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Gregory Palamas in Africa's Inter-Religious Dialog

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Abstract:

The remarkable absence of Eastern Christian Orthodoxy in African Christianity is as profound as it is prodigious for many reasons. First and foremost of which is the non-player of Eastern Orthodox Christianity in the colonial project and the scramble for Africa. A cursory examination of the biblical, Patristic and theological traditions of Eastern Orthodoxy posits a powerful, but illuminating critique of Western Christianity as inherited and espoused by Africa, more so in the areas of the nature of sin, human dignity, the place of the church, suffering, sacrament, saints, and scriptures. The purpose of this paper is three-fold. First, is the examination of the nature of religions in the light of Palamas life, theology and practice. It is said that "religions are like men, they grow old and die unless they are renewed, unless the seed perishes and is born again" (Robert Payne, 1958: 296). I will argue that the historic and theological services provided and performed by Gregory Palamas can be a fulcrum to a renewal of African Christianity. Second, Gregory Palamas creative engagement in his day makes a significant contribution to current attempts at dialog between Orthodox Christians and Western Roman Catholicism and Protestantism (Papademetriou 2004:1). Palamas was one of the best and astute exponents of Orthodox Christian theology in the fourteenth century. He was also a creative thinker. The import of this dialog for Africa, which has had its share of ethnic and religious violence, Christian-Muslim conflicts, and socio-political rudderlessness cannot be overstated. Third, it is pertinent to note that this dialog is not limited to Christians. Eastern Orthodoxy has historically and geographically shared relationships, engagement, and dialog with Islam ever since the rise of Islamic faith in the seventh century. A good number of African nations also share identical experience of sometimes peaceful, or violent co-existence. Gregory Palamas and Eastern Orthodoxy can provide a new paradigm of engagement and enrichment as this paper will demonstrate. Finally, through this engagement, young churches in Africa will be further enriched through the nature of Palamas' hesychasm, Christology, Jesus prayer, and inter-religious dialog.

Orthodox Christianity in Northern Africa is as ancient as the history of the Christian Church itself. For example, Egypt was a fertile ground for monasticism, such that by A.D. 400 Egypt was a land of hermits and monks.(Ward, 1984). A singular prototype of the hermitic life in northern Africa during this period was St. Anthony the Great, who is usually referred to as the "father of monks" and from who many of the sayings of the Desert Fathers come. St. Anthony was the son of a prosperous peasant, who having heard of the saying of Jesus: "Go sell all you have and give it to the poor and come and follow me" immediately applied that to himself and left for a life of solitude in the desert. Other examples abound not just among those usually labeled as the Eastern Orthodox Fathers but also Latin Fathers as well: Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, on the Greek part, but also Saint Augustine¹ from the Latin Fathers (Payne, 1957; Ward, 1984).

¹Aurelius Augustinus was born in 354 A.D. in Thagaste, located in current day Algeria, North Africa. His mother, Monica belonged to the Berber tribe of North Africa. The African-ness of Augustine has been a subject of debates in Augustinian scholarship, as to whether he was a European or African. More recent discussion was undertaken during the Seminar on Augustine at Waynesburg University with the guest lecturer, Professor David Nagle of Dallas Baptist University. He underscored the seriousness of this debate to the extent that he chose to represent

Apart from the aforementioned fourth century examples of Church Fathers, African connection to the nascent New Testament budding church is also seen in the book of Acts 8: 26-39, which gave an account of Phillip's encounter with the Ethiopian Eunuch. The Ethiopian was said to *be a eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem to worship.*² Orthodox Coptic/Ethiopian churches thrive not just in the country of Ethiopia but among Ethiopians of the Diaspora in the United States. This is also demonstrated by recent publication by EnziraSebhat, (Sebhat, 2010), a popular patristics series and a major hymn sounding the praises of the *Theotokos* from the heart of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in its Golden Age. Ethiopian significance in being a country in Africa that did not suffer from Western colonial powers/occupation like other African nation may create a potential for receptivity and understanding among Africans in general. Furthermore, Slagle's work (Slagle, 2011) on the non-involvement of Eastern Orthodoxy in fomenting slavery also enables it to be receptive among African Americans.

Account of the Ethiopian encounter with Philip has been a source of inspiration and encouragement to Africans, who see this as an example that God is no respecter of persons and that the gospel is for all and sundry. More so, African Americans in the Diaspora have also taken liberty in identifying African connection with Orthodox faith right from the inception of the church.³

Orthodox Church/Faith: Personal Background And Pilgrimage

I was born in Nigeria, West Africa where I grew up with significant exposure to the Anglican Church. Then at 11 years of age, I left home for boarding school: an Islamic boarding school where I was a student for five years. After my high school education, I was almost persuaded to become a Muslim. The last twenty-five years has been devoted to intensive search for the meaning especially growing up in a society which Ali Mazrui aptly called the "triple heritage:" African traditional religion, Christianity and Islam.(Mazrui, 1986).⁴ Over the last thirty years, and more so since 911, it is reasonable to surmise that Africa, and more so Nigeria, has been a crucible if not a cauldron in mediating between the world of Islam and that of the West (Lanneh, 1996:3; (Sanneh, 2003). In the process, either by cultural osmosis or diffusion, the imprint of the two influences (Islam and Western Christianity) is evident in many parts of the continent today. Africa has also added its own accent and imprint through acculturation, vernacularization, and enculturation (Lanneh, 2004).

There is very little or no mention of Orthodox Church Missions when it comes to the history of Christian missions in sub-Saharan Africa. My own research over the last five years has seen only fragmentary works here and there about Orthodoxy in the continent, more so in sub-Saharan Africa. Orthodox Churches and faith have thrived for centuries in Egypt and Ethiopia. Stephen Methodius Hayes (Hayes, 1987) alluded to Orthodox churches in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zaire. He underscored the centuries old development of Orthodoxy in Africa thus:

Augustine in his film on him by using a Hispanic American – a sort of mid-way in skin coloration between white and black.

² Act of the Apostle 8:29 in the Holy Bible: King James Version. This event was shortly after the ascension of Jesus and it indicated that the Spirit of God said unto Philip to go next to the eunuch and explain the passage of scripture he was reading from the book of Isaiah.

³ A good example of the budding Orthodox Faith in North America is the Brotherhood of Moses the Black, which is a pan-Orthodox nonprofit organization. Its mission is to minister to Americans the gift of Orthodoxy. In an effort to be good stewards of the manifold grace of God (I Peter 4:10), the organization presents an annual conference that targets those who have little exposure to Orthodoxy *as well as the African roots of Orthodoxy*. Its vision is to bring Americans closer to Jesus Christ. See: <http://catholicknight.blogspot.com/2006/06/black-americans-turning-to-eastern.html>. As part of African American attraction to Orthodox Church, Amy Slagle also asserted that Eastern Orthodoxy, "played no institutional role in fomenting slavery, that Orthodoxy only arrived on the scene decades after Reconstruction. Therefore, its potential to reconcile persons divided by race and class cannot be overstated. See Amy Slagle. 2011. *The Eastern Church in the Spiritual Market Place: American Conversions to Orthodox Christianity*: (Dekalb: NIU Press), page 154.

⁴ Ali also asserted that, "according to the Coptic Church, Christianity was brought to Egypt by St. Mark himself. Thus, "the earliest Egyptians learnt about Jesus not from the Gospel written elsewhere but directly from the mouth of St. Mark." (page 48).

The Orthodox Church in Africa falls under the jurisdiction of the Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, and its history goes back to the first century. The tradition of the patriarchate is that it was established by St Mark in AD 62. In the first few centuries it was confined to North Eastern Africa. The North Western part was under the jurisdiction of the Pope of Rome. At first Christianity had only a rather precarious two-hold on the African continent, but towards the end of the second century it became indigenous, and spread rapidly among the native Egyptian population (rather than the Graeco-Roman ruling class). The third and fourth centuries were marked by the ascendancy of Alexandrian Christianity⁵

According to Hayes, there were also scattered groups in West Africa, notably in Nigeria and Ghana from the 1930s and 1970s. These are indigenous Orthodox churches started by Ghanaians and others with rudimentary exposure to the faith. However, throughout the author's stay in Nigeria, including recent trips over the last five years, not of a single Orthodox church was visible or referenced by pastors in the country. It is reasonable to conclude from the foregoing that at best, Orthodox churches in Africa are few and far between when compared with Western Churches. In 2019, while attending a conference at Fordham University, I was introduced to Archbishop Alexander who is currently overseeing the development of Orthodox Church in West Africa. The Greek Orthodox Church was started in Lagos Nigeria in the early 1990s and it is thriving today ministering to young people with a theological college in Mainland Lagos.⁶

It is from the foregoing that the insights of St. Gregory Palamas becomes a rather tedious and prodigious task, but at the same time, one that must be undertaken in view of the massive problems associated with political rudderlessness, ethnic conflicts, religious tensions taking place especially in the most populous country (Nigeria) in the continent. Palamas not only lived through one of the most perilous times in Muslim Christian co-existence, but he also dealt directly with issues that are as germane today as ever before.

Palamas And Spiritual Renewal: African Application:

St. Gregory Palamas comes from a long and rich tradition of spiritual explorers, whose contribution in the realm of the interplay of Christology and human experience, that is spirituality and Christology cannot be overstated. Daniel Rogich (Rogich, 1997) called St. Gregory Palamas a "Christologian" - denoting his experiential interplay between intimacy with Jesus of Nazareth and inner silence that unites man and God in the process of *theosis*. In his Homilies, (Gregory & Veniamin, 2002), commenting on the need to mortify the deeds of the flesh, St. Gregory Palamas stated that, "whosoever turned the passions into virtues receives a martyr's crown" (40, page 151, 598). Anestis Keselopoulos (Keselopoulos, 2004) also underscored this when he asserted that, "What St. Palamas writes is not the product of simple meditations or imaginative theories, but the fruit of inner experiences, enlightened and enriched by the divine grace and of the Holy Spirit." (2004:14). It is this transformative power of the Holy Spirit that made Palamas (Gregory & Meyendorff, 1983), (Meyendorff, 1974) assert as follows: "When spiritual joy comes to the body from the mind, it suffers no diminution by this communion with the body from the mind, but rather it transfigures the body, spiritualizing it." (Triads I, 2; paragraph 2, page 79). John Meyendorff (Meyendorff, 1998) underscored Palamas opposition to profane Hellenism and the place of hesychasm in the life of a believer whose search for union with Christ (theosis) is not under undergirded by the scriptures, but also by the example of Taboric transfiguration of Christ with the three disciples (Peter, James and John) in Matthew 19:18-26.

⁵ Stephen Hayes: <http://hayesfam.bravehost.com/ORTHMISS.HTM>. Accessed on Friday, May 18, 2012. Hayes also indicated that some non-canonical Orthodox churches were established in Ghana after sporadic brushes with books on Orthodoxy, a noted example is The Orthodox Church by Bishop Kallisto Ware. He also noted that, one Joseph Kwame Labi, travelled to the USA, where he attended St Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary. He was later ordained and served as a priest in Larteh. He also noted similar situation in Nigeria of back and forth connection with Orthodox members in Accra, Alexandria and Yaounde, Cameroon with the resultant effect of conversion and ordination of two Christians in 1985.

⁶ Over the last year, I have been in contact with the Archbishop. I was scheduled to meet him in Lagos this year, but the pandemic prevented by trip to Nigeria. He continues to update me on Orthodoxy in Nigeria in particular and West Africa in general.

Recent explosion and resurgence of churches and Christian conversions in Africa and the Diaspora is well documented as to need no further elucidation, as this will be far beyond the scope of this paper (Olagoke, 2002; Sanneh, 2003). A cursory look at the Christian experiences in the continent shows a profound intensity for practical, experiential relationship with the person of Christ in a way that is personal, liberating and salvific.

It also falls within the rubric of evangelicalism – with emphasis of the centrality of Christ (Christocentrism), centrality of the holy scripture (bibliocentrism), centrality of evangelism, and centrality of the Holy Spirit (Pneuma-centrism).⁷ In this regard, these core evangelical doctrines will find a more liberating resonance when Palamas own hesychast experience, theological stance in his debate with Balaarm, and his overall dealing with the political authorities of his time.

Furthermore, it is reasonable to surmise that Africa has one of the highest statistics, not only of poverty but also of religious beliefs and practices. For the most part, belief in God is rather axiomatic; the reality of gods or Supreme Being, God is not abolished, nor has secularism taken over every vestige of polity. Charles Taylor (Taylor, 2007), made the distinction between the West which has been profoundly influenced by secularity and non-Western countries which have not, notably in his in his prodigious work called the *Secular Age*. In this very deeply religious atmosphere, one can state that Africa is has not been beaten by the devastating bug of Enlightenment prejudice against religion. This is not to say that Africa does not have it own “cultured despisers of faith” or Western religion, but by and large it is the association of colonial Western Christianity with oppression, subjugation and slavery that made a few to either renounce Christianity or see it as a faith of the oppressor (Mudimbe, 1997).⁸

As I listen earnestly during the Divine Liturgy when the "blessedness" of the believer is pronounced: they (blessednesses) connect very powerfully and profoundly with Palamas challenge to "turn our passions into virtues": blessed are the poor, those who hunger after righteousness, the persecuted, the outcast, the wretched and the disinherited of the earth. In fact, some of the horrendous persecutions and day today experiences in some parts of Nigeria resonate profoundly with those of earlier centuries: Examples abound:

- Systematic destruction of churches and Christians
- Christmas Christian massacre in churches which is still under investigation
- Destruction of Christian properties and sources of livelihood
- Enslavement of Christians in Sudan
- Political marginalization of people of faith in parts of the continent
- The current mass assault by the offshoot of Al Queda in Nigeria called Boko Haram, that hates everything and anything Western, and is determined to turn the nation into an Islamic state.

These are many instances where Palamas calls us to turn personal and collective passions into virtues. At both personal and corporate levels, this is not easy, and in fact, is impossible without the power of Christ, but these are at the same time needed for man to reach blessed dispassion and ultimately *theosis* in Christ. The corruptive power of passions leads the soul to spiritual death. St. Gregory Palamas saw this happening in his day, we see it magnified in ours today. It is easy to conclude that St. Gregory's challenge to avoid the world of passions is only livable by those in the monastery, but accumulated wisdom of the fathers of the church says otherwise: For example, the eminent Golden Mouth, St. John Chrysostom once stated, "You greatly deceive yourself and are mistaken if you think that one thing is required of the person living in the world and

⁷ African Christians whether of the Pentecostal branch or the established Western Protestant churches, see the world as the struggle between good and evil, Satan and its demonic hosts, unseen warfare that militate against personal and national or continental progress. It is not usually for congregations in the continent to have days and weeks set aside for all night deliverance, fasting and prayer for specific personal needs as well other needs so that a new lease of life will be witnessed in the continent. It is in this light that an Orthodox book by Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain. 1987, revised by Theophan the Recluse, *Unseen Warfare: The Spiritual Combat and Path to Paradise of Lorenzo Scupoli*, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press), will find resonance with African spirituality.

⁸Very few African intellectuals come to mind when it comes to declaration to being avowed atheists or agnostics. Mudimbe of Congo, Wole Soyinka of Nigeria, Chinua Achebe, are few that have basically jettisoned the forms of colonial Christianity. Other Africans have thought it fit to abandon Western and Christian names for their African names: James Ngugi of Kenya and other Africans that I attended school with are examples of the so called “decolonization” of the mind and names that were espoused in the sixties as well as early seventies.

another of the monk. For the difference between the two is that one has married and the other has not; as for the rest, we have common responsibility, and all of us must rise to it" (quoted in Keselopoulos, page 18).

The experiential way of the Church fathers which forms the foundation of Orthodox ascetical tradition, and which was profoundly practiced by Palamas can be a spiritual treasure for Africa in this day and age.⁹

St. Gregory Palamas And Dialog With Other Traditions:The Controversy With Barlaam And Akindynus

St. Gregory Palamas' thesis is that God is indeed unknowable. At the same time, however, God has revealed Himself through Christ by becoming Incarnate. In doing so, God has granted men a supernatural knowledge, which is distinct from intellectual knowledge, eminently and profoundly real, in fact, much more real than any philosophical knowledge. This thesis is at variance with the modern mode of epistemology and empirical analysis of the world. John Meyendorff addressed Palamas engagement with Western intellectual tradition as represented by Barlaam. Meyendorff asserted that, "in Barlaam's flight from the intellectual realism of Western Thomistic scholasticism, Barlaam clashed with the mystical realism of the Eastern monks (Meyendorff page, 89) Barlaam had identified the Hesychasts monks with Messalian** or "bogomil heretics." As you know, these are heretical teachings condemned by the Byzantine church that claim to see the divine essence with their bodily eyes. Barlaam - dialectic proof of the basis for scriptural and patristic statements, since he opined that the direct knowledge of God, of the relations between the person of the divine Trinity, was inaccessible to the human mind. He saw monks as intellectually unqualified fanatics. Used virulent language against the monks: "their souls are in their navels." He also affirmed that secular education was a condition for a true knowledge of God.

Palamas Contact With Islam: Significance In African Context

Apart from the dialog with Barlaam, Palamas was also in dialog with Judaic and Islamic monotheism. As Palamas points out:

Muslims confess that he, Jesus is, word and spirit of God,
and also that he was born from a virgin, and that he did and taught
like God, that he ascended into heaven, that he remains immortal, and
that he is going to judge the entire world – although, therefore they knew
Christ this way, they did not honor him as Christ, that is, as God-man Word¹⁰

Though Palamas' Christology remains impeccable in the way he saw and lived out the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, he did not disparage the Muslims. In fact, according to Rogich, (1997:218), he applauds what he, Palamas called Muslim *theosevia*(*religion and piety). Palamas lived during a period when Constantinople and Byzantium were under the constant siege of Turkish Muslims. Therefore, he witnessed pillage and plundering, in fact, was captured at one time by the Muslims. Nevertheless, Palamas was always convinced that the religiosity of Muslim deserves our utmost respect and dignity. Furthermore, Palamas was familiar with the "this worldly" nature of both Islam and Judaism. He did not mince words about the founder's empire building aspiration, conversion, and the physical *Jihad*:

Muhammad marched from the East and he progressed
victoriously to the West. He did so, however, by the means of war
and the sword, with pillage, enslavement, and execution, none of
which has its origin in God, the righteous One.¹¹

⁹Recent excursus and participation in vigils in Nigeria and the United States echo some of the ascetic as well as mystical theology espoused by Palamas. For example, churches in Nigeria like the Foursquare Gospel church, Redeemed Christian Churches, and the Deeper Christian Life Churches all preach the central significance of the inner man as well as the transformative and transfigurative effect of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The digression from Palamas' hesychasm may be the noted excessive emphasis on the gifts of the spirit not unconnected with Pentecostalism, which Palamas or Orthodox Christianity will not approve.

¹⁰ Quoted in Daniel Rogich. 1997. *Becoming Uncreated: The Journey to Human Authenticity – Updating the Spiritual Christology of Gregory Palamas*. Light and Life Publishing: Minneapolis), page 218.

¹¹ Ibid. page 218.

While there are parallel examples in Christianity of wars of religion, it must be noted that Palamas experience even in captivity was not to engage in vitriolic and violent dialog with Muslim, but to engage them constructively, not only in understanding the religion of Islam but also to look for common ground and common good toward peaceful co-existence.

Palamas In Discourse With Turks' Representatives: Example In Christian Muslim Relationships In Africa

In the year 1354, Palamas was under Turkish captivity. Even during captivity, he engaged in missionary activities from town to town, strengthening the weak and explaining the mysteries of God. He also engaged in theological discourse with key elements in the Muslim community, particularly the "*Chiones*."¹² Areas of discourse with Islam which Palamas gave clearly lucid and systematic responses were:

- Comparison of Jesus and Mohammed: birth, miracles, death and resurrection.
- The nature of the law given to Moses.
- The Prophets of the Old Testament and their prophecies regarding Messiah.
- Explanation and distortion of the Holy Spirit by Muslims in the New Testament.
- The place of icons in Orthodox faith.
- Jesus' return to earth at end times.

Account of his experience in captivity was not always pleasant; he was treated cruelly, often beaten and kicked around like other kidnapped victims by Moslems.¹³ Yet in all this, Palamas did not consider or see Moslem victory as the end of the history of Orthodoxy. His comment is instructive: "This impious people boast of their victory over the Byzantines, attributing it to their love of God. This is because they do not understand that this world below dwells in sin, and that evil men possess the greater part of it."¹⁴ Here is what we see Palamas learned from his experience with the Moslems. Palamas example is noteworthy today especially in Nigeria where Moslem-Christians conflict is more and more intense, and where Christians, even key leaders, have responded to the situation with rhetoric of violence, intransigence, and religious zealotry. At the same time, Palamas was aware of this-worldly nature of both Judaism and Islam, a this-worldly approach which has often lent credence to political Islam in its conquest, war, enslavement and executions, none of which, he opined, has its origin in God, the righteous One (Rogich, 218). Even with the Saint's incredible and remarkable engagement with Islam, Rogich further opined that it remains doubtful whether Palamas was familiar with the Sufism aspect of Islam, which to some extent also underscores the pacifist nature of religion.¹⁵

Conclusion:

The symbiotic relationships between Christianity and Islam in some parts of Africa, notably Sudan, Nigeria, have been dealt with by scholars (Lanneh, 1994, 2003; Komolafe, 2012. Mamdani, 2003). Still, religious and political alignments and antagonisms persist in the polity. The seed of the negative religious fervor and ferment is not of a recent origin, dating back to AD 1000 when Islam was first introduced in the northern part of Nigeria. In a secularized world of the West, there is often a lack of sensitivity and awareness of the inner world, which is underestimated by post-Christian cultures of the West. Works on the critique of Enlightenment and secularization thesis have been articulated by the likes of Peter Berger, Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno on one hand, and C.S. Lewis on the other (Lewis, 1947).¹⁶ John Milbank (Milbank, 2006;

¹² The Chiones were converts to Islam who were familiar with the scriptures of the Old Testament, and whose defense of Islam in the presence of the Emir when Thessaloniki was under Turkish occupation.

¹³ Also noted is the degree of tolerance afforded Orthodox Christians during the Turkish occupation compared to the persecution experienced by Orthodox Christians from Latins in Cyprus. See <http://www.scribd.com/doc/32990227/Saint-Gregory-Palamas-on-Islam>: (page 338-340). The lesson in religious toleration and inter-religious dialog cannot be overstated.

¹⁴ (See Saint Gregory Palamas on Islam: compiled by Holy Apostles Convent): <http://www.scribd.com/doc/32990227/Saint-Gregory-Palamas-on-Islam-compiled-by-Holy-Apostles-Convent>

¹⁵ A comparative analysis of affinity between Orthodoxy and hesychasm *vis a vis* Islamic Sufism: See Orthodox Journal called: *Synaxis: "The Prayer of the Heart in Hesychasm and Sufism."* July 1988.

¹⁶ On pages 11-14 of the Abolition of Man, Lewis discussed the type of education devoid of values that produced what he called the "trousered ape and the urban blockhead." He asserted that, "by starving the sensibility of our pupils we only make them easier prey to the propagandist when he comes. For famished nature will be avenged

Milbank, Pickstock, Ward, & ebrary Inc., 1999), echoed the same sentiments concerning the dissatisfaction with secularism and theological powerlessness in responding to it when he advocated a new orthodoxy, stating:

Not simply returning in nostalgia to the premodern,
It visits sites in which secularism as invested heavily –
sesthetics, politics, sex, the body, personhood, visibility.
space, and resituates them from a Christian standpoint:
that is in terms of the Trinity, Christology, the Church and theEucharist.¹⁷

These criticisms are also highlighted by in post-colonial African studies, bearing similarities with post-modernist critique. Africa faces, not just a human physical economic, political crisis but also existential ones. As Grigoriatis (2001:17) asserted, “the soul of the African inclines toward mysticism and for this reason Orthodoxy has something to say to them and something to offer.” (Grigoriatis, 2001). The lack of bifurcation between secular and the sacred, a tendency that has impacted the West over the last three hundred years is rather alien to Orthodox faith. Palamas life and examples are instructive.

This paper surmises that historical examples of cultures and societies that have lived either under external political or religious occupations have a lot to offer for the African continent to glean from. His commitment first to the Incarnate Christ, his philosophic bent with deep engagement with the best minds of the time as well as the practice of hesychasm culminating in his dealing with Turkish Moslems when captured toward the end of his earthly life, all enlighten our enlightenment as well as challenges us to a life of the Spirit, more so in the discordant voices that have plagued Africa whether in pre-colonial, colonial or post-colonial periods. In a world of economic realities of the McWorld and political rudderlessness on one hand, and the booming Pentecostalism which promises miracles, a new realism based on concrete human communities, dialogic churches capable of forming habits and lives with a different logic of existence may posit a substantial hope for Africa’s future. In the final analysis, as Emmanuel M. Katongole(Katongole, 2005) underscores the global ramification, it is not just Africa that will be affected, but world Christianity as well in building bridges transcending race, religion and creed. Palamas’ relevance in today’s world cannot be overstated.

and a hard heart is no infallible protection against a soft head.” Lewis words uttered in1943 resonates in today’s society, not just in the West but in Africa as well.

¹⁷ John Milbank. 1999. *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*. London: Routledge, page 1.

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