by concentrating on making their denominations look good while avoiding telling about their failures.
6. Missionary protégés histories – these are full of one person’s or mission organization’s opinions and agendas.
7. Nationalistic histories – these are written to counter the one-sided histories written by past missionaries and their protégés – these concentrate too much on the African agents, leaving out the foreign missionaries.
8. Scholarly works unaware of the undergirding missionary ideology – these have failed to include the secular politics, economic and social realities.

³¹ Kalu 2005, 9–12.

³² Kalu 2005, 21–22.

³³ Kalu 2005, 15–21.

Kalu urges that current church histories from Africa should never leave out the local voice; contexts, society, and heroes, for these have been missing in the past methods of writing church histories. At the same time, contemporary church histories must be holistically ecumenical, not leaving out the non-Africans and the non-religious encounters. One major source of church history, and more so, when studying the African Instituted Churches, is to seek to study the entire life of their founder, for this mainly constitutes the life of such a church.³⁴

Studying the life of Bishop George will borrow from this method of studying church history in Africa. The method of this study, being a historical one, will seek for information from existing literature, which gives very little, but also oral history from personalities that knew the bishop. The most important text in this study is Bishop George's burial program and the autobiography printed behind it. This study will first seek to get his life history from birth and later his connection to the church and the legacy he left the AOCC and the Orthodox Mission. From the results of this, the answer to the ecclesial recognition shall be sort.

Biography of Bishop George Arthur Gatungu Gathuna

Early years, education and family life

Bishop George was born Arthur Gatungu Gathuna in the year 1905 in Kenya, in the village of Gathūngu, Ndwaru Road in Riruta, Nairobi West. His parents were Gathuna Muthiora and Wanja Kinuthia, while his siblings were four brothers and one sister. As a young boy and into his teenage years he mainly cared for his father's flock. He entered Ruthimitu Primary School in 1918 for his lower primary education, before entering middle school at Mambeere in Thogoto, Kikuyu before 1922. He was circumcised later that year with the *riika ria ciringi* (agemates of the one shilling group). Arthur would then attend Alliance High School from 1928–1930. He did exceptionally well. He was thus sponsored by the Thogoto Scotland Missionaries to join Chogoria Teachers

³⁴ Adogame & Jafta 2005, 309–329.

College in Meru for a year. He taught in Chogoria area under the Scotland Missions after his graduation and then at Mang'ara school in Limuru from 1931. He later joined the Ruthimitu *Karing'a* School as from 1932, a school formed after the breakaway of the Africans from the British missionary churches and schools in 1929.

While at Ruthimitu *Karing'a* School, Arthur was sent by the *Karing'a* church to Kandara, Muranga in 1936. His task was to officially translate for Archbishop Daniel William Alexander of South Africa of the African Orthodox Church in South Africa, at the Orthodox Seminary in Gituamba village where the first Kenyan cohort of that school and the Orthodox faith were taught for 18 months.³⁵ Arthur would later turn out to not only be a brilliant translator but also an excellent learner to an extent that Archbishop Alexander received him as one of the students. Thus, Arthur graduated on 27th June 1937, with the rest of this first cohort, which he was also translating for. He would later receive an honorary Degree to complement all his achievements in the Orthodox faith in December 1985 at Gregory Palamas Monastery in Etna, California USA.

Arthur married Frasier Wambui, the daughter of one Karanja Muthoka of Ruthimitu, Dagoretti South in 1944.³⁶ Although the custom then was to have many children, the couple had only two children, Stephen Mbugua (1945–2014) and Oliviah Wanja (1948–1964). This could be attributed to the national liberation processes, which Reverend Arthur Gathuna was central in, which forced such leaders to be mainly separated from their families and stay in hiding. Presbytera Frasier Gatungu departed from this life in 1965, and soon after, their daughter Oliviah passed on. Reverend Arthur could not marry again due to the canonical implication of the Greek Orthodox priesthood that once ordained, one cannot contract any lawful marriage.³⁷ Bishop George's daughter-in-law, Jane Wanjuhi Mbugua, and her two adopted children Arthur Gatungu and Frasier Wambui, are the only surviving members of this family who live in the bishop's homestead in Kwa Ng'ang'a, Ndwaru Road in Riruta, Nairobi West.

³⁵ Welbourn 1961, 149

³⁶ Ngethe 2018; Kamau 2018; Mbugua 2018; Michara 2019b.

³⁷ Rodopoulos 2007, 128.

Politics, priesthood and ministry

On 1st June 1953, the British colonial government in Kenya arrested Reverend Arthur, together with other *Mau Mau* liberation fighters, including the famous Kapenguria six arrested on 21st October 1952.³⁸ Reverend Arthur possibly remains the only Kenyan cleric arrested due his senior position in the *Mau Mau* liberation movement. His arrest was because he was the cleric of the liberation church and the head teacher of the school system that produced most of the liberation soldiers and adherents. Reverend Arthur was imprisoned in Senya in Kajiando, then later transferred to Lamu where he stayed until 1958, and finally in Hola where he served his time until his release in 1961, having served a total imprisonment of 8 years.

After independence, Fr Arthur was nominated by the Kenya African National Union (KANU) party as a Councilor of the Nairobi City Council government for the years 1963–1970, and later vied for the larger Dagoretti Ward position succeeding Ms Margaret Wambui Kenyatta, who left the position to take over as the City mayor.³⁹ Reverend Arthur served the Council in different positions including serving as the Nairobi Councilor attending the Kiambu Municipal Council and as a Chairman of different Council committees until his departure from politics in 1979.

Reverend Arthur was ordained a priest in 1937 in Waithaka, Nairobi County, by Archbishop Daniel William Alexander and started his ministry in his home area in Nairobi-Kiambu Counties as a lone priest of the African Orthodox Church of Kenya.⁴⁰ He was elevated to the status of Patriarchal Vicar for the church of Kenya in 1946 by Patriarch Christophoros II Danilidis, after the East African congregations were received under the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa. He was elevated to the rank of Archimandrite during the reign of his former Archbishop, Patriarch Nicholas VI Varelopoulos, and soon after consecrated as the Bishop of Nitria on 25th February 1973 at Saint Paul Kagira, Nairobi West. Metropolitan Frumentios Nassios of Irinoupolis (in office 1973–1982), assisted by two newly consecrated assistant bishops, Christophoros Spartas Sebbanja Mukasa (1899–1982) and

³⁸ The Kapenguria six included the later first President of Kenya Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, and his so-called deputies Bildad Kagia, Kungu Karumba, Fred Kubai, Paul Ngei and Achieng' Aneko cf. Elkins 2005, 38–40.

³⁹ Nairobi City Council 1968.

⁴⁰ Githieya 1997, 102.

Theodoros Nakyama (1924–1997) both from Uganda, led this service. It is during this service that Reverend Arthur was given a new first name of Saint George the Great, to henceforth be Bishop George. As a hierarch, Bishop George became the first in many ways. He was the first Kenyan to become an Orthodox Bishop under the Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa;⁴¹ the first bishop in Africa to be consecrated outside the Patriarchal headquarters in Egypt; the first Assistant Bishop of the church of Kenya; and the first Kenyan widowed priest to become a bishop.⁴²

Defroccation and schism

Bishop George's consecration to the episcopacy had some opposition from four of the younger priests, Peter Michara, Gerasimos Gachumi, Eleftherios Ndwaru and Dimitrios Kinyanjui. According to Rev. John Ngethe, who was Bishop George's deacon and secretary for long, these priests thought of him as an old man who was too stringent and who abused the young ones excessively.⁴³ After his consecration, this did not diminish but was rather

⁴¹ The second Kenyan canonical Orthodox hierarch under this same Patriarchate was Bishop Neofytos Kongai, who was consecrated Bishop of Nitria on 6/12/2014 at St Savvas, Alexandria in Egypt and worked as an Assistant Bishop of the Metropolis of Kenya, until 6/11/2015 when he was elevated to be the first Diocesan Bishop of Nyeri and Mt.Kenya. The third Kenyan of this same stature was the late Bishop Athanasios Akunda consecrated as the first Diocesan Bishop of Kisumu and Western Kenya on 6/12/2015 at St Savvas, Alexandria in Egypt, and who passed on while undergoing treatment in Boston USA on 4th January 2019. The other Kenyans to be elevated to the level of hierarchs although under what is termed uncanonical and schismatic groups within the Orthodox church were, Metropolitan Niphon Nicassios Kiggundu Magu of the Holy Synod in Resistance consecrated in Filli Greece in 1985, and who succeeded Archbishop George; Metropolitan Matthew Muroki of the Genuine Orthodox Church of Cyprus consecrated in Limassol Cyprus on 10th May 2008; and Metropolitan Paul Njoroge of the synod of the Holy Orthodox Church in North America consecrated in Boston USA in November 2016.

⁴² The second hierarch of the Patriarchate of Alexandria to be consecrated outside Egypt was the current Metropolitan of Nairobi, Makarios Tillyrides, a Cypriot living in Kenya since 1977, who was consecrated on 25/7/1992 as the Bishop of Riruta, at Saint Makarios seminary chapel in Riruta-Nairobi Kenya, and was then made the Assistant Bishop of the Metropolis of Kenya and Irinoupolis. He was elevated to the level of Metropolitan in November 2001 and sent to Zimbabwe until 2002 when he returned to Kenya up to date.

⁴³ Ngethe 2019.

reinforced. According to Rev. John Ngethe and Rev. Peter Michara, the defrocking was connected to the 1974 national elections in Kenya.⁴⁴

There were two candidates for the local seat of Member of Parliament within Dagoretti, an Orthodox Christian Dr Johnstone Muthiora, a first cousin to Fr Councilor John Ngethe, and a non-Orthodox who was the seating MP, Dr Njoroge Mungai. Dr Njoroge Mungai, a freedom fighter, was highly friendly to the Orthodox, and was a first cousin and personal doctor to President Jomo Kenyatta. Because the Orthodox Christians constituted the majority of voters within the Dagoretti constituency, whoever they accepted was almost an automatic winner. Dr Muthiora was very popular with his fellow Orthodox clergy and laity, and especially Bishop George and thus seemed like an automatic winner. In the process, President Kenyatta intervened and requested his friend, Bishop George, to support his relative Dr Njoroge Mungai, and thus Bishop George started campaigning for Dr Njoroge Mungai, winning to his side only one clergyman Rev. Eleftherios Ndwaru and a few lay people. All other clergy and lay people were strongly behind the former favourite candidate Dr Muthiora. As a leader of all these clergy and lay people, Bishop George was highly embarrassed and took offense. The local councilor Rev. John Ngethe, the then Attorney General Charles Njonjo, and the Vice President Daniel Moi, supported Dr Muthiora vehemently.

This contest was also about who would become the next President of Kenya, after the sickly and aged Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. The seating MP of Dagoretti, Dr Njoroge Mungai, was pushing to be the next president, while the seating Vice President, Daniel Moi with the help of the then Attorney General, Charles Njonjo, was seeking for the same position. Thus, the attorney general and the vice president funded Dr Muthiora to shake down the popularity of Dr Njoroge Mungai locally, which would make him lose his ministerial position and national popularity. Dr Muthiora won, and Bishop George's candidate thus lost, to his great disappointment. Dr Muthiora died a year after in a very suspect way similar to another MP, JM Kariuki, who had died a week earlier.⁴⁵ This did not help matters, for the supporters of Dr Muthiora felt cheated by those of Dr Njoroge Mungai, who would later reclaim the seat.

The clergy who supported Dr Muthiora, among them being those who had opposed Bishop George's consecration, realized they could use this political hostility to overturn things against Bishop George. Our two

⁴⁴ Michara 2019; Ngethe 2019.

⁴⁵ Ngotho 2019.

informants, Reverends Peter Michara and John Ngethe, together with nine others, Dimitrios Kinyanjui, Ioanikios Gachau, Peter Wangige, Eleftherios Wainaina, Chrysostomos Kagwima, Paul Nyore, Paul Kagucia, Ephantus Kamiaraho, and Gerasimos Gachumi, wrote a letter to Patriarch Nicholas VI through Metropolitan Frumentios in 1978. In the letter they highlighted how Bishop George was wrongly consecrated and a terrible bishop who did not obey the local Metropolitan and who did Protestant services within the Orthodox Church. The local Metropolitan, Frumentios Nassios (d. 1982), who had consecrated and let Bishop George operate freely,⁴⁶ is said to have tried to stop them, knowing most of these were false accusations, but they could not listen. The clergy rather urged him with other lay leaders and clergymen to take it to the level of defrocking Bishop George.⁴⁷

According to Rev. Michara and Rev. Ngethe, Patriarch Nicholas and Metropolitan Frumentios arranged for a meeting with all these clergy and Bishop George in Nairobi, but Bishop George did not show up, giving the same clergy more time to smear his name. Considering the Patriarchate would not accept the idea of independency and autonomy, which Bishop George kept pushing for, and the fact that Bishop George did not fully understand his place as an assistant bishop, for he did a lot of things without consulting the Metropolitan, not forgetting his refusal to meet the Patriarch, Metropolitan Frumentios easily agreed to go with the supposed accusations. The Metropolitan revealed to the involved clergy and laity, as attested by Rev. Michara and Rev. Ngethe, how he would make Bishop George agree to go to Alexandria for the synodal meeting by lying to him that he would be elevated to the status of Metropolitan and henceforth would be independent of any Greek bishop. Bishop George fell for it.

Thus due to these contextual and theological issues that created a rift between Bishop George, the Kenyan clergy and essentially the Alexandrian hierarchy, this Kenyan bishop was defrocked on 30th November 1979.⁴⁸ This

⁴⁶ Yannoulatos 2015, 127.

⁴⁷ Tillyrides 2019. Cf. lower picture on Orthodox Archbishopric of Nairobi 2009, 305, for the picture of some of the clergy and lay people that came to see Metropolitan Frumentios right before he took the proposal to defrock Bishop George to the synod. The words the Metropolitan wrote behind the original photo explains the purpose of the gathering.

⁴⁸ Metropolitan Frumentios is said to be the only hierarch that served Kenya who during his ten years tenure only ordained one bishop and one priest in East Africa, while other hierarchs did more. He was noted as extremely strict, and quick to react, and thus most Africans opted to stay away from him and rather dealt with Bishop George or his Vicar General Fr John Ngethe.

was after the Holy Synod led by Pope and Patriarch Nicholas VI Varelopoulos together with 13 Metropolitans sat in Egypt and resolved the same, with only two of the youngest hierarchs, Ireneos of Accra and Petros of Aksum, dissenting. In his response letter on this subject Bishop George took the verdict as a biased preconceived verdict, where he was wrongly accused in Greek, a language he could not understand or respond in, by a synod full of Greek hierarchs that did not understand the contextual mission matters he was accused of.

According to Rev. Michara and Rev. Ngethe, Bishop George had not done all the things they wrote in the letter, but they had three authentic reasons that pushed them to write against him. First, Bishop George abused them openly in front of the congregants and even their families, which brought much shame to them. Although such language was common among the aged in society like Bishop George, they were not comfortable hearing that within the church context and especially in front of their wives and children. Secondly, Bishop George repeatedly told the lay people that these clergy were too hungry for money, another aspect these clergy were not happy with, seeking to know where this hierarch wanted them to get their salaries from, while they were not as rich as he was. A third reason, which pushed this clergy to the edge, was the common trend of Bishop George working very closely with the elderly lay people to run the church, without much involvement of these clergy. When Bishop George, who was extremely busy, was not available, such council of elders led the church business without consulting these younger clergy. For them this cultural trend was diminishing their strength as clergy in the parishes.

These clergy, according to Rev. Ngethe and Rev. Michara, would only later realize the implications of falsely accusing Bishop George, and ask for forgiveness from Bishop George who gladly gave it to them in 1985, asking them to end the existing conflict and protect the AOCK lands and resources from the Greeks, for to him, the battle for autonomy was to never finished until the Kenyans would get it.⁴⁹

Most of the Kenyan faithful could not understand why Bishop George, their founding father and shepherd, was defrocked. They actually considered him a “victim of white colonialists.”⁵⁰ As Rev. Michara explains, it is the use of the same words used during the colonial times, *Muthungu* (white man here

⁴⁹ Ngethe 2019; Fr Michara 2019a.

⁵⁰ Yannoulatos, 2015, 130.

referring to the Greek hierarchs) and *Mundu Muiru* (black man here referring to Bishop George), which fueled the schism and subsequent conflicts in Kenya. Considering the Orthodox Christians were in the national *Mau Mau* liberation movement where the same terms were used, such was the beginning of a battle cry and thus an internal conflict ensured.

After his defrocking, some Kenyans, who Bishop George had sent to study and were now living in Greece, helped him rebel further and later join one Old Calendar schismatic group from Greece known as the *Holy Synod in Resistance*, where he was to be given the title of Metropolitan, which he had been falsely promised by Metropolitan Frumentios. In fact, when Bishop George returned to Kenya as promised, he told the Kenyans that he got the title of Metropolitan, although he was still waiting for his application to be reviewed by the Old Calendarists. This new synod elevated him to the rank of Metropolitan on 8th August 1984 at Saint Irene New York, USA, and he since held the title Archbishop of Kenya, holding this title as the first one in history. In the beginning, only a few priests and parishes who were involved in the defrocking were not with Archbishop George, but after Archbishop Anastasios's many efforts to reunite the Kenyan church, the Western Kenya clergy, as well as those of Nyeri and Laikipia returned to the Alexandrian side. Although Archbishop George's side was mainly holding churches within the central region of Kenya, he had the most churches and members, compared to that of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, even with his side being considered officially schismatic and uncanonical.

The original idea of bringing Archbishop Daniel William Alexander to Kenya was to have him ordain a few Kenyans who would then henceforth continue with the local church unaided. Thus, when the Kenyans joined the Greek tradition, the same mentality was always on focus, that one day when some of them became bishops they would be left to run their church, independently from the Greeks. Bishop George, who had not studied much Eastern Orthodox theology, did not understand or probably never cared about the ecclesiology of what a local church meant and what this meant for a diocese and a diocesan bishop. He and Bishop Christophoros Spartas continued with their demand for independency and autonomy, especially after their episcopal elections in 1972 and consecrations in 1973.⁵¹ In fact, it was Bishop Anastasios Yannulatos, who had been sent to East Africa to help heal

⁵¹ cf. Yannulatos, 2015, 127, 143.

the schism, and the death of Bishop Christoforos that made the independency agenda not to develop much in Uganda.⁵²

Assessing this situation as the acting Archbishop of Kenya (1981–1991), Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos explains that the fact that Metropolitan Frumentios was too reluctant to serve the Africans had given Bishop George excessive power in leadership. This had led the locals to believe that Bishop George was the hierarch of the blacks and Metropolitans Frumentios of the three hundred whites (200 Greeks from Greece and Cyprus, and 100 Lebanese) in Kenya.⁵³ This thickened the plot of independency and autonomy, which Bishop George always wanted since the formation of the AOCK.⁵⁴

This was further reinforced by the existence of two church registrations, the African Orthodox Church of Kenya first registered in 1933 and subsequently in 1965 after independence, which was led by Bishop George, and the Holy Archbishopric of Irinoupolis (reg. 1968) led by the sitting Metropolitan.⁵⁵ Bishop George used this situation to declare constantly that the AOCK had no relations with the Patriarchate of Alexandria, and that it was always independent since 1933 when it was first registered.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the Patriarchate of Alexandria, according to Archbishop Anastasios hastily defrocked Bishop George, without first investigating, what he later came to note as defrocking provoked by some clergy who did not like Bishop George, besides the incompetency of the then Metropolitan Frumentios to understand his own clergy.⁵⁷ Archbishop Anastasios tried his best to bring back Bishop George to the jurisdiction of Alexandria, but the fact that he had the title Archbishop, had a large flock that followed him, kept ordaining and celebrating as a hierarch, and his goal of wanting autonomy, made it impossible.⁵⁸ On this matter, Archbishop Anastasios gives the best way forward to such challenges, including teaching Orthodox theology seriously in mission lands, producing contextualized constitutions for Orthodox churches in the mission, ordaining local clergy and hierarchs as soon as they are ready, and studying the contexts of the mission.⁵⁹ If all these had been done, he believes, there would never have been a schism in Kenya.

⁵² Yannoulatos, 2015, 123, 142–143.

⁵³ Yannoulatos, 2015, 122, 127.

⁵⁴ Yannoulatos, 2015, 127.

⁵⁵ Yannoulatos, 2015, 126–128.

⁵⁶ Yannoulatos, 2015, 129.

⁵⁷ Yannoulatos, 2015, 129.

⁵⁸ Yannoulatos, 2015, 132–136.

⁵⁹ Yannoulatos, 2015, 134–139.

Demise and lifting

After having been diagnosed with diabetes for some years, Bishop George became very weak in his old age, but never stopped ministering to his spiritual children. On his deathbed, he forgave and embraced the clergymen who had falsely accused him, as confirmed by Rev. Ngethe and Rev. Michara. He emphasized to all Kenyans that he would always have one eye open, even in his grave, to look and punish whoever tries to destroy the church he so diligently worked for. Bishop George departed from this life on 27th July 1987 at 5:30 pm at the age of 82 years. True to his words, not even the morticians could close his right eye, which was fully open during the burial. Bishop George was buried at the parish of Saints Raphael, Nicholas and Irene in Thogoto-Kiambu, Central Kenya, where he had proposed to be buried before his demise. The service was led by his successor Metropolitan Niphon Kiggundu, assisted by the president of his new synod; the *Holy Synod in Resistance*,⁶⁰ Metropolitan Cyprian Kutsumbas of Oropos & Fili in Greece, who was accompanied by the England-born Archimandrite Fr Ambrosios Adrian Baird (later the Bishop of Methone from 1993).⁶¹ Bishop George's tomb remains a historic monument for the Orthodox Christians in Kenya, visited by the Orthodox at will, and especially on his annual memorial on 27th July.

On 1st November 2006, the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa under the presidency of Pope and Patriarch Theodoros II Choreftakis and 17 Metropolitans, including Petros of Aksum who dissented in the defrocking synod in 1979, resolved to posthumously lift the 27 years old defrocking of Bishop George, after a proposal by Metropolitan Makarios Tillyrides of Kenya. Thus, an official Tomos no. 1524 was issued to mark this historic occurrence. In fact, this act of good faith brought many of the schismatic clergy and laity of Kenya back under the See of Saint Mark, which they had left after the defrocking of Bishop George.

⁶⁰ The *Holy Synod in Resistance* was founded in 1979 and ceased to be on 18th March 2014 after joining with the *Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece*, which is currently the largest Greek Old Calendarists group in Greece.

⁶¹ cf. Eastern Christianity and Politics 2014, 397.

Ministry legacy

Bishop George Gathuna is considered the father of Orthodoxy in Kenya not only for having become the first indigenous Kenyan Orthodox priest (1935) and hierarch (1972), but also for being the first in some many areas as well as spearheading many substantial activities of the church that are visible to the present. Most importantly, he is considered a father due to his ministry in almost every corner of the country and leading the Kenyans into the first Orthodox community and the Greek tradition. This ministry included, converting and baptizing most of the first Orthodox faithful of Kenya, initiating most of the first Kenyan parishes, as well as getting lands from the relevant government bodies for the church. Even more memorable, Bishop George mentored the first priests in Kenya, and led them to expand the Kenyan church to considerable extents. He also contextualized many activities to fit the locals, contributed highly in theological education, initiated women and translation ministries as well as resource mobilization strategies.

Evangelization and converting others

One exceptional ministry of Bishop George was that of converting and baptizing most of the first Orthodox faithful of Kenya, initiating most of the first Kenyan parishes, as well as getting lands from the relevant government bodies for the church. We have two forms of evangelization in the AOCK as early as the formative days of the Orthodox faith in Kenya. Some people having heard of Orthodoxy and some having experienced it in Kiambu and Nairobi invited Bishop George (then Fr Arthur) to bring them the Orthodox tradition. A good example of this are the Luhyas of Western Kenya, among them the Bunyore, Maragori and Ebuyangu residents who invited him in 1942⁶² and 1946,⁶³ and Bishop George henceforth came often to spread the gospel in all Luhya towns. When the *Mau Mau* national liberation challenges could not allow him as a liberation movement leader, he invited Fr Obadiah Basajjitaloh of Uganda to continue with the evangelization from the Ugandan side, a process that eventually brought the Luos and Nandis into Orthodoxy.

⁶² Nganda, 2009, 206–215.

⁶³ Rosberg & Nottingham 1966, 326; cf. Akunda 2010.

As a priest, Bishop George is said to have spread Orthodoxy alone in most parts of Kenya. In his conversion ministry, Bishop George is noted to have converted many through his door-to-door evangelization, where he picked one of the respectable and prominent families of a village. He would teach them what Orthodox Christianity was all about and explained what was acceptable from their African way of life and what was not. The catechism class went continuously until he would win this family, then using their place invite the rest of the village to join Orthodoxy. It was such evangelistic methods that made him convert five members from the famous Kenyan tycoon, Njenga Karume's family in 1942, having visited them since 1939.⁶⁴ This is how the Orthodox Church was established in most areas that formerly had no Orthodox Christians in those early years.

Contextualization

Contextualization is at the core of the formation of the Orthodox Church in Kenya. This was essential because the AOCK was formed by individuals who wanted the liberation of the Africans from a European Christianity that demonized the African culture, thus restricting all Africans from involving themselves with the African cultural ways.⁶⁵ Bishop George became a strong proponent of inculturation, teaching the Africans how to distinguish and avoid pagan and syncretistic tendencies, by worshiping in the Orthodox way, while all other ways of their life remained African. This is the very fundamental reason Orthodoxy in Kenya grew and was embraced in the early days.

A good example is how Bishop George brought in the African-Gikuyu way of leadership and management into the Orthodox administration. He created councils of elders similar to the traditional Gikuyu ones, but instead of just having old men in it he also brought some old women and a few middle-aged men. Everyone in such councils needed to have reached the traditional level and age of leadership as well as personally gone through the traditional ritual that qualified one to be in the council of leadership in the traditional sense. In this way, the locals would see whatever was discussed and decided on in such forums as legitimately binding and worthy of following within and outside the church context. It is such which was replicated in the parish

⁶⁴ Karume 2009, 2–3.

⁶⁵ Githieya 1997, 35–39.

councils around the country. Such a hybrid of Christian and African leadership models liberated each other in a way; the traditional leadership from gender imbalance, and the Christian leadership getting seasoned leaders that brought in younger members who would take over from them in future after their on the job training.

Nevertheless, these leadership aspects were part of the issues genuinely raised by the clergy who were for Bishop George's defrocking. They accused their bishop of excessively using the cultural ways, for it lowered the power of the clergy in church administration, giving the older lay people excessive power in the community and in the church as well.

Joining the Greek Orthodox tradition

It was Bishop George and Bishop Christophoros Reuben Mukasa Sebanja Spartas of Uganda, who through Archimandrite Fr Nicodemos Sarikas, helped the East Africans join the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa, a process that started in the late 1930s and culminated in 1946 with their official reception.⁶⁶ This was because after a little digging, Fr Arthur and Fr Spartas did not trust the apostolic succession and religious authenticity of the American-based African Orthodox Church, which they were at first part of.⁶⁷ Thus they sought to join a church with authentic apostolic roots.

This move led to some of the adherent of the first grouping of the African Orthodox Church in Kenya led by all other Kenyan clergymen ordained by Archbishop Daniel William Alexander of South Africa, except Bishop George, to split on 27th June 1937,⁶⁸ for not wanting to join the Greek Orthodox Church. The ones who refused to join Orthodoxy were mainly from Eastern Kiambu, Muranga and Nyeri Counties, and they thus formed new churches; the Independent African Orthodox Church,⁶⁹ and the African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa (AIPCA);⁷⁰ the precursors of the Akorino Church and the African Independent Pentecostal Church of Kenya (AIPCK). The Orthodox has minimal presence in the noted three regions in

⁶⁶ Welbourn 1961, 89.

⁶⁷ Githieya 1997, 106; Welbourn 1961, 80.

⁶⁸ Rosberg & Nottingham 1966, 130; cf. Thiani 2018, 29–34.

⁶⁹ Githieya 1997, 104.

⁷⁰ Githieya 1997, 103.

Kenya to this day due to this decision. If not for Bishop George, there would not have been this initial chance of the Kenyans to join the canonical Greek Orthodox Church under the Patriarchate of Alexandria.

Theological education

Before his ordination, Bishop George helped educate the very first Kenyan Orthodox clergy while under his tutor Archbishop Daniel William Alexander from early 1936 to late 1937 in Gituamba, Muranga County, right before they were transferred to Waitthaka in Nairobi County where they finished their coursework.⁷¹ This first-generation seminary had offered a mixed Eastern Orthodox and Western Christian theology. The first cohort of this school produced two priests, Rev. Arthur and Rev. Philip Kiande of Nyeri County, as well as eight deacons from Muranga County. Except for Rev. Arthur, all the other students formed the breakaway church as noted above.⁷²

Bishop George, having separated with his colleagues from Muranga County who owned the Gituamba Seminary, initiated the second-generation seminary; Saint Paul's senior seminary, in Waitthaka-Dagoretti (*Gwa Kabuu*), where he would train his leadership team and future clergy, now that he was alone. This school was erected exactly where Dagoretti High School is at present. He would also initiate the Saint Paul's Orthodox Junior Seminary at Waitthaka, Nairobi West in 1965, where locals were taught Eastern Orthodox theology in a high school joint syllabus similar to the ecclesiastical high schools in Greece. Due to his many responsibilities, Bishop George mainly did the administration work of the seminary, including sourcing for teachers, locally and internationally. He thus left the teaching to his other colleagues including two Ugandan clergymen; Rev. Obadiah Bassajakitaro and Rev. Emmanuel Mulunga, who taught theology together with some visiting lecturers from Greece and Reader Anesti Anderi from Western Kenya. The later Metropolitan Niphon Niccassios Kiggundu Magu, and the later Rev. Moses Ngugi taught humanities and language courses, while some other Kenyan and Tanzanian teachers taught the science courses. Some graduates of the prior senior seminary, Rev. Peter Wangige and Rev. John Ngethe, taught teleturgics and served as the Chaplains and Rectors of the junior seminary. Bishop George

⁷¹ Nganda 2009, 192–195; Rosberg & Nottingham 1966, 129.

⁷² Orthodox Archbishopric of Nairobi/ Kenya 2016, 49.

also raised the needed financial resources and the needed items locally from the parishes, until Rev. Chrysostomos Papasarantopoulos, a citizen of Greece, came to help raise most of the finances that helped transform highly the living standards of this seminary and that of the seminarians. Rev. Chrysostom would later leave after he was unable to work with the local Metropolitan, Archbishop Frumentios Nassios. These Saint Paul's earlier senior and later junior seminaries in Waithaka (*Gwa Kabuu*) in Nairobi County served the church from 1964 until 1982.⁷³ It took three years to graduate from the senior seminary, which received high school graduates, and four years for the junior seminary students who did a hybrid of high school and Orthodox theological education.

This second-generation Seminary would come to a halt after His Beatitude Archbishop Makarios III of Cyprus, who also doubled as the President of Cyprus, visited Waithaka in 1970. His Beatitude offered to help Rev. Arthur build a new upgraded seminary, to replace the existing mud-walled and thatched-roof one. To His Beatitude, the structures of the Waithaka Seminary were similar to a chicken house in Cyprus, and thus he felt the need to offer a construction fit to educate Africans that wanted to serve as future theologians and clergymen of the Orthodox faith. Archbishop Makarios reiterated the same sentiments in July 1970 when Pope & Patriarch Nicholas VI Varelopoulos of Alexandria paid him a visit in Cyprus, adding that he would also offer human resource and finances to the new seminary. Archbishop Makarios promised this would be possible, if only some suitable place to build the same would be found. Bishop George, who also worked in the Nairobi City Council Assembly, together with the local Member of Parliament Dr Njoroge Mungai who also served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, plus the then Mayor of Nairobi, Margaret Wambui Kenyatta (daughter to President Kenyatta), found some community land in Riruta, a village close to Waithaka. The land was owned by the family of the Paramount Chief Kinyanjui Gathirimu who wanted a community project set on the same premise, which the Orthodox Church promised to add to the seminary. Once the land was processed and fully owned by the Orthodox Church, His Beatitude Archbishop Makarios III of Cyprus fulfilled his promise and built a new magnificent third-generation seminary, later named after the financial

⁷³ The first seminary was at Gwa Kabuu, exactly where Dagoretti High School is at present, and the second seminary was at the same place Saint Paul Orthodox Church, Kagira is built at present.

donor Archbishop Makarios III, as well as a technical institute named after the land donor Paramount Chief Kinyanjui.

This third-generation Orthodox Seminary and its adjacent Technical Institute had the foundation stone blessed and laid on 22nd March 1971 by H.B. Archbishop Makarios, who also visited the ongoing work in September 1972 and in August 1974 when he spoke to the new Archbishop of East Africa, Metropolitan Frumentios Nassios, about opening the two schools in January 1975. Although the construction was fully finished by June 1974 and entirely furnished by mid-1977, in preparation for the official opening, this did not happen due to the 20 July–18 August 1974 Turkish occupation of Cyprus, and the later death of H.B. Archbishop Makarios in August 1977 in Cyprus.⁷⁴

The two schools opened their doors officially in 1982 under H.G. Bishop Professor Anastasios Yannoulatos of Greece, who was the acting Archbishop of East Africa (1981–1991). At first the two schools served only the Orthodox Christians in Kenya, but later opened their doors to other East African Orthodox students for theology, and the rest of the world for the technical school. The financial donor also sent one Dr Andreas Tillyrides from Limassol in Cyprus, who he had sponsored take graduate studies in France, Oxford and Belgium, to come assist initiate higher theological studies in the newly formed seminary. Bishop George helped bring in the needed first students of the seminary. This Dr Andreas Tillyrides would later be consecrated on 25th July 1992 as Bishop Makarios of Riruta, to serve as an assistant bishop of Kenya and is currently the Metropolitan of Nairobi. According to his statements, the later Metropolitan Makarios Tillyrides who visited Bishop George every Thursday, highly relied on this African hierarch on understanding the Orthodox mission in Africa as well as getting seminarians annually.

Starting from 1995, under Pope and Patriarch Petros VII Papapetrou, through the influence of the then General Dean, Bishop Dr Makarios Tillyrides of Riruta, this Seminary became the main theological school for the entire Greek Orthodox Church in Africa, a status it has kept till today. The Orthodox Patriarchal Ecclesiastical School: Archbishop Makarios III of Cyprus Seminary, as it is now known, have had students from all corners of Africa, including some students of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church who attended this seminary at its initial stage.

This only goes to show how instrumental Bishop George is been on matters theological education in Kenya as well as the entire continent of Africa.

⁷⁴ Yannoulatos 2015, 145.

For through the foundational work of Bishop George, the current theological school for the Greek Orthodox Church in Africa exists. A simple seed planted by Bishop George to start a seminary for fellow Kenyans who would help him minister in the vast lands of Kenya, would through the assistance of Archbishop Makarios III of Cyprus become the light of Orthodoxy for the entire continent. This endeavor may even be broadened further when the current initiatives of the Orthodox Church of Finland through its mission arm, *Filantropia*, succeeds in assisting this third-generation seminary to enter their fourth-generation status and offer accredited degrees.

Translations

The first translations of liturgical and theological books for the Orthodox Christians in Kenya were done using English liturgical and theological books from American books bought in 1935 through Archbishop Daniel William Alexander of South Africa.⁷⁵ Bishop George as a translator of Archbishop Alexander at the time was also the chief translator of books for the Kenyans. The translations came from English texts bought from the American Orthodox churches; mainly Greek and Antiochian, and later from the Greek Archdiocese of Thyatira and Great Britain given by the Patriarchate of Alexandria in the 1940s.⁷⁶

The first foreign missionaries serving at the Saint Paul's Seminary in Waithaka helped translate some of the liturgical services from Greek books, through reading and dictating the same to the seminary students in English. Such missionaries included Rev. Nicodemos Sarikas of Asia Minor in the 1930s, as well as Rev. Obadiah Bassajakitalo of Uganda and Rev. Chrysostomos Pappasantopoulos of Greece in the 1960–1970s.

The Kenyans would also later print a few liturgical services, catechism, and extra-liturgical songs books, with the earliest in the early 1970s. These were mainly done by Peter Kahuho Muchai (b. 1932), a parishioner of Saint Paul in Waithaka, who worked for the International Air Transport Association (IATA) in Nairobi as a printer. His first printings were basically done illegally at his place of work. In his narration, Kahuho used to go early to work, print the service books, and take the printed papers back home for arrangement

⁷⁵ Nganda 2009, 193.

⁷⁶ Welbourn 1961, 90.

and binding.⁷⁷ He would sell them at a cheap price, for money enough to only buy more printing papers and binding materials, and not for any profit. Some of the most famous of these publications done by the locals include the general catechism book, the Orthros and the Divine Liturgy bound together, and the christening services, burial and matrimony services bound together. The other liturgical translations were initiated by Metropolitan Makarios Tillyrides after he went to Luhya land for a burial and found they only had English texts for the same, a reality he was not used to, having served in areas where the translations of the time of Bishop George were done. On return to Nairobi, he ordered that the seminarians make translations for their tribes and thus many translations existing in Kenya and other African countries were produced by the seminarians.

Women in ministry

Bishop George's ministry used many women in church leadership as well as the liturgical life. While it was easy to have women in senior church management and leadership positions within the administration, what remained unique was the way he involved them in the liturgical life of the church. It is during the time of Bishop George, as a priest and later as hierarch, that women, married or widowed, that were mature and deeply knowledgeable in the Orthodox faith and the scriptures, were informally trained and given similar preacher's IDs like the ordained male clergy. The card had the respective woman minister's photo, names, their designated spiritual responsibilities and the authorizing entity signature (Bishop George's). Such women ministers would lead the services that did not need an ordained clergy; lead the prayer services, preach and even catechize non-Orthodox in the congregations where the priests were not available. Although the contemporary Orthodox Church worldwide does not have many chances for women in ministry, Kenya has always had women valued for this very reason, integrated in the system by Bishop George. When some women were widowed, Bishop George brought them even closer to ministry by "marrying them to Christ and the Church" as the locals called it. A normal wedding service was done, only that the groom was considered to be the invisible Christ, and from that day such a woman

⁷⁷ Muchai 2019.

would be expected to serve in the altar, clean the sanctuary/altar area, clean the sacred vessels, covers and vestments, handle sacred items for the priest if need be, preach to the people if there was no ordained clergy, among such sacred duties. All Bishop George's contemporaries and generations of clergy after them also followed this trend, which either the bishop or the priests were allowed to do in their parishes.

At the moment this trend of doing a "marriage" without a physical groom has been stopped. Rather, a dedication prayer, which is usually a slightly extended version of the prayer for making a reader, is done on the dedicated widowed women that want to serve the church in an extra way, after which the local bishop takes the woman in the altar place through one altar side door and out the other. Such women ministers get to do the same duties as earlier prescribed under Bishop George. These women almost live like nuns although they are not exact nuns, for they live in their homes and continue with their normal life. The only difference being that these women serve the church in the above described capacity, which they would not have otherwise been allowed to do, and are henceforth expected to live a more revered and morally upright life than before, in addition to the expectation to not be married in the future.

This trend of having women serve in the altar and as preachers is not entirely Bishop George's idea alone, but rather an extension of what Archbishop Daniel William Alexander of South Africa had taught him, only that with Archbishop Daniel, the women who served in such capacity were the wives of the ordained clergy.⁷⁸ Bishop George took this and turned it into a ministry that allowed all faithful women, not just the clergy wives, regardless of whether they were married or widowed, to serve the church. During Bishop George's time, the local priests would also be allowed to dedicate any woman into this ministry. The current practice only allows the widowed old women into this ministry, only when permitted and dedicated by the local hierarch. Such women are currently not given any documents to prove this and their work entails only cleaning the altar and nothing further. Although the number of women serving in such a capacity in Kenya is reduced, it remains a Bishop George's legacy, for it is not found anywhere else in the Orthodox world.

Nevertheless, this is similar to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa 16th November 2016 so called revived deaconesses'

⁷⁸ African Orthodox Church Archives, Box 8 Folder 78.

ministry.⁷⁹ Since this date seven women have received this so called deaconess ministry in Africa; six women from the Democratic Republic of Congo were dedicated on 17th February 2017 and one Australian citizen serving in Sierra Leon on 11th November 2018. Although the Patriarchate of Alexandria agreed to revive the ancient ordination of women in ministry as deaconesses, the Pope and Patriarch Theodoros II Choreftakis seems to have conducted the sub-deacon service to the above-noted women, and they are actually taking the same role as the current Kenyan old widowed women ministers.⁸⁰ The original deaconesses service was conducted in the altar like that of a male deacon, and the deaconesses were to serve exactly like the male deacon,⁸¹ but none of this is so far been seen among the seven women. The women in Alexandria received in this office had their prayers conducted outside the altar, and none serve like a male deacon in the liturgical services.

In Kenya, the news of the deaconesses revival was received with much excitement, but not for long, especially after it was realized that the same principal of selection, responsibility and the service done to the so called deaconesses, was a reality similar to what is been in Kenya since the late 1930s under Bishop George. The revival of the deaconesses for the Orthodox in Africa appears to the Kenyans as a continuation of the legacy of Bishop George. Bishop George thus came long before his time, as his desire for active women ministers in the Greek Orthodox Church is now formally realized, even though not fully.

Resource mobilization

The Orthodox Church under Bishop George was economically self-sustaining in almost all aspects.⁸² All matters pertaining to resource mobilization was done from the local parish and through that the AOCK head office got assistance too. The AOCK used many resource mobilization mechanisms. Such included raising funds through charging for the liturgical services, internal fundraising or fundraising through the harambee method by inviting national and local leaders (Orthodox or not) to come to the church fundraising

⁷⁹ Patriarchate of Alexandria 2009a; 2009b.

⁸⁰ Brian 2017.

⁸¹ Ordination of Women 2013; Chryssavgis 2009; FitzGerald 1999.

⁸² cf. Thiani 2016, 33–34; Kangethe 1981, 386–389.

rallies, requesting for set contributions given by all or the financially abled persons, and asking for assistance from well-off families or individual parishioners, among others. The local monthly contributions expected for an AOCK adherent were mainly KES 5 in the 1960–1980s, and after the demise of Bishop George, the same trend seems to have continued considering that the parishioners gave KES 10 in the 1990s, and KES 100 from year 2000. Some of the contributions raised had a mechanism set through an annual circular to divide amongst the Archbishopric office, the parish, the hierarchs, the priests, the deacons, readers, and altar helpers. This meant that all institutions and the senior or lower order clergy, depending on the service they offered, would receive some form of remuneration. At the same time the priests and deacons were awarded a monthly salary by the parishes they served. Whatever resources came from abroad during the tenure of Bishop George only added to the existing local resources.

Currently, all funds circulating to pay the clergy, run the Archdiocese, and most of the AOCK institutions are funds coming from abroad. This has created a challenge since the European financial crisis in 2011 that highly affected Greece and Cyprus, the main donors and partners contributing most of the finances used in Kenya.

Conclusion and discussion

While Bishop George Arthur Gatungu Gathuna could be termed as one of the most important Orthodox personalities in Kenya, he had his venerable side, but also stands out as a controversial figure in several ways. Amongst the controversial aspects outlined in this study, several other controversies have also been raised in the life of Bishop George as Welbourn has highlighted.⁸³ The AIPCA group that split with the Orthodox in 1937, being purists, accused Bishop George of drinking and smoking, while Bishop Spartas accused him and the Kenyans of excessive mixing of religion and politics. He was also accused of accepting the African traditions taking excessive roots in the faith, bringing a form of syncretism. When he was given a chance to explain himself by Kamuyu wa Kangethe in an interview in January and February 1979, he denied all of these accusations, explaining that the context of his mission was

⁸³ Welbourn 1961, 144–161.

what made some of these seem too much.⁸⁴ Worst of all was his relationship with some of his clergy, which made them force his defrocking, and even worse was his decision to continue ministering and purporting to be a hierarch after this, creating a schism that has lasted to this very day.

From this study, it is also clear that Bishop George's foundational contribution to what the Orthodox Church is become in Kenya and beyond, is a rich legacy that has dictated much of what is done in the Kenya and by extension in some other African nations, through the seminarians of the Patriarchal seminary in Nairobi. Thus he remains an important beam of the Orthodox faith and point of reference to this region even to this very moment.

In memory of his spiritual, leadership, and general development of the church in Kenya, does Bishop George therefore deserve an ecclesial recognition that will go beyond history? While controversies have not stopped other personalities in the past from getting recognized by the church, can the ones of Bishop George be ignored to have him receive an ecclesial recognition? From what has been the defining factor for all ecclesial recognitions in the past, it seems that the Kenyans are the ones to determine what Bishop George is to them when it comes to ecclesial recognition. If favorable, they could do that through popular veneration or have their hierarchs investigate more and if satisfied, propose the kind of recognition they would prefer to the synod of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa for a final resolution. Whether this recognition will be among the already known church recognitions for church founders in different regions, including Apostles or Enlighteners, or whether a new recognition will be needed, such a response can only be given by this holy synod.

On the other hand, it may be that the Kenyan church will not need to offer Bishop George any special ecclesial recognition, but rather take his historic contribution to their church as it stands. Furthermore, they could recognize the need to seek more information about him in history, making this study a beginning. If the historic legacy of Bishop George becomes the choice of Kenyans, it will be important to highlight that the Greek Orthodox hierarchs as well as the clergy and church leaders who served Kenya during Bishop George's lifetime and even after, have ignored or completely forgotten his place in the formation and development of the Orthodox faith in Kenya. More so, they have forgotten how instrumental his legacy is not only in the

⁸⁴ Kangethe 1981, 297–349.

formative stages of the Kenyan church, but also for the current and future existence of this church. Such will need to be reviewed and a deliberate attempt to make clear the history of the AOCK be taken seriously to avoid losing such personalities among other Orthodox figures who may have been overlooked along the way.

It is important to even ask at this point whether what this study has provided is enough to make any of the two hypothetical determinations that this paper has concluded with. A question that is best answered not only by the readers of this study, but more so the adherents of the African Orthodox Church of Kenya, as well as the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa who all of these directly involves. Whatever the decision, maybe a similar study and action should be done for Bishop Christoforos Reuben Sebbanja Ssedimba Mukasa Spartas and Rev. Obadiah Kabanda Basajjakitalo both from Uganda, and Rev. Chrysostomos Papasarantopoulos of Greece, who were instrumental in the formation and development of the Orthodox faith in Uganda and Tanzania respectively, and East Africa as a whole.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Thiani 2018, 30–33.

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Tiivistelmä

Evangelos Thiani, Piispa George Arthur Gatungu Gathunan kirkollisen tunnustamisen kysymys. Kenian afrikkalaisen ortodoksisen kirkon perustaja

Useimmat itsenäiset tai riippumattomat afrikkalaiset kirkot syntyivät, kun afrikkalaiset alkoivat johtaa itse perustamiaankirkkoja kapinoituaan ensin lähetyssaarnaajia vastaan. Näissä kirkoissa ei alkuun ollut pappeja, ja vihkimyksien järjestäminen vaati ponnisteluja. Itsenäisten kirkkojen ensimmäisillä papeilla oli runsaasti työtä, ja kirkkojen menestyminen oli riippuvainen heidän onnistumisestaan. Skotlantilaisten lähetyssaarnaajien johtamasta Keski-Kenian kirkosta irtaantunut ryhmä perusti Kenian afrikkalaisen ortodoksisen kirkon vuonna 1929. Arthur Gatungu Gathuna (sittemmin piispa George) oli Kenian kirkon ensimmäinen pappi. Ortodoksissa perinteessä monia kirkkojen perustajia kunnioitetaan pyhinä. Heitä nimitetään sen alueen apostoleiksi tai valistajiksi, jonne he toivat kristinuskon. Näin ei kuitenkaan ole tapahtunut niiden henkilöiden kohdalla, jotka olivat osallisina ortodoksisuuden tuomiseen Itä-Afrikkaan. Tässä artikkelissa paneudutaan Kenian piispan George A.G. Gathunan toimintaan Kenian ortodoksisen kirkon synnyssä ja muotoutumisessa – elämänvaiheisiin, hengellisyyteen, kiistoihin ja lähetystyöhön sekä hänen työnsä perintöön. Artikkelissa arvioidaan hänen kirkollisen tunnustamisensa perusteita. Piispa George oli keskeinen toimija kanonisen ortodoksisen kirkon perustamisessa ja kehittämisessä Keniassa. Aleksandrian patriarkaatti ei kuitenkaan ole osoittanut häntä kohtaan erityistä kunnioitusta tai ryhtynyt toimiin hänen kanonisoimisekseen.