RUSSIA – AFRICA

Research Article

FIRST YEARS OF ACTIVITY OF THE PATRIARCHIAL EXARCHATE OF AFRICA OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

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Abstract. The decision to establish the Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa in 2021 was of a historical nature and caused wide discussions in the scientific and public environment. In this article, on the basis of unique materials of the Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), as well as those from the personal archive of the author, the prehistory and the first years of the establishment of the Exarchate are shown. For the first time, a number of documents, statistical and factual data on the first years of the existence of this organization are introduced into academic discourse. Readers are presented with the history of the Russian ecclesiastical presence on the African continent, beginning in 1885, when an attempt was made to establish a spiritual mission in Ethiopia, and the creation of parishes in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco in the context of Russian emigration after the revolution of 1917, as well as in other countries of the continent. The author reveals the background of the decision to withdraw from the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Alexandria the parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church located on the African continent, as well as the reaction to it. The historical context of the decision to establish the Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa in 2021 is also given and the first years of its functioning are shown. The article provides a detailed chronology of the ROC's expansion in Africa in 2022–2024. The appendices to the publication include appeals from African clerics, as well as Russians living in Africa, asking to be accepted into the fold of the ROC. Overall, the article presents a comprehensive history of the ROC's activities in Africa over the past three years.

Keywords: Africa, Orthodoxy, African Exarchate, Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate

Conflict of interest: The author declared that there is no conflict of interest.

DOI: 10.31132/2412-5717-2025-70-1-99-125

For citation: Maximov Y.V. (2025). The first years of activity of the Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa of the Russian Orthodox Church. *Journal of the Institute for African Studies.* Vol. 11. № 1. Pp. 99–125. https://doi.org/10.31132/2412-5717-2025-70-1-99-125

INTRODUCTION

The Decision of the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church of December 29, 2021, on the establishment of the Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa (hereinafter referred to as the Exarchate) was the most significant geographical expansion of its church and missionary activities in the past two hundred years, and possibly in its entire history[1]. It has caused a lot of discussion both in the religious, socio-political, and academic environment in Russia [Voronina 2023; Lyapunov 2024; Stenko 2023] and abroad [Kouremenos 2024; Ray 2024; Suslov 2024; Thiani 2024; Voronina, Turianitsa 2022]. Thanks to this decision, the geography of the actual presence of the Russian Orthodox Church (hereinafter referred to as the ROC) in Africa has increased from 4 to 34 countries in just three years, the clergy from 4 to almost 270 people, and the number of parishes and communities from 5 to 350.

However, to date, there has been no academic description of the historical context of the emergence, as well as the first years of the formation of the Exarchate. This article aims to fill this gap. It introduces into academic discourse a number of documents, as well as statistical and factual data, which allow us to form a comprehensive view of the historical context of the creation of the Exarchate and the first three years of its existence: from January 2022 (start of actual operation) until January 2025.

The documents published in the appendices, as well as the statistical data provided in the article, are taken from the archive of the Exarchate and the personal archive of the author.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Since the first centuries of Christianity, there have been two autocephalous Orthodox Churches on the African continent: the Alexandrian and the Carthaginian. The canonical territory of the first of them was Egypt ("May the Bishop of Alexandria govern the churches of Egypt alone"—Canon 2 of the II Ecumenical Council). Later, Ethiopia and Libya were added to the titles of the Patriarch of Alexandria. The second one was located on the territory of modern Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, and, partially, Libya. The first was Greek-speaking, the second was Latin-speaking. Moreover, it was the Bishop of Carthage who bore the title of "Bishop of Africa, Numidia, Tripolitania, and Mauritania."

As a result of the process of Islamization of North Africa, the Carthaginian Church weakened, was jurisdictionally absorbed into the Roman Church, and gradually disappeared. The Alexandrian Orthodox Church (hereinafter referred to as the AOC), although it was severely undermined by the departure of a significant part of believers to Monophysitism (including all of Ethiopia) and also weakened by Islamization, was able to survive as the Church of the Greek communities in Africa.

The area of its ecclesiastical influence before the beginning of the 20th century remained limited to the northeastern part of the continent. Only in 1930, Patriarch Meletios (Metaxakis) of Alexandria claimed the entire continent and changed his title, adding the words "and of all Africa" to it. According to Metropolitan Gregory (Stergiou)

[1] The opening of Orthodox missions in China and America in the 18th century could be called comparable in scale. However, in terms of the number of countries covered, these initiatives seem to be inferior to the African one.

of Cameroon, it was only in 2001, that is, more than seventy years later, that the Patriarch of Constantinople recognized in a special document that the whole of Africa is the canonical territory of the AOC[2]. Analogous decisions by other Churches are not known, and there has been no pan-Orthodox decision on the matter.

If we talk about the Russian church presence on the African continent, the year 1885 can be considered the starting point. Since that year, the permanent parish has made several attempts to establish a spiritual mission in Ethiopia, for which it consistently sent priests there until the beginning of the 20th century. In 1914, a permanent parish of the Russian Church was established in Egypt, based on the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission that moved here from Jerusalem, which was forced to leave the territory of the Ottoman Empire due to the outbreak of the First World War[3].

The third impetus for the emergence of Russian parishes in Africa was the Russian exodus after the revolution, which led to parishes appearing in Tunisia (1920), Algeria (1922), and Morocco (1927) [Sukhov 2016; Sukhov 2019; Yurieva 2005; Panova 2008]. All these parishes were created without any coordination with the AOC and were subordinate to Metropolitan Eulogius (Georgiyevsky), who remained under the jurisdiction of the ROC until 1931, when he transferred to the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. After that, some of the North African parishes moved with him, and some moved to the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR), which had been separated from the ROC since 1927.

On June 14, 1945, during Patriarch Alexy I (Simansky)'s visit to Egypt, the Russian Orthodox community of Alexandria was officially accepted into ecclesiastical communion and under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate. Russian Orthodox communities return to the bosom of the Russian Orthodox Church and become outposts of Russian Orthodoxy, designed to spread its light throughout the world [Patriarch Sergius 1947: 352].

Hieromonk Alexy (Dekhterev), who had transferred from ROCOR, mentioned that Patriarch Alexy I blessed him to commemorate his name during divine services and address his needs to the Patriarch of Alexandria and gave him a Patriarchal Letter of acceptance of the parish "into ecclesiastical communion and under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate" [Shkarovskiy 2022].

Patriarch Christopher II of Alexandria, without objecting directly to the Patriarch of Moscow, called Fr. Alexy after he left and told him that "it was impossible to commemorate two bishops at the liturgy, and therefore it was necessary to commemorate only him, Christopher, and also ordered the church to remove the announcement of reunification with the Moscow Patriarchate" [Shkarovskiy 2022]. Instead, Fr. Alexy was given a certificate of affiliation of the church and the rector himself to the Patriarch of Alexandria.

After receiving a complaint about this from Hieromonk Alexy, the ROC sent a church delegation to Egypt in 1946, which "largely resolved issues concerning the right of Russian churches in North Africa to independent religious life" [Shkarovskiy 2022].

[2] «Εισήγηση περι της εισπήδησεως του Πατριαρχείου Μόσχας στο κανονικό έδαφος του παλαιφάτου Πατριαρχείου Αλεξανδρείας» τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Καμερούν Γρηγορίου. *Orthodoxian News Agency, 2022*. P. 3. https://orthodoxianewsagency.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/%CE%95%CE%99%CE%A3%CE%97%CE%93%CE%97%CE%A3%CE%99%CE%A3-%CE%9A%CE%91%CE%9C%CE%95%CE%A1%CE%9F%CE%A5%CE%9D-%CE%93%CE%A1%CE%97%CE%93%CE%9F%CE%A1%CE%99%CE%9F%CE%A5.pdf (accessed: 24.03.2025)

[3] Archive of the Foreign Policy of Russian Empire (AVP RI). F. 317. Inv. 820/1. Doss. 657. File 129 (rev.). (In Russ.)

In 1948, the Russian church in honor of the holy Life-Giving Trinity in the city of Kuriga (Morocco) was officially reported to be "under the jurisdiction of His Holiness Patriarch Alexy[4]"[5].

ROCOR also intensified its activities in Africa. At the turn of the decade from the 1940s to the 1950s, archpriest Simeon Starikov opened the Russian parish of the Holy Martyr Tryphon in Nairobi, Kenya. Then he moved to South Africa, where in 1952, he established the parish of St. George the Victorious in Kapstadt and the parish of St. Prince Vladimir in Johannesburg. He also served three Orthodox communities in the Belgian Congo (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo): the Holy Protection Church in Bukawa, as well as communities in the cities of Jadotville and Elisabethville. At the same time, in Morocco, Archpriest Mitrofan Znosko nurtured four ROCOR communities in Casablanca, and an entire bishop was sent to Tunisia to develop church life and build a temple.

It is worth quoting the words of Metropolitan Anastasy (Gribanovsky), the then primate of ROCOR, from his report at the Council of Bishops in 1953:

"Having arrived [in Tunisia], His Grace Panteleimon established church life there. He was highly respected by the authorities, and thanks to this, our community was provided with a good site for building a church... and good relations with the Greeks were established there. The Patriarch of Alexandria initially protested against the appointment of our bishop to North Africa and claimed that our communities there should be subordinate to him. We had to point out very firmly to him our right to lead the religious life of our flock and point out to him that the title of Patriarch of All Africa, which he assumed after the Great War, was unknown to the Russian Church. However, we have agreed that, as a sign of the unity of the Churches, our clergy in Africa should commemorate the name of the Patriarch of Alexandria. Before the departure of His Grace Panteleimon from Africa, the patriarch acknowledged that he had not violated the holy rules in any way and no longer objected to the appointment of His Grace Nathanael on the same principles. Some attempt to subjugate our priest was also made by the metropolitan of Johannesburg. However, Prot. Simeon Starikov did not give up his position, and we wrote a letter to the Patriarch, defending for Fr. Starikov the same position as that of our clergy in other parts of Africa"[6].

Thus, in the post-war period, both ROCOR and the ROC had their parishes in Africa, which belonged to their ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The attempts of the Patriarch of Alexandria to completely subjugate them were resolutely rejected, and his claims to the entire territory of Africa were openly challenged. This continued until the end of the 20th century. On December 29, 1998, the Holy Synod of the ROC decided to "Establish an Orthodox parish of the Moscow Patriarchate on the territory of the Republic of South Africa ... on the basis of a corresponding agreement with His Beatitude Peter, Patriarch of Alexandria."[7] Although an agreement with the AOC is indicated, the parish itself is designated as a parish of the ROC in Africa, and not as a Russian-speaking parish of the AOC, to which the ROC simply sends its priest (as was the case, for example, in South Korea).

[4] His Holiness Patriarch Alexy I of the Russian Orthodox Church (1945–1970)

[5] Hegumen Mitrofan. (1948). The Orthodox parish in the city of Kuriga (Morocco). *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. 1948. №. 4. P. 53. (In Russ.)

[6] Report "The Life of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia During the Inter-Council Period of 1950–1953." *The Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia*. (In Russ.). https://sinod.ruschurchabroad.org/Arh%20Sobor%201953%20Doklad%20m%20Anastasiya.htm (accessed: 30.03.2025)

[7] Decisions of the Holy Synod. *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate.* 1999. № 1. P. 17. (In Russ.).

RELATIONS WITH THE PATRIARCHATE OF ALEXANDRIA

By the beginning of the 21st century, a practice evolved whereby two patriarchs (Moscow and Alexandria) were commemorated in Russian African parishes, but the parishes themselves started to be considered under the jurisdiction of the AOC. Russian priests coordinated their activities with the closest bishops of the AOC, and the latter perceived the Russian parishes as integrated into their dioceses. The situation was similar with Romanian and Bulgarian churches in South Africa, as well as Serbian churches in South Africa and Botswana.

This church unity was disrupted on November 8, 2019, when Patriarch Theodoros II of Alexandria recognized the schismatic "Orthodox Church of Ukraine," which was regarded by the ROC as a hostile and uncanonical move. In response, on December 26, 2019, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church recognized the impossibility of commemorating the name of Patriarch Theodoros of Alexandria in diptychs, as well as continuing prayerful and Eucharistic communion with him and with those hierarchs of the Alexandrian Orthodox Church who supported or would support in the future the legalization of the Ukrainian schism.

Later, the Church of Alexandria responded with similar measures. On January 12, 2022, the Synod of the AOC expressed solidarity with Patriarch Theodoros's actions in recognizing the OCU [8], and on November 22, 2022, it decided to suspend the commemoration of Patriarch Kirill's name during divine services.

The act of Patriarch Theodoros, who previously supported the canonical Church of Ukraine, put the Russian Church in a difficult position. She repeatedly warned her children against communion with the schismatics, and now the laity she baptized and the priests she sent to Africa would be forced against their will to enter into communion with the schismatics through prayer and Eucharistic communion with the Patriarch of Alexandria, who recognized this schismatic group.

Therefore, at the same meeting on December 26, 2019, the Synod of the ROC also decided to "Withdraw the parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church located on the African continent from the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, giving them a stavropegial status."[9] Thus, the jurisdiction of the ROC in Africa was restored. It includes Russian parishes in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and South Africa.

At the same time, Patriarch Theodoros's decision to recognize the OCU met with a mixed reaction within the AOC itself. Already in December 2019, an open letter was published from 27 African priests from Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and Zambia to the Patriarch of Alexandria asking him to reconsider the decision [10]. The subsequent ecclesiastical punishments against some of the signatories only increased the tension and fueled the desire of many African priests to transfer to the Russian Orthodox Church. They believed that they could be accepted in the same way as the Russian priests serving in Africa were accepted.

It is worth noting that it was African priests who proposed the idea of creating an African exarchate of the ROC. As confirmation, I cite a letter from a Kenyan priest dated November 12, 2019. (Appendix 1). Petitions have been received from dozens of clergy of

[8] Kalmoukos Th. The Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Alexandria Speaks Regarding Russia's Coup. *The National Herald.* 21.01.2022. https://thenationalherald.com/the-holy-synod-of-the-patriarchate-of-alexandria-speaks-regarding-russias-coup/ (accessed: 24.03.2025)

[9] Resolutions of the Holy Synod. *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate.* 2020. № 1. Pp. 10–11. (In Russ.).

[10] An open letter from the priests of the Patriarchate of Alexandria. 17.12.2019. *Pravoslavie.RU.* (In Russ.). https://pravoslavie.ru/126439.html (accessed: 24.03.2025)

the AOC asking for their admission to the Russian Church. Specifically, in January 2020, five collective appeals were sent to Patriarch Kirill of Moscow from the priests of the Patriarchate of Alexandria. In particular:

on January 16, the petition of 42 priests from Kenya,
on January 19, the petition of 9 priests from Madagascar,
on January 22, the petition of 13 priests from Tanzania,
on January 25, the petition of 4 priests from Uganda,
on January 30, the petition from 14 priests from Nigeria.

A total of 82 people from five African countries. The text of one of these appeals is given as an example (Appendix 2).

One of the bishops of the AOC, the retired Metropolitan Panteleimon (Lampadarios) of Antinoe, also publicly criticized the Patriarch's decision: "The decision of the Ecumenical and Alexandrian Patriarchates regarding the recognition of the autocephaly of the 'Orthodox Church of Ukraine' is uncanonical and contradicts the sacred canons of the Orthodox Church. Unfortunately, this decision has created more problems not only in Ukraine but throughout the Orthodox world, especially in Africa… As for the priests of Tanzania who want to join the Russian Orthodox Church, this is a matter that they must decide for themselves. The only way to overcome this conflict is the true repentance of Patriarchs Bartholomew and Theodoros and Archbishop Hieronymus of Athens. They must withdraw their non-canonical decisions and restore peace and unity of the Church."[11]

For more than a year and a half, the Russian Church had not taken a decision on the petitions of African priests, trying to avoid deepening the schism. However, on August 13, 2021, Patriarch Theodoros of Alexandria entered into direct Eucharistic communion and concelebration with the head of the OCU, which was perceived in the ROC as an escalation of the schism on the part of the AOC. After that, the Synod of the ROC, at a meeting on September 24, 2021, made the following resolution: "Patriarch Theodoros of Alexandria... further deepens the schism between our Churches. Considering the above and taking into account the numerous appeals of the clergy of the Orthodox Church of Alexandria to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia with a request to be accepted under the omophorion of the Moscow Patriarchate, to instruct His Grace Archbishop Leonid of Vladikavkaz and Alania to submit proposals to the Holy Synod after a thorough study of the received appeals."[12]

Archbishop Leonid unofficially visited Tanzania in November 2021, where he met with African priests from a number of countries. The relevance of applications received in 2020 and later was also checked. As a result, the Synod of the ROC, at a meeting on December 29, 2021, after hearing the report of Archbishop Leonid, decided:

"To accept 102 clergymen of the Patriarchate of Alexandria from eight African countries into the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church, according to the petitions submitted. To form the Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa within the North African and South African Dioceses."[13]

Archbishop Leonid (Gorbachev) was appointed the first exarch of Africa with the title "of Klin." On January 7, 2022, he was elevated to the rank of metropolitan.

[11] "The only way to overcome the conflict is the true repentance of Patriarchs Bartholomew and Theodoros." 13.10.2021. *The Chrysma Center*. (In Russ.). https://zen.yandex.ru/media/id/5f244705fd3f2b5772973d28/edinstvennyi-sposob-preodolet-konflikt--istinnoe-pokaianie-patriarhov-varfolomeia-i-feodora-6167024e33373b5e80308676 (accessed: 24.03.2025)

[12] Resolutions of the Holy Synod. *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. 2021. № 10. P. 11. (In Russ.).

[13] Resolutions of the Holy Synod. *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. 2022. № 2. P. 6. (In Russ.).

The above are well-known facts, but they are almost always ignored by the authors who write about the causes of the Exarchate. A common statement has become that this is a "Kremlin project" that has political, not religious, reasons behind its creation. As the Kenyan priest of the AOC Evangelos Thiani writes, "The use of religion for entering Africa is therefore an ideal form of Russian soft power… The Russian Exarchate in Africa is about their nation creating space for their involvement in African countries through religious soft power, that eventually benefits their political and economic agendas." [Thiani 2024].

However, it is doubtful that Russia needs such sophisticated ways to "enter African countries," since it has already entered it, having embassies in 43 countries and decades-long political, economic, military, and humanitarian cooperation. Both in the Soviet past and in the recent present, Russia successfully cooperated with African countries without resorting to religion in general and Orthodoxy in particular. Russia could have continued to do so. If it needed "soft power" to influence the internal political processes in African countries, then much better suited for this role would have been, for example, associations of alumni who had studied in the USSR and Russia. Many of them are much wealthier and more influential than the majority of the parishioners of the Exarchate, and they are also free to participate in the political life of their countries, which is prohibited for the officials of the ROC by its internal documents. [Garanova 2021].

If we accept this conspiracy theory of the "creation of the Exarchate by the Kremlin for political reasons, for which religious rhetoric was just a smokescreen and should not be taken seriously," then it becomes unclear why the Exarchate was not created immediately after Patriarch Theodoros recognized the OCU in November 2019. After all, everything for its creation, including the appeals of African clergy, was ready in January 2020. But the ROC had not been giving a positive response to these appeals for almost two years. What were they waiting for? Why the delay?

Because, up until the end, they still hoped to preserve relations with the AOC and didn't want to take this step. Metropolitan Leonid says that on August 11, 2021, he was sent to Greece to meet with Patriarch Theodoros as Patriarch Kirill's personal envoy. The sole purpose of the conversation was to convince the Patriarch of Alexandria not to escalate by a concelebration with the head of the OCU, the preparation of became known. If Patriarch Theodoros had listened, there would still have been no Exarchate of the ROC in Africa. But he refused, and another bishop of the AOC, who was present at that meeting, asked with a jeer: "And what are you going to do to us?"[14].

The actions of the leadership of the AOC actually forced the Russian Church to do something that it did not want to do and that it had been postponing for almost two years. Archpriest E. Thiani offers the following argument for the "conspiracy" hypothesis: "The fact that Russia created an exarchate only in Africa and not in Turkey, Greece or Cyprus, all of whom have accepted the OCU, only confirms the same" [Thiani 2024: 262].

But the fact is that not a single priest from Greece or Cyprus has applied to the ROC for admission. In contrast, as for the Orthodox Church of Constantinople (hereinafter the OCC), after Patriarch Bartholomew recognized the OCU and broke off communication with the ROC, the ROC actually adopted on September 14, 2019, an entire Archdiocese of Western European parishes of the Russian tradition, previously belonging to the OCC, consisting of 2 bishops, 75 priests and 30 deacons, 58 parishes and 5 monasteries. In addition, several of the OCC clerics in the United States and the Philippines who wished

[14] From the Past-2. *Metropolitan Leonid (Telegram Channel)*. 23.02.2022. (In Russ.). https://t.me/exarchleonid/281 (accessed: 25.03.2025)

to transfer were also accepted. Parishes of the ROC in Turkey were also established, and Russian priests commemorating Patriarch Kirill were sent there to serve. The word “exarchate” was not used in that case, since the existing parishes of the ROC in Turkey are not enough for the status of an exarchate, but apart from the word “exarchate,” the ROC did the same thing in relation to the OCC that was later done in Africa. All the more surprising is the carelessness with which the leadership of the AOC decided to repeat the actions of Patriarch Bartholomew.

After the ROC interrupted Eucharistic and canonical communion with the heads of the Churches of Constantinople and Greece for their recognition of the OCU, Patriarch Theodoros could not help but understand that by a similar act (recognition of the OCU) he was forcing the ROC to sever Eucharistic communion with him and, accordingly, with the Church he heads. Knowing that after the break in communication with Constantinople, the ROC established its parishes on its territory and accepted the clergy of the OCC who wished to transfer, Patriarch Theodoros should have understood that the escalation on his part was forcing the ROC to take the same steps with regard to his own clergy who did not agree with his course, the existence of which was already known to him.

The truth is that it is not political but purely religious reasons that underlie the creation of the Exarchate. And, probably, it was the misunderstanding and underestimation of how fundamental these religious reasons are for the ROC that led Patriarch Theodoros and his entourage to be so careless about the consequences of actions related to the recognition of the OCU.

The conspiracy hypothesis makes it possible to remove responsibility for what happened from the leadership of the AOC. They claim that since the creation of the Exarchate is Putin’s secret plan to conquer Africa, which would have been implemented in any case, nothing depended on the recognition or non-recognition of the OCU by Patriarch Theodoros. But this contradicts the objective facts. The subsequent actions of the ROC were dependent on the actions of the Patriarch of Alexandria.

The other ten local Churches drew conclusions that Patriarch Theodoros could have drawn in 2019. Therefore, even despite the special military operation, despite the pressure of the Patriarch of Constantinople and the United States on this issue, not a single local church recognized the OCU after 2019. And no Exarchate of the ROC emerged on the territory of any of them.

THE BEGINNING OF THE ACTIVITY OF THE EXARCHATE OF AFRICA

It was mentioned above that in January 2020, 82 clergy from five African countries applied for admission, and the Synod’s decision of December 2021 states that 102 clergy from eight countries were accepted. Why this difference?

Since January 2020, 14 more priests from Kenya, 11 priests from Malawi, 3 priests from Zambia, and 3 priests from Congo have applied to join the Russian Orthodox Church. A total of 31 priests. However, of the 82 priests who signed the collective letters in January 2020, some died and some others changed their minds, so that, as a result, the total number of relevant petitions for December 2021 was 102 people.

Thus, together with those four Russian priests adopted in December 2019 in four countries (Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and South Africa), the total number was 106 clergy from 12 African countries at the time of the creation of the Exarchate.

One of the primary tasks of the Exarchate was to establish church life in new countries, where clerics from the Church of Alexandria joined. For this purpose,

Metropolitan Leonid of Klin organized trips of Russian priests Dionysius Grishkov and George Maksimov and Archpriest Andrey Novikov to eight countries[15] (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, Zambia, Congo, Malawi, Madagascar).

During these trips, the priests conducted joint divine services with newly united African clergy, as well as general meetings and pastoral seminars, which determined the church structure in the countries, including the election of deans (senior priests), priority steps for further development, and general principles of joint work. Antimensions[16] signed by a Russian bishop and liturgical supplies were also handed over.

In May of 2022, Metropolitan Leonid of Klin visited Uganda, where he met with President Yoweri Museveni, the leadership of the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, which "welcomed the appearance of the Russian Orthodox Church on the continent, testifying its support for the activities of the Exarchate"[17], as well as with Russian Ambassador V.S. Semivolos and Ugandan priests.

Metropolitan Leonid of Klin noted that "the local African clergy and flock, despite threats and persecution from the bishops of the Orthodox Church of Alexandria, deprivation of shelter, and expulsion from churches, remain faithful to their choice"[18].

The news about the start of the mission of the Russian Orthodox Church in Africa has caused a surge of interest both in the countries mentioned above and in many other countries. Numerous applications for admission began to arrive from other clergy of the AOC, from compatriots living in African countries, from leaders of non-canonical Orthodox groups, and from non-Orthodox clergy and community leaders, including Protestant and Catholic ones.

This resulted in an increase in the number of clergy and parishes in most of the 12 countries mentioned and in the spread of the Russian Orthodox Church in other countries. African priests and communities transferring from the AOC made up the majority of converts only at the very first stage; after it, the expansion of the mission gradually became more and more due to other groups (communities of compatriots and members of non-canonical Orthodox churches[19]). The following is an example of a group appeal from compatriots living in West Africa (Appendix 3) and from leaders of the non-canonical Orthodox community of Gabon (Appendix 4).

Under Metropolitan Leonid, a program of short-term training courses for future African clergy and their ordination began in Moscow, as many communities were in need of priests. In these classes, "dogmatics, history, liturgics, and patrology courses are intensively taught in English for them, they undergo liturgical practice in English and French, they serve in the altar and sing during the Liturgy and other services of the daily circle. Such training will allow them to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for taking holy orders in a short time"[20].

[15] In unity with the Russian Orthodox Church. *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. 2022. № 7. Pp. 41–42. (In Russ.).

[16] A necessary part for a priest to perform the main divine service, the liturgy; a sign of his belonging to a particular local Church.

[17] In unity with the Russian Orthodox Church. *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. 2022. № 7. P. 41. (In Russ.).

[18] Metropolitan Leonid of Klin. The decision to create the Patriarchal Exarchate was a powerful impetus for the establishment of Orthodoxy on the African continent. *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. 2022. № 7. P. 43. (In Russ.).

[19] This term refers to numerous groups of local residents who call themselves Orthodox but have no connection with any of the canonical Orthodox Churches.

[20] Metropolitan Leonid of Klin. One of the main tasks is to organize basic theological education for future African pastors. *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. 2023. № 1. P. 51. (In Russ.).

In 2022, the first group of 11 African seminarians was also sent to the St. Petersburg Theological Seminary. The Russian language was taught to them in the first year of their studies, and a specially developed program with in-depth study of theological terminology was developed, which also provided them with an introduction to Russian culture and Russian practice of worship [Archpriest Dimitriy 2023].

During the first months of 2022, Russian clergy, sent by Metropolitan Leonid, actively traveled through African countries, contributing to the emergence of new communities of the ROC on the continent (See *Table 1*).

Table 1. **Chronological table of the expansion of the Exarchate from 2022 to 2024 in African countries**

№	Country	Date of founding of the community	Priest accepting the community
1.	Kenya	January 2022	Priest George Maksimov
2.	Tanzania	February 2022	Archpriest Andrey Novikov
3.	Uganda	February 2022	Priest George Maksimov
4.	Nigeria	February 2022	Priest George Maksimov
5.	Zambia	February 2022	Priest George Maksimov
6.	Ethiopia	February 2022	Hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov)
7.	Rwanda	February 2022	Priest George Maksimov
8.	DR Congo	February 2022	Priest George Maksimov
9.	Congo	April 2022	Priest Dionysius Grishkov
10.	Malawi	April 2022	Priest Dionysius Grishkov
11.	Cameroon	April 2022	Priest Dionysius Grishkov
12.	Madagascar	May 2022	Archpriest Andrey Novikov
13.	Mauritius	May 2022	Archpriest Andrey Novikov
14.	Namibia	May 2022	Archpriest Daniil Lugovoy
15.	CAR	July 2022	Priest George Maksimov
16.	Côte d'Ivoire	September 2022	Priest George Maksimov
17.	Benin	November 2022	Priest George Maksimov
18.	Senegal	January 2023	Priest George Maksimov
19.	Mali	January 2023	Priest George Maksimov
20.	Burundi	January 2023	Priest George Maksimov
21.	Burkina Faso	June 2023	Priest George Maksimov
22.	Gabon	June 2023	Priest George Maksimov
23.	Angola	June 2023	Priest George Maksimov
24.	Togo	June 2023	Priest Parthenius Dansu
25.	Seychelles	June 2023	Priest George Maksimov
26.	Mozambique	July 2023	Priest George Maksimov
27.	Zimbabwe	July 2023	Priest George Maksimov
28.	Equatorial Guinea	October 2023	Priest George Maksimov
29.	Liberia	June 2024	Priest Parthenius Dansu
30.	Chad	June 2024	Priest George Maksimov

Source: compiled by the author based on publications on the official resources of the Exarchate.

Monasticism also started to develop. On January 4, 2023, Metropolitan Leonid of Klin tonsured the first African nun in the ROC. She became a nun Matrona (Jepchirchir) from Kenya. She began her monastic practice at the Convent of Nativity of Theotokos in Moscow. Later, two more novices joined her, and together they formed the core of the first potential monastic community in Kenya. Another monastic community, consisting of one nun and three novices, joined the ROC from the AOC in Madagascar. Several monks moved to the DRC, where in 2024, a male monastic community was formed in Kinshasa. A number of monks from Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, and the DRC were sent to Russian monasteries to gain experience.

THE REACTION OF THE PATRIARCHATE OF ALEXANDRIA

The reaction of the Church of Alexandria to the appearance and actions of the African Exarchate was sharply negative. On January 12, 2022, the communique of the Synod of the Patriarchate of Alexandria was published protesting against the creation of the Exarchate, which was interpreted as a violation of the canonical territory of the AOC. In response, the Synod of the ROC issued a Statement on January 28, 2022, in which the creation of the Exarchate was explained by the desire to "give canonical protection to those Orthodox clerics in Africa who do not want to participate in the lawless legitimization of the schism in Ukraine. We call on His Beatitude Patriarch Theodoros II of Alexandria and the hierarchs of the Holy Church of Alexandria to abandon their support for the Ukrainian schism and return to the canonical path in order to preserve the unity of Holy Orthodoxy"[21].

Patriarch Theodoros did not reconsider his position on recognizing the OCU but instead sent a letter to Patriarch Kirill of Moscow on February 14 demanding that the Exarchate of Africa be abolished, threatening otherwise to defrock Metropolitan Leonid of Klin.

Patriarch Kirill published his response, in which, in particular, he pointed out: "As for your threat to expel His Grace Metropolitan Leonid of Klin, whom the Holy Synod of our Church appointed exarch of Africa, it is devoid of any basis in church law. A bishop or cleric of one autocephalous Church is not subject to the jurisdiction of another autocephalous Church. The canonical rules you refer to (First Ecumenical Council, 8; Fourth Ecumenical Council, 12), do not support your threats and are inappropriate, as they are devoted to completely different issues. The sacred canons strictly forbid a bishop to interfere in the affairs of another diocese.

And if they forbid him even to receive someone else's cleric, who does not have a representative letter from his bishop (see Apostolic Canons 33; First Ecumenical Council 16 etc.), then how can they allow him to judge him and, moreover, impose the highest penalty, which is defrocking? In this regard, I declare to you that any judicial decisions of your Church regarding Metropolitan Leonid of Klin or other hierarchs or clerics of our Church will be canonically declared null and void by us"[22].

To show the seriousness of his threats, Patriarch Theodoros issued decrees on February 25 on the "defrocking" of priests of the ROC, Priest George Maximov and

[21] Statement of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church dated January 28, 2022. *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. 2022. №. 3. P. 11. (In Russ.).

[22] The response of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill to His Beatitude Patriarch Theodore of Alexandria on his appeal to cancel the decision on the formation of the Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa. *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. 2022. №. 4. P. 14. (In Russ.).

Archpriest Andrei Novikov[23]. Later, a similar statement was made regarding Priest Dionysius Grishkov.

And on November 22, 2022, the Synod of the AOC announced the "defrocking" of the Patriarchal Exarch of Africa, Metropolitan Leonid of Klin. After that, the Synod of the ROC, at its meeting on December 29, 2022, decided: "Taking into account the actual deviation into schism of Patriarch Theodoros of Alexandria... and proceeding from the generally recognized principle rooted in the canons and tradition of the non-jurisdiction of clerics of one autocephalous Church to the court of another autocephalous Church, consider the decision of the Synod of the Patriarchate of Alexandria on the "defrocking" of Patriarchal Exarch of Africa Metropolitan Leonid of Klin and all other similar decisions regarding clerics of the Russian Orthodox Church without canonical force and invalid"[24].

In addition to attempts to directly influence the ROC, the Patriarch of Alexandria attempted indirect influence through other local Churches. In particular, on January 22, 2022, the delegation of the AOC personally handed Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople a letter from Patriarch Theodoros calling for a "synaxis of the pentarchy," that is, a meeting of the heads of five Churches—Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and Cyprus—to condemn the actions of the ROC in Africa[25]. The envoys of the AOC began to visit other patriarchates, and Patriarch Bartholomew personally attempted to gather the heads of the four patriarchates (without the Church of Cyprus). He proposed to hold such a meeting as early as April 2022, but it did not take place, and neither did the conciliar condemnation of the ROC for the creation of the Exarchate of Africa, since other patriarchs, in particular, of Antioch, did not support this initiative[26].

Later, in his letter to Patriarch Bartholomew and the hierarchs of the Patriarchate of Constantinople dated September 3, 2024, Patriarch Theodoros, speaking about the "uncanonical intrusion" of the ROC in Africa, complained about the "deafening silence" of other primates of the Orthodox Churches who show indifference to this "violation." He condemned the lack of reaction from both the ancient Patriarchal sees and the new autocephalous churches as "unacceptable, unjust, and unholy silence," saying that this silence actually supports the continuation of the ROC's missionary activities in Africa.[27]

Both after this letter and before it, the Patriarchate of Constantinople supported the AOC's critical position on the Exarchate[28], however, since the Eucharistic communion of

[23] Καθαίρεσε δύο Ρώσους ιερείς το Πατριαρχείο Αλεξανδρείας. *Orthodoxia News Agency*. 25.02.2022. https://orthodoxianewsagency.gr/patriarxeia/patriarxio_aleksandrias/kathairese-rosous-iereis-to-patriarxeio-aleksandreias/ (accessed: 24.03.2025)

[24] Resolutions of the Holy Synod. *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. 2023. № 2. P. 25. (In Russ.).

[25] Αντιπροσωπεία του Πατριαρχείου Αλεξανδρείας στο Οικουμενικό Πατριαρχείο. *Romfea*. 23.01.2022. https://romfea.gr/epikairotita-xronika/48039-antiprosopeia-tou-patriarxeiou-aleksandreias-sto-oikoumeniko-patriarxeio-foto (accessed: 25.03.2025)

[26] Dominick J. Lowered Expactations? On the Proposed Council of the Petarchy. *Orthodox Christianity*. 17.02.2022. https://orthochristian.com/144503.html (accessed: 25.03.2025)

[27] Patriarch of Alexandria sends letter to Ecumenical Hierarchs alerting to Russian intrusion in Africa. *Orthodox Times*. 03.09.2024. https://orthodoxtimes.com/patriarch-of-alexandria-sends-letter-to-ecumenical-hierarchs-alerting-to-russian-intrusion-in-africa/ (accessed: 25.03.2025)

[28] Ecumenical Patriarchate and Hierarchs of the Ecumenical Throne Condemn Actions of Russian Orthodox Church in Africa. *Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America*. 03.09.2024. https://www.goarch.org/-/ecumenical-patriarchate-and-hierarchs-of-the-ecumenical-throne-condemn-actions-of-russian-orthodox-church-in-africa-1 (accessed: 25.03.2025)

the ROC with the OCC was terminated on October 15, 2018 due to the uncanonical interference of Patriarch Bartholomew in church affairs in Ukraine[29], his subsequent statements could not have any impact on the Russian Church.

The lack of Pan-Orthodox support for the AOC in countering the ROC, mentioned by Patriarch Theodoros, is probably due to the fact that other local churches are well aware that the reason for the appearance of the Exarchate was the actions of Patriarch Theodoros himself in recognition of the OCU, which they have no desire to identify with.

For example, back in 2020, a statement was published by four bishops of the Cyprus Orthodox Church, which stated, in particular: "The act of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew—granting 'autocephaly' to the schismatic structures of the Ukrainian Church—is an arbitrary act contrary to the canons and anti-ecclesiastical; if we take into account that the Orthodox Church of Ukraine belongs to the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, this action constitutes, as we have already said, an invasion of the jurisdiction of this Patriarchate. For this reason, the Russian Church, in response, justifiably severed church communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, as well as with the Churches of Greece and Alexandria."[30]

And on February 14, 2022, Metropolitan Seraphim of Piraeus (Greek Orthodox Church), in a published statement, although he called the creation of the Exarchate "unacceptable," but laid the responsibility for this on Patriarch Theodoros himself, who "transferred the Ukrainian problem, although he should not have done so, both to the Church of Alexandria and to the sensitive African continent," although "a significant part of the clergy of all ranks and of the believers (of the AOC. – *ed.*) from the very beginning opposed the choice of Patriarch Theodoros of Alexandria to recognize the church formation of the Kiev schismatics and marginalize the canonical Church lead by Metropolitan Onufriy."[31]

Another way to counter the Exarchate was an appeal from the leadership of the AOC to the US authorities with a request for help in this struggle. The special military operation provided an additional argument for this. On March 2, 2022, Patriarch Theodoros held a meeting at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, where he "condemned Russia's actions" and "expressed sorrow" for the victims of the war, as well as for the "previous non-canonical intrusion" of the Russian Orthodox Church in Africa.[32]

And in October 2022, he personally visited the United States, where on the 12th, he met with President Biden, as well as with "high-ranking officials at the White House responsible for national security issues related to Ukraine, Russia, and Africa." Among the topics discussed, the very first was the "invasion of the Moscow Patriarchate into the canonical jurisdiction of the ancient Patriarchate of Alexandria in response to the recognition of the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine."[33]

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[29] Resolutions of the Holy Synod. *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate.* 2018. № 11. P. 7. (In Russ.)

[30] "Η απόφαση του Αρχιεπισκόπου Κύπρου αποτελεί κατάφωρη παραβίαση του Συνοδικού συστήματος". *Romfea*. 24.10.2020. https://www.romfea.gr/epikairotita-xronika/40082-i-ap (accessed: 15.03.2025)

[31] Μητρόπολη Πειραιώς: Αδικαιολόγητη η εμμονή του Φαναρίου βαθαίνει το σχίσμα. Αγαπώ τον Χριστό. 14.02.2022. https://agapotonxristo.blogspot.com/2022/02/blog-post_85.html (accesssed: 25.03.2025)

[32] The Deputy Ambassador of the United States visited the Patriarch of Alexandria. *Orthodox Times.* 02.03.2022. https://orthodoxtimes.com/the-deputy-ambassador-of-the-united-states-visited-the-patriarch-of-alexandria/ (accessed: 25.03.2025)

[33] Kalmoukos Th. Patriarch Theodoros II of Alexandria Meets President Biden. *The National Herald*. 12.10.2022. https://thenationalherald.com/patriarch-theodoros-of-alexandria-met-with-president-joseph-biden/ (accessed: 25.03.2025)

Perhaps the campaign against the Exarchate that began later in the Western media, in particular, The Economist[34], BBC[35], Foreign Policy,[36] The Times,[37] Le Monde,[38] and in the materials of the analytical centers[39], is part of the strategy adopted at the aforementioned meeting.

These publications reproduce completely identical narratives about the Exarchate as a Putin's "crusade," a "blatant challenge to the historical authority of the Patriarch of Alexandria," which caused "a serious split in the world Orthodox community," and claim that African "priests were lured to join the Russian Orthodox Church" by the promise of money but in the end were disappointed and now intend to return. At the same time, some Western academic circles have recognized the excesses in certain theses of this smear campaign. In particular, the Religions journal published an article by M. Suslov, which said: "This relatively small number of Russian priests in Africa makes the fears of the exarchate being staffed with FSB officers not only improbable but also an egregious exaggeration... Similarly, the assumption that Orthodox parishes in Africa could serve as "ideal conspiracy nodes" <…> while not entirely dismissible, lacks sufficient empirical evidence to be taken seriously" [Suslov 2024].

DEVELOPMENT OF THE EXARCHATE'S ACTIVITIES

The Exarchate continued its activities and began to develop them in several directions at once. In terms of education, St. Sergius of Radonezh Elementary School was opened in Bimbo (a suburb of Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic); an educational center in Kisarawe (a suburb of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania); St. Panteleimon Elementary School in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya; St. Barnabas Comprehensive School in Njabini, and three Orthodox kindergartens in western Kenya (in the districts of Migori and Homabei); St. Serapion Kozheozersky Elementary School in Mbuji-Mayi (DR Congo).

With regard to social work, the Russian Church has taken over the maintenance of Orthodox orphanages in Kenya (St. Peter in Rigena and St. Athanasius in Nyabigege), in Cameroon ("Kason" in Yaoundé), and DR Congo ("Orans la Force" in Kinshasa). Humanitarian actions were carried out to help victims of natural disasters in Malawi, Kenya, Congo, and Nigeria.

Work has begun on the translation and publication of Orthodox literature into African languages (Swahili, Afrikaans, Malagasy, Acholi, Tiv, Kirundi, Kinyarwanda, Kikuyu, Tiriki, Lingala). First of all, these were the prayer book, the following of the liturgy of St.

[34] Russia's plan to seduce Christians in Africa. The Ukraine war has split Africa's Orthodox church. *The Economist.* 25.01.2024. https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2024/01/25/russias-plan-to-seduce-christians-in-africa (accessed: 25.03.2025)

[35] Heart and Soul – Russia's Africa crusade. *BBC*. 19.01.2024. https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3ct4pkp (accessed: 25.03.2025)

[36] Braw E. Russia is Waging Spiritual War in Africa. The Patriarchate of Moscow is trying to steal Orthodox believers to weaken Ukraine. *Foreign Policy*. 12.03.2024. https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/03/12/russia-africa-religion-orthodox-church-influence/ (accessed: 25.03.2025)

[37] Loyd A. Diamond-rich African country is a zombie host for Wagner Group. *The Times*. 19.05.2023. https://www.thetimes.com/world/russia-ukraine-war/article/russian-wagner-group-central-african-republic-ukraine-war-anthony-loyd-9ltsmd3qx?region=global (accessed: 25.03.2025)

[38] L'Eglise orthodoxe de Bangui, symbole de l'influence russe grandissante en Centrafrique. *Le Monde*. 28.07.2023. https://lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/07/28/l-eglise-orthodoxe-de-bangui-symbole-de-l-influence-russe-grandissante-en-centrafrique_6183752_3212.html (accessed: 25.03.2025)

[39] Luchenko K. Propaganda in holy orders: Africa, Ukraine, and the Russian Orthodox Church. *European Council on Foreign Relations*. 20.09.2023. https://ecfr.eu/article/propaganda-in-holy-orders-africa-ukraine-and-the-russian-orthodox-church/ (accessed: 25.03.2025)

John Chrysostom, the Gospel with Orthodox commentaries, and the catechism. To unify Orthodox terminology, the Exarchate's experts prepared a dictionary of church terms, which was translated into English, French, and major African languages (Swahili, Lingala). This dictionary is used by translators, which ensures the correct use of special religious terms and their uniformity. Secular experts in African languages, in particular, Swahili, were also involved in this work.

At a meeting on October 11, 2023, the Synod of the ROC decided to "dismiss Metropolitan Leonid of Klin from the post of Patriarchal Exarch of Africa with gratitude for his labors," and appoint His Grace Bishop Konstantin of Zaraisk as the new Exarch.[40] This unexpected news sparked a discussion on the Internet, in which many in Russia feared that the personnel reshuffle would lead to a reduction or even termination of the Exarchate's activities. The Church of Alexandria welcomed the news with optimism. However, the new exarch continued everything that his predecessor had done in Africa, and then the Synod of the AOC at a meeting on February 16, 2024, announced that it was "defrocking" Bishop Konstantin of Zaraisk.[41] In response, the Synod of the Russian Church decided on March 13, 2024: "to consider illegal and invalid the decision of the Synod of the Patriarchate of Alexandria on the 'defrocking' of Bishop Konstantin of Zaraisk," and on March 24, Bishop Konstantin was elevated to the rank of metropolitan.

Later, on October 24, 2024, the Synod of the ROC decided to appoint Bishop Euthymius of Lukhovitsy (Moiseev) as a vicar bishop to the Exarchate of Africa to assist Metropolitan Konstantin.

It is noteworthy that the AOC no longer "defrocked" either Bishop Euthymius or other Russian priests that the Exarchate sent to perform services in African countries from 2022 to 2024 (a total of 19 people), having obviously become convinced that this measure had no effect and did not in the least hinder the activities of the Exarchate.

During the first year of his leadership of the Exarchate, Metropolitan Konstantin visited twenty African countries. Among these visits, one can especially highlight the baptism of thousands of people in Malawi in April 2024, and a meeting with the President of the Central African Republic, F.A. Touadéra, in October of the same year. The number of African students sent to study in Russian seminaries has increased to 54. The number of priests and parishes continued to grow.

Since the 1980s. The Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia had its own mission in Uganda. In 2024, with the assistance of Metropolitan Konstantin, the Ugandan ROCOR Mission, which includes two priests and four communities, became part of the Exarchate.

On May 2, 2024, Metropolitan Seraphim of Zimbabwe ordained a woman deacon, Angelic Molen. This is an unprecedented innovation for Orthodoxy, which prohibits the ordination of women to holy orders. At the same time, it was stated that the ordination took place "with the approval and support of the Synod of Alexandria and His Beatitude Patriarch Theodoros."[42] This action caused great embarrassment both among Orthodox Africans and among believers around the world, who perceived it as a sign of the

[40] Resolutions of the Holy Synod. *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. 2023. № 11. P. 17–18. (In Russ.)

[41] The Patriarchate of Alexandria defrocked the second "Exarch in Africa" of the Patriarchate of Moscow. *Orthodox Times*. 16.02.2024. https://orthodoxtimes.com/the-patriarchate-of-alexandria-defrocked-the-second-exarch-in-africa-of-the-patriarchate-of-moscow/ (accessed: 24.03.2025)

[42] Reflections on the Ordination of Deaconess Angelic. *Public Orthodoxy*. 17.05.2024. https://public orthodoxy.org/ru/good-reads/ordination-of-deaconess-angelic/ (accessed: 25.03.2024)

apostasy of the AOC from the purity of Orthodoxy.[43] Responding to the criticism, on May 11, 2024, The Patriarchate of Alexandria issued a statement saying that "Missions in Africa require deaconesses," and that "Metropolitan Seraphim of Zimbabwe, being an experienced missionary in Africa, proceeded with the implementation of the initial decision of the Holy Synod" of 2016.[44]

As a result, this event became the reason for the second wave of transfers of those priests of the AOC, who would not accept ordination of women to holy orders, to the ROC. As one Madagascar priest said when applying for admission to the Exarchate, "A church that ordains women is not the Church I joined once. The AOC is clearly going somewhere wrong, and I don't want to follow it anymore." Another priest, from Kenya, asked: "If, as we are told, ordination as a deaconess is such a good thing, then why hasn't it been done in any other Local Church, in any traditionally Orthodox country, including Greece? It seems that we Africans are being used as a testing ground for dubious innovations."

Ultimately, after the replenishment caused by the episode with Angelic Molen, in February 2025, the exarchate had 268 clerics, of whom 260 were Africans, seven Russians, and one American (*Table* 2).

Table 2. **Number of clerics of the African Exarchate of the ROC by country on the continent, February 2025**

№	Country	Priests adopted from the AOC	Priests ordained by the ROC	Total number
1.	Kenya	100	7	107
2.	Madagascar	26	2	28
3.	Uganda	20	4	24
4.	Tanzania	18		18
5.	DR Congo	15	1	16
6.	Malawi	13	2	15
7.	Cameroon	6	4	10
8.	South Africa	4	4	8
9.	Rwanda	7		7
10.	Nigeria	5	1	6
11.	Côte d'Ivoire	1	4	5
12.	CAR	2	2	4
13.	Congo	3		3
14.	Burundi	3		3
15.	Zambia	3		3
16.	Egypt		2	2

[43] Commentary of a metropolitan of the Patriarchate of Constantinople https://helleniscope.com/2024/05/12/metropolitan-of-konya-theoliptos-the-ordination-of-deaconess-is-a-disgrace Commentary of a metropolitan of the Patriarchate of Antioch: https://www.antiochian.org/regulararticle/2052 A long critical commentary from a member of the Antiochian Church: https://orthodoxreflections.com/the-way-to-schism-part-1-ordination-of-a-female-orthodox-deacon/

[44] Efthimiou E. Patriarchate of Alexandria's shilly-shalling regarding the ordination of a deaconess. *Orthodox Times*. 12.05.2024. https://orthodoxtimes.com/patriarchate-of-alexandrias-shilly-shalling-regarding-the-ordination-of-a-deaconess/ (accessed: 25.03.2024)

№	Country	Priests adopted from the AOC	Priests ordained by the ROC	Total number
17.	Benin		2	2
18.	Togo		1	1
19.	Burkina Faso		1	1
20.	Gabon		1	1
21.	Angola		1	1
22.	Tunisia		1	1
23.	Morocco		1	1
24.	Mauritius		1	1
	Total:	226	42	268

Source: compiled by the author on the basis of data from the archive of the Exarchate

HOW MANY PARISHES AND BELIEVERS ARE THERE?

In some cases, a single priest attends several parishes. According to the data announced by Metropolitan Konstantin, as of February 2025, there are a total of 350 parishes in African countries.[45] As for the number of believers, there are no statistics, not even approximate ones. Different parishes have from several dozen to several hundred people. If we take an average figure of 100 people per parish, we can get an approximate figure of 35,000 active parishioners, but this is a very tentative estimate, and the actual number can vary greatly in both directions.

It is equally difficult to determine the overall number of Orthodox Christians in Africa or the number of followers of the AOC before the creation of the Exarchate. On the website Religionnews.com, it is stated that "The Patriarchate of Alexandria proclaims (the presence of. – *ed.*) 2.9 million followers."[46] M. Nami writes in his article of 1.3 million.[47] The monograph by Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) and his co-authors states that "The number of Orthodox Christians in Africa is about 1 million people" [Alfeyev et al. 2018: 244].

The spread of numbers shows how arbitrary and uncertain they are. None of these versions is supported by any research. Apparently, behind them are the statements of the hierarchs of the AOC with their personal assumptions. How unreliable they can be is evidenced by the discussion under the above-mentioned article by M. Nami on the Orthodox History website. J. Burnett, who worked for a long time as an Orthodox missionary in Uganda, writes:

"The idea that there are three quarters of a million Orthodox Christians in Kenya is ridiculous, as are the figures given for other countries. The Metropolitan of Kampala (Jonah) once stated in my presence that there are 300,000 Orthodox believers in Uganda.

[45] Chesnokov E. Metropolitan Konstantin of Zaraisk: Africans are increasingly adopting Russian Orthodoxy (interview). *Komsomolskaya Pravda.* 4.12.2024. (In Russ.). https://www.kp.ru/daily/27669/5019983 / (accessed: 25.03.2025)

[46] Heneghan T. Russian Orthodox eye expansion in Africa, maybe Turkey as well. *RNS.* 22.03.2022. https://religionnews.com/2022/03/22/russian-orthodox-eye-expansion-in-africa-maybe-turkey-as-well/ (accessed: 25.03.2025)

[47] Namee M. How Many Orthodox Christians Are in the World? *Orthodox History.* 08.07.2020. https://orthodoxhistory.org/2020/07/08/how-many-orthodox-christians-are-in-the-world/ (accessed: 25.03.2025)

I have personally visited almost every parish in this country, and my rough estimate would be about 3,000. Yes, one percent of the stated figure."[48]

For my part, I would like to add that M. Nami's report about "100,000 Orthodox Christians in Côte d'Ivoire" looks absolutely fantastic. At the time of publication of his article (2020), there were only two elderly priests of the AOC in that country who served in two parishes. In the largest of them, Sunday services were rarely attended by more than a dozen people. But even if the church were packed, with a maximum capacity of about 150 people and that of the other church of 100 people, it remains unclear where the remaining 99,750 "Orthodox Ivorians" could go.

However, some conclusions about the numbers can be drawn. The vast majority of the clergy, parishes, and laity of the AOC are located in Kenya. According to the general population census conducted there in 2019, 201,263 people identified themselves as Orthodox Christians.[49] Not all of them are members of the AOC. This number includes followers of the Coptic Church, which has an active mission among Kenyans, and members of the Ethiopian and Eritrean churches, which are also represented in the country. It also includes members of numerous non-canonical Orthodox groups. Unfortunately, the census did not distinguish between all of them. I assume that after deducting them, the total number of AOC adherents in Kenya may be 150,000 or even less.

According to A. Chaldeos, an expert in the history of the Greek Diaspora in Africa, "the total number of Greeks living in Africa is estimated at 100,000 people,"[50] although, of course, not all of them are Orthodox or religious in general. J. Filipas, in turn, writes that "The population of the last major Greek center in Africa (South Africa) has decreased from more than 100,000 people in the mid-1970s to only 35,000 people today.… Today, the last remaining Greeks in South Africa continue to leave the country en masse... the numbers of Greeks in Africa seem certain to decrease to almost zero."[51]

Nevertheless, adding up these data—for Kenyans as the largest flock of the AOC and the Greek diaspora—we can conclude that the figure of 300,000 members seems more realistic than others, although it is likely that it is also an overestimate. For comparison, according to some data, over 50 thousand Russians live in Africa[52], but it would be incorrect to include them all in the flock of the Exarchate.

GEOGRAPHY OF DISTRIBUTION

The statistics above shows, in which countries the ROC is currently most widespread. At the same time, there are certain patterns that refute some of the theses that are widespread in the media space. In particular, many authors have expressed the belief that

[48] It is noteworthy that Suslov's paper indicates as many as 500 thousand Orthodox believers of the AOC in Uganda, which is opposed by 850 believers of the Russian Orthodox Church in the same country as an insignificant number. This is an example of how even academic publications use completely arbitrary numbers of AOC followers in Africa, from which far-reaching but completely unfounded conclusions are drawn.

[49] Christians in Kenya by County and Denomination. *StatsKenya.* https://statskenya.co.ke/at-stats-kenya/about/christians-in-kenya-by-county-and-denomination/75/ (accessed: 25.03.2025)

[50] Rethinking Greece. Antonis Chaldeos on the Greeks of Africa. *Greek New Agenda.* 24.12.2021. https://www.greeknewsagenda.gr/greeks-of-africa/ (accessed: 25.03.2025)

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the ROC mission is supposedly so successful in Africa because it relies on the presence of military advisers from the PMCs and the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation[53], and also uses government resources in the form of embassies. That the ROC uses precisely the political and military successes in Africa, as well as Russia's diplomatic influence, to strengthen its positions in pro-Russian countries, converting this into the appearance of converts and parishes.

However, the above statistics show that the Exarchate has the greatest missionary success in countries where leadership is by no means pro-Russian, in which there are no military advisers from the Russian Federation, and diplomatic influence is minimal due to the openly pro-Western orientation of local authorities (Kenya, Malawi, Madagascar, Ivory Coast). Or in countries whose leadership takes a neutral position and cannot be called unequivocally pro-Russian (Cameroon, DR Congo, Rwanda).

Of the first ten countries in the *table* 2, in which 89% of the clergy of the Exarchate serve (239 out of 268), none have instructors from the PMCs or the Ministry of Defense, and only two whose leadership positions can be described, with some stretch, as pro-Russian (Uganda and South Africa). In fact, the above *table* 2 shows that the spread of the Exarchate took place, as officially announced by the Synod of the ROC, primarily due to the transition of clergy and parishioners of the AOC. Accordingly, where the AOC had many clerics, the Exarchate had many, and where the AOC had few or no clerics, the Exarchate had few.

Many countries where the presence of Russian military specialists has been noted in recent years—Libya, Mali, Niger, Sudan, Burkina Faso—are countries with a predominant or even overwhelming majority of the Muslim population, which by no means implies favorable conditions for a Christian mission due to the sharply negative attitude in Islam towards conversion to other religions and the existence of strict prohibitions in this regard. The countries with the predominant Christian population where the PMCs operated are Mozambique and the Central African Republic, but in the former, the Exarchate still does not have a priest, and in the latter, there are only three priests and one deacon.

THE REASONS FOR THE TRANSITION OF THE CLERGY OF THE AOC TO THE ROC

The total number of priests and deacons of the AOC who applied for transfer to the ROC is 298, of which 11 who applied in 2020 were not accepted due to the fact that, by the time the Exarchate was created, they had died or changed their minds, 34 were not accepted due to poor reputation or lack of serious reasons for the transfer, 5 accepted died, 13 have returned to the Greeks, 227 are serving, and 2 more are under consideration. And how many priests were there in the AOC at the time of the creation of the Exarchate? It is extremely difficult to find data on this. The Patriarchate of Alexandria

[53] For example, it is claimed that "The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has also expanded in Africa for several years, often following the routes of Wagner Group mercenaries." See.: Putin's Orthodox crusade in Africa. *La Croix.* 29.05.2024. https://international.la-croix.com/religion/putins-orthodox-crusade-in-africa (accessed: 25.03.2025). K. Luchenko, in a paper for the European Council on Foreign Relations, argues that "The countries where the Moscow Patriarchate has expanded in Africa… First are those states where Russian interests are concentrated and the private military company Wagner is present." See: Luchenko K. Propaganda in holy orders: Africa, Ukraine, and the Russian Orthodox Church. *European Council on Foreign Relations.* 20.09.2023. https://ecfr.eu/article/propaganda-in-holy-orders-africa-ukraine-and-the-russian-orthodox-church/ (accessed: 25.03.2025)

itself publishes only the number of bishops. As of 2021, there were 45 of them, 40 active and 5 retired. It is impossible to find official data on the number of priests and deacons in publicly available sources. There are none on the AOC website. Novaya Gazeta cites a figure of "about 700 priests" of the AOC[54], without specifying sources for it.

I have at my disposal the Yearbook of the Archdiocese of Nairobi for 2021, which contains statistical information about the AOC, including a list of priests by country[55]. There are a total of 670 priests in 21 countries in the book. There is reason to believe that, with the exception of Kenya, the lists are incomplete for some countries. That is since I know that there were many more AOC priests in South Africa, Malawi, and Madagascar; and priests in Egypt, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Botswana are also not mentioned in it. But even with this in mind, their total number is unlikely to exceed 715 people. So, in general, the data provided in Novaya Gazeta coincide with those indicated in the Yearbook. Since this Yearbook cannot be called an easily accessible publication, I will provide below a table of the data published in it on priests (*Table* 3).

Table 3. **Number of clergy of the AOC by country on the continent, January 2021**

№	Country	Number of priests
1.	Archdiocese of Nairobi (Kenya)	246
2.	Diocese of Nyeri (Kenya)	46
3.	Diocese of Kisumu (Kenya)	49
4.	Diocese of Eldoret (Kenya)	49
5.	Diocese of Kananga (DR Congo)	26
6.	Diocese of Kinshasa (DR Congo)	5
7.	Diocese of Katanga (DR Congo)	39
8.	Diocese of Brazzaville (Congo)	7
9.	Diocese of Rwanda and Burundi	6
10.	Cameroon	26
11.	Uganda	50
12.	Nigeria	20
13.	Benin	5
14.	Togo	1
15.	Zambia and Malawi	3
16.	Ghana	23
17.	Diocese of Mwanza (Tanzania)	33
18.	Diocese of Irinopolis (Tanzania)	20
19.	South Africa	3
20.	Zimbabwe	3
21.	Madagascar	10

Source: Year Book and Review 2021. Nairobi: Orthodox Archbishopric of Nairobi, 2021. Pp. 105–139.

[54] The Thurible's Tears. The Russian Orthodox Church is strengthening its influence in Africa. *Novaya Gazeta of Europe.* 05.09.2023. (In Russ.). https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2023/09/05/kadilovy-sliozy (accessed: 03.25.2025)

[55] Year Book and Review 2021. Nairobi: Orthodox Archbishopric of Nairobi, 2021. Pp. 105–139.

Thus, if we take as a basis the maximum number of 715 priests of the AOC, it turns out that more than 40% of them officially applied for transfer to the ROC. What reasons prompted such a significant number of African priests to make such a decision?

Judging by the first reactions after the creation of the Exarchate, the bishops of the Patriarchate of Alexandria were amazed not only that the Russian Church had decided to take such a step but also by the scale of the transfer of their clergy. In January 2022, Metropolitan Gregory of Cameroon publicly assured that "The ROC has recruited schismatics and marginals into its African ranks. Most of the priests who have joined the ROC are Old Calendarists (representatives of non–canonical Orthodox churches), as well as various violators of canonical norms who were previously banned from service or defrocked."[56]

Later, when it became clear that all the converts were legitimate and canonical clergy of the AOC, such statements began to sound less and less often and the bitter truth about the scale of the phenomenon was gradually accepted.

If we talk about the reasons for the transfer of African clerics, the ROC and the AOC have completely different explanations. The Russian Church officially indicates one reason, the canonical one. Disagreement with the recognition of the OCU by Patriarch Theodoros. This was indicated both in the decisions of the Synod and in the statements of the exarchs.

The Church of Alexandria also points out one reason: a mercantile one. And this is also quite an official position. Patriarch Theodoros at the Synod of the Orthodox Church on January 12, 2022, accused the ROC of "stealing" the clergy through bribery; and the Synod of the AOC on November 22, 2022, also accused Metropolitan Leonid of bribing the African clergy[57].

The "mercantile" version has a number of problems. Firstly, in addition to the black clergy, a number of the AOC clergy from among white Africans in South Africa (descendants of the Boers) also joined the ROC. These are people with good jobs and high incomes independent of their church activities. Also, among black Africans, there are examples of the transition of well-off people who held high positions and duties in the AOC. In particular, archimandrites, archpriests, diocesan secretaries, and vice-rectors of the seminary. In some cases, after joining the Russian Church, African clerics lost the Greek sponsors who had supported them earlier, that is, financially they lost rather than gained from their decision (this concerns two priests I personally know in the Kisii region and one in Njabini, Kenya).

Secondly, this does not explain the mass migration of not only the clergy but also the laity to the ROC. There are cases when the priest, the rector of the parish, decided to return to the AOC and tried to convince the parishioners to follow him, but the parishioners remained in the ROC – in particular, the parish of St. Zosima in the town of Chemelil and St. George the Great Martyr in the village of Ngombe (both in Kenya). Even more examples are known when the parishes of the AOC initially independently applied to the ROC with a request for admission, without involving a priest serving with them (Kenya, Burkina Faso, Mauritius). At the same time, even the bishops of the AOC do not say that the ROC also bribes African laity.

[56] Ο Καμερούν Γρηγόριος για την Ρωσική εισβολή στο Πατριαρχείο Αλεξανδρείας. *ΦΩΣ ΦΑΝΑΡΙΟΥ*. 29.12.2021. https://fosfanariou.gr/index.php/2021/12/29/kameroun-grigorios-gia-rosiki-eisboli-sto-patr-alexandreias/ (accessed: 25.03.2025)

[57] Το Πατριαρχείο Αλεξανδρείας διέκοψε την μνημόνευση του Πατριάρχη Μόσχας. *Romfea*. 22.11.2022. https://www.romfea.gr/patriarxeia-ts/patriarxeio-alexandreias/53586-to-patriarxeio-aleksandreias-diekopse-tin-mnimonefsi-tou-patriarxi-mosxas (accessed: 25.03.2025)

At the same time, the “canonical” explanation can hardly be considered sufficient to explain the mass transition of priests and laity from the AOC to the ROC. With such a big step as the change of church jurisdiction, it is logical to expect a combination of a number of reasons.When discussing them, it is necessary to take into account such a feature of the Alexandrian Church as a strong racial imbalance at different levels of the clergy. In the case of the highest level, the bishops, the overwhelming majority are Greeks, and not from among the Greeks who were born in Africa and know the local realities but who arrived in adulthood from Greece or Cyprus. In the case of the lower grades—priests and deacons—the vast majority are Africans. The congregation is also largely made up of black Africans. The antagonism between Greeks and Africans (including non-Greek white Africans), which had been accumulating and deepening for decades, certainly prepared the mass exodus from the AOC.

In November of 2022, I interviewed nine African priests from different countries (Nigeria, Tanzania, Madagascar, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, South Africa, Zambia, Uganda). They all joined the ROC, and I invited them to tell me the reasons. A video of their interview in English was posted on my YouTube channel.[58]

All respondents cited disagreement with the decision of Patriarch Theodoros of Alexandria to recognize the OCU as the main reason, many were outraged that it was taken without consulting the African clergy, and their requests to cancel it caused ignoring or even persecution of those who disagree. That is, for some Africans, unlike Russians, the emphasis was not on the fact of recognizing the OCU in itself but on how it was done. For them, this became an expression of the “dictatorial” style of the Greek church administration and the “disregard for the opinion of Africans,” of which they had previously accused the top of the AOC. The entry of the Patriarch of Alexandria into the schism was for many the last drop that overflowed the cup of patience.

In one of my conversations with a Kenyan priest who transferred to the ROC, the following thought came out: “We did not like many things about the Greek Church and the Greeks, but we endured, believing that this is the true Church of Christ, which leads us to the Kingdom of Heaven. And when they joined with the schismatics and led us along, it ceased to be the way to the Kingdom of Heaven, since schism leads to hell, according to Orthodox teaching. And after that, why would we stay with them and continue to endure all this?” Another Kenyan priest, also in an oral conversation, expressed the same thought in other words: “If the bus I'm on breaks down and stops running, I’ll get off and get on another bus that can take me to my destination.”

Referring to the recorded interviews mentioned above, it can be noted that seven of the nine priests indicated other than canonical reasons for their decision to switch, in particular:

– The ROC assists to the “development of the Church in Africa” (Priest David Lakwo, Uganda).

– Thanks to the ROC, Africans “receive education, health support, and spiritual guidance” (Priest Peter Bikamumpaka, Rwanda).

– The Russian Church provides opportunities for spiritual education, humanitarian programs to help the hungry, and respectful treatment from Russians who consult with Africans (Archimandrite Mark (Hule), Nigeria).

– Disappointment in the Greeks, who are “here for business,” an opportunity for spiritual growth and learning of faith in the ROC (Priest Lawrence Sakwa, Tanzania).

[58] Why did African priests convert to the Russian Orthodox Church? *Priest George Maximov*. 12.11.2022. (In Russ.). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3X-e5DhvjqM

– Problems in the AOC: “segregation and neglect of Africans, poor governance, dictatorship, poor spiritual, pastoral, and social work, poor theological education.” At the same time, unlike the Greeks, “the Russians listen to us” (Priest Titus Kipngeni, Kenya).

– Disappointment with the Greek bishops of the AOC: “Our leaders were selfish, arrogant, who imposed nepotism and segregation, and enriched themselves by squandering church money and resources. Mistreatment of African clergy and laity through intimidation and threats. Poor administration, which disrupted and stopped our pastoral and missionary work” (Priest George Chabwera, Malawi).

– “We definitely didn’t feel welcome in the Greek Church. There are no services in languages other than Greek. And with regard to the Afrikaans mission, it became clear that we were not going anywhere. The Russian Church has the opportunity to actively engage in mission and serve in Afrikaans” (Archimandrite Zachariah Van Wyk, South Africa).

The last quote is notable because it belongs to a white African priest.

In total, the reasons indicated by the African clergy can be divided into two groups: fatigue of and disappointment in the AOC and expectations (partially already fulfilled) for the improvement of the church situation in Africa thanks to the ROC.

In the same year, 2022, Kenyan priest Evangelos Thiani, who remained in the AOC, published his research based on interviews he conducted with twelve African priests who converted to the ROC. Despite the fact that he stands by the positions of the AOC, Thiani came to generally the same conclusions:

Interviews carried out in 2022 revealed that poor administration and morality were their reasons for leaving Alexandria. They further complained about not being involved in the decision-making, management and planning of their dioceses, lack of proper remunerations, abusive and disrespectful language by some Greek bishops towards African priests and lay people, the language barrier between some Alexandrian priests and their European-born bishops, discrimination by European expatriates against black Christians. Furthermore, moral decay and the excessive love for money of some hierarchs impaired the spiritual focus of Alexandrian hierarchs. Not contextualising the Orthodox Church enough for Africans, they showed a disregard of Africans in church administration and management, in addition to a culture of secrecy in the African synods.

Although the regions, languages and countries of the interviewed priests differed, their issues were very similar. The interviewed African priests believed Moscow would give them what they lacked under Alexandria, liberate them from the ‘evil’ Greeks and help them grow an authentic Orthodox Church firmly planted in African culture and ethos… Over half of the interviewed clergy enquired, ‘How come no Greek bishop has invited us to explain why we joined Moscow, but expedited the release of threatening letters?’ (Alexandrian Orthodox Priest 4 2022). These interviews show the same sentiments… revealing dissatisfaction with Alexandria long before the Ukrainian issue arose, which opened the doors for them to leave Alexandria. [Thiani 2024: 259].

As part of his research, Father Evangelos Thiani also interviewed six bishops of the AOC and, summarizing their responses, came to the conclusion that they were isolated from the African clergy, did not understand their moods and motives, and, as a result, misjudged what was happening in connection with the emergence of the Exarchate and its prospects:

“The Alexandrian hierarchs interviewed believed that these priests had approached Moscow for money and that they would soon return to Alexandria because Moscow would soon be exiting the continent of Africa. These hierarchs were unaware that most

African clerics who joined Moscow had challenges with their hierarchs or the patriarchate long before the Ukrainian crisis."[Thiani 2024: 260].

CONCLUSIONS

1. The statements of the AOC that there has always been only one canonical Orthodox Church in Africa, the Alexandrian Church, contradict historical facts, in particular, the existence of the Carthaginian Church in the first millennium A.D.

2. The thesis that the entire African continent has always been recognized as the canonical territory of the AOC is incorrect. The article proves that the Constantinople and Russian Churches in the 20th century They did not recognize this claim, which was first voiced only by Patriarch Meletios (Metaxakis).

3. The thesis that with the creation of the Exarchate, the ROC invaded a territory where it had never been before is incorrect. The ROC's ecclesiastical presence in Africa begins at the end of the 19th century and continues until the second half of the 20th century, including it. Thus, with its decisions in 2019 and 2021, the ROC did not create but restored its previous jurisdiction in Africa.

4. The thesis that the creation of the Exarchate was solely for political reasons by the Russian state authorities does not stand up to criticism. It is proved that religious reasons played a decisive role in making a decision about this, and it was provoked by the actions of P. Theodoros.

5. The prerequisites for the mass departure of the African clergy arose in the AOC long before the appearance of the Exarchate. The isolation of the Greek bishops from their African clergy and flock, their lack of understanding, coupled with an unsuccessfully chosen manner of behavior, did not allow them to recognize the problem before the emergence of the Exarchate (although requests of dozens of the AOC clerics for their admission to the ROC had been known since the beginning of 2020), nor to stop it immediately after its occurrence.

6. The desire of the bishops of the AOC to explain the mass exodus of African clergy only by mercantile considerations and the venality of Africans is a dubious strategy, since it expresses precisely that contemptuous attitude towards the local Orthodox, which caused the alienation. It is also incorrect to reduce everything to canonical reasons alone. Despite the importance of the issue of schism, there may well be additional reasons, both objective and subjective.

7. The AOC's opposition to the Exarchate went in several directions simultaneously: direct appeals to the ROC and the "defrocking" of Russian clergy of the Exarchate, the involvement of other local Churches for pressure and possible trial of the ROC, and, finally, an appeal to the secular authorities of the United States for help. All this did not lead to the desired result. The exarchate has not only not been abolished but, on the contrary, continues to actively develop and spread.

8. The thesis about the connection between the spread of the Exarchate and the successes/activities of Russian military specialists and Russia's special political influence in certain countries is incorrect. It is proved that the distribution of the Exarchate in most cases correlates with the geography of the distribution of the AOC, since the majority of the clergy are those who have transferred from the AOC.

9. The thesis that the ROC in Africa is not engaged in missionary activity but only lures priests and flock from the AOC could be true only in the very first months of the Exarchate's existence. By 2025, it can be stated that the ROC had begun an active

mission among non-canonical Orthodox groups in Africa, becoming a center of attraction for Africans interested in Orthodoxy. In three years, 34 African priests have been trained and ordained in the Exarchate. In addition, the ROC's presence covers more and more countries that have never had an AOC mission.

10. Despite the opposition and numerous difficulties of growth, the Exarchate successfully fulfills the tasks of bringing Africans into the Church and of the pastoral care of Russians, and occupies an increasingly solid position on the continent.

As Metropolitan Konstantin notes, in Africa "there is a real Church, real communities, real priests… The crucial point is that we are not a Church of newcomers. We are a Church of local priests, local parishioners. They are all citizens of their countries… The mission of the Exarchate is to help people enter the Kingdom of Heaven and find eternal life. It would be a huge mistake to deal with foreign policy issues. Our task is to do the church's work. To ensure the liturgical life, the organization of the church structure is important. The construction of temples is an urgent issue. Equally important are social projects and helping others. Educational processes are promising. There is also the task of pastoral care of the Russian people." [Konstantin 2025].

Additional materials to the article[59]:

Appendix 1. Letter from the Kenyan cleric of the AOC to the Department of External Church Relations of the ROC dated November 12, 2019, on 2 sheets.

Appendix 2. A collective letter from the Tanzanian clergy of the AOC addressed to Patriarch Kirill of Moscow on admission to the ROC dated January 22, 2022, on 1 sheet.

Appendix 3. Letter from a group of clerics of the non-canonical "Patriarchate of Nations" from Gabon requesting admission to the Russian Orthodox Church dated June 13, 2023, on 1 sheet.

Appendix 4. A collective letter from Russians living in eight West African countries dated August 2022, on 2 sheets.

Appendix 5. Chronology of the spread of the Russian Orthodox Church in Africa, on 7 sheets.

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[59] Additional materials constitute an integral part of this paper and are available on the official website of the Journal of the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (https://africajournal.ru /), at the webpage of this paper.

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Научная статья

ПЕРВЫЕ ГОДЫ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ ПАТРИАРШЕГО ЭКЗАРХАТА АФРИКИ РУССКОЙ ПРАВОСЛАВНОЙ ЦЕРКВИ

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Аннотация. Решение о создании Патриаршего экзархата Африки Русской Православной Церкви (РПЦ) в 2021 г. носило исторический характер и вызвало широкие дискуссии в научной и общественной среде. В данной статье на основе уникальных материалов Патриаршего экзархата Африки Русской Православной Церкви, а также из личного архива автора показана предыстория и первые годы становления Экзархата.

Впервые вводится в научный оборот целый ряд документов, статистических и фактических данных о первых годах существования этой организации. Читателям представлена история русского церковного присутствия на Африканском континенте, начиная с 1885 г., когда была предпринята попытка создания духовной миссии в Эфиопии, показано образование приходов в Тунисе, Алжире и Марокко в контексте русской эмиграции после революции 1917 г., а также в других странах континента. Автор раскрывает предысторию принятия решения о выходе из юрисдикции Александрийского Патриархата приходов Русской Православной Церкви, находящихся на Африканском континенте, а также реакция на него. Также дан исторический контекст принятия в 2021 г. решения об образовании Патриаршего экзархата Африки и показаны первые годы его функционирования. В статье подробно представлена хронология распространения РПЦ в Африке в 2022–2024 г. Приложения к публикации (размещены на официальном сайте журнала) включают обращения африканских клириков, а также прихожан, проживающих в Африке, с просьбой о принятии в лоно РПЦ. В целом, в статье представлена масштабная история деятельности РПЦ в Африке за последние три года.

Ключевые слова: Африка, православие, Африканский экзархат, Русская Православная церковь, Московская Патриархия

Конфликт интересов: автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

DOI: 10.31132/2412-5717-2025-70-1-99-125

Для цитирования: Максимов Ю.В. Первые годы деятельности Патриаршего экзархата Африки Русской Православной Церкви. *Ученые записки Института Африки РАН*. 2025. Т. 11. № 1. С. 99–125. https://doi.org/10.31132/2412-5717-2025-70-1-99-125