Holy Trinity Theological College

Comparative Theology

To: Degree Three

Prepared by: Abba Gedion Birhane

Addis Ababa,

Ethiopia, 2012 E.C.

Comparative Theology

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

General Objectives of the Course

The primary objective of this course is to understand the theological standpoint of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in comparison with the other ecclesiastical traditions. It is aimed to strengthen the faith and to train the students to safeguard the true faith of the Church. Cults containing mutilated forms of Christian elements are also analyzed with an Orthodox Christian perspective. Modern Theological movements having no affiliation to the theological standpoints of any established denomination also have been seen critically in the Course. Such approaches are intended to enhance the ability of students to make serious evaluations of liberal and liberation tendencies in the current theological literature.

By analyzing the differences between some dogmatic issues and perspectives in Oriental Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant understandings the students will be equipped to witness Orthodox Theology and Spirituality in a clear and distinctive way in the present context.

Specific Objectives of the Course

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

- To equip the students to defend the faith of Orthodoxy against rationalism and liberalism
- To make the students familiar with different methods of presenting Theology.

Reading materials

Pope Shenouda, Comparative Theology, published by Coptic Orthodox Publishers association 50 Netherford road London, 1988

Georges Florovsky, Scripture and Tradition: An Orthodox Point of View, Dialog, Vol.2, No. 4 Autumn 1963

Maged Attia (2001) The Coptic Orthodox Church And The Ecumenical Movement, Abasseya, Cairo, Egypt

Assignment

Each student is required to prepare from five –to- ten pages of computer typing, and submit on the title will be given by the instructor and the college time schedule.

1) What are the councils and their decisions held by the **Coptic Orthodox Church about the Ecumenical Movement**?
   - ✓ What are the main issues which discussed?
     - Dogmatic issues
     - Ethical or traditional issues
     - Canonical issues
   - ✓ Who are Participants?
   - ✓ And what are the main agreement and disagreement or unity and disunity?

   (***N.B. The document is attached with your reading materials)*** (20%)
2) What are the main differences between Oriental and Eastern (Byzantine) churches? (10%)
3) Discuss the meaning and significant of the unique Tradition of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church: Ark of the Covenant and its application in New Testament and finally evaluate from other Oriental Orthodox point of view. (20%) final exam 50%

Grading System: 96-100 = A+; 91-95 = A; 86-90 = A-; 81-85 = B+; 76-80 = B; 71-75= B-; 61-70 = C; 51-60 = D; 50 – F

CHAPTER ONE

1. Different Theological Traditions: East and West

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

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

Generally we can classify the theological traditions into two. Those are Eastern and Western. This classification is based on their general trend or attitude regarding the presentation of theology. The Church in the Western part of the ancient Roman Empire is qualified as Western or Occidental Church. The Churches in the Eastern region of the Roman Empire and in the other parts of the world are called Eastern or Oriental Churches. Before the origin of Protestantism, the Latin Catholic Church was the only ecclesiastical body in the West. From the early time itself East is noteworthy of its plurality of traditions. A student of theology can notice a sharp distinction in the approaches of Western and Eastern minds. Generally it is called Cataphatic and Apophatic approaches respectively. The theological methodology in both approaches differs.

1.1.Characteristics of the Western Approach in Theology

In general the western approach in theology from the early times itself more rigid and legalistic. The west attempted to express theological truths using hard and fast definitions and principles. They followed a more legalistic approach in theologization. Later in the medieval period empirical philosophies brought more rigidity to the western theology and it expressed the traits of monotonous and academic nature. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), an Italian scholastic philosopher and theologian of 13th century prepared a more cataphatic and academic platform for the western theology. Thus the medieval western theology became an intellectual and philosophical exercise stand far from the pastoral tasks of the Church. Hans Kung[1], a catholic theologian of 20th century comments on Aquinas' theology and its method:

> Thomas Aquinas' theology, unlike more contemplative monastic theology of the church fathers and still that of Augustine, is quite essentially a rational university theology, composed by professors in the schools, and proposed basically not for the people and pastoral care, but for students and colleagues in theology. All the works of Aquinas are thoroughly sealed with scholastic approach to learning. They are all fully composed in Latin, all are very clear, compact, concise, and dense but impersonal and monotone. Because their approach is consistently analectic with sundry divisions and subdivisions and subdivisions, with edged definitions of concepts, and formal distinctions, with objections and answers with all the means of grammar, dialectic and controversies and with deep theological acumen. There is colossal use of highly developed and often over developed scholastic skill. With this style, Thomas created a new Philosophical and theological synthesis for the new time, brilliant, constructed with methodological rigour and academic mastery, of an exceptional unity. He paved the rational basis for theology by highlighting the use of reason in theology. This was his hermeneutical and methodological foundation[2].

The whole of the western theological world continued to be in the Thomistic legacy until the emergence of Protestantism. Protestantism emerged as a breakthrough in the milieu of legalistic mediaeval theology of the Catholic Church. The movement of reformation in the Catholic

[1] Hans Küng was a very radical Swiss Catholic Theologian of 20th century.
[2] Hans Küng, *Great Christian Thinkers* (London 1994) 107.

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

1.1.1. Cataphatic Approach

This approach is also known as positive or affirmative theology. The Cataphatic way tries to define the theological truths using logical and rational theories. Reason plays greater role than the scriptural guidelines in theologization in the cataphatic approach. It tries to define the divine self-revelation using human language and knowledge and to affirm the definitions and ideas as if they are perfect conclusions on theological affairs. Such a trend prevents the understanding of theology as an enquiry everlasting. It will rather end up in conclusions within the limits of human intelligence and reasoning capacity. It also tries to get answer for every questions regarding theology. It is rather speculative and philosophical than spiritual and mystical which the medieval western theology which has eventually lost much of its pastoral traits.

1.1.2. Compartmentalization and Objectivism in Theological Enquiry

Following the footsteps of the medieval western theology the modern theologians use techniques of scientific and logical enquiry to reach in objective conclusions in Theology. Compartmentalization of theological disciplines like Biblical, Systematic, Pastoral, Moral, Historical etc. are also a result of the reorganization of theology in line with the modern academic disciplines. Brian Daly, one of the scholars of the Catholic Church comments on the critical approach of the western Biblical theology: "...modern historical criticism including the criticism of Biblical texts is methodologically atheistic; even if what it studies is some form or facet of religious belief, and even if it is practiced by believers. ... explanations that could be acceptable to believers and unbelievers alike, are taken as historically admissible".[3] The

[3] Brian Daly S.J., "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable", 191 as quoted in A.K. Harkins, 'What do Syriac/Antiochene Exegesis and Textual Criticism have to do with Theology' as quoted in R.D. Miller (ed.) *Syriac and Antiochian Exegesis and Biblical Theology for the 3rd Millenium* (NJ, 2008) 163.

protestant academia has a different attitude towards the approach of historical criticism of the Bible, thus,

> *The valleys of biblical truth have been filled up with the débris of human dogmas, ecclesiastical institutions, liturgical formulas, priestly ceremonies and casuistic practices. Historical criticism is digging through this mass of rubbish. Historical criticism is searching for the rock-bed of the divine word, in order to recover the real Bible. Historical criticism is sifting all this rubbish. It will gather out every precious stone nothing will escape its keen eye*[4].

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

1.2.Contemporary Attitude of the West Regarding the Eastern Theology

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

> With regard to the authentic theological traditions of the oriental, we must recognise that they are admirably rooted in the Holy Scriptures, fostered and given expressions in liturgical life, and nourished by the living tradition of the Apostles and by the writings of the fathers and spiritual authors of the east. They are directed towards a right ordering of life, indeed towards a full contemplation of Christian truth[5].

These words of admiration are most likely to be out of the so called 'ecumenical interests' of the Catholic Church. Even then it is an acknowledgement of the fact that after all trial and error process in theologization in the west they came down to appreciate the position of the east, which we are holding since the Apostolic period with strong conviction, steadfast stability and consistency.

---

[4] James L. Kungel, 'The Bible in the University' as quoted in R.D. Miller (ed.) *Syriac and Antiochian Exegesis and Biblical Theology for the 3rd Millenium, 158.*

[5] Documents of the Vatican – II; Decree on Ecumenism (UR) 17.

1.3.Significant Characteristics of Eastern Approach in Theology

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

1.3.1. Scriptural foundation of Eastern Theological Tradition

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

Semitic Theology is remarkably rich with its biblical flavour and freshness. It has its own indigenous and highly original approach in exposing the divine revelation. Greatest figures in Syriac Theology like Aphrahat, Ephrem the Syrian, Jacob of Serugh, Isaac the Syrian etc. are known for their originality in both style of presentation and depth and beauty of ideas. Great writers of the Ethiopian tradition like St. Yared also follow a similar approach in using Scripture for developing theology of the Church. Where historical interpretation is concerned we are dealing with facts and we can speak of a historical interpretation as being correct or incorrect. This is quite different from the situation with spiritual interpretation. Here it is not a case of one interpretation right and the other wrong, for there is never one correct interpretation of the exclusion of all others. Often several spiritual interpretations may be simultaneously valid. The very spirit of Biblical Commentaries of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (*Andimta*) also is nothing but the same. Historical and spiritual interpretations of Scripture operate in very different

ways, each with its own mode of operations. Historical interpretation provides us with the outer meaning whereas spiritual interpretation leads us to the inner meaning of the biblical text.

The eastern approach in theology never completely denies the role of logic or philosophy in theology, but limit it to the level of a tool or method to explore the real meanings of the revealed truth. The understanding of St. Gregory of Nyssa on this regard is thus, "Reason, in its speculative thrust, is free to go where ever it wants, where as for the Christian, reason has to be controlled by the category of the *Intent of Scripture* "[6]. In his work *On Soul and Resurrection* Gregory explains, "We make the Holy Scripture the standard and rule of all teaching; we are bound, therefore, to have in view that and only that is which is in harmony with the intention of Scripture"[7].

1.3.2. Pastoral Nature of Theology of the Eastern tradition

Theology is understood by the Oriental fathers as necessarily and intimately a pastoral task. They developed the theology profoundly pastoral in its tenor, purpose and execution. Theology of the Eastern tradition keeps it free from the intellectual and philosophically bound conflicts of the consular period, but keeping its allegiance to the proper faith and life of the main stream church. Ephrem the Syrian sings:

> O Lord, may the works of your herdsman
> Not be defrauded;
> I will not have then troubled your sheep,
> But as far as I was able,
> I will have kept the wolves away from them,
> And will have built as I was capable,
> Enclosures of hymns
> For the lambs of your flock[8].

---

[6] Paulos Gregorios, *The Cosmic Man: The Divine Presence* (New Delhi, 1980) 3.
[7] *On Soul and Resurrection* , NPNF Vol. V,
[8] Hymns against Heresies. 56:10.

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

1.3.3. Liturgy as the Locus of Theology

According to the understanding of the Orthodox Churches, liturgy is the celebration of faith. Liturgical texts contain long prayers where the understanding of the Church is beautifully expressed. Relatively long prayers in the Eastern liturgies have very clear catechetical motif together with its primary purpose of worshipping God. The Liturgical texts of the Orthodox Churches developed in the monasteries and ascetical communities very well serve the pastoral responsibility of the Church to provide spiritual formation to the believers who gather to worship the Almighty.

So we would consider Liturgy as the locus of Theology where the understanding of the Church is preserved in the forms of creedal expressions and doxologies. Worshipping God in Spirit and Truth involves holding true faith and celebrating it. Commentaries of the Liturgy and prayers unfold the real depth of theological content preserved in the Orthodox Liturgical texts. The Divine Liturgy is also referred to as ―The drama of Divine Salvation‖. Proper participation requires proper preparation.

Apophatic Aproach is the theological methodology of the Eastern ecclesiastical tradition. This approach is also called negative theology. The basic principle behind this approach is that the divine mysteries are beyond human perception and we cannot make definitions or theories regarding it. It explains the faith in a mystical way and makes a series of negations while

learning theology. According to the apophatic theologians, rational theories and logical definitions are quite irrelevant in explaining the Divine Mysteries.

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

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

He advocates a sequence of negations aimed at an ascent to a mystical experience of the absolute one who is beyond the nature of everything else. For him the denial of everything lesser will guide the enquirer to the absolute reality beyond comprehension. The Absolute is beyond assertion and denial. Possibilities of assertion or denial are not applicable to the absolute reality.

The message of Apophatic theology is that we are unable to use the concepts of the human mind or of creation for signifying God. Apophatism affirms the absolute otherness of God‘s being which is found at the heart of biblical theology. Apophatism emphasizes that what we know about being from the creation must not be ontologically identified with God. God has a simple and unknowable existence, inaccessible to all things and completely unexplainable, for He is beyond affirmation and negation. The Apophatic approach attempts to acknowledge the ultimate God, Who has an entirely different Essence (ousia)[9] from the very being of created entities.

---

[9] Holy Trinity has one ousia and three hypostases. Hypostases signifying individuals sunjectivisation. West (Latins) uses Substantia whereas East (Greek) uses Ouisa (Essence). Greeks use Hypostasis and Latins uses Prosopon. Latins define doctrinal of Trinity is one Substatia in three Prosopon, while the Greeks define it as one Ousia and three Hypostasis. McGuckin, St. Cyril of Alexandria.

The inaccessibility of created intelligence to comprehend the uncreated is clearly noticeable in the Eastern liturgical and patristic literature. The EOTC Anaphora of St. Mary, for example, explicitly speaks of the incapability of human beings to attain complete knowledge about God. It says:

> *. . . Again when I think of this, my mind likes to soar and ascend secretly and drew back the curtains of hiding places of the Living one; it became afraid of the flame of the fire and does not reach even one fourth of the way to heaven. . . . He is the mighty one whom none can discern by subtle device*[10].

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

> *The existence of an Apophatic attitude of going beyond everything that has connection with created finitude is implied in the paradox of Christian revelation: the transcendent God becomes immanent in the world, but in the very immanence of His economy, which leads to incarnation and to death on the cross. He reveals Himself as transcendent, as ontologically independent of all created beings*[11].

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

1.5.1 Apophatism beyond Epistemology

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge. It deals with how we do obtain knowledge about something. Apophatism is not a system advocating either Gnoticism or Agnosticism, rather pointing to the need and possibility of trans-intellectual mystical union between the devotee and

[10] Ethiopian Orthodox Anaphora of St. Mary, stanzas 85 and 88: The liturgy of the Ethiopian Church (New Jersey, 1997) 79, 80.

[11] Vladimir Lossky, in the image and likeness of God (New York: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1985) 14,15.

deity. According to Eastern Churches, theological enquiry is inseparable from spiritual experience.

Lossky says: The Eastern tradition never made a sharp distinction between mysticism and Theology; between personal experience of the divine mysteries and the dogma affirmed by the Church. The following words spoken a century ago by a great Orthodox theologian, the metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, express this attitude perfectly: ―None of the mysteries, of the most secret wisdom of God ought to appear alien or altogether transcendent to us, but in all humility we must apply our spirit to the contemplation of divine things. To put it in another way, we must live the dogma expressing a revealed truth, which appears to us an unfathomable mystery, (incapable of being fully explored or understood or impossible to measure its extent) in such a fashion that instead of assimilating the mystery to our mode of understanding, we should, on the contrary, look for a profound change, an inner transformation of spirit, enabling us to experiences it mystically. The more mystical it is, the more directly it aspires to the supreme end of union with God[12].

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

> *I, too, know many things but I do not know how to explain them. I know that God is everywhere and I know that he is everywhere in his whole being. But I do not know how he is everywhere. I know that he is eternal and has no beginning. But I do not know how. My reason fails to grasp how it is possible for an essence to exist when that essence has receives its existence neither from itself nor from another. I know that he begot the Son. But I do not know how. I know that the Spirit is from him. But I do not know how the Spirit is from him.*
>
> (St. John Chrysostom, On the Incomprehensible Nature of God: Sermon 1)

12

. . . Why should anyone describe the silly chatter of our own people? For these are not less than the attacks upon us from without, while they give the teacher even more trouble. Some out of an idle curiosity are rashly bent upon busying themselves about matters which are neither possible for them to know, nor of any advantage to them if they could know them. Others again demand from God an account of his judgments, and force themselves to sound the depth of that abyss which is unfathomable. "For thy judgments," saith the Scriptures, "are a great deep," and about their faith and practice thou wouldest find few of them anxious, but the majority curiously inquiring into matters which it is not possible to discover, and the mere inquiry into which provokes God. For when we make a determined effort to learn what He does not wish us to know, we fail to succeed (for how should we succeed against the will of God?); and there only remains for us the danger arising from our inquiry.

Now, though this be the case, whenever anyone authoritatively stops the search, into such fathomless depths, he gets himself the reputation of being proud and ignorant; so that at such times much tact is needed on the Bishop's part, so as to lead his people away from these unprofitable questions, and himself escape the above-named censures. In short, to meet all these difficulties, there is no help given but that of speech, and if any be destitute of this power, the souls of those who are put under his charge (I mean of the weaker and more meddlesome kind) are no better off than ships continually storm-tossed. So that the Priest should do all that in him lies, to gain this means of strength.

St Chrysostom, On the Priesthood, Book 4, No. 5

Understand what He was, and what He became for thy sake, and do not confuse things which are distinct, nor make the argument of his loving kindness an occasion for blasphemy. He was lofty, and she was lowly: lofty not by position but by nature. His essence was pure, and imperishable: His nature was incorruptible, unintelligible, invisible, incomprehensible, eternal, unchangeable, transcending the nature of angels, higher than the powers above, overpowering reason, surpassing thought, apprehended not by sight but by faith alone. Angels beheld Him and trembled, the Cherubim veiled

themselves with their wings, in awe. He looked upon the earth, and caused it to tremble: He threatened the sea and dried it up: He brought rivers out of the desert: He weighed the mountains in scales, and the valleys in a balance. How shall I express myself? how shall I present the truth? His greatness hath no bounds, His wisdom is beyond reckoning, His judgments are untraceable, His ways unsearchable.

Such is His greatness and His power, if indeed it is safe even to use such expressions. But what am I to do? I am a human being and I speak in human language: my tongue is of earth and I crave forgiveness from my Lord. For I do not use these expressions in a spirit of presumption, but on account of the poverty of my resources arising from my feebleness and the nature of our human tongue. Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I utter these words not in presumption but because I have no others: nevertheless I do not rest content with the meanness of my speech, but soar upwards on the wings of my understanding. Such is His greatness and power. I say this, that without dwelling on the words, or on the poverty of the expressions, thou mayest also thyself learn to act in the same way. Why dost thou marvel if I do this, in as much as He also does the same, when He wishes to present something to our minds which transcends human powers? Since He addresses human beings He uses also human illustration, which are indeed insufficient to represent the thing spoken of, and cannot exhibit the full proportions of the matter, yet suffice for the infirmity of the hearers.

St Chrysostom, Homily II on Eutropius

And by this deliverance the Word seems to me to lay down for us this law, that we are to be persuaded that the Divine Essence is ineffable and incomprehensible. . . . It follows, then, that if it were possible for human nature to be taught the essence of God, He "Who will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" would not have suppressed the knowledge upon this matter But as it is, by saying nothing concerning the Divine Essence, He showed that the knowledge thereof is beyond our power, while when we have learnt that of which we are capable, we stand in no need of the knowledge beyond our capacity, as we have in the profession of faith in the doctrine delivered to us

what suffices for our salvation. For to learn that He is the absolutely existent, together with Whom, by the relative force of the term, there is also declared the majesty of the Son, is the fullest teaching of godliness; the Son, as has been said, implying in close union with Himself the Spirit of Life and Truth, inasmuch as He is Himself Life and Truth. **St. Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius**

. . . Learning these things, then, from the lofty words of the Apostle, we argue, by the passage quoted, in this way:-If His judgments cannot be searched out, and His ways are not traced, and the promise of His good things transcends every representation that our conjectures can frame, by how much more is His actual Godhead higher and loftier, in respect of being unspeakable and unapproachable, than those attributes which are conceived as accompanying it, whereof the divinely instructed Paul declares that there is no knowledge. **St. Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius**

St. Gregory the Theologian has written about the ineffability and incomprehensibility of the Divine Essence. Some are as follows:

Not to everyone, my friends, does it belong to philosophize about God; not to everyone; the Subject is not so cheap and low; and I will add, not before every audience, nor at all times, nor on all points; but on certain occasions, and before certain persons, and within certain limits. . . . Let even our disputings then be kept within bounds. (The First Theological Oration, 3)

. . . For these are the Back Parts of God, which He leaves behind Him, as tokens of Himself The Face of God signifies His Essence and Deity, which were before all worlds: His back parts are Creation and Providence, by which He reveals Himself; like the shadows and reflection of the sun in the water, which show the sun to our weak eyes, because we cannot look at the sun himself, for by his unmixed light he is too strong for our power of perception. In this way then shalt thou discourse of God; even wert thou a Moses and a god to Pharaoh; (Exod. iv. 2) even wert thou caught up like Paul to the Third Heaven, (2 Cor. xii. 2) and hadst heard unspeakable words; even wert thou raised above them both, and exalted to Angelic or Archangelic place and dignity. For though a thing be all heavenly, or above heaven, and far higher in nature and nearer to God than

we, yet it is farther distant from God, and from the complete comprehension of His Nature, than it is lifted above our complex and lowly and earthward sinking composition.

(The Second Theological Oration, 3)

But far before them is That nature Which is above them, and out of which they spring, the Incomprehensible and Illimitable—not, I mean, as to the fact of His being, but as to Its nature. For our preaching is not empty, nor our Faith vain, (1 Cor. xv. 19). nor is this the doctrine we proclaim; for we would not have you take our candid statement as a starting point for a quibbling denial of God, or of arrogance on account of our confession of ignorance. For it is one thing to be persuaded of the existence of a thing, and quite another to know what it is.

(The Second Theological Oration)

That the Divine Nature cannot be apprehended by human reason, and that we cannot even represent to ourselves all its greatness.

(The Second Theological Oration, 11)

And Abraham, great Patriarch though he was, was justified by faith, and offered a strange victim, the type of the Great Sacrifice. Yet he saw not God as God, but gave Him food as a man. Elias sees in this occurrence a foreshadowing of the Incarnation; and also with many others, a revelation of the Trinity, in that Abraham saw Three and conversed with One. He was approved because he worshipped as far as he comprehended. And Jacob dreamed of a lofty ladder and stair of Angels, and in a mystery anointed a pillar — perhaps to signify the Rock that was anointed for our sake—and gave to a place the name of The House of God in honour of Him whom he saw; and wrestled with God in human form; whatever this wrestling of God with man may mean . . .; and for a reward of his reverence he received a change of his name; being named, instead of Jacob, Israel— that great and honorable name. Yet neither he nor any one on his behalf, unto this day, of all the Twelve Tribes who were his children, could boast that he comprehended the whole nature or the pure sight of God.

To Elias neither the strong wind, nor the fire, nor the earthquake, as you learn from the story, has a Sound of a Light breeze but a light breeze adumbrated the Presence of God, and not even this His Nature. And are you not amazed at Manoah the Judge of yore, and at Peter the disciple in later days; the one being unable to endure the sight even of one in whom was a representation of God; and saying, "We are undone, O wife, we have seen God;. speaking as though even a vision of God could not be grasped by human beings, let alone the Nature of God; . . . What would you say of Isaiah or Ezekiel, who was an eyewitness of very great mysteries, and of the other Prophets; for one of these saw the Lord of Sabaoth sitting on the Throne of glory, and encircled and praised and hidden by the six winged Seraphim, and was himself purged by the live coal, and equipped for his prophetic office. . . . But neither these of whom I am speaking, nor any of their fellows ever stood before the Council and Essence of God, as it is written, or saw, or proclaimed the Nature of God. . . . And let faith lead us rather than reason, if at least you have learnt the feebleness of the latter in matters nearer to you, and have known reason by knowing the things that are beyond reason, so as not to be altogether on the earth or of the earth, because you are ignorant even of your ignorance.

(The Second Theological Oration, 18)

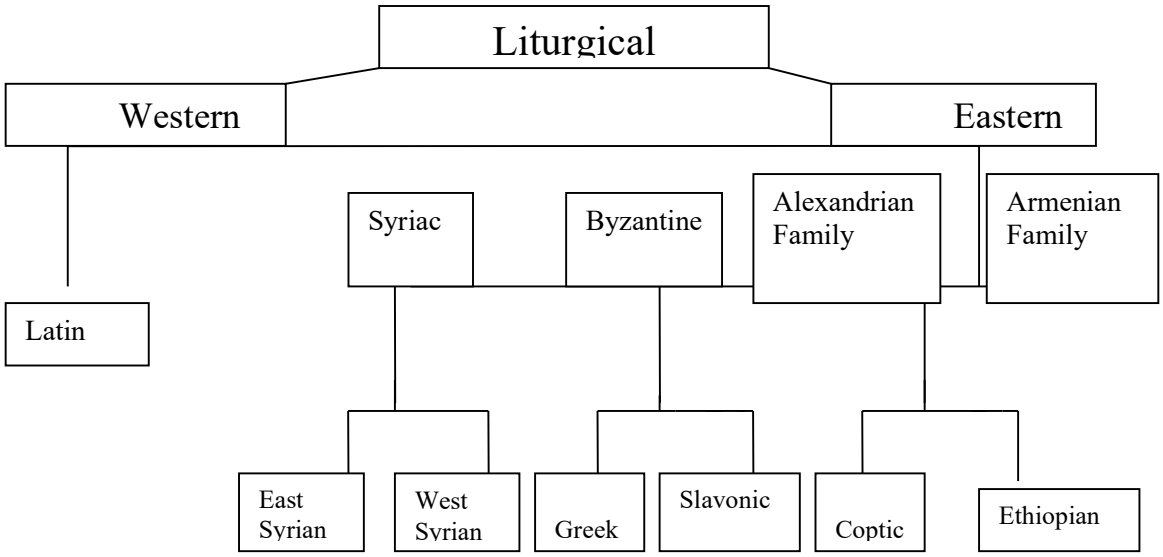
Theology is inseparably united with the life of the Church. Apophatism is not parallel ascent of intellectual enquiry to the higher plane of truth, but the very activity of the church integrating theology and spirituality. Mysticism in the Eastern tradition is not something detached from intellectual pursuit, but quite complementary to it and transcending it in the higher stages of spiritual growth towards _theosis14'. Lossky explains —God no longer presents Himself as an object, for it is no more a question of knowledge but union. Negative theology is thus a way towards mystical union with God whose nature remains incompressible.‖15 In general Apophatism is: We cannot make direct comment There is true proposal but not conclusive statement Intellectual mysticism (trans- intellectual) Understanding is not in itself the end of the purpose of life Human purpose is to grow to the image and likeness of God.

1.3.4. Apophatic Approach

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

1.4. Different Liturgical Families

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



CHAPTER TWO

2. Theological Topics in which the Oriental Orthodox and the Catholics differ

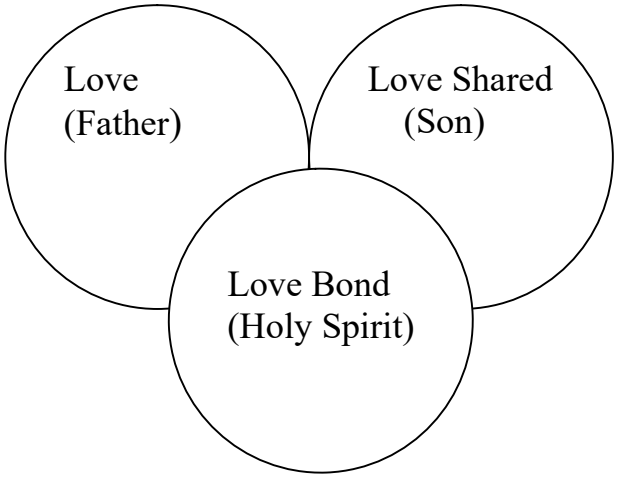
The basic approach of the Catholic theologians differs from the Orthodox perspective. The Catholic theologians are defining the dogma in a more speculative way, while the Orthodox Fathers are more mystical and apophatic. The oriental Orthodox Churches differ in many of the theological aspects with the Catholic teachings.

2.1. The Doctrine of Holy Trinity Developed in the Fourth Century

Capadocian Fathers developed the famous Trinitarian formula that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are of 'one *ousia* and three *hypostases*'. That means one substance and three divine persons. There is no subordination among the three divine persons in the Holy Trinity. But the Capadosian Fathers explains Father as the centre of unity in the Holy Trinity. Gregory of Nazianzus (A.D. 329-389) explains the doctrine by stating, " The three have one nature, i.e. God, the ground of unity being the Father, out of whom and towards whom the subsequent persons are reckoned" Gregory of Nyssa speaks of " one and same person (□□□□□□□□) of the Father, out of whom the Son is begotten and the Holy Spirit proceeds". The Orthodox doctrine of the Holy Trinity is mainly depending on the definition proposed by the Capadocian Fathers

The Catholic Church follows the theological stand point of St. Augustine (354-430) regarding doctrine of the Holy Trinity. St. Augustine taught that the essence (□□□□□□□*ousia*) of the divine persons is the basis of the Holy Trinity. Depending on this theory the peculiarities of each divine person like begetting of Son and procession of Holy Spirit cannot be explained well. In order to settle the problem of defining the relationship between the three Divine Persons, Augustine developed another interpretation as follows. 'God is love'. So we can understand the *ousia* (*substantia*) of God as love. Father is the perfect Love. He perfectly shared His existence and so Son as Love Shared. Since the act (sharing of being), subject, object and result are perfect, it must be eternal, because perfection cannot be in finite realm. Holy Spirit is presented as the Love Bond between the Father (Love) and Son (Love Shared). Being the Bond of Love between the two perfect beings, having love as the *ousia,* Holy Spirit also is perfect in His being.

According to this theory the relationship of the Third Person (Holy Spirit) towards the First Person (Father) and Second Person (Son) cannot be differentiated. So this theory paved the way for the later Catholic teaching of dual procession of the Holy Spirit. The diagram below shows the nature of Augustinian definition of Trinity.



This theory paved the way for the later Catholic Church teaching of the dual procession of the Holy Spirit. So later on, the Catholic church started to teach that the Holy Spirit proceeded not only from the Father but also from the Son. This is called the Filioque controversy. The Orthodox Church teaches that God is One ousia (homoousios) in three hypostasis; three divine persons. The Capadocian Fathers developed the famous Trinitarian formula that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are of ‗one ousia and three hypostases'. That means one substance and three divine persons. There is no subordination among the three divine persons in the Holy Trinity. But the Capadosian Fathers explains Father as the centre of unity in the Holy Trinity. Gregory of Nazianzus (A.D. 329-389) explains the doctrine by stating, ― The three have one nature, i.e. God, the ground of unity being the Father, out of whom and towards whom the subsequent persons are reckoned‖ Gregory of Nyssa speaks of ― one and same person of the Father, out of whom the Son is begotten and the Holy Spirit proceeds". The Orthodox doctrine of the Holy Trinity is mainly depending on the definition proposed by the Capadocian Fathers.

2.2 God the Son

Regarding Christology, the Oriental Orthodox Churches differ from Eastern Orthodox and Catholic Churches, who accept the Chalcedonian synod and its faith formulation, which says: “We then following the Holy Fathers all with one consent teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; fully God and at the same time truly man, of a reasonable soul and body, consubstantial with Father according to His Godhead and Consubstantial with us according to His manhood, in all things like unto us apart from sin; begotten both before all ages of Father according to His Godhead, and in the last days born of Mary the Virgin, *Theotokos* for us and our salvation, according to His manhood, one and the same Christ, Son, Lord only begotten being made known ‘in two natures’ without confusion, without conversion, without division, without separation, the distinction of natures having been in no way abolished through the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved and meeting in one person and one hypostasis".

The expression ‘in two natures’ however creates problem and is not acceptable. It is very close to the heresy of Nestorius. In fact the term ‘without division’ and ‘without separation’ used against the heresy of Nestorius have become meaningless. Moreover, it is incomprehensible that two natures exist in one person. The incomprehensibility can be removed if we say “from two natures” instead of “in two natures”. Oriental Orthodox Churches teach that Christ’s is a single personality formed by the union of perfect Godhead and perfect manhood. In the words of St. Cyril of Alexandria, Jesus has ‘One incarnate nature of God the Word’.

The ecumenical dialogues on Christology convinced the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Churches that the real cause of the separation were more a communication gap then theological understanding. Theologians from both groups prepared a common statement of faith in 1971. The common statement says: “We believe that our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ is God the Son incarnate, perfect in His divinity and perfect in His humanity. His divinity was not separated from His humanity for a single moment, not even for the twinkling of an eye. His humanity is one with His divinity without commixture, without confusion, without division and without separation. We in our common faith in the one Lord Jesus Christ regard his mystery as exhaustible and ineffable and for the human mind, never fully comprehensible or expressible. “This statement is not an official declaration of the churches in both groups. But it is noteworthy that no concerned churches disagreed with the common statement.

2.3. Procession of the Holy Spirit

In the Niceo- Constantinopolitan Creed it is said about the Holy Spirit: “Proceeds from the Father and who with the Father, and the Son is worshipped and glorified.” The Catholic Church added the expression ‘from the son’ to the creed. And then it became “Proceeds from the Father and the Son.” It caused a controversy between Orthodox churches and the Catholic Church, which is named ‘filioque controversy’. In Latin ‘filioque’ means ‘from the son’

A local council held at Toledo in Spain in AD 589 first made this addition. It was an illegal act, because a local council doesn’t have the right to change the decision of an ecumenical council. In the former half of the 9th century Pope Leo III of Rome accepted the addition. In the latter half of the same century patriarch Photius of Constantinople opposed the addition to the creed. He taught that the Holy Spirit proceeds from Father alone. He proposes a logical theory that 'something, which is common to two persons in the Holy Trinity, is common to three'. The three divine persons are sharing the common essence, will, co-eternity etc. The three Persons are not sharing anything related to their hypostases. He argued that if it is said Holy Spirit proceeds from Father and son, we will be forced to say He proceeds from Himself also, because what is common to Father and son are common to Holy Spirit also. If we said so, it would be clearly absurd. So the correct explanation is what is proposed by the Capadocian Fathers and accepted by the council of Constantinople, that 'Holy Spirit proceeds from Father'.

The Holy Bible also witnesses the Orthodox teaching. In Jn. 15:26, we read: “But when the counsellor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me.” Jn. 14:16 also expresses the same idea: “And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another counsellor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world can’t receive...”. These Biblical verses make it clear that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. Therefore, it is wrong to interpret that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the son. The source is God the Father. The Son begets and Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.

2.4. Life after Death and purgatory

The three different traditions of Christianity (Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox) differ regarding the belief that after the death faithful departed are in a state of growth in connection with God. They are active and can pray and praise God. If a relation with God is established during their earthly life, souls will be capable of growing in that relation. They will attain salvation at the second coming of our Lord.

From 12th century onwards the Roman Catholic Church teaches that there is a place of liberation, a place of purification known as purgatory (literally means 'the house of salvation') where the souls of those who died in grace but had lived in imperfection, those who died in grace but had lived in imperfection, those who had committed only venial sins in their earthly life, those who were forgiven their deadly sins and of those who had not suffered earthly punishment for their sins in the world go for purification and wait till the of Judgment when they enter heaves. According to some of Roman Catholic theologians, 1 Cor 3:10-15 contains proof that there is purgatory. The words, “It will be revealed with fire” cannot be interpreted as referring to any particular place of purification.

This teaching has a theological problem. According to orthodox belief the salivation is a gift of God, which He extends to man by his love and grace. Our duty is to respond to the will of God through faith prayer, words and deeds. It all say we are redeemed by the suffering of God the Son. Our sufferings are not salvific in it. After the death the soul will certainly suffer and alienation from God cause by the sin committed before death. That can’t be called a suffering for purification.

2.5. Catholicity of the Church

Catholicity is one of the four notions of the Church mentioned in the Creed. The adjective ‘Catholic’ can etymologically be traced to the Greek word *Kat’holos* which literally means universal, all inclusive, comprehensive etc. When Church is called ‘Catholic’, what is meant is not mere geographical unity. Much more than the quantitative extension, it has a qualitative

connotation referring to perfection, completeness, and absoluteness. It is the processions of the complete reality of divine revelation in history.

Tracing the history of the word 'Catholic' the third attribute of the Church we reach invariably St. Ignatius of Antioch, who employed the adjective for the first time in his letter to Smyrnaens 8:2. He writes: "Let that be regarded as a vital Eucharist which is held under the bishop or to whomever he entrusts it. Where the bishop is, there is the community, just as where Jesus Christ is there is the Catholic Church". For him, the local Church around the bishop in the Eucharistic celebration is the reality in which the Catholic Church is fully present and real. The Eucharistic community, which has the body and blood of Christ as its nucleus contains the fullness of the Catholic Church qualitatively.

2.5.1. The Roman Catholic Teaching

The chief criterion of unity and Catholicity of the Church in Roman tradition is allegiance to the Pope, the Bishop of Rome. The Roman Church teaches that the claim of any local Church to be catholic becomes tenable only if it owes allegiance to Pope. Thus, according to the Roman teaching the Church in the whole world should owe its allegiance to Pope, who is the Patriarch of the Western Church, for it to be described as a universal or Catholic Church. They teach that the local Churches in different regions are imperfect components of the universal Church. When all such Churches come together in communion with Pope, 'the shepherd of the universal Church' and the vicar of Christ, the Catholic nature of the Church became manifest. This in brief is the traditional teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Cyprian of Carthage (+258), a third century Latin Church Father pioneered in presenting such a theory, which is called 'Universal Ecclesiology'.

2.5.2. Contemporary Teachings of the Catholic Church

Catholic Church has thoroughly reorganized their understandings about Theology, Spirituality and organization of the Church in the second Vatican Council (1963-65). The concept of Catholicity which is related to the organization of the Church also has been changed significantly. Catholic Church currently considers itself as a Communion of Churches with

diverse expressions of faith following different liturgical as well as spiritual traditions. This reorganized system of Catholic Ecclesiology is named *Communion Ecclesiology*. The attempt of the Catholic Churches in different eastern countries to imitate the respective Orthodox Churches is a practical implementation of this new trend in Catholic ecclesiology. Orthodox Churches are suspicious of this approach as an attempt to bring the whole of Christianity into the umbrella of Papacy without challenging the diversity in spiritual expressions.

2.5.3. Orthodox Understanding

The Orthodox Churches are more in line with Ignatian ecclesiology. According to our tradition Catholicity of the Church is more qualitative than quantitative. It is not allegiance to any particular Pope or Patriarch that determines the catholic nature of the Church. The Orthodox tradition teaches that the fullness of the Catholic Church is manifest in the local Church, where the Holy Trinity is worshiped in true faith and in the one Holy Eucharist, in communion with the bishop. Many of such regional Churches expressing the Catholicity and fullness exist. The dogmatic Orthodoxy is the basis of communion of different local Churches to form regional and national Churches. But the only universal shepherd of all these Churches is our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ did not appoint any bishop as his vicar or substitute in any part of the world. All bishops manifest in their persons the sacramental presence of God. The universality of the Church is based on the dogmatic Orthodoxy. The 'Episcopal Synod' refers to the coming together of the bishops, the shepherds of the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in communion of the Holy Eucharist. The universal or ecumenical synod is one of the visible expressions of the catholicity of the Church. The Eucharistic communities coming together with true faith expresses the fullness of the Catholic Church.

2.6. Orthodox and Catholic Views on Sacramental Theology

The Apophatic and Cataphatic approaches reflect in their understandings of the Sacraments. Catholic theology emphasizes the Augustinian definition, 'visible form of invisible grace' or 'sign of sacred thing'. They define Sacraments with magical effects. (This tendency has begun to be changed by the second Vatican Council held in 1963-65 which shows a significant inclination towards Orthodox Theology). The etymological root of sacrament can be traced back to the Latin

word ‘Sacramentum’, which literally means seal or stamp. The word ‘Sacramentum’ was used in the ancient Roman Empire to denote the oath taken by the Soldiers and the seal put on the animals for sacrifice. Later in Christianity the word acquired the present meaning. In the Eastern traditions the word used to denote Sacraments, is Mysteries, which comes from the Greek root *Musterion* (□□□□□□□□□□). The expression ‘Mysteries of the Church’ is more acceptable to us. The Catholic Church developed certain laws regarding the validity of the Sacraments and time of Consecration of the elements used in it. The Orthodox Tradition considers the Sacraments as the acts of the Church entering into the eternal salvific mysteries of God.

In the middle ages, Catholic theologians developed a sacramental theology depending on Aristotelian idea distinguishing ‘matter and form’. The Catholic theologians explained matter as the elements for Sacraments (water, wine, bread etc.) form as the consecratory formulae. Later this theory became the norm of Catholic theology. There the consecratory formulae began to be considered as something magical. Eastern tradition never employs such kind of magical effects to any of the formulae or prayers. The whole Liturgy of the Sacrament is equally important for us.

2.6.1 Transubstantiation and Moment of Consecration Theory

This theory is originally found in Thomas Aquinas, one of the most prominent among Catholic Theologians of Scholastic age. According to this theory, in Eucharist the ‘whole substance’ of the bread and wine will be converted to the ‘whole substance’ of Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, even when the appearances of the former substances remain unchanged. The word ‘transubstantiation’ was widely used in the Catholic circles from the latter half of the 12th cent. In the Lateran Council of 1215 the Eucharistic elements were said to be ‘transubstantiated’ into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, but the philosophical elaboration was done by Aquinas.

Along with this another theory about the moment of change also emerged in Catholic theological circles. According to it the elements will be consecrated at the moment of pronunciation of the ‘Words of Institution’ by the celebrant. They declare the ‘Words of Institution’ as Consecratory formula. Importance of the rest of the Anaphora is totally neglected here. The role of Holy Spirit

in the Eucharist is also ignored. For them the power of the ‘Words of Institution’ is important than the working of the Holy Spirit. They call it consecratory formula.

In the Orthodox understanding the whole Anaphora is consecratory. We do not attribute a special consecratory effect to a particular prayer or formula. Eucharist is the utmost act of the Church, which makes her the body of Christ. In the Eucharist the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. It is divine mystery realised by the working of the Holy Spirit. We cannot explain it using any theory like ‘transubstantiation’ and specify any moment of consecration.

2.6.2. Use of Leavened Bread

All the Orthodox Churches, except the Armenians, use leavened bread for the Eucharist. The Catholic Church uses un-leavened bread. This difference in practice comes out of the understanding of the Churches regarding the bread used by our Lord for the institution of the Eucharist. Two approaches regarding the day of last supper are seen in the Gospels. The Synoptic Gospels clearly mention that the Last Supper was a Passover meal. (Mt.26:17-28; Mk.14:12-24; Lk.22:7-20). If it was a Passover meal the bread taken by Jesus Christ was certainly un-leavened bread, because the Jews never use leavened bread on the day of Passover.

According to the forth Gospel crucifixion was done on the day before the feast of Passover. Even though the narration of Last Supper is absent in it some hints of the day are there. In Jn.18:28 we read, “Then they brought Jesus from Caiaphas to the praetorium. It was morning. And they themselves did not enter the praetorium, in order not to be defiled so that they could eat the Passover. So Pilate came out to them and said, "What charge do you bring (against) this man?" In this narration the trial of Jesus in the Court of Pilate was at the morning of the day before Passover. The Jews did not enter into the Court of the Roman Governor who was a pagan, because they wanted to keep their purity to celebrate the feast of Passover. This event shows that the crucifixion happened on the day of preparation for Passover. If so the Last Supper would have been in the previous night to it. Then the possibility goes to the use of leavened bread. According to this Johannine description, we can naturally get into the conclusion that the bread

blessed by Jesus Christ at the Last Supper was leavened one. The Orthodox Churches follow this Johannine tradition. That is the main reason for the use of leavened bread for Eucharist.

2.6.3. Sacrament of Marriage

According to the Catholic understanding marriage is a contract between bridegroom and bride. The role of Church in the marriage is that of a witness and to communicate divine blessings to them. There the celebrant of the Sacrament is the couple, not the Church. Priest witnesses and bless their union as representing Church.

According to the Orthodox understanding, in the Sacrament of Marriage Church unites two of her children to constitute a Christian family. There the priest as the representative of the Church serves as the celebrant of the Sacrament. The couple is recipient and participant of the Sacrament. So for us marriage is not a mutual contract between two persons but a sacramental mystery executed by God through Church.

2.6.4. Sacrament of Confession

The Catholic Church separate sins into different grades like mortal, venial etc. Such kind of gradation is not in the Orthodox tradition. For them the right to remit some sins is reserved to Bishops or Pope. The prayer of absolution in the Catholic Church is different from the same in the Orthodox Churches. In catholic tradition the priest says, "...by the authority given to me I absolve your sins." Whereas the in Eastern traditions the prayer of absolution is in a passive grammatical structure, "...let God absolve your sins." Cataphatic and Apophatic approaches are clearly visible in these prayers. Catholics do not call it prayer but 'formulae of absolution. The Catholic approach has the influence of Roman legalism.

CHAPTER THREE

3. Difference in Faith between Orthodox and Protestant Traditions

Unlike Orthodox the Protestant Churches are not much bothered about serious dogmatic issues. But there are a lot of points of disagreement between these denominations. Among the Protestant Churches there are many denominations with doctrinal and practical differences. The main faith matters in which the Orthodox and Protestant differ are acceptance of Tradition, Sacraments,

Priesthood, prayer for the departed and communion with the Saints, infant Baptism and veneration of Cross and Icons.

3.1. Protestant Denominations

We can divide the present-day Protestantism generally into three groups (1) Episcopal (2) Presbyterian (3) Congregationalists.

Church of England is an example for the first group of Protestantism. They have the three fold ministry in the Church. But the traditional Churches, both Orthodox and Catholic do not completely accept their Apostolic succession.

The second group believes only in the two-fold ministry. In their system each parish is administered by a pastor with the help of selected presbyters. The elders of different parishes together constitute the synod of the Church. There are those who teach that the Apostolic succession continues through the presbyters, but there are also who do not attach any importance to this belief. There are about twelve million Presbyterians in the world. It is recognized as a national Church only in Scotland.

The third group believes in the evangelization and witnessing of Christ only. They do not believe in the need of any kind of Apostolic Succession. Pentecostals and other kind of sectarians are examples for this category. We cannot accept the Presbyterians and Congregationalists as Churches. They can be called Christian Communities.

3.2. Bible and Tradition in Orthodox and Protestant Point of View

Holy Bible is the nucleus and measuring rod of the tradition, because it contains the living word of God. And it was formed out of the primary experience and understanding the Apostolic community. The Church, which is the living body of Christ interprets and explains the mystery of God in accordance with the guidance given by the Holy Spirit. ‘Tradition’ occurred out of those interpretations made by the Church through centuries. It includes oral traditions, liturgical texts, patristic writings, canons, creeds, and practices in the Church. Tradition of the Church

contains many things which are not in the Bible. The Bible itself testifies that it is not complete [Jn. 20:30; 21:25]. The Tradition of Church always stands in accordance with the Holy Bible and never contains anything against the doctrine of the Bible. The Church cannot accept a tradition or practice which contradicts the teachings in the Holy Bible. St. Paul says, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what which we preached to you, let him be accused". Nobody has the right and authority to teach against the message of the Holy Bible. As the living body of Christ, Church developed different traditions in the light of the guidance given by the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit is leading the Church and reminding her about all that was said by Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. He said to the disciples, "These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn.14:25).

The protestant Churches are not concerned about the importance of any kind of tradition. For them the only source of Theology and divine revelation is the Holy Bible. This attitude is called 'Sola-Scriptura' theory. It was proposed by the Martin Luther, the pioneer of Protestant movement.

3.3. Life after Death and Intercession to the Saints

The Orthodox Church believes that the faithful departed are in a state of active communion with God. They can pray for us and make benefit out of prayers. If the believer has a communion with God during his earthly life, he will be able to grow in that even after the separation of soul and body. From the very beginning itself the Christian Church, it has a custom of praying for the departed and interceding to the saints. It was not questioned by anybody till the origin of Protestantism in 16th century. By Baptism we are being engrafted to the body of Christ. By death we do not lose the relationship with God. Church is the communion of living and dead whom are united in true faith and Baptism. Separation of soul and body are not capable enough to cut that communion. All the members of the Holy Church, living and departed are responsible to help each other through prayers.

Protestant Churches are teaching that after the death, soul will be in a state of sleeping without any communion with anybody. According to them this state of being will continue till the second coming. They are using Ps. 6:7 for this argument. There we see, “For in dead there is no remembrance of thee; in Sheol who can give thee praise?” But the previous verse is a prayer of the Psalmist save him by the love of God. It shows that the death mentioned is no0t mere physical death, but a spiritual death, a total alienation from God. Another reference they are putting forward is Ps. 115:17, “The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any that go into silence”. The following verse proves that it also is not a mention of natural death: “But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and for ever more”. The expression ‘forever more’ reveals the eternal nature of uninterrupted praise to be offered by the Psalmist. The faith of the Orthodox Church is not against the doctrine of the Holy Bible. We could see a lot of clear-cut evidences in the Holy Bible.

3.3.1. Old Testament Evidences

- Deut. 26:14- Here the arms giving done in the name of the dead is mentioned.
- Ruth. 2:20- Living as well as dead are not out of the compassion and grace of God.
- Gen. 49:4; Deut. 33:6- Moses prayed for Ruben, who died in his sin. Spiritual death mentioned in the prayer of Moses.

3.3.2. New Testament Evidences

- Mt. 17:13- Moses and Elijah appeared before Christ in the Mountain of Transfiguration and they discussed about His passion. It shows that they are alive and in communion with God.
- Jn. 8:56- Our Lord speaks about the active state of Abraham, father of the believers.
- 1Pet. 3:19-20; 4:6- After death Jesus went to Sheol to preach the gospel to the people who died in their rebellion to God. Even they were in a state of receiving message from God.
- 1Cor. 15:29- It shows that there was a custom of receiving Baptism for the believers who died without receiving the Sacrament.
- Jn. 8:52; 11:25-26- Here the mention is about complete alienation from the communion with God.

3.4. Infant Baptism

Among the Protestant denominations, the Congregationalists do not practice the Infant Baptism. This trend first originated in 16th century. They were called Anabaptists (Re-Baptists), because they re-baptized the Christians, who joined their community. Their former leaders were Conrad Grebel and Felix Marz of 16th century. All the other leaders of reformation denied their attitude and followed the traditional practice of 'Infant Baptism'. This sect of Anabaptists declined in the same century of its origin. But at present we could see the same attitude in the Pentecostal and Brethren denominations. They can be called the modern Anabaptists. They are taking Mk.16:16 ("He who believed and baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be contemned") as the basis of their argument.

We can summarize their teachings regarding Baptism as follows:

1) Infant-Baptism is not clearly mentioned in the Bible, and there for it is wrong.
2) Faith Baptism (reception of Baptism after believing) only is right.
3) The members of the traditional Churches who are re-baptized are separated from their Churches and they must have constant fellowship with the new sect.

Teaching of the Orthodox Churches regarding infant Baptism is totally based on the Holy Bible. Let us examine the biblical teachings regarding it.

1) We have already seen that the Pentecostals are taking Mk.16:16 as the basis of their argument against Infant-Baptism. In that verse nothing is said about children and it is not against Infant-Baptism. In vs. 15 of the same chapter we read, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation". It is only the verse follows that says, "He who believes, and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned". Those who listen to preaching are grown-up people. Those among them who believe will receive baptism and be saved. But those who do not believe and receive Baptism even after hearing the Gospel will be condemned. This is what is emphasized here.

2) "Let the Children come to me, do not hinder them, for to such belong to the kingdom of God" (Mk.10:14). Jesus had said this to His disciples. Infant Baptism is to help children to reach God. Opposing it is hindering them.

3) Jesus answered to Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God” (Jn.3:5). It implies that the Children should be baptized so that they are ever ready to enter the kingdom of God.

4) On the day of Pentecost, St. Peter says in the fullness of the Spirit: “For the promise is to you and your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God Calls to Him” (Acts. 2:39). Children are also heirs of the promise of the Lord. So they also must be ready to receive it.

5) The practice among the Israelites was to have the children circumcised. “He that is eight days old among you shall be circumcised”(Gen. 17:12). Only after circumcision was a child admitted into Judaism. Infant baptism in Christianity is a similar practice.

6) In the New Testament we see the mention of five families. In the absence of children the husband and wife of each family would have been referred as ‘both of them’ or ‘couples’ instead as families. So, we have to infer that the families included children also. Whatever it be , it is difficult to prove that all the five families were without children. Children also have a share in the faith of their parents; so, they deserve baptism.

3.4.1. List of families baptized as mentioned in the New Testament

- Acts.16:15- Lydiya and her family.
- Acts.16:33- Jailer and his family.
- Acts.10:48- Cornelius and his family.
- Acts.18:8- Crispus the ruler of Synagogue and his family.
- 1Cor.1:16- Stephen’s family.

3.4. Justification by Faith

Another important faith affair in which the protestant differ from Orthodox is the concept of ‘Justification’ from sins. Regarding this in the New Testament also two interpretations of the same reality are seen. St. Paul and St. James apparently differ in their interpretations regarding this theological subject.

3.4.1. Protestant Understanding of Justification by Faith

The teaching of Martin Luther causes the wrong impression that faith without action is enough. It is called *Sola Fide* (Faith only). Luther misunderstood the epistle of St. James and called it mere straw. They took the verses by St. Paul and teach that faith without work is sufficient for justification and salvation. In Eph. 2:8- “For by Grace you have been saved through faith”. They interpreted it as a message which stands against the importance of work. They are taking Rom.4:1-5 also as the basis of this theory. There St. Paul says “What then can we say that Abraham found, our ancestor according to the flesh? Indeed, if Abraham was justified on the basis of his works, he has reason to boast; but this was not so in the sight of God. For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." A worker's wage is credited not as a gift, but as something due. But when one does not work, yet believes in the one who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness”.

3.4.2. Orthodox Criticism against this Theory

According the Orthodox Churches salvation is a gift of God, but faith and work are human response towards the divine grace and revelation. St. Paul never taught ‘justification is by faith’. In his expression, “For by Grace you have been saved through faith”, the more importance is given to grace. In Rom.3:24 he says, “They are justified by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus”. Here it is clear that the justification is by the Grace of God.

St. James presents the importance of the work as a result of genuine faith. “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by the works. Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called "the friend of God." See how a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (Jas.2:21-24). St. James presents the work as an expression and fruit of the real faith. According to the Orthodox tradition all good works like Sacraments, fasting; prayer, almsgiving etc. are human response towards divine revelation and grace which God pours upon us.

3.4.3. Relation between Sacrifice of the Lord and the Eucharist

The protestant Churches do not consider the Eucharist as a sacrifice. For them that is a love feast and commemoration of the Last Supper of Our Lord Jesus Christ. But the Orthodox Church believes in the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist. We have solid biblical proofs to explain this mystery.

The Epistle to the Hebrews clearly testifies that the crucifixion of our Lord was a sacrifice of redemption and for the remission of sins. The self-sacrifice of the Lord is perfect, unique and once for all. More than a historical event it has got an eternal realm. (Heb.9.11-12; 26-28). Through our Eucharistic Liturgy, we are participating in the eternal sacrifice, which is beyond the limits of time and space.

In Hb.9:14 the role of the Holy Spirit in the eternal sacrifice of Christ is made clear. “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God”. The self-sacrifice of the Lord is offered to God, the Father trough the Holy Spirit. It is an act of the Holy Trinity. The significant role of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist, the celebration of the economy of salvation, is clear in this biblical exhortation.

At the end of His earthly ministry Our Lord established the Holy Eucharist and entrusted His disciples to continue it till the second coming [Mt.26:26-29; Mk.14:22-25; Lk.22:19-20]. At the very next day Jesus was crucified. Both of the events are inter-connected and complementary. Through Eucharist we are participating in the eternal sacrifice of our Lord, the incarnated God the son. We are repeatedly participating in the same sacrifice. The sacrifice is one, the victim is one and the High priest also is one. We are sharing the priesthood of Christ in different levels. Christian priesthood is the continuation of the real priesthood of Christ, which is given to the Church. The Holy Church executes its priesthood through her sons in different levels.

3.5. Priesthood

The protestant Churches differ regarding the belief in ministerial priesthood. Congregationalists among them deny the importance of priesthood completely. They believe in the general

priesthood of all the believers only. The basis for the same is 1Pet.2:4-5 “Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God, and, like living stones, let you be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”. Here all the Christians are called holy priesthood.

Orthodox Churches believe that Church, the body of Christ shares the priesthood of Jesus, the eternal high-priest. And all her members are partakers of it in primary level. But to continue the Apostolic ministry entrusted to the Church, God select some of the members of the His body. They are not practicing the ministry in their own capacity, but in the Church and for the Church. The ordained ministers of the Church share the Priesthood in different levels. Both the general priesthood and ministerial priesthood are mutual complementary.

The Priestly authority was entrusted to the Apostles by our Lord. During the time of the Institution of Eucharist (Last Supper) Lord delegated the authority of Eucharistic celebration to the Apostles [Mt.26:26-29; Mk.14:22-25; Lk.22:19-20]. After resurrection He gave them the power to remit the sins (Jn.20:22-23). It indicates the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession). By the pouring of Holy Spirit as a gift whole authority for fruitful and effective continuation of the salvific ministry was given to the Church.

St. Paul says to the elders of the Church of Ephesus: “Keep watch over yourselves and over the whole flock of which the holy Spirit has appointed you overseers, in which you tend the church of God that he acquired with his own blood” (Acts. 20:28). He specifies that the leaders of the Church are appointed by the Holy Spirit. In 2Cor.5:20 he says: “So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God”. Here the role of priesthood is mentioned as mediator ship.

Episcopos (overseers) or Presbyters (Elders) are two terms used in the Holy Bible to denote the leaders of the Church. In the New Testament, both terms are used as synonyms. But later in course of history they began to be used to denote first and second positions of the three fold ministry. Some references to the use of those words in the New Testament are given below.

- Episcopos (overseers): Acts.20:28; Phil.1:1; 1Tim.3:1,2-7; Tit.1:7

- Presbyters (Elders): Acts.21:18; 20:17; 1Tim.4:14; 5:17-19; 1Pet.5:1-5; Tit.1:5.

3.6. Glossalalia (Speaking in Tongues)

Glossalalia (Speaking in Tongues) is an important issue for the modern Pentecostal communities. They are considering it as the visible manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit in one person. Utterances of meaningless words cannot be considered as Glossalalia mentioned in the Holy Bible. Two types of this phenomenon are mentioned in the New Testament.

The greatest example of 'speaking in tongues' is in Acts.2. That is the great event happened on the day of Pentecost. There the Apostles spoke in different languages or their speech was understandable to people of different languages. That event is unique and never else reported in the entire history of the world. That was an anti-type of the scattering of languages in Babel (Gen.11). In Babel difference of languages scattered people because of the wrath of God, whereas on Pentecost the difference of languages attracted the people to the divine message. There the words of the Apostles were understandable to all the people gathered there. If the practice of the Pentecostals is of that kind, it is acceptable to us. But utterance of meaningless words cannot be included into this group.

The second type of Glossalalia is mentioned in 1Cor.12:10 as a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is given for the enrichment of the Church. It is not mentioned there as the visible sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. In 1Cor.14 St. Paul speaks about the gift of tongues discouraging manner. In vss. 18 and 19 He says, "I give thanks to God that I speak in tongues more than any of you, but in the church I would rather speak five words with my mind, so as to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue". In 1Cor.13:1 he writes, "If I speak in human and angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal".

As a conclusion we can say that speaking in tongues is not a proof of the presence of the Holy Spirit, but only a minor personal gift. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to some of the persons for the betterment of the Church. It will not be received by all the members of the Church. So the attitude of the Pentecostals considering the utterances of strange and meaningless

words accompanied by emotional gestures cannot be called a gift of the Spirit or Glossalalia. It has no relationship to the presence of the Holy Spirit.