HOLY TRINITY UNIVERSITY

Introduction to Orthodox Theology

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Course Description

No	Items	Descriptions
1	Faculty	Fundamental Theology
2	Department	Dogmatic Theology
3	Course Name	Introduction to Orthodox Theology
4	Course Code	
5	Allotted Years and Semester	1st year, 1st Sem.
6	Course Goals	This course aims at helping students to understand orthodox theology well and to be aware of the difference between Eastern and Western Theological Approaches
7	Course Descriptions	There is a remarkable difference between eastern and western traditions, not only in content but also in their approach to theology. Eastern Orthodox Theology aims at perfection of the individual person to the level of Theosis. This course deals with an orthodox understanding of theology as a mystical union with God, its sources, classifications, and some prominent figures/models in Orthodox Theology.
8	Pre Requisite Course	No
9	Name of the Course Leader	
10	Medium of Instruction	English
11	Objectives of the Course	At the end of the Course, students should be able to:) Understand fundamentals of theology) Differentiate between Eastern and Western theological traditions and approaches Grow in spirituality since theology is a mystical union with God
12	Course Methodology	) Weekly classes, lectures, and presentation (Q&A)) Agenda focusing on the objective of the

		course for discussion and case studies Active participation in the class
13	Course Materials	Main references: Andrew Louth, Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology; Vladimir Lossky, Orthodox Theology: An Introduction; The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church ግርማ ባቱ፣ የነገረ መለኮት መግቢያ Additional References: Lossky, Vladimir. *The Vision of God;* *Ware*, T., *The Orthodox Church;* Ware, T. The Orthodox Way; St. Ephrem, the Syrian, the Luminous Eye, Andrew Louth, The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition.
Weeks	Lesson	
1	Definitions of Theology	
2	Situating Eastern Orthodox Theology	
3	Eastern and Western Theological Approaches	
4	Source and Sources of Theology	
5	Holy Tradition and Holy Scripture	
6	Patristics and Decisions of the Ecumenical Councils	
7	Liturgy and Sacraments	
8	Mid-Term Exam	
9	Classifications of Theology	
10	Major Classifications of Theology: Scriptural, Dogmatic	
11	Major Classifications of Theology: Historical and Practical	
12	Sub Fields of Theology	
13	Theosis: The True purpose of Orthodox Theology	
14	Theosis: An orthodox Doctrine of Soteriology	
15	Summary and Conclusion	

16	Final Exam	

INTRODUCTION

Orthodox Theology differs from other western theology in many ways. The word orthodox refers to this difference since orthodox comes from *orthos*-straight, right, and correct; and *doxa*

means glory, worship, praise, opinion (from the verb *dokein*). So, in the context of theology it is a claim that we are right in contrast to others who are heretical.

The split between Eastern and Western Churches happened in 451 AD at the Council of Chalcedon. Those who supported the decisions of the council (Byzantine Greeks, Russians, and Other East European Churches) are called Chalcedonians and those who reject are called Non-Chalcedonians. These churches are Ethiopian, Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Indian, and Eritrean Orthodox Churches.

Eastern Churches called themselves Orthodox, but dogmatically different from the Oriental Orthodox Churches. But in theological approach, these two Orthodox categories share many things in common. The theological approach of Eastern Orthodox Churches is called Apopahtic, whereas the rest of Western Churches' approach is called Cathaphatic. The two groups understand and define theology differently; they use dissimilar sources, etc. The following parts will discuss these differences and the unique features of Eastern Orthodox Theology in detail.

BASICS OF THEOLOGY

God creates, conserves and provides everything and **from the created realities man can know God**. But from the very beginning God also revealed himself and invited humans to have intimate communion with Him.

> "At various times in the past and various different ways God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets, but in our own times, the last days, he has spoken to us through His Son" (Heb. 1:1-2)

Through times Humankind responded to God's call through faith. **God's revelation and its counterpart, human faith and human understanding constitute the subject matter of Christian theology.** Within this basic framework itself, there have been different understandings, emphases, and definitions of Christian theology. The different definitions of theology derive from diverse and different perspectives. For instance, on the existence of God there are generally three views: Atheism, Agnosticism and Theism. But within each of these

views there are numerous schools and theories. These all influenced the notion about theology directly or indirectly.

Atheism as an ideology rejects the existence of God. Among the atheists are included some of the philosophers, scientists, politicians, and psychologists, etc. The reasons for the denial of God vary. According to some, there is so much evil, unmerited suffering and injustice in this world that one cannot believe in a good and loving God. Many of the atheists argue that God is the projection of the human mind created by primitive religions and powerful groups by which they subdue the powerless and the poor. For psychologist Sigmund Freud, the God who controls and provides everything, is created by the human psyche in response to its need for love, safety and security.

The **Agnostics** simply say that they do not know whether God Exists or not. After all, for them the question of God's existence is not an important one. With or without God, the world will go on as it is. It must be noted here that even some of the religious traditions are non-theistic, e.g. *Charvakas* of Hinduism and *Theravada* Buddhism.

Theism is conceived differently by different religions and philosophical systems. Along with Christianity, Judaism and Islam speak about a personal God who is the origin and destiny of the Universe and of humankind. Some other religions and philosophical systems conceive an impersonal God, and absolute power, a supreme mind or will or spirit, a pure Act the Divine, the Sacred, a Higher Power. Whatever be the differences, God is conceived in Theism as the Ultimate Reality, the Ultimate Ground of Being and the Ultimate Horizon of Meaning. "An ultimate point of reference for grasping and interpreting human life and the world will always be needed in our quest for understanding and formulation"[1]

Human knowledge of God is limited. God is not an object to be experienced like other objects. Human persons cannot fully comprehend the Mystery of God as it transcends human capacities. As God is the source and destiny of the whole creation, there is a certain similarity, though very imperfect between the Creator and the created. It is by studying the created world and its qualities and by eliminating its imperfection and limitations that we arrive at some

[1] Gordon D. Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, 1979

understanding of God and divine mysteries. The History and the realities of the time also influence human knowledge and perspective. All these mean that human knowledge of God and its articulations need continuous learning and communication with God.

1.1. ETYMOLOGY OF THE TERM THEOLOGY

The term "Theology" derives from the Greek words, *Theos* meaning "God" and *logos/logia,* "study,word, discourse, science". So the term *theologia* originally coined by the Greek philosophers means "human talk about gods", "discourse on God", "science about God". But in today's world of secularism, agnosticism and atheism, God's existence cannot be taken for granted. Does God exist? If God exists, can we know anything about God? Can we speak of God meaningfully as we speak about other subjects and objects?

1.2. DEFINITIONS OF THEOLOGY

The Fathers of the Church began to use the term "theology" for their Trinitarian and Christological discussions of the time, and subsequently for the interpretation of sacred scriptures.

Christian theology in its beginnings was simply the study and interpretation of sacred scriptures.

Christian theology for the East is always a means; a means to attain union with God or deification. There are two theological approaches. The first One is **Apophatic theological proceeding by negations** and the other one is **Cataphatic or positive theology, proceeding by affirmations.**

The only way which is fitting with regard to God who by 'His very nature is **unknowable** is the latter which finally leads to total ignorance. Now God is beyond all that exists; In order to approach Him it is necessary to deny all that is inferior to Him, that is to say, all that which is. It is by *unknowing (agnawsia)* that one may know Him who is above every possible object of knowledge.

We should remember here that the goal of Apophatic theology is not God as object, but God as subject or union with God. Moses', entering the darkness and so seeing God within it is compared by Eastern Fathers to the Apophatic way of theologizing. According to the Cappadocian fathers for example, if the first THEOPHANY Moses ' received was in the

burning bush (Ex. 3.1-4.17), there was a spiritual growth in his life to experience God in 'thick darkness' (Ex. 33.17-23), that is, in the total negation of any perception, physical or intellectual. This darkness is the inherent incapacity of created nature to penetrate the essential mystery of God. This veil of darkness which hinders the vision of God's nature has a salutary function. Also, it is interpreted that the rock which hid Moses' complete vision of God and thus saved him from fatal exposure to a total vision of God was Christ.

The incarnate Christ acts as a veil that hides from humans any intellectual knowledge of the, essential nature of God. He is the saving curtain which covers the window of any rational comprehension of God.

1.3. SOME WESTERN VIEWS ON THEOLOGY

A.H. Strong described theology as "The science of God and of the relations between God and the universe." (*Systematic Theology,* 1886)

Charles Hodge wrote that it is "The science of the facts of divine revelation so far as those facts concern the nature of God and our relation to Him, as His creatures, as sinners, and as the subjects of redemption." (*Systematic theology*; 1872–73)

"Rational discussion respecting the deity"
—Augustine

"Thinking about God and expressing those thoughts in some way"
—Charles Ryrie

"The study of Science of God"
—Millard Erickson

The problem is that when we think of "science," we usually think of the study of the natural world and that which can be quantitatively measured—subjects such as biology and physics. So what was a science? Augustine defined it as anything to do with knowledge of the temporal world. Thomas Aquinas considered theology a science because it encounters special and general revelation.

So, theology was seen as a science in the middle Ages. How, then, was it supreme over, and therefore "queen of," the other sciences? In the Medieval universities, it was understood that the

various branches of learning required an overarching standard. That standard was the Bible. Because the Bible was seen as the source of all truth, theology became the natural standard by which other scholarship had to abide.

The scholars of the day rightly saw that one's view of God and the Bible affects every other area of life. A scholar's theology is the foundation of his worldview and shapes his study of philosophy and other fields. Theology, then, was the "queen of the sciences"; that is, God's Word is the majestic source of knowledge that informs all other knowledge. The above notion on theology as a science understands God as an object, and as "the other" - thought by Augustine. But, the eastern orthodox theological tradition disagree with theses and never made a sharp distinction between theology and spirituality, that is to say man has opportunity to have a full communion with God.

In Orthodoxy, theology is not a mere rational activity, not a human search or quest or investigation on God, based on reason alone, but a search to understand God's words and action revealed in human history for the salvation of human kind. That is to say theology is primarily an activity of faith; it is a science of faith.

In contrast to this, "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… To put it another way, we must live the dogma expressing a revealed truth, which appears to us as an unfathomable mystery, 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 the spirit, enabling us to experience it mystically… There is, therefore, no Christian mystery without theology; but, above all, there is no theology without mysticism… Mysticism is accordingly treated in the present work as the perfecting and crown of all theology: as theology *par excellence"*[2]

1.4. KNOWLEDGE AND VISION OF GOD

In this case, vision meaning knowledge, and knowledge of things related with divine being, and it is the definition of theology as a whole.

[2] Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, pp. 8f.

The Cappadocian Fathers are regarded as exponents of the negative theology, and of the mystical tradition in Christianity. The supreme antinomy of the Triune God, unknowable and knowable, incommunicable and communicable, transcendent and immanent is the primary locus of their Apophaticism.

Moreover, the negative theology of the Cappadocian Fathers is balanced by their acute sense of the revelation of God ad extra (equally predicated of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit). Thus, they are compelled to recognize an indefinable distinction between the essence (Ousia) and energies (Energia) within the uncreated God.

The divine nature is eternally transcendent and beyond man's experience and comprehension. The energies of God, on the other hand, are forces proper to, and inseparable from God's essence, in which He manifests, communicates and gives Himself to us.

Thus, the knowledge and existence of God is understood by Gregory of Nyssa, Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian in two different modes: inside and outside the essence. Further, the Cappadocian Fathers acknowledge two methods of understanding and experiencing God. The first is a method of knowledge by epinoia, (ለባዊነት) an intellectual and rational approximation (a category of kataphatic knowledge). It is used to describe God in a rational realm of the created world and formulates in language manifestations of God in His names and energies.

The second is the method of knowledge by means of direct experience. It goes beyond sense perceptions (a category of apophaticism) towards union with God.

Gregory of Nyssa agrees that a real knowledge of God is not to be found in the created world, but was careful not to make the cognitive knowledge, even if necessarily limited, seem unimportant. He insists on the absolute transcendence and unknowability of the Trinity, while emphasizing the reasonable accuracy of words as verbal signifiers. The main characteristic of Gregory's via negativa is concrete experience of theology against the limits of language. Human comprehension becomes a method of negation, rather than affirmation, and truth rises above (simply because it lies beyond) cognitive knowledge. Positive affirmations limit God to categories appropriate to human speech since they are the products of human experience of the created universe.

"For we say, it may be, that the Deity is incorruptible, or powerful, or whatever else we are accustomed to say of Him. But in each of these terms we find a peculiar sense, fit to be understood or asserted of the Divine nature, yet not expressing that which that nature is in its essence". [3]

"**Now the divine nature as it is in itself, according to its essence, transcends every act of comprehensive knowledge and cannot be approached or attained by our speculation**".[4]

God is above every name, thought or concept, not only of humans, but also of angels, and above any linguistic expression, transcendent and incomprehensible. Because the divine essence is perfectly ungraspable and cannot be compared to anything", every idea made up about God is essentially an idol, a false likeness, declared Gregory of Nyssa.

Basil often discusses the human limits involved in studying God. He readily identified that "language is powerless to express [even] what the mind conceives." For him, not only divine essence is indefinable, unnamable and unknowable but humans do not even know the essence of the ground on which they are standing.[5]

In general knowledge of God may be beyond both the apophatic and kataphatic realms and human language is incapable of grasping the divine nature. However, the negative theology (apophasis) which relies on denial or negation as higher form of argumentation and understanding" is more suitable linguistic method to designate the transcendence of the divine essence.

According to Basil, not only the divine essence alone but also created essences could not be expressed in concepts. In regards to names, applicable to God, the negative names tell us what God is not, forbidding the use of concepts alien to God. The kataphatic attributes point out what must be conceived when we think of God. They show us God as He reveals Himself to created beings. But there is not one among all the divine names expressing what God is in essence,

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[3] Gregory of Nyssa, To Ablabius; ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2:

[4] Gregory of Nyssa, Homily on Beatitudes, Sermon 6, PG 44, 1269

[5] Basil the Great, Adversus Eunomium I, 12, PG 29

since all types of names are posterior to the divinity. The divine names reveal his energies which descend towards the created world, yet they do not draw humanity closer to his inaccessible essence. God's nature remains beyond the human capacity for comprehension and knowledge. "The peace of God surpasses all understanding," asserted Basil alluding to Philippians 4, 7. Yet, what can be said about God in his being? Can human language express the antinomy of transcendental Christian God revealing Himself in this world as creator and redeemer?

The distinction between divine essence and energies forms part of theological resource by which Basil the Great defends the transcendence of God and the reality of God's communication of himself to his creation. The essence of God and its properties cannot be comprehended by humans in any other ways, except apophatically. However, it is possible to know God in a certain way through the entire creation, and more through creation of humanity.

"We know the greatness of God, his power, his wisdom, his goodness, his providence over us and the justness of His judgments, but we do not undertake to approach near to his essence. His operations come down to us, but His essence remains beyond our reach."

CHAPTER TWO

2. SOURCES OF THEOLOGY

A debate on the source or sources of theology started with the medieval reformers, especially Luther and Calvin who proposed the sola scriptura principle. What the reformers meant was that "the Bible, inspired by the Holy Spirit, contained everything necessary for our salvation, and there shall not be any teaching and experience of the church, which contradicts the word of God in the Bible. Scripture alone is the exclusive norm of faith."

But this lucks the very context of the Christian faith –Tradition, and detaches the Holy Scriptures from the context. The Reformers' position affected/affects continuity in the history of the Church. This continuity was clearly seen in patristic: writings of the early Church fathers. Tradition as the unique source is the historical faith-experience of the disciples of Jesus Christ of the definitive divine self- communication in Jesus Christ. This faith-experience is expressed, reenacted and mediated through the Christian Tradition, which had been mediated and communicated by the various and numerous elements and components or traditions of that one Tradition.

2.1. REVELATION OF GOD

The term **revelation** refers to how God has *manifested* Himself to humanity or in other words how He has made himself known. "Because humans are finite and God is infinite, if they are to know God, the knowledge must come about by God the initiative to make Himself known."[6]

Revelation in its totality is therefore a history; it is a reality of history, from creation to parousia.[7] Revelation is thus a "theocosmic" relationship which includes us. In the immanence of revelation, God affirms Himself to be transcendent to creation. God transcends His own revelation. God is immanent and transcendent at the same time. That is why we cannot think of God in Himself, in His essence, in His secrecy. To attempt to think of God in Himself reduces us to silence, as neither thought not language can imprison the infinite in those concepts which, in defining, limit. That is why the Church Fathers had alternative, for knowledge of God, to the negative way.[8]

Theologians generally distinguish God's revelation in two ways: General, and Special revelation.

2.1.1. GENERAL REVELATION

Also known as Universal revelation, general revelation deals with how God can be understood through his creation. More specifically, this can be manifested in **physical nature, human**

[6] Millard Erickson, Christian Theology, Third Edition, 2013, 123.
[7] Parousia is a Greek term means present presence, a being present, a coming to a place; presence, coming or arrival. A technical term used of the coming of Christ (Matt 24:3; 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 2.
[8] Vladimir Lossky, Orthodox Theology: An Introduction, 1978, 31.

nature, and history. Scripture itself proposes that there is knowledge of God available through the created physical order. General revelation is also called indirect revelation because; it has no direct revelation with human salvation.

A. PHYSICAL NATURE

The book of Psalms says that, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). Paul quotes Psalm 19:4 in reference to hearing the gospel, "But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for *'Their voice has gone out to all the earth and their words to the ends of the world'*" (Rom. 10:18).

Later on in Psalm 97:6 it says that, "The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory." Paul told men that God had given testimony of Himself in that he has shown kindness by giving them rain from heaven, crops in their seasons and even provides them with their food (Acts 14:15-17). A clearer passage states that, "What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Rom. 1:19-20).

B. HUMAN NATURE

Because humans are made in God's image (Genesis 1:27), something about God can be learned from the study of human nature. Most evident is the moral and spiritual qualities found within humankind that reflect the character of God. Paul says that even the law is written on the hearts of people who do not have the specially revealed law (Romans 2:11-16).

C. HISTORY

Some theologians note that history is *His* - story. The Bible clearly indicates in numerous places that God is moving the course of history and is controlling the destinies of nations (Job 12:23; Psalm 47:7-8, 66:7; Isaiah 10:5-13; Daniel 2:21; Acts 17:26). It should then be possible to sense God at work within history. A careful analysis of the history of the nation of Israel should provide more evidence than is needed.

2.1.2. SPECIAL REVELATION

Special revelation is God's manifestation of Himself to particular persons at definite times and places, enabling those persons to enter into a redemptive relationship with Him. Special revelation was necessary because humans had lost the relationship they had with God prior to the fall.[9]

Special revelation is distinguished from general revelation in that it is *direct* revelation from God. Examples include God's direct speech to various people (e.g., prophets; cf. 2 Peter 1:20-21), the incarnation (cf. Hebrews 1:1-2), and the Bible. Such revelation is sufficient to special revelation.

2.2. TRADITION

Tradition as a unique source of Christian Theology is the historical faith-experience of the disciples of Jesus Christ. This faith experience is expressed, reenacted and mediated through the *Christian Tradition*, or *Apostolic Tradition*. The word '*Tradition'* denotes the sum total of the Christian heritage passed down from previous ages. Scripture is just one item of Tradition in this all-embracing sense. The act of handing on this heritage is sometimes described as 'active Tradition', the stress being on the process rather than the content.

Scripture and Tradition cannot be studied in isolation. They only interact with one another through a third party, the contemporary church. The New Testament writings sprang out of this latter Tradition at different stages in its history. There is therefore an important sense in which (apostolic) Tradition precedes Scripture, an aspect largely ignored by Protestant theology. But although this has important implications for the origin of the New Testament it does not foreclose the question of the subsequent relation between Scripture and Tradition. The New Testament may derive from the original apostolic tradition. The original apostolic Tradition did not suddenly die when the New Testament was produced but remained as the context in which it was read and interpreted.

The early church and the fathers of the church, especially Irenaeus, in the context of heresies, emphasized the necessity of holding fast to the Apostolic Tradition. The interpretation of the sacred scriptures may be diverse, but the *Apostolic Tradition* is one and the same. The foundational experience of revelation and its response in faith was expressed, lived and attested

[9] Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology, 2013, 143.

in the *Apostolic Tradition*. For the early church, the process of the handing on of the *Apostolic Tradition* was a complex process where along with the written scriptures, the catechesis, liturgy prayers, sacraments, the ancient customs, and the writings of the fathers played important roles in mediating the foundational experience.

2.3. SACRED SCRIPTURES

The church holds that the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments are the records of God's Revelation and the faith experience of the people of Israel and of the Apostolic Church, and accepts them as the normative source of faith and theology today.

"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 deeply rooted in the Biblical interpretation."[10]

Both the Old and New Testament books were written by human authors under the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so that God can be said to be their author too. The sacred scriptures contain God's revelation.

The books of Scripture must be acknowledge as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted to put in to the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation. In this case the Holy Bible is considered as the main source of theology together with Tradition.

2.4. WRITINGS OF THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

The Church Fathers lived much closer to the days of the apostles than we do, and they were forced to crystallize the apostolic teaching in response to the invasion of various heresies and errors. Their formulation of Trinitarian and Christological doctrine was eminently biblical

[10] Fr. Dr. Jossi Jacob, Comparative Theology, unpublished

and foundational for true Christianity, and their homilies, apologetic and homiletic writings, and so on, contain innumerable valuable insights.

Studying the Patristic gives us a much clearer understanding of the history of the Church, and acquaints us with how apostles and the outnumbered and persecuted churches they started grew up into the Christianity that we recognize today. This acquaintance with Church history gives us a sense of continuity with the beginnings of Christ's gospel accomplishment, and firmly tethers us to the community of saints worldwide and throughout the ages.

As a source of theology, it is important to know what the Patristic say simply because, virtually every branch of professing Christendom respects them and wants to employ their writings in support of their own teachings. Eastern Orthodoxy claims a significant degree of continuity with the Church Fathers. Defending those claims of continuity by an appeal to the actual writings of the Patristic is, therefore, a very valuable apologetic strategy.

“Following the holy fathers” (በከመ ማህሩነ አበው) . . . it was usual in the ancient church to introduce doctrinal statements by phrases like this.

Following the Holy Father is not a reference to abstract tradition, to formulas and propositions. It is primarily an appeal to persons, *to holy witnesses.* The witness of the Fathers belongs, integrally and intrinsically, to the very structure of the Orthodox faith.

The Church is equally committed to the *kerygma (the apostolic proclamation of religious truths)* of the Apostles and to the *dogmata* of the Fathers. Both belong together inseparably. The Church is indeed *"Apostolic."* But the Church is also *"Patristic."*

And only by being *"Patristic"* is the Church continuously *"Apostolic",The* Fathers testify to the Apostolicity of the tradition. There are two basic stages in the proclamation of the Christian faith. *Our faith had to acquire composition.*

There was an inner urge, an inner logic, an internal necessity, in this transition—from *kerygma* to *dogma.*

The apostolic preaching is not only kept in the Church: it *lives* in the Church. In this sense, the teaching of the Fathers is a permanent category of Christian faith, a constant and ultimate measure or criterion of right belief.

2.5. DECISIONS OF THE ECUMENICAL COUNCILS /CREEDS

Ecumenical councils play a very important role for the development of theology in the history of Christianity.

2.5.1. The First Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) This Council, the first Ecumenical Council of the Universal Church, was held in order to bring out the true teaching of the Church as opposed by the heresy of Arius. It formally presented the teaching of the Church declaring the divinity of God the Son to be one substance and one nature/Homousios with that of God the Father.

In many ways, Nicaea marked a starting point for the church as it began to more fully explain and clarify its belief about the three persons of the trinity and their relation to one another. Further, Nicaea demonstrated that doctrinal orthodoxy and fidelity to scriptural understanding of it could be established through the use of non-scriptural terms.
There were twenty canons drawn up, in which the time of celebrating Easter was clarified, also various matters of discipline or law were dealt with and several decisions advanced. From this Council we have the Nicene Creed.

We can see at least three key theological statements in the creed about Christ, powerfully restated:
I. The reality of his nature
II. His incarnation as a human being
III. The work of salvation that he accomplished.

The Nicene statements are taken as corner stone of Theology, and the holistic context as the decisive source of Theology.

2.5.2. The Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) Again the true faith was maintained against the Arians. Answer was also given against the Apollinarian[11] and Macedonian heresies. In answering the latter which denied the Godhead of the Holy Spirit, the dogma of the Church was

[11] **Apollinarianism** is a heresy maintaining that Jesus Christ was not a real man, but not totally divine either. Apollinarians suggested that he had a human body and a human soul, but his mind was taken over by the eternal Logos. The heretical belief is named for Apollinaris of Laodicea (ca. 350).

again stated and the words inserted into the Nicene Creed declaring the truth that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.

2.5.3. The Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431) The third General Council of the Church defined the Orthodox dogma that the Holy Virgin Mary is the Mother of God (Theotokos) and presented the teaching of the truth of one united nature (Miaphysis) in Christ. The Council was convened against the heresy of Nestorius

2.6. LITURGY, SACRAMENTS AND PRAYERS

Etymology: **Greek leitorgia translates Hebrew 'Abodah' in the LXX. Leitos comes from archaic Greek Leos=people, and erqo=to do, to work.**

In Old Testament abodah can mean the temple service of God, public service or even slavery.

In the New Testament Leitourgia means temple service (Zacharia, Lk. 1:23, Heb. 9:21), the giving of aid to Christians in Jerusalem

Some definitions of the term liturgy

"Liturgy can be defined as the public and official service of worship that the Christian church renders to God."

"Liturgy comprises the whole group of symbols, chants and actions by means of which the church expresses and manifests her religion towards God."

Liturgy often means the whole complex of official services, all the rites, ceremonies, prayers, and sacraments of the Church, as opposed to private devotions. In this sense we speak of the arrangement of all these services in certain set forms (including the canonical hours, administration of sacraments, etc.), used officially by any local church, as the liturgy of such a church — the Liturgy of Antioch, the liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, and so on. So liturgy means rite; we speak indifferently of the Byzantine Rite or the Byzantine Liturgy. In the same sense we distinguish the official services from others by calling them liturgical; those services are liturgical which are contained in any of the official books. In the

cases of the Old and the New Testaments, Liturgy in the sense of the public worship of God, precedes the writing down of the scriptures.

A good deal of the materials in the old and in New Testaments had a liturgical provenance before they were reduced to writing. Certain liturgical formulae can now be found embedded in the scriptural text.

The New Testament has a significant amount of Old Testament sacramental symbolism. The liturgical practices of the church, especially in regards to baptism, and the Eucharist are reflected in the New Testament, and have profoundly influenced the form and content of the latter.

Alexander Schmemann, a Russian emigrant to France and then to the United States, Orthodox theologian, and dean for two decades of St. Vladimir's Seminary, was acutely aware of this tension between liturgical piety/faithfulness and liturgical theology. Schmemann charged that when scholars of liturgy focus only on cataloging and reflecting on existing practices of Christian worship, they elide the crucial question of what happens in worship. This led Schmemann to differentiate **'liturgical theology'** from **'theology of liturgy.'** In the latter, liturgy is seen as an object studied and governed by theology. In the former case, liturgy is a source for theology.

For liturgical theology, what can and cannot be said about the Christian faith is determined, at least in part, by liturgy. Liturgical theology is not a descriptive enterprise, and it is not the project of governing liturgical practice. Liturgical theology recovers resources from liturgy that inform – with normative, not simply advisory, force – theology as a whole.

According to Schmemann, moving from theology of liturgy to liturgical theology is a move from scholastic to patristic understandings of liturgical experience: 'The Fathers do not "reflect" on liturgy. For them it is not an *object* of theological inquiry and definition, but rather the living source and the ultimate criterion of all Christian thought.

There are Sacraments in the Church: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Ordination (Cheirotonia), Marriage/Matrimony and Extreme Unction. In the East the Sacraments are called Mysteries. Because, each one of them hides in itself a mysterious and miraculous action of God the Holy Spirit. The very kernel of each of them consists of this mysterious and miraculous

divine action. In the Christian Mysteries we do not know HOW but we know THAT, i.e., we do not know how the Holy Spirit works in a Mystery but we know that He works in and through it.

In the Mystery of Baptism God the Holy Spirit cleanses the soul from sin, so that the soul receives God's son-ship by grace and is recruited into the communion of Christ the Savior. Baptism effectuates such a tremendous change in a man that is called the new birth (John 3:5). Baptism was ordered by the Lord (Matt 28: 19). "Whosoever is anabaptized cannot be saved, except the martyrs, who even without the water (but by the blood) receive the Kingdom of God" (Cyril of Alexandria).

The Church expresses herself in the liturgy. The liturgical celebration is the noblest expression of the faith of the church. Hence the faith and sacramental life are intimately related. One cannot speak of faith of the church without dealing with the sacramental life of the church. Therefore, church, faith and sacraments are strictly interrelated.

Besides, the Church is the continuation of the mystery of Christ. The mystery of Christ expresses is itself in the mystery of the church. The mystery of the church actualizes itself concretely in the sacramental mysteries.

The East cannot behold Sacraments without relating them to the basic mysteries of the Holy Trinity and the Church - the spirit - centeredness and the eschatological nature in sacramental activities are the basic tenets of Eastern Sacramental theology.

The East always preserved the historicity and tradition of sacraments by standing close with the Bible and the teachings of the early fathers. But in the medieval period, the basic concepts regarding the church itself had changed. The church has changed from the concept of a fellowship and mystery to the concept of an institutional system. Sacraments were limited to certain rites performed in the church from the stature that Sacraments formed the church. This was because of the influence of western theology.

CHAPTER THREE

CLASSIFICATIONS OF THEOLOGY

Orthodox Theological Tradition prefers a holistic approach to classification of Theology. For that reason, we have been discussing the interrelatedness of Sources of theology in the previous chapter,. In this chapter we are dealing with classification just for the sake of better understanding of each field and they will be united at the end with the final purpose of Theology-Soteriology.

Classifications are mostly a Western tradition. But, this doesn't mean that the Eastern Theological Tradition has no any classification at all. In EOTC's Tradition, for example, the Pillars of Mystery (አእማደ ምሥጢር) and Doctrine or Mystery of the Holy Trinity, Mystery of Incarnation, mystery of Baptism, mystery of the Holy Eucharist, and Mystery of Eschatology can be taken as classifications of Theology. In addition, we do Theology as Christology, Mariology and etc. to have a close look at that specific area of Theology. In today's theologization and classification approaches, there are four primary Classifications of Theology: Scriptural/Biblical Theology, Historical Theology (Church History), Dogmatic Theology (Systematic in the West) and Practical Theology. Some other western approaches add contemporary theology on this classification that deals with modern, secular and liberal theologies that are not acceptable to the Orthodox Tradition.

3.1. SCRIPTURAL/BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

* This includes fields such as biblical (OT & NT) Theology

Biblical Theology investigates the periods of history in which God has revealed Himself or the doctrinal emphases of the different Biblical writers are set forth in an orderly manner.

As one aspect of Scriptural Theology, Biblical Theology pays attention to important historical circumstances in which the biblical doctrines were given.

An orthodox doctrine that we have long held is the belief in progressive revelation; God didn't reveal all truth about Himself at one time but revealed Himself portion by portion to different people throughout history (Heb. 1:1). Biblical Theology traces that progress of revelation.

Biblical Theology has a direct relationship to exegesis in as much as Biblical Theology is the result of revelation. Exegesis lies at the foundation of Biblical Theology. Exegesis calls for an

analysis of the biblical text according to the literal, allegorical, historical, and other methodologies.

Biblical Theology can be classified in to two major classes- Old Testament Theology and New Testament Theology.

3.1.1. OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

Old Testament Theology can be summarized under the central theme of **kingdom**. From the beginning of history God has worked through appointed mediators in administrating the kingdom throughout Old Testament history. It seems best to see the unity of the Old Testament as developed around the theme of "kingdom". The theme is emphasized throughout the Old Testament – in the Law, the prophets, and the writings. **God Promise** can be a popular theme of the Old Testament Theology.

3.1.2. NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

New Testament theology is what God has revealed about Himself in the New Testament. The New Testament theology takes the various truths that the New Testament books teach us about God and presents them in an organized manner. The New Testament discloses the coming of the predicted and promised Messiah in the Old Testament (Isaiah 9), the birth of the New Testament Church (the body of Christ), the Church age, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the rejection of the Messiah by Israel, and the doctrinal beliefs applied to the believer in Jesus Christ as God the Savior and Lord.

New Testament Theology also classified as:

- Theology of the Synoptic (the gospel of Matthew, Mark, and Luke)
- Theology of the Acts
- Johannine theology
- Pauline Theology etc.

3.2. **HISTORICAL THEOLOGY (CHURCH HISTORY)**

Historical theology is the unfolding of Christian theology throughout the centuries. It is cognizant of the development and growth of Christian theology, and studies the historical development of Christian doctrine and its influence on the life of the church throughout history.

Historical theology is the study of the development and history of Christian doctrine. As its name implies, historical theology is a study of the development and formation of essential Christian doctrine throughout the history of the New Testament church period. Historical theology can also be defined as the study of how Christians during different historical periods have understood different theological subjects or topics such as the Essence of God, the nature of Jesus Christ, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the doctrine of salvation-Soteriology, etc.

Historical theology covers subjects such as the development of creeds and confessions, church councils, and heresies that have arisen and been dealt with throughout church history.

A historical theologian studies the development of the essential doctrines that separate Christianity from heresies and cults from the 1st Century (NT times) until now. It looks to understand how the church has expressed its belief.

Theologians often break down the study of historical theology into four main periods of time:

1) The Patristic Period from AD 100—590;

2) The Medieval Period (AD 590—1517);

3) The Reformation and Post-Reformation Periods from AD 1517—1750; and

4) The Contemporary Period (AD 1750 to the present day).

* Note that the Orthodox Theological Tradition in particular doesn't agree with such classification and the concept behind. The Orthodox Churches always Patristic and by being patristic the Orthodox Church is Apostolic. The inner meaning of Tradition gives us the basic idea behind the conceptual danger behind classification of history of the Apostolic Church in this manner.[12]

Patristics: also known as Patrology specifically deals with the writings of the Church Fathers. The Fathers were the Bishops or Patriarchs, leading monastic elders of the early Church.[13]

[12] Timothy Ware, The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity, 2015, 189-193

[13] John Anthony McGockin, (ed.), The Concise Encyclopedia of Orthodox Christianity, 2014, 358፤ The Westminster Handbook of Patristic Theology, 2004, Preface. ግርማ ባቱ (ሙ/ር)፣ የነገረ መለኮት መግቢያ፣ 2014፣ 127።

3.3. DOGMATIC **THEOLOGY**

Dogmatic Theology (Systematic in the West) refers to something being merged into a specific class. Dogmatic theology is, therefore, a particular theme is taken from scriptures and divided into many classifications that explain its various areas like: Doctrine of the Holy Trinity, Mariology, Angelology, etc.. For example, many books of the Bible give information about the Angels. No one book gives all the information about the Angels. Dogmatic theology takes all the information about Angels from all the books of the Bible and organizes it into a class or field called Angelology. That is what Dogmatic theology is all about, means organizing the teachings of the Holy Bible into categorical arrangements.

3.3.1. THEOLOGY PROPER (DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY TRINITY)

God is one in Essence (Ousia) and triple in persons (Hypostasis) –Try-Hypostatical unity. The Hypostases have personal or hypostatic attributes: God the Father is unbegotten, the Son is begotten from the Father and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. We worship the Holy Trinity with a single and inseparable worship.[14]

Under this theology proper (Doctrine of the Holy Trinity) we have:

- **Paterology** is the theology/Doctrine of God the Father. This theological area specifically discusses God the Father as begetter and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.
- **Christology** is the Theology of God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Often in the Holy Fathers and and in the divine service texts, the Son of God is called the Word or Logos. This has its foundation in the first chapter of the Gospel of John the theologian. The concept or name "Word" we find in its exalted significance many times in the books of the Old Testament. By the Word of the Lord were the heavens established" (Ps. 32:6); "Forever O Lord Thy Word abideth in heaven" (Ps. 118:89); "He sent forth His Word and He healed them" (Ps. 106:20;
  Of the Son it is said that He is "the only begotten" (John 1:14; 3:16) "from the womb before the morning star have I begotten Thee" (Ps. 109:3); "the Lord said unto me: Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee" (Ps. 2:7; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5).

[14] Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky, Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, 2015, 77.

- **Pneumatology** is the Theology of God the Holy Spirit. **"We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified"** (The Creed)

  The dogma of the procession of the Holy Spirit rests upon the following direct and precise expression of the Savior "but when the comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, Who proceeds from the Father, He shall testify of Me (John 15:26).

The ancient Orthodox teaching of the personal attributes of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit was distorted in the Latin Church by the creation of teaching of the procession, outside of time and from all eternity, of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son-the Filioque. This idea was originated in certain expression of Augustine and became established in the West from the 9th C.

The dogma of the begetting of the Son from the Father and the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father shows the mystical inner relations of the Persons in God and the life of God within Himself. Detail discussions on this subject will come in the form of Doctrine of the Holy Trinity, Christology, and Pneumatology in the coming Years.

OTHER FIELDS UNDER DOGMATIC THEOLOGY

Mariology is the theology of the person and roles of Holy Virgin Mary, the Mother of God.

> "The Orthodox Church has not made Mariology into an independent dogmatic theme: it remains integral to the whole of Christian teaching. ... The dogmatic emphasis of the term Theotokos, as affirmed against the Nestorians, is above all Christological: what is defended against gainsayers (heresies) of the divine maternity is the hypostatic unity of the Son of God become the Son of Man. It is Christology which is directly envisaged here; but at the same time, there is a dogmatic confirmation of the church's devotion to Her who bore God. It is said that all those who rise up against the appellation Theotokos – all who refuse to admit that Mary has this quality which piety ascribes to Her – are not truly Christians, for they oppose the true doctrine of the Incarnation of the Word."[15]

The Ever-Virginity (parthenos) and Mother of God (Theothokos) are the two important Mariological issues. The Ever-Virginity of the Mother of God entered into the symbol of faith

[15] Vladimir Lossky, In the Image and Likeness of God, 1985, 210.

of the first ecumenical council as “who for the sake of us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by te Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became Man.” (ተሰብአ ወተሰገወ እምቅድስት ድንግል)

The council of Ephesus (431) formally approved Mary as Theotokos- against the Nestorian heresy – Anthropotokos or Christotokos. The Early Church Fathers taught about Holy Virgin Mary.[16] Justin Martyr, St. Iranaeus, St. Ephrem the Syrian and others compared Holy Virgin Mary with Eve.[17] The role of Holy Virgin Mary in the Incarnation of God the Son, Salvation of humanity, and Her Intercession is among the core points in Mariology.

At the snake’s persuasion Adam incurred a debt to justice
And the demand for repayment passed on to all generations
The angel and the maiden met together
And having conferred and heard one another they repaid the debt.”[18]

Soteriology is the theology of salvation. It is rom Greek *Soteria*, salvation The doctrine of Christ’s Incarnation, the unity of His Humanity and Divinity, and His works on the Cross are major issues in the doctrine of Orthodox Soteriology. In Orthodox Christian perspective, salvation has a progressive order. In this case sacraments play a very significant role. From man’s side willingness, readiness, and participation are also very important. Theosis is an orthodox Theology- will be discussed in the next chapter.

Ecclesiology – The theology of the church. The German *Kirche* and the English Church derived from the Greek word *kuriakon,* the neuter adjective of *Kurios* (“Lord”), and meaning “belonging to the Lord”. The English word Church also translates the Greek word ekklesia (Ecclesia), which is derived from *ek*, meaning “out of,” and *kaleo/Kalein*, which means “to call”. Therefore, the church is “a called out group”. Ekklesia appears 114 times in the New Testament.[19]

[16] Thomas Buffer (Translator), Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Maryin Patristic Thought, 1999, 46.
[17] Pomazansky. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, 2015, 189-197.
[18] Sebastian Brock (Translator), Bride of Light: Hymns on Mary from the Syriac Churches, 2009, 113. ግርማ ባቱ፣ የነገረ መለኮት መግቢያ፣ 2014 ዓ.ም. ፣ 251-264.
[19] Donald K McKim, Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms, 1996, 85.

The church is built by the blood of Christ and salvation is possible only in the Church through the sacraments. Christ promised the existence of the Church (Matt. 16) and fulfilled on the cross by the blood and water sprang out of His Side. ለቤተ ክርስቲያን በደሙ ቀደሳ ወበማይ ዘውኅዘ እምገቦሁ አጥመቃ በእለተ ሰንበት እምግብርናት አግዓዛ[20]

Ecclesiology has a strong relationship with Sacraments, Christian Anthropology and Soteriology. Christ is the head of the Church as He also is the head of Man (Eph. 5).

Christian Anthropology: Theology of the Human Being.

"What is man, that You are mindful of him? Or the son of man, that you care for him? ... (Ps. 8).

The Human person stands at the center of Christian reality. At the pinnacle of creation is the formation by the very hands of God. At the opposite pole, at the *eschaton*, the Christian scripture proclaim humanity's fulfillment and perfection. Along the way, between these poles of creation and fulfillment, the whole of the economy is focused on these being: that which God fashions, which turns against its creator, for which the creator works correction and redemption, even becoming that which he begins to save"[21]

Man is a unique creation created "after the Image and Likeness of God" (Gen. 1:26). Orthodox theology gives more emphasis[22] on this as St. Basil the great said, "the Image is an instrument of knowing God; it is the seal of belonging to Him, the means of entering into personal relationships with Him, of being in communion with Him and ultimately of having Him present and making Him present in a very dynamic way"[23]

In addition to the created qualities of the Human person, the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ also made man more dignified and accelerated Man's likeness of God. St. Athanasius said: "God became Man in order to make us gods"[24]. Theologians understand these as

[20] ቅዱስ ያሬድ፣ ዝማሬ ወመዋሥእት ዘሰንበተ ክርቲያን።
[21] M.C. Steenberg, Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius, 2009, 1.
[22] Vladimir Lossky, In the Image and Likeness of God, 1985, 125-139.
[23] Maximos Aghiorgoussis, In the Image and Likeness of God, 1999, 10.
[24] On the Incarnation, 54:6.

"Christological Anthropology", and the theology of Human personhood related to sacraments through the church is called "Ecclesial Personhood".[25]

Hamartiology: the Theology of Sin. Hamartia (Gk.) means sin – failure, guilt, or not living according to that which is expected by God (Luke 5:21, John 16:8, Rom. 6:23, Heb 9:28).

The creator imparted to man three great gifts at his creation: Freedom, Reason and Love. These gifts are indispensable for the spiritual growth and blessedness of man. But where there is freedom there is the possibility of wavering in one's choice; thus, temptation is possible. The temptation for reason is to grow proud in mind; instead of acknowledging the wisdom and goodness of God; to desire oneself to be a "god". The temptation for the feeling of love is: in place of love for God and one's neighbor, to love oneself and everything that satisfies the lower desires and gives temporary enjoyment. This possibility of temptation and fall stood before mankind, and the first man did not stand firm against it.

The sin committed by our ancestors was by violation of the direct commandment of god not to eat the forbidden tree. With this transgression sin entered into man. This was a beginning of moral deviation and then they noticed their nakedness, they hid from Him, and guilt.

The sinful inclinations in man have taken the reigning position; man has become the servant of sin (Rom. 6:17). Sin had moral, psychological, physical, social and other consequences. But God's mercy did not reject man the sinner, He neither took away His Image from man which distinguished him from the animal world, nor the freedom of his will, nor his reason, by which man was capable of understanding spiritual principles, nor his other capabilities. Rather, God became man and saved humanity from the bondage of sin.[26]

Eschatology: the theology of last/end times. The Greek *eschatos* means "last things". Eschatology as a theological dimension includes the second coming of Jesus Christ, the Last Judgment and events of the end time concerning the total universe of the entire human race.

[25] Marc Cortez, Christological Anthropology in Historical Perspective, 2016, 181; John D. Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 49-65.
[26] Pomazansky. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, 2015, 155-162.

The Nicaeo-Constantinopolitan Creed/Symbol of Faith in the seventh, eleventh, and twelfth articles contains the orthodox Christian confession of faith in the future coming of the Son of God.

Article 7: ዳግመ ይመጽእ በስብሐት ይኮንን ሕያዋነ ወሙታነ፣ ወአልቦ ማኅለቅት ለመንግሥቱ (and He is coming again with glory to judge the living and the dead; and His kingdom will have no end),

Article 11: ወንሴፎ ትንሣኤ ሙታን (I look for the resurrection of the dead), Christians hope the resurrection of the dead. The reason for this hope is the Resurrection of Christ: "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Co. 15:20). Death, the state of the soul, judgment, future life, etc. are points of discussions in Eschatology.

Article 12: ወሕይወተ ዘይመጽእ ለዓለመ ዓለም (and the life of the age to come)

The last part of Dogmatic theology thus speaks about the culmination of the great process whose beginning is set forth in the first page of the Book of Genesis.[27]

3.4. PRACTICAL THEOLOGY: THEOLOGY IN PRACTICE

Practical theology, as its name implies, is the study of theology in a way that is intended to make it useful or applicable. Another way of saying it is that it is the study of theology so that it can be used and is relevant to everyday concerns like:

* Application to life of the things contributed by scriptural, historical and dogmatic theology.

* Our manner based upon what we believe.

* The expression of our understanding of how we should behave.

Practical Theology is multivalent. It appears in a broad array of spaces and places. Liturgical Theology, Moral theology also called Christian Ethics, Orthodox Spirituality, Canon laws, Pastoral Theology, Homiletics, Missiology, eco-theology, etc. are fields under practical theology.

[27] Pomazansky. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, 2015, 332.

3.4.1. Liturgical Theology

As its name indicates, liturgical theology is the elucidation of the meaning of worship. Therefore the task of liturgical theology consists in giving a theological basis to the explanation of worship and the whole liturgical tradition of the Church. This means:

- First, to find and define the concepts and categories which are capable of expressing as fully as possible the essential nature of the liturgical experience of the Church;
- Second, to connect these ideas with that system of concepts which theology uses to expound the faith and doctrine of the Church; and
- Third, to present the separate data of liturgical experience as a connected whole, as, in the last analysis, the 'rule of prayer* dwelling within the Church and determining her 'rule of faith.[28]

In liturgical Theology, nature itself, symbols, types, sacraments, prayers, movements, chants and other activities play an important role by representing the hidden realities by their visible appearance.

The terms **'symbol'** (the Syriac word literally means 'mystery') and **'type'** are regular in St. Ephrem and St. Yared's poetry, and it is they which provide the key to their understanding of the Bible — and indeed of Creation as whole. Perhaps no other writer has ever put typological exegesis to such creative use, employing it to provide an intricate network of links between the two Testaments, between this world and the heavenly world.

A good example of the way in which St Ephrem employs typology in the course of his extended meditations on Scripture is provided by his treatment of the verse in St John's Gospel, 'One of the soldiers pierced the side of Jesus with a lance and from it there immediately came forth blood and water' (19:34). The 'side' and the 'lance', for St. Ephrem, point back to the opening chapters of Genesis, to Adam's 'side' that miraculously gave birth to Eve, and to the 'sword' that barred the entrance of Paradise to fallen Adam and Eve (St. Ephrem often uses the same word for both weapons); the 'blood and the water', on the other hand, point forward to the sacraments, to Baptism and the Eucharist (the order of the two words in John 19:34 is often reversed). We are thus provided with the pattern:

Adam's side: Eve: Christ's side: Church. Adam's side gave birth to Eve, at whose listening to the evil counsel of the serpent the primordial pair were stripped of their original 'robe of glory' and banished from Paradise, kept out by the revolving sword of fire. A second weapon undoes this

[28] Alexander Schmemann, Introduction to Liturgical Theology, 1966.

damage, by piercing another side, from which 'flow forth' (Ephrem sometimes deliberately uses the word 'flow', borrowed from John 7:38) the two sacraments that wash away sin and effect the potential re-entry of the baptized into Paradise, enabling them to feed on Christ the Tree of Life, Baptism having clothed them once again in that 'robe of glory' which Adam and Eve had lost at the Fall.

Eve's miraculous 'birth' from Adam's side is in turn linked typologically with Mary's miraculous birth of Christ, thus providing the chiastic pattern:

Adam: Eve: Mary: Christ (second Adam).

Adam brought travail upon the woman who sprang from him, but today Mary, who bore him a Savior, has redeemed that travail; Adam, a man who himself knew no birth, bore Eve the mother, how much more should Eve's daughter Mary be believed to have given birth without the aid of man! (1, 14-15)

(The third line alludes to the second typological 'witness' to Mary's virgin birth in the Old Testament, namely Adam's own 'birth' from the Earth.)

This vast and rich web of exegesis, taking as its starting point the single verse John 19:34, is to be found in many passages in St Ephrem, sometimes just conjured up by a brief allusion, as in another passage from the **Hymns on the Nativity**:

Blessed is the Merciful one who saw the sword
Beside Paradise, barring the way
To the Tree of life; He came and took for himself
A body that was wounded, so that by the opening of his side
He might open up the way into Paradise. (8, 4)

For both St. Ephrem and St. Yared, the Heaven is a symbol of Holy Virgin Mary:

- ኮንኪ ዳግሚተ ሰማይ ዲበ ምድር ኦ ወላዲተ አምላክ ሠረቀ ለነ እምኔኪ ፀሐየ ጽድቅ ...[29]
- ሃሌ ሉያ ለአብ ሃሌ ሉያ ለወልድ ሃሌ ሉያ ለመንፈስ ቅዱስ ቀዳሚሃ ለጽዮን ሰማየ ሣረረ ወበዳግም አርአዮ ለሙሴ ዘከመ ይገብር ግብራ ለደብተራ[30]

[29] ቅዱስ ኤፍሬም፣ ውዳሴ ማርያም ዘቀዳሚት
[30] ቅዱስ ያሬድ፡ ድጓ

In both cases, the role of Holy Virgin Mary to the salvation of man, the divine economy for that specific purpose and symbols are discussed in a different way. Such kinds of theological articulations are abundant in liturgy. Taking the whole Liturgy as Theology, Liturgical Theology as a course discusses the aforementioned issues in detail.

3.4.2. Pastoral Theology

As a branch of practical Theology Pastoral Theology's is the pastoral actions of the Church. Pastoral actions, care and support are practical implications based on the principles taken from the theology of the church and the pastor is the agent of the church's pastoral actions.

The object of pastoral theology is the enduring, mystical, and sacramental nature of the church. As a branch of practical theology, it deals with the church as a reality with a social and historical structure, and therefore concerned with empirical/experienced data.

The orthodox churches base their pastoral principles on the doctrine of the church: Ecclesiology, and the doctrine of man: Christian orthodox anthropology. In this case, man is not an isolated entity, but a member in the mystical body of Christ. Biblical understanding on man's nature, equality among human beings, fair-share of natural resources, etc. are among unique features of orthodox theology, and this extends its view to pastoral theology.

Pastoral theology and its practical implication pastoral care are mutual and universally human. No one can take care of himself in every respect. No one can even speak to himself without having been spoken to by others. One cannot become a person without encountering another person and discovering the limit of one's own claim in the claim of another one.

The pastoral work of the Church is the continuation of Christ's ministry. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who came among men to cure mainly the spiritual diseases, never hesitated to ease the bodily infirmities, the diseases of all those who asked him to and even those who did not. He never saw in these diseases a necessary pain and thus He gave us an example of what our proper attitude should be against them. He showed Himself to the people as a Doctor (Physician): ,It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick (Mt, 9:12).

In this regard, the Holy Fathers and the whole tradition of the Church take care to present Him both as the ፈዋሴ ሥጋ ወነፍስ "Doctor of bodies" and as the "Doctor of souls". This healing power was then transmitted by priesthood/ordination to the ecclesiastical hierarchy and held on until the ages. The Orthodox Church has never made a distinction between the faith and the

ordination of the individual clergy. Validity depends on the orthodoxy of faith; heretics cannot perform the work of Christ (Matt.16).

3.4.3. Moral Theology/Christian Ethics

One of the most distinctive aspects of the Orthodox Church is its approach to ethics. Ethics is supported not by strength of reason but through the pursuit of Theosis: the result of Orthodox Spirituality. Orthodox Christians understand theosis/deification as the soteriological process by which Christians undergo an Ethical and Anthropological transformation of the whole person, becoming what that God is by grace. This relates Ethics with orthodox Spirituality.

Ethics is rooted in a personal God who is wholly transcendent and yet is disclosed to the human person through personal transformation with the Liturgical and ascetical life of the church. The liturgical and ascetical life of the church forms the basis by which ethics is undertaken. Consequently, ethics is primarily the fruit of an unmediated experience of God in pursuit of deification.

The phrase "God became human so that humans may become gods [by grace]" - sated in various forms by important theologians including Irenaeus of Lyon, Athanasius the great, Gregory the theologian ... provides the framework within the Orthodox Tradition for understanding the Ethical life. The core teaching of Orthodox ethics is not to know and do "good" but to be good. Therefore, theosis fulfills this purpose as the highest form of goodness in Christ.[31]

3.4.4. Eco-Theology

Eco-theology describes theological discourse that highlights the whole "household" of God's creation, especially the world of nature, as an interrelated system (eco is from the Greek word for household, oikos).

Eco-theology arose in response to the widespread acknowledgment that an environmental crisis of immense proportions was threatening the future of human life on the earth.

In Orthodox understanding, life is a precious gift from God the almighty. Human beings have responsibilities to preserve this gift and to be transformed by using the gift. God created the Human person after His own Image and Likeness (Gen. 1:26-27), and put the Man whom He had formed to protect and take care of it. (Gen. 2:8). Man's responsibilities originate from his

[31] Joel B. Green (ed.), Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics, 2011, 168.

place in the universe. Man is made up of body and soul, is a world. That is to say there is a reciprocal relationship between man and the world. Man is a "Microcosm" (*microcosmos*) a "little world". But he is both visible and invisible, made up of body and soul.

Because man is made of a rational soul, he is like the incorporeal, spiritual nature of the Angels. At the same time having the body, he is like everything in the physical world. Man is a unique creature that shares both realms and is therefore stands in the middle of incorporeal (spiritual) and corporeal (Phisical).

Having this middle position man has to do God's work since he is an image of Him. This can be seen in three ways: **Eco-Justice, Christian Stewardship**, and **Ecological Spirituality**.

"For which creation's integrity illuminating a kind of natural value, christen moral practices must give the earth its due. By naming and theologically describing the "integrity of creation", eco-justice secures modes of Christian respect for nature's standing."[32]

"Man's role, then, in service to his role as a mediator of the salvation of the whole creation ... unifying through himself the disparate elements of creation."[33]

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOSIS: THE TRUE PURPOSE OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY

[32] Willis Jenkins, Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology, 2008, 61-93.

[33] Elizabeth Theokritoff, Living in God's Creation: Orthodox Perspective on Ecology, 2009, 67-68. ግርማ ባቱ፣ የነገረ መለኮት መግቢያ፣ 2014 ዓ.ም. 283-330.

Eastern Orthodox Theology is Mystical. The Eastern Orthodox Tradition has never made a sharp distinction between Mysticism and Theology. Theosis is a result of Mystical Experiences. Mysticism is the crown of all theology. (V. Lossky) In this case, the aim of Orthodox Christian Theology is Theosis-union with God.

The word "*Theosis*" is the transliteration of the Greek word θεωσις meaning "deification"-being made of God, having union with God.

In the Eastern Orthodox Tradition, it is a vision of human potential for perfection, anticipated in ancient Greece, witnessed to in both the Old and New Testaments, and developed by Patristic Christian theologians of the first five centuries after Christ.

Orthodox Theology places the questions of human destiny, sin and salvation at the forefront of its entire theological vision, although in ways very different from the western Christian tradition. The long history of Orthodox theology answers the question of the **purpose of life** with a definitive, unique and unified response.

The doctrine of salvation *(Soteriology)* holds a central place in the life of every religion, especially Christianity. As McDaniel puts it: Salvation is what Christianity is all about, the reason it is Gospel: 'good news of great joy'. It was for this- to bring salvation to the world that the Word of God became flesh and was born in the city of David; for this that the true Lord of this world suffered on a cross and conquered death by his love; for this that the holy ministry was ordained, that through the sacraments and preaching the Holy Spirit might create saving faith.[34]

Similarly, the whole of theology is inherently developed from a soteriological point of view, salvation is not one of the main topics, along with the doctrine of God, Christ, church, sacraments, eschatology and the like, and it is rather the perspective from which all these subjects are interpreted. [35]

For the Eastern tradition theology is only a means towards an end that is union with God, or *theosis.* Consequently the emphasis lies not on developing positive theological systems, but on

[34] M CD McDaniel 'Salvation as Justification and *theosis' A Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue*
J Meyendorff and R Tobia~ edd (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 1992) p 67
[35] C E Braaten *Principles of Lutheran Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1983) p 63

the mystical aspect of this union. The whole purpose of theological epistemology and ecclesial practice is to help the faithful to attain to deification.[36]

Deification/Theosis would be defined as: "union, participation, partaking, communion/partnership, divine filiation, recreation, similitude with God, transformation, elevation, integration, rebirth, regeneration, and transfiguration.

Christ revealed the divine truths and opened the possibility of attaining to the fullness of Mystical union. If He has no the same substance with the father, as Athanasius said, if he be not truly God, our deification is impossible. This is why Lossky said Theosis is the crown of all theology-theology proper, Soteriology...

The Orthodox Church used the concept against

Arianism,

Nestorianism,

Apoliniarianism,

Monophisitism, and appreciated perfect union between divinity and humanity of the God and Man for theosis to be possible. Theosis particularly is an Orthodox Soteriology but encompasses all areas of theology-Personhood, Moral, spirituality, Dogmatic, Mariology…

4.1. THEOSIS IN THE HOLY BIBLE

Though implicitly, the concept is rooted in the Holy Bible.

The promise of salvation has been understood as theosis by many theologians on the basis of principal passages in the bible.

- Gen. 1:26- 27 "God created man in His own Image; in the Image of God He created him; male and female He created him.
- Ps. 82:6 "I say, 'you are gods' the sons of the most high"
- Jn. 10: 34 "Jesus answered them, is it not written in your law, I said you are gods?
- 2Pet. 1:4 whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by this you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

[36] In practical terms this relation between revelation and deification is perfectly illustrated in the Christ-event. The sentence 'God made Himself man that man might become God' sums up the essence of Christianity for the Ortodox Church. See Irenaeus *Adversus haeresis* V; Athanasius *On the Incarnation,* 54; Beck 'Divine Initiative: Salvation in Orthodox Theology' *Salvation in Christ 1* Meyendorff and R Tobias eds. p 106.

4.2. DEVELOPMENT THROUGH FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

"ዘንተ ተምህርናሁ እመጻሕፍተ መለኮት ወዓዲ ረከብናሆሙ ለምእመናን ሰባሕያን በንባበ መለኮት ይሰመዩ አማልክተ በከመ ይቤ መጽሐፍ አማልክት አንትሙ ወደቂቀ ልዑል ኩልክሙ፤ ዘከመ ግብሩ ለመለኮተ ሥላሴ"[37]

It remains evident enough that the term Theosis itself is not explicitly advanced by scriptures. But, Church Fathers used it to sum up the message and meaning of the Scriptures.

Irenaeus of Lyon was said to be the first to develop the doctrine imaginatively. Developed:

- Its dynamicity as a soteriological term
- Its rootedness in the concept of creation's purposes
- Its close relation to the ideas of corruption and immortality
- Its essential closeness to the concept of transitive substitution in the Incarnation of the Logos

"The Word of God was made man and He who was Son of God was made Son of Man united to the Word of God, in order that man should receive adoption and thereby become the Son of God. How else could we have received incorruption?"[38]

Alexandrian Fathers understood theosis as "assimilation to God as far as possible" in the progressive order of salvation. The process identified as "being baptized, we are illuminated, illuminated, we become sons; being made sons, we are made perfect; being made perfect, we are made immortal" + ps. 82:6

They emphasize that it is related to the Divine gift of salvation. This will differentiate it from previous pagan ideas that Christianity teaches human deification is possible because of God's prior humanization in Christ. In the decent of divinity, spiritual merging occurred and human and divine woven together. As a result, by prolonged fellowship with divinity, human nature might become divine through grace.

The statement made by Irenaeus: 'God made himself man, that man might become God', the idea rephrased by **St, Athanasius of Alexandria**, is very well known. Lossky explains, "God made Himself Man, that Man might become God- these powerful words which we found for the first time in St. Irenaeus, are again found in the writings of St. Athanasius, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, and St. Gregory of Nyssa.

"ወበእንተ አፍቅሮቱ ኪያነ ኮነ ከማነ ይረስየነ አማልክተ እስመ ዛቲ ይዕቲ ሥምረቱ"[39]

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[37] ሃይማኖተ አበው ዘዲዮናስዮስ፣ ም ፲ ክፍል ፩፣ ፱።

[38] Norman Russell, The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition, 2004, 105.

Cyril of Alexandria (377-444) spoke of deification as the supreme goal of created beings. He said, through participation in the body and precious blood of Christ, He is united in us and we to in Him. Cyril's Miaphisite Christology, which imparted to the EOTC, has a great importance in the doctrine of theosis.

St. Ephrem the Syrian taught the "divine descent and human ascent" He adds in his symbolic expression:

"A bird grows up in three stages: from womb to egg, then to the nest where it sings, and once it is fully grown it flies in the air, opening its wings in the symbol of the cross."[40]

These three stages are creation of man, incarnation of the Logos, and His resurrection.

"Divinity flew down and descended,
to raise and draw up humanity.
The Son has made beautiful the servant's deformity,
and he has become a god, just as he desired." [41]

Cappadocian Fathers are probably best understood as the theologians who successfully transformed this largely Alexandrian theology into a universalized tradition of the church.

Both **Gregory Nazianzus and Basil** wished to re-present Plato as a "door into Christianity." Basically, they wanted to Christianize Platonic Philosophy to help evangelize the educated classes of their day. **Gregory Nazianzus** has taken the "ideal state" of Plato as a post-death transfiguration, a "third creation" which will make us more able to contemplate God. He also revises Athanasius, making the syllogism:

"And since, then, God is made man, so man is perfected as God, and that is my glory."

Adam was deified by his "inborn propensity toward God" and this is the root of our return to God in the deified life. The key to deification for Gregory of Nazianzus is a sort of "Divine orientation." In this life the process is begun, but the greater glory will come in the next life. Cappadocian Fathers also successfully came up with a distinction between essence and energy of God: unknowable and knowable aspects of God.

"Man," writes Gregory of Nazianzus, "has been ordered to become God."[42]

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[39] ሃይማኖተ አበው ዘሳርሳርዮስ ገባሬ መንክራት፣ ም ፲፭፣ ክፍል ፩፣ ቁ ፬

[40] Hymns on faith.

[41] Hymns on paradise, (Trans By Sebastian Brock), 1990: 73.

[42] Gregory Nazianzus, "Funeral Oration for St. Basil," in Stavropoulos, *Nature* 18.

The idea of theosis is a distinctive feature that characterizes Orthodoxy and assumes central importance in its overall theological framework. Like a continuous golden thread running throughout the centuries of its ancient theological tapestry, almost all of the major theologians of the east weave the threads of this doctrine into the pattern of eastern Christianity.

Gregory of Nyssa is more constrained than the other Gregory when discussing Theosis. He describes how humanity was created to find communion with God. His view of "spiritual kinship" is taken much further than Plato's idea of "ontological assonance" as a person is called to transcendent life. The Resurrection plays a key role in the restoration of the original design of the human race. St. Gregory called the return of the alienated created order to unity with God "the reconstitution." (We see here again the integrated aspects of cosmology, soteriology and anthropology)

4.3. THE EOTC'S THEOLOGICAL VIEW

The Ethiopian view on this doctrine sees Man as a crown of creation, created after the Image and Likeness of God. Highlighting the special place given to the human person, the Ethiopian Book of Creation (Mäṣəḥafä Śənä Fəṭərät) addresses Adam, the first human creature, as "the lord of creation."

Also the Ethiopian anaphora of St. Athanasius also marvels the divine providence for the person: "O Lord how much have thou done for man! Thou did stretch heaven as a tent for his astonishment, and widen the earth for the tread of his feet. Thou keep water in the womb of clouds to feed him; thou did light the sun that he might be illumined by day; …"

The creation of the human person from "the four elements [earth, water, fire, and wind]" and the person's soul that has three attributes (reasoning/understanding, speaking, and immortality) imply perfection. As the "number seven is a perfect number for the Hebrews, the presence of the aforementioned seven elements (attributes) in the person indicates that Adam was created for perfection"

Its emphasis on "Tewahedo" –Miaphisite Christology in EOTC is a centerpiece of the doctrine of Theosis. The expression ሥጋነ ነሥዓ ወመንፈሰ ቅዱሰ ወሀበነ፣ ወረሠየነ ዕሩያነ ምስሌሁ (He took our flesh-humanity and Gave as His Spirit and made as the same with Him) is a witness that

shows all biblical and patristic teachings on Theosis are well preserved and taught in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

As Mebratu Kiros (Rev. Dr.) said in his excellent work, "Miaphisite Christology", the Ethiopian perspective relates the concept of Theosis with the concept of redemption. As the Eastern theological perspective asserts, he also says "sin left human wholly corrupted, and when it was impossible for them to reach God, the savior appeared in a body so as to renew the divine image in them which was lost as a result of sin."[43]

In my own understanding, this last statement needs a careful study to know where the impact of seen clearly seen. We can find some Eastern Church fathers defining Theosis as the movement from the divine image to the divine likeness. Many orthodox theologians like Diadochos of photiki, maximos, john of Damascus, Palamas and others say that every person is made in the divine image but that only a few attain the transformation of the distorted image into the divine likeness.

According to this distinction we all possess the divine image by nature, but only some acquire divine likeness by watchfulness. The image of God is the common property of all people, an inherent aspect of every person's human nature by virtue of creation as explained in Gen 1:26-27. We see an agreement in Ethiopian church's doctrine as expressed in the book of Sa'tat by Abba Giorgis of Gasicha, a 14th century indigenous scholar. He said ቅዱስ፣ ቅዱስ፣ቅዱስ እግዚአብሔር ዘገብሮ ለአዳም በዘዚአሁ አርአያ ወአምሳል (Holy, Holy, Holy God the one who created Adam/human being/ after his image and likeness). These repeated words refer to the three persons of the holy trinity and directly related with the plural expression of the creator in Gen. 1:26-27

According to the Ethiopian church's teaching this image is seen in three attributes of the Soul- eternity ሕያውነት, intelligence/rationality ለባዊነት, and the quality to speak and use language ነባቢነት. Also the image refers primarily to our rationality and capacity for free choice. The likeness of God, on the other hand, signifies a potential similitude to God that requires our free cooperation with God's grace. The image might be thought of as potential likeness, and the likeness as realized image. **The image is static, whereas the likeness is dynamic.** As we

[43] Mebratu Kiros, 2009: 87

cooperate with God's grace he renews the distorted image in us so that we attain the likeness and consequently become godlike.

Basil the Great observes that "the image was given to us in our nature, and it is unchangeable; from the beginning until the end it remains. The likeness, on the other hand, we gain and achieve through our cooperation and volition; exists potentially in us, and is energized through the good life and excellent behavior."[44] Likewise Gregory of Nyssa: We "possess the image of God by being rational; you receive the likeness of God by acquiring virtue. In creation I have the image, but I become through the exercise of my free will in the likeness of God."[45] Thus, by grace and imitation we move from the divine image to the divine likeness.

Andualem Dagmawi (Rev. Dr.) says people move from nature to grace, from the divine image to the divine likeness, from sin to salvation through Theosis.[46] For Orthodoxy, he continues, the ultimate purpose of Christian life here and now is to attain the God-given grace of His divine likeness. As such it is a lifelong process, which is to be nourished constantly through the ecclesiastical sacraments. Being a divine gift and human task, divinization demands *synergia* – the divine-human cooperation.

Here is the interesting point which needs to be taken into consideration. He came up with a solution for the confusion that many western theologians as we seen earlier criticized theosis as it is a human endeavor alone to be god. But, Andualem like that of the Eastern Church fathers clearly mentioned that it is a divine gift and human cooperation, willingness, openness, readiness. That is the position of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and generally the position of Eastern theology. The other important point is the distinction between divine essence and divine energies. As it is discussed earlier the Cappadocian fathers distinguished between these two and followed by many Greek theologians.

They were arguing Eunomius's claim on the absolute intelligibility of the divine essence. He insists on the perfect simplicity of the divine being, arguing that God's nature can be revealed in language and known through the concept of ungeneracy. The idea that human discourse can describe the divine essence is the point to which Cappadocian Fathers objected.

In this regard, the church has a lot to share with Greek theologians who entertain the Apophatic approach.

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[44] Basil, Hexaemeron

[45] on the creation of man

[46] *Theosis* Some ideas of Deification as reflected throughout the Ethiopic Divine Liturgy

What the Greek Fathers term the *Theosis* of man, his "deification" - but at the same time we exclude any pantheistic identification between the two: for man participates in the energies of God, not in the essence. There is union, but not fusion or confusion, with the divine, man still remains man; he is not swallowed up or annihilated, but between him and God there continues always to exist an "I-Thou" relationship of person to person."[47]

Relying on the Traditional Ethiopian commentary on psalms 82:6, Mebratu Kiros adds on the concept of Theosis in the following terms:

"Eliminating our corruptibility, the savior exalted our nature to His likeness. Yet our transformation into his likeness is not absolute, but relative. Therefore, in addition to the redemption that Christ brought to us by His incarnation, He has also honored our humanity, by raising it in to His Divine substance. .. Thus maintaining the necessary conditions for the theology of redemption, and highlighting the perfect union between the divinity and Humanity (of Christ), the Ethiopian Miaphisite Christology reflects the ultimate deification of humanity. The logos entered our world through His incarnation, and as the new Adam, Christ redeemed us, renewed our relation with God, and enabled us to be partakers of the divine nature."[48]

[47] Andualem Dagmawi, Theosis, 51, cf. T.K. WARE, *The Orthodox Way*, pp. 22-23; The Orthodox Church, 1963: pp. 231-238

[48] Mebratu Kiros, Miaphisite Christology, 2010:87

SOURCES AND MODELS FOR FURTHER REINFORCEMENT

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EASTERN THEOLOGICAL TRADITIONS

In the course of her early history, the church had been subjected to the influence of three major cultures: the Semitic, the Greek (Helenistic), and the Latin. As we are observing today the Semitic tradition and its influence on the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church is so immense.

THE THEOLOGICAL APPROACH OF ST. EPHREM

The theological approach of St. Ephrem the Syrian, an illustrious representative of the Syrian-Semitic Tradition is now briefly described.

At Edessa St. Ephrem confronted the disciples of Bardaisan, a second century heretic, whose ideas were being spread by the use of the 'madrasa' a kind of hymn invented by him, which employed rhyme, parallelism, alliteration and catchy word plays. St. Ephrem used the same form to plug in Christian messages and thereby successfully combated the heretics. He became the master of this form of hymn. St. Ephrem's literary output was huge, both in prose and poetry, including his poetic hymns. In addition to writing songs, Ephrem also directed women's choirs, quite an innovation at the time. He had a great devotion to Mary, extolled the life of virginity, and praised the ascetic life.

EPHREM'S HYMNS- <u>THEOLOGY AS POETRY</u>

The largest portion of Ephrem's prodigious literary output is his hymns and there are several collections in English, which are divided by subject matter, including the excellent work of Kathleen McVey which gives us Ephrem's Hymns on the Nativity, his Hymns against Julian, and The Hymns on Virginity and on the Symbols of the Lord. Here is a sampling of these three collections.

An important theme of St. Ephrem is the idea that God's design in salvation history is to divinize humanity (Theosis), a doctrine taught by St. Athanasius in his "*On the Incarnation"*, 54.

St. Ephrem writes in Hymn 1 of the Hymns on the Nativity: Today the Deity imprinted itself on humanity, so that humanity might also be cut into the seal of Deity (Nat. 1.99).

In Hymn 4 on the Nativity, we hear Ephrem's praises of the Incarnation:

Glory to the Voice that became a body, and to the lofty Word that became flesh.
Ears even heard Him, eyes saw Him, hands even touched Him, and the mouth ate Him.
Limbs and senses gave thanks to the One Who came and revived all that is corporeal.

Theological reflection is commonly understood as having to do with dogmatic definitions. Ephrem on the contrary, deliberately shies away from all definitions. He considers definitions as being potentially dangerous, inasmuch as by chalking out boundaries they tend to fossilize theological inquiry, which is the reflection on the human experience of God. Further he views this tendency as blasphemous, because, by attempting to define God, one is in a sense, trying to tie down and restrict the limitless one.

On his part, Ephrem has a very coherent and well-articulated theological vision, which however, is fluid in character, given his staunch resistance to all attempts at either conceptualizing or systematizing it. His approach, instead, proceeds by way of paradox and symbol. Understandably poetry attracted him as a suitable medium for creative theological expression. Of its very nature, poetry tends to avoid any bid to compartment salvific truths, and consequently, serves as an excellent vehicle to present what is essentially a dynamic theological vision, which invites the reader to go beyond the outer façade of words.

St. Ephrem is aware that, prior to initiating any theological reflection, the theological enterprise itself needs to be situated. It is necessary to know at the very outset what areas can be investigated by the human intellect and what areas cannot.

For Ephrem theological reflection can assume three different forms, depending on the attitude of the person setting out on the path of theological enquiry.

There is a **first** stance, where the theologian tries to dominate and control the object of enquiry – God. This is a basic a basic error of method in to which many heretics have fallen and should be rejected outright.

A **second** approach aims at studying the object of enquiry in an uninvolved manner. Ephrem found also this attitude problematic, since it tends to reduce God to an object; and furthermore, the entire process is envisaged here as a one way street: from the mind of the theologian to the object of enquiry-God.

But, there is a **third** approach, Ephrem's own – which is holistic in character and requires in the theologian an attitude of love and wonder. This process involves a constant interaction between God and the theologian. It is only in and through such an exchange of love that any human knowledge of God can grow.

McVey writes on the symbolic theology of the Hymns on Virginity as follows:

"Ephrem's poetry is based upon a vision of the world as a vast system of symbols or mysteries. No person, thing or event in the world exists without a mysterious relation to the whole. History and nature constitute the warp and woof of reality. To divorce an individual from its context in either direction would destroy the handiwork of God in time and space. Each moment of life is governed by the Lord of life and is an opportunity to see oneself and the community in relation to the Lord."[49]

Ephrem's Broad Understanding of Revelation

One of the sectors of Ephrem's thought that has been most carefully worked out is his understanding of revelation, as God's self-communication. Revelation is God's presence to his creatures in a way that enables Him to enter their field of awareness. God wished to communicate with creatures in order to achieve a particular goal, and that goal can be attained, only if the specific contact is of a kind that human beings can understand.

This encounter between the God and creature, in Ephrem's thought, is not an irregular condition but rather, a constitutive element of the human experience of living in the world. The openness and breadth of the contact which God initiates with the world stand out clearly in the way Ephrem visualizes scriptures and nature as two realms of revelation.

[49] McVey, Kathleen E (trans.) (1989). *Ephrem the Syrian: hymns*. Paulist Press

Look and see how Nature and Scripture
are yoked together for the Husbandman:
Nature abhors adulterers,
practicers of magic and murderers;
Scripture abhors them too.
Once Nature and Scripture had cleaned the land,
They sowed in it new commandments
— in the land of the heart, so that it might bear fruit:
Praise for the Lord of Nature,
Glory for the Lord of Scripture
(Hymns against Heresies 28, 11)

In other words, everything in Scripture and in Creation is, to the eye of faith, a pointer to the Creator. As he writes in one of the hymns, 'On Virginity':

Wherever you turn your eyes, there is God's symbol; whatever you read, you will find there his types (20, 12).

THE PLACE OF SACRED SCRIPTURE IN THE TEACHINGS OF ST. EPHREM

Early Syriac theology, greatly influenced by the thought patterns of Scripture, emphasized the role of the imagination in arriving at truth. An example of this approach is found in its sacramental theology. A reading of the works of St. Ephrem, James of Seroug, and others of the early centuries indicates that typology was used not just as a method to interpret Scripture, but as the main vehicle of doing theology. For these writers, types and antitypes were not only indicators of the plan of salvation but became the means by which to understand how salvation as Theosis would be achieved.

What God has said about Himself in sacred scripture, is for Ephrem, a primary source for any human knowledge of God. But it is in the Bible that God not only reveals himself, but also clothes Himself in human knowledge. Sacred scripture has both an exterior and an interior meaning.[50]

[50] Sebastian Brock (Trans.), The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem the Syrian, 1985, 46.

St Ephrem specifically warns against literalism, which he sees as deadening, and in a wonderful passage he speaks of God's condescension in allowing himself to be described at all in human terms, as if this in itself was a form of divine *kenosis:*

If someone concentrate his attention solely
on the metaphors used of God's majesty,
he abuses and misrepresents that majesty
by means of those metaphors with which God has clothed
himself for man's own benefit, and he is ungrateful to that Grace
which bent down its stature to the level of man's childishness:
although God had nothing common with it,
He clothed himself in the likeness of man
in order to bring man to the likeness of himself.

Do not let you intellect be disturbed by mere names,
for Paradise has simply clothed itself in terms that are familiar
to you: it is not because it is poor that it has put on your imagery, rather, your nature is far too weak to be able to attain to its greatness, and it beauties are much diminished by being depicted in the pale colors that you are familiar with.

(Hymns on Paradise 11, 6-7)

TYPOLOGY AND SYMBOLISM IN ST. EPHREM'S WORKS

The terms 'symbol' (the Syriac word literally means 'mystery') and 'type' are regular in Ephrem's poetry, and it is they which provide the key to his understanding of the Bible — and indeed of Creation as whole. Perhaps no other writer has ever put typological exegesis to such creative use, employing it to provide an intricate network of links between the two Testaments, between this world and the heavenly world.

A good example of the way in which St Ephrem employs typology in the course of his extended meditations on Scripture is provided by his treatment of the verse in St John's Gospel, 'One of the soldiers pierced the side of Jesus with a lance and from it there immediately came forth blood and water' (Jn. 19:34).

The 'side' and the 'lance', for Ephrem, point back to the opening chapters of Genesis, to Adam's 'side' that miraculously gave birth to Eve, and to the 'sword' that barred the entrance of Paradise to fallen Adam and Eve (Ephrem often uses the same word for both weapons); the 'blood and the water', on the other hand, point forward to the sacraments, to Baptism and the Eucharist (the order of the two words in John 19:34 is often reversed).

We are thus provided with the pattern:

Adam's side: Eve: Christ's side: Church. Adam's side gave birth to Eve, at whose listening to the evil counsel of the serpent the primordial pair were stripped of their original 'robe of glory' and banished from Paradise, kept out by the revolving sword of fire. A second weapon undoes this damage, by piercing another side, from which 'flow forth' (Ephrem sometimes deliberately uses the word 'flow', borrowed from John 7:38) the two sacraments that wash away sin and effect the potential re-entry of the baptized into Paradise, enabling them to feed on Christ the Tree of Life, Baptism having clothed them once again in that 'robe of glory' which Adam and Eve had lost at the Fall.

Eve's miraculous 'birth' from Adam's side is in turn linked typologically with Mary's miraculous birth of Christ, thus providing the chiastic pattern:

Adam: Eve: Mary: Christ (second Adam).

Adam brought travail upon the woman, who sprang from him,
But today Mary, who bore him a Savior, has redeemed that travail;
Adam, a man who himself knew no birth, bore Eve the mother,
How much more should Eve's daughter Mary is believed to have given birth without the aid of man! (1, 14-15)

(The third line alludes to the second typological 'witness' to Mary's virgin birth in the Old Testament, namely Adam's own 'birth' from the Earth.)[51]

This vast and rich web of exegesis, taking as its starting point the single verse John 19:34, is to be found in many passages in St Ephrem, sometimes just conjured up by a brief allusion, as in another passage from the Hymns on the Nativity:

[51] St. Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns on Paradise, 1990, 62-66. ግርማ ባቱ፣ የነገረ መለኮት መግቢያ፣ 2014 ዓ.ም.፣ 276-282.

Blessed is the Merciful one who saw the sword
Beside Paradise, barring the way
to the Tree of life; He came and took for himself
a body that was wounded, so that by the opening of his side
He might open up the way into Paradise. (Hymns on the Nativity, 8, 4)

What this verse meant for St Ephrem can be summed up in the following beautiful words from Commentary on the Gospel Harmony, or Diatessaron:

I have run to all Your limbs, and from them all I have received every kind of gift. Through the side pierced with the sword I entered the garden fenced in with the sword. Let us enter in through the side that was transfixed, for we were stripped by the counsel of the rib that was extracted. For the fire that burnt in Adam burnt him in that rib of his; for this reason the side of the second Adam has been pierced, and from it comes a flow of water to quench the fire of the first Adam. (XXI, 10)

Symbols and types work for Ephrem on two separate planes: horizontally, between the Old and the New Testaments, and vertically, between this world and the heavenly; in both cases they serve to 'uncover' something of the 'hiddenness' of a mystery not yet fully revealed. All the symbols of the Old Testament focus on Christ, the 'Lord of symbols' who reveals their true meaning in the New Testament. Thus, in a poem on the symbolism of the oil and the olive, we find:

The dove gave comfort to Noah at the Flood (Gen. 8:11), and related to the dove is Mary (John 12:3): instead of an olive leaf, she depicted symbolically the death of the Son by means of fine oil.

In the alabaster vase that she poured over Him, she emptied out over Him a treasury of types:

At that moment the symbols of oil found their home in Christ,
And oil, that treasurer of symbols, hand over the symbols to the Lord of symbols.
Creation conceived the symbols of Him, but Mary conceived His very body. (Hymns on Virginity 6, 7)

The Old Testament symbols only become fully meaningful in the light of the Incarnation, yet, because Christ is both God and Man, there still remains an element of' hiddenness', since his divine nature is not capable of comprehension by the human mind (a point that Ephrem stresses time and time again); this 'hiddenness' will only be fully 'revealed' in the heavenly world.[52]

THE PRIMACY OF FAITH: THE LUMINOUS EYE (SEBASTIAN BROCK)

The manner in which human beings perceive both God and the created world is conditioned by one basic element, viz. Whether humans see themselves as irrevocably involved in the object of the inquiry and-in the case of the theological reflection - are willing to be involved in the mystery.

A human being can gain authentic knowledge of God only through faith. Faith is perspective; it is the eye, which can see hidden things. As an attitude, faith is holistic in the sense that it needs to be accompanied by love, prayer a sense of wonder and awe. It constitutes, as it were, the initial offering to God that needs to be made before any progress in knowledge of Him can be realized.

In this perspective of involvement and participation, free will also plays an important role. The presence of sin clouds the inner eye of faith. Far ahead of his time, Ephrem refers to the ecological consequences of the abuse of free will. The physical and spiritual ecospheres are so intimately linked, that, any abuse of nature resulting from the misuse of free will is liable to have repercussions anywhere in the cosmos.[53]

THEOLOGY AS THE ARTICULATION OF THE LITURGICAL EXPERIENCE: ALEXANDER SCHEMEMANN

Christian existence, as understood by the Orthodox Church, is perceived as a lived experience of wholeness. This partly explains what, at times, some theologians, especially those with the mindset of West European thought, consider to be one of the most irritating and challenging

[52] The above pages which speak about St. Ephrem's approach are taken from the harp of the spirit, Introduction and Translation by Sebastian Brock.
[53] The Luminous Eye, 1985, 29.

aspects of Orthodox theology, viz its refusal to allow itself to be pigeonholed or to be restricted by labels and categories.

The Orthodox approach cannot be presented as an objectified detached faith reflection, since it sees itself basically as the unfolding, the spelling out of the implications of a lived experience.

This theological approach can be aptly likened to the peeling of an onion layer by layer; one needs to uncover the different levels or strata of Christian experience, which situate this understanding and, in a sense, proceed inwards to the core of its articulation. In this exposition we shall briefly present the stance of the well-known Russian Orthodox theologian, Alexander Schmemann.[54]

THE ECCLESIAL EMPHASIS OF THIS APPROACH

This approach explicitly situates itself within the context of the Church in general, and of the worshipping Church in particular. Obliviously, this is true to some extent of every Christian theological elaboration, but emphatically so of this specific theological mode.

In this stance, the Church is experienced as a lived reality-an icon of life in Christ. She is perceived as a new creation which manifests the Kingdom of God in her life. On the one hand, the reality of the Church involves the dimension of Preparation. She prepares us for our definitive life with God, and it is her function to transform our beings. By her preaching, doctrine, prayer and the sacraments, she constantly reveals and communicates to us that the ultimate value which gives meaning and direction to our lives is at the "end" and "is still to come", "to be hoped for", "expected", "and anticipated". In other words, there is a dimension of the "not yet" supplement in the Church. However, this approach would also underscore the other equally important dimension which characterizes the Christian understanding of the Church. The Christ event, which saw the birth of the Church and which constitutes the very source of her life, has "already taken place". In this sense, the Church is also Fulfillment.

The Church can therefore be called the sacrament of the Kingdom, because, in her, human beings are given the possibility to see in and through this world, the "world to come", to see and

[54] Alexander Schmemann (1921-1983), A Russian theologian, who contributed books on Liturgical Theology like: The Eucharist: Sacrament of Kingdom, For the Life of the World, Great Lent, Of Water and the Spirit, The Historical Road of the Orthodox Church ....

direct it to Christ. There is also the other side of the coin: to the extent that the Church exists, not only as a pilgrim, but also as one who has already attained her goal, she gives us "a glimpse of the mystery of the age to come" and expresses her love to the Lord who dwells in her.

THE CENTRALITY OF THE LITURGY IN THIS THEOLOGICAL APPROACH

Narrowing the focus further, this stance asserts that it is primarily in and through the liturgy that we participate in this understanding of the Church and Christian life. Theology is best expressed and communicated in the form of praise (doxology).

Liturgy is seen as the revelation, the embodiment and the expression of the Church's faith, of the vision of God, the human person and the world, so that- paradoxically - if, on the one hand, it is necessary that one have faith in order to enter into the liturgy, on the other hand, it is equally true that the liturgy truly fulfills the faith, is its existential expression and also gift.

The Church's liturgy has both a cosmic dimension, i.e. it assumes all creation into Christ; and likewise an historical dimension, i.e. it assumes all time into Christ. As a consequence, the reality of the human person's relationship to the world is directly connected with the very notion of worship. Worship is a reality with cosmic, historical and eschatological dimensions, the expression, not merely of piety, but of an all-embracing commitment and worldview.

In this sense, worship can be called the purpose of the Church. It is in this context that one should understand the oft-quoted adage: The norm of prayer is the norm of belief (Lex orandi lex credendi). This approach would rather assert that true 'understanding' is made possible by belonging to the church; it is its result or 'fruit' rather than its condition.

Using the biblical images of 'food' and 'blessing', Alexander Schmemann aptly describes the cosmic and liturgical implications of this stance. According to the Bible, the food that a human being eats, is given by God; and furthermore, it is given as a symbol of communion with God. All that exists is God's gift to us and it all exists to make God known to us, to make human life, in its turn, a communion with God. God blesses everything He creates and, literally, this means that He makes all creation the signs and means of His presence and wisdom, love and revelation. In other words, the world is the sacrament of God.

On the other hand, to 'name' a thing is to 'bless' God for it and in it. And for the bible, 'blessing' God is not a 'religious' or a cultic act, but a way of life. God blessed the world, blessed the man, blessed the Seventh day (i.e. time); and this means that He filled all that exists with His love and goodness; He made all this 'very good'. Consequently, the only response of the human to whom God gave this blessed and sanctified world would be to bless God in return, to thank Him, to see the world as God sees it - and in this acts of gratitude and adoration - to know, name and possess the world.

The unique position of human beings in the universe lies in this that they alone are able to bless God for the food and life they receive from Him. They alone are able to respond to God's blessing with their own blessing. Hence the Christian can be considered the priest, who stands in the center of the cosmos and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God in the liturgy.

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