

Holy Trinity University

Comparative Theology

To: Degree 4

Prepared by: Abba Gedion Birhane
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CHAPTER ONE

Comparative Theology

- Different denominations and traditions existing in Christianity are keeping diverse standpoints in regard to many important theological issues.
- Theological perspectives also differ according to the denominational differences.
- Here in this course we are mainly dealing with the **dogmatic issues** in which the **Oriental Orthodox Churches** differ from **Eastern Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant denominations**.
- The topics are analysed from an **Oriental Orthodox point of view**.
- It implies the defence of correct doctrine of the Church. Comparison of diverse perspectives in theological understandings also is analysed.

General Objectives of the Course

- The primary objective of this course is *to understand the theological standpoint of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in comparison with the other ecclesiastical traditions*.
- It is aimed *to strengthen the faith and to train the students to safeguard the true faith of the Church*.
- Cults containing mutilated forms of Christian elements are also analysed with an Orthodox Christian perspective.
- Modern Theological movements having no affiliation to the theological standpoints of any established denomination also have been seen critically in the Course.

- Such approaches are intended to enhance the ability of students to make serious evaluations of liberal and liberation tendencies in the current theological literature.
- By analyzing the differences between some dogmatic issues and perspectives in Oriental Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant understandings the students will be equipped to witness Orthodox Theology and Spirituality in a clear and distinctive way in the present context.

Specific Objectives of the Course

- To make students aware of the difference in faith between the different denominations in Christianity.
- To create awareness in them to preserve the doctrines of the Church unaltered.
- To train and empower them to answer the questions of believers properly.
- To make their conviction regarding the doctrinal affairs stronger.
- Equipping students to have critical and clear perspectives in analysing theological stand points of other denominations and systems.
- To equip the students to defend the faith of Orthodoxy against rationalism and liberalism
- To make the students familiar with different methods of presenting Theology.

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Different theological approach...

- The Apostolic Kerugma which derived out of the hopes, concepts and beliefs of the people of the Old Testament and the primary experience of Apostles with Jesus Christ formed the **basic ground of Christian Tradition**.
- The oral tradition sprouted out of the apostolic message and developed according to the kerumatik scheme, the Apostolic understanding of the divine revelation and economy of salvation.
- In the course of history, the **Apostolic Kerugma spread over to different lands with people having diverse culture and way of life**.
- The seed of Christianity, the Apostolic Kerugma, developed in different cultural soil acquainting with the indigenous elements.
- However, different Christian communities with the same content of faith and diverse expressions of faith emerged and developed into different ecclesiastical traditions.

The definition of Comparative Theology

- It is a relatively new discipline within Theology
- It studies the historical, dogmatic, order, and worshipping differences among the different Christian groups.
- Deals with respective knowledge of religion, its aspect, order, doctrine, rites, principles and its thought (Garden, p.3-4)
- It comes from Christian religious tradition

Different theological approach...

- Within the Roman Empire many diverse traditions developed but eventually dominance of the Latin tradition eliminated the others in the western part of the Empire.
- Greek tradition with its prominence survived in the eastern part of the Roman Empire (Byzantium).
- In addition to those within the Eastern group there are some traditions developed outside the ancient Roman Empire.
- Those are Armenian, Ethiopian, East Syrian and Indian.
- The Ecclesiastical communities grown keeping allegiance to different traditions in both West and East began to be classified as Western and Eastern Churches.

CHAPTER ONE

The Theological Comparison between
Orthodox and Catholic Church

Different Theological Traditions: East
and West

- They differ in expressing their faith and theology.
- And some differences in faith also occurred in the course of the history.
- Generally we can classify the theological traditions into two. Those are Eastern and Western.
- This classification is based on their general trend or attitude regarding the presentation of theology.
- The Church in the Western part of the ancient Roman Empire is qualified as Western or Occidental Church.
- The Churches in the Eastern region of the Roman Empire and in the other parts of the world are called Eastern or Oriental Churches.

Different theological approach...

- Before the origin of Protestantism, the Latin Catholic Church was the only ecclesiastical body in the West.
- From the early time itself East is noteworthy of its plurality of traditions.
- **A student of theology can notice a sharp distinction in the approaches of Western and Eastern minds.**
- Generally it is called **Cataphatic** and **Apophatic** approaches respectively. The theological methodology in both approaches differs.

Characteristics of the Western Approach in Theology...

- **Thomas Aquinas' theology, unlike more contemplative monastic theology of the church fathers and still that of Augustine, is quite essentially a rational university theology, composed by professors in the schools, & proposed basically not for the people and pastoral care, but for students and colleagues in theology.**
- **All the works of Aquinas are thoroughly sealed with scholastic approach to learning.**
- **They are all fully composed in Latin, all are very clear, compact, concise, and dense but impersonal and monotone.**

Characteristics of the Western Approach in Theology

- In general the western approach in theology from the early times itself **more rigid** and **legalistic**.
- The west attempted to express theological truths using **hard** and **fast definitions** and **principles**. They followed a more legalistic approach in theologization.
- Later in the **medieval period empirical philosophies brought more rigidity to the western theology** and it expressed the traits of **monotonous and academic nature**.

- Hans Küng was a very radical Swiss Catholic Theologian of 20th century.

- **Because their approach is consistently analectic with sundry divisions & subdivisions & subdivisions, with edged definitions of concepts, and formal distinctions, with objections & answers with all the means of grammar, dialectic and controversies and with deep theological acumen.**
- **There is colossal use of highly developed and often over developed scholastic skill.**
- **With this style, Thomas created a new Philosophical and theological synthesis for the new time, brilliant, constructed with methodological rigour and academic mastery, of an exceptional unity.**
- **He paved the rational basis for theology by highlighting the use of reason in theology.**
- **This was his hermeneutical and methodological foundation.** Hans Küng, *Great Christian Thinkers* (London 1994) 107.
- The whole of the western theological world continued to be in the Thomistic legacy until the emergence of Protestantism

Characteristics of the Western Approach in Theology...

- **Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), an Italian scholastic philosopher and theologian of 13th century prepared a more cataphatic and academic platform for the western theology.**
- **Thus the medieval western theology became an intellectual and philosophical exercise stand far from the pastoral tasks of the Church.**
- **Hans Kung, a catholic theologian of 20th century comments on Aquinas' theology and its method:**

- Protestantism emerged as a breakthrough in the milieu of legalistic mediaeval theology of the Catholic Church.
- The movement of reformation in the Catholic Church has successfully identified some of the problems of then Catholic Church, but pathetically failed in introducing a balanced approach to rectify the serious issues in the theological standpoint of the western theological world.
- It seems to be an un-thoughtful emotional reaction towards the rigidity of the catholic administrative structure, the over philosophized theology and ritualistic and superstitious piety promoted by the Catholic Church in the mediaeval period.

Cataphatic Approach

- This approach is also known as **positive or affirmative theology**.
- The Cataphatic way **tries to define the theological truths using logical and rational theories**.
 - Reason plays greater role than the scriptural guidelines in theologization in the cataphatic approach.
- It tries to define the divine self-revelation using human language and knowledge & to affirm the definitions & ideas as if they are perfect conclusions on theological affairs.

- Such a trend prevents the understanding of theology as **an enquiry everlasting**.
- It will rather end up in conclusions **within the limits of human intelligence and reasoning capacity**. It also tries **to get answer for every questions regarding theology**.
- It is rather **speculative & philosophical** than **spiritual and mystical** which the medieval western theology which has eventually lost much of its pastoral traits.

Compartmentalization and Objectivism in Theological Enquiry

- Following the footsteps of the medieval western theology the modern theologians use techniques of scientific and logical enquiry to reach in objective conclusions in Theology.
- Compartmentalization of theological disciplines like Biblical, Systematic, Pastoral, Moral, Historical etc. are also a result of the reorganization of theology in line with the modern academic disciplines.

- Brian Daly, one of the scholars of the Catholic Church comments on the critical approach of the western Biblical theology:
- "...modern historical criticism including the criticism of Biblical texts is methodologically atheistic; even if what it studies is some form or facet of religious belief, and even if it is practiced by believers. ... explanations that could be acceptable to believers and unbelievers alike, are taken as historically admissible".
- The protestant academia has a different attitude towards the approach of historical criticism of the Bible, thus,

Compartmentalization...

- The valleys of biblical truth have been filled up with the **débris of human dogmas, ecclesiastical institutions, liturgical formulas, priestly ceremonies and casuistic practices**.
- **Historical criticism is digging through this mass of rubbish**.
- **Historical criticism is searching for the rock-bed of the divine word, in order to recover the real Bible**.
- **Historical criticism is sifting all this rubbish**.
- **It will gather out every precious stone nothing will escape its keen eye**.

Compartmentalization...

- Here we see an attempt to highlight historical criticism as a way to explore the real Christianity by passing over the understanding of whole generations of faithful.
- The contemporary western theology seems to be disorganized in its approaches.
- It attempt to move into diverse directions without stability of faith and following the trial and error system while spirituality identified its own path free from intellectual traits and logical quests.
- So there we see distinct traits of lifeless theology and shallow spirituality.

Contemporary Attitude of the West Regarding the Eastern Theology

• The Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church (1963-65) has made some positive remarks about the theological traditions of the east, thus,

• With regard to the authentic theological traditions of the oriental, we must recognise that they are admirably rooted in the Holy Scriptures, fostered and given expressions in liturgical life, and nourished by the living tradition of the Apostles and by the writings of the fathers and spiritual authors of the east. They are directed towards a right ordering of life, indeed towards a full contemplation of Christian truth.

Contemporary Attitude...

- These words of admiration are most likely to be out of the so called 'ecumenical interests' of the Catholic Church.
- The Catholic Church is strategically working to assimilate the theological beauty and depth of the Eastern Liturgical and Theological traditions, where as we the original heirs of it tend to rely on Western techniques and methodology.
- I think we have to work hard to assimilate more Eastern (especially Semitic) Theological and Spiritual elements into the life and functioning of our Church.
- *Even then it is an acknowledgement of the fact that after all trial and error process in theologization in the west they came down to appreciate the position of the east, which we are holding since the Apostolic period with strong conviction, steadfast stability and consistency.*
- Documents of the Vatican – II; Decree on Ecumenism (UR) 17.

Apophatic Approach

It is the theological methodology of the Eastern ecclesiastical tradition.

- This approach is also called negative theology.
- The basic principle behind this approach is that the divine mysteries are beyond human perception and we cannot make definitions or theories regarding it.
- It explains the faith in a mystical way and makes a series of negations while learning theology. According to the apophatic theologians rational theories and logical definitions are quite irrelevant in explaining the divine mysteries.

Significant Characteristics of Eastern Approach In Theology

- In general we can say that Theology of the **Eastern tradition is grounded on the sources of faith namely scriptures, tradition, liturgies, Patristic writings, monasticism, asceticism, mysticism, spiritual literature, and all sort of spiritual expressions.**
- **Theology in the Oriental, especially Semitic, traditions is not an academic exercise supported by a rational enquiry, but it is the conviction of church naturally developed out of prayer, meditation, contemplation, fasting, abstinence and ascetical life deep-rooted in the her commitment to God.**

Scriptural foundation of Eastern Theological Tradition

- Theology of the Eastern tradition in general and that of Semitic traditions in particular can justly be portrayed as the output of a creative and fecund meditation upon the scripture.
- The most fundamental tenet of Semitic theology is its scriptural rootedness.
- Theology is the interpretation of bible for them. It is mainly true with the Syriac and Ethiopian Traditions.
- The biblical commentaries constitute an important part of the theological Tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.
- Theology and spirituality are deep rooted in the biblical interpretation.

Scriptural foundation...

- Semitic Theology is remarkably rich with its biblical flavour and freshness. It has its own indigenous and highly original approach in exposing the divine revelation.
- Greatest figures in Syriac Theology like Aphrahat, Ephrem the Syrian, Jacob of Serugh, Isaac the Syrian etc. are known for their originality in both style of presentation and depth and beauty of ideas.
- Great writers of the Ethiopian tradition like St. Yared also follow a similar approach in using Scripture for developing theology of the Church.
- Where historical interpretation is concerned we are dealing with facts and we can speak of a historical interpretation as being correct or incorrect.
- This is quite different from the situation with spiritual interpretation.

- Here it is not a case of one interpretation right and the other wrong, for there is never one correct interpretation of the exclusion of all others. Often several spiritual interpretations may be simultaneously valid.
- The very spirit of Biblical Commentaries of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (*Andimta*) also is nothing but the same.
- Historical and spiritual interpretations of Scripture operate in very different ways, each with its own mode of operations.
- Historical interpretation provides us with the outer meaning whereas spiritual interpretation leads us to the inner meaning of the biblical text.

Scriptural foundation...

- The eastern approach in theology never completely denies the role of logic or philosophy in theology, but limit it to the level of a tool or method to explore the real meanings of the revealed truth.
- The understanding of St. Gregory of Nyssa on this regard is thus, "Reason, in its speculative thrust, is free to go where ever it wants, where as for the Christian, reason has to be controlled by the category of the *Intent of Scripture*".
- In his work *On Soul and Resurrection* Gregory explains, "We make the Holy Scripture the standard and rule of all teaching; we are bound, therefore, to have in view that and only that is which is in harmony with the intention of Scripture".

Different theological approach...

- To put it in another way, we must live the dogma expressing a *revealed truth*, which appears to us an unfathomable mystery, (incapable of being fully explored or understood or impossible to measure its extent) in such a fashion that instead of assimilating the mystery to our mode of understanding, we should, on the contrary, look for a profound change, an inner transformation of spirit, enabling us to experiences it mystically.

Different theological approach...

- The more mystical it is, the more directly it aspires to the supreme end of union with God.
- The Church Fathers unanimously speak about the incomprehensible nature of God. The following are some selected teachings of the Fathers on this issue.
 - *I, too, know many things but I do not know how to explain them. I know that God is everywhere and I know that he is everywhere in his whole being. But I do not know how he is everywhere. I know that he is eternal and has no beginning.*

Different theological approach...

- *But I do not know how. My reason fails to grasp how it is possible for an essence to exist when that essence has receives its existence neither from itself nor from another.*
- *I know that he begot the Son. But I do not know how.*
- *I know that the Spirit is from him. But I do not know how the Spirit is from him.*

Different theological approach...

Pastoral Nature of Theology of the Eastern tradition

- Theology is understood by the Oriental fathers as necessarily and intimately a pastoral task. They developed the theology profoundly pastoral in its tenor, purpose and execution. Theology of the Eastern tradition keeps it free from the intellectual and philosophically bound conflicts of the consular period, but keeping its allegiance to the proper faith and life of the main stream church. Ephrem the Syrian sings:
 - *O Lord, may the works of your herdsman*
 - *Not be defrauded;*
 - *I will not have then troubled your sheep,*
 - *But as far as I was able,*
 - *I will have kept the wolves away from them,*
 - *And will have built as I was capable,*
 - *Enclosures of hymns*
 - *For the lambs of your flock. Hymns against Heresies. 56:10.*

Different theological approach...

- These words of this great Poet Theologian of Christian Orient reveal the very pastoral intention behind developing theology and presenting the same in a manner quite understandable and appealing to the ordinary believers.
- It is a theological approach which spontaneously developed for the spiritual enrichment of the believers **which is totally free from the so called academic bindings and philosophical jargons of the medieval Scholastic approach** which is still prevalent in the western theological scholarship.
- **Pastoral outlook** was the general characteristic of the whole patristic theology.
- Even in the tensed phase of ecumenical councils, most of the Fathers succeeded in maintaining **the focus of theology pastoral and stereological**.

- Liturgy is **the ultimate norm** for theology.
- Let's take a look at the distinction between a "*philosophy of religion*" and "*religious philosophy*."
- The former approaches *religion as an object or as a phenomenon* that attracts attention, whereas the latter looks at *reality from a religious point of view*.
- By the same token, while a "***theology of liturgy***" takes liturgy outside of itself, "***liturgical theology***" takes the challenge to take theology from a *liturgical perspective*.
- Moreover, *liturgical theology* should not be confused with *liturgical studies*.

Different theological approach...

Liturgy as the Locus of Theology

- According to the understanding of the Orthodox Churches, The essence of the liturgy is nothing else but the Church's faith so **liturgy is the celebration of faith**.
 - What Liturgical Theology is and is NOT?
- It is focused on the **manifestation, communication** and **fulfillment** of the church's faith.
- Liturgical theology is **NOT** part of a theological discipline which deals with liturgy or has liturgy as its object.
- Liturgical theology is **NOT** theology of liturgy; nor is it theology of worship

- The ***objective of liturgical studies*** is to gain more knowledge about liturgy, whereas ***liturgical theology*** is ***interested in the meaning of the liturgy***.
- Liturgical studies can serve as a necessary condition for liturgical theology; but a liturgical theologian is not simply interested in accumulating knowledge about liturgy without experiencing the of the Church.
- Thus, liturgical theology is mainly defined as "the theological work of a liturgical assembly, not a work done by an academic upon liturgical material."
 - David Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima: What is Liturgical Theology*, 2004, ix.
- Liturgical theology is **normative** for any theological enterprise because it is the place where the sources of theology function

- A "*theology of the liturgy*" is interested in constructing theological ideas *relating to the liturgy of the Church*.
- It is convinced of the **importance of liturgy**, and deals with **methods of theology as an academic discipline**.
- BUT Liturgical theology **does not consider the liturgy as a field of thorough theological reflection among various theological fields**.
- For Liturgical theology the study of liturgy is **NOT** an option; it is a necessary condition for any theology.
- The Liturgy, thus, **is NOT an object**, but the conceptual and existential framework par excellence for any theology.

- "The subject matter of theology is ***God, humanity, and creation***, and the vortex in which these three existentially entangle is liturgy."
 - (Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima*, 2004, ix. Lex orandi lex est credenda)
 - We see a mutual dependence of **liturgy and theology** as practiced in the **patristic era**.
- ***Whereas one tends to give primacy to dogma over liturgy, liturgical theologians argue for the opposite.***
- For them the actual celebration of the liturgy, which shapes both the community itself and the way it reflects on its faith, comes first.
- Thus the primacy of liturgy over doctrine is claimed.
 - A short apologia/ reflection presented at a Liturgy Colloquium by Robert Taft in 1977.

- A study of worship (liturgical study) is a theological discipline (enterprise); not just a matter of worship-planning or pastoral care.

– Is a liturgical study a legitimate theological task? – a question that reflected the “identity crisis” faced by liturgy students in the 70s.

- **Liturgy as an expression of belief**

- Like the other monuments of tradition, such as (patristic writings, theological treatises, canonical sources, even the Bible) liturgy is an expression of belief; and thus it is an object of theological investigation.
- If we agree that the homily of St. John Chrysostom needs a theological attention, then the prayers by which he worshipped with his flock (the liturgy which he composed) is worthy of the same.

- **Scripture is the result of a worshipping community. The Bible**, thus is the Church's first liturgical book, whose riches are most properly revealed in the covenant assembly of the word.
- If theology studies the saving activity of God in Christ, then liturgy is an object of theology.
- **If theology studies:-** the nature and life of Christ's Church; of how the book that preserves that word has been formed and proclaimed and preached and hymned; of how we pray together, receive forgiveness; bring the healing (comforting) Christ to the sick and dying, to the lonely, the abandoned, the oppressed, the desperate; if theology studies all this, **then the study of liturgy is the study of theology.**
- **Liturgy, therefore, is theology.** Finally, liturgy is part of the Church's Holy Tradition, which is not simply the past, but the present insofar as it is in continuity with the past.

- **Liturgy as an activity of God in Christ.**

- + Christ saves through the ages in the activity of his mystical Body (The Church) of which he is the head.
- He does this saving act in his word that calls us to union with him in that Body by his saving grace – and that is liturgy.

- **Liturgy as an activity of the Church**

- As leitourgia (work of the people), liturgy is an activity of men and women in union with their head (Christ) – and thus it is the Church's activity.
- It is how the Church responds in praise, surrender and thanksgiving to this call of God's revealing and saving word.
- The Eucharist, indeed, is the supreme act of the life of the Church in this saving dynamic of call & response.

Theology from the Locus of Liturgy

- It is worth recalling the famous saying of Evagrius of Pontus in his treatise On Prayer, “
- If you are a theologian you will truly pray and you will be a theologian if you truly pray”.
- It is quoted not with an intention to disregard the academic nature of theology or to over simplify it, but to point to the essential link between ‘talking with God’ and ‘talking about God’.
- In another way we can say the Orthodox approach does ‘faith adores the mystery’ more than ‘faith seeking understanding’.

Christian Theology as a Liturgical Theology

- Apparently, liturgy is an object of theology; and thus we have a theology of liturgy.
- But a true Christian theology must be liturgical theology – that is, doxological in nature, involved with God's unending saving activity and humans' prayerful response to it throughout the ages.
- Otherwise our theology is not the study of how a living God saves. The dialectic (interaction) of salvation history and prayer in the Bible is the dialectic which we call liturgy.
- God acts, and his people respond: “He who is mighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name!” (Lk. 1: 49)

- The doctrines of the Church are not being neglected or diluted by relating theology with worship.
- According to the understanding of the Orthodox Churches, **liturgy is the celebration of faith.**
 - **Liturgical texts contain long prayers where the understanding of the Church is beautifully expressed. Relatively long prayers in the Eastern liturgies have very clear catechetical motif together with its primary purpose of worshipping God.**
- The idea is very clear in the words of Metropolitan Dr. Paolos Mar Gregorios: The theologically rich long prayers appear to be more homiletically meditations that prayer: is too simple a way of putting it.
- **The point is that the prayer is the proper context for true dogma**, not that the dogma is to be regulated by the prayer of the Church.

- *There is always danger in taking dogma out of the context of prayer & making it a subject for discursive thought.*
- *Academic theological development in our day appears to be heading for a dead end of dry barrenness; perhaps reincorporating the faith in the devout prayers and offices of the Church may provide a heal their approach to theology everywhere.*
- Transcending the predicament of western theological dualism, which keeps a sharp divide between academic theology and liturgical expressions of the Church, has become an essential task for us to lead our people to have meaningful life of prayer with proper conviction and understanding of faith.

- *We have to make a self-critical analysis whether in any way we fall into the western tendency of over rationalization and detachment of theology from the liturgical life of the Church.*
- *Considering Prayer and Liturgy as the locus of theology* doesn't prevent the study & understanding of Scripture and faith of the Church in any other context.
- Since worship is the core & nucleus of the life of the Church, every one of her activities must be **convergent** to it.
- The conscious and disciplined teaching in the Church shall be complementary to the liturgical experience and will help us to enhance the spiritual content and identity consciousness among the believers.
- Relatively long prayers in the Eastern liturgies have very clear catechetical motif together with its primary purpose of worshipping God.

- We have to take initiative to teach our people theology in the context of liturgy and prayer.
- Through liturgy and prayers we understand, proclaim and celebrate the content faith and experience the communion with God.
- An active participation in the liturgy with higher understanding will elevate many of the believers form considering it as 'an obligatory ritual' or 'a routine practice'.
- Liturgy centered spirituality has to be seen as an inevitable aspect of the way of life of Marthoma Nazranies.

The Theological & Ascetical Dimensions of Liturgy

Liturgical Theology as the way to Spirituality

- What is meant by Orthodox Spirituality?
- **Orthodox spirituality involves a journey towards a mystical union with God through living the Gospel teachings in the context of the Church and participating in her sacraments and Holy Traditions.**
Why? through living the Gospel teachings in the context of the Church ? Why impossible Interpreting the Bible by our selves?
- Holy Tradition is the Church's Guide
- to Interpreting Holy Scripture

- The Bible can only be understood through the Church, for the Holy Scriptures came forth from the Church.
- The reformers dumped the papacy only to replace that institution with themselves as the ultimate authority.
- Since reason and logic ruled, there was no room for the intuitive, noetic nature of the heart.
- Thus the interpretation of the Bible became a debatable subject between believers, ending in new denominations proliferating like rabbits.

- The Bible is the written account of the first Christians experience with God and was a living, oral tradition inspired by the Holy Spirit, and put down in written form. To think that it is therefore open to personal interpretation, apart from the Church from which it sprang, is the cause of over thirty-five thousand different denominations today!
- The Orthodox Church has kept the early teachings and liturgical traditions precisely because she has refused to interpret Scripture apart from that which was always taught. Her Divine services connect us to the early Church precisely because they are the same liturgical services used by the early Church.

- Orthodoxy is increasingly becoming known in the West, and more and more people are being drawn to her. But we don't convert people to Orthodoxy by words and debate, but by the example of our lives. Judging others can not be a part of our witness to the truth of Orthodoxy. Giving witness to the transformational power of the Church is what convicts others of the truth of our faith.
- We must pray for our friends and loved ones who do not yet know Orthodoxy, yet we should also give thanks for those who know Jesus Christ. It is a joy to have God as our Father and an extra benefit to have the Church as our Mother. But lest we forget, it is of no value whatsoever to be Orthodox if we do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

- We have seen the famous quotation of Evagrius about *integral relationship between liturgical prayer and theology*.
- In the Orthodox understanding liturgical theology and spirituality are neither parallel nor divided aspects of the life of the Church, rather diverse expressions of her consciousness, experience and commitment to God.
- Praising the human mind it yet condemns the human nature".

- Dimitru Staniloae; says It "presents the process of a Christian progress on the road to perfection in Christ, by the cleansing of the passions and the winning of the virtues. God calls us to perfection (Matt 5:48).
- This can't be obtained without the participation in the divine-human life of Christ.
- The goal of Orthodox Spirituality is the perfection of the believer by his union with Christ and living in a state of deification or participation in the divine life.

- He speaks of the Orthodox approach in theology in which achieving the likeness of God, theosis, is more passionately being held as the purpose. "Orthodox theology has the opposite paradox - it lacks this great sanguinity about the power of human intellect, but still passionately holds to perfectibility of the human become the icon of the Divine".
- In the Orthodox perspective the right ordering of faith leads us to the right practice of worship through liturgy and spirituality which elevates the believer to the union with the Almighty.
- Learning theology has to lead us to living liturgical theology.

• Dimitru Staniloae, the features of Orthodox Christian Spirituality:

1. The culminating state of the spiritual life is a union of the soul with God, experienced.
2. By the working of the Holy Spirit, involved in a prolonged effort of purification.
3. When man reaches the "likeness of God." It is at the same time apophatic knowledge and love.
4. The effect of this union consists of a considerable intensification of spiritual energies in man, accompanied by all kinds of charismas.

- Both the community worship together with whole sacramental activities of the church and the personal experience of the believers are not detached from the theological activities of the church.
- Vladimir Lossky, a prominent Russian Orthodox theologian of twentieth century explains the relationship between the spiritual experiences which he calls mysticism:
- The eastern tradition has never made a sharp distinction between mysticism and theology; between personal experience of the divine mysteries and the dogma affirmed by the Church.
- The following words spoken a century ago by a great Orthodox theologian, the Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, express this attitude perfectly:

- There is, therefore, *no Christian mysticism without liturgical theology*; but, above all, *there is no theology without mysticism*.
- Christian theology is always in the last resort a means: a unity of knowledge sub serving an end which transcends all knowledge.
- This ultimate end is union with God or deification, the *Theosis* of the Greek Fathers.
- Thus, we are finally led to a conclusion which may seem paradoxical enough: that Christian theory should have an eminently practical significance; and that *the more mystical it is, the more directly it aspires to the supreme end of union with God*.

- *We have to make a self-critical analysis of how far theological academics and spirituality are integrated properly in our Church.*
- Mostly what we call theology remains an intellectual kind of learning during studentship and eventually *being neglected while engaging in the ministry*.
- In our ministry we use to seek ***more practical ways*** to enhance and nurture *our personal spirituality* and that of the congregation entrusted to us.
 - The outcome of this divergence of theology and spirituality will naturally be the lifeless academic theology and shallow spirituality without proper orientation and effectiveness in the life of the Church.

• *I feel it a painful fact that even while keeping the doctrinal positions and liturgical practices intact, our Church is overmuch vulnerable to westernization in different regards.*

- ☐ It is questionable how far we can be proud of claiming the Patrimony and legacy of St. Yared being the most authentic Church of Ethiopia.
- ☐ We have to seriously consider developing a liturgical theology and spiritual system of our own, an Orthodox way of life compatible in the contemporary life situations.
- ☐ It is not an invocation to make any alteration in doctrinal position or liturgical practices, but for incorporation of more unhellenised forms of Orthodox theological and spiritual aspects into the Church and to lead her in an Ethiopian way of St. Yared.

- Spiritual activities of the Church must be an extension of the liturgical celebrations illuminating the whole body of Christ.
- Promoting spirituality deep-rooted in the theology of Orthodox Fathers with indigenous ways of expressions will be a successful way of reviving and upholding the Marthoma Nazrani identity in twenty first century.
- Encouraging the usage of hymns of early Syriac Fathers of the Church which contain simple, but logical expositions of scripture will be more spiritually enriching and culturally matching than the making discourses on Greco-Roman theology stuffed with philosophical jargons and intellectual speculations which prevents the believers from transcending 'the written code' towards the 'life giving Spirit'.

- The word *theologia* has been given different meanings by the Fathers of the Church.
- For Clement of Alexandria it meant: "a science of divinity," whereas Origen understood it as "a doctrine about God."
- St. Athanasius used the term to refer to the doctrine of the Trinity.
- Indeed, theology is a knowledge of God which results in the illumination of the soul by the Holy Spirit.
- As Evagrius of Pontikus nicely put it, ***theologia is the perfect knowledge of God, identified with the summit of prayer.***

Liturgy, theology, asceticism

- This summit can be reached only through *askesis* (*ascesis*), spiritual training or discipline.
- A theologian should be able to speak about God, using the correct grammar of liturgy.
- Of course, he/she needs to have a liturgical life as well, being familiar with *Orthodoxia* (right or correct worship/doxology).
- ***"If you are a theologian you truly pray. If you truly pray you are a theologian."***
 - St. Evagrius, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*.
- *Liturgical theology involves asceticism, and Christian asceticism is a substantially liturgical activity.*

- This builds on the "liturgical fact" established by the historical study of the *ordo*.
- The theological contents of the Eastern/Western liturgies are studied thoroughly.
- A number of doctrinal expositions (Tridology, Christology, Mariology, Pneumatology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology, baptismal and eucharistic theologies, etc.) can be drawn upon the primary liturgical sources.
- We have to concede that the primary goal of liturgical theology is to worship the true God through the true faith, and to protect the true faith there must be a defense.

Different theological approach...

- The Liturgical texts of the Orthodox Churches developed in the monasteries and ascetical communities very well serve the pastoral responsibility of the Church to provide spiritual formation to the believers who gather to worship the Almighty.
- So we would consider Liturgy as the locus of Theology where the understanding of the Church is preserved in the forms of **creedal expressions & doxologies**.
 - **Worshipping God in Spirit and Truth involves holding true faith & celebrating it.**
- Commentaries of the Liturgy and prayers unfold the real depth of theological content preserved in the Orthodox Liturgical texts.
- The Divine Liturgy is also referred to as — **The drama of Divine Salvation**. **Proper participation requires proper preparation.**

- Orthodox Theology throughout the history has been developed for pastoral care and defense of the true faith.
- Great Fathers of the Church like St. Athanasius of Alexandria and St. John Chrysostom brilliantly kept the balance between **pastoral care for nurturing the faith and spirituality**, and polemics for defense of the faith while developing theological literature.
- Pastoral outlook was the general characteristic of the whole patristic theology.
- Even in the tensed phase of ecumenical councils, most of the Fathers succeeded in maintaining the focus of theology **pastoral and soteriological**.

Different theological approach...

- Apophatic Approach is the theological methodology of the Eastern ecclesiastical tradition and is also called **negative theology**.
- The basic principle behind this approach is that **the divine mysteries are beyond human perception and we cannot make definitions or theories regarding it.**
- It explains the faith **in a mystical way** and makes a series of negations while learning theology.
 - **According to the apophatic theologians, rational theories and logical definitions are quite irrelevant in explaining the Divine Mysteries.**

- Their diligence in defending the true faith was with soteriological motif and thus pastoral in its core.
- That means they dedicated their lives to teach the people worshipping True God with 'True Faith' for the sake of entering into real communion with Him through liturgical theology.
- **Liturgical texts contain long prayers where the understanding of the Church is beautifully expressed. Relatively long prayers in the Eastern liturgies have very clear catechetical motif together with its primary purpose of worshipping God.**

Different theological approach...

- Apophatism is **not a branch of Theology but an attitude** which should underlie all theological discourse and understanding.
- Apophatic approach in Theology is not mere intellectual ascent into ideas, but a constant enquiry of absolute by negating each stage of knowledge acquired through the enquiry.
- The negation of knowledge for acquiring the higher is explained by Dionysius in his treatise, 'The mystical Theology', as follows:

my advice to you as you look for a sight of the mysterious things, is to leave behind you everything perceived & understood, everything perceptible & understandable, all that is not & all that is, & with your understanding laid aside, to strive upward as much as you can towards union with absolute abandonment of yourself and everything, shedding all and freed from all, you will be uplifted to the ray of the divine shadow which is everything.

- The EOTC Anaphora of St. Mary, for example, explicitly speaks of the incapability of human beings to attain complete knowledge about God.

• It says:

... Again when I think of this, my mind likes to soar and ascend secretly and drew back the curtains of hiding places of the Living one; it became afraid of the flame of the fire and does not reach even one fourth of the way to heaven. . . . He is the mighty one whom none can discern by subtle device.

—This poetic presentation points the incomprehensibility of the Godhead by the created finitude.

- He advocates a sequence of negations aimed at an ascent to a mystical experience of the absolute one *who is beyond the nature of everything else*.
- For him the denial of everything lesser will guide the enquirer to the absolute reality *beyond comprehension*.
- The Absolute is beyond assertion and denial. Possibilities of assertion or denial are not applicable to the absolute reality.
 - *The message of Apophatic theology is that we are unable to use the concepts of the human mind or of creation for signifying God.*
 - *Apophatism affirms the absolute otherness of God's being which is found at the heart of biblical theology.*

- The absolute otherness of God's being which is found at the heart of biblical theology is not by neglecting God's immanence.
- God is transcendent in His essence but immanent in His Divine providence. He is the inaccessible but also the closest to us than even we are to ourselves.
- Lossky's explanation seems to fit in the context better:

- Apophatism *emphasizes* that *what we know about being* from the creation must not be ontologically identified with God.
- God has a *simple & unknowable existence, inaccessible to all things and completely unexplainable, for He is beyond affirmation and negation*.
- The Apophatic approach attempts to acknowledge the ultimate God, Who has an entirely different Essence (ousia) from the very being of created entities.
- The inaccessibility of created intelligence to comprehend the uncreated is clearly noticeable in the *Eastern liturgical and patristic literature*.

•The existence of an Apophatic attitude of going beyond everything that has connection with created finitude is implied in the paradox of Christian revelation: the transcendent God becomes Immanent in the world, but in the very Immanence of His economy, which leads to Incarnation and to death on the cross. He reveals Himself as transcendent, as ontologically Independent of all created beings.

Holy Trinity has one ousia and three hypostases. Hypostases signifying individuals sunjectivisation.

- West (Latins) uses **Substantia** whereas East (Greek) uses **Ousia** (Essence).
- Greeks use **Hypostasis** & Latins uses **Prosopon**.
- Latins define doctrinal of Trinity is **one Substantia in three Prosopon**, while the Greeks define it as **one Ousia and three Hypostasis**.

• McGuckin, St. Cyril of Alexandria.

- St. Ephrem the Syria says about the **ontological gap between the Creator and created**, which he calls a **bottomless chasm**.
- The Apophatic approach of the ineffability of God is strongly testified in the teachings of Ephrem. He writes, —**What is made cannot reach its maker**.
- This concept is at the heart of the theological writings and commentaries of the Orthodox Fathers.

Apophatism beyond Epistemology

- Epistemology is the **theory of knowledge**. It deals with **how we do obtain knowledge about something**.
- Apophatism is n't a system advocating either Gnosticism or Agnosticism, rather pointing to the need and possibility of **trans-intellectual mystical union between the devotee and deity**.
- According to Eastern Churches, **theological enquiry is inseparable from spiritual experience**.
- Lossky says: The Eastern tradition never made a sharp distinction between **mysticism and Theology**; between personal experience of the divine mysteries and the dogma affirmed by the Church.

The Church Fathers unanimously speak about the Incomprehensible nature of God. The following are some selected teachings of the Fathers on this issue.

•I, too, know many things but I do not know how to explain them. I know that God is everywhere and I know that he is everywhere in his whole being. But I do not know how he is everywhere.

•I know that he is eternal and has no beginning.

•But I do not know how. My reason fails to grasp how it is possible for an essence to exist when that essence has received its existence neither from itself nor from another.

•I know that he begot the Son. But I do not know how. I know that the Spirit is from him. But I do not know how the Spirit is from him.

- Theology is inseparably united with the life of the Church.
- Apophatism is not parallel ascent of intellectual enquiry to the higher plane of truth, but the very activity of the church **integrating theology and spirituality**.
- Mysticism in the Eastern tradition is not something detached from intellectual pursuit, but quite complementary to it and transcending it in the **higher stages of spiritual growth towards Theosis**.
- ' Lossky explains —God no longer presents Himself as an object, for it is no more a question of knowledge but union. **Negative theology is thus a way towards mystical union with God whose nature remains incompressible**.
- In general Apophatism is:
 - □ **We cannot make direct comment**
 - □ **There is true proposal but not conclusive statement**
 - □ **Intellectual mysticism (trans- intellectual)**
 - □ **Understanding is not in itself the end of the purpose of life**
 - □ **Human purpose is to grow to the image and likeness of God.**

- The following words spoken a century ago by a great Orthodox theologian, the metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, express this attitude perfectly:
 - None of the mysteries, of the most secret wisdom of God ought to appear alien or altogether transcendent to us, but in all humility **we must apply our spirit to the contemplation of divine things**.
 - To put it in another way, we must live the dogma expressing a revealed truth, which appears to us an unfathomable mystery, (incapable of being fully explored or understood or impossible to measure its extent) in such a fashion that instead of assimilating the mystery to our mode of understanding, we should, on the contrary, look for a profound change, an inner transformation of spirit, enabling us to experiences it mystically.
 - The more mystical it is, the more directly it aspires to the supreme end of union with God.

1.4. Different Liturgical Families

- After the day of Pentecost, Apostles and other Evangelists went to different places of the world to propagate the message of our Lord Jesus Christ. They established Christian Communities in different parts of the World.
- **The Communities begun in various lands grew up as accustomed to the cultural, social and other situations of the lands, but without losing the content of Christian faith.**
- Thus the Liturgical traditions developed. The theological attitudes of East and West reflect in the development of the Liturgical Traditions also. We can classify them generally into two groups, Eastern and Western.
- The only one surviving tradition in the Western family is Latin, whereas we see various traditions in the Eastern family. The liturgical families and sub-families are presented in the following chart.