

**Order Number 8818495**

**Filsata: The Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary and  
the Mariological tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo  
Church**

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**Princeton Theological Seminary, 1988**

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**FILSATA:**  
The Feast of the Assumption  
of the Virgin Mary and the Mariological  
Tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

by

Bishop Paulos Yohannes

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Princeton, New Jersey  
May 30, 1988

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## FOREWORD

The writing of this doctoral dissertation, much like the living of life, was a task wrought with interruptions, conflict and political upheavals. The plan I had when I arrived at Princeton Theological Seminary, namely to finish my comprehensive exams before returning to Ethiopia for related research and field work, quickly changed with the course of political events affecting the country. In 1974, Ethiopia was invaded by Communist insurgents, and many of the monasteries and churches from which I had hoped to gather much of my research were either shut down, occupied, or eventually destroyed. I had dreamed of returning, one day, to Addis Ababa to contribute to the building up of the Holy Trinity Theological College as a place of national study and promise. Instead, the college was shut down, and many of its students scattered and dispersed. I had dreamed of returning to Ethiopia to complement my doctoral work with field work and additional research. Instead, I was called back to be consecrated a bishop, and six months later, I was arrested by a government I had never known before, and put in prison where I remained for the next seven years.

Life is never predictable, but, with God's grace and mercy, the help of the World Council of Churches, and Princeton Theological Seminary, I was miraculously released from prison, allowed to depart Ethiopia, and arrived once more in the United States where I immediately resumed my studies on the campus of Princeton Theological Seminary. It was here, for a second time, in October of 1982, that I once more began my doctoral work. I remember how many of the people whom I had known before were surprised to see me walking across the campus; and how some greeted me with Christian love and tears in their eyes, telling me they thought I had been killed by the prison guards. To be sure, prison life had exacted a harsh toll, and it was difficult, at first, to read even one book; yet, I found myself suddenly faced with the task of reading many--most of which I had read

before, ten years earlier. So, in this way, my doctoral work progressed, slowly, but steadily. Even more amazing, perhaps, was the growth of an Ethiopian congregation in New York City, where, by the grace of God, I have been able to officiate each Sunday for the Ethiopian community living there. I can only attribute all that has happened to me to the providence and goodness of God. Indeed, by my own efforts alone, such projects, academic and pastoral, would have been far too difficult for me to attempt, much less achieve.

Perhaps, in a way, this dissertation represents more of a valiant attempt than a triumphant achievement. Certainly, it is a departure from my original plan. Resources for this project were scant--even in the voluminous library of Princeton Theological Seminary--and my subject matter, likewise, limited. Still, despite these limitations, I believe that this work, more than anything, is a tribute to God through whom all things are possible, and have been possible for me. What I have, nevertheless, endeavored to accomplish through the writing of this thesis is to draw back, as it were, the veil which conceals the life, liturgy and faith of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (and, indeed, Ethiopia herself!) from the knowledge and understanding of many, particularly those in the West; to shed light on the importance and theological significance of the person and role of the Virgin Mary, particularly as she relates Christologically and liturgically, in the life of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church; and finally, it is my hope in presenting this project that a common ground for discussion and reflection might emerge on which we, of our respective traditions, might engage in true ecumenical dialogue regarding the Virgin Mary and her unique contribution to our common faith in the Risen Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It is in His name that I humbly submit this project.

Bishop Paulos

## A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

The completion of this project, which began sixteen years ago, represents for me more than a piece of paper, or the securing of an academic degree. For me, it is representative of a dream which began a long time ago in my native country, Ethiopia, endured through seven years in a communist harsh prison, and which was finally realized in the History Department of Princeton Theological Seminary.

Indeed, the completion of this dissertation represents the fulfillment of a hope that many people shared with me, and helped me to accomplish. Were it not for the Christian commitment on the part of many Protestant congregations, the World Council of Churches, and Princeton Theological Seminary, under the leadership of Dr. James McCord, neither my release from prison, departure from Ethiopia, or completion of this work, would be realities today. Words cannot describe my gratitude both to God, through whom all good things are possible, and to God's people, faithfully demonstrating their love in service to others, in this case, myself.

There are many individuals who have been instrumental in assisting me to accomplish this work, among them seminary students. Although too many to mention all by name, I thank Rev. Linda Roberts who typed and re-typed the original manuscript, patiently struggling with my handwriting, my nephew Tadesse Wuhib who assisted with computer work, and the many other students whose compassion, dedication and Christian commitment made me feel at home in a foreign land. I thank my youngest brother and best friend, Tewolde Yohannes, who often risked his own life for my sake during my years in prison, and whose unfailing love has been, and remains to this day, a constant source of support and encouragement to me. It is difficult to fully express the depth of my gratitude to Dr. James McCord, whose friendship and wisdom throughout these many years has not only enabled me to complete my doctoral work, but to re-unite many Ethiopians through the

establishment of Orthodox congregations in New York, California and Texas. Finally, I thank my doctoral committee for their guidance and patience throughout the years; but, most of all, I deeply thank my faculty advisor and brother in Christ, Dr. Karlfried Froehlich whose tireless dedication, understanding and Christian service, detailed revisions and editorial suggestions greatly aided this project.

It is with gratitude and thanksgiving to God that I remember all these who have played such an important role in my life in this great nation, and who have helped me to shed light on the person and importance of the Virgin Mary in the faith and life of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

May 30, 1988  
Bishop Paulos Yohannes

A B S T R A C T

O F

FILSATA:

The Feast of the Assumption  
of the Virgin Mary and the Mariological  
Tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

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Images of Ethiopia as a country of drought, war and famine are common. Yet, a closer look at its history reveals a unique civilization, dating from the time of the Queen of Sheba, with roots in ancient Judaism, a long history of one of the oldest Christian Churches in the East. Among the special treasures of this Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo ("Union") Church with its rich store of patristic sources, religious art and architecture, iconography, hymnody, literature, and monastic traditions, perhaps the greatest has been a deep understanding, devotion and theological reflection regarding the person and the role of the Virgin Mary, Theotokos, Mother of God, in the mystery of the Incarnation. It is the intention of this dissertation to shed light on the cult of the Virgin Mary in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church through an examination of Filsata, the Feast of Mary's Assumption, which is celebrated on 16 Nahase or August 22 (Western Calendar), in the context of Ethiopian Orthodox Mariology and liturgy. It is the hope of the author that through a better knowledge and understanding of this unique feature a clearer rationale for Marian devotion in the Orthodox tradition may emerge and encourage the discovery of the importance of Mariology for a proper theology of the incarnation in the ecumenical dialogue today.

The study begins with a brief examination of Ethiopia's relations to the ancient world, especially ancient Israel, and of the early and medieval development of Christianity in the country according to the tradition. The first chapter presents the literary sources of Marian devotion in Ethiopia, beginning with the "Book of the Birth of Mary" or "Protoevangelism of James," the rich transitus literature about Mary's death and assumption ("Book of the Rest," "Book of the Apostle John," "Lecture about the Apostle Thomas," "Covenant of Mercy"), to the hymnody of St. Yared, the "Book of the Miracles of the Holy Virgin Mary," and the major hymnic offices (Weddassie Maryam, Angasa Berhan, Arganona Weddassie, Malka Maryam, and the hymns of the Horologium). The second chapter explains the setting of the

divine liturgy and discusses the role of the Virgin Mary in the texts of the service, especially the various anaphoras. Chapter three describes in detail the connection between devotion and liturgy is Ethiopia's most important annual Marian feast, the Assumption (Filsata), including the preceding fast and the activities of the feast days. Chapter four explores in a more systematic fashion the theological basis for Mariology in the Ethiopian Orthodox context, drawing not only patristic basis and the results of later doctrinal controversies, but also on the Church's teaching concerning the incarnation, original sin, eschatology, and the nature of death. The author shows that Ethiopian Orthodox theology sees the blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, on the one hand as honored by God above all other creatures in being chosen as the mother of God, the Word incarnate, but on the other hand as a human being, born under the shadow of original sin, whose death and assumption into heaven represent the epitome of God's work of salvation for all of humanity in its most exalted member. Finally, chapter five tries to draw out some lines for the ecumenical dialogue in the present situation. Comparing the role of Mariology and Marian devotion in the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox Churches with each other, it is suggested that, while all traditions contribute important, yet widely divergent elements, accents, and cautions, a common ground exists in the Christological affirmation of the title, Theotokos, for the Virgin Mary by all of them. This could and should be the basis for further exploration.

Bishop Paulos Yohannes

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Dedicated  
in loving memory to my parents  
whose devoted commitment to the Orthodox faith  
first brought me to the knowledge of God  
in whose love I was raised.  
God rest their souls

## INTRODUCTION

### THE LAND & CLIMATE

Between the valley of the upper Nile and the plains of Somaliland rises a vast block of mountains, homeland of the Ethiopian people. Bordered on the north and northwest by the Sudan, on the south by Kenya, and on the southeast by Somaliland, Ethiopia stretches across 400,000 square miles, forming part of the structural unit known as the horn of Africa.<sup>1</sup> Praised for the abundance of its gold, precious metals and spices, ancient Ethiopia has sometimes been referred to as a land of milk and honey whose diverse regions and climate contribute to the production of wheat and barley in the valleys; the pasturing of sheep, goats and cattle on the lofty highland plateaus rising 9,000 feet and upwards; the cultivation of vineyards at 6,000 feet; and to the harvesting of cotton, frankincense, myrrh and aloes in the hot desert lowlands. Abounding with an amazing variety of flora and fauna, as well as the much desired elephant ivory and ostrich plumes, ancient Egyptian explorers, on expeditions to Ethiopia's precious gold mines, were often apt to refer to the region as "The Land of Punt" or "God's Land" (a land which, at the time, included all the countries between the Nile

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<sup>1</sup>A. H. M. Jones & E. Monroe., A History of Abyssinia (New York: Negro University Press, 1935), p. 1.; E. Ullendorff, The Ethiopians: An Introduction to Country and People. (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 23.

and the Red Sea, and between the Equator and the Indian Ocean.)<sup>2</sup>

Ethiopia is a mountainous country divided between high plateaus and sloping lowlands. The heart of the country consists of two high plateaus. The western plateau runs from the Red Sea to the Kenyan border; the eastern plateau is situated at a lower elevation and less broken by valleys and gorges than its western counterpart, sloping gently eastward toward the Indian Ocean. Separating these two plateaus is the well-defined Great Rift Valley, which continues northward geologically into the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aqaba, the Dead Sea, and the Jordan River Valley.<sup>3</sup>

Though Ethiopia's highest plateau, Mount Ras Dashan or "ረገገገ" ገገገ

" towers at 15,158 feet, no peak in Ethiopia is permanently snow-covered.<sup>4</sup> The Blue Nile, which has inspired many people with its mystery, majesty and power, flows in a great arc from Lake Tana southward, west to the Sudan, north to Khartoum, and finally unites with the White Nile,<sup>5</sup> flowing onward through the African desert, Egypt and Alexandria, and emptying itself into the Mediterranean Sea. Called Abbai Wonze in Ethiopic, and Gihon in Holy Scripture (Genesis 2:13), the Nile has "roused the

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<sup>2</sup>Sylvia Pankhurst, Ethiopia: A Cultural History (London: Lalibela House, 1955), p. 1.; E. A. W. Budge, A History of Ethiopia, Nubia, and Abyssinia (2 vols. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1928), p. 122.

<sup>3</sup>R. L. Hess, "Ethiopia," Encyclopedia Americana, X (Danbury: Grolier, Inc., 1983), p. 620.

<sup>4</sup>"Ethiopia," Encyclopedia Britannica, VIII (Chicago: William Benton Publisher, 1967), p. 781.

<sup>5</sup>Hess, Encyclopedia Americana, op. cit.

passionate curiosity of men from Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar to James Bruce and, in our day, R.E. Cheesman...The point of its origin had been a place of worship since pagan days; now a church dedicated to St. Michael and Zara Buruk (an Ethiopian saint) is situated there, and many Ethiopians come here in search of a cure from their disease by the holy waters..."<sup>6</sup>

Ethiopia's climate is as varied as its geography. Largely determined by the country's range of altitudes and terrain, Ethiopian plateaus, lowlands and deep plateau valleys are generally subtropical and tropical in climate, with a limited yearly rainfall. The traditional division of the country's climate is understood in terms of elevation, and can be broken down into three general zones, namely Dega, Woina-Dega, and Quolla, ጸገ፣ ወይን፣ ጸገ፣ ቁሀ ; which describes Ethiopia's cool, warm and hot zones respectively.<sup>7</sup>

The temperate plateau region of Ethiopia is highly fertile and suited to agriculture. Cereals, such as wheat, barley, durra, sorghum, and an indigenous grain called teff, thrive there. In the southern highlands, wild coffee, for which Ethiopia is renowned throughout the world, grows in abundance. The lush vegetation of the valleys and border lowlands is characteristically tropical. As a whole, Ethiopia's generally favorable climatic and soil conditions produce a variety of trees

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<sup>6</sup>Ullendorff, The Ethiopians, pp. 24-25.

<sup>7</sup>Hess, Encyclopedia Americana, op. cit., p. 621.  
Encyclopedia Britannica, op. cit., p. 781.

and fruits -- a list which includes palms, mimosas, giant sycamores, laurels, myrrh, gum trees, oranges, limes, pomegranates, peaches, bananas, grapes. In addition, cotton, sisal, indigo and sugar cane are also agricultural products of Ethiopia.<sup>8</sup>

#### RELATION WITH THE ANCIENT WORLD

Throughout its long and rich history, Ethiopia has played an important role in the commercial, cultural and religious life of many nations and can boast of one of the oldest Christian civilizations in the world. The country has maintained a bridge between Africa and Asia serving as a favored cross-road for many civilizations, and a junction for diverse cultures and races.<sup>9</sup>

From ancient times, Ethiopia was an important trade center for Egypt, Greece and Rome. Many inhabitants of Egypt were, originally, settlers from Ethiopia; and Egypt herself was literally built up from the mud of the Nile -- springing from the foot of a great mountain in a remote part of Ethiopia.<sup>10</sup> Many Egyptian laws seem to be of Ethiopian origin,<sup>11</sup> and Ethiopian trade with Egypt was well-known to the Greek Ptolemies, who

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 782.

<sup>9</sup>Ullendorff, The Ethiopians, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup>Sergew Hable Sellassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270 (Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1972), pp. 46-48.

<sup>11</sup>Budge, A History of Ethiopia, p. 66.



succeeded the Egyptian Pharaohs. Both Greek and Roman expeditions, common in early Ethiopian history, sought out the country's precious metals and the Nile River's source.<sup>12</sup> The Old Testament is full of references to Ethiopia and often links Ethiopia with Egypt as two contiguous countries (Ps. 68:31; Isa. 20:3; Ezek. 30:4; Dan. 11:43; Nahum 3:9). Later immigrants, such as South Arabian people, migrated to Ethiopia. These Arabs sought refuge in Arab trading settlements located on the Red Sea coast in Ethiopia as early as 1,000 B.C.<sup>13</sup> Their influence on the existing Ethiopian civilization can be compared to that of Greece upon Roman civilization--with South Arabia contributing much to the commercial, cultural and religious life of Ethiopia.<sup>14</sup>

#### RELATION WITH ISRAEL

According to tradition, the relationship between Ethiopia and Israel is as old as the Old Testament itself. The first Ethiopians are believed to be descendants of Noah, through his second son, Ham. The sons of Ham were the parents of the peoples of Cush (Nubia), Misraim (Egypt), Put (Libya), and Kanaan (Phoenicia); and Cush was the father of the peoples of Sheba,

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<sup>12</sup>Hable Sellassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History, pp. 55-57.

<sup>13</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica, p. 783. Hable Sellassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History, pp. 26-27.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 29-33.

Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah and Sabteca -- all of whom apparently dwelt on the western and eastern shores of the Red Sea (Gen. 10:6-7). Thus, from their earliest history, Ethiopians were followers and worshippers of the God of Noah. The first Ethiopian people were led by the great-grandson of Noah to the land bordering the Red Sea and the upper Nile.<sup>15</sup> From Israel, tradition claims, Ethiopia received the true faith and covenant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, along with the Ten Commandments, the Ark of the Covenant, and the tradition of the priests or Levites. To this day, many of the ancient traditions and rituals of Judaism resonate in the worship and faith of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church--with church architecture often modeled after the Jewish synagogue, and many Ethiopian Orthodox traditions patterned after the example of early Jewish practices (e.g., Sabbath observances, distinctions between the clean and unclean, prohibition of graven images).<sup>16</sup> The Queen of Sheba's visit to King Solomon, resulting in the birth of the first Ethiopian Emperor Menelik I, served to strengthen Ethiopia's early relationship with Israel (I Kings 9:26-28).<sup>17</sup> From Israel, Menelik I is believed to have carried the original Ark of the

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<sup>15</sup>Budge, A History of Ethiopia, p. 14

<sup>16</sup>A. Tamerou, Ye Etiopia Emnet Be Sewestu Hegegat ("The Faith of Ethiopia in Three Laws.") (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, 1953), p. 18.; A. Wondmagegnehu & J. Motovu, eds., The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (Addis Ababa: Ethiopian Orthodox Mission, 1970), p. 1.

<sup>17</sup>S. Bergsma, Rainbow Empire (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1932), pp. 195-196.

Covenant to his African home, Axum, where it remains to this day.<sup>18</sup> In this way, the Old Testament prophecy is believed to have been fulfilled: "Ethiopia will stretch out her hands to hurry to submit to God (Psalm 68:3)."

**TRADITION ABOUT ETHIOPIA AND THE OLD TESTAMENT: THE KEBRA NAGAST**

Central to Ethiopia's early political, commercial and religious connections with ancient Israel is the relationship between the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. Indeed, the Queen of Sheba's long and arduous journey to Jerusalem to hear the wisdom of the earth's "wisest king", King Solomon, is a deeply cherished story and heritage of the Ethiopian nation. This story has been carefully preserved in Ethiopia's treasured national chronicle and royal genealogy, the Kebrā Nagast or The Glory of the Kings.<sup>19</sup> Comprised of a wealth of historical and traditional material partially derived from the Old Testament and later Rabbinical writings, the Kebrā Nagast -- as its title suggests-- notes the origins of Ethiopia's Emperors from King Solomon of Israel<sup>20</sup> all the way to Haile Sellassie (Ethiopian Emperor, 1928-

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 48; 71-75.

<sup>19</sup>Translated into English by E.A. Wallis Budge, under the somewhat misleading title, The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menelik (London: Oxford University Press, 1932). Budge thinks that the earliest form of the Kebrā Nagast might be attributed to a sixth century Coptic priest. Later it was translated into Geez from a 14th-century Arabic translation: p. xvi.

<sup>20</sup>Pankhurst, Ethiopia: A Cultural History, p. 98.

1974). Though little is known regarding the Kebrā Nagast's origin and author, scholars seem to agree that it represents a compilation of traditions current in Syria, Palestine, Arabia and Egypt during the early centuries of the Christian era. Included in its pages is a detailed account of the relationship between the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon; the birth of their son, Ethiopian Emperor Menelik I; the removal of the Ark of the Covenant from Jerusalem to Axum, the ecclesiastical and political capital of Ethiopia.<sup>21</sup> The book also records Judaism's appearance in Ethiopia as the national religion, expressed in the Queen of Sheba's vow to King Solomon to "worship the One, true God," putting aside all paganism and idolatry.<sup>22</sup>

That the Queen of Sheba traveled to Jerusalem to hear the wisdom of King Solomon is attested in I Kings 10:1-10 and 2

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<sup>21</sup>Budge, E.A.W., The Queen of Sheba, p. xvii, pp. 30-38; 68-102. For the full stories, see also his History of Ethiopia, pp. 194-227. W. F. Macomber, A Catalogue of Ethiopian Manuscripts Microfilmed for the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library Addis Ababa, (Collegeville: St. John's Abbey and University, Monastic Manuscript Microfilm Library, 1975), Vol. I., p. 54. Tamerou, A., The Faith of Ethiopia, pp. 22-26.

<sup>22</sup>The Kebrā Nagast records how King Solomon emphatically declared that "it is right that (humanity) should worship God who created the universe, the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land, the sun and the moon." Whereupon, the Queen, after careful reflection, publicly declared and promised that and said, "From this moment I will not worship the Sun, but will worship the Creator of the Sun, the God of Israel. And that Tabernacle of the God of Israel shall be unto me my body, and unto my seed after me, and unto all my kingdoms that are under my dominion. And because of this I have found favor before thee, and before the God of Israel my creator, who has brought me unto thee, and has made me to hear thy voice, and has shown me the face, and has made me to understand thy commandment." Budge, E.A.W. The Queen of Sheba, pp. 28-29.

Chronicles 9:1-9; and it was to this event that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ when he said: "The Queen of the South shall rise up in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon" (Matthew 12:42; Luke 11:31). Ethiopia's merchant relations with Israel culminated with the meeting of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.<sup>23</sup> According to the account given in the Kebra Nagast, it was the Queen of Sheba's merchant, Tamrin, who, after trading with King Solomon and returning to Ethiopia full of praise for the King's wisdom and glory, put it in the heart of the Queen to go to Jerusalem to hear for herself the wisdom of Solomon.<sup>24</sup> Thus began one of the world's greatest love stories and Ethiopia's embrace of Judaism. Sylvia Pankhurst, in her valuable book about Ethiopia, summarizes the visit in this way:

(In) the Kebra Nagast...we are told that "the Queen, having communed with Solomon on important themes, was wedded to him, and on returning to Ethiopia, gave birth to their son, David. When this first-born son of Solomon reached manhood, he visited his father, who desired to keep him at his side to succeed him on the Throne of Israel. David, however, insisted that he must return to his mother. King Solomon therefore ordered that the first-born sons of all the priests and nobles of Jerusalem should accompany David to his home and remain there at his court when he ascended the Ethiopian Throne, as Menelik I, the founder of the Solomon line of Emperors."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Hable Sellassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History, p. 34.

<sup>24</sup>Budge, E.A.W., The Queen of Sheba, pp. 19-21.

<sup>25</sup>Pankhurst, S. Ethiopia a Cultural History, p. 98.

The Kebrā Nagast reveals a vast preponderance of Old Testament references and thus indicates the deep sediment of Hebraic lore underlying Ethiopia's great storehouse of tradition and legends.<sup>26</sup> It is on the basis of the Old Testament that the Queen of Sheba acquires prominence in the Kebrā Nagast. Not only is she extolled for her beauty, wisdom and nobility; she is praised for her decision to abandon the worship of the sun, choosing, instead, to worship its creator, namely the God of Israel.<sup>27</sup> Ethiopian scholar Hable Sellassie notes that other Jewish sources, such as the works of Josephus, testify to the validity of the report in the Kebrā Nagast regarding the Queen of Sheba, her visit from Ethiopia to Jerusalem, her subsequent alliance with King Solomon resulting in the birth of their son David, who was to be enthroned as the Ethiopian Emperor Menelik I.<sup>28</sup> Even today, the Ethiopian Constitution of 1955 reads: "The Imperial dignity...whose line descends without interruption from the Dynasty of Menelik I, son of the Queen of Ethiopia, the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon of Jerusalem;" and the imperial emblem bears the motto: "The Conquering Lion of Judah."<sup>29</sup> Also,

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<sup>26</sup>Ullendorff, E., Ethiopia and the Bible (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 76-77.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 139-140; Budge, The Queen of Sheba, p. 29.

<sup>28</sup>Hable Sellassie, Ancient & Medieval Ethiopian History, pp. 35-36.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 38. Revised Constitution of Ethiopia (Addis Ababa: 1953), p. 3.

attesting the Queen's Ethiopian roots is her tomb of which Hable Sellassie makes note, located south of the city of Axum. We may add that, in 1906, the "Deutsche Axum-Expedition" unearthed a complex of buildings believed to be Axum's Zion Cathedral in which the bones of Menelik I are housed.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, a significant part of the record of the Kebra Nagast is the transfer of the Ark of the Covenant from Jerusalem to Ethiopia by Menelik I. Hable Sellassie notes that today, the most important place in Ethiopia is the shrine of the Ark of the Covenant where the original Ark of the Covenant, carried on the shoulders of the first-born sons of the Israelites by arrangement of Menelik I, is said to reside. For this reason, Axum is considered a holy place, a second Jerusalem; and the shrine, guarded by a single monk of the utmost virtue and righteousness, who is responsible for burning incense within its walls continually,<sup>31</sup> stands as a testimony to ancient Ethiopia's embrace of the God of Israel.

#### INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY

According to traditional sources, early pagan worship existed in Ethiopia alongside of Judaism, prior to Christianity's entrance in the country (both pagan and Jewish practices being

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<sup>30</sup>N. Pearn, & V. Barlow, Quest for Sheba (London, 1937), pp. 40-41.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

influenced, in part, by Ethiopian-Middle Eastern commerce)<sup>32</sup>  
 Hable Sellassie describes one of these pagan beliefs in  
 Ethiopia's early history:

The first Ethiopian king and god was a serpent whose name was Arwe--which means "beast." His father was python and his mother, a certain woman. When his parents died, it is said that the beast became dangerous to the inhabitants. Yet, through his sister the people made an agreement with the beast that they would offer him many young girls, goats, sheep and milk on a regular basis for forty years. Then a man called Gebgebo or Angabo arose and killed the beast, and he, himself, became king by marrying the sister of the beast.<sup>33</sup>

As in many Semitic countries, Ethiopia's early pagan rituals involved the worship of a serpent. Hable Sellassie notes that the story of Arwe, the beast, is similar to ancient Persian legends.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, it seems that many of Ethiopia's early pagan practices originated in Persia--with the description of "serpent" worship in Persia's sacred book identical with that of the tradition in Ethiopia.<sup>35</sup> Early pagan practice in Ethiopia, according to Hable Sellassie, was also closely connected with that of Southern Arabia--with South Arabian gods being worshipped

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<sup>32</sup>The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama of History and Spiritual Life (Addis Ababa: The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, 1970), p. 1.

<sup>33</sup>Hable Sellassie, Ancient & Medieval Ethiopian History, p. 95. Tekle Sadiq Makurya, From Paganism to Christianity (Addis Ababa: Ethiopian Orthodox Church, 1941), p. 33.

<sup>34</sup>Hable Sellassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History, pp. 95-96.

<sup>35</sup>The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama, p. 1.



and their temples being built in the Ethiopian civilization.<sup>36</sup> Later, with the introduction of the Greek culture to Ethiopia, worship of the Greek Pantheon was also widespread.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, according to the Kebra Nagast, the official religion of Ethiopia, since the time of the Queen of Sheba, was monotheistic.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, it is believed that the Ethiopian Jews of today, known as the Falasha tribe, are direct descendants of the Israelites; they practice a form of pre-Talmudic Judaic worship.<sup>39</sup>

Several Ethiopian traditions regarding the introduction of Christianity into the country exist. Nevertheless, Christianity's earliest contact with Ethiopia dates back to Apostolic times and is heralded in the New Testament with the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch by the disciple Philip (Acts 8:26-40). Ethiopian Christians may also have been present at Pentecost in Jerusalem, although they are not mentioned by St. Luke in Acts. St. John Chrysostom, in his Epiphany Homily, mentions them expressly when he writes that "the Ethiopians also understood."<sup>40</sup> One of the three Magi from the East who brought

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<sup>36</sup>Hable Sellassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History, p. 96.

<sup>37</sup>The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup>Budge, The Queen of Sheba, p. 42 Hable Sellassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History, p. 96.

<sup>39</sup>The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama, pp. 2-3.

<sup>40</sup>Hable Sellassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History, p. 97.

gifts to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ at his Nativity is believed to have been of Ethiopian origin--arriving from Seba, a place where the grandchildren of Ham settled and the Queen of Sheba reigned (Ps. 72:20-22; 20-22; Isaiah 60:6-7; I Kings 10:1-24). Throughout the centuries, religious artists have faithfully portrayed one of the Magi with Ethiopian, or dark-skinned, complexion. Furthermore, tradition holds that the Apostle Matthew preached the Gospel in Ethiopia and baptized the Ethiopian King, Aeglippos. Aeglippos was succeeded by his brother Hyrtacus, who, it is believed, killed Matthew because he refused to sanction Hyrtacus' marriage to Ephigenia, daughter of Aeglippos.<sup>41</sup> Although many stories surround Matthew's death, the Roman Martyrology clearly states that St. Matthew was martyred in Ethiopia.<sup>42</sup> That Christianity was received in Ethiopia prior to the fourth century may also be concluded from a passage in Origen who writes: "The Gospel is not said to have been preached to all the Ethiopians, especially to such as live beyond the river<sup>43</sup>..." suggesting that the Gospel, sometime before the fourth century, was preached to some but not all Ethiopians.

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<sup>41</sup>Ullendorff, E., Ethiopia and the Bible, pp. 12-13. Wondmagegnehu, A. and Motovu, V., eds., The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup>Hable Sellassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History, p. 98. F. L. Cross, and . A. Livingstone, The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (2nd ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 890.

<sup>43</sup>Hable Sellassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History, p. 97. A. Harnack, The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, Vol. II (London: Williams and Norgate, 1905), p. 123.

During the fourth century, however, Christianity was expanded and officially established as Ethiopia's state religion. Beginning in the royal court, the Christian faith gradually penetrated among the lives of the common people, where it played an integral role in all aspects of national life.<sup>44</sup> The birth of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church as a state church took place at a time when the Arian heresy was at its peak. Ethiopia's first bishop, Bishop Frumentius, was consecrated by the Patriarch of Alexandria, St. Athanasius, known as the "Column of Orthodoxy," who was a strong defender of the Nicene faith against Arianism. The first Ecumenical Council of 325 A.D. which condemned Arius as a heretic served to strengthen and define Ethiopian Orthodoxy. For this reason, St. Athanasius is highly venerated by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. One of its fourteen Anaphoras is attributed to Athanasius, another to the 318 Church Fathers who, according to the tradition, participated in the first Ecumenical Council.<sup>45</sup> Thus, under the influence of Bishop Frumentius, St. Athanasius, and the 318 Fathers, Orthodox Christianity flourished in Ethiopia in what is considered to have been the country's general first evangelization.

#### FRUMENTIUS AND AEDESIUS

Though Ethiopians are firmly convinced that Christianity was

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<sup>44</sup>The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama, p. 5.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 5-6.

introduced to the country during the Apostolic period, others insist that Christianity first appeared in Ethiopia during the fourth century A.D. As controversial as this issue may appear, one thing is certain: the conversion of Ethiopians to Christianity was not the result of a well-planned missionary effort,<sup>46</sup> but the result of the faithful dedication of two men whose contribution to Christian Ethiopia cannot be overstated. These two men were Frumentius and Aedesius, whom the Ethiopian book of saints, the Synaxar<sup>47</sup> records as having come to Ethiopia

...(with) a certain man from the country of the Greeks...He had with him two youths of his family and the name of one was Frumentius, and that of the other was Aedesius...And he arrived in a ship at the shore of the sea of Ethiopia, and he saw all the beautiful things which his heart desired, and as he was wishing to return to his country, enemies rose up against him and killed him, and all those who were with him.

And these two youths were left alive, and the men of the city made them captives, and taught them the work of war, and took them as a present to the king of Axum whose name was Alameda. And the king made Aedesius director of his household, and Frumentius keeper of the laws and archives of Axum; and after a few days the king died, and left a little son with his mother...And Aedesius and Frumentius brought up the children, and taught them little by little the Faith of Christ, and they built for them a place of prayer, and they gathered together to it the

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<sup>46</sup>Hable Sellassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History, p. 98.

<sup>47</sup>Budge, E.A.W., The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church ("Mashafa Synaxar") (4 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), is the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's sacred book of saints. Translated into Geez from Arabic, the Mashafa Synaxar lists the saints of the Orthodox Church whose lives ended in martyrdom.

children and taught them psalms and hymns.<sup>48</sup>

The Synaxar goes on to relate how after Frumentius and Aedesius had raised the king's son to manhood

...they asked (the son) to dismiss them to their native country; and Aedesius departed to his country of Tyre to see his kinsfolk, and Fermentius departed to Alexandria to see the Archbishop Athanasius...and he related to him everything that had happened unto him because of their Faith in the country of Ethiopia, and how the people believed on Christ, but had neither bishops or priests. And then Abba Athanasius appointed Fermentius Bishop of the country of Ethiopia, and sent him away with great honor. And he arrived in the country of Ethiopia during the reign of Abreha, and he preached the peace of Christ in all the regions thereof, and because of this he was called "Abba Selama" ("Father of Peace").<sup>49</sup>

The Ecclesiastical History of Rufinus puts the matter this way:

While...Frumentius held the reins of government in his hands, God stirred up his heart and he began to search out with care those of the Roman merchants who were Christians and to give them great influence and to urge them to establish in various places conventicles to which they might resort for prayer in the Roman manner. He, himself, moreover, did the same and so encouraged the others, attracting them with his favor and his benefits, providing them with whatever was needed, supplying sites for buildings and other necessities, and in every way promoting the growth of the seed of Christianity in the country.

When the prince for whom they exercised the regency had grown up, they completed and faithfully delivered over their trust, and, though the queen and her son sought greatly to detain them and begged them to

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<sup>48</sup>Tekle Sadiq Makurya, Ye Ethiopia Tarick ("The History of Ethiopia") (Addis Ababa: Tenssaie Zegubaie Printing Press, 1959), pp. 306-307. Budge, E.A.W., The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church, Vol. IV (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), pp. 1164-1165.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

remain, returned to the Roman Empire. Aedesius hastened to Tyre to revisit his parents and relatives. Frumentius went to Alexandria, saying that it was not right to hide the work of God. He laid the whole affair before the bishop and urged him to look for some worthy man to send as bishop over the many Christians already congregated and the churches built on barbarian soil. Then Athanasius (for he had recently assumed the episcopate) having carefully weighed and considered Frumentius' words and deeds, declared in a council of priests: "What other man shall we find in whom the Spirit of God is as in thee, who can accomplish these things?" And he consecrated (Frumentius) and bade him return in the grace of God from where he had come...<sup>50</sup>

When Frumentius returned to Ethiopia, he did much to strengthen the position of the clergy there and to help with the expansion of Christianity throughout the country. In addition, Frumentius is remembered for his translations of several sacred books from the Hebrew, Greek and Coptic into the Ethiopian liturgical language, Geez.<sup>51</sup> Even before his consecration in 347 A.D. by Athanasius, Frumentius was an influential man, having used his power to facilitate the building of an oratory to be used by the Christians in the city. This center was also used as a school where children, even those from non-Christian families, came to receive religious instruction.<sup>52</sup> Finally, he is remembered for his unwavering defense of orthodoxy against the strong Arian policy of the Emperor Constantius:

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<sup>50</sup>Historia Ecclesiastica I.9. Translation: A. Jones & E. Monroe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 26-27.

<sup>51</sup>Abba Gorgorios, The History of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (Addis Ababa: The Apostolic Association Press, 1974), pp. 24-26.

<sup>52</sup>Mircea Eliade, General ed., The Encyclopedia of Religion, V, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), p. 174.

Constantius was an Arian and he was trying to make Arianism the official doctrine of the Empire. Therefore, he ordered it to be preached in all his dominion, and those who resisted the imperial decree were imprisoned.<sup>53</sup>

That his defense of orthodoxy indeed put Frumentius in conflict with the ruling powers of his time (i.e., the Emperor and many in the Alexandrian Church who had accepted the Arian doctrine) is evident from a letter written by Constantius and quoted by Athanasius in the Apologia and Constantium:

Victor Constantius Maximus Augustus to Ezana and Shaizana...You in fact know and understand though you pretend to be ignorant...that Frumentius was promoted to his rank by Athanasius who is guilty of a thousand crimes which cannot be justified by any of the pretences of the accused and has today been deposed from his office and is not found in any locality where it is possible to live. He goes as a vagabond from one region to another almost as a fugitive criminal.

If Frumentius spontaneously obeys and renders account of the whole state of the case and in every way manifests that he has in no wise broken away from the law of the Church and of the faith it holds; and when he has been judged, having rendered an account of his whole life, and has furnished explanations to those who are competent to judge questions of this nature, it will be decided by them whether he is worthy to be considered a true bishop and to be ordained according to the law.<sup>54</sup>

From all accounts, Constantius' letter proved futile, with Frumentius living out his days, preaching orthodoxy throughout Ethiopia until his death, and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo

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<sup>53</sup>Hable Sellassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History, pp. 99-101.

<sup>54</sup>Athanasius, "Ad Imperatorem Constantium Apologia," Patrologia Graeca, Vol. XXV: S. P. N. Athanasii Opera I, edited by J. P. Migne (Paris: Ex Typis Migne, 1857), col. 636.

Church standing firm in its pro-Nicene doctrine and opposition to Arianism.<sup>55</sup>

Thus the first evangelization of Ethiopia and Christianity's establishment as a state religion marked a turning point in Ethiopia's history. To this day, Christianity does not constitute a purely "religious" phenomenon in the country but plays an integral role in the life of the nation. The Church is not just a religious institution but has for many centuries been the repository of all the traditions of Ethiopian cultural and social life. In this respect, Frumentius was instrumental -- so much so that he is considered a saint of the Church. His influence in the expansion of Christianity within the country can be glimpsed from the names Ethiopia's faithful bestowed upon him, namely "Abba Selama" ("Father of Peace"), and "Kesate Berhan" ("Revealer of Light").<sup>56</sup> The Feast of Frumentius is celebrated within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church on the 26 of Hamle, (July) and a monastery church, dedicated to the first bishop, still flourishes on a hill-side today at Abbi Addi in Tigre.<sup>57</sup>

#### SAINTS AND MONASTICISM: THE ETHIOPIAN-SYRIAN RELATION

The second major evangelization of Ethiopia occurred in 480

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<sup>55</sup>Hable Sellassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History, p. 102.

<sup>56</sup>The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama, p. 5.

<sup>57</sup>Hable Sellassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History, p. 104.



A.D. with the arrival of nine holy men from Syria, known in Ethiopia as Teseatu Keddusan or "The Nine Saints." Persecuted for their anti-Chalcedonian convictions, these nine men fled to Axum, where they were warmly received by the Ethiopian Emperor and the city's inhabitants.<sup>58</sup> Following in their steps was yet another group of holy men, called the Sadgan or "The Righteous" who were also fleeing religious persecution. In the estimate of Ethiopian scholar Tamrat, the arrival of both of these groups in Ethiopia was critical for the evangelization and growth of Christianity in the country.<sup>59</sup> "The Righteous" are remembered in Ethiopia as having wrought many miracles in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and the "Nine Saints" as having brought to the country the first foundation of Ethiopian monasticism.<sup>60</sup>

The relation between the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and the Syrian Church is of long standing. Ethiopia's first bishop, Frumentius, was a Syrian by origin.<sup>61</sup> Likewise, the "Nine Saints" were also Syrian by origin. Some of them may originally have come from Asia Minor, but most of the "Nine Saints" have Syrian names which resemble, oddly enough, the names

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<sup>58</sup>H. M. Hyatt The Church of Abyssinia, (London: Luzac and Co., 1928), p. 65; The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama of History and Spiritual Life, pp. 7-9.

<sup>59</sup>T. Tamrat, Church and State in Ethiopia (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 23-24.

<sup>60</sup>S. Kaplan, The Monastic Holy Man and the Christianization of Early Solomonic Ethiopia (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1984), p. 32. Budge, A History of Ethiopia, p. 152. Hyatt, The Church of Abyssinia, p. 65.

<sup>61</sup>Kaplan, S., The Monastic Holy Man, p. 15.

of some of Syria's famous monasteries.<sup>62</sup> This corresponds to the fact that each of the "Nine Saints" founded a monastery in Ethiopia. Their names and respective monasteries are as follows:

Abba Alef--Founded a monastery at Bi'isa  
 Abba Yimata--Founded a monastery at Garalta  
 Abba Liganos--Founded a monastery outside Axum  
 Abba Pantallewon--Founded a monastery outside Axum  
 Abba Afse--Founded a monastery at Yeha  
 Abba Aragawi (also known as Za-Mikael)--Founded a  
 monastery at Dabra Damo  
 Abba Gerima--Founded a monastery at Adowa, Medera  
 Abba Guba--Founded a monastery at Sedenya<sup>63</sup>

That the members of the second group, "The Righteous" who somewhat later flocked into Ethiopia, were also of Syrian origin is probable in light of Ethiopia's open-door policy to the Syrians, and of the intense effort of the Syrian Fathers to translate sacred books from Syriac, Greek and other languages into Geez, and to build churches, monasteries and schools throughout the region.<sup>64</sup> Tamrat insists that it was the work of both these groups, particularly of the "Nine Saints", which accounted for the orthodox church reaching deep into the Ethiopian interior basically through the foundation of monastic communities.

The importance of these monastic communities lay, more than in anything else, in their serving as permanent centers of

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<sup>62</sup>H. M. Hyatt The Church of Abyssinia, p. 65. Abba Gorgorios, The History of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, p. 27.

<sup>63</sup>J. Doresse Ethiopia, trans. by E. Coult (New York: GP Putnams Son's, 1956), p. 81. Budge, E.A.W., A History of Ethiopia, op. cit., p. 152.

<sup>64</sup>Abba Gorgorious, The History of the E.O.T.C., p. 27.

Christian learning and scholarship. No doubt, Tamrat maintains, these Syrian monks first set out to translate the Bible and other religious books into Ethiopia's language.<sup>65</sup> While the "Nine Saints" concentrated their efforts in the province of central Tigre, the second group, "The Righteous", focused theirs on the district of Eritrea far to the north.<sup>66</sup> Some chose to build monastic communities in isolation, cutting themselves off from all human contacts and choosing instead to live like wild animals in the shelter of a ravine or upon a mountain-side. Others, of a more social sensibility, devoted themselves to the propagation of the Gospel in Ethiopia. Listed among this group is Abba Yohannes who is remembered for having founded the Monastery of Dabra Sina, and Abba Libanos, known as Matea, who, at the instigation of St. Pachomius, founded the Monastery of Dabra Libanos in the province of Eritrea.<sup>67</sup>

Thus, Ethiopia's ties with Syria were established and strengthened mainly through the faithful missionary efforts of these holy men who settled in the region. Through their influence many of the monasteries founded in Ethiopia incorporate distinctly Syrian elements.<sup>68</sup> Ethiopia's liturgical language, Geez, contains many Syriac words thought to have been introduced

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<sup>65</sup>Tamrat, T., Church and State in Ethiopia, pp. 23-24.  
Cerulli, E., Storia della letteratura Ethiopica (Rome: 1956), pp. 23-33.

<sup>66</sup>Tamrat, T. Church and State in Ethiopia, pp. 23-24.

<sup>67</sup>Doresse, J., Ethiopia, p. 64.

<sup>68</sup>Doresse, Ethiopia, pp. 81-82.

into the language largely through the translation of the Old and New Testaments according to the Antiochian text rather than that of Alexandria.<sup>69</sup> Hable Sellassie also notes that the Ethiopian liturgy resembles the Syrian rite more closely than the Alexandrian; moreover, its music also reflects the Syrian style of Ethiopia's great sacred musician, St. Yared. Many of Ethiopia's ancient churches were built in a distinctly Syrian style of architecture.<sup>70</sup>

Today, in Ethiopia, there are over eight hundred monasteries, serving as sources of orthodox teaching and storehouses of both the religious and historical heritage of the country. Without the existence of these ascetical centers, the growth of Christianity in Ethiopia would have been severely limited. Monasteries in Ethiopia are usually perched upon some remote summit, hence their name "Dabra" or "Mountain." Many of them are contemplative centers; others are charitable foundations for the poor and infirm (for whom the monastery provides small huts).<sup>71</sup> According to ancient monastic laws, no female person (or animal, for that matter) is allowed to enter most Ethiopian monasteries. In some, such as Waldebba, in the isolated district of Tigre, monks frequently withdraw into solitude for a life-time

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 82; J. Guidi, La Chiesa Abissina (Rome: Oriente Moderno, Anno II, 1922), p. 6. Budge, E.A.W., A History of Ethiopia, pp. 152-153.

<sup>70</sup>R. Cornevin Histoire de l'Afrique (Paris: Payot, 1962), p. 240. Hable Sellassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History, pp. 120-121.

<sup>71</sup>Hyatt, H.M. The Church of Abyssinia, p. 66.

of prayer and penitence. Nor is this solitary retirement always confined to monks only.<sup>72</sup>

In the Ethiopian monastery, a monk is a candidate for admission three to six years, sometimes longer. Life is hard and laborious--with monks spending their day in service to the monastic community, i.e., cutting wood, cleaning, sewing, cooking or spending hours in meditations, prayers, devotions and fasting. Professions or vows of faith usually occur in four stages. The first profession consists in receiving a gamus or gown, usually made of a long cotton cloth; it is usually white in color, but some monasteries prefer yellow. The second profession consists in receiving a ginat or girdle--a leather belt which is worn over the cloak. The third profession, or habit, is symbolized by the gob or skull cap which is placed on the head. Finally, the fourth profession is known as Askema or Akelile-Sock ("crown of thorns") with its twelve crosses worn by the monks who have completed the third profession. The head of each monastery is known as an Abe Menate, i.e., "Teacher", or "Abbot."<sup>73</sup>

In the admission rites, the superior or abbot of the monastery or order says the prayer of admission over the monk and blesses with the cross all the elements. This ceremony of purification concluded, the leather girdle of St. John the Baptist is tied about the new monk's loins, and the attending

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>73</sup>Wondmagegnehu and Motovu, The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, p. 23. Tamrat, T., Church and State in Ethiopia, p. 164.

priests chant the requiem for the dead. Often, in the interest of the mortification of the flesh, a heavy iron chain is substituted for this girdle. Throughout his life, a monk is to eat moderately and to impose fasts upon himself over and above those observed by the laity. All monks are required to live in monasteries unless special dispensation is given. At various times in their lives, monks may make pilgrimages to Jerusalem or to Ethiopia's holy places.<sup>74</sup> Another kind of monk, albeit "unofficial," is not uncommon in countries like Ethiopia; it is the Bahtawi, Bahtawian or "The hermit" or "anchorite". Generally, these holy persons live apart from society in deserted or isolated places. They do not take vows; they do not follow any human order or established rule. More like the Old Testament prophets, these hermits live an extremely solitary life, having little or no formal connection with a church. Often practicing mortification of the flesh, they will on occasion appear in a city or a town crying aloud the Word of God as it has come to them in a vision or a dream, saying "Take heed and give alms to the poor." Hermits in Ethiopia are regarded as messengers of God who appear at different times to shout out the message: "A mighty tribulation is at hand. Repent!"<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Hyatt, The Church of Abyssinia, pp. 70-71.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 72. Wondmagegnehu and Motovu, eds., The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, p. 23. C. H. Walker The Abyssinian At Home (London: Sheldon Press, 1933), p. 115.

ETHIOPIAN-ALEXANDRIAN RELATIONS

The advent of monasticism in Ethiopia was not only due to Syria's influence but was also the result of Ethiopia's relation with Alexandria. Prior to arriving in Ethiopia, the "Nine Saints" lived in Egypt in monasteries founded by Pachomius. It was after this preparation that they set out in different directions to preach the Gospel and to introduce monastic institutions throughout Ethiopia.<sup>76</sup> According to Hyatt, Ethiopian monasticism was introduced into the country from Egypt; Hyatt claims that one of the "Nine Saints", Abba Aragawi, received his habit from St. Pachomius and founded the monastery in Tigre known as Dabra Damo. He also maintains that with Abba Aragawi came eight other monks who followed the order of St. Anthony.<sup>77</sup> According to him the monastic rules of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church were derived from founders of Egyptian monasticism, namely, St. Anthony and St. Pachomius.<sup>78</sup> The Ethiopicist Doresse makes a similar claim, maintaining that Ethiopian monks themselves claim such holy men as Pachomius, Macarius and Anthony as their earliest predecessors.<sup>79</sup> Both scholars are agreed that during the sixth and seventh centuries,

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<sup>76</sup>The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama, p. 7.

<sup>77</sup>Hyatt, H.M., The Church of Abyssinia, p. 65.

<sup>78</sup> Wondmagegnehu, and Motovu, The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, p. 23.

<sup>79</sup>Doresse, Ethiopia, p. 81.

the growth of the Ethiopian monastic movement occurred under the rule of St. Pachomius of Egypt, becoming highly developed at that time.

The official relationship between Ethiopia and Alexandria, however, began much earlier, in the fourth century, with the consecration of Ethiopia's first bishop, Bishop Frumentius, by the Patriarch of Alexandria. This event served to strengthen the Ethiopian-Alexandrian ties, making the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church to a large extent similar, both dogmatically and juridically, to the Coptic Church of Alexandria. The Alexandrian see often sent Egyptian bishops to aid the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church before the rise of Islam. That the Patriarchate of Alexandria itself attached much importance to maintaining Ethiopia's dependence is evident from its version of the Acts of the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.)<sup>80</sup> in which it clearly prohibits Ethiopians from claiming historical primacy. Although this rule was always suspect to the Ethiopian clergy, it was generally respected until the 13th century when a new wave of Ethiopian independence arose. Egypt retaliated with a new prohibition incorporated in the Fetha Nagast, Ethiopia's politico-religious code, that an Egyptian bishop would always occupy the place of leadership for the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church--a mandate which lasted for about sixteen hundred years.<sup>81</sup> This situation

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<sup>80</sup>Wondmagegnehu and Motovu, The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, p. 11; The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama, p. 9; Y. Mara, The Church of Ethiopia, (Asmara: Il Poligrafico, 1972) p. 15.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid. The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama, p. 9.



finally ended when Ethiopia, conscious of its national unity, could no longer tolerate a dependent church, even in no more than an administrative sense, in an independent nation. In addition, the Egyptian Church had lost much of its splendor.<sup>82</sup> Thus, in an effort to achieve its independence, Emperor Yohannes IV (1872-1889) persuaded the Alexandrian Patriarch to consecrate four Egyptian bishops (instead of the usual one) who were assigned to Ethiopia's northern provinces, thereby preparing the way for the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in that region.<sup>83</sup> In 1929, Ethiopian Emperor Haile Sellassie also persuaded the Patriarch of Alexandria to consecrate, for the first time, five Ethiopian bishops. With this act, and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (1935-1941)--which established a separatist movement in which the Italians chose their own Patriarch and collaborating bishops, an act which the Synod in Cairo condemned--<sup>84</sup> the movement toward an independent Orthodox Church gained momentum. From 1941 to 1951, negotiations between the Alexandrian and Ethiopian Church continued. An agreement was reached in 1948 that, upon the death of the Abuna, his successor should be an Ethiopian with an Ethiopian co-adjutor, and another five Ethiopian monk priests were consecrated bishops in 1949. Finally, in 1951, for the first time in its history, an Ethiopian ascended to the

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<sup>82</sup>Mara, Y., The Church of Ethiopia, p. 20.

<sup>83</sup>Wondmagegnehu and Motovu, eds., The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, p. 11.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

Metropolitan see with the right to consecrate other bishops. This event signified and proclaimed Ethiopia's complete religious independence from Egypt, with the Alexandrian Patriarch retaining only a moral and spiritual primacy in Ethiopia.<sup>85</sup> Thus, Ethiopia's relationship with the Alexandrian Church entered a new phase, and in 1959, the Ethiopian Metropolitan was invested with the dignity of the title of Patriarch of Ethiopia.<sup>86</sup>

Today, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church is one of five Oriental Orthodox Sister Churches: the Coptic, Antiochian Syrian, Armenian, Indian Syrian, and Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Churches.<sup>87</sup> All five remain loyal to the orthodoxy of the Alexandrian theological tradition as defined by the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. On this ground, they reject the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. weighing, instead, all new doctrines and declarations against the authority of the Holy Bible and the teachings and traditions of the Church Fathers (2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:6-17).<sup>88</sup>

#### THE SOLOMONIC ERA: Zara-Yaqob'S TIME

The political upheavals of the thirteenth century which

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., pp. 11-14.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>87</sup>The Oriental Orthodox Church (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printers, 1965), p. 3.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

culminated in the downfall of the Zagwe Kingdom<sup>89</sup> and the restoration of the Solomonic line, under the leadership of Yekunno Amlak, were accompanied by events of comparable significance for the development of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. It was during this period that the monastic movement in Ethiopia reached its zenith.<sup>90</sup> For the first time in Ethiopia's long history, a monastery, Dabra Hayq, founded by Abba Iyasus Mo'a in 1241, was established in the southern provinces of Amhara and Shawa. The existence of this monastery provided the southern region with its first center of Christian education.<sup>91</sup> However, the community of Dabra Hayq was much more than a center of learning. With the rise of the Solomonic empire, Iyasus Mo'a's monastery became one of the religious communities most closely associated with the royal court.<sup>92</sup> Throughout the early Solomonic period, the abbot of Dabra Hayq maintained a close alliance with the Solomonic Emperor Yekunno Amlak. In this way, the "monastic clergy were intimately involved in the events which led to the rise and consolidation of the Solomonic dynasty during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century."<sup>93</sup> In acknowledgment of its assistance in this victory, the kings of

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<sup>89</sup>Hable Sellassie, Ethiopian History to 1270, p. 239.

<sup>90</sup>Hyatt, The Church of Abyssinia, p. 65.

<sup>91</sup>Tamrat, T., Church and State in Ethiopia, pp. 158-160.  
Kaplan, S., The Monastic Holy Man, p. 34.

<sup>92</sup>Kaplan, S., The Monastic Holy Man, p. 34.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

Ethiopia made lavish gifts of land and religious objects to the monastery which, in turn, offered them its prayers and support in times of crisis.<sup>94</sup>

Yet, this easy relationship between monastery and king was not to last long. With the introduction of monasticism to the Shawa province (occurring somewhat later than that of the Amhara),<sup>95</sup> led by Ethiopia's patron saint, Takla Haymanot, relations between church and state began to change. Although Takla Haymanot was a student of Iyasus Mo'a, who was brought up in the monasteries of Dabra Damo and Dabra Hayq, he does not seem to have followed the tradition of his teacher, choosing, instead, to have little or no relations with the ruling classes of his time. He is credited with the founding of the monastery of Dabra Libanos, formerly known as Dabra Asbo.<sup>96</sup> Because of Takla Haymanot's differing views regarding monastic relations with the state, his relationship with Iyasus Mo'a is shrouded in uncertainty and controversy. Indeed, with the establishment of Dabra Asbo by Takla Haymanot, the emergence of two very different models of royal-monastic relations can be observed, namely, the "model of mutual support and cooperation", exemplified by Dabra Hayq; and the model of "independence and eventually rebellion",

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

exemplified by Dabra Asbo.<sup>97</sup> It is, however, Tamrat's impression that the source of this controversy stems from the fact that both Iyasus-Mo'a and Takla-Haymanot traced their monastic origins to the house of Abuna Aragawi--making their conflict one of seniority rather than theology, i.e., "whose monastery came first."<sup>98</sup>

By the last quarter of the fourteenth century, with the consolidation of the Solomonic rule, the monastic holy men of Dabra Asbo or Libanos had resumed relationships with the royal court, once again, "turning their backs on their anti-monarchical brethren" and becoming the "most prominent royalists in the Church."<sup>99</sup> "The most stubborn rebels died or were sent into exile. Others accepted royal favors and dropped their opposition to the kings."<sup>100</sup> However, new monastic movements were in the wings in Ethiopia. It was during this period that Abba Ewostatewos emerged as a figure who was to found a "monastic movement in Tigre which was opposed by virtually all the clergy of the Ethiopian Church."<sup>101</sup> Ewostatewos, a man of noble birth, who studied in the monastery of Gar'alta where, at an early age, he was ordained a deacon and later a priest, is said to have

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<sup>97</sup>Tamrat, T., Church and State in Ethiopia, p. 164. Kaplan, S., The Monastic Holy Man, p. 35.

<sup>98</sup>Tamrat, T., Church and State in Ethiopia, p. 166.

<sup>99</sup>Kaplan, S., The Monastic Holy Man, p. 38.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

maintained good relations with the Egyptian Bishop Ya'aqob, but a "deteriorating relationship" with his fellow Ethiopian clergymen,<sup>102</sup> due to his apparently anti-social behavior, and his observance of the Sabbath as well as Sunday. It was the observance of both Sabbath and Sunday that triggered the controversy surrounding Ewostatewos.<sup>103</sup> Ewostatewos' disciples soon gathered to establish the community of Dabra Maryam in Qohayin in addition to other monastic communities collectively known as the Seven Disciples of Ewostatewos.<sup>104</sup> The three major communities were known as Dabra Maryam, Dabra Bizan and Daqi Yita with each of them supervising a number of smaller monasteries and convents.<sup>105</sup>

With a growing number of followers, the movement begun by Ewostatewos revealed more clearly than ever before that the Alexandrian and Ethiopian churches were at variance on many points of religious practice. In an attempt to overcome these difficulties the Egyptian bishops insisted upon strict disciplinary measures; it was as a result of their stern actions that the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church came very close to dividing into two contending parties.<sup>106</sup> Emperor Zara-Yaqob

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., pp. 38-39.

<sup>103</sup>Tamrat, T., Church and State in Ethiopia, p. 207.

<sup>104</sup>Gadla Ewostatewos, ed. by B. Turaiev, in Monumenta Aethiopiae Hagiologica, Vol. III, (St. Petersburg, 1905), pp. 116-117.

<sup>105</sup>Tamrat, T., Church and State in Ethiopia, p. 211.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. 221.

(1434-1468), known also as Constantine and praised for his piety and generosity to the country's monasteries and churches, found himself in the unique position of having to work out a unifying resolution to the internal ecclesiastical conflict. Ironically, it had been his father who had granted to Ewostatewos in 1404 the freedom to observe the Sabbath and Sunday together. Now, Zara-Yaqob was faced with the strong anti-Sabbatarian opposition of Ethiopia's clergy, led by Saraga-Birham "(Light Came Out)", the abbot of Dabra Hayq, who was known throughout the country for his strong anti-Sabbatarian sentiments.<sup>107</sup> On the opposite side stood Abba Giyorgis of Gascha, who taught the legitimacy of observing both the Sabbath and the Lord's Day together--a view that put him in direct conflict with the community of Dabra Libanos which, was allied with the Egyptian bishops and the Church of Alexandria.<sup>108</sup> In its opposition to the Sabbath day observances, Dabra Libanos greatly influenced all the other monastic communities in the tradition of Takla Haymanot.<sup>109</sup> For this reason, Zara-Yaqob convened a council in 1450 at his new church of Dabra Mitmaq in Shawa, which he had built after news of the demolition of the Egyptian monastery of the same name by the Muslims had reached him. Both parties were present. The meeting was undramatic but decisive; it was here that the Egyptian bishops formally authorized the observation of Sabbath

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 225.

observances in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, and the Ewostatians agreed to receive Holy Orders from the Egyptian prelates. Zara-Yaqob himself officially presided at the Council of Dabra Mitmaq.<sup>110</sup>

A new monastic movement of resistance, this time against King Dawit (1380-1409), occurred in the later fourteenth century through the influence of an Ewostatian monk named Gabra Iyasus who was active among the Sons of the Jews or "The House of Israel", also known as the Falasha.<sup>111</sup> Some time later, under the leadership of another monk name Qozemos, the Falasha were encouraged to revolt against the Solomonic king Dawit- a revolt which was, in the end, suppressed by the king. Though many of the Falasha were converted to Christianity through Yeshaq, son of Dawit, many more resisted conversion, choosing rather to be landless and disinherited, due to the royal mandate: "He who is baptized in the Christian religion may inherit the land of his father; otherwise, let him be a Falasi".<sup>112</sup> Many of the Falasha were thus deprived of their land and forced to develop alternative means to earn their livelihoods, such as handcrafts. Thus, like the Ewostatians before them, "the Beta Israel sought to use the institution of monasticism to preserve their unique

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid., pp. 229-230.

<sup>111</sup>Conti Rossini Conti "Note di agiografica etiopica (Abiya-Egzi, Arkaladese Gabra Iyasus)," in Rivista degli Studi Orientali, vol. XVII, (1938), pp. 409-52. Kaplan, S., The Monastic Holy Man..., op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid.



identity against the onslaught of Christian Solomonic culture."<sup>113</sup>

The last of these resistance groups during those centuries, known as the "Stephanite" movement arose at the end of the fourteenth century in the province of Tigre, specifically in a district known as Agame, not far from Axum.<sup>114</sup> The Stephanites were followers of Abba Istifanos, who was ordained a deacon by Abuna Batalomewos at the age of eighteen and later joined the monastic community of Abba Samuel of Qoyasa, in Shire.<sup>115</sup> Like others before them, the Stephanites refused to bow in allegiance to the king. Only this time, bowing to the king meant veneration of the Virgin Mary and prostration before the cross of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ--both of which represented submission to the leadership of the Solomonic kings rather than worship of Mary and her son.<sup>116</sup>

The cult of Mary, which came to prominence in Ethiopia in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, can to a considerable degree be viewed as a royal intervention in religious life. The Miracles of Mary were translated into Ethiopic

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<sup>113</sup>J. A. Quirim, The Beta Israel (Felasha) in the Ethiopian History (Minnesota, 1977), p. 61.

<sup>114</sup>Gadla Istifanos, MS., no. 2, Institute of Archaeology, Addis Ababa, p. 1.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., pp. 2-3. Conti Rossini, C. "Liber Aksumae," Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Script. Aeth. Ser. altera, Vol. VIII (Louvain: Secretariat du Corpus SCO, 1910), pp. 21-22. Kaplan, S., The Monastic Holy Man, p. 41.

<sup>116</sup>F. Alvarez, The Prester John of the Indies, tr. by C.F. Beckingham & G.W. Huntingford (Cambridge: The University Press, 1961), p. 170.; A. Caquot, Gadla Ezra, Annales d'Ethiopie, IV (1961), pp. 69-121.

during the reign of Dawit and the cult of Mary was instituted by Zara-Yaqob. Opposition to the cult, which was by no means confined to the Stephanite clergy, was closely identified with resistance to the royal domination of the Church.<sup>117</sup>

Yet, even while the Stephanites refused to acknowledge these acts of veneration as true marks of religious life, they never appear to have challenged the authenticity or orthodoxy of the main body of the Church. They continued, for example, to accept the validity of consecration by the Egyptian bishops.

The Stephanites responded that it was not the cross or Mary they denied, to these they would willingly bow, but they would not bow to the king.<sup>118</sup>

Nonetheless, the movement was short-lived, and within another fifty years, after the death of Istifanos, the Stephanites, like others before them, were once again peaceably co-existing with the king and seeking to placate their enemies within the Church.<sup>119</sup>

Thus, the development of Ethiopian monasticism, which reached its zenith in the thirteenth century, can be seen as a series of movements toward and away from the state and the Church, brought about by such influential figures as Iyasus-Mo'a (died 1292); Takla Haymanot (1215-1313), and others. Certainly, Zara-Yaqob was also influential in this progress, however controversial he may at times appear in Ethiopia's history of resistance and reconciliation. To be sure, others before him,

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<sup>117</sup>Kaplan, S., The Monastic Holy Man, p. 43.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., pp. 43-44.

such as Yekunno Amlak and other Solomonic kings, e.g., Amda-Zion (1314-1344) and Yishak (1413-1430), contributed much to the development and growth of Christianity in both positive and negative ways. However, it is Zara-Yaqob ("Seed of Jacob") who is remembered for his decisive efforts to stabilize and unite the manifold religious movements of his kingdom through a strong monarchy in Church and State.<sup>120</sup> Though criticized for his harsh retaliation against unauthorized Christian practices, Zara-Yaqob accomplished many things for Christendom, including the resolution reached at the Council of Dabra Mitmaq over which, he himself presided,<sup>121</sup> to observe both Sabbath and Sunday, the mandate that the 29th day of each month be observed in honor of the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and, finally, that the thirty-three feasts of our Lady, the blessed Virgin Mary, be observed as strictly in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church as any Sunday liturgy.<sup>122</sup>

#### THE PLACE OF THE VIRGIN MARY

Despite some historical reactions such as the monastic resistance-movement of the Stephanites, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church has always honored and venerated the holy Virgin

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<sup>120</sup>Tamrat, Church and State in Ethiopia, p. 248. Kaplan, S., The Monastic Holy Man, p. 43-44.

<sup>121</sup>Tamrat, T. Church and State in Ethiopia, p. 230.

<sup>122</sup>Budge, E.A.W., A History of Ethiopia, p. 309.

Mary, Mother of God in its liturgy and theology. Marian devotion in Ethiopia is as old as the Christian faith itself and is based on the essential unity between the incarnation and the Mother of the incarnate one, chosen by God to participate in this His greatest work of salvation. For Eastern Orthodoxy as a whole, a proper Christological understanding hinges upon a right understanding of the Virgin Mary's role in the incarnation, a point which is often overlooked or under-estimated by the Reformed churches. As the Mother of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary is exalted above all creatures, worthy of the praise and honor befitting her high status; yet, the Ethiopian faithful never forget that the Virgin Mother of God is also their sister, the daughter of Adam, the descendant of Abraham and David, herself in need of redemption and therefore of a Saviour (Luke 1: 46-47).

The importance of the blessed Virgin Mary is foundational to the Eastern Orthodox Churches, and the non-Chalcedonian Christian Churches, who profess their belief in the "One Incarnate Nature of God the Word," and who see in the common portrayal of the Madonna and her Child the central expression of the Orthodox Faith.<sup>123</sup> Within Eastern Orthodoxy in general, and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in particular, sacred devotional writings and compositions in honor of the Virgin Mary abound. The Syrian biblical exegete and ecclesiastical writer, St.

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<sup>123</sup>E. A. W. Budge, tr., Legends of our Lady Mary, the perpetual Virgin and Her Mother Hanna (London: Mayflower Press, 1970), pp. xlii-xlii.

Ephraem,<sup>124</sup> is regarded as the author of a number of such works, especially the Weddassie Maryam or Praise of Mary. In addition, Emperor Zara-Yaqob did much to promote Marian devotion within Ethiopia.<sup>125</sup> Under his reign, every church in the country dedicated an altar to the Virgin Mary, and thirty-three Marian feasts were observed annually throughout the Church Year--a practice which continues to the present day. Zara-Yaqob is also responsible for the translation of the book of the Miracles of the Virgin from Arabic into Ethiopic and for many of the devotional Marian compositions, such as the Arganona Dengel or the Harp of the Virgin commonly attributed to him.

While the Virgin Mary's praise is joyfully sung throughout the Eastern Orthodox Church, the churches in the Protestant tradition have remained comparatively silent regarding the role of the Virgin Mary in the mystery of the incarnation. Moreover, for many people in the West, Orthodox Marian devotion has been shrouded in mystery, very little being known or understood regarding the significance of the cult of the Virgin and her relationship both to Christology and Soteriology.

The beginnings certainly were different. Devotion to the blessed Virgin clearly had its origins in the life and history of the early church. We find its first expression in the Gospel of Luke with a woman's exclamation to our Lord, "Blessed is the womb

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<sup>124</sup>Cross, The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 462.

<sup>125</sup>Budge, A History of Ethiopia, pp. 304-311.

which bore thee and the breasts which nursed thee!" (Luke 11:27). For early ascetics, Mary was the pattern or model of virginity; and by the third century the idea of the holy Virgin as the New Eve, adopted by the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.), greatly increased the devotion of the faithful to her.<sup>126</sup> In addition, the development of Marian devotion was aided by the spread, in popular piety, of a belief in the Virgin's miraculous powers of intercession. This belief was undergirded by the stories of the manifestations of the Virgin Mary to such important Church Fathers as Gregory the Wonderworker (related by Gregory of Nyssa)<sup>127</sup> and of the visions of Mary received by the Alexandrian Patriarchs Theophilus and Timothy.<sup>128</sup>

For the Orthodox Church, however, veneration of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, is the expression of the one triune God and a clear Christological imperative. In the words of Father Bulgakov, it is the soul of Orthodox piety. In fact, Bulgakov maintains that a faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ which does not include a deep love and veneration for the Mother of God is another faith, another Christianity, altogether.<sup>129</sup> For Orthodox Christians, adoration of the humanity of our Lord and

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<sup>126</sup>D. Attwater, A Dictionary of Mary (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1955), p. 66.

<sup>127</sup>M. O'Carroll, Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1983), p. 121.

<sup>128</sup>Budge, Legends of Our Lady Mary, pp. 61-102.

<sup>129</sup>S. Bulgakov, The Orthodox Church (London: Centenary Press, 1935), p. 137.

Saviour Jesus Christ necessarily implies veneration of his Mother from whom he received his humanity, and who, in her person, represents the whole of humanity.<sup>130</sup> The Orthodox Church fully affirms that the Virgin Mary now resides with her Son in a state of heavenly, eternal glory in which she prays and intercedes on behalf of the world. Thus, the Orthodox Church addresses the Virgin with supplications, invoking her aid. The veneration of the Virgin leaves an imprint on all Christian anthropology, cosmology and the entire life of prayer and piety.<sup>131</sup>

It is the intention of this dissertation to shed some light on the cult of the Virgin Mary within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church through an examination of the Filsata or the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. In addition, it is my hope that through a better understanding of Ethiopia's ancient and largely unknown liturgical and theological tradition, a clearer rationale for Marian devotion and its importance in the mystery of the incarnation may emerge, both for the purpose of clarifying misunderstandings regarding the cult of the Virgin Mary within Orthodoxy, and to re-open a chapter in the on-going ecumenical dialogue between Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox Churches.

This author firmly believes that in the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, resides, both literally and figuratively, a treasure, largely hidden, yet of great value to the Body of our Lord and

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<sup>130</sup>Ibid., pp. 137-138.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid, pp. 139-140.

Saviour Jesus Christ as a whole. Putting aside all differences of tradition, for a moment, he wants to encourage the reader to look anew at the Virgin Mary's unique role in the mystery of our Lord and Saviour's incarnation.



## CHAPTER I

### THE TRADITION OF MARIAN LITERATURE IN ETHIOPIA

#### EARLY SOURCES

Among the Orthodox Churches, none has demonstrated the devotion to, and love for, the Virgin Mary like the Copts and the Ethiopians.<sup>132</sup> Thus, it is not surprising to find that the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church abounds with a rich array of literature dealing with the life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and His Blessed Mother. E.A. Wallis Budge maintains that, as the influence of the Apostles' message of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ spread abroad, the general demand for more information regarding their earthly lives also increased.<sup>133</sup> As this interest surpassed the Gospel account, many written accounts of the birth, infancy, childhood and related stories of the lives of our Lord and Saviour and of His Mother, the Virgin Mary, made their appearance under the names of Apostles and disciples. Such works were current especially in Syria and Egypt and were soon translated into the languages of more remote regions and countries.<sup>134</sup>

Marian traditions probably made their way into Ethiopia

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<sup>132</sup>Palmer, J. Our Lady Returns to Egypt (New York: Culligan Publications, 1969), p. 2.

<sup>133</sup>Budge, W. Legends of Our Lady Mary, p. xxvi.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid.

prior to the fifth century A.D.. The cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary may well have begun in Ethiopia with the arrival of Bishop Frumentius. There is no reason to doubt that invocations of the Virgin were common in the East at this time, with the traditions about Mary becoming known and accepted by the people. By the fifth century, pictures of the Holy Virgin and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ child made their appearance; they may have been the result of the condemnation of Nestorius at the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D.. By this time, the Christian churches which believed that the divine human nature were united in "One incarnate nature of God" accepted and affirmed the truth that the Holy Virgin Mary was indeed the Mother of God. With this teaching, the icons of the Virgin, Mother of God, spread rapidly.

The Ethiopian Church suffered much at the hands of the Arabs when they extended their conquests in East Africa into Ethiopia. Both native pagans and foreign Arabs attacked the Christians at this period, burning church buildings, religious literature, and artifacts. By the eleventh century, practically the entire Christian literature of Ethiopia was destroyed with the exception of a number of manuscripts which monks managed to hide in safety. It seems that in the thirteenth century these remnants were brought out of hiding and re-copied by the scribes.<sup>135</sup>

The fourteenth century saw a general increase of literary activity throughout Ethiopia. Under the patronage of King Zara-Yaqob (1434-1468), literary works flourished in Ethiopia and

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<sup>135</sup>Budge, Legends, pp. xlii-xliii.

paintings were commissioned portraying the earthly lives of the saints and various Biblical events and scenes. Much of the existing Marian literature, including The Book of the Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary as well as hymns and devotional materials, were written during this period.

Much of the tradition, however, is older and goes back to important writings which the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church shares with other early Christian literatures. One of the oldest and best known works of Marian devotion is the so-called Protoevangelium Jacobi or The Book of James. Its original title which is preserved in the Ethiopian version is "The Book of the Birth of Mary." While being considered apocryphal by the Western churches, it was attributed to James, the "brother" of the Lord and first bishop of Jerusalem and was widely used in the East. Scholars often assign it a date in the second century; it was known to Clement of Alexandria and Origen at the beginning of the third century. Today we have available an early Greek text from the third or fourth century in a papyrus of the Bodmer collection in Geneva, and several oriental translations are in existence, the oldest of which is the Syriac. A modern edition of the Ethiopic version was published by the French scholar M. Chaine in 1909.<sup>136</sup> The Book of Mary's Birth is read on the first day of

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<sup>136</sup>M. Chaine, "Apocrypha de B. Maria Virgine," Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptorum Aethiopicum, Vol. VII (Romae: Execudebat Karolus de Luigi, 1909), pp. 3-19. An English translation of the Greek text may be found in E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, New Testament Apocrypha. Volume I: Gospels and Related Writings (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), pp. 374-388, and in M.R. James, The Apocryphal New Testament (Oxford:

Genbot (E.C.) or May 9 (W.C.), the feast of the Birth of the Holy Virgin Mary. Like all feasts in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, it is celebrated or commemorated no less than twelve times a year, i.e., monthly.

From The Book of the Birth of Mary we learn a great deal about the life of Mary's parents Hanna and Joachim, Mary's annunciation by an angel, her birth, her childhood and years in the Temple, her being given over to the care of Joseph, the birth of Our Lord and Saviour, and the holy family's persecution by Herod and flight into Egypt. The book closes with an account of the death of Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, during this persecution. Upon Mary's birth, Hanna dedicated her daughter to God, bringing her to the priests of the Temple where the young Virgin lived for the next twelve years. The account, written in the vivid imagery and language of poetry, is also found in other writings that deal with Mary's childhood. Especially important among them is a long work describing the life of Mary and the infancy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, attributed to St. Matthew.<sup>137</sup> It has often been assumed that this was the Book of St. Matthew originally written in Hebrew and mentioned by Church Fathers such as Eusebius, Athanasius, Chrysostom, and Jerome who said he translated it into Latin. Many of the stories in the Book of St. Matthew were

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Clarendon Press, 1924), pp. 38-49.

<sup>137</sup>James, The Apocryphal New Testament, pp. 73-79, gives a brief survey of the contents and some excerpts.

elaborations of the tradition found in The Book of the Birth of Mary. They were well known in the medieval West, and the Ethiopian books dealing with the childhood of St. Mary follow them in many cases as well. Such accounts often add important details. According to the annunciation story of Mary, an angel told Joachim that God closed the womb of Hanna, his wife, in order to work a more wonderful miracle, namely, the birth of a child not through lust but through divine intervention. The Ethiopian tradition preserves a History of Hanna, the Mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary which speaks of the presence of Mary even at the creation of the first man:

And when He had made an end of creating His creation, He created our father Adam...At that time Mary, the daughter of Joachim, existed in the belly of Adam in the form of a White Pearl which shone in his right side.<sup>138</sup>

Before the birth of the Virgin, Hanna told her husband Joachim that she had a dream, seeing a dove sitting on her head, and it entered into her belly.<sup>139</sup>

The accounts also give a lively description of the young Virgin's early life in the Temple, full of simplicity and grace.

Pure in body and soul, (Mary) lived in chastity, and in the service of God, and in the ordered service of the Temple...The angels came and ministered unto her, and they passed the whole day standing before her in the form of young doves, giving her courage and comforting her ... She spent her days weaving a purple veil for the Temple ... and all the powers in the heavens marveled at her purity and chastity, for her

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<sup>138</sup>Budge, Legends, p. 4. The entire History of Hanna is translated by Budge, Legends, pp. 1-53.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

virtues eclipsed those of Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel, and Anna, the mother of Samuel.<sup>140</sup>

As many of the faithful began to attribute miraculous healing powers to the Blessed Virgin and to seek her intercession, interest in her history grew steadily. Stories of the Virgin's early childhood, her life with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and after His death, were in great demand.<sup>141</sup> Budge notes that with this spark of Marian interest and demand for her stories came a careful recording of oral traditions regarding the holy Virgin. Every detail pertaining to her life was carefully preserved and incorporated into ever new forms of the old accounts. Visions of the Virgin Mary, experienced by certain Church Fathers such as Theophilus and Timothy, Patriarchs of Alexandria, furthered the popular interest in the Virgin. Often these men composed written narratives of the Virgin's life which they have received from the Blessed Virgin herself. The substance of such narratives was derived chiefly from the Protevangelium.<sup>142</sup> Many Church Fathers also wrote homilies about the Virgin Mary praising and exalting the holiness of her life.<sup>143</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem wrote extensively about the Virgin's life in the Temple, St. Cyril of Alexandria described her life before the Annunciation, and Demetrius of Antioch

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<sup>140</sup>E. A. W. Budge Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt (London: Longman & Co., 1915), p. lxxxii-lxxxiii.

<sup>141</sup>Budge, Legends, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., pp. xxix-xxx.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., p. xxx.

authored a discourse on the life of the Virgin following the archangel's Annunciation.<sup>144</sup> Many of the Fathers are recorded as seeking the Virgin's intercession and help. St. Cyril of Alexandria writes:

O wise Virgin, I beseech thee to bring the favor of God, who is thy Son, upon us, that He may forgive us our sins, and deliver us from the crafts of the adversary, the Devil...O Mary, do thou draw nigh unto the King, the Christ, that He may receive thy supplication on our behalf, for He is thy Son and thy Beloved, and thou didst bear Him, and He called thee 'My Mother.' Verily, O Mary, the Virgin, thy honor is greater than that of all the women in the world...Thou art more exalted than the cherubim and seraphim...because Christ loved thee.<sup>145</sup>

Regarding the power of Mary's intercession for humanity, Epiphanius of Cyprus writes:

I beseech thee, O Virgin, Mother of God, to help me, Epiphanius, thy worthless servant, and to make supplication to Christ on behalf of all the people of my city, nay, more, the whole world...For unto thee, more than to all the saints, belongeth the power to make supplication unto Him.<sup>146</sup>

### TRANSITUS MARIAE

In the early centuries of the Christian Church stories sprang up regarding not only the early life of the Virgin Mary, but also her life following the crucifixion of her Son. Before the end of the sixth century, a number of collections recording

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<sup>144</sup>Ibid., pp. xxx-xxxvii (extracts). Budge, A.W. Miscellaneous Coptic Texts, pp. 662 ff; p. 717f.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., p. 723.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., p. 714.

the miracles of the Virgin Mary and the events preceding her death were in circulation. Especially famous is the Transitus Mariae, the "Crossing Over" or the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin which was attributed to the Church Father Melito of Sardes. Along with other Marian collections, this writing was condemned in Rome by Bishop Gelasius in 494; nevertheless, at an early date these texts found their way to Egypt and, from there, to Ethiopia. Books dealing with the latter part of the Virgin's life including her miracles and her assumption were read in both Coptic and Ethiopian churches before the close of the 10th century.<sup>147</sup> Quite a few of these Ethiopian texts, particularly those recording the miracles of the Virgin Mary, have close parallels in medieval Western manuscripts, which is not surprising in light of the fact that even in the Ethiopian version many of the Virgin's miracles are said to have occurred in Turkey, Italy, France, Holland, and various other European countries. A collection of Marian miracles was published in Europe during the 12th and 13th centuries; some of them apparently found their way into Arabic and, later, into the Ethiopic languages. Thus, the Marian tradition of European origin did not enter Ethiopia before the end of the 13th century.<sup>148</sup>

As regards the Ethiopian Book of the Dormition, the Transitus Mariae, Arras observes in his important volume De

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<sup>147</sup>Hyatt, H.M. The Church of Abyssinia, pp. 252-254.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., p. 254; see also below, pp. 55-62.



Transitu Mariae Apocrypha Aethiopice, that the "Pseudo-Melito" version was based on a narrative written by a heretic named Leucius on the topic of the Virgin's Assumption. Though scholars believed the Leucius text to have been lost, Arras maintains that it is preserved in its totality in an Ethiopic version under the title Book of (Mary's) Rest. His edition of the Book of the Rest is accompanied by some other Transitus writings preserved in the British Museum, the Bibliotheque Nationale (Paris), and the Vatican Library.<sup>149</sup> Previously, M. Chaine had already printed the story of Mary's Dormition from a Liber Transmigrationis Mariae, attributed to the Apostle John.<sup>150</sup> Arras now adds other texts describing the "Covenant of Mercy" made between the Virgin and her Son, the Virgin's miraculous raising of Se'id while walking to her Son's sepulchre in Golgotha in order to pray, and other miraculous events and encounters. Arras dates the manuscripts of these various Transitus documents between the 15th and 18th centuries.

In brief, Arras presents the following texts describing the Virgin's latter days after the crucifixion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and her ultimate Assumption under the general heading, Transitus Mariae documents.

- The Book of the Rest (I, pp. 1-84), from Codex Orientalis

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<sup>149</sup>Victor Arras, ed. "De Transitu Mariae Apocrypha Aethiopici I and II," Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptores Aethiopice, Vol. LXVI and LXVII (Louvain: Secretariat du CorpusSCO, 1973, 1974), see the introduction, pp. v-vii.

<sup>150</sup>Chaine, M., Apocrypha de B. Maria Virgine, pp. 23-49.

692 in the British Museum (15th century). It recounts Mary's last days, her death and burial, and her Assumption into Heaven. There is no English translation available as yet.

- **The Book of the Apostle John** (I, pp. 85-100), from Codex Orientalis 604 in the British Museum (18th century). Attributed to St. John, the Beloved Disciple, and read in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church at the Feast of the Dormition, Ter 21 (E.C.) or January 21 (W.C.), it describes the Virgin's conflict with the Jews after our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's Resurrection, her death and her Assumption. E.A. Wallis Budge, Legends, pp. 152-167, provides an English translation of this "shorter version." Marius Chaine had published a "longer version" of the Book of the Apostle John from a Paris manuscript, mentioned above in note 150. An English translation of the longer version is found in Budge, Legends, pp. 168-201.
  
- **A Homily of St. Cyril of Jerusalem** (II, pp. 1-32), from Codex Orientalis 604 in the British Museum. Attributed to the fourth century Church Father, this homily is read at the feast of the Assumption, Nahase 16 (E.C.) or August 23 (W.C.). It draws on the Apostle John's eyewitness account of Mary's death and Assumption which was said to have been written down by Prochoros, John's scribe. No English translation is available.
  
- **A Homily of Cyriacus of Behnesa or Oxyrrhynchus** in Upper Egypt (II, pp. 34-55), from the same codex. Attributed to another Church Father of the fourth century and read at the same Feast, Nahase 16 (E.C.), this homily also describes the events surrounding Mary's burial and Assumption and showers her with titles of honor. No English translation is available.
  
- **Lecture About the Apostle Thomas** II, pp. 62-72), from Codex Orientalis 641 in the British Museum. Recounting St. John's witness of the Virgin Mary's burial in Heaven and the waiting of the Apostles after her death, the lecture then focuses on the Apostle Thomas' absence at the burial and witness to the Assumption. It is also read on Nahase 16 (E.C.). No English translation is available.
  
- **Covenant of Mercy I and II** (II, pp. 73-76 and 77-85) from Codex Orientalis 604 and 605 at the British Museum. This important text is read at the Marian Feast of Yakatit 16 (E.C.) or February 23rd. (W.C.) which celebrates the commemoration of this pact. It

describes the promise made by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to His mother that all who call upon the name of Mary, though they be sinners, will be saved. The first recension is well known. Budge, Legends, pp. 54-58, gives an English translation. He adds a briefer version on pp. 58-59. The second recension edited by Arras is very different.

- The Story of Mary Raising Se'id (II, pp. 86-87), from Codex Abadie 102 in Paris (17th century). Again attributed to St. John and read on Nahase 16 (E.C.), this account describes Mary's miraculous raising of the Muslim Se'id in order to demonstrate her Son's power, and the resultant conversion of many unbelievers. There is no English translation available.

A brief summary of the contents of these Transitus documents regarding the death and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary will serve to present some of the treasured traditions of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church which live on in the worship life of the people. One might say, in fact, that these stories describing the final days of the Virgin on earth and her last conversations form the bedrock of the Ethiopian Orthodox faith regarding the Virgin Mother of God. As part of the ongoing teaching of the Church, these stories are recited and heard again and again throughout the year and are finally celebrated in the climactic annual Feast of Mary's Assumption on Nahase 16 (E.C.) or August 23 (W.C.).

#### THE BOOK OF THE REST

In his Legends of Our Lady Mary, E.A. Wallis Budge printed an account describing how the "History of Saint Mary", dealing

with her departure from this world was discovered.<sup>151</sup> Three priests, governors of the monasteries in Mount Sinai, who ministered diligently before the Tabernacle of the Lord on the very spot where God appeared to Moses in a burning bush, wrote to the Bishop of Jerusalem inquiring about the details of Mary's death, and her transition from this temporal world to the eternal abode of God. Their names were David, John, and Elias, and they had heard of the existence of a book describing Mary's passage from this life to the other which was in the possession of the Apostle John.<sup>152</sup> Although they were told that another similar book existed, written by James, the "brother" of our Lord, they found inscribed in its pages James' notation that "the history of Saint Mary existed with John, the Son of Zebedee, the beloved of Christ."<sup>153</sup> After sending letters to Egypt, Rome, Alexandria, inquiring about the book, the Apostle John himself is said to have appeared to the priests, whereupon a copy of his book concerning the Assumption of the Virgin Mary was given to them. The priests, then, took the book, translated it, and sent it to the House of the Sanctuary in Jerusalem.<sup>154</sup>

Victor Arras' edition of the "Book of the Rest", gives us a good idea of the contents of this dearly treasured Ethiopian Marian tradition. The story relates events leading up to the

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<sup>151</sup>Budge, Legends of Our Lady Mary, pp. 143-151.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., p. 146-147.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

Virgin's departure, or "rest", from this world. Full of the poetry common to most Ethiopian Orthodox sacred writing, "The Book of the Rest" relates the praises of the Virgin Mary, how "even the trees rejoiced (at the sight of Mary)."<sup>155</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to the Virgin with a book which he instructed her to give to the apostles that they might know and share her joy. Knowing of her impending death, Mary gathers her earthly family of friends, relatives and Apostles together, conveying to them the angel's words, and exhorting them to love one another.<sup>156</sup> When Mary expresses her fear of death, virgins who serve Mary come to comfort her, followed by the Apostle John, to whom Mary gives the book entrusted to her by the angel; angels, archangels, the heavenly host appear, and finally her own dear Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. As in other Transitus accounts, the entire earthly and heavenly host, Apostles, angels, archangels, and the Lord Himself, all are present in their glory upon the death of Mary, and her departure from this world.

...Then the Virgin Mary stood up and went out to pray and afterwards she went into her house and slept. And there were Peter at her head and John at her feet and the rest of the Apostles around her bed, and a heavenly fragrance filled the house...Then our Lord came with the Archangels Michael and Gabriel and the multitudes of angels, all singing and standing outside when the Saviour entered (Mary's) house.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup>Arras, V., De Transitu Mariae Apocrypha Aethiopice, p. 1, ch. 3.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid., pp. 22f., ch. 38-39.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid., p. 39, ch. 66.

"The Book of the Rest" goes on to relate how our Lord and Saviour entrusted the soul of the Virgin to the Archangel Michael, how the Apostles wrapped the body of Mary and carried it upon her bed, "singing as they went, much like the Israelites as they left Egypt, Halleluya!"<sup>158</sup> As in other Transitus accounts, a conflict arises between Jewish authorities and the Apostles.

When the chief priests heard the (Apostles') song, they inquired and discovered that the soul of Mary had departed and the Apostles were singing on her behalf. But when they came near to the bed (of Mary), the angels of the Lord punished them with death...<sup>159</sup>

Common to these accounts is the description of a Jew reaching to grab the bed of Mary, only to find his hands ripped from his arms and suspended where he had laid hold of the bed. In each case, the Jew asks an Apostle--in this case Peter--to heal him, whereupon the Apostle exhorts the Jew to "believe in the Son of God, and to kiss the body of the Virgin Mary, confessing his faith in the One who came from her", and he would be healed.<sup>160</sup> When the Jew does this and is healed, the Apostle Peter exhorts him to bear witness to others, healing those who would believe, and leaving those in their former condition who refused to believe.<sup>161</sup>

Finally, after the Apostles have buried the Virgin's body,

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<sup>158</sup>Ibid., pp. 41f., ch. 71.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., p. 42, ch. 72f.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-44, ch. 73-76.

<sup>161</sup>Ibid., p. 44, ch. 76.

and wait three days for the Lord to come to bring her body to dwell in Gaheret or "Heaven", our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ returns bringing both the Virgin's body and the Apostles with Him to the Tree of Life in heaven where many of the souls of the faithful before them, i.e., Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others greet them, rejoicing.<sup>162</sup> Even the souls in Sheol, upon seeing the Virgin Mary and the Apostles, are calling out to Mary uttering names of praise and honor, such as "Mary, the Light, and Mother of the Light", "Mary, the Life, and Mother of the Life", "Mary, Our Lady", and "Mary, Our Queen," and begging her intercession with her beloved Son.<sup>163</sup> Finally, after heaven and earth have praised the Virgin Mary, and the Apostles have witnessed her glory with her Son in heaven, they are exhorted to return to earth and to bear testimony of what they have seen.<sup>164</sup>

#### THE BOOK OF THE APOSTLE JOHN (LONGER VERSION)

This Transitus account describes Mary's habit, following her Son's crucifixion, to pray at His grave at Golgotha, and the Jewish authorities' prohibition to do so. The account tells how the Jews had taken the Lord's cross, the sword which had pierced his side, the crown of thorns, nails, and robe, and buried them

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<sup>162</sup>Ibid., p. 53, ch. 89.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid., p. 58, ch. 99.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid., p. 83, ch. 135.

for fear that they would be discovered.<sup>165</sup> Each day, however, these same men observed how the Virgin Mary would come to pray to her Son, saying: "My Lord and my God, take me away from this evil world for I fear your enemies the Jews."<sup>166</sup> Although the account conveys how the guards were ordered to kill anyone who approached the grave and were, in fact, ordered to stone Mary to death, they refused to do so.<sup>167</sup> In answer to her prayer, the angel Gabriel appeared one day to Mary and told her that God had heard her prayer and she would soon depart from this world. As in other Transitus accounts, upon the time of the Virgin's Assumption, the Apostle John arrives, followed by the Archangels, the heavenly host, and ultimately her Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, all of whom surround the house of Mary in Bethlehem with the glory of heaven.<sup>168</sup> Likewise, any Jew who comes near the house with the intent to destroy is consumed with the fire which burns forth from the wings of the surrounding angels.<sup>169</sup> A particular Jew, named Tanfania, loses his hands when he attempts to grab the bed of Mary, as in "the Book of the Rest". Peter heals Tanfania after the latter confesses his belief in the Lord and Saviour

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<sup>165</sup>Chaine, M. Liber de Transitu ("The Book of Rest") (see above note 137), p. 23; cf. Budge, Legends, p. 168.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid., p. 24; cf. Budge, Legends, p. 169.

<sup>168</sup>Ibid., pp. 33f.; cf. Budge, Legends, p. 182.

<sup>169</sup>Ibid., p. 38; cf. Budge, Legends, p. 187.



Jesus Christ and kisses the body of His blessed Mother.<sup>170</sup> Finally, as in the other accounts, all of the Apostles with the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ accompany the body of the Virgin Mary to heaven where they are greeted by all the people of God, beginning with Adam, who have gathered to celebrate the Virgin's Assumption. The account concludes with Jesus' promise: "See the good things God has prepared for those who love Him!", and with a description of the glory of heaven.<sup>171</sup> The twelve gates that surround the New Jerusalem are described as praising Mary:

Then the Virgin Mary went into the heavenly Jerusalem and when she reached the first gate the angels bowed to her; and at the second gate the seraphim praised her; and at the third gate the cherubim exalted her; and at the fourth gate, the hosts of heaven bowed to her; and at the fifth gate, the lightning and thunder praised her; and at the sixth gate, the angels shouted before her saying 'Holy, Holy, Holy the Conqueror God!"; and at the seventh gate, all the light and fire worshipped her; and at the eighth gate, the rains and dew bowed down before her; and at the ninth gate, the Archangels Michael and Gabriel bowed before her; and at the tenth gate, the light of the sun and moon and stars all praised her; and at the eleventh gate, the Apostles worshipped and praised her; and at the twelfth gate, all the power of heaven and of earth praised her, and there she saw He who was born of her. And it was in this manner that Mary entered into the heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>172</sup>

After showing her the joy of heaven, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ showed to Mary the misery of hell. Mary heard the righteous rejoicing, and the sinners weeping, and she begged her

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<sup>170</sup>Ibid., p. 41; cf. Budge, Legends, pp. 191f.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid., p. 45; cf. Budge, Legends, p. 197.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid., p. 46; cf. Budge, Legends, pp. 198f.

Son to forgive and to be merciful to the sinners when He comes again in glory to judge the quick and the dead.<sup>173</sup> The "Book of the Apostle John" ends with the praise of Mary who bows in worship before the Lordship of her Son.

Unique to the long version of the "Book of the Apostle John" is the account of a King of Roha, i.e., Edessa, who, after being healed by one of the seventy-two disciples, built a church in the country of Edessa in honor of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.<sup>174</sup> Upon hearing that the Jews had crucified our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the king was filled with sorrow, and sought for a way to punish the Jews, asking permission from the Emperor Tiberius. But the Jews, in fear, blamed all these things on the Virgin Mary.<sup>175</sup> Also unique is the naming of the virgins who accompany Mary, serving her day and night, comforting her in her fear of death, and listening to her stories about her Son's birth, childhood, and sufferings. Their names are: Hanna, which means "Church which is the Assembly of the Gentiles, i.e., The Heavenly Temple" "Abse, which means 'Christ the Son of the Living God who sits on the right hand of the Father"; and "Thsega or Grace, which means 'The Holy Spirit who gives eternal life to all who believe by the heavenly Christ."<sup>176</sup> Another uncommon feature is the Archangel Gabriel's instruction to the Virgin Mary

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<sup>173</sup>Ibid., pp. 47f.; cf. Budge, Legends, p. 200.

<sup>174</sup>Ibid., pp. 24f.; cf. Budge, Legends, pp. 170f.

<sup>175</sup>Ibid., p. 25; cf. Budge, Legends, p. 171.

<sup>176</sup>Ibid., p. 27; cf. Budge, Legends, pp. 173f.

to "...rise and go to Bethlehem and dwell there until you see all the heavenly host of angels and the Apostles and all creatures coming to pray and supplicate to you."<sup>177</sup> Finally, the "Book of the Apostle John" records that the Apostles, after having witnessed the Virgin's Assumption, commanded that three feasts be kept annually in honor of Mary. They are:

- The day after Christmas (when all seeds preserved from the destruction of insects are offered on behalf of Mary).
- The day of flowers (day of Air)--(when the fruit preserved from the ravaging of birds is offered to Mary on behalf of the hungry so that there is no scarcity or starvation in the land)
- The commemoration of the Virgin's Assumption (August 16)--(When the fruit of all trees and pure wheat flour is offered on behalf of the Virgin Mary).<sup>178</sup>

The shorter version of the "Book of the Apostle John" is basically similar in content and structure. Except for a number of details (i.e., the description of the Apostles coming to Bethlehem "seated on clouds" and entering heaven "seated on clouds", or the story of the Apostle Thomas' absence at the death of Mary, his disbelief and later astonishment at the sight of the Assumed Virgin)<sup>179</sup> the two books correspond in their outline almost point for point. However, the longer version is read on Nahase 16 (E.C.) or August 23 (W.C.); the shorter version

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<sup>177</sup>Ibid., p 27; cf. Budge, Legends, p. 173.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid., pp. 44f.; cf. Budge, Legends, pp. 196f.

<sup>179</sup>Arras, pp. 89 and 98f; cf. Budge, Legends, pp. 156 and 165f.

on Ter 21 (E.C.) or January 28 (W.C.).

**THE HOMILY OF ST. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM**

According to the text, the homily is not just the work of St. Cyril, but is based on the account which the Apostle John had dictated to his disciple Abrokoros (Prochoros). The Church Father describes how he found the writing in Jerusalem and placed it in the House of Mary. Thus, it is meant to incorporate an eye-witness account of the Virgin's death and assumption on Ter 21 (E.C.) or January 28 (W.C.) and Nahase 16 (E.C.) or August 23 (W.C.), respectively.<sup>180</sup> St. Cyril's preaching of the homily regarding Mary's Assumption is to fulfill the mandate that the witness of the Apostles be told throughout the world.

The Homily, read at the commemoration of the Feast of the Virgin Mary, speaks of the humanity and divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, born of a woman, conceived of the Holy Spirit, his humanity and divinity united upon the cross as blood with water.<sup>181</sup> The author compares the womb of the Virgin to the depths of the earth: as the Virgin's womb cradled God, so the earth cradled her for six months after her death and rejoiced.<sup>182</sup> It compares the Virgin to the holy city of Jerusalem, saying:

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<sup>180</sup>Arras, V. De Transitu Mariae Apocrypha Aethiopice II, "Cyrilli Hierosolymitani Homilia", op. cit., pp. 29-30, ch. 78-80; also p. 11, ch. 26.

<sup>181</sup>Ibid., pp. 2-3, ch. 6.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid., p. 4, ch. 9.

It is fitting to praise the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ who has brought us into the holy place, and made us kings and priests, a living people, all for the sake of our Lady, the Virgin Mary, who is given honor from the Father, glory from her Son, and blessing and grace from the Holy Spirit who gave her to all people.<sup>183</sup>

The Homily asserts that never before her birth and never after has there been such a woman as Mary, whose light fills the whole world. Greater than all the women of the world, she, alone, carried the eternal light and fire of the Word of the Father. Yet, though the Eternal dwelt within her, she is still a human being, flesh and blood, who:

...gave birth to Him at a time of weakness that He might carry the weak. She gave birth to Him in a time of illness and suffering that He might carry our suffering and heal our diseases. And all the grace of God to us is for the sake of our Lady Virgin and Pure, the Holy Mary...born on earth from a human father and mother like all humanity.<sup>184</sup>

According to the Apostle John, at the time of the Virgin's death, our Lord did not leave the Virgin Mary to die like all people: to wait in the grave until the final day of judgment at the Lord's coming. Instead, her Son speaks to her softly, saying: "O Dove, pure, come to me so that I might take you to the place of Rest."<sup>185</sup> Her body rested six months in the earth where the ground was "pure, holy, clean as the earth of Eden from whence

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<sup>183</sup>Ibid., p. 5, ch. 12.

<sup>184</sup>Ibid., pp. 7-8, ch. 17.

<sup>185</sup>Ibid., p. 8, ch. 17f.

God formed Adam."<sup>186</sup> And her Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, comforted her by saying:

O, my Mother...from now on rest in the heart of the earth a little while because of the Word said to Adam, 'You are dust, and to dust you shall return' (Gen. 3:19)... From henceforth, O my Mother, Virgin Mary, let not your heart be sick...Even I, the King and Lord of heaven and earth, was dead and buried like all people. Death has no power over me, but that all may know and believe that I was indeed born on earth, and came by my will and the will of my Father.<sup>187</sup>

After six months, the Lord gathered the Apostles with the help of John, His Beloved Disciple, who commanded the earth to "give what has been put in you, in the name of your Creator, the Lord Jesus Christ," whereupon the earth rendered up the jewel which had been placed within it, namely the body of the holy and pure Virgin Mary.<sup>188</sup> Then, the Lord commanded her body to ascend to the highest heaven, at the same time commanding that her soul come down from heaven to be re-united with her body.<sup>189</sup> Toward the end, John hears her Son's words:

Indeed the greatest of days is the day the Virgin rested, for it is the rest for all those in suffering and in Gehanen and the sinners.<sup>190</sup>

Finally, the Virgin asks her Son's forgiveness on behalf of all

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<sup>186</sup>Ibid., ch. 19.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid., p. 13, ch. 30-31.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., pp. 17-18, ch. 46-47.

<sup>189</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-20, ch. 51.

<sup>190</sup>Ibid., p. 24, ch. 64.

the sinners; and He in turn gives His promise that all who honor her name will be saved by Him and transferred from a place of agony to the place of angels, the heavenly Church.<sup>191</sup>

#### THE HOMILY OF CYRIACUS OF BEHNEA

Similar in style and content to the Homily of St. Cyril is the Homily of Cyriacus of Behnesa. The text opens with the affirmation that God the Word was incarnate from the Virgin Mary; clothed in the flesh of Mary, yet conceived by God, He was divine and human without separation.<sup>192</sup> It was through the Virgin Mary, chosen by God to bear our Redeemer, that the sad world of Adam and his children was freed from its bondage and redeemed.<sup>193</sup>

The homily describes how Mary, like all humanity beginning with Adam, was created from earth and how, at the time of her death, she returned to the earth--yet, not like others. God, in His mercy, gave her body to rest in the earth six months in order that the earth might be comforted, and the host of heaven praise her glory.<sup>194</sup> The author records the tradition how the Apostles, upon the Virgin's death, gathered together and wrapped her body, carrying it to Gethesemane; and how when they saw the Jews and

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<sup>191</sup>Ibid., p. 26, ch. 70.

<sup>192</sup>Arras, V., De Transitu Mariae Apocrypha Aethiopice (II), "Cyriaci a Behnesa Homilia", p. 34, ch. 2.

<sup>193</sup>Ibid., p. 35, ch. 3-4.

<sup>194</sup>Ibid., p. 40, ch. 16.

their anger, the Apostles fled in fear. John, the beloved disciple, remained. After the Apostles had gathered again and brought the Virgin's body to Gethesemane, the Lord Himself took it from the grave and brought it to Heaven. When John could not find the body, he cried and searched and prayed; God, in His mercy, answered John's prayer by allowing him to see the Virgin Mary in the splendor of Heaven resting under the Tree of Life.<sup>195</sup> The homily also records how, on the 16th of Nohase (August 23--W.C.), the Lord commanded all the Apostles, with John, to gather together to witness the Assumption of His Mother, our Lady, the blessed Virgin Mary. A horn was blown, and the whole of Heaven was filled with the joy of the angels and archangels and all the saints. Yet, unlike the account in the Homily of St. Cyril, Cyriacus reports that, when the Archangel Michael stood over the place where the Virgin's body rested and commanded the earth to render back what God had given to it, the earth, surprisingly, refuses!

...And the seven Archangels spoke with the earth concerning the body of our Lady the Virgin Mary... Then the earth told them to go away from her, and urged them not to take from her the body of Mary without the permission of God.<sup>196</sup>

In this vivid way, the homily makes the point that the earth, since the time of Adam, had been under bondage, mourning and grieving over his sin; it was not until the time of Mary, the Mother of God, that the earth rejoiced again. Indeed, the homily

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<sup>195</sup>Ibid., pp. 41-42, ch. 21-22.

<sup>196</sup>Ibid., p. 47, ch. 37.



describes the great joy of earth to receive the precious body of the Virgin Mary, and its refusal to give that blessed body up until the Lord commanded it. At the Lord's command, earth is recorded as having given up "the one true jewel, namely the body of our Lady, the Virgin Mary."<sup>197</sup>

The homily of St. Cyriacus of Behnesa continues with a description of the Virgin's Assumption into the highest heaven riding in a golden chariot, accompanied by angels waving branches from the Tree of Life, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and followed by the Apostle John. Prochoros reports the words of the Lord to John that the Feast of the Rest of the Virgin Mary will be rest unto all souls who honor her.<sup>198</sup> Finally, the homily describes the Apostle's joy and heaven's glory as our Lord presides over a heavenly communion in memory of the Virgin's Assumption; it ends with Christ's promise that all who receive Holy Communion on this day will be forgiven.<sup>199</sup>

#### LECTION ABOUT THE APOSTLE THOMAS

Yet another Transitus account, treasured in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church is the lection about the Apostle Thomas. The lection begins with a description of the Virgin's death and the carrying of her body to paradise by the Lord and the Apostle

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<sup>197</sup>Ibid., pp. 47-48, ch. 39, cf. p. 43, chs. 23-25.

<sup>198</sup>Ibid., pp. 48-49; 52, chs. 42-44 and 55.

<sup>199</sup>Ibid., pp. 53-54, chs. 61-62.

John to be placed under the Tree of Life in Gahnet (Heaven).<sup>200</sup> According to the teaching of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, John's witness of this event remains one of the principal causes for the pre-Assumption fasts and prayers which follow the disciples' example. For seven months after the Virgin's departure from this earthly life into heaven on the first of August, the disciples were fasting and praying that the Lord might allow them to see what John had seen. After this, the Lord answered their prayer and gave to them the body of His Mother which they buried on the same day, a Sunday. The Lord then raised her on the third day, Tuesday, which is now the day of the Feast of the Assumption.<sup>201</sup>

The same tradition also recounts that Thomas, one of the twelve disciples, was not with the other disciples when this happened. But while he was on his way to join them, Thomas witnessed the body of St. Mary being taken up into heaven. When he arrived, the other disciples relayed to him that St. Mary had died and was buried, but Thomas refused to accept their account; he would not believe that the blessed Mother had died unless he saw her body for himself. The lection recounts how all the disciples rushed to the grave and, upon opening it, found it to be empty. Then Thomas revealed to the others what he had seen in

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<sup>200</sup>Arras, V., De Transitu Mariae Apocrypha Aethiopice II, "De Thoma Apostolo Lection", p. 62, ch. 2.

<sup>201</sup>Weddassie Mariam (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, 1950-51), pp. 209-210; Arras, De Transitu Mariae Apocrypha Aethiopici II, p. 62, chs. 3-4.

the clouds, namely the body of the Mother of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ascending into heaven. And when the disciples heard the words of Thomas they glorified the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.<sup>202</sup>

The lection also recounts the Virgin's conversations with the Apostle Thomas. She relayed to him that it had been fourteen years, four months, and twenty days since her Son's crucifixion up until her Assumption day; after three years, nine months and twenty-one days, on Sene 21 (E.C.) or June 28 (W.C.), she would manifest herself to all who would come to worship her Son in a church He Himself would build from three bright stones.<sup>203</sup> The Apostle grew sad after listening to the words of the Virgin; he lamented the fact that he had been absent at what he called the "Wedding of the Virgin's Death"<sup>204</sup> and his past doubts regarding our Lord's resurrection. The lection describes the Virgin's sympathy and records her words of assurance to Thomas; of all his brothers, she said, he (Thomas) was more blessed for he had touched the wounds of our Lord and Saviour. For this reason, she promised Thomas that his fingers would live even in the grave and serve as a blessing to others.<sup>205</sup> Then the Virgin gave Thomas a book entitled The Prayer of Mary or Ye Sane Golgota and

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<sup>202</sup>Weddassie Mariam., pp. 210-211; Arras, De Transitu Mariae Apocrypha Aethiopice II, pp. 66-67; chs. 18-22.

<sup>203</sup>Arras, V. De Transitu Mariae Apocrypha Aethiopice (II), "De Thoma Apostolo Lectio", op. cit., p. 64, ch. 12.

<sup>204</sup>Ibid., ch. 13.

<sup>205</sup>Ibid., p. 65, ch. 16.

instructed him to give it to his brothers to read over the sick throughout the world. She also gave Thomas a bit of cloth from her burial gown to divide among the Apostles as a blessing.<sup>206</sup> Finally, she comforted him by telling him that the other Apostles had only seen her death, but he had been witness to her glorious Assumption and the majesty and power of the Living God.

#### THE PACTUM MISERICORDIA OR "COVENANT OF MERCY"

The Pactum Misericordia or "Covenant of Mercy", written in two versions, describes how, on the 23rd. of February (16 Yakatit), the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ made a covenant with His blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary. Though basically the same in structure, the two versions differ slightly in detail and emphasis.

The first version recalls the traditional story of the Virgin's visitation and prayer at her Son's grave in Golgotha as well as the Jews' anger and jealousy at the sight of the Virgin praying for the one whom they had crucified. But God covered the Virgin with a mantle of His glory to hide her from the sight of the Jews and sent angels to minister her every need.<sup>207</sup> The text goes on to describe how an angel of the Lord lifted the Virgin up

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<sup>206</sup>Ibid., ch. 17. To this day, Ethiopian clergy carry such a piece of cloth in commemoration of the Virgin Mary on her Feast days.

<sup>207</sup>Arras, V. De Transitu Mariae Apocrypha Aethiopice II, "Pactum Misericordia I", pp. 73-74, sections 1-4, cf. Budge, Legends, p. 54.

to heaven to reveal to her the place where the righteous rest, and how the spirits of the fathers who had died from Adam unto our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ received her. After witnessing the joy of heaven, the angel revealed to Mary the misery of Sheol. Being led to the place of darkness, the Virgin Mary exclaimed: "Woe is me! Who will warn the children of men, lest they shall come here?" The angel brought her to the former place again; but the heart of the Virgin Mary was exceedingly sorrowful for the sinners.<sup>208</sup> She stood up on the place of the skull, Golgotha, and made supplication unto her Son. The passage reads:

I adjure thee, O my Son, by God Almighty Thy Father, and by Thy name Christ, and by the Paraclete, Thy Spirit, and by my womb which bore Thee nine months and five days; I adjure Thee by my breasts which gave Thee suck, and by my mouth which kissed Thee, and by my arms which embraced Thee, and by my feet which walked about with Thee.....I entreat and make supplication unto Thee, that Thou mayest hearken unto the voice of my petition, and mayest come unto me, and mayest fulfill everything which is in my heart.

And it came to pass that when our Lady, the Holy Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Light, had thus spoken, our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ came down, and with Him were thousands of thousands and tens of thousands of angels. And He said unto her, 'What shall I do for thee, O Mary, my Mother? And what is in thy heart, that thou wishest Me to fulfill for thee?'

Then our Lady, who is the interceder of mercy answered her beloved Son and said, "Oh! my beloved Son, my Lord, and my Saviour and my hope and my refuge in whom is my trust, in Thee have I my strength while still in the womb of my mother and Thou has covered me in the womb. Thou art He whom I remember always. And now, hearken thou unto my prayer and unto my entreaty, and incline Thine ear unto the words of my mouth. I Thy mother Mary who speak unto thee, and I am Thine handmaiden. Whosoever shall celebrate the festival of my

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<sup>208</sup>Ibid., pp. 74-75, sections 5-7; cf. Budge, Legends, pp. 55f.

commemoration, or shall build a church in my name, or shall clothe the naked, or shall visit the sick, or shall feed the hungry, or shall give drink to him that is at thirst, or shall comfort him that is sorrowful, or shall make to rejoice him that is broken in spirit, or shall write a book of my praises, or named his son after my name, or shall joyfully sing upon the hymns to me on the day of my festival, reward Thou him O Lord, with a good reward from Thyself, the which eye has not seen, nor ear has heard, nor mind of man has conceived. I beseech Thee and I make supplication unto thee, O Lord, on behalf of all those who shall believe on me, that Thou wilt make him to be free from Sheol, remembering the hunger and thirst and all the suffering or trials which came upon me with Thee."

And our Lord Jesus Christ answered and said unto her, 'It shall be even as thou sayest, and I will fulfill for thee all thy petition. Did I not become man for thy sake? I swear by Myself that I will not break my Covenant with thee.<sup>209</sup>

The second version of the Pactum Misericordia begins "In the name of God the Father who chose and sanctified Mary; in the name of God the Son who dwelt in her womb; and in the name of the Holy Spirit who purified and overshadowed her. He honored her like Himself and He crowned her, and in Himself He made her queen, perfect Virgin, in flesh and soul."<sup>210</sup>

In this version, Mary is praised as the Mother of Mercy, Mother of Life, Mother of Medicine, Mother of the Conqueror through whom forgiveness is extended to the world. She is referred to as the throne of God; the vision of Enoch; the wisdom of the saints; and the offering of Elijah. Under Biblical images such as the Refuge of Noah and the Bright Rainbow, this version

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<sup>209</sup>Arras, V., De Transitu Mariae Apocrypha Aethiopice (II), "Pactum Misericordia I", op. cit., pp. 74-76, The translation is based on Budge, Legends, pp. 56-57.

<sup>210</sup>"Pactum Misericordia II", p. 77, section 1.

venerates Mary with titles of honor and showers of praise. It records how Mary reminded her Son of her journey with Him from the day of His conception by the Holy Ghost, to the foot of the cross when the spear that pierced His side pierced her heart as well.<sup>211</sup> For this reason, she adjures her Lord and Saviour to fulfill what she asks for His name's sake: that whoever calls upon her name in faith and observes her feasts may be forgiven by her Son.<sup>212</sup>

The account describes how the Lord praised His mother for her supplication on behalf of the life of the world; for it was for this that He came into the world, suffered, and took flesh from her.<sup>213</sup> Remembering His Blessed Mother's agonies, the Lord compares them with His own.

He likens His sufferings on the cross to her weeping; His blood shed by its nails to her tears; His cup of death to her lamentation; His descent into the grave to her agony and sorrow.<sup>214</sup> Mary, He says, is the life of the world: she makes supplication, and the Father pardons; she intercedes, and God pardons. She prays, and the Holy Spirit cleanses the whole world of its sin. She is worthy to sit on His right hand as the psalmist says: "At your right hand stands the Queen in gold of Ophir. Hear, O daughter, consider, and incline your ear. Forget

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<sup>211</sup>Ibid., pp. 80-81, sections 19-21.

<sup>212</sup>Ibid., p. 81, section 21.

<sup>213</sup>Ibid., p. 82, sections 22-24.

<sup>214</sup>Ibid., section 24.

your people and your father's house; and the King will desire your beauty...." (Psalm 45: 9-11). In the end, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ promises Mary an everlasting covenant: Anyone who calls upon her name seeking refuge, who commemorates her with faith, who builds a church in her honor and gives oblations on her account; who gives to the stranger food, to the naked clothing, and to the sorrowful comfort; whoever even names a little child after the name of His blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary, will be saved.<sup>215</sup> The virgin worships her Son, saying: "Glory be to Thee, and worship to Thy Father, and thanks to the Holy Spirit for the Covenant you gave to me forever and ever. Amen."<sup>216</sup>

#### STORY OF MARY'S RAISING SE'ID

Another Transitus account describes the Virgin's raising of a dead man named Se'id. The account tells how the Virgin met a group of Jews carrying the body of their dead friend. Among them was the high priest, Caiaphas, who asked the Virgin for mercy explaining that the Jews had crucified our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ on account of their ignorance. Although Mary questioned what manner of people these were since they had crucified her Son, she wished to show forth His glory. Mary said to the Jews,

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<sup>215</sup>Ibid., p. 83, section 27.

<sup>216</sup>Ibid., p. 84, section 29. Budge, Legends, pp. 58f., prints still another version of the "Covenant of Mercy". It is much shorter and spells out the "Five Sorrows" of the Virgin.



"Oh! ye who are full of injustice, stop the body so that I will show you, and you will see the glory of my son." She then stood on her feet and turned her face towards the east and stretched her hands and said: Help me, my Son, at this hour so that the people may believe. For thou knowest my humble state, for I am but poor and have no helper except thee. Then she utters the following words: Kinas, Yaros, Meseyas, Torto, Royatoron, Yaresmon and Earos. Most probably these words are incarnations or divine names revealed to her. Afterwards Mary continued calling upon her Son and said, "O Lord I call thee, hearken unto my prayer and accept my supplication."<sup>217</sup> Then, holding the right hand of the dead man, she called him by his name, saying, "Se'id rise." And immediately the dead man awoke, sat up, and worshipped and kissed the Virgin Mary exclaiming, "O Queen, Mother of the King of Heaven!" Seeing this miracle, Caiaphas tore his clothes, throwing dust upon his head and confessing: "I believe in Thee Jesus, Son of the Living God." Throwing himself at the feet of the Virgin Mary, he begged God for mercy. Helping him to his feet, the Virgin told him not to be afraid; believing in her Son, he would be saved. The account records that on that day 700 men and 800 women believed.<sup>218</sup>

Still, the Virgin Mary was sad and retreated to Golgotha to pray over the grave of her beloved Son until her tears poured

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<sup>217</sup>Arras, V., ed. De Transitu Mariae Apocrypha Aethiopice II, "De Se'id Resuscitato", p. 86, section 2.

<sup>218</sup>Ibid., p. 87, section 3.

forth like water and the angels of heaven came to wipe them away with their clothes, saying:

O, our Lady and the Mother of our Lord! O, joyful,  
O blessed, why are you sad? Your Son is the Lord of  
all the living. He created all and He rules all  
that is seen and all that is not seen!<sup>219</sup>

The angels bade her farewell, and the Virgin left for Bethlehem where she instructed the Apostles to baptize the people in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. At the place of Jesus' birth, the Apostles celebrated the divine liturgy and gave to the people the holy communion. Caiaphas was renamed "Zakristos" or "Christ's"; and Se'id, who was raised from the dead, was called Alazar (Lazarus). The account concludes with the description of both men's faithfulness to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and their common life with the Apostles until their death, when they received the crown of life in the kingdom of heaven.<sup>220</sup>

#### VISIONS OF THEOPHILOS, TIMOTHY & DEXIUS

As mentioned already, many of the narratives regarding the Virgin Mary's assumption and her life up until her death were attributed to visions received by certain Church Fathers. The vision of Patriarch Theophilos of Alexandria in the fifth century is said to have occurred at a monastery in Egypt known as Dabra

<sup>219</sup>Ibid., section 4.

<sup>220</sup>Ibid., section 5.

Mitmaq. Theophilos reports that Mary appeared to him in the midst of a great and marvelous light. As he looked upon her holy face, he declared, "Never has there been anyone in the world worthy to look upon such great glory!" Around the Virgin were hundreds of angels and archangels, accompanied by the seraphim and cherubim, all bowing before her Son on the day of his birth (Takhsas 29, E.C.), praising him and saying, each in his own tongue: "This is the day which God has made and blessed." Mary in turn told Theophilos that at the birth of her Son all the heavenly beings came and honored her. The shepherds also bowed before her Son in the stable, thanking God for being chosen to see the glory of His divinity, and blessing the womb of her who bore him and the breasts of her who fed him. The Virgin went on to narrate to Theophilos all that the following days and weeks held in store for the holy family, including the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ child's circumcision, the visit of the Magi with their gifts, the presentation in the Temple, and the angel's warning to flee to Egypt to avoid Herod's slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem.<sup>221</sup> She added the story of the difficulties encountered on the way to Egypt, and miracles performed by her Son there.<sup>222</sup>

Similar to the vision of Patriarch Theophilos is the vision of Patriarch Timothy of Alexandria to whom the Virgin manifested

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<sup>221</sup>Taamera Maryam ("The Miracles of Mary"), (Addis Ababa: Tessfa Gabra Sellasie Printing press, 1968-69), pp. 342-354. Budge, Legends, pp. 61-80, gives an excerpt of this vision in English.

<sup>222</sup>Taamera Maryam, pp. 355-357, Budge, Legends, pp. 68-80.

herself in the late 5th century. Appearing at the monastery of Dabra Quesquam, the Virgin Mary narrated to Timothy the events of her earthly life, including her childhood, her growth, her conception of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit, and her life with Him from His birth to His crucifixion. She also related some of the events surrounding her assumption. Like Theophilos, Timothy says that the Virgin appeared to him in a great light surrounded by many angels, telling him not to be afraid. In addition, she announced that many would come to the site of her manifestation with praises and exaltation on their lips, for God had clothed her with His favor.

In the vision, the Virgin described at some length her sorrow and pain at the grievous slaughter of the children by Herod.

...In every place she visited along the way to Egypt she heard the cries of mothers for their children, and the bitter wailing of women mourning, until she felt that her soul might well be wrenched from her.

She told of the women in Jerusalem filled with bitter anger; and the women in Galilee, with their clothes rent and their head uncovered in despair; and the women in Bethlehem, whose shrieks and cries reached the gates of heaven; and how, from one border to another, the sound of sorrow rent her own sad soul.<sup>223</sup>

At one point, the Virgin speaks of her wonder at the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ-child whom she held in her arms. She considered the little baby sucking at her breasts and thought how He sat simultaneously enthroned in the highest heaven, surrounded

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<sup>223</sup>Taamera Maryam, pp. 381-382.

by a host of angels. She marveled that He who was now in her arms, fragile as a flower, was indeed stronger than the earth, and the little hand that grasped her, was the same hand that grasped the world. And as she gazed upon her resting Son, she seemed to hear him say: "The depths of the earth are the highest heaven; your breasts the earth's circumference; my hands the strength of heaven, for, lo, my Father and I are One."<sup>224</sup>

The vision of Timothy is recorded in the Taamera Maryam or Miracles of Mary in Ethiopic. Budge has printed an English version in his Legends of Our Lady Mary.<sup>225</sup> Included in that translation is a re-iteration of the story of the holy family's flight to Egypt, their hardships, the miracles performed by the our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ-child there. In addition, the place of the Virgin's manifestation to Timothy, Dabra Quesquam, is described as the hiding place of the holy family from the snares of Herod.<sup>226</sup> At the end, the Virgin praises Timothy as a flowering branch, a new plant which never shall wither.<sup>227</sup> She instructs him to understand the things which she has described and to write them down in a commemorative narrative describing how the holy family took refuge upon Mount Quesquam.

In the vision of the Bishop of Toledo named Dexius, the Ethiopian Church finds yet another treasured tradition regarding

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<sup>224</sup>Budge, Legends, pp. 91-92.

<sup>225</sup>Budge, Legends, pp. 81-98.

<sup>226</sup>Ibid., pp. 98-99.

<sup>227</sup>Ibid., pp. 99-100.

the blessed Mother of God, the Virgin Mary. It begins with the report that Dexius, a man of God, loved the Virgin Mary exceedingly. Day and night, his mouth declared her praise, and his heart abounded with thoughts of her.<sup>228</sup> Diligently he ministered unto her and expressed his love by composing the Book of the Virgin's Miracles and History. When he was about to finish, the Virgin Mary appeared to Dexius to express her pleasure at the bishop's writing and to bless him for his faithfulness.<sup>229</sup> Dexius rejoiced with great joy and honored the Virgin with even greater exaltation by celebrating a great festival the likes of which has never before or after been seen in commemoration of Mary. Held on the 22nd of Takhsas (E.C.) or 30th of December (W.C.), the day of the angel's annunciation to Mary, the festival continues to be celebrated to this day with joy and gladness.<sup>230</sup>

The account claims that the Virgin appeared to Dexius a second time, praising him for his homage spread throughout the land in her honor. She presented him with a splendid vestment from heaven, woven at the divine command of her Son, and instructed him to wear the vestment at the service of the Eucharist but warned him that no one but himself was to wear it, lest he be destroyed. Dexius is said to have worn the garment

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<sup>228</sup>E. A. W. Budge, One Hundred and Ten Miracles of Our Lady Mary (London: Medici Society, Ltd., 1923), p. 1.

<sup>229</sup>Taamera Maryam (Miracles of Mary), op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>230</sup>Ibid., pp. 21-22.

until the time of his death when it became part of the treasures of the Church.<sup>231</sup> When a new bishop replaced Dexius and longed to wear the heavenly garment, the priests warned him that it had been reserved for Dexius alone. The new bishop, however, ignored their warning, donned the garment, but was thrown from the altar of God and dashed into pieces. The people and the priests were in great dismay and fear, but afterwards marveled and were silent. Glorifying God, they praised the honor of the holy Virgin Mary day and night.<sup>232</sup>

#### OTHER LITERATURES

In addition to the childhood and transitus accounts regarding the Virgin Mary, a vast amount of other kinds of Marian literature, emphasizing various aspects or events of her life are cherished by the faithful of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. Included in this literature are narratives, prayers and sermons written in honor of the blessed Virgin Mary's feast days at various times in the history of Ethiopian literature. Especially E.A. Wallis Budge has drawn the attention of Western scholars to this rich source. A preliminary list of different items from the "Ethiopic literature of the Virgin Mary" which he put together just on the basis of the manuscripts in the British

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<sup>231</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>232</sup>Ibid., pp. 22-23. Budge has also translated the vision of Dexius into English: One Hundred and Ten Miracles of Our Lady Mary, pp. 1-4.

Museum contains no less than 29 numbers.<sup>233</sup> Budge translated several of them into English, but there are many more, and a detailed analysis of all of them would be a major task which would go beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Also included in the treasure of great Ethiopian Orthodox sacred literature, however, is the devotional music and the hymns composed in honor of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God. Central to this part of the Ethiopian Church's heritage are the compositions of the great sacred musician St. Yared. To him we now turn our attention.

#### THE MARIAN HYMNODY OF ST. YARED

Chroniclers relate that, during the reign of King Gabre Maskal (550-580 A.D.), an Ethiopian composer by the name of Yared composed the hymns which now make up the Mazegaba-Deggwa or "Treasure of Hymns" of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. Born in Axum, Yared is undoubtedly Ethiopia's greatest religious composer. Tradition has it that Yared was taken up to Paradise where he learned the sweet song of heaven; on his return to earth, he taught this song to the people. Arranging his hymns according to the liturgical seasons of the year, Yared himself is said to have assigned each of them to one of the three modes

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<sup>233</sup>Budge, Legends, pp. lxii-lxix.



(Zema'etat) of chanting, namely Geez, Ararai and Ezel.<sup>234</sup>

The Mezgebe-Deggwa is the general title of the collection of hymns frequently used in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church's worship. In addition to the Mezgebe-Deggwa, and the Zemare which contains the psalmody for the eucharistic service, four other collections govern the canonical daily offices. These are:

1. Deggwa or the antiphonal chants for the entire liturgical year (with the exception of Lent).
2. Tsomedeggwa or chants for Lent (with the exception of Holy Week).
3. Mawase'et or anthems for the entire year, less frequently used during daily offices.
4. Me'eraf or the Common Order for the daily office.<sup>235</sup>

The chronicles record that the early life of Yared did not hold much promise: a slow student in school and rather undisciplined, Yared did not show much indication of becoming one of the leading hymnologists and composers. Yet, his compositions, found in the Mezgebe-Deggwa, show an astounding

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<sup>234</sup>Yared's memory is celebrated on 11 Genbot (E.C.) or May 18 (W.C.). For his story, see the entry in E.A. Wallis Budge, The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church, vol. III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), pp. 875-877. The most important traditional source is the "Homily on Saint Yared" which was edited with a Latin translation by C. Conti Rossini (Rome and Paris: Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, scriptores aethiopici, Vol. XVII, 1904), pp. 3-39. On Yared and Ethiopian sacred music, see Hable Sellassie, Early and Medieval Ethiopian History, pp. 164-166 and 169-175. Michael Powne, Ethiopian Music: An Introduction (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980).

<sup>235</sup>Wright, W., Catalogue of the Ethiopic Manuscripts, pp. 114-117; Paul Verghese, "Ethiopian Worship," A Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship, edited by J. G. Davies (New York: MacMillan, 1972), p. 172.

knowledge of the Holy Scripture, and a clear familiarity with the teaching of the Church Fathers. Today, Yared is not only acknowledged for his fine scholarship but also for his saintly life for which he was highly honored and respected. He was later canonized by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church as a saint. So beautiful are the hymns of Yared that the ten musical notations which he employed in his compositions are likened to the ten strings of the harp of David. These notations (milikit), unique to the Ethiopian Orthodox liturgy, are known as: Deret, Yezat, Rekerek, Defat, Querse, Hidete, Cherat, Kenazt, Derse and Anebre.<sup>236</sup> The Mezgebe-Deggwa or "Treasure of Hymns" or used throughout the liturgical year (with the exception of Lent).

#### THE FIVE COLLECTIONS OF CHANTS

Beginning with Yared's composition of the Mezgebe-Deggwa, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church has developed five distinct collections of chants. They correspond to the five collections mentioned above: Deggwa, Tsomedeggwa, Me'eraf, Zemare and Mawase'et. Each mode expresses itself in a different tone and therefore conveys the subject matter or contents of each hymn in a different way. Thus, the hymns in honor of the Virgin Mary vary within each of these five distinct modes of chanting and will be examined separately. For now, it may be sufficient to consider some of the distinctions that exist between the various

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<sup>236</sup>Saint Yared, Mazgaba Deggwa (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Press, 1959), pp. 1-2.; Powne, Ethiopian Music, pp. 90-98.

kinds of chant used by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

According to tradition, the Tsomedeggwa, mainly used during the season of Lent and the fasting periods,<sup>237</sup> originated sometime during the sixth century, though some scholars speculate that it may have originated in the fifteenth century, during the reign of King Zara-Yaqob. Thought to have been composed in the Province of Wallow in the Monastery of Hayq, known as the Mount of God, this mode of chant is attributed to Abba Giyorgis, who also composed the "Harp of Praise" as well as many other important compositions, and who studied there.

The Me'eraf chant is related to the word "chapter" or "pose", and reflects the oral studies in their sections and chapters. It is also called Me'eraf because it utilizes many suitable sections of prayers and thanksgiving from various chapters of the Psalms. Moreover, the chant is divided into ten lines taken directly from these chapters of the Psalms. In addition to the material from the Psalms, the Me'eraf includes original compositions of its author, and an accompanying commentary.<sup>238</sup>

Another type of liturgical chant, known as Zemare, expresses thanksgiving. Like Me'eraf and Mezgebe-Deggwa, the Zemare is believed to be the composition of St. Yared. Used during the service of the divine liturgy, the Zemare is divided into five

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<sup>237</sup>Saint Yared, Amestu Tsewatewe Zemema ("The Five Modes of Chants") (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, 1966), Preface.

<sup>238</sup>Ibid.

parts, known as Hebest (bread), Sewae (cup), Manefase (Spirit), Mestyre (Mystery), and Akotete (thanks). The first three are chanted by Debteras at the Kine-Mahelate; the remaining two are chanted by the officiating priest from the Holy of Holies. All parts of the Zemare represent a form of thanksgiving sung to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ during the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

The Mawase'et chant (which alternates between the three musical modes Ezel, Geez and Ararai) represents a repetition of lines or notes, usually for the sake of emphasis or as a response in the liturgy. Possessing a rather solemn quality, the Mawase'et is commonly used at the burial service, but also during the feast days of the saints, martyrs, and angels.<sup>239</sup>

#### THE VIRGIN IN THE MAZGABA-DEGGWA

In the Mazegaba-Deggwa, St. Yared recalls various manifestations of the Holy Virgin to saints and prophets which are remembered and celebrated at the various Marian feasts. In striking imagery, using Biblical references and symbolism, St. Yared compares the Virgin to the Holy Church and sees in her more honor and exaltation than even the cherubim and seraphim in heaven enjoy. Guarded by the wings of angels, he affirms, the

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<sup>239</sup>Ibid. (see preface).

Holy Virgin prays on behalf of all creatures.<sup>240</sup> She is the horn of medicine of which the prophet Jeremiah speaks, and all of the saints of God call upon her name.

In recalling the blessed Virgin's manifestation to the prophet Zedariah, observed in the Ethiopian Church Calendar on Hedar 21, St. Yared describes the Virgin as a flaming candlestick made of gold with seven extending branches. She is compared to Zion, the Church, and various other symbols such as the ark of Noah, the rod of Aaron, etc. Adorned in holiness, sealed in virginity, and clothed in gold, St. Yared insists, she is a fitting object of the highest praise.<sup>241</sup> Through the Virgin, God himself took flesh; in her was born the wisdom of the Word, Almighty God, who holds all things within His holy hands. The Holy Virgin is the burning bush which Moses saw ablaze but which was not consumed. St. Yared marvels that the fire which Moses saw and before which he trembled was the same fire which the Holy Virgin carried without fear within her womb: for from a distant land called Bethlehem a young lamb has given birth to a wonderful calf of Zion. He who made the whole world, the Saviour, giver of hope and peace, has clothed Himself in the flesh of the Virgin Mary, and manifested Himself openly. He who is robed in light, who slept in a manger robed in human flesh, has been born from a Virgin Mother. For this reason, St. Yared maintains the light of the Holy Virgin is greater than the Sun: she is the gate of

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<sup>240</sup>St. Yared, Mazgaba-Deggwa, p. 45.

<sup>241</sup>Ibid., pp. 100-102.

salvation whose beauty and virginity is incorruptible. She is the basket containing the heavenly bread, for He who stretched the heavens, invisible in His glory, has been made visible through her. Thus, the Virgin herself recounts the grace of God saying, "God the Father, whose dwelling place is the heavens, favored me in order to bear Him."<sup>242</sup>

St. Yared recalls the day on which the Holy Virgin received the Covenant of Mercy from her beloved Son and praises the Virgin for seeking forgiveness for sinners. Whenever the angels of heaven praise God saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased," they are also praising the Holy Virgin for having given birth to our Lord, the Saviour of us all. Therefore, through the Virgin's reception of her Son's Covenant of Mercy, all creation will be saved from destruction. As St. Yared argues, the Virgin is the sign of the Covenant of Mercy itself, since the Saviour of all was born from her. For this reason, all power of intercession is attributed to the Holy Virgin, hope of sinners, and Mother of God.<sup>243</sup>

The Mazgaba-Deggwa concludes with a description of the passing of the Virgin Mary from this life to the next at the age of sixty. While the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church teaches that the Virgin departed this world at the age of sixty-four, St. Yared insists that the Lord took the Virgin at the age of sixty in a flaming chariot after she had died. By this, he maintains,

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<sup>242</sup>Ibid., p. 238-239.

<sup>243</sup>Ibid., p. 395.

all creation recognizes the Lord of hosts as the God of justice: not even His own precious mother was spared from tasting death.<sup>244</sup> Remembering her life, St. Yared asks who among all the daughters of humanity can be likened to the Holy Virgin, Mother of God? She is the treasure of the world, the circle of the moon, the warmth of the sun, from whose womb the fruit of wisdom is born. He who has created all things, whose dwelling place cannot be described, chose to dwell in her holy womb. Thus, all honor, all exaltation, all praise is given to the Virgin Mary who, having died and ascended into heaven in the strong arms of her Son, remains the mother of light, of healing salvation, and hope. She is the banquet of earth and the joy of heaven: the Mother of God. Therefore, she is likened to a "tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and whose leaf does not wither (Ps. 1:3).<sup>245</sup>

#### THE VIRGIN IN THE TSOMEDEGGWA

In the Tsomedeggwa chants, the Virgin Mary is likened once again to many Old Testament symbols and references. Called the stick of Aaron, the pure hall, the ark of the covenant, the bush of Moses, Mary is exalted for her pure virginity which possesses no stain or blemish. She is called the gate of Salvation, and the Holy of Holies; in her the peace of God dwells. Greater than

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<sup>244</sup>Ibid., p. 346.

<sup>245</sup>Ibid., pp. 346-347.

all women, St. Mary is the conveyor of peace, and her word is as sweet as honey. She is sanctified in body and soul for God dwelt in her. The Lord refers to her as His dove, on account of her innocence, beauty, and patience. She is the food of all creatures. The Tsomedeggwa chants appeal to the Holy Virgin to intercede for all people that her Son might grant His favor and forgiveness, for God Himself has created and named the Holy Virgin His Mother.<sup>246</sup>

The Tsomedeggwa is chanted in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church during the season of Lent. One particularly important day in the Ethiopian Orthodox Calendar is Magabit 29 (E.C.) or April 6 (W.C.), on which the original day of God's incarnation is celebrated. The hymn, chanted in the Tsomedeggwa mode, speaks of the Holy Virgin's favor with God. God Himself created the Blessed Virgin with His own hands for the sole purpose of being incarnated from her. Thus, the hymn describes how He whose throne is the cherubim of heaven and whose dwelling place is in the unspeakable heaven, has made His abode in the womb of the Holy Virgin Mary.<sup>247</sup>

#### THE VIRGIN IN THE ME'ERAF

In the Me'eraf chants, the Virgin is described as the purest of the pure, a chosen Virgin who lived in the Holy Temple.

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<sup>246</sup>Yared, Saint The Five Modes of Chants, pp. 58-59.

<sup>247</sup>Ibid., p. 59.



Likened to the Ark of the Covenant, the Virgin's early life is described in words of praise and wonder, telling of the miraculous care given to her for twelve years by the angels who brought her the food and drink of life.<sup>248</sup>

Chanted throughout the Ethiopian liturgical year, the Me'eraf represents a constant hymn of thanksgiving for the Holy Virgin and God's saving act wrought through her. In September's Marian Feast, the Holy Virgin is described as the peaceful dove, greater than all women and purer than the seraphim.<sup>249</sup> On Hedar 21 (E.C.) or 28th. (W.C.), the day of "Zion", the hymn speaks of the Virgin as the golden candlestick of Zedariah's vision. She is the city of Zion which King Solomon chose and the east gate of the prophet Ezekiel which is sealed.<sup>250</sup>

On Takhsas 3 (E.C.) or 10th. (W.C.), the day on which the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church commemorates the Virgin's entrance into the Temple, the Me'eraf recalls the years which the Holy Virgin resided in the Temple of Jerusalem. She is called the "Queen" in this day's hymns on account of her perpetual service to the King, her Lord and God, who desires that she should bow in worship to Him, forsaking all others (Ps. 45:9-12). She is referred to as the "river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High, for God is in the midst of her, and she shall not be moved. God will help her

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<sup>248</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>249</sup>Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>250</sup>Ibid., pp. 283-284.

right early" (Ps. 46:4-5). God has bestowed upon the Virgin Mary all heavenly riches. She is the daughter of God, having given birth to the lion (of Judah), and the foundation of the world. She is the divine garment, having sanctified in her body the Word of God which dwelt in her.<sup>251</sup>

On Ter 21 (E.C.) or 28th. (W.C.), the day of the Holy Virgin's death and transition from this temporal world into the eternal, the hymn describes the justice of God which does not spare even His own Mother from tasting death. The hymn asks why a rich or powerful man should boast in his riches or powers when our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Himself is not partial in His dealings with the members of His body. It is not surprising, the hymn continues, that the dying should die; however, it is surprising that the Mother of our Lord should taste death like any other person. But God's justice is equal for all people as is evident in the death of His own Mother. The hymn describes the Virgin's parting from this world, how her Son descended from on high and vested her with the garment of majesty, and how all the saints and Apostles came to the Virgin's body to rub it with the oil of thanksgiving. It exalts the Virgin's trust in God; she shed not tears at the time of her death, but relied upon Him who stretched out the heavens and cleanses the world of its guilt, seeking her eternal home with Him. Thus, God Himself has vested the Holy Virgin in His abundant blessing.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>251</sup>St. Yared, The Five Modes of Chants, op. cit., pp. 288-289.

<sup>252</sup>Ibid., pp. 314-315.

On Yakatit 16th (E.C.) or 23rd. (W.C.), the day on which the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church remembers the Holy Virgin receiving the Covenant of Mercy from her beloved Son, the hymn describes her as the hope of sinners, the salvation and medicine of all souls. To her, the Mother of our Saviour, has been given authority from the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to forgive the sins of her people and to be to them a bridge extending between heaven and earth and leading to eternal life.<sup>253</sup> Thus, the bringing of mercy is entrusted to the Archangel Michael and the bringing of good news to the Archangel Gabriel, but the heavenly gifts are given to the blessed Virgin Mary; for she is the refuge of the sinners, and the sister of the archangels.<sup>254</sup>

On Genbot 1 (E.C.) or 8th. (W.C.), the day of the Holy Virgin's birth, the Virgin is praised as the Mother of God, shining white, the sister of angels, full of beauty. She who sprang from the root of Jesse and was born from the descendants of David in the land of Judah is sweet in voice and good in deeds; God created all good things for her sake in order that she might be the foundation of the life of the world, our Mother, and the Mother of our Lord. The hymn encourages all who believe in God to seek the loving intercession of His Mother. Indeed, when Joachim and Hanna wept to God for a child, God bestowed upon them a blessed virgin who would forgive the guilt of all and in whom even criminals would find refuge. She is called the child of

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<sup>253</sup>Ibid., p. 320

<sup>254</sup>Ibid., pp. 320-321.

heaven in whom the Son rested, and the rising sun who went forth. She is the vessel of the heavenly bread; for through her the second heaven was born to us.<sup>255</sup> Thus, the hymn praises St. Mary as the pure spiritual land which the Conqueror, Immanuel, has chosen for His own.<sup>256</sup>

On Genbot 21 - 25, feast days commemorating the Virgin's appearance to many people at Dabra Mitmaq, the "Mount of Baptism" in Egypt,<sup>257</sup> the Holy Virgin Mary is described as the one who is brighter than the sun. She is called the sabbath of the Christians and the hope of the hopeless; God has united His divinity with her flesh. The wonderful grace from on high overshadowed her, and the angels of God surrounded her in joy.<sup>258</sup>

On Nahase 7, the day on which the Holy Virgin was conceived, her kindness is praised. She is described as the one who is good to the prophets and who is called by the Apostles the Holy of Holies. God in His graciousness has created her beauty and made it like His own. He has made her His Mother and named her the dwelling place of divinity.<sup>259</sup>

On Nahase 16, the day on which the Holy Virgin's ascension into heaven is commemorated, she is described as having been

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<sup>255</sup>Ibid., p. 338.

<sup>256</sup>Ibid., p. 339.

<sup>257</sup>Taamera Maryam ("The Book of the Miracles of the Virgin Mary"), pp. 17-18; Budge, One Hundred and Ten Miracles, p. xlix.

<sup>258</sup>The Five Modes of Chants, p. 343.

<sup>259</sup>Ibid., p. 364.

exalted to the heaven of heavens in glory, dwelling at the right hand of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>260</sup> The hymn pays tribute to the Virgin having been carried into the glory of heaven by her beloved Son, who accompanied and welcomed her surrounded by angels and archangels.<sup>261</sup>

#### THE VIRGIN IN THE ZEMARE

The Zemare chants praise the Holy Virgin with a hymn of thanksgiving. Her face is the circle of the moon, her eyes the brightness of the morning sky. In her all beauty dwells, for she has given birth to the hidden bread of life and brought salvation to all who suffer.<sup>262</sup> She is the Lady of our Salvation, who was born from the root of Adam, sanctified in her body by the Father, having become the pure dwelling place of the Son. By the blood of her Son the saints have been sanctified. And from her womb, the flesh and blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was given to His disciples that they may eat and be satisfied. All praise and honor is given to the blessed Virgin, for from her flesh was born the body and blood of us all; through Him we share in His communion, becoming one.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>260</sup>Ibid., p. 368.

<sup>261</sup>Ibid.

<sup>262</sup>Ibid., p. 416.

<sup>263</sup>Ibid., pp. 453-454.

### THE VIRGIN IN THE MAWASE'ET

In the Mawase'et chants God's favor upon the Holy Virgin Mary is described in beautiful words of praise and exaltation. She is extolled for her beauty which God loves. In all the world, God has found none like the blessed Virgin to be the Mother of His only begotten and incarnate Son. Therefore, He robed the Virgin in His grace and vested Himself in her flesh, being born from her womb. No amount of praise is sufficient to honor the blessed Virgin Mary; through her God was born, making it possible for us to share in His eternal kingdom. Through the Holy Virgin, God has brought us closer to Himself and has glorified Himself for the salvation of the whole world (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 2:20).

### THE ERA OF ZARA-YAQOB

There can be no doubt that the era of King Zara-Yaqob (1436-1468) was of the greatest importance for the growth of the cult of the Virgin Mother of God in Ethiopia. Zara-Yaqob encouraged her veneration among the clergy and the people, organized the annual cycle of Marian feasts, built churches in her honor, and promoted the copying and production of a vast body of Marian literature. The few early manuscripts of the great works of Ethiopian Marian piety which have been preserved come from the time of his reign. Among them is the Book of the Miracles of the

Holy Virgin Mary, but also the Book of Light (Mashafa Berhan) and the great hymnic offices such as the Weddassie Maryam and the Arganona Weddassie.<sup>264</sup>

**THE BOOK OF THE MIRACLES OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY**  
**("TAAMERA MARYAM")**

During the thirteenth century, some Coptic monks arrived in Ethiopia from Egypt and devoted themselves to the restoration of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church with the support of the Ethiopian kings. They brought with them various service books as well as The Book of the Miracles, written in both Arabic and Coptic, and began translating them into Geez. These translations were then copied and incorporated into ritual liturgical books which appear to have been lacking in the Ethiopian Church at that time.<sup>265</sup> King Zara-Yaqob had the Miracles of the Holy Virgin Mary translated from Arabic into Geez under the supervision of Abba Michael and Abba Gabriel, metropolitans of Ethiopia. As we mentioned earlier, many of the miracle stories in this book were of European origin and had found their way into Egypt during the earlier Middle Ages, probably through crusaders.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>264</sup>Budge, A History of Ethiopia, pp. 304-312. Tamrat, History of Ethiopia, pp. 231-240.

<sup>265</sup>Budge, A History of Ethiopia, p. 154.

<sup>266</sup>Ibid., p. 311. See also the "Preface" and the "Introduction" to Budge's English translation in his book, One Hundred and Ten Miracles, pp. vii-x and xxvii-xxxvi. The Italian scholar E. Cerulli has made a full study of the European sources of the stories in his book, Il libro etiopico dei miracoli di

Considered the most important book among the Marian devotional texts and hymns, The Book of Miracles of the Virgin Mary reflects the immense scope of Marian devotion and piety within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. The complete book of The Miracles contains 366 miraculous accounts of the Virgin Mary, one for every day of the year including leap years.<sup>267</sup> Although we have mentioned The Book of Miracles before, it is significant to note that the format of the book as it is in liturgical use in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church includes texts such as:

- the History of Mary's Conception,
- the History of the Virgin's Birth,
- Discourses on the Virgin's Birth,
- the Virgin's Annunciation, and the dialogue between Mary and the Angel of the Annunciation
- the History of Mary's Death (as narrated by St. John)
- the History of the Covenant of Mercy which our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Made with His Mother
- the History of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary

Together with the miracles, these texts are read on appropriate days of worship. Accompanied by an explanation given by one of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo scholars and doctors, these readings remind the congregation of the life of the Holy Virgin and the deep love and faith which they have for her. For this purpose, the Book of the Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary contains a tract on each of the thirty-three festivals held in the Virgin's honor.

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Maria e le sue fonti nelle letterature del Medio Evo Latino, Vol I (Rome: Dott. Giovanni Bardi, 1943).

<sup>267</sup>Budge, A History of Ethiopia, p. 569; One Hundred and Ten Miracles, p. xxviii.



The Book of the Miracles of the Holy Virgin Mary features two introductory readings: one for every-day worship, and the other for Sundays and Feast days. The first introductory reading speaks of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, whose name serves as a guide to Paradise and who existed in the mind of God even before the creation of the world or before time began.<sup>268</sup> It traces the Virgin's genealogy from Adam to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses and onward to David together with a rich array of symbols and poetic imagery. Among all creatures, the Holy Virgin is unique, possessing a two-fold virginity<sup>269</sup> which not even the angels in heaven enjoy. She alone has served as the resting place for the God the Father, the dwelling place of God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Purer than all the angels and greater than all the daughters of humanity, the Virgin Mary is the couch of the heavenly bridegroom, the chariot of the Sun of Righteousness, the Mother of the incarnate God.

In the second introductory reading of the Miracles,<sup>270</sup> known as the "Book of Rules", an injunction is read by the priest prior to the reading of the miracles of the Virgin, that the Miracles of Our Lady Mary shall be recited without fail in all churches with great honor and gladness; for Mary is worthy of honor, and after God Almighty there is no one more honorable or worthy of

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<sup>268</sup>Budge, One Hundred and Ten Miracles, pp. xliii-xlv.

<sup>269</sup>On this concept, see Isaac, E., A New Text-Critical Introduction (below, note 405), pp. 120-125.

<sup>270</sup>Budge, One Hundred and Ten Miracles, pp. xlvi-liv.

praise and exaltation. Coming "from the throne of St. Mark the Apostle" in the Church of the Virgin at Cairo, the "Book of Rules" claims to have been inspired by the Virgin who manifested herself in dreams and visions to the various dignitaries who compiled "The Book of Rules." Also, the translation from Arabic into Geez during the reign of King Zara-Yaqob is mentioned. The "Rules" then give a set of injunctions listing the requirements for reading and listening to the Miracles of the Holy Virgin Mary. After enumerating thirty three Marian festivals,<sup>271</sup> it specifies that these are to be held in honor of the Virgin Mary with all due respect and reverence like the Sabbath day, Sunday, the first and most holy day of the week. The people are not to do any kind of work during Marian festivals. In addition, all who hear the reading of the Book of Miracles must compose their mind and focus their undivided attention in order to listen fully. Absolute silence must be maintained throughout the church at this time. The hierarch or priest then blesses the four corners of the church and prostrates himself before the Ark of the Covenant, offering up incense. The faithful are admonished that it is no light matter to hear the reading of the Miracles; those failing to offer proper regard and reverence to the hearing of the Virgin's miracles must be considered to be outside the flock of the sheep of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Finally, the priest salutes the Holy Virgin as the Queen and the true uncultivated vine who bears the blessed fruit of salvation.

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<sup>271</sup>Ibid., p. xlvii-xlix.

The faithful are reminded that through her the Son of God became man, He who alone pardons our sins and offers us salvation. Therefore, the Holy Virgin is abundantly endowed with the grace of God, and many shall speak up throughout the world regarding her honor; she is the Mother of the Lamb, clothed in the greatness of His glory; she is the New Zion, the City of our God, wherein the joy of all the prophets dwells.<sup>272</sup>

The Book of the Miracles of the Holy Virgin is therefore both a tribute to the wondrous virtues and life of the Holy Virgin herself, and a source of the edifying stories of her miracles which are shared time and again to strengthen individual believers and the community of faith as a whole throughout the ages. It is also an exaltation of the tender-heartedness, the purity, and the holiness of the blessed Virgin who, having been chosen by God and filled with His grace and favor, gave birth to the Son of God, in virginity. There is no absolutely firm guideline for the amount of reading that should be done at each festival. The "Book of Rules" states that

...they shall read the Book of the Miracles of Our Lady Mary three at a time: those who know the Book well shall each read three of the Miracles from the Book of the Miracles of Our Lady Mary, but those who are not able to read the Book in a perfect manner, shall read one of the lesser Miracles.<sup>273</sup>

One can say without exaggeration that the Book of the Miracles of the Holy Virgin Mary occupies a place of high honor along with

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<sup>272</sup>Ibid., pp. lii-liii.

<sup>273</sup>Ibid., p. li.

the Holy Scriptures in the regular readings of the worship of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. This place of honor reflects the deep devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, among the people.

THE MASHAFA BERHAN ("BOOK OF LIGHT")

Another work attributed to the Ethiopian King, Zara-Yaqob, is the Mashafa Berhan. Compiled from Old Testament, Apostolic and Patristic sources, and perhaps even Jewish Christian documents, the Mashafa Berhan is Zara-Yaqob's effort to instruct Ethiopian Orthodox Christians in matters of their faith. Of particular interest is its teaching regarding the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, as it is contained in various texts found in Book I.

In his book, A New Text-Critical Introduction to Mashafa Berhan, Dr. Ephraem Isaac gives a good translation of a Marian Homily included in the Mashafa Berhan.<sup>274</sup> Here, the Virgin Mary is seen in relation to the Old Testament in general and to the Decalogue in particular. As the name of Jesus, according to the Didascalia of the twelve Apostles, begins with "Iota" or "ten" and thus corresponds to the fulfillment of the Ten Commandments; so the Virgin Mary, whose womb held the Lord of all, including

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<sup>274</sup>Ephraem Isaac, A New Text-Critical Introduction to Mashafa Berhan (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), pp. 116-125; Dr. Isaac translates from the edition of the Ethiopic text by Conti Rossini and Lanfranco Ricci, "Il Libro della Luce" in Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptorum Aethiopicum, Vol. XLVII-XLVIII (Louvain: Secretariat du Corpus SCO, 1964), vols. 47-48, (1964).

the Law, corresponds to the stone tablets on which God wrote His Law.

...the beginning of the name of Jesus is the Iota, in its number ten. The (Decalogue) is written by the fingers of God on stone tablets. (Those) stone tablets when held like the womb of Mary, by the hand of fire, did not burn, melt, or become destroyed.

The womb of Mary, the twofold Virgin, is like the Tablets in which the Decalogue is written.<sup>275</sup>

The Mashafa Berhan draws many comparisons between the Old Testament and the Virgin Mary, Mother of God. Mary is likened to the Holy of Holies, which contains the Tablets of the Covenant and Ten Commandments themselves--in the sense that whoever breaks the commandments of God, will also not listen to the pure Virgin Mary or her Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.<sup>276</sup> She is described as the two-fold Virgin--virgin in body and in mind--whose womb carried the divine fire of God, and yet was not consumed.<sup>277</sup> There is none equal to Mary in purity, in holiness, in honor, and in exaltation. From the womb of her mother Hanna, the creator of Adam created, purified and sanctified Mary in order that He might wear her flesh as his own.<sup>278</sup> She alone kept the Decalogue. She alone was able to hold the fulfillment of the Law, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, within her womb. She

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<sup>275</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>276</sup>Ibid., pp. 117f.

<sup>277</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>278</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

alone was chosen from among all women to be the Mother of God.<sup>279</sup>

Indeed, the homily asserts, it is the twofold virginity of Mary which is the very foundation of the Church:

For (Mary) is a Virgin without (any) intention of sin, and without committing physically the deeds of sin. And the Son of God, who is borne in her womb, wore Virgin body from her flesh, and took on Virgin mind from her mind; and He synthesized her virgin body and mind with his divinity...

As for us, we say that it is seemly that people bow to the honor of the pure conscience of the Son of God, which he took from the conscience of the pure and virgin Mary. As for us Christians, our pride which excels everything, the beauty of our robe, and the foundation of our faith is the virginity of the mind and body of Mary.<sup>280</sup>

#### SIX IMPORTANT DEVOTIONAL PRAYERS & HYMNS

As was mentioned already, another important part of Marian literature in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church is a number of beautiful hymnic texts and prayers. Since the entire divine liturgy is chanted, the importance of this hymnic literature for the life of Ethiopian Orthodox Christians cannot be over-stated or under-estimated. For the Ethiopian faithful, homage to God is expressed not only in words, but also through the sweet sounds of music, through which all true religion exalts God as an expression of religious feeling.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church has conformed her

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<sup>279</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>280</sup>Ibid., p. 123, compare also p. 92 and 104.

music to the spirit of the service, adapting it to the nature of the particular religious function, the season of the ecclesiastical year, and the solemnity of the feast. Thus, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church music is jubilant and exultant at a festival of joy and mournful in seasons of penance and services for the deceased. Adoration, thanksgiving, supplication, sorrow, joy and triumph all are aspects of the Ethiopian hymnic literature. Among these treasures of hymnic poetry, however, none are so moving or inspired as those composed in honor of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God. Six texts or text collections are especially important in light of our examination of the role of Mary in the devotional literature. These include:

- The Weddassie Maryam ("Book of the Praise of Mary"). Arranged in seven parts for the seven days of the week, this Marian prose office may be a translation from a Coptic service book made in the seventh century A.D. Ethiopian tradition regards it as the work of St. Ephraem the Syrian. Western authors who speculate about the authorship often point to a story in the "Book of Miracles" (Budge, One Hundred Ten Miracles of Our Lady Mary, no. 35, pp. 129-133) which suggests a "Syrian potter" as the one who composed the text in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary: S. Euringer, "Der mutmassliche Verfasser der Koptischen Theotokien und des ethiopischen Weddasse Marjam," (Oriens Christianus, n.s. 1, 1912, pp. 215-266; Grohmann, A., Aethiopische Marienhymnen (Leipzig, 1919), pp. 10-18. In the West, the Ethiopic text was first published with a German translation by Karl Fries, Weddase Maryam: Ein aethiopischer Lobgesang (Upsala, 1892). Since the Weddassie Maryam is also found in the Me'eraf, its text has been printed in Bernard Velat's edition of the Me'eraf: Patrologia Orientalis, vol. 34 (Paris: Firmin-Didot Editeurs, 1968), pp. 1-392; Velat also provided a French translation in his earlier volume, Etudes sur le Me'eraf (Patrologia Orientalis, vol. 33; Paris, 1966), pp. 284-296. Budge, Legends, pp. 279-296, has an English translation. The Weddassie Maryam is considered by many as the greatest hymnic work in the Ethiopian language, ranking second in importance to the Weddassie Amilak

("Praise of God") only which, being arranged in the same way for seven days, contains lessons of Church Fathers such as Basil of Caesarea, Ephraem, Aragawi-Manfosawi, Abba Sirada, Athanasius, and Cyril of Alexandria.

- The Angasa Berhan ("The Gate of Light"). Also known under the name Angasa wa-genay, this Marian office is almost as popular as the Weddassie Maryam and is traditionally recited every morning in the Christian home. It is rare that the Weddassie Maryam would be recited without the Angasa Berhan following close behind. Ethiopian tradition attributes it to the authorship of St. Yared: see the "Homily on St. Yared," edited by C. Conti Rossini (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, vol. 17, 1904), pp. 12, 21, 29. Velat published the ethiopian text (Patrologia Orientalis, vol. 34, 1968, pp. 69-75), and a French translation (Patrologia Orientalis, vol. 33, pp. 279-283). An English translation with useful notes is available in an article by Christopher Lash, "Gate of Light: An Ethiopian Hymn to the Blessed Virgin," (Eastern Churches Review, vol. 4, 1972, pp. 36-39, and vol. 5, 1973, pp. 145-148).
  
- The Arganona Weddassie ("Harp of Praise"), or Arganona Dengel ("Harp of the Blessed Virgin"). It is the longest of the Marian offices. Like the Weddassie Maryam, it is arranged in seven sections for the days of the week. This office of great beauty was written at the request of Emperor Zara-Yaqob in 1440 by Abba Giyorgis, one of the most important theologians in Ethiopia at that time. On Abba Giyorgis and his other works, see Tamrat, Church and State, pp. 222-224. Professors Euringer and Grohmann apparently planned to publish an edition in the Patrologia Orientalis, but it never appeared. Budge, Legends, pp. 297-304, printed an English translation of most of the Sunday hymn, but not more.
  
- The Mezmure Dengel ("Psalter of the Virgin"). It is usually issued by itself but also accompanies the Psalter of David, the Song of Solomon, and the Old and New Testament Canticles in books of private devotion. No English translation is available.
  
- The Malka Maryam ("Image of Mary"). This poem is a moving hymn of praise recited by the faithful in everyday meditations. Its special feature is the unique formal structure: in its various verses, all the different members of the Virgin's body are praised and considered. This form of Malka exists for many saints; it is still used by modern poets in creating new praises of the saints: See F. Heyer, Die Kirche Aethiopiens, pp. 98-101. An English translation of a short form of the Malka Maryam is given in Budge, Legends, pp. 236-244.



-The Horologium, Sa'atat-za lelit woza negeh ("The Hours of the Night and of the Day"). This is a collection of various hymns and chants which serves as a standard prayer book. Like the Arganona Weddassie, it is attributed to the pen of Abba Giyorgis of Gascha. The chants address God, the Holy Trinity, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, the saints and angels. Also included are scripture lessons for a number of holy days. Since the prayers of the Sa'atat are often used for private devotions, the book is in print in Ethiopia in many forms; a pocket-size edition is available for personal use. I am quoting from Sa'atat-za lelit woza-negeh (Addis Ababa: Tesfa Printing Press, 1960).

These major texts are complemented by a huge number of other Marian hymns which are used by the faithful in their devotions but also in public worship. In his scholarly study, Aethiopische Marienhymnen,<sup>281</sup> the Ethiopicist Adolf Grohmann edited some of them, e.g., the Mahleta Sege ("Flower Song"), the Agonu Be'esi ("It is not a man"), and a short poem on the Angasa Berhan. He also made mention of many others, especially the short Marian poems in the Degqwa, the Me'eraf, and the Mawase'et, and added an alphabetical list of 65 other hymns about Mary. But the number is much larger. To gain an impression of the vast and boundless treasure of these hymns, one only must look at the contents of many of the manuscripts described by William F. Macomber and Getachew Haile in the volumes of their Catalogue.<sup>282</sup> This rich tradition shows that within the faith of the Ethiopian Orthodox

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<sup>281</sup>A. Grohmann, "Aethiopische Marienhymnen," Abhandlungen der Saechsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vol. XXXIII, No. 4 (Leipzig, 1919), pp. 26ff.

<sup>282</sup>Macomber, W.F. and Getachew Haile, A Catalogue of Ethiopic Manuscripts Microfilmed for the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library (Addis Ababa) and the Monastic Manuscript Microfilm Library (Collegeville, Minnesota; St. John's University), 7 volumes, 1975-1983.

Tewahedo Church lies a deep and abiding treasure: a genuine love of and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. To her is given the most prominent place second to God. An examination of the above six hymns and collections should reveal something of the nature of this position and of the genuine devotion to her.

#### THE WEDDASSIE MARYAM

The Weddassie Maryam or "Praise of Mary" is divided into seven sections, one for each day of the week, and represents one of the best known and loved of all the Marian devotions. Praised for the purity of its language, the variety and beauty of its metaphors, the Weddassie Maryam is a daily prayer, recited both in private and communal worship. Commentary recitation occurs during one season only: Each service of the all-night vigil during the fifteen days preceding the Feast of the Virgin's Assumption is followed either by the service of divine liturgy or by the recitation of the Weddassie Maryam; on Saturdays and Sundays, the Weddassie Maryam follows the service of the divine liturgy; on other days it precedes it.

Like other forms of prayer, the Weddassie Maryam, is traditionally learned by heart, since it is commonly used in daily private meditation. It speaks about the holy will of God to save humanity and God's favor toward the Virgin Mary in choosing her to be the principal instrument of His work of

salvation. Thus, the name 'Weddassie Maryam' may be somewhat misleading for it implies exclusive focus on Mary while, in fact, the focus is on both the mystery of the incarnation and the one favored by God.

The tradition and the teaching of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church holds firmly to the belief that the Weddassie Maryam is the work of St. Ephraem the Syrian, the fourth-century Church Father. St. Ephraem possessed a very deep love for the Holy Virgin Mary whose perfect sinlessness he described in such absolute terms that he is often remembered as a witness to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church tradition recounts how St. Ephraem prayed the Magnificat sixty-four times daily in the earnest hope that God might give him an eye to perceive the vast and wondrous mysteries of the blessed Virgin and a voice to praise the unspeakable beauty of the Mother of God. Not only did God answer his prayer, but the Holy Virgin herself, accompanied by angels and saints of God, appeared to him in a glorious throne of light, asking him to praise her. When St. Ephraem, out of humility and awe, responded, "how shall I praise you, when not even the heavenly angels and earthly saints are able to render proper praise to you?", the Virgin commanded him to speak only those words which God would reveal to him through the Holy Spirit. In saying this, the Holy Virgin recalled her own wonder and humility at the angel's Annunciation, "...How shall this be, since I have no husband", and the answer of the angel of the

Lord, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you..." (Luke 1:34-35). Tradition recounts how St. Ephraem set himself to the task of praising the Holy Virgin, completing the Weddassie Maryam in just seven days.<sup>283</sup>

In its contents, The Weddassie Maryam emphasizes the mystery of the incarnation and the Virgin's favor with God. Each day's section highlights certain aspects of Mary's personality, of which a brief synopsis will be given here.

#### MONDAY'S HYMN

Monday's section of the Weddassie Maryam deals with the sympathy and love of God toward humanity and His will to restore Adam and Eve to their former estate as children of God by His merciful grace. God's decree of judgment was upon Eve (Gen. 3:16), whom He chose to set free out of a heart full of love. It is interesting to note that the Ethiopic text specifies that it was Eve whom God freed from the bondage of sin rather than Adam.<sup>284</sup> (The word in Geez means to free her.) God became incarnate through the blessed Virgin Mary, abolishing the things of old, overthrowing the plot of the enemy, and tearing into pieces the bill of Adam's and Eve's indictment (Ephesians 2:15) thereby setting them free. Adam was delivered from his error and

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<sup>283</sup>St. Ephraem: Weddassie Maryam, with commentary (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, 1943), pp. 16-17.

<sup>284</sup>Budge, Legends of the Virgin Mary, p. 281; correct translation: Velat, Etudes, p. 284.

Eve from the suffering of death.<sup>285</sup>

### TUESDAY'S HYMN

Tuesday's section of the Weddassie Maryam begins, like each day's hymn of praise, with the description of the Holy Virgin's glorious manifestation, seated on her throne of light, and her command to Ephraem that he should praise her. Following her blessing, the Weddassie Maryam begins in full.

In the first section, the Virgin is praised as "the crown of our glory, the origin of our deliverance, and the foundation of our sanctification, who came into being to give birth to the Word of God, becoming Incarnate for our salvation."<sup>286</sup> The description then uses metaphorically the rich imagery and symbolism of the Old Testament. Mary is likened to "the ladder which Jacob saw reaching from earth to heaven (Gen. 28:12)", and to "the burning bush which Moses saw blazing with fire but which was not consumed (Exodus 3:2)." These images symbolize the blessed Virgin's participation in the saving purpose of God by the conception of the Son of God who dwelt within her womb and whose fire of divinity did not consume her flesh. She is further described as the field wherein no seed was sown, from which went forth the fruit of life, and the treasure house which Joseph

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<sup>285</sup>Ibid., p. 282f.

<sup>286</sup>Saint Ephraem, Weddassie Maryam with Commentary, p. 26; Budge, Legends, p. 283.

bought, finding in it a precious stone.

The author acknowledges that no amount of praise can fully express the beauty, the purity, the favor and grace of the Holy Virgin Mary. She is the joy of the angels; she is purity itself and the prophecy of the prophets, having received the grace of God. She is the joy of all the world, having received the word of the angel and bearing the creator of the world, who delivered Eve. The One who suckles all creation suckled at her breasts: therefore, she is the Mother of God and the Mother of all living beings, of the living and of the righteous. God has done a marvelous thing: overshadowing her, He has brought forth the living Word of the Father through her precious womb; thus, she is the rational mountain. God became incarnate of her, taking a perfect body which was endowed with reason like our own, and became perfect man. She alone has been favored by the invisible, incomprehensible God to be the God-bearer. Thus, she is the pure twig and the proper vessel of the true faith of our Holy Fathers. To her, the angels bring praise and the cherubim bow down in worship for the sake of Him who took abode in her womb, singing ceaselessly, "This is the Queen of Glory."<sup>287</sup>

#### WEDNESDAY'S HYMN

Wednesday's section explores a number of new images. The

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<sup>287</sup>Ephraem, Saint, Weddassie Maryam with Commentary, pp. 45-84; Budge, Legends, pp. 283-285.

Virgin is described as the second heaven upon earth, the door of the sunrise, the pure bride chamber of the bridegroom. Among all women, God found none like unto her from whom to become incarnate. She is the city of God, the abode of all who rejoice, and the light in which all the kings of the nations walk in splendor (Isaiah 60:3) The glory of Mary is greater than that of all the saints in heaven and on earth for she alone was found worthy to receive the Word of the Father, her greatness exceeds that of the cherubim and seraphim: for she has become the tabernacle of one of the Holy Trinity. She is the city of the prophets, Jerusalem, the habitation of the joy of all the saints, and the sealed door of the East (Ezekiel 43:4; 44:1-2). For us, the Virgin brought forth the Redeemer and yet remained in her virginity.<sup>288</sup>

#### THURSDAY'S HYMN

Thursday's section of the Weddassie Maryam exalts especially the purity of the Virgin Mary and the mystery of God's saving act wrought through her. Because of her willing participation in His purpose, the Holy Virgin has destroyed the curse which rested upon our race. Mary is likened to the door of Paradise which, once shut through Eve, is once again open for humanity whom God wanted restored. The author marvels at the depth of the mercy

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<sup>288</sup>Ephraem, Saint, Weddassie Maryam with Commentary, op. cit., pp. 85-119; Budge, Legends, pp. 286-288.

and wisdom of God, describing His transformative power: the womb which He once decreed should bring forth children in pain and suffering and sorrow of heart has now become the fountain of life bringing forth without the seed of man Him who removes the curse of the human race. Thus, the Virgin's joy is a double joy: she brought forth both God and the restoration of the children of Eve without suffering pain or the loss of her virginity.

The hymn praises the beneficence of the Holy Virgin toward all the saints of the Old Testament and the high priests in bringing forth Him for whom they had waited. She is the joy of the prophets, bringing forth Him whom they had prophesized; she is the joy of the Apostles, bringing forth Him in whose name they were to preach throughout the world and the joy of the martyrs, bringing to them Him for whom they would fight and die.<sup>289</sup>

#### FRIDAY'S HYMN

Friday's section of the Weddassie Maryam exalts the honor of the Holy Virgin, Mother of God, from whom the Sun of Righteousness has risen upon us. Mary is the Mother of Light, greater than heaven, and more glorious than all the earth, beyond the conception of every human mind. None can be compared with her, for He who dwelleth upon the cherubim and seraphim descended from heaven and took up His abode within her womb, replacing our

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<sup>289</sup>Ephraem, Saint, Weddassie Maryam with Commentary, pp. 199-137; Budge, Legends, pp. 289-291.



death with His abundant and eternal life. Because of the God-bearer, the Holy Virgin Mary, God, who existed before the world's creation, became incarnate, taking our flesh, and bestowed on us His Holy Spirit, thus making us co-partners with Him through His goodness and grace. Mary is called the spiritual city wherein God, the Most High, was pleased to dwell, she is likened to a vessel of priceless ointment, the spring of the water of life (John 7:37-38). She is the tent under which the people of God gather to worship and learn of the life-giving Holy Trinity. To her womb alone God has entrusted Him whom heaven and earth cannot contain. She is the eastern horizon whence appeared the brilliant star which the saints viewed with gladness and in joy.<sup>290</sup>

#### SATURDAY'S HYMN

In Saturday's section of the Weddassie Maryam, the praise of the mystery of the incarnation of God and of the virginity of Mary are again combined. Mary is compared to the young shoot from the root of David, the tabernacle of the "Holy of Holies" wherein is concealed the Ark of the Covenant covered with gold, holding the tablets and the pot of gold with the manna; for from her precious womb has proceeded the creator of the Holy Covenant. Through a marvelous mystery, the blessed Virgin brought forth the

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<sup>290</sup>Ephraem, Saint, Weddassie Maryam with Commentary, pp. 148-170; Budge, Legends, pp. 292-294.

incarnate King of Glory, yet continued in her spotless virginity. At her beloved Son, the Holy Virgin has become our intercessor, the glory of the world, the light which shall never be extinguished, and the staff of faith never failing to support the lives of the saints.<sup>291</sup>

### SUNDAY'S HYMN

Sunday's section of the Weddassie Maryam, representing the first day of creation and the seventh day of the "Praise of Mary", uses again various scriptural symbols and metaphors, especially those referring to the sacred vessels or articles of the Holy Sanctuary. The Virgin is compared to the tablets of the Ark of the Covenant on which the Ten Words were written by the finger of God. She is praised as the golden container filled with the heavenly manna given for the life of all the world (John 6:35, 48-52); and the golden candlestick whose brilliant light represents the Light of the World, the light of lights, having no beginning or end, the light of God Himself. She is likened to the golden censer which carried the coals of the blessed fire Aaron took from the sanctuary, whose incense rises up to heaven as the sweet perfume of God Himself; she is a pure and lovely dove, giving birth to the Word of God, and the sweet flower which blossomed from the root of Jesse. She is the rod of Aaron which,

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<sup>291</sup>Ephraem, Saint, Weddassie Maryam with Commentary, pp. 170-184; Budge, Legends, pp. 294-296.

without being planted or watered, bursts forth in blossoms of flowers.

The Weddassie Maryam concludes on the seventh day, Sunday, with a prayer for intercession, asking that the Holy Virgin, Mother of God, whose grace exceeds the saints and high priests' and whose honor is greater than the honor of the prophets, pray to her beloved Son that He may keep all who believe in Him strong and faithful in the true faith, namely faith in Him.<sup>292</sup>

#### THE ANQASA BERHAN - THE GATE OF LIGHT

Almost as popular as the Weddassie Maryam, the Angasa Berhan should be recited every morning in a Christian home, together with the Weddassie Maryam and other devotional prayers. The Angasa Berhan, usually learned by heart and sung in the schools, bears a striking similarity to the Weddassie Maryam. Shorter than the Weddassie Maryam, it follows the latter within the pages of devotional books, and hardly ever is there a recitation of the Weddassie Maryam which is not followed by a subsequent recitation of the Angasa Berhan.

According to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church teaching, the Angasa Berhan is the work of St. Yared. Despite the difference in authorship between the Weddassie Maryam and Angasa Berhan, both employ very similar imagery often utilizing

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<sup>292</sup>Ephraem, Saint, Weddassie Maryam with Commentary, pp. 184-208; Budge, Legends, pp. 279-281.

the same scriptural references to draw out types of the Virgin. Although less carefully styled and systematic than the Weddassie Maryam, the Angasa Berhan offers a rich vocabulary in the service of praise and poetry honoring the blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

The Angasa Berhan praises the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, through whom the incarnate Word of God came forth like a brilliant light upon the world. The hymn opens with an injunction that praise and reverence is due to Mary, the Mother of Adonai, whom God has blessed.<sup>293</sup> Along with her blessedness, the Virgin is exalted for her purity and the grace which God has bestowed upon her. She is referred to as the "Gate of Light", the "Ladder of Life", the "Holy of Holies", "Our Lady" and the "God-bearer." Other names are "the good pleasure of the Father", "the dwelling place of the Son", and "the shade of the Holy Spirit". The first refrain states that because of God's incarnation through the blessed Virgin Mary humanity has drawn closer to God, and heaven has come closer to earth. She is the purest of the pure, a chosen virgin to whom the angels of heaven brought manna during her twelve years spent in the Temple.<sup>294</sup> She is compared to the Holy of Holies because the Holy Spirit came upon her and the power from on high overshadowed her. She is, likewise, compared to the curtain concealing the Holy of

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<sup>293</sup>Mezmure-Dawit ("Book of Psalms"). (Addis Ababa: Tesffa Gebre Selassie Printing Press, 1972-73), p. 45; Lash, "Gate of Light," p. 37.

<sup>294</sup>Mezmure Dawit, pp. 48-49; Lash, "Gate of Light", p. 39.

Holies which symbolizes her flesh concealing the Word of God within her womb. For this reason, the heavenly troops of angels stood before the Virgin in fear and trembling when she gave birth to her beloved Son, the world's Redeemer.

Like the Weddassie Maryam, the Angasa Berhan draws upon a rich array of Old Testament imagery. Again, she is compared to the golden candlestick and the golden container wherein is hidden the heavenly manna.<sup>295</sup>

The hymn compares the Virgin to the golden censer; she is the censer of the heavenly high priests from whom ascend all the prayers of the saints and the faithful of the earth in the name of the Holy Virgin, dwelling place of the Holy Trinity. To Mary is given the power of intercession to forgive the sins of the people. She is compared to a life-saving boat, a crossing bridge rescuing the children of humanity from the storms of this fleeting life to the certainty of our eternal home; for she has given birth to the Saviour of the world.<sup>296</sup> She is likened to the burning bush which Moses saw and called a blessed tree, the tree of life, standing on earth like the Tree of Life in Paradise. Her fruit--the fruit of her womb--is the fruit of life: whoever eats from it will have eternal life.<sup>297</sup>

At the end, the Angasa Berhan implores the Virgin Mary to pray for the sake of her servants who believe and trust in the

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<sup>295</sup>Mezmure Dawit, p. 51-54. Lash, "Gate of Light", p. 146.

<sup>296</sup>Mezmure Dawit, pp. 55-56; Lash, "Gate of Light", pp. 146f.

<sup>297</sup>Mezmure Dawit, p. 56; Lash, "Gate of Light", p. 147.

name of her Son,<sup>298</sup> for He before whom the seraphim and cherubim cover their faces because of the flame of His divinity, has been born from the Virgin without consuming or destroying her. She who has become the rubbing cloth of the divine fire and the container of the holy flame, the Lord of Lords, is implored to make supplication to her beloved Son, our Lord, on behalf of all who believe in Him. Through her prayer, the faithful are assured of the eternal life and the steadfast love and mercy of the Saviour. Thus, like the Weddassie Maryam, the Angasa Berhan concludes with an appeal to the Holy Virgin to make intercession to her precious Son.

#### THE ARGANONA WEDDASSIE

Another of the most popular offices or service books containing prayers and hymns to the Holy Virgin Mary is entitled the Arganona, or Arganona Dengel, or Arganona Weddassie, i.e., "The Harp", or "The Harp of the Virgin" or "The Harp of Praise," respectively. Like the Weddassie Maryam, the Arganona Weddassie represents a collection of hymns arranged for the days of the week, beginning on Monday and ending on Sunday.

Written by Abba Giyorgis of Gascha during the reign of Emperor Dawit I<sup>299</sup>, the father of Zara-Yaqob, between 1382-1413 A.D., the Arganona Weddassie or "Harp of Praise" is found in a

<sup>298</sup>Mezmure Dawit, p. 58; Lash, "Gate of Light", p. 147.

<sup>299</sup>Tamrat, Church and State, p. 223.

small bound book, usually by itself, although it is sometimes bound together with other shorter devotional prayers and hymns such as:

- The Anaphora of Mary
- The Canticles of the Flower
- The Lamentation of the Virgin
- "Thou Art Exalted More than All Creatures"
- The Angasa Berhan

Printed in both Geez and Amharic, the Arganona Weddassie is most frequently found in Geez, the liturgical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

#### MONDAY'S HYMN

Abba Giyorgis opens the Arganona Weddassie in the name of the triune God: "Believing in the name of God, Three without separation and One in cosubstantial union, equal in Godhead, who at once are worshipped by men and angels, we begin to write this book, which is called Arganona Weddassie, Harp, Flute, Psalm and Praise.<sup>300</sup> Coming to the intention of the Arganona Weddassie, he explains that it is a hymn whereby humanity makes supplication to the blessed Virgin, magnifying her with words and paying honor to her name, praising her holiness and submitting to the purity and blessedness of her who alone is free from the curse of body and soul and obtains mercy and blessing for all believers, the Mother

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<sup>300</sup>Abba Giyorgis Za-Gascha, Mashafa-Arganone ("Harp of Mary") (Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press, 1965-66), p. 9; Budge, Legends, p. 297.

of God.<sup>301</sup>

Abba Giyorgis then proceeds to praise the Virgin in the poetic language so typical of the hymns of devotion written in honor of Mary. He compares the Virgin to a ship of gold, a raft bound strong with the inseparable ropes of the Holy Trinity, the pillar of pearl which will not be shaken or fall for those who lean on it. The poetry of Abba Giyorgis is a song of deep and abiding love for the Holy Virgin which he shares with the faithful who express with his words their love and devotion to the Virgin in their daily meditative hours:

I have sought thee, my helper, and I rejoice in thy love and in the salvation of Christ, thy Son. The depth, width, length and height of thy love are in the fortress of my body, and it has filled me like the overflow of a river, like the river Nile in the days of winter and like the river Nile in the days of flowers,<sup>302</sup> and like the river Tigris in the days of harvest, and like the river Euphrates when the Tigris wheat is in the ear, and like the river Efeson at the time of the flowering of the vines. And thy love has spread itself out in me like the mist on the face of the earth and like the descent of a cloud in air. And thou hast been my adornment in my happiness, and a crown to me in my joy. I marvel at thee in my being, and I say, 'How great is the grace which God has given to the daughter of the children of men!'<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>301</sup>Abba Giyorgis Za-Gascha, Mashafa-Arganona, pp. 9-10; Budge, Legends, p. 297.

<sup>302</sup>The Ethiopian Calendar knows four seasons: Tsedey (spring), Begga (summer), Metsew (autumn), and Kiremt (winter). Winter is from June 25-September 25; it is also the rainy season. At this time, all the tributaries in the country feed the river Nile as they do during spring (September 25-December 25). Spring is known as the season of flowers.

<sup>303</sup>Abba Giyorgis Za-Gascha, Mashafa-Arganona, pp. 14-17 ;the translation is taken from Budge, Legends, p. 300.



Abba Giyorgis enumerates the births of the first Biblical figures, Adam, Eve, and Cain, and he finds in their lives nothing that profits anyone. Only the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who was born of a virgin without carnal union is of great profit to all. Therefore, homage and worship, exaltation and praise, magnification and song, singing and jubilation are due in honor of the birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

He marvels at the mystery of the Virgin, how marvelous and difficult the incarnation of the Saviour was; and how marvelous, difficult, and astonishing the mighty virginity of Mary, the "Saviour of Eve...and destroyer of the curse of Adam..."<sup>304</sup> He marvels at the worship of the soldiers of heaven at the feet of the daughter of lowly folk and praises the manger where the Lord of Hosts lay, comparing it to the highest throne; he praises the hosts of heaven who paid homage to the Virgin Mary when she gave birth to the creator of the angels and the angels who watched overhead the birth of Him who gives the cherubim their strength. He ponders how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit took their place in the humble abode of a manger.<sup>305</sup> Of all things, Abba Giyorgis wishes that he might have had the rare privilege of sharing in that company at Bethlehem, witnessing the birth of the Saviour; he would have praised the angels, and marveled with the mid-wife; he would have worshipped with the shepherds and offered gifts

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<sup>304</sup>Abba Giyorgis Za-Gascha, Mashafa-Arganona, pp. 17-18; Budge, Legends, p. 301.

<sup>305</sup>Abba Giyorgis Za-Gascha, Mashafa-Arganona, pp. 19-20; Budge, Legends, pp. 301-302.

along with the Magi. He would have kissed the earth where the daughter of the Saviour left her footprint as she walked, and embraced the shadow of the daughter of compassion as it passed by and touched him. He would have carried the sandals of the daughter of mercy and followed the daughter of light wheresoever she went. Yet, though his body was not in Bethlehem that holy night, he does not lament: for in spirit he, too, was there, in faith he heard the angels' song, worshipped with the humble shepherds, offered gifts with the Magi from the East, and marveled at the precious Saviour's birth, remembering the Lord's words, "Blessed are those who, not having seen Me, believe in Me (John 20:29)." <sup>306</sup>

All things reflect the Holy Virgin. The rock from which Peter was named is the Virgin Mary, and the Church, the council of the Apostles, was founded upon her, she is its arch, and walls, and roof. The Church, the fruit of the cross of the only Son of the Virgin, cleansed by the blood of the fruit of her womb, praises the Virgin Mary. The Church, which is the body of her beloved Son, praises Mary, the Mother of God. <sup>307</sup> Indeed, all things came into being for the sake of the blessed Virgin. Even Adam and Eve were created by God for the sake of giving birth one day to her. The earth and all of nature were created by God to give birth to the parents of the Virgin, to sustain them for her

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<sup>306</sup>Abba Giyorgis Za-Gascha, Mashafa-Arganona, pp. 21-22; Budge, Legends, pp. 302-303.

<sup>307</sup>Abba Giyorgis Za-Gascha, Mashafa-Arganona, pp. 37-40.

sake with its vegetation.<sup>308</sup> No amount of praise can exhaust her honor or give full expression to her grace. Even the hills and mountains submit to the Virgin. She is above all creatures and is exalted above the highest heaven, for He who was born of her is the ruler of all creation. Oceans and rivers tell of her exaltation because He who has made them deep and wide has taken refuge in the narrowness of her small body. Fire and flame tell of her mystery because her hands have touched the flame of Him of whose divinity even fire is afraid. The thunder exalts her who has heard the voice of Him before whom the sky trembles.<sup>309</sup> Thus, the Arganona Weddassie affirms that wherever our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's divinity rules, there will also be heard the Virgin's honor and exaltation; for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father, has united His divinity with his blessed Mother's frame.<sup>310</sup> Therefore, it is fitting that all things should submit and serve the one who gave birth to the divine bread, the cleansing water of life, the heavenly lamb, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Lord.

Abba Giyorgis can say that the Holy Virgin has reconciled and made peace between humanity and the angels by giving birth to the Lord and creator of all. Because He who suffered and died for the sake of the world was born of her, she has broken down

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<sup>308</sup>Ibid., pp. 41-42.

<sup>309</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-44.

<sup>310</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

the wall of enmity between heaven and earth and strengthened the foundation of faith. Because of the cross of her beloved Son, the Virgin has freed humanity from the slavery of sin. The Holy Virgin is the source of life and peace and salvation because the Prince of Peace, the Saviour of the world, was born of her.<sup>311</sup> Adam and his children sing praises to the Virgin, for it is through her that the curse of former days has been removed.<sup>312</sup> Indeed, through the Holy Virgin Mary, God has done a new thing: in her spotless purity he found the one among all the daughters of Galilee worthy to be a pure dwelling place for the Holy Spirit.<sup>313</sup>

#### TUESDAY'S HYMN

Tuesday's section of the Arganona Weddassie praises the love of the Virgin Mary, attributing efficient power to her prayer. Abba Giyorgis declares that it is the dear love of the blessed Virgin which enlightens his whole body like a light breaking forth from East to West,<sup>314</sup> and whose sweet prayer ascends to heaven as intercession for the faithful. It is for this reason, that the devil, the arch-enemy of prayer, hates and fears the Holy Virgin. For while the Virgin's prayer is a soothing balm

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<sup>311</sup>Ibid., pp. 51-54.

<sup>312</sup>Ibid., pp. 55-56.

<sup>313</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>314</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

for those who believe, it is to the devil like a hammer which breaks his bones and like a sword which cuts his hands. The devil has a long-standing aversion to the blessed Virgin. Even the mention of her name causes him to shake in fright as though the sky was alive with the full power of its thunder and lightning. Most of all, since the Virgin's birth, the devil has never found rest. He was sick unto death and suffered because of the Virgin's precious Son and His holy cross. Therefore, the devil hates the Holy Virgin more than all God's creatures and constantly seeks ways to mislead others to despise and hate her likewise.<sup>315</sup> Thus, all who hate the Holy Virgin, aligning themselves with the devil's wickedness, are known as "enemies of Mary."<sup>316</sup>

Abba Giyorgis affirms the beauty of the Blessed Mary who is clothed in the righteousness of the Father, the wings of the Holy Spirit, and the divinity of the incarnate Son. He speaks of the depth of her purity and beauty which was deepened and colored by God's presence in her womb. As God grew and changed within her womb, the Virgin also changed, moving from one degree of beauty to the next. Sometimes she became like a red rose, brightened like the light of day because of the child within her womb. At other times, she blossomed like a green tree, but never did her beauty fade either before or after the birth of her beloved

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<sup>315</sup>Ibid., pp. 90-91.

<sup>316</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

Son.<sup>317</sup>. Therefore, God has given her authority over all, making her the foundation of all holiness.<sup>318</sup> Vested in the purity of the angels, intoxicated with the Holy Spirit like the prophets, the Holy Virgin is incomparable. Heaven and earth cannot compare with the majesty of the womb which carried Him who is unlimited. Her womb is the gate of heaven through which the sun of righteousness exited; the treasure of the righteous; the ark of Adonai. Therefore, the Holy Virgin is our glory and honor, our happiness and joy, for through her salvation has come into the world.<sup>319</sup>

#### WEDNESDAY'S HYMN

Wednesday's section of the Arganona Weddassie further marvels at the purity and holiness of the Holy Virgin. She is the ornament of the Father, the Mother of the Son, and the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.<sup>320</sup> The author urges the cherubim and seraphim to exalt her, the angels of heaven to shout for joy; Mary is the prophecy of the prophets, the preaching of the Apostles, the mother of all the holy martyrs; the horn of salvation for all faithful Christians. She is called "Our Queen" by the righteous kings of the nations, and heaven and earth bow

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<sup>317</sup>Ibid., pp. 103-104.

<sup>318</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>319</sup>Ibid., pp. 106-107.

<sup>320</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

in humble submission to her.<sup>321</sup> Abba Giyorgis sees no end to the list of virtues attributed to the Holy Virgin. He addresses her as the "life-saving medicine, the foundation or purity and holiness, the ornament of the entire world, the crown of pride of the children of humanity, the ladder reaching from earth to heaven, the bridge of salvation, the gate of heaven, the mountain of refuge, the shield of faith, and the tree of life."<sup>322</sup> She is compared to the fleece of wool, moistened with the dew of God's heavenly grace, (Judges 6:37f.)<sup>323</sup> and the harp of David by which songs of praise are offered to God. She is Mother and Virgin, the bride ornamented with holiness.<sup>324</sup> Not even the throne carried by the cherubim of heaven in all its glory can compare with the wonder of the Virgin, or save the poet from the wickedness of the devil and the exile from paradise. The Holy Virgin is better than heaven itself; for heaven did not plead on man's behalf that he might not be driven out from Eden's Garden.<sup>325</sup> The Holy Virgin, the wedding chamber of the Holy Spirit, is the tender shoot of the root of Jesse which sprang from the stem of David, the source of the water of life which cleanses the filth of sin, and curtain of joy.<sup>326</sup> Without her,

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<sup>321</sup>Ibid., pp. 145-146.

<sup>322</sup>Ibid., pp. 149-150.

<sup>323</sup>Arganona Weddassie, op. cit., p. 165.

<sup>324</sup>Arganona Weddassie, op. cit., p. 152.

<sup>325</sup>Ibid., pp. 154-156.

<sup>326</sup>Arganona Weddassie, op. cit., pp. 157-158.

God would not have taken flesh, remaining invisible to the world. Thus, the Holy Virgin is the hall of God. She is neither shaken nor troubled by the desire of the flesh, but is like a calm ship on the world's troubled seas.<sup>327</sup> Whom the Virgin loves, will be loved by her Son, and no one will prevail over him, either by power or authority.<sup>328</sup>

In this way, the Wednesday section of the Arganona Weddassie praises the Holy Virgin's qualities with an enormous list of attributes. No amount of praise seems sufficient to cover her virtues. Were Abba Giyorgis able to take the tongue of the cherub and the language of the Seraph, he still could not adequately praise the Holy Virgin. Were he to digest the Book of wisdom, knowing the mysteries of all the saints and prophets; were he to know the wisdom of Solomon or to drink the cup of praise itself, he would not be able to exhaust the Virgin's honor or to find the words which could extol her praise;<sup>329</sup> let alone to comprehend the wondrous work which God in His mercy has accomplished through her in whom the New Covenant has been prepared.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>327</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>328</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>329</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>330</sup>Ibid., pp. 186-188.



THURSDAY'S HYMN

In Thursday's section of the Arganona Weddassie, Abba Giyorgis describes the confidence he has in the Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God. He extols her intercession and the power of her prayer; for the power of prayer belongs to the Virgin, and salvation belongs to God. He has been given the power to believe, the Holy Virgin the power of intercession; and to the Most High God, belongs the power of forgiveness. Thus, he prays in the Virgin's name, assured that she intercedes for him to her beloved Son who has the highest regard for His Mother's holy prayer. Were he not to love the Virgin Mary, she would not be eager to assist him, nor would her Son be eager to forgive him. Therefore, Abba Giyorgis recognizes himself as being thirsty, in need of the Virgin's cup of mercy and her Son's boundless water of life. He compares himself to a merchant eager to purchase the precious pearl of God; the Virgin, on the other hand, is the boat of life. Her Son is likened to a hidden treasure in which all good things reside. Therefore, Abba Giyorgis is bold to pray that God may forgive his sin, and bestow upon him all that he needs because of the prayer of the Holy Virgin. Though he is wounded, he knows where there is healing, for the Holy Virgin is the vial of medicine and her Son the great physician.<sup>331</sup>

The Arganona Weddassie speaks of the Holy Virgin as the pure Jerusalem, a promised land of God overflowing with milk and

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<sup>331</sup>Ibid., pp. 222-224.

honey; Bethlehem, named after Jacob's Bethel the "Gate of Heaven"; the country of the prophets: the place of the victorious incarnation of God. The Holy Virgin is the place where the faithful gather to pray and worship, receiving forgiveness for their sins.<sup>332</sup> Did anything good precede her holy birth? What, the author asks, is the meaning of salvation and mercy apart from the Virgin Mary? From whence came blessing and health before her birth? Though many have come before her, not one accomplished God's redemptive and saving purpose for the world. Abel was unjustly killed by his brother Cain, yet his blood accomplished nothing, nor did it free Adam and his children. Enoch "walked with God, (but) was not, for God took him" (Gen. 5:24), but his righteousness profited no one but himself. Noah saved his own family but forfeited the lives of others. Only the blood of the fruit of the Holy Virgin's womb freed the children of Adam; and the death of her beloved Son saved the dead through His divinity.

Abraham, to whom God gave His covenant and whose faith was counted by God as righteousness, could not save himself from the power of Sheol, nor could the blood of Isaac's sacrificial lamb accomplish anything of lasting value. Only the precious Lamb of God, born of the Holy Virgin, was able to help the world with eternal salvation. Though Jacob saw the ladder extending from earth to heaven, he was not able to climb it; nor was Moses, who saw and spoke with God in the pillar of clouds and the pillar of fire, able to save himself or his people. Only the Holy Virgin,

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<sup>332</sup>Ibid., pp. 231-232.

Mother of God, was able to bridge the gap between heaven and earth, and offer to the world a lasting salvation. Though the children of Israel ate the manna of heaven, drank water from the stone in the wilderness, and followed the pillar of God's fire, they were unable to save themselves, and many fell in the wilderness. Only the Virgin's Son was able to keep His faithful from falling and to promise them eternal life. Even the great arch-priest Aaron with all his gifts of service to God, clothed in holiness and invested with power and authority from on high, was not able to escape from death like any ordinary man. The Virgin's Son, however, crucified on a cross, presented an acceptable offering to God, saving all by His precious blood.<sup>333</sup> It was only through the birth of the Redeemer from the womb of the Blessed Virgin that anything of value for the life of all the world was accomplished. Only the Virgin's Son rescued humanity from death to life, from ignorance to knowledge. Only her Son cleansed body and soul of their disease and iniquity and salted the world's dullness with His divine savor. Only the birth of the Word of God from the Virgin's womb could preach freedom to the prisoners and salvation to those in the snare of death and Sheol.<sup>334</sup> Even all the patriarchs, prophets, and saints of God combined, Abba Giyorgis maintains, with all their works of love and mercy, serving as the holy instruments of God, were unable to benefit the entire world or bring to it eternal salvation.

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<sup>333</sup>Ibid., pp. 232-237.

<sup>334</sup>Ibid., pp. 241-248.

How marvelous, then, is the pure day on which the blameless and blessed Virgin of Israel was born! How holy the day on which the pure dove from the tribe of Judah was conceived! How pleasing the day on which Mary, the hall of the King of Kings, was founded! Therefore, Abba Giyorgis invites all creatures of the living God to rejoice in the blessed Virgin who has raised up for us the horn of our salvation.<sup>335</sup> She alone is the staff of the priesthood and the kingdom; she is the staff of righteousness and salvation, the staff of faith and religion, purity and holiness, power and victory.<sup>336</sup> She is the crown of gold which glistens on the head of the holy prophets. She is the crown of light which shines upon the chosen Apostles of God. She is the crown of victory which lights the lives of the martyrs, and the crown of pride which decorates the priests and makes clean their soiled garments. She is the pure crown which covers the head of the virgins, renewing their bodies like the bodies of angels. She is the crown of holiness, brighter than the sun, which shines upon the monks who have renounced the world, choosing instead the heavenly wedding. She is the crown of honor, the crown of blessing which only the righteous deserve to wear.<sup>337</sup>

#### FRIDAY'S HYMN

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<sup>335</sup>Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>336</sup>Ibid., pp. 260-261.

<sup>337</sup>Ibid., pp. 266-268.

Friday's section of the Arganona Weddassie opens, like all the week's sections, with the name of the Holy Trinity, and the prayer of Abba Giyorgis that the Holy Virgin might reveal herself to him along with all the prophets, that he might understand the mystery of her wondrous praise. He mentions all the names of the Apostles, martyrs, and saints<sup>338</sup> whose lives reflect the holiness of the blessed Virgin. Once again, he assures the faithful that they may have confidence in the womb of the Holy Virgin which promises refuge and salvation by the birth of the world's Saviour.<sup>339</sup> He extols the Virgin's purity comparing her to a spotless young calf in whom there is no snare of sin.<sup>340</sup> Yet, in all his praise, Abba Giyorgis never misses the distinction between the Holy Virgin and her beloved Son, our Lord and Saviour. He never fails to emphasize that intercession and assistance come from the Holy Virgin, but forgiveness and salvation from her beloved Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.<sup>341</sup> Still, without the Holy Virgin, salvation would not have come into the world. For this reason, Abba Giyorgis praises the Virgin who is the tree of paradise, planted by the right hand of God, upon whom the power of the Holy Spirit blossomed and who bore the fruit of the Lord and Saviour.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>338</sup>Ibid., pp. 281-284.

<sup>339</sup>Ibid., p. 302.

<sup>340</sup>Ibid., pp. 315-316.

<sup>341</sup>Ibid., pp. 320-321.

<sup>342</sup>Ibid., p. 326.

SATURDAY'S HYMN

In Saturday's section of the Arganona Weddassie, Abba Giyorgis extols the Holy Virgin whom God the Father loved in her purity; and in whom God the Son was well-pleased to dwell; and whom God the Holy Spirit overshadowed. The blessed Virgin is praised in this day's section for being the mother of mercy from whom the sweet dew of her beloved Son's mercy is poured out upon all people.<sup>343</sup>

SUNDAY'S HYMN

In the name of God the Father, who has lengthened her royal hem, God the Son, who has been carried in her womb for nine months, God the Holy Spirit who has made all her ways,<sup>344</sup> Sunday's final section of the Arganona Weddassie begins. Abba Giyorgis gives praise to the One Spirit, the Paraclete, who protected and nurtured the Virgin while she was still in the womb of her mother; who cleansed her and made her a pure dwelling place for the Son. He praises God the Father who loved her, God the Son who was incarnate of her, and God the Holy Spirit who overshadowed her.<sup>345</sup> With words of highest poetry and praise, the Arganona Weddassie thus concludes its exaltation of the Holy

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<sup>343</sup>Ibid., pp. 341-342.

<sup>344</sup>Ibid., pp. 378-379.

<sup>345</sup>Ibid., p. 385.

Virgin Mary, Mother of the victorious God, Mother of God Adonai, Mother of the God of Israel,<sup>346</sup> and Mother of the Saviour of the world.

### THE MALKA MARYAM

One of the most popular devotional prayers of the Ethiopian faithful is the Malka Maryam or "The Image of Mary." Usually recited by individuals in daily private devotions or public worship, the Malka Maryam is chanted and sung on the annual Marian feasts. Attributed to Zara-Yaqob, the Malka Maryam is usually found in the collection of psalms and hymns comprising the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church's standard devotional prayer book. Almost every devout Ethiopian Church member possesses a copy of such a book which includes:

- 150 Psalms
- The Weddassie Maryam
- Angasa-Berhan
- The Malka Maryam
- The Malka Iyasus

Divided into sixty-one verses, each verse containing five lines, the Malka Maryam is as interesting as it is remarkable. Each verse names another member of the Holy Virgin's body, extolling the virtues of each member in the form of a poem. Thus, every aspect of the Blessed Virgin is admired in the devotion of the Malka Maryam as a reflection of the glory and workmanship of God. As a whole, the work simply speaks of the depth of love that the

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<sup>346</sup>Ibid., p. 403.

Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church has for the Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

The Malka Maryam is clearly the work of an Ethiopian writer, for its description parallels the life-style of young Ethiopian virgins. In turning to the different physical attributes of the Holy Virgin, Zara-Yaqob describes the beauty of the fashion of her robe, the style and dressing of her hair, her eyes, in true Ethiopian character and style. He praises the Holy Virgin for the purity of her soul and body whose beauty is brighter than the moon and sun. Adorned in purity and holiness, the Holy Virgin is always working vigorously for the forgiveness of all people. Thus, the Malka Maryam compares the Virgin to the leaning staff or supporter stick of the lives of all believers and the house of holiness.<sup>347</sup>

The back of the Holy Virgin is greater than the back of the cherubim, for she carried upon it the divine fire and was not consumed. Thus, the Virgin's back became the throne of the divine fire, sanctifying souls and healing them by its warmth. Her womb is the resting place of the heavenly wisdom. Her arms possess the strength of heaven; in them she carried God's flame, and on them the divine flame leaned as if upon the softest pillow.<sup>348</sup> She is the Garden of Eden for God's chosen children, bringing to them peace and rest, and the rainbow symbolizing the new covenant.

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<sup>347</sup>Mezmure-Dawit, pp. 3-7 of the Malka Maryam.

<sup>348</sup>Ibid., pp. 7-9.



Thus, the Malka Maryam describes the various aspects of the Holy Virgin's beauty. The work concludes with a description of how the body of the Virgin did not remain on the bier, for God raised it up quickly and she now dwells forever at the right hand of her Son in His eternal kingdom. In this way, the "Image of Mary" compares the Holy Virgin to Sunday, the day of rest in a weary and troubled world and describes her passing away from this world to the next without agony and in peace.<sup>349</sup>

#### HYMNS OF THE MASHAFA SA'ATAT (HOROLOGIUM)

Needless to say, the hymns written in honor of the Virgin Mary are full of imagery and symbols. Some hymns in the Horologium or The Hours of the Night and of the Day, beautiful in themselves, recall events in the life of Mary and describe her nature and personality. One of them remembers the Virgin's hardship and sorrow as she fled with her family to Egypt. In this hymn, the author speaks of her faithful endurance and sacrificial love for the sake of her Son:

You have fled the sword (of Herod) with your  
babe in your arms, ascending the mountains like  
a bird, while your tears fell, and your sweat  
filled your brow. Your beauty has been darkened  
by the heat of day and the night's cold; for you  
have been driven from your country like a lost  
sheep; and like a sheep abandoned you have  
wandered in the desert, alone...

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<sup>349</sup>Ibid., pp. 11-18.

O, purest of the pure, how did you endure?<sup>350</sup>

In Mary's suffering, the faithful find solace in their own life of pain and hardship. Sympathizing with the Virgin's struggle, the hymn expresses the faithful's response to Mary's difficulty:

Let your journey's fatigue strengthen  
my weakness.

Let your tears for your Son  
be the joy of my salvation.

Let the sea of your sorrow  
be the cleansing of my sin.

Many of the Marian hymns express prayers to God, asking forgiveness in the name of the womb of the Virgin Mary and mercy on account of her holy body which obeyed and served Him. They beseech God's grace in the name of Mary's womb which carried Him and from which He was conceived without blemish. Or, in the name of Mary's ears, which have heard and listened to the angel's message, the faithful entreat God's forgiveness. Comparable to the Malka Maryam, these hymns praise every part of Mary for her faithfulness, purity and obedience to God.

Through these hymns the faithful also pray to the Holy Virgin, Mother of God, for protection from the wrath of God to come:

When your Son comes clothed in righteousness and judgment, then those who pierced him with their swords will cry aloud. But let us not be found among them; hide us in your purity and love. For the sake of the journey of your Son; for the sake of the crucifixion of your beloved, you who art

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<sup>350</sup>Saatat-Za Lelit Woza-Negeh or Horologium "Hours of the Night and of the Morning," (Addis Ababa: Tesfa Printing press, 1960), pp. 113-115.

the honor of truth, the crown of the pure, the well of mystery, the spring of joy, the well of prophecy, and the spiritual mother of all people. We have shared your sorrow; grant us that we may share your joy, forever and ever.<sup>351</sup>

The hymns confess that the Holy Virgin is the daughter of Adam, affirming that she is our sister, possessing a humanity like ours. She is the Mother of the community whose tongue pleads for mercy and whose sweet words console the sorrowful of heart.<sup>352</sup>

When I was poor, you were my treasure.  
When I was weak, you were my strength...  
You are filled with the fire of the heavenly King;  
and from you came forth the Living Saviour.

With words of adoration and praise, the faithful sing of the attributes of the Virgin, rejoicing in her humanity which the Word of God took and united with His divinity. In the hymn of the Horologium which likens the Virgin to the ark of Noah, the faithful utter their glad praise:

Your heart is like the innocence of a dove,  
welcoming the angel's message which has brought  
us joy. Your body is like a rose, and your womb  
like a precious white stone. In peace, we bow  
to thee...

Your height is like a young tree; your shoes  
are like the moon, and their laces, like the dawn.  
Your clothes are the purity of daylight, and your  
crown the morning star. In peace, we bow to thee.<sup>353</sup>

One of the most popular Marian hymns in the Horologium is sung to a beautiful melody which is chanted at all the major Marian feast days and on all Sundays. It is known as "The Praise

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<sup>351</sup>Ibid., pp. 131-137.

<sup>352</sup>Ibid., pp. 140-142.

<sup>353</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

of the Beloved." Many of the faithful weep when they hear the sound of this tune. It is a long hymn, divided into eighty-five sections, written in the form of a psalm.<sup>354</sup> It is usually preceded by a brief introductory chant from the "Magnificat" and the reciting of the names of the Holy Trinity. It is God whom Mary magnifies, and God in her who is praised.<sup>355</sup> The veneration paid to the Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and the worship given to God is distinct as seen in the following supplication:

...O Mary, you are blessed, blessed are you;  
and you are beautiful, for your Son is the blessed  
Saviour of the world.

We honor you with praise for you are the Mother  
of God...Honor and veneration is due to you, but  
worship and prostration is to your Son only, on  
earth and in heaven...forever and ever. Amen.<sup>356</sup>

The Marian devotional literature of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church presents us with an almost inexhaustible array of beauty, poetry, and praise in honor of the Mother of God. Throughout the narratives, mystical accounts, prayers, sermons, homilies and hymns one senses something of the central place of the Virgin Mary within the life of the Ethiopian Church. We are told that Mary is the Mother of God, who magnifies His glory. Yet, she is also the sister of humanity whose suffering and sorrow she shares. She is the pure of heart in whom the Word of God has found a home, and the hope of humanity through whom the

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<sup>354</sup>Ibid., pp. 161-181.

<sup>355</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>356</sup>Ibid., pp. 160-161.

Saviour of the world was born. For the Ethiopian faithful, Mary is what we originally are meant to be; and yet, her humanity is like our own. However, she, of all women, is also unique: God has chosen the Virgin Mary from all the world to bear His Son, our Lord, to a world dark in travail.

## CHAPTER II

### MARIAN DEVOTION IN ETHIOPIA

#### IN GENERAL

Worship is the natural duty of humanity rendered to God. Two kinds of worship can be distinguished in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. There is the worship rendered unto God precisely because He alone is God. This form of worship can be given to none other, for God Himself has given the command: "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth, you shall not bow down to them or serve them (Exodus 20:3-5; cf. Psalm 81:9)."

While worship is given to no being other than God, there are acceptable forms of veneration or reverence given to sacred things and objects which are means of manifesting the mystery and grace of God. This second form of veneration or high respect is seen in Scripture when Moses bows before the Ark of the Covenant while simultaneously worshipping God Himself. The Ark itself was decorated by representations of the cherubim (Exo. 25:10-22; 33:8-9). In Ethiopian culture, high respect and love is extended to certain people, in particular fathers and mothers and one's elders in general. In similar fashion, high honor and veneration is given to the saints. This second form of veneration is known

as "Yessegga-Sigidet" or "Veneration of Grace."<sup>357</sup> Among all the saints, none is so highly venerated as the blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

The Church believes that the saints are born again by grace, and that through this grace, the Lord is manifest in them and works wonders through them. Thus, the "veneration of grace" is given to the Holy Virgin Mary as well as to the Holy Cross because they have been chosen to be the instruments of salvation. In short, saints bow to saints because the latter are the vessels of the Holy Spirit. One example of such veneration can be seen when Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, recognized Mary's favor with God, and exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy (Luke 1:41-46)." This form of veneration of the saints, then, supplements the worship of God, who, alone, is worthy of humanity's ultimate devotion.

The Virgin Mary occupies a unique place in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Her intercession is continually sought, as evidenced by the common prayer of supplication: "Our Lady Mary, Mother of God, offer up our prayer that our sins may be forgiven." She pleads for the human race. She is not "immaculate" in the sense that she was born without sin, but in

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<sup>357</sup>A. Tamerou, Ye Etiopia Emnet Be Sewestu Hgegat ("The faith of Ethiopia in the Three Laws.") (Addis Ababa: Berhanena-Selam Printing Press), 1953, p. 201.

the sense that she was specially prepared by the Holy Ghost.<sup>358</sup>

The Ethiopian faithful honor the Blessed Virgin Mary preeminently for the supreme grace and call which she received from God to be the Mother of our Lord; therefore, she is praised as Our Lady--holy, blessed and exalted. She is loved by her Son so dearly that He will grant her every prayer. Because of the mission which she received from God, the Virgin's life is most closely linked with the mysteries of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; there is none who has followed in the footsteps of the incarnate Word of God more faithfully than she. Holier than the cherubim and seraphim, she enjoys greater glory than all God's creatures, for she is full of grace, the very Mother of God, who gave birth to our Redeemer. To the Ethiopian faithful, she is a glorified human soul, more perfect than any other. She is worthy of the highest place and honor that a creature can attain: God has chosen her, among all women, to be His Mother; He has bestowed upon her His abundant grace; and she has kept that grace in faithfulness and love. Yet, in no sense do the members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church regard the Virgin Mary as a fourth member of the Holy Trinity, nor do they assign to her the worship due to God alone.

Mary is not venerated in isolation, but in relation to our Lord Jesus Christ. The reverence shown to her, far from eclipsing the worship of God, has exactly the opposite effect,

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<sup>358</sup>Ibid., p. 205; G. Florovsky "The Ever-virgin Mother," in: The Mother of God, edited by E. L. Mascall (London: Dacre press, 1951), p. 59.



the more Mary is esteemed, the more vivid is the awareness of the majesty of her Son. It is precisely on account of the Son that Christians venerate the Mother of God:

We honor the Mother on account of the Son: Mariology is simply an extension of Christology. The Fathers of the Council of Ephesus insisted on calling Mary Theotokos, not because they desired to glorify her as an end in herself, apart from her Son, but because only by honoring Mary could they safeguard a right doctrine of Christ's person. Anyone who thinks out the implications of that great phrase, 'The Word was made flesh', cannot but feel a certain awe for her who was chosen as the instrument of so surpassing a mystery.<sup>359</sup>

From early times, devotion to the Holy Virgin Mary has expressed the religious attachment of individuals to various aspects of her role as well as to the person of Mary herself. In the early church Mary was revered as the model and pattern of virginity, especially for the early ascetics. In addition, the development of the theme of Mary as the New Eve and the recognition of the Holy Virgin as the Mother of God greatly increased the general devotion to Mary. Moreover, such devotion was incorporated into the early churches' liturgy. With this development, manifestations of popular piety spread from East to West, expressing the belief and confidence in the intercessional power of the Virgin Mary.<sup>360</sup>

While, as we mentioned, the ultimate object of all devotion is God, and the aim of all veneration is to foster and promote

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<sup>359</sup>Timothy Ware, The Orthodox Church (London: Richard Clay, Ltd., 1963), pp. 262-263.

<sup>360</sup>M. O'Carroll, Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Wilmington: M. Glazier, 1982), pp. 186f.

worship of God, a rich variety of devotions exists enumerating and contemplating the infinite majesty of God and the boundless abundance of His grace. The cultivation of the contemplative or meditative mood is indispensable to the life of devotion. Thus, Marian devotion, rather than focusing solely on the person of Mary, serves to awaken and strengthen for the faithful devotional attitude and ultimately the worship of God. It is through the contemplation of the Virgin Mary that the devout man or woman grasps something of the infinitely compassionate wonder of the living God's purpose to save humankind.

Devotional texts are the record or the expression of such vital devotion. As the single most fundamental source of Christian devotion, the Bible bears the supreme marks of a deep and developing devotion and possesses the power of awakening and sustaining the devotional life of all who read and utilize it aright. All great devotional texts take as their source the Word of God as expressed in Holy Scripture; very often they are the result of the dedicated and devout lives of the saints nourished by the Bible. Through their devotional writing, the faithful are led to a deeper comprehension of the rich treasures which are hidden in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The prime criterion by which the Church evaluates the merit of a devotion is its conformity to revealed truth, our Lord's teaching as manifested in Holy Scripture.

Throughout antiquity, the Church, conscious of her commission to teach the truth to all people (Matt. 28:19-20), has

encouraged the expression of both public and private devotion in formal corporate worship and in personal or individual piety. There is no need for each individual believer to formulate unique devotions to foster his or her own spiritual life. The Holy Spirit nurtures the spiritual life of groups as well as of individuals, often through the particular lives of saints and holy people, thus giving devotional directions to the life of the Church in subsequent ages.

It seems clear that from its early days the Christian Church has held St. Mary the Virgin in special honor. Even before the development of a formal liturgy, Mary's essential role in relation to our Saviour was recognized and affirmed in worship.<sup>361</sup> As the early liturgies developed, devotion to the Blessed Virgin acquired prominence. In the early Egyptian Liturgy the divine motherhood of Mary is celebrated; she is invoked in the third century in the prayer "sub tuum praesidium",<sup>362</sup> and is honored in the fourth century in connection with the feast of the Lord's Nativity. In addition, toward the end of the third century, an Alexandrian Patriarch, Theonas, built a church in honor of the Holy Virgin, giving further proof of the Virgin's prominence in early devotional practices.<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>361</sup>O'Carroll, M., Theotokos, p. 220.

<sup>362</sup>Ibid., p. 336.

<sup>363</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

IN ETHIOPIAN LIFE AND CULTURE

According to Ethiopian tradition, however, the original church of the Holy Virgin dates back to the Apostolic era and was built and established by our Lord Jesus Christ through the miraculous placement of three single stones at Filipisiwse (Philippi). The Lord commanded that five golden pillars be situated to support the church, and five golden and silver articles, the paten, chalice, cross-spoon, and various vessels and vestments for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, be placed in its confines. The tradition further relates how, following the construction of this early church, our Lord with His blessed Mother ascended into heaven, mounted on the wings of the cherub.<sup>364</sup> It is also mentioned in the Taamera Maryam that in the land of Egypt, the earliest and most magnificent Church building was dedicated to the the holy Virgin Mary.<sup>365</sup> In Ethiopia, the first Church building named in honor of the holy virgin is the great church of St. Mary of Zion in Axum, in the northern province of Tigre. As mentioned before,<sup>366</sup> Axum played an important role in the history, civilization, and religious tradition of Ethiopia, serving as the religious center and the capital city since the time of the Queen of Sheba. To this day, Axum remains a virtual store house of religious artifacts and

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<sup>364</sup>Taamera Maryam, p. 18; pp. 101-102.

<sup>365</sup>Budge, One Hundred Ten Miracles, op. cit., p. 116.

<sup>366</sup>See above, pp. 9-10.

archeological treasures.<sup>367</sup> The original Ark of the Covenant which is said to have been brought from Jerusalem to Axum under King Menelik I is kept in the Holy of Holies of this sanctuary. All around the country one finds churches dedicated to Mary, and colorful Marian icons and pictorial cycles describing scenes from her life decorate the interior of many of them.<sup>368</sup> One could say that Ethiopia is a country literally built around churches dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Even those churches not named after the Blessed Virgin contain an extra tabot or ark which is dedicated to her.<sup>369</sup>

It is difficult to find among Ethiopian Christians a family in which a daughter or son has not been given the sweet name of Mary, so highly esteemed is she. Children are often named "the daughter of the son of Mary", "the servant of Mary", "the messenger of Mary", "the love of Mary", "the mercy of Mary." Expectant mothers pray to Mary for a safe delivery, while others

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<sup>367</sup>On Axum and its treasures, see Pankhurst, S., Ethiopia, chapter III, pp. 60-97. The Church of St. Mary of Zion is described on pp. 81-87.

<sup>368</sup>A fine discussion of Marian themes in these paintings is found in the book of Chojnacki, S., Major Themes in Ethiopian Painting (Aethiopistische Forschungen, no. 10; Wiesbaden, 1983), chapters 1-6.

<sup>369</sup>A tabot is a replica of the Ark of the Covenant made of special wood by monks, priests, and woodworkers. It is consecrated by the bishop with a special prayer and placed in the Holy of Holies upon the altar. According to the Ethiopian canons, no eucharistic service may be held in a building without a tabot being present. A building with a tabot is called a church, one without a tabot is known as a chapel. See Budge, A History of Ethiopia, pp. 16f.; Hammerschmidt, E., Studies (below, p. 19 note 38 ), p. 50; and F. Heyer, Die Kirche Aethiopiens (Berlin: Water De Gruyter, 1971), pp. 39-47.

pray that expectant mothers will find consolation in the Virgin's tender heart during their travail. New mothers are often congratulated in the name of the Holy Virgin, after having given birth. Students attending school in local monasteries with no means of support earn their daily food by appealing to the people of nearby villages chanting the names of the Lord and the Holy Virgin Mary. Similarly, the poor beg their daily bread in the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary. One could say that it is the love and kindness embodied in the Virgin Mary that feeds the hungry in the country of Ethiopia. Ethiopian Christians emphasize that, were it not for the blessed Virgin Mary, salvation would not have come into this world and the hope of humanity would have been lost.

Praise and adoration of Mary, the Mother of God also find expression through the many Marian feasts of the Ethiopian calendar. There are thirty-three prescribed feasts commemorating the Virgin Mary alone as well as a number of unprescribed feasts observed in her honor. Many of the feasts in honor of our Lord Jesus Christ are also regarded as feasts honoring St. Mary; they include the Annunciation, Christmas, and the Presentation in the Temple. Most Marian feasts celebrate events in the life of the Virgin Mary. Such celebrations take the form of chants of prayer and supplication and hymns of gratitude, love and praise. Central to the devotion for Mary is her holy icon, which stands in the Holy of Holies near the icon of her Son in almost every Ethiopian Orthodox Church across the country.

The tradition of the Church is expressed not only in liturgical actions and gestures but also in the rich and colorful line of the holy icons. According to the Eastern Orthodox tradition, an icon is not simply a religious painting designed to arouse appropriate emotions in the beholder; it is one of the ways whereby God is revealed to humanity. Through the holy icons orthodox Christians receive a vision of the spiritual world. Because the icon is a part of tradition, the painter is not free to innovate according to his pleasure; rather, the work must be an accurate reflection of the teaching of the Church.<sup>370</sup>

The veneration of icons is a part of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church tradition; it is, however, directed not to the images but to the holy persons whom they represent.<sup>371</sup> Behind the painting of the saint is the person of the saint, and behind the saint God Himself. Similarly, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church does not venerate the symbol of the sacred cross as such, but offerings of incense and light are given to its representation and to the holy books of the Gospels in order to honor the persons with whom they are connected. By kissing or uncovering their heads to the images of Christ, the cross, the Virgin Mother of God, and other saints, Ethiopian worshippers adore Christ and honor His Mother and the saints and angels who are viewed as the very representatives of God.

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<sup>370</sup>Leonid Ouspensky, Theology of the Icon (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978).

<sup>371</sup>Heyer, F., Die Kirche Aethiopiens, pp. 47f.

The icons which tradition attributes to St. Luke's craftsmanship are particularly revered by the faithful. While several churches and monasteries of Europe claim to possess icons painted by St. Luke, such claims are also made by a number of ancient monasteries and churches of the Ethiopian highlands.<sup>372</sup> To the people of the surrounding countryside these icons are a powerful source of religious healing, hope and divine presence. Because of their importance, these icons are generally unknown and not seen by outsiders, being kept inside the makdas<sup>373</sup> or ekabit, the "treasure house."

According to an early tradition, the original icon of the Virgin Mary was painted by St. Luke and is imbued with miraculous powers of intercession.<sup>374</sup> In Ethiopia, the icon of the Holy Virgin is employed for intercession in times of flood, drought and disease. Carried in the arm of a monk, priest or deacon, it is taken around the outside of the church and held up as a blessing. While the icon is raised in the air, clergy and congregation antiphonally chant "Lord have mercy upon us."<sup>375</sup> At the threat of a widespread epidemic or crop failure, the procession of the icon of the Holy Virgin and of other patron

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<sup>372</sup>Diana Spencer, "In Search of St. Luke Icons in Ethiopia," Journal of Ethiopian Studies, (Addis Ababa, Vol. X, 1972), pp. 67-95.

<sup>373</sup>The makdas represents the Holy of Holies, the innermost chamber of the church; see below, pp. 32-35.

<sup>374</sup> Spencer, "In Search of St. Luke's Icon in Ethiopia," pp. 68-69.

<sup>375</sup>Ibid., p. 72.



saints is commonly carried out by the clergy around the country.<sup>376</sup>

The icon of St. Luke is generally referred to with special designations such as Se'el Adheno ("The saving picture") which define the icon's power to heal and bestow grace.<sup>377</sup> Traditionally, it is seen by the public only on special feast days, such as the Feast of the Dormition held on January 21 (E.C.). On such occasions the icon of St. Luke is revealed and revered in the traditional all-night vigil in which monks and priests on the one side of the church and the debteras or church musicians on the other perform their respective offices. The service begins around 10:00 a.m.; the Ark of the Covenant and the icon of St. Mary are carried in the arms of a monk or priest around the church building. Often a colorful canopy is stretched on two poles over the heads of those who carry the icon, while others of the clergy swing censers or hold colorful ceremonial umbrellas as symbols of the Holy Spirit.

During the entire procession, the debteras perform a sacred dance and the whole congregation sings and chants in joyful acclamation while prostrating and bowing before the Ark of the Covenant and the icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This prostration is an expression of respect and honor, not worship. It is likened to Moses' prostration before the Ark of the Covenant with its "mercy seat," decorated with the two cherubim

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<sup>376</sup>Ibid., p. 72

<sup>377</sup>Ibid., pp. 68-83.

of gold, where God spoke to Moses. The procession continues to the churchyard around the church building three times without interruption. It is a beautiful celebration of joy, praise and thanksgiving for the grace of God and the favor of the Virgin Mary.

There are, also, hymns in the tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church which are specially directed toward the icons. These hymns bring to life the personality of the saint represented in the icon. Such special hymns to the Marian icon express in a beautiful way the heart-felt devotion of the faithful towards the Virgin. For example, the faithful lovingly refer to her as the "tender-hearted" in a hymn of praise directed to her icon immediately preceding the reading from the Book of the Miracles of the Virgin Mary and expressing utter confidence in the goodness, charity, and generosity of the Virgin's intentions toward all her children.<sup>378</sup>

#### IN PERSONAL PIETY AND PUBLIC WORSHIP

The Holy Eucharist is the center of the celebration of the Divine Liturgy in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It is an event surrounded by utmost reverence--greater than any other single event on a particular day. The Eucharist by its nature is the crown of all celebrations, the climax of worship. Therefore, the

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<sup>378</sup>Saatat-Za Lelit Woza-Negesh or Horologium, pp. 228-235; see below, pp. 17-18 (chapter III).

entire day as well as the previous evening is ordered and arranged for the faithful around the climactic event of Holy Communion. In preparation for it, certain activities are foregone or undertaken. Both the night vigil and the morning prayers are preparatory services for the Divine Liturgy during which the celebration of the Holy Eucharist takes place. Moreover, the celebration of Holy Communion means the breaking of an eighteen-hour fast which always precedes it and the beginning of a feasting time.<sup>379</sup> The celebration of the Holy Eucharist and the Divine Liturgy together determine the nature of the day's activities.

The Divine Liturgy is celebrated daily in the monasteries and episcopal cathedrals; in parish churches it is usually celebrated on Sundays and holy days. Exceptions are made in the case of baptisms or memorial services. The time of the service depends upon whether the day is a fast day or a feast day. On feast days, the liturgy begins at sunrise; on fasting days in the afternoon. Only during Passion Week, with the exception of Maundy Thursday, is the celebration of the Divine Liturgy suspended.

In spite of the large numbers of churches and clergy in Ethiopia, the content of the Divine Liturgy remains generally the same from one church to another. Occasionally slight modifications in the length of services may occur, mainly in city churches which try to accommodate working people; however, the

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<sup>379</sup>See below, p. 39

tradition of worship, firmly rooted in the customs and the memory of the people, has changed very little in the last five centuries.

Church attendance in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is generally large, but churches are particularly full every day during the two most important periods of the Ethiopian Church calendar, the Lenten and the pre-Assumption fasts. Because of the modest size of most church buildings in Ethiopia, the crowds of people who flock to the churches during these periods for worship and devotion can seldom be accommodated. To ensure a place in the church requires the faithful to arrive well in advance of the service, perhaps as much as an hour prior to the start of the Divine Liturgy. Even without a place to sit, many attend the service standing outside in the churchyard for its entire duration regardless of the weather. These holy seasons also see many more young people and children participating in fasting, attending church and receiving Holy Communion. The distribution of the elements alone may take as long as an hour or more, and the services overflow with the number of faithful who attend.

#### THE HISTORY OF THE ETHIOPIAN LITURGY

The Church of Ethiopia is one of the few churches of Christendom which has preserved close ties with the worship of the early Church. This is largely due to the geographical

position of the country and to historical developments which led to her virtual isolation from the rest of the Christian world since the time of the seventh century. In a very real sense, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has retained much of the form of worship which she had originally received. In Ethiopian liturgical worship as elsewhere in Eastern Orthodox Christendom, one senses the spirit and form of ancient mystery religions in the best sense of the term. During the Divine Liturgy, for instance, worshippers are closed off from the sanctuary, with the most sacred actions of the clergy screened from view.<sup>380</sup>

The early liturgies were rather fluid rites, founded upon the New Testament account of the Last Supper and combined with the Christianized synagogue service.<sup>381</sup>

They gradually crystallized into different liturgies in different ecclesiastical areas. Differences in emphasis accounted for variations in the rites which, though they had the same basic outline, developed their own details.<sup>382</sup> Nonetheless, from the time of Christianity's beginning to the fifth century, a general coherence in the early liturgies had evolved until the rise of the great parent rites. This development can be summed

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<sup>380</sup>D. O'Hanlon, Features of the Abyssinian Church (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1946), p. 36.

<sup>381</sup>On Jewish elements in Ethiopian worship see E. Hammerschmidt, "Jewish Elements in the Cult of the Ethiopian Church," Journal of Ethiopian Studies, III, no. 2, (Addis Ababa, 1965) pp. 1-12.

<sup>382</sup>S. A. B. Mercer, The Ethiopic Liturgy: Its Sources, Development and Present Form (Milwaukee: The Young Churchman Co., 1915), p. 46.

up as follows:

First there arose a form of service which was the result of a combination of Jewish and pagan influence; very soon the service took on the general character of a memorial meal, a development which may be considered purely Christian; then this Eucharistic service severed its connection with the primitive common meal, and gradually united with the synagogue-like service which became the 'Service of the Word', or the Pre-Anaphora of the Eucharistic Service; then gradually, as the institution of the Catechumenate developed, elaborate prayers were introduced into the 'Service of the Word' or Pre-Anaphora; and finally, when we come to the time of Justin, we meet a service the same in general order as the great parent rites.<sup>383</sup>

In Alexandria, the most influential religious center in the South, the early Egyptian rite finally gave birth to a liturgy which has been associated with the name of St. Mark, dating back to the fifth century. Initially, prior to the break of religious unity which occurred at the Council of Chalcedon, the ancient Alexandrian rite was used by many Eastern Churches. Soon after the break at Chalcedon, however, additions and alterations were made. The Melchites in Syria and Egypt, for instance, adopted the liturgy of Constantinople while the non-Chalcedonians in Egypt discarded the Greek language for liturgical purposes, employing instead the Coptic which was spoken by the majority of the people. It is possible that there is a direct link between the liturgy first used at Alexandria and the immediate parent rite of the later Coptic and Ethiopic liturgies.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>383</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>384</sup>Ibid., pp. 78-79.

The Ethiopian liturgy naturally possesses characteristics of the Alexandrian rite, i.e., the Greek liturgy of St. Mark and the Coptic liturgy of St. Cyril.<sup>385</sup> Moreover, the first Bishop of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Bishop Frumentius who received his consecration in Egypt from St. Athanasius, probably introduced the rite then prevailing at Alexandria to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In any event, it seems that the early Ethiopian liturgy was an expanded version of the liturgy of St. Mark as it is still used in the service of the Coptic Church in Egypt.<sup>386</sup> The original language was Greek, as was the case in Alexandria.<sup>387</sup> Following the Council of Chalcedon the liturgy was translated into the language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, namely Geez.<sup>388</sup> Most of the extant manuscripts of the Ethiopian liturgy are not older than the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, scholars generally agree that its earliest complete form rests on

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<sup>385</sup>O'Hanlon, Features, p. 36.

<sup>386</sup>Mercer, The Ethiopic Liturgy, pp. 85-86.

<sup>387</sup>Several remnants of the Greek original still remain in the present-day liturgy, such as the exclamation 'Awlogos Gerios' ("Blessed is the Lord").

<sup>388</sup>The traditional language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It is semitic in origin and has close connections to the Coptic and Arabic languages. Geez, or "the language of freedom", was first spoken by people called "the liberators." It entered Ethiopia with the semitic invasions that crossed over the Red Sea after the time of Christ, and reached its height before the Christian era. Unlike other Semitic languages, Geez is written from left to right. Geez is to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church what Latin is to the Catholic Church. Today, however, the Ethiopian Bible and liturgy are translated into the spoken language of the people, 'Amharic,' in order to assist the faithful in their understanding. See Budge, History, pp. 577f.

a right reconstruction of the fifth-century Markan Liturgy.<sup>389</sup> Today this form is known as the "Anaphora of the Apostles."

#### THE ANAPHORAS OF THE ETHIOPIAN LITURGY

In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Anaphora of the Apostles, one of many anaphoras used in the divine liturgy, is believed to go back directly to the Apostles; they passed it on to their successors who adapted the prayers and made their own additions. Subsequently, it was edited as a separate liturgical book of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The name, however, need not imply direct authorship by the Apostles themselves. The fact that it was never bound with the Holy Bible suggests that it was compiled at a later date.<sup>390</sup> It is clear that the Anaphora of the Apostles bears close resemblance to the liturgy of St. Mark in its style, its content and the form of its blessings; nevertheless, the Liturgy of St. Mark itself was never included among the anaphoras of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It is found in ancient Ethiopian monasteries and is even included in the Ethiopian liturgy printed in Rome, but it is not known when or why it was excluded from the present-day Ethiopian Liturgy.<sup>391</sup>

Today the Coptic Church uses only three Anaphoras, namely

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<sup>389</sup>Hyatt, op. cit., p. 95.

<sup>390</sup>Meshafa Kiddassie ("The Book of the Liturgy") (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, 1971-72), p. 9.

<sup>391</sup>Ibid., p. 10.



those of St. Basil, St. Cyril, and St. Gregory. Among these three only the Anaphora of St. Basil shows resemblance to the Ethiopian anaphoras. Other sister churches, such as the Syrian Orthodox Church, include in their liturgies a large number of anaphoras which are not included in the Ethiopian liturgy. Even so, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has been called the mother of many anaphoras, due to its impressive preservation of so many anaphoras old and new. At present, the anaphoras included in the modern Ethiopian liturgy are fourteen in number.<sup>392</sup>

While some scholars see no means of assigning an exact date to the origin of the old Ethiopian anaphoras,<sup>393</sup> others have devoted themselves more recently to the study of their literary history, origin, place of birth and general structure. Professor Hammerschmidt, the major Western expert in this field, points out that most of the names connected with the Ethiopian anaphoras belong to the period prior to 400 A.D. The list includes:

St. Athanasius (295-373)  
 St. Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390)  
 St. Basil (330-379)  
 St. Epiphanius (died 403)  
 St. Cyril (died 444)  
 St. John Chrysostom (354-407)  
 St. Gregory of Nyssa (died 394)  
 St. Dioscorus (died 451)

Hammerschmidt mentions that it was the custom of the early Christian Church to name liturgical formularies after famous theologians or Church Fathers to increase the popularity of these

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<sup>392</sup>Ibid.

<sup>393</sup>F. E. Brightman, ed. Liturgies Eastern and Western (Oxford: Clarendon Press, Vol. I, 1896; reprint, 1965), p. lxxv.

texts and to encourage their use in the Church.<sup>394</sup> According to him, the original Ethiopian liturgies, the "Anaphora of the Apostles" and the pre-Anaphora or Ser'ate Kiddassie, represent the survival of prayers dating back to the third century.<sup>395</sup> In this regard, he is in agreement with others who think that the Anaphora of the so-called Egyptian Church Order of Hippolytus in its Ethiopian form is the basis of the Anaphora of the Apostles.<sup>396</sup>

The "Anaphora of the Apostles" and the "Anaphora of Our Lord" are probably the oldest remaining liturgical texts in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.<sup>397</sup> Therefore, some agreement seems to exist among scholars that the earliest elements of the Ethiopian liturgy date as far back as the first half of the fourth century, corresponding to the time of Bishop Frumentius. Hammerschmidt thinks that a second group of the Ethiopian anaphoras were later translations from other languages. The most striking example would be the Anaphora of St. Basil which was originally translated into Arabic, and from there into Ethiopic.<sup>398</sup>

A third group consists of indigenous Ethiopian

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<sup>394</sup>E. Hammerschmidt, Studies in the Ethiopian Anaphoras, (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1961), pp. 40-41.

<sup>395</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>396</sup>Edmund Bishop, "Liturgical Comments and Memoranda IV-VII," The Journal of Theological Studies, Vol. XII, (1910-1911), p. 339.

<sup>397</sup>Hammerschmidt, Studies Ethiopian Anaphoras, p. 42.

<sup>398</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

anaphoras or those which borrowed some foreign elements but appear to be quite Ethiopian in character.<sup>399</sup> There is no indisputable proof regarding each anaphoras' origin, nor is there clarity about the additions and omissions which occurred down through the course of history. Certain Ethiopian authors, such as the author of the Anaphora of St. Gregory of Nyssa, knew some Coptic model texts but adapted them to his own Ethiopic liturgy since "no trace of a Coptic original has come to light."<sup>400</sup> Thus, Hammerschmidt argues that the anaphoras of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church fall into three categories: those which have been translated from Greek into Geez; those translated from other languages, such as the Anaphora of St. Basil, and those which were written and composed in Ethiopia itself. Thus, Hammerschmidt believes that the Anaphora of the Three Hundred and Eighteen Orthodox Fathers may have been written in Greek, perhaps for a Greek-speaking colony, by someone in Ethiopia, since no trace whatsoever is to be found of a Greek original.<sup>401</sup> In addition, the Anaphora of Dioscorus bears no relation to the Syriac "Anaphora Dioscori Alexandrini prima et secunda."<sup>402</sup> Nor does the Anaphora of St. Athanasius bear direct resemblance to the Egyptian anaphoras; rather, its description of the Sabbath reveals a typically Ethiopian feature within the Christian

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<sup>399</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>400</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>401</sup>Hammerschmidt, Studies Ethiopian Anaphoras, p. 46.

<sup>402</sup>Ibid., pp. 44-47.

liturgy.

Hammerschmidt identifies in his studies a total of twenty anaphoras which belonged at one time or another to the Ethiopian liturgy. His list includes the following:

- The Anaphora of the Apostles
- The Anaphora of our Lord
- The Anaphora of our Lady Mary by Cyriacus of Behnesa
- The Anaphora of St. Dioscorus
- The Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom
- The Anaphora of St. John the Evangelist
- The Anaphora of St. James the Lord's brother
- The Hosanna Liturgy of St. Gregory<sup>403</sup>
- The Christmas Liturgy of St. Gregory
- The Anaphora of our Lady Mary by St. Gregory
- The Alternate Anaphora of our Lady Mary by St. Gregory
- The Anaphora of the 318 Orthodox Fathers
- The Anaphora of St. Basil
- The Anaphora of St. Athanasius
- The Anaphora of St. Epiphanius
- The longer Anaphora of St. Cyril
- The shorter Anaphora of St. Cyril
- The Anaphora of St. James of Serugh
- The Anaphora of St. Mark
- The Anaphora of our Lady Mary<sup>404</sup>

Fourteen anaphoras are presently in use in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Each of them is a collection of prayers centering around the sacrifice of the eucharist, the kidassie. Moreover, each anaphora is celebrated on different occasions and prescribed dates throughout the liturgical year. The most frequently employed in the service of the divine liturgy are the Anaphoras of the Apostles, of our Lord, and of Dioscorus—largely due to the fact that they are generally much shorter and thus more convenient than the others. A list of the fourteen

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<sup>403</sup>The tradition is not clear about the identity of the various "Gregorys" in these titles.

<sup>404</sup>Hammerschmidt, Studies Ethiopian Anaphoras, p. 7.

anaphoras may clarify their use.

- The **Anaphora of the Apostles**, reaching back to the Apostles according to Ethiopian Orthodox Church tradition, is celebrated on the memorial day of any Apostle.
- The **Anaphora of our Lord**, thought to have been written during the forty day period following the Lord's resurrection (Acts 1:3), is celebrated on the memorial days of the consecration of St. Mary's churches November 6, June 20, and on August 16--the memorial day of St. Mary's ascension into heaven.
- The **Anaphora of St. John the Evangelist** is celebrated on several occasions, such as January 4, the memorial day of his death; the first week of December, the season of flowers; September 26--November 5, the forty-three Advent fasting days; on the feast day of the prophets; and on the memorial day of any Apostle.
- The **Anaphora of St. Mary**, attributed to Bishop Heryacos or Cyriacus of Behnesa in upper Egypt, is celebrated on the feast days of St. Mary, the 21st day of each month; on December 28, the day preceding Christmas; on March 29, the memorial day of her Annunciation; on October 2, the memorial day of St. Heryacos.
- The **Anaphora of the 318 Orthodox** attributed to the 318 orthodox bishops known as the Fathers of Nicea is celebrated on September 21, the memorial day of the Virgin; November 8, the Feast of the Four Feasts; November 9, the opening day of the Council of Nicea; November 24, the feast day of the Twenty-Four Heavenly Priests at Christmas; January 13, the Feast of Cana of Galilee; and on the memorial day of any of the righteous.
- The **Anaphora of St. Athanasius** is celebrated on May 7, the memorial day of the death of the saint; and on every Sunday (unless there is another feast).
- The **Anaphora of St. Basil** is celebrated on January 6, the memorial day of St. Basil's death, and on the memorial days of bishops, priests and kings. It is believed that St. Basil collected the Anaphoras of the Apostles, the Three Hundred Eighteen Fathers, and the Anaphora of Athanasius.

- The **Anaphora of St. Gregory of Nyssa** is celebrated five days before the end of Lent (from the Wednesday prior to Palm Sunday until Palm Sunday; on January 21, the memorial day of St. Gregory's death.
- The **Anaphora of St. Epiphanius of Cyprus** is celebrated on May 17, the memorial day of his death; the fast day(s) of Epiphany; Maundy Thursday (Holy Week); and during the rainy season.
- The **Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom** is celebrated on the 27th of each month; the Feast of the Saviour of the World, commemorating the Lord's crucifixion; on March 10, the memorial day of Constantine's mother Helen's discovery of the Lord's Cross; on Great Saturday; on every Wednesday and Friday; on May 12, the memorial day of St. John Chrysostom's death.
- The **Anaphora of St. Cyril** is celebrated on the Ascension of St. Mary; on memorial days; on feast days of Abraham, Job and Elijah; on July 3, the memorial day of the death of St. Cyril. The 24th Patriarch of Alexandria, St. Cyril presided at the third ecumenical council held at Ephesus in 431 A.D., where he fought against the Nestorian heresy. He takes high rank in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as a dogmatic theologian.
- The **Anaphora of St. Jacob of Sarugh** is celebrated on the feast days of the angels; in the month of Pagoni (a period of 6-7 days when the Second Advent of the Lord is anticipated); on the fifth Sunday in Lent; on June 27, the memorial day of St. Jacob of Sarugh's death. One of the best Syrian writers, St. Jacob was known as "The Flute of the Spirit and the Harp of the Believing Church."
- The **Anaphora of St. Dioscorus**: much debate exists among scholars regarding St. Dioscorus' authorship of this Anaphora (Hammerschmidt, p. 40). According to Ethiopian Orthodox tradition, St. Dioscorus wrote this Anaphora. It is celebrated on Christmas; Epiphany; Easter; Ascension; Pentecost; the seventh day of each month; the Feast of the Holy Trinity; on September 7, the memorial day of the death of St. Dioscorus. The 25th Patriarch of Alexandria, St. Dioscorus, at the Council of Chalcedon, argued after that the Incarnation there were not two natures, but one

Incarnate nature of the Word"--following the teaching of such Church Fathers as St. Athanasius, Gregory and Cyril.

- The **Anaphora of St. Gregory** is attributed to St. Gregory "the Wonderworker"; it is celebrated from the time of Christmas to the Feast of Ninevah ( ).<sup>405</sup>

From among this list, Hammerschmidt maintains that the following Anaphoras are of Ethiopian origin:

- The Anaphora of St. Athanasius
- The Anaphora of St. Cyril
- The Anaphora of St. Epiphanius
- The Anaphora of St. Gregory of Nyssa
- The Anaphora of St. Gregory
- The Anaphora of St. John the Evangelist
- The Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom
- The Anaphora of St. Dioscorus
- The Anaphora of St. Mary by Heryacos
- The Anaphora of 318 Orthodox Fathers<sup>406</sup>

#### THE HOLY EUCHARIST IN THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX TRADITION

The act of sacrifice is the highest deed of worship, by which humanity affirms its faith by honoring and glorifying God. Sacrifice entails the offering of an object to God out of love in order to express the believers' thankful dependence on God, the creator and sustainer of their lives.

The act of sacrifice is as old as religion itself. Because the propensity to honor God with sacrifices is inborn in the soul of humanity, it is practiced by all religions, by all

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<sup>405</sup>Marcos Daoud, tr., The Liturgy of the Ethiopian Church, Revised by M. Hazen (Cairo: Egyptian Book Press, 1959), pp. 69, 98, 110, 130, 153-154, 174, 197, 218, 233, 249, 263, 279, 294, 304.

<sup>406</sup>Hammerschmidt, Studies Ethiopian Anaphoras, p. 48.

peoples, in all times from the very beginning: "And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering." (Gen. 4:3-5) The sacrifices of the Hebrew people were established by God through Moses, through whom the details were arranged--what kinds of sacrifices, their appropriate times and place, and the manner in which they were to be offered. (Lev. 3:1-17)

Christians also offered sacrifices to God, namely the Holy Eucharist. The Greek word  $\epsilon\upsilon\chi\alpha\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}\delta$  (Eucharist) as used in the Christian Church originated in the thanksgiving which Jesus pronounced over the bread and wine of the Last Supper. Linguistically, the Greek  $\epsilon\upsilon\chi\alpha\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\iota}\delta$  corresponds exactly to the Ethiopic word አካተት (Akotet); both are designations of the eucharistic liturgy. However, the Ethiopic expresses an additional aspect of the Eucharist in the word ቆርባን (querban), which means "sacrifice." Hammerschmidt maintains that the combination of the two terms to designate the eucharist in the Ethiopian rite describes more exactly what is meant by the liturgical act than the designations of other oriental rites.<sup>407</sup> In most of Christendom, the Greek word alone, which means "thanksgiving", came to be the title for the central act of Christian worship and sacrifice; its meaning may have derived

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<sup>407</sup>Hammerschmidt, E. Studies in the Ethiopic Anaphoras, pp. 37-38.



from the Lord's "giving thanks" at the Last Supper, or it may reflect the idea that this sacrifice is the supreme act of Christian thanksgiving to God.

In the course of time, the term "liturgy" also came to designate the eucharist as the chief act of public worship instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ. Ever since apostolic times, this "liturgy", the eucharistic rite, has been the core of Christian life and worship among all Orthodox Churches.<sup>408</sup> In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as in other orthodox traditions, the service during which the Holy Eucharist is prepared and offered is called the divine liturgy.

Unlike the Jewish sacrifices of the old covenant, which were sealed with goat's or calf's blood, (Exodus 24:18) the new covenant between God and humanity was sealed with the very body and blood of our Lord and Saviour on the cross at Golgotha. At the last supper, Jesus gave to His disciples, in the form of bread and wine, His sacrifice, which was to be carried on by His apostles according to His commandment, "This do in remembrance of me. (Lk. 22:19; I Cor. 11:24) The Orthodox Churches understand that by these words He appointed His Apostles as bishops or priests, servants of the new sacrifice. In Canon 18 of the First Ecumenical Council, the Fathers of Nicea mandated that the Holy Eucharist was not to be administered or handled by anyone except bishops, priests, or presbyters:

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<sup>408</sup>Cross, F.L., ed. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (2nd. ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 830.

It has come to the knowledge of the holy and great Synod that, in some districts and cities, the deacons administer the Eucharist to presbyters, whereas neither canon nor custom permits that they who have no right to offer should give the Body of Christ to them that do offer. And this also has been known, that certain deacons now touch the Eucharist even before the bishops. Let all such practices be utterly done away, and let the deacons remain within their own bounds, knowing that they are the ministers of the bishop and the inferiors of the presbyters. Let them receive the Eucharist according to their order, after the presbyters, and let either the bishop or the presbyters administer to them. Furthermore, let not the deacons sit among the presbyters, for that is contrary to canon and order. And if, after this decree, anyone shall refuse to obey, let him be deposed from the diaconate.<sup>409</sup>

It is clear from this canon that the Nicene Fathers held that one who receives the Holy Eucharist receives not mere bread and wine but the body and blood of Christ. For this reason, they mandated that the Eucharist be regarded with utmost reverence and respect, giving the power of its administration to those only who were appointed bishops and presbyters. Thus, a recognized hierarchy of bishops and presbyters existed in the Church to which the deacons were subordinate.

On the cross at Calvary our Lord offered a visible sacrifice; in the Holy Eucharist it is an invisible sacrifice, concealed in the form of bread and wine. On the cross, it was a bloody sacrifice through the shedding of our Lord's blood, but in the Holy Eucharist, it is an unbloody sacrifice.

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<sup>409</sup>H. R. Percival, ed., Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, Vol. XIV: The Seven Ecumenical Councils (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1979), pp. 38-39, Canon 18.

In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church the divine liturgy consists of a set number of prayers, during which the bloodless sacrifice of the New Testament is performed eternally in the Christian Church in memory of our blessed Lord and Saviour and for the remission of the sins of the members of the Church. As the Lord Himself said, "This is my body which is given (sacrificed) for you" (Mt. 26:26). The Ethiopian Church holds firmly to the doctrine that the consecrated bread and wine are transformed into the true body and blood of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The faithful communicant eats the blessed flesh of our Lord and drinks His precious blood concealed under the form of bread and wine. The bread is truly changed, after the prayer of consecration, into the Lord's very body which was born at Bethlehem from the Virgin Mary, baptized in the Jordan River, suffered, buried, and risen from the dead. Likewise, the wine is changed into the very blood of the Lord which was shed on the cross.

Thus, the Eucharistic offering of bread and wine is not a mere memorial service in remembrance of the Lord's suffering and death. Rather, this transformation is a great and profound mystery, signifying the omnipotence of God for whom all things are possible. As a mystery, it needs no proof for the Ethiopian faithful other than the Saviour's own words, "This is my body which is given for you...this cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:19-20).

Therefore, affirming the faith of the Ethiopian

Orthodox church, the celebrating priest confesses thrice in the course of the Divine Liturgy:

I believe, I believe, I believe, and I confess unto my last breath, that this is the Body and Blood of our Lord and our God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, which He took from the Lady of us all, the Holy Mary, of twofold virginity, and made it part of His godhead without mixture or confusion, without division or alteration; and He verily confessed with a good testimony in the days of Pontius Pilate, and this body He gave up for our sakes and for the life of all.

I believe, I believe, I believe, and I confess that His godhead was not separated from His manhood, not for an hour, nor for the twinkling of an eye, but He gave it up for our sakes for the remission of sins unto them that partake of it in faith

I believe, I believe, I believe, and I confess that this is the Body and Blood of our Lord and our God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, and that to Him are rightly due honor and glory and adoration with His kind heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit, giver of life both now and ever, world without end. Amen.<sup>410</sup>

Prior to his own receiving the Holy Eucharist, the priest prays: "Lord, my God, behold the sacrifice of thy Son's Body which pleaseth Thee. Through it, blot out all my sins because thy only-begotten Son died for me. And behold the pure Blood of thy Messiah, which was shed for me upon Calvary, crieth aloud in my stead. Grant that this speaking Blood may be the forgiver of me, thy servant."<sup>411</sup>

During other parts of the divine liturgy the priest

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<sup>410</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie with Commentary ("The Book of the Liturgy") (Addis Ababa: Tefferi Mekonen Printing Press, 1918), pp. 136-138; Daoud, p. 66.

<sup>411</sup>Ibid., pp. 138-140; Daoud, p. 67.

declares to the recipients of the Holy Eucharist that the bread and wine are truly changed into the flesh and blood of the living Christ. In the anaphora of our Lord, the priest says, "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ for the sanctification of Body, Soul and Spirit." In the Anaphora of the Apostles, he declares, "The Bread of life which came down from heaven, the Holy Body of Christ.: And in the anaphoras of the various Fathers he says, "The Body of Emmanuel our very God which He took form the Lady of us all, Mary," to which the recipients respond, "Amen."<sup>412</sup>

Thus, the sacrament is administered and received with the utmost seriousness and reverence. This is particularly clear in the officiating priest's warning to those who attempt to receive the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ without full awareness regarding the seriousness of this holy offering. The priest washes his hands saying, "He that is pure, let him receive of the oblation, and he that is not pure, let him not receive it, that he may not be consumed by the fire of the godhead which is prepared for the devil and his angels. Whosoever has revenge in his heart and whosoever has in his strange thoughts and fornication, let him not draw near."<sup>413</sup> Immediately after the celebrant washes his hands, he once again declares loudly and persistently: "As I have cleansed my hands from outward pollution, so also I am pure from the blood of you all. If you presumptuously draw near to the body and Blood of Christ, I will

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<sup>412</sup>Daoud, p. 69.

<sup>413</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

not be responsible for your reception thereof. I am pure of your wickedness, but your sin will return on your head if you do not draw near in purity."<sup>414</sup> This declaration is followed by the deacon's words: "If there be any who disdains this word of the priest or who laughs or speaks or stands in the Church in an evil manner, let him know and understand that he is provoking to wrath our Lord Jesus Christ, and bringing upon himself a curse instead of a blessing, and will get from God the fire of hell instead of the remission of sin."<sup>415</sup>

As a result of this strong warning, today mostly children and older people actually commune in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It is difficult to tell whether it is this warning that has prevented many young and middle-aged people from receiving the holy communion; it certainly has contributed to this phenomenon. Nonetheless, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church insists the soul must be free from sins, washed in the water of repentance, prior to the reception of the Holy Eucharist. What is necessary to prepare body and soul for the Holy Eucharist is purity of heart and the works of faith, namely, love, gentleness and mercy. Outward fasting alone does not prepare the recipient for the Holy Eucharist, although fasting of all liquids and foods prior to its reception is required.

Because of the supreme regard for the sacred nature of the Eucharist, the elements themselves are handled in a

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<sup>414</sup>Ibid.

<sup>415</sup>Ibid.

prescribed ritual manner both prior to and following their reception. Bread and wine are made before each service by the deacon in the back-house at the east-side of the church known as "Bethlehem." The wine is freshly squeezed from dried grapes which have been soaked in water. The elements are consecrated and administered on the same day, and it is believed that once bread and wine have been consecrated they remain flesh and blood until completely consumed. Immediately following the reception of the elements, blessed water is administered to the communicants, in order that they may rinse their mouths to be certain that each particle of the bread and wine is consumed.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church believes that the Holy Eucharist provides the faithful recipients many things. It nourishes the faithful spiritually, allowing them to grow in grace; they receive forgiveness of their sins and holy companionship with Christ and with fellow worshippers, along with all the Church on earth. By receiving the Holy Eucharist, believers receive true life in this world and eternal life in the next.

Only the lawfully ordained bishops and priests who are appointed according to the canons of the Church are permitted to officiate at the divine liturgy. Those who for various reasons are expelled from the Church or suspended cannot preside at the service. In addition to the officiating priest, Ethiopian canon law requires that at least two other assistant priests and two deacons (or one assistant priest and three deacons) must be

present to assist the celebrant at certain points. A deacon is forbidden to officiate alone but must serve as an assistant to the presiding bishop or priest.

The divine liturgy is celebrated only in duly consecrated churches, except when the Church holds an outdoor service in a place which has received the approval of the bishop. If possible, all worshippers are required to stand throughout the divine liturgy with fear and reverence toward God. Within the church, each participant in the service stands in his or her prescribed place: the bishop is first, followed by the priest(s), the deacons, and the faithful. Men and women stand in separate places.<sup>416</sup>

In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, unlike many other traditions, the entire divine liturgy is sung or chanted. Not only the priests, deacons, and people are involved in the singing, however. Rather, much of the music in the divine liturgy is led and performed by the debteras or church musicians, a unique feature of Ethiopian worship life.<sup>417</sup> In every church, at least six men should normally serve as debteras; they lead the congregation in singing and chanting before, during, and after the service and perform many pieces in the liturgy as soloists or

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<sup>416</sup>The Fetha Nagast ("The Law of the Kings") (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, 1958), pp. 194-195.

<sup>417</sup>On the debtera and his education see Pankhurst, S., Ethiopia, pp. 232-239; Hable Selassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History, pp. 167-169; M. Powne, Ethiopian Music: An Introduction, (West Port: Greenwood Press, 1980), pp. 109-133; The Church of Ethiopia, 1970, pp. 60-61 and 90-93.



a solo group accompanied by the rhythmic rattle of the sistrum (tsemasel) and the beat of a drum (gebaro). At times they dance while singing in the graceful, measured movements of an intricate choreography which arranges them in two groups facing each. Trained in the traditions of sacred music and dance as well as the theology of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, these musicians are also equipped to serve in a teaching capacity. Their art requires considerable skills which are learned during many years of study and practice at various levels of schooling. A debtera is a literate man; nevertheless, most of the chants and songs are learned by heart as part of an oral tradition carefully handed down from generation to generation.

In the Ethiopian churches a number of sacred articles is set aside and consecrated, each for a particular use in the service of the divine liturgy. Detailed rules enumerated in the "Canon" of the Mashafa Kiddassie govern each articles's preparation and use according to canon law. First among these sacred articles is the altar. The altar must be covered, with no part left exposed. In addition, the altar must be equipped with the following items: a cross, three lighted candles made of beeswax, and the liturgical book from which the priest reads the appropriate anaphora and other portions of the liturgy. the vestments of the celebrating priests consist of alb (gamis), girdle (zenar), stole (mothatet), and chasuble (qasa langa). Also needed for the service of the divine liturgy are the following sacred articles:

- The chalice (zewae)
- The paten (zachel)
- The cross-spoon (erfa-masgal)
- The veils in which the eucharistic bread is wrapped (mahefadat)
- The platter on which the bread is carried from the Bethlehem (masob)
- The censer (maetant)
- The incense bowl (incense)
- the processional cross (qawami maskol)
- The Holy Bible (meshaf kiddus)
- The lectionary with the scripture readings (sherate gezawe)
- The sanctuary lamp (gandil)

#### THE PLACE OF THE LITURGY: THE CHURCH BUILDING

Foreign travelers have observed that there seem to be more churches in Abyssinia than in any other country of Christendom. In \*ethiopian custom, to erect a church is considered an act of Christian piety, and one who does so is believed to have been forgiven of all sins.<sup>418</sup> Churches, especially those in the countryside, are often built upon some prominent height and are easily identified from a distance by the grove of trees surrounding them. Throughout Ethiopia, one can observe piles of stones marking the place along the roadside where the church of a neighboring village first comes into view. Pious travelers who pass this stone marker add a stone to the pile.

The ca. 20,000 churches in Ethiopia show much architectural variety--from the standard form of the little round village church to large rectangular and octagonal buildings, including the towering modern cathedrals in cities such as in Axum, Addis

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<sup>418</sup>Hyatt, The Church of Abyssinia, p. 109.

Ababa, and Asmara.<sup>419</sup>

Modeled after the structure of the Hebrew sanctuary, the interior of the standard church is built in three concentric sections or chambers. The outside ambulatory is known as "kene mahlet" (Chancel). Here, hymns are sung or chanted, and the debteras or sacred musicians stand in this area to lead the congregation in song. The second chamber is called the "keddest" or nave; it is here that the Holy Eucharist is administered. The innermost chamber, known as the "makdas", "kedust kedusan" or The Holy of Holies, contains the "tabot", the ark of the covenant.

None but the lawfully ordained clergy may enter the makdas. There are normally three gates or entrances to the church: one for the priests, one for the men, and one for the women. The women's entrance faces south while the men's entrance faces north. The gate through which the priests enter faces east towards the rising sun. Adjoining the church, though not attached to it, is a small building or hut; it, too, is found on the east side of the church and is called "the Bethlehem" Here, the deacon prepares the eucharistic elements--baking the bread and squeezing wine from dried grapes soaked in water. Parish churches which are generally served by married priests are called "dabir" (mountain) churches; those churches served by monks are known as "geddam" (monastery) churches. Churches are consecrated by the bishop (or the archimandrite). If the tabot is

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<sup>419</sup>On the main features of Ethiopian churches see Pankhurst, S., Ethiopia, pp. 167-177; Heyer, Die Kirche Aethiopiens, pp. 27-39; and Hyatt, The Church of Abyssinia, pp. 109-121.

desecrated, it must be re-consecrated by the bishop only.

Within the inner sanctuary or Holy of Holies, the walls are painted. In addition, an oblong altar of masonry or more commonly a simple wooden board resting on upright posts and covered with a stone slab, stands in the center of the makdas. Sometimes plated with a considerable amount of gold, the altar contains the communion vessels, service books and other gear needed for the service. Most importantly, the altar serves as the resting place for the tabot, the ark of the covenant, which stands on it like a tabernacle and is surmounted by a canopy.<sup>420</sup>

#### THE STRUCTURE OF THE DIVINE LITURGY

The divine liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church consists of two parts: the pre-Anaphora and the Anaphora. Both together constitute the full service of the Holy Eucharist or the kiddassie. The pre-Anaphora is a preparatory service, while the Anaphora or "Prayer of Thanksgiving for the Holy Eucharist" represents the actual celebration of the Holy Eucharist itself.<sup>421</sup> The service is outlined in the Mashafa kiddassie, the "Book of the Liturgy." The Mashafa kiddassie contains all liturgical texts which are recited or chanted in the divine liturgy as well as rubrics for its proper celebration.

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<sup>420</sup>Hyatt, The Church of Abyssinia, pp. 118-121; Heyer, Die Kirche Aethiopiens, pp. 139-45.

<sup>421</sup>Hammerschmidt, Studies, pp. 50-60.

Naturally, its language is Geez, but translations into Amharic and Tigregna are available to the people.<sup>422</sup> Today, the text of this important liturgical book is easily accessible. In its present form it is the result of a long process of development over many centuries.

While the fourteen anaphoras used in the services of the divine liturgy would alternate, depending on the particular day and feast of the church year, the structure and content of the preparatory service remains always the same. The main sections of the pre-Anaphora are as follows:

- Prayers and blessings over the holy articles
- The prothesis or preparation
- the enarxis or opening
- the liturgy of the catechumens
- the liturgy of the faithful.<sup>423</sup>

Similarly, the Anaphora is composed of the following parts:

- The eucharistic thanksgiving
- The institution narrative
- The anamnesis
- The epiclesis
- The prayer of fraction
- The inclination and prayer of repentance
- The manual acts
- The consignation
- The confession of faith by the priest
- Holy communion
- post-communion thanksgiving

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<sup>422</sup>The modern Mashafa Kiddassie is available in English in an edition by the Coptic scholar Marcos Daoud: The Liturgy of the Ethiopian Church, (Cairo: Egyptian Press, 1954). This volume contains all fourteen anaphoras. Older translations of the pre-anaphora and the Anaphora of the Apostles may be found in Mercer, S.A.B., The Ethiopic Liturgy, pp. 295-373, and F. E. Brightman, Liturgies Eastern and Western, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), vol. I, pp. 194-224; Anaphora of the Apostles only.

<sup>423</sup>Daoud, The Liturgy, pp. 5-55; Mercer, The Ethiopic Liturgy, pp. 295-349. See also Mercer's discussion on pp. 141-220.

- Prayer of the "Pilot of the Soul"
- Benediction
- Dismissal<sup>424</sup>

We now turn to a consideration of the Virgin Mary in the divine liturgy.

### ST. MARY IN THE DIVINE LITURGY

Within the divine liturgy the Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, plays a prominent role. Her role is significant inasmuch as she points toward the holy mystery of the incarnation. While she is referred to throughout the whole of the Mashafa Kiddassie, there are specific sections which are of particular importance: the liturgy of the catechumens, the liturgy of the faithful, and the various anaphoras commonly employed in the service of the divine liturgy.

#### A. ST. MARY IN THE LITURGY OF THE CATECHUMENS

The divine liturgy presents the Virgin Mary in a rich array of biblical imagery, depicting her exalted place as the Mother of God. For example, in the enarxis which precedes the liturgy of the catechumens, the Holy Virgin is described symbolically as the pot of pure gold wherein is hidden the manna, which came down

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<sup>424</sup>See the discussion in Mercer, The Ethiopic Liturgy, pp. 295-349. See also Mercer's discussion on pp. 141-220.

from heaven giving life unto all the world.<sup>425</sup> Her body is the pure container through which the bread of heaven was born. She is also compared to the "new loom"<sup>426</sup> on which two distinct threads are woven together and united into one single cloth, symbolizing the mystery of the incarnation in which the "One Incarnate Son of God" has been born from the two-fold Virgin, i.e., virgin in both body and soul.

In the liturgy of the catechumens, which is the prayer of the baptized and unbaptized, Mary's role as intercessor is particularly prominent. It is seen especially in the section known as 'The Prayer of Incense', when the priest prays for the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the "golden censer" of Aaron, asking her to pray for the congregation.<sup>427</sup>

Throughout the liturgy the name of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, is mentioned with the name of the second person of the Holy Trinity when the 'Blessing' is spoken. Thus, the form of the prayer of blessing found in the liturgy of the catechumens reads, "Blessed be God the Almighty Father. And blessed be the only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ, who was born of our Lady Mary, the Holy Virgin, for our salvation. And blessed be the Holy Spirit, strengthener of us all. Glory and honor are fitting to the Holy Trinity, the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

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<sup>425</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie (Addis Ababa: Tefferi Mekonen Printing Press, 1918), p. 43; Mercer, The Ethiopic Liturgy, p. 304; Daoud, The Liturgy, p. 19.

<sup>426</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie, p. 59; Mercer, p. 316; Daoud, p. 27.

<sup>427</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie, p. 59; Mercer, p. 316; Daoud, p. 27.

both now and forever, world without end."<sup>428</sup> In this formula, the mystery of the incarnation is associated with the favor shown to the Blessed Virgin who was chosen by God to be the instrument of the world's salvation. The 'call to worship' which precedes the reading of the Holy Scriptures in the liturgy of the catechumens reveals still another dimension. Because the Church is the dwelling place of God and the body of Christ, Mary as the Mother of Christ is a symbol of the Church. Ordinarily, the priest chants "Thou are the golden censer", referring to the Holy Virgin Mary. However, on the great feasts of the Lord and Marian holy days the priest greets the Church saying, "Peace be unto thee," to which the congregation responds, "Holy Church, dwelling place of the godhead."

A little later the priest and the congregation will join in a recitation that further emphasizes the mystery of the incarnation:

Thou art the golden censer which didst bear the coal of fire which the blessed (i.e., Aaron) took from the sanctuary, and which forgiveth sin and blotteth out error, who is God's Word that has made man from thee, who offered himself to His Father for incense and an acceptable sacrifice. We worship thee, Christ, with thy good heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit, giver of life, for thou didst come and save us.<sup>429</sup>

The golden censer symbolizes the Virgin Mary's purity and sanctity, the incense symbolizes the incarnation, and the coal of fire God's divinity. The stick of pure gold which Aaron used to

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<sup>428</sup>Mercer, p. 308; Daoud, p. 31.

<sup>429</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie, p. 70, Mercer, pp. 323f.; Daoud, p. 34.



mix the coal of fire and the incense is symbolic of the work of the Holy Spirit in the mystery of the incarnation.<sup>430</sup> Thus, just as the golden censer of Aaron the priest stood as a shield between the congregation and the plague,<sup>431</sup> so the Holy Virgin, Mother of God, stands as a shield between the curse of the children of disobedience and the salvation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ for she is the instrument of salvation for all the world.

After the priest has censed all the doors of the church, which symbolize the four corners of the world, chanting "Glory and honor are always fitting to the Holy Trinity, the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever, world without end. Amen," he enters the Holy of Holies, and there recites: "The angel went in unto her, and stood before her, and said to her: 'Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, thou art full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb; pray for us to Christ thy Son to forgive us our sins.'" The priest then compasses the tabot and offers incense three times over the altar. In this manner, the intercession of the Holy Virgin, Mother of God, is implored, for among all women "she is blessed" and thus free from the curse of body and soul. She received the blessing of God for the sake of humanity, being pure and obedient in both body and soul.<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>430</sup>Weddassie Mariam, pp. 202-203; Budge, Legends, p. 280.

<sup>431</sup>Numbers 17:41-50.

<sup>432</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie p. 73; Mercer, pp. 325f.; Daoud, p. 35.

Ethiopian Christians are convinced that the Virgin Mary is the most favored human person in God's sight; some see her as the instrument through which every prayer ascends to heaven. Thus it is fitting that the priest in the liturgy of catechumens stands before the holy altar and rejoices because he shares in the joy of the Mother of God, singing of her power of intercession, her royalty, and her universal mediation:

Rejoice, O thou of whom we ask healing, O holy, full of honor, ever-virgin, parent of God, Mother of Christ, offer up our prayer on high to thy Beloved Son that He may forgive us our sin.

Rejoice, O thou who didst bear for us the very light of righteousness, even Christ our god. O Virgin, pure, plead for us unto our Lord that He may have mercy upon our souls and forgive us our sins.

Rejoice, O Virgin Mary, parent of God, holy and pure, very pleader for the race of humanity; plead for us before Christ thy Son, that He may vouchsafe us for the remission of our sins.

Rejoice, O Virgin pure, very Queen, rejoice o pride of our kind; Rejoice, O thou that borest for us Emmanuel our God. We ask thee remember us, O true Mediatrix, before our Lord Jesus Christ, that He may have mercy upon our souls and forgive us our sins.<sup>433</sup>

In this manner, the prayers of the congregation are understood to ascend to God through the intercession of the Holy Virgin Mary.

After a repetition of the 'Prayer of the Incense', there follows a more developed recitation of symbolic images in regard to the Virgin Mary. The incense symbolizes the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as well as His Holy Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

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<sup>433</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie, p. 81.; Mercer, pp. 332f; Daoud. p. 39.

She is referred to as incense for the fruit of her womb Jesus has come down from heaven and perfumed humanity. to her God has given the power to lead people to the kingdom of heaven. She is also symbolized by the fragrant ointment, for He who is more fragrant than all the incense of the world was incarnate of her. She is compared to the tabernacle in which Moses and Aaron worshipped God, for God was well-pleased to adorn her with purity and holiness to be the habitation of His beloved Son.<sup>434</sup> Thus, the mystery of the Holy Trinity was not manifested without the Blessed Virgin Mary. The triune God was not revealed until the mystery of the incarnation was wrought through her.

#### B. ST. MARY IN THE LITURGY OF THE FAITHFUL

Following the liturgy of the catechumens, the service moves to the liturgy of the faithful, a short transitional section specifically for the baptized. Here, the Holy Virgin is mentioned only in the "Prayer of Faith", (amakniyou), a form of the creed, and in the Nicene Creed. In the former, the Blessed Virgin Mary is praised for her role in the mystery of the incarnation: "...who in the last days was pleased to become man and took flesh from our Lady Mary, the Holy Virgin, without the seed of man, and grew like men, yet without sin or evil; neither

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<sup>434</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie, pp. 82-85; Mercer, pp. 333f; Daoud, p. 40.

was guile found in His mouth."<sup>435</sup> The Nicene Creed speaks of Mary's specific role: "...taking a body from her body, and a soul from her sould, (God) became man."<sup>436</sup>

#### ST. MARY IN THE ANAPHORAS

In general, eucharistic thanksgiving is the foundation of all that follows in the anaphora. The Church gives thanks for God's mighty works in the past, in creation and redemption, thereby proclaiming its faith which is the source from which all prayers proceed. The eucharistic prayers typically are based on a consideration of the plan or the "economy" of salvation which reveals God's greatness and goodness in His wondrous works. Some eucharistic prayers are joyful acclamations praising the very being and nature of God. Striking also is the contemplative character of the Ethiopian liturgy in general. This quality is conveyed from the outset by the priest's stance and the meditative nature of the long prayers which he chants.

We have seen that the Holy Virgin Mary plays a prominent role in the pre-Anaphora; she also figures prominently in many of the anaphoras of the divine liturgy. Particularly noteworthy is her role in "The Anaphora of St. Mary" which is dedicated entirely to her. Although St. Mary is mentioned in all fourteen anaphoras of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, her place is

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<sup>435</sup>Daoud, p. 52.

<sup>436</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie, p. 274.

more prominent in some of them.

In the Ethiopian tradition, mentioning the name of Mary is the assurance of receiving that for which one prays to God. In the Anaphora of the Apostles, the name of the Holy Virgin appears along with the names of other saints in the intercessory prayer. Following each petition deacon recites: "...for the sake of Mary the Mother of God.<sup>437</sup> This same invocation is employed by the priest. Later, following the manual acts and the consignation, when confessing his faith, he declares:

I believe, I believe, I believe, and I confess unto my last breath, that this is the body and blood of our Lord and our God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, which He took from the Lady of us all, the Holy Mary, of two-fold virginity, and made it one with His Godhead, without mixture or confusion, without division or alteration...<sup>438</sup>

Then, just prior to receiving the Holy Communion, the communicants pray to God, humbling themselves before His glory and asking for remission of sins and life everlasting in place of judgment and the wrath of God. Again, this prayer is asked through the petition of our Lady, the Holy Mary.<sup>439</sup>

In the Anaphora of our Lord, the Virgin's role in the incarnation is re-stated in the priest's proclamation that the will of the Father was expressed in the act of sending His Son to be conceived by the Holy Ghost in the womb of a virgin, thereby

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<sup>437</sup>Mercer, pp. 350-352; Daoud, pp. 56-58.

<sup>438</sup>Mercer, p. 362; Daoud, p. 66.

<sup>439</sup>Mercer, p. 363; Daoud, p. 68.

becoming flesh.<sup>440</sup> In the Anaphora of our Lord and the Anaphora of the Apostles, the dimension of the incarnational mystery which is particularly emphasized is God truly becoming man; this emphasis refutes certain docetic heresies which suggest a divine descent from heaven. At the distribution, the anaphoras of the Fathers, of St. Basil, of St. Athanasius, and of St. Gregory, all stress the incarnation through the Holy Virgin Mary in the words, "The body of Emmanuel our very God which He took from the Lady of us all, Mary."<sup>441</sup> These words give prominence to the fact that Jesus Christ is both God and man. After the "laying on of the hand," the deacon beseeches God through the prayers and supplications of the Holy Virgin, Mother of God, that the congregation may be kept in the right faith, in glory and honor all the days of their lives. At the conclusion of the divine liturgy, in a prayer of benediction, the priest makes supplication that "all who have come and gathered and prayed in this holy church, and have eaten the holy body and drunk the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, may be forgiven of their past sins, and kept from future sins." This supplication is offered "for the sake of His body, the divine body, and for the sake of his blood, the blood of the covenant of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Lord of hosts, and the Son of pure Mary, who is sealed in the virginity of her conscience and body."<sup>442</sup> The name of the

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<sup>440</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie, p. 171; Daoud, p. 82.

<sup>441</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie, p. 152; Daoud, p. 69.

<sup>442</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie, p. 157; Daoud, p. 76.

Virgin Mary is mentioned every time the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God is celebrated and affirmed.

Similarly, in the Anaphora of St. Basil the priest affirms during the Prayer of Thanksgiving, that God the Father causes the light of His only-begotten Son, the Lord and God Jesus Christ, "who was made man from the Holy Spirit and from the Holy Virgin Mary," to shine upon the faithful.<sup>443</sup> During the Prayer of Intercession, the priest again makes supplication to the holy pure Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, who is full of grace and mercy at all times; the congregation responds by saying three times: "Mary is continually virgin."<sup>444</sup> Shortly thereafter, before seeking the intercession of the numerous saints and martyrs, the ministering deacon first calls upon the name of the great, holy, glorified, pure and honorable Lady, the Virgin Mary, Mother of God.<sup>445</sup> Thus, the Anaphora of St. Basil honors the Blessed Virgin Mary especially for her purity, holiness, and ever-virginity.

In the Anaphora of St. Cyril, a brief account of the mystery of the triune God and the birth of the Son of God is given. The anaphora upholds the divinity and humanity of our Lord, acknowledging both the Holy Spirit's and the Virgin Mary's participation in the incarnation. The eucharistic prayer develops three themes which are related to St. Mary's role in the

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<sup>443</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie, p. 341; Daoud, p. 158.

<sup>444</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie, p. 349; Daoud, p. 163.

<sup>445</sup>Daoud, p. 163.

mystery of the incarnation: 1) The one who is born from Mary is God; he is one of the Trinity; 2) he was born from a virgin without an earthly father and yet is perfectly human, lacking nothing of human nature; 3) it is the body taken from Mary which we take in the life-giving food, which becomes the body and blood of Christ.

The Father was with his Son and the Holy Spirit before there were hours and days, before there were months and years.

The One was not before the Other, and the Second was not before the Third. How swift is the speed of lightning and how swift is the movement of eagles' wings!

They are united without separation, connected without being mixed, they live in trinity, they are joined in oneness, equal in persons and similar in light and appearance.

The Father did not beget his Son to help him in his work before the world was created, and the existence of the Holy Spirit is not to contribute wisdom and work.

Let us speak of his birth from God the Father only. At that time he had no mother because the existence of the creatures had not yet appeared. Again let us speak of and proclaim the birth of him who is alone the Son of God and who alone was born without an earthly Father from the Virgin, the daughter of David.

His humanity was not inferior because he had no Father to be born of his seed, but was perfectly incarnated from a virgin only.

As Eve's female nature was not inferior through having no mother when she was formed from the bone of Adam's side, and as the building of the body of the first Adam did not lose anything when a bone of his side was taken away, so also the seal of Mary's virginity was not destroyed when she gave birth to the Father of Adam in the flesh;

And as Adam did not feel pain when a bone was taken from his side, so also the Galilean Mother of God did



not feel travail.

Thus we believe and thus we affirm that this bread which we break is the body of Christ which he took from the daughter of the Hebrews.

We also believe that this cup is the blood of the Deity shed from the side of God's Lamb. We also believe that this sign of the cross is the image of Christ's crucifixion when he was stretched out at the time of his suffering.

We bow before the altar of him who is clothed with a vesture dipped in blood and before that vesture dipped in blood, world without end.<sup>446</sup>

In the Anaphora of St. Jacob of Serugh, the celebrant priest recalls the words of Christ to His Holy Mother Mary, when he said in the covenant of mercy that whoever remembers her and calls upon her name will have eternal life.<sup>447</sup> The congregation is encouraged to trust the Mother of their Lord, the Lady Mary, who is described as the "shield of the human race," giving birth to the Saviour of the world.

#### THE ANAPHORA OF ST. MARY<sup>448</sup>

In examining the Anaphora of St. Mary, it is important to clarify first the meaning of the title. The title has been misleading, suggesting to some readers that it represents a eucharistic prayer addressed to the Holy Virgin; clearly, the "Anaphora of Mary" is a eucharistic prayer addressed to God. It

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<sup>446</sup>Daoud, p. 218.

<sup>447</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie, p. 445; Daoud, p. 230.

<sup>448</sup>Daoud, pp. 104-121.

unites the praise of God with the narration of His wondrous work of salvation wrought through the Blessed Virgin Mary. God's dealings with the Virgin are celebrated as epitomizing His dealings with the whole of humanity. As in all the eucharistic prayers of the divine liturgy, a contemplative, meditative element is present. From the opening of the anaphora, the wonder of the Blessed Virgin giving birth and the mighty mystery of the eucharistic offering are contemplated together with humility and love.<sup>449</sup> This thought is further emphasized in one of the anaphora's opening prayers: "O Mary, for this we love and exalt thee, because thou didst bear for us the true food of righteousness and the true drink of life."<sup>450</sup> Soon after, the words of the priest recount the mystery of the saving act of God who alone made the Blessed Virgin worthy of humanity's honor and exaltation: "Truly God the Father looked down from heaven towards the east, the west, the north, and the south, and towards all the ends (of the earth). He breathed in every savor and found none like unto thee He approved they savor and loved thy beauty and so sent to thee his Son whom he loveth."<sup>451</sup>

The thanksgiving of the anaphora leading up to the Sanctums is rather lengthy and includes the "prayer of Faith", or the Nicene Creed. After a Trishagion said by the people, the priest begins the praise of the Holy Virgin. Mary is typified in images

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<sup>449</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie, p. 215; Daoud, p. 104.

<sup>450</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie, p. 218; Daoud, p. 105.

<sup>451</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie, p. 226; Daoud, p. 106.

from the lives of all the great men and women of the Old Testament from Adam to Malachi.

In contrast to other traditions which minimize the Virgin's symbolic role in the Old Testament and instead concentrate on the New Testament passages speaking of her, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church finds in the Old Testament a rich treasure of inexhaustible symbolization of the Holy Virgin. The poetry of the "Anaphora of St. Mary" gives a vivid impression of the abundance of images:

O Virgin, full of glory, with whom and with what likeness shall we liken thee? Thou are the loom from which Emmanuel took his ineffable garment of flesh. He made the warp from the same flesh as that of Adam, and the woof is thy flesh. The shuttle is the Word himself, Jesus Christ. The length of the warp is the shadow of God the Most High. The weaver is the Holy Spirit.

How marvelous and wonderful is this thing! O bridge over which the ancient fathers crossed from death unto life! O ladder from earth to heaven, through thee the first creation was renewed!

St. Mary is the hope of Adam when he lost his identity by his fall and was driven out of the Garden of Eden in a state of hopelessness:

Thou wast the hope of Adam when he was driven out from paradise, the meekness of Abel who was killed through unrighteousness, the kindness of Seth, the works of Enoch, the ard of Noah through which he was saved from the evil destruction, the blessing and portion of Shem;

Throughout the Old Testament, Mary is indirectly signified by the symbols through which the work of God was performed:

the sojourning of Abraham, the savour of Isaac, the ladder of Jacob, the comforter of Joseph, the tables of Moses, the bush of Sinai, the bells in the garment

of Aaron the priest, the rod which grew, blossomed and bore fruit,

the stone of testimony of Joshua, the fleece of Gideon, the bottle of ointment and horn of oil of Samuel, the root of Jesse of which he boasted, the chariots of Amminadib, the harp of David, the crown of Solomon, the garden enclosed, the spring shut up;

When the prophets began to prophesy about the coming of the Messiah, she was the foundation of their prophecy:

the golden omen of Elijah, the curse of Elisha, the virgin conception of which Isaiah prophesied, the first giving birth without intercourse of which Daniel (also spoke),

the mountain of Pharan of Habakkuk, the closed house in the east of Ezekiel, the place in Bethlehem from which the law goes forth, the land of Ephratah of Micah, the tree of life of Silondis, the healer of Nahum's wounds, the rejoicing of Zechariah, the clean hall of Malachi.

When the Apostles began to preach, she provided them with the subject of their preaching. When the martyrs were going to their execution, she was their mother; they were martyred in her name, for the sake of her son. In her purity, virginity and holiness, she is the sister of the angels, and the model of religious men and women:

O Virgin, thou art the ideal and the prophecy of the prophets; the favour of the apostles, the mother of martyrs; the sister of angels; the boast of the young men and the virgins and the monks who are watchful day and night at thy gates.<sup>452</sup>

The "Anaphora of St. Mary" highlights the thematic significance of the Holy Virgin, the mystery of the incarnation, and the saving work of God throughout the Old Testament from its

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<sup>452</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie, pp. 134-135; Daoud, pp. 107-108.

first pages on. Adam's disobedience and consequent exile from paradise look toward his subsequent restoration and joy through the mystery of the incarnation from the daughter of Eve, the Virgin Mary. Ethiopian Orthodox tradition holds that God promised to Adam restoration to his former place after five-and-a-half days,<sup>453</sup> anticipating the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ from the Virgin Mary 5,500 years later, for "with God, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day" (2 Peter 3:8). In addition to finding the mystery of the incarnation anticipated within the Old Testament Scriptures, tradition also maintains that before the world existed the blessed Virgin Mary existed in the mind of God. Hence all creation including Adam and Eve was created for the sake of Mary and the blessing which through her God would bestow upon the world.<sup>454</sup>

Thus, the "Anaphora of St. Mary" extols the Virgin's purity and holiness; she was chosen by God to be the Mother of His Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It recounts the story of her conception through the working of the Holy Spirit as well as her obedience and devotion to God. There is a long passage which speaks about her purity:

O Virgin, thou wast not conceived through unclean lust, but in lawful marriage wast thou born from Hanna and Eliakim.

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<sup>453</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie, p. 229; Daoud, p. 109.

<sup>454</sup>Taamera Maryam, p. 9; Budge, One Hundred Ten Miracles, p. xliii.

O Virgin, thou didst not grow in mirth like the Hebrew daughters who stiffened their necks, but thou didst live in the sanctuary in holiness and purity.

O Virgin, thou didst not eat earthly bread but heavenly bread prepared in the heaven of heavens.

O Virgin, thou didst not drink earthly drink but heavenly drink poured from the heaven of heavens.

O Virgin, thou didst not know uncleanness like the women that were before thee and are to come after thee, but thou are adorned with holiness and purity.

O Virgin, the wicked young men could not entice thee, but the angels of heaven visited thee, and as it was said, the priests and the high priests praised thee.

O Virgin, thou wast not espoused to Joseph for coming together, but in order that he might keep thee in purity, and thus it was fulfilled.

When God the Father saw thy purity he sent to thee his effulgent angel, whose name is Gabriel, and he said unto thee: The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.

The Word came to thee without being separated from the bosom of his Father; thou didst conceive him without his being limited, and he stayed in thy womb without making subtraction from above or addition beneath.

There abode in thy womb the estimate and unsearchable fire of the godhead. It is not just to compare him with earthly fire. Fire has measurement and volume but of Deity it cannot be said that it is like this or even seems to be like this.<sup>455</sup>

The richness of language and the vivid imagery used here in describing the wonder of God and the favor bestowed on the Blessed Virgin Mary are characteristic. In seeking to convey the wondrous workings of God through the virginal conception of his divine Word by the blessed Mary, the anaphora employs the imagery

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<sup>455</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie, pp. 135-136; Daoud, pp. 108-109.

of God's eternal flame of fire:

O Virgin, when there abode in thy womb the fire of the godhead, whose face is fire, whose clothes are fire, whose covering is fire, how did it not burn thee? In what part of thy womb were the seven curtains of the flame of fire prepared and spread? Were they on the right or the left side while thou wast a small body? In what part of thy womb was the glittering cherubic throne, compassed by the flame of fire, prepared and planted while thou wast a young bride?

How wonderful it is! A mother and a maiden; the narrowness of the womb and the infinite; conception without intercourse, as a bee conceives, from the voice of a word; milk (to feed her baby) with virginity. When I think of this my mind likes to swim in the depths of thy Son's seas, and the billows from the hiding place of thy Beloved sweep across it...<sup>456</sup>

The pages of this anaphora, perhaps more than any other anaphora of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, express the deepest wonder and awe. The combination of vivid imagery with the breathlessness of ecstasy, the obvious delight in paradox, all create a powerful mood for the poetic contemplation of God's handiwork in Mary.

According to tradition, the "Anaphora of St. Mary" was the work of Abba Heryacos (Cyriacus), bishop of the province of Behnesa or Oxyrrhynchus in upper Egypt. It is used on all Marian feast days as well as on the day preceding Christmas, December 28, on the memorial day of the Annunciation, and on the memorial day of Abba Heryacos.

The "Anaphora of St. Mary" concludes with the dismissal at the end of the service of the divine liturgy. The faithful are reminded of the Holy Virgin, MOTHER of God, whose life, full of

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<sup>456</sup>Daoud, p. 112.

grace, was dedicated to the work of God from her birth to the death of her beloved Son on the cross and on unto the everlasting consummation. The text closes with a prayer of supplication to the Virgin Mary asking her to intercede for the faithful with her beloved Son whom she was favored by God to conceive, bear, and accompany throughout his earthly life of suffering and tribulation, and with whom she celebrated his resurrection and victory in God's eternal kingdom:

O Virgin, remind him who remembers, not forgetting any.

O Virgin, remind him of his birth, delivered from thee at Bethlehem, of his being wrapped in swaddling clothes and his being warmed by the breath of ass and cow on the cold days.

O Virgin, remind him of his flight with thee when thou didst flee one country to another in the days of the cursed Herod.

O Virgin, remind him of the bitter tears shed from thy eyes and dropped on the face of thy Beloved Son.

O Virgin, remind him of hunger, thirst, poverty, sadness and all the trouble which thou didst suffer together with him.

Remind him of mercy and not of destruction. Remind him of compassion and not of anger.

Remind him of the sinners and not of the righteous. Remind him of the impure and not of the pure.<sup>457</sup>

As the congregation departs, the sweet assurance of the loving intercession of the Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, at her beloved Son, goes with them.

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<sup>457</sup>Mashafa Kiddassie, pp. 266-267; Daoud, p. 120.



### CHAPTER III

## THE FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY (FILSATA) IN ETHIOPIA

### INTRODUCTION

The Ethiopian orthodox tewahedo church teaches that our Lady, the Virgin Mary, was assumed into heaven in soul and body. Like the rest of humanity, she underwent physical death, but after her death, her body was taken up into heaven, and her tomb was found to be empty.<sup>458</sup> Thus, for Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, the blessed Virgin has passed beyond death and judgment and lives already in the age to come. Yet she is not utterly separated from the rest of humanity, for all humanity awaits and hopes to share that same bodily glory which Mary now enjoys. Even in her perfect state she intercedes for humanity until the final judgment.

The death of the Mother of God is an affirmation of the reality of the humanity of Mary and in this way attests also to the humanity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the incarnation. It is through Mary that one beholds the human nature of her Son as the incarnate Son of God. Her death confirms that she is not a heavenly being but is truly our human sister. As our sister, she became a prototype of the Church, receiving from God a universal maternity over humanity as one who loves the whole world, longing for the perfect salvation of all.

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<sup>458</sup>Arras, V., De Transitu Mariae Apocrypha Aethiopice I, p. 99.

The Assumption of the Virgin Mary is the most highly honored feast among all the feasts of the saints. It ranks second only to the feasts of the Lord. Observed on August 16, the Feast of the Assumption commemorates the entrance of St. Mary's corporeal body and soul into heaven as she preceded the faithful believers, taking her seat at the right hand of her bridegroom and Son. The feast is based on the conviction that the Lord did not permit the body in which He Himself had dwelt to fall prey to corruption and dissolution: though Mary as a human being underwent death, she was taken up into heaven. To Ethiopians, the celebration of this event bears a powerful witness to the eschatological truth of their faith. As members of the Church, they await the final consummation. On the Last Day, the righteous will rise from the grave and be united once more to a body--not a body such as we possess now, but one that is transfigured and "spiritual" (1 Cor. 15:40-42), a body in which inward sanctity is made outwardly manifest. The Ethiopian faithful, assured of their resurrection first and foremost by the resurrection of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, are being further assured by the Assumption of their sister, the Virgin Mary, and therefore observe the Feast of the Assumption with high honor and supreme joy.<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>459</sup>Bulgakov, S. The Orthodox Church (London: The Centenary Press, 1935), p. 139; Florovsky, G. "The Ever-Virgin Mother of God," The Mother of God, edited by E. L. Mascall, (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1951), p. 63

ECCLESIASTICAL FEASTS

Since there is a large number of religious feasts in the Ethiopian Orthodox liturgical year, the celebration of these feasts forms a regular, almost continuous chain in the life of the Church. The frequent feasts and holy days are not regarded lightly but are strictly observed by the members of the Ethiopian orthodox tewahedo church.

There are four major categories of feasts: feasts of the Lord, feasts of the angels, feasts of the saints, and feasts of the martyrs. The feasts of the Lord are divided into major and minor occasions of celebration and worship. The major feasts are:<sup>460</sup>

- The Annunciation, known as the "Good News" (Beserat) and observed on 7 Megabit or March 17 (W.C.).
- Christmas (Ledat), observed on 29 Tahsas or January 7 (W.C.)
- Epiphany (Temkat), observed on 18 Ter or January 27 (W.C.)
- The Transfiguration (Dabra Tabor), observed on 13 Nehase or August 19 (W.C.)
- Palm Sunday (Hosanna)
- The Crucifixion (Seklet)
- The Resurrection, or Easter (Tensa'e)
- The Ascension (Ergat)

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<sup>460</sup>The Ethiopian calendar is difficult to understand. The year has 12 months of 30 days each; the extra five days (or six in a leap year) form a special group at the end. The year begins with the first day of Maskaram which equals August 29 of the Julian calendar or September 11 (Sept. 12 in a leap year) of the modern Gregorian calendar used in the Western world. The names of the other months are: Tekemt (Julian October), Hedar (November), Tahsas (December), Ter (January), Yakatit (February), Megabit (March), Miyazya (April), Genbot (May), Sane (June), Hamle (July), and Nehase (August). In the following lists, I give the Ethiopian date and add the Gregorian or Western equivalent of it. See Budge, A History of Ethiopia, pp. 138-141, and Velat, Etudes sur le Me'eraf, pp. 21-26.

-Pentecost (Paraklitos)<sup>461</sup>

Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost are moveable feasts. Christmas, Epiphany, and the Transfiguration are immoveable feasts.<sup>462</sup> The Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is of course also commemorated each Sunday.

In addition, nine secondary or minor feasts of the Lord are observed. They include:

-The Invention of the Holy Cross by St. Helen, the mother of Constantine, observed on 22 Maskaram (October 2 W.C.)

-Three simple liturgies, Preaching, Light, and Shepherd (Sebkat, Berhan, and Nolawe), held on the three Sundays before Christmas to thank God for the prophets who predicted the coming of the Son of God, the light of the world and shepherd of souls.

-The Circumcision (Gezeret) of the infant Jesus eight days after his birth in accordance with the law of Moses.

-The Feast of Simeon or the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple (Sim'on), observed forty days after our Lord's birth to commemorate the fulfillment of the law of Moses (Lev. 12:6-8; Lk. 2:22-24; Matt. 5:17).

-Cana in Galilee (Gelila) held in remembrance of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's first miracle at the wedding in Cana.

-Mount of Olives (Dabra Zayte), a moveable feast, remembering the prophecy of the temple's destruction and the details associated with the end of human history (Matthew 24). In the countryside, it is customary for the people to prepare various foods to give as alms to the poor on this day.

-The Cross of March (Meskel Megabit), in remembrance of St. Helen's excavation of the cross (which began in the month of March and ended in September).

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<sup>461</sup>Abba Gorgorios, B., The History of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (Addis Ababa: E.O.C. Apostolic Institution Press, 1974), pp. 127-133.

<sup>462</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

Besides these major and minor feasts of the Lord, ecclesiastical feasts also commemorate the angels and the major events in the lives of the saints such as their martyrdom, death and departure to paradise.

The Ethiopian orthodox tewahedo church observes these feast days by annual celebrations as well as by monthly liturgical commemorations. While the monthly feasts are generally observed locally in the countryside parishes, the annual feasts unite worshippers from several provinces for a regional observance. Thus their celebration typically includes a pilgrimage of several days to regional sanctuaries bearing the name of the saint whom the feast day commemorates. At those occasions, the parishes hosting the feast day celebrations customarily extend hospitality and accommodations to the sojourner. Opening their homes to the pilgrims who seek God's blessings, they believe they share in the mercy of the blessings given on the holy day.

Among the feasts of the saints, the Marian feasts have a special place in the hearts of the faithful. It is to them that we now turn.

#### PRESCRIBED MARIAN FEASTS

A complete list of the prescribed Marian feasts is found in the introductory rules of the Taamera Maryam or Miracles of the

Blessed Virgin Mary.<sup>463</sup> The celebration of these feasts entails the chanting of a variety of Marian hymns and readings from the Book of Miracles, which is also read every Sunday. All in all, there are thirty-three prescribed feasts of the Virgin Mary according to the Ethiopian orthodox tewahedo church calendar.<sup>464</sup> They include:

- 7 Nehase (August 13 W.C.), Mary's conception (Qoeserata)
- 16-21 Nehase (August 22-27 W.C.), the six-day festival of the Assumption of the Virgin (Filsata Kiddane Mehret)
- 10 Maskaram (September 20 W.C.), the "entry of the icon" (Ba'ata Seela) of our Lady into the Egyptian city of Sedenya where it became life-like, shedding tears and perspiring
- 21 Maskaram and 21 Tekemt (October 1 and 31 W.C.), monthly Marian commemorations
- 6 Hedar (November 16 W.C.), the "entry" (Ba'ata) of the Virgin Mary into the ancient monastery of Dabra Queskuam in Egypt
- 21 Hedar (November 30 W.C.), the manifestation of the Virgin to the prophet Zachariah (Zech. 4:2) in the form of a golden candlestick (Tekewama-Mahetot)
- 3 Tahsas (December 13 W.C.), the Presentation or "entry" (Ba'ata) of the three-year old Virgin Mary to the Temple
- 22 Tahsas (December 31 W.C.), the commemoration of Bishop Dexius (Ba'ala Dakseios)
- 28 Tahsas (January 6 W.C.), Christmas Eve, or the Feast of Immanuel (Gehna)
- 29 Tahsas (January 7 W.C.), Christmas or the Nativity

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<sup>463</sup>Taamera Maryam, pp. 16-18; cf. Budge, One Hundred Ten Miracles, pp. xlvii-lii.

<sup>464</sup>Each day of a feast extending over several days as well as of the entire fifteen days fast before Filsata is counted separately to arrive at the number 33.

(Ledat) of the Redeemer

- 21 Ter (January 30 W.C.), the Feast of the Dormition, Mary's "Manifestation" (Astereo Maryam) or her "Rest" (Erefta)<sup>465</sup>
- 16 Yakatit (February 24 W.C.), Mary's reception from her Son of the "Covenant of Mercy" (Kiddane Mehret)
- 29 Megabit (April 7 W.C.), "When she conceived the Savior" (Baza-sansato le-modahanine)
- 1 Genbot (May 9 W.C.), Mary's Birth (Ledata)<sup>466</sup>
- 21 - 25 Genbot (May 29 - June 2 W.C.), Mary's coming to Egypt, celebrated with a huge gathering of pilgrims at Dabra Mitmaq; the last days, 25 Genbot commemorates the miracle "when her Son planted dry rods and turned them into trees" (Baza takale wolda abatra yebusene woreseyomou a'ewame)
- 8 Sene (June 15 W.C.), the day "when her Son split the rock and made water flow from it to bring healing to the sick" (Bazaanka'a wolda maye emgoqueh wokonomou fawese ledwoyan)
- 20 Sene (June 27 W.C.), the day "when the Apostles were assembled and her Son came down to build her house" (Baza tegabeu haworiat wo worda wolda lehens'tete beta)
- 21 Sene (June 28 W.C.), commemoration of the consecration of her house (Qeddase beta), that is, of the first church built in honor of Mary.

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<sup>465</sup>According to Ethiopian Orthodox tradition, Mary died on 21 Ter. As we have seen, many different legends about her death and burial are in circulation. The commonly accepted version states that the Apostles, while taking the Virgin's body to be buried at Gethesemane, were met by angels who lifted it up to heaven where John laid it under the Tree of Life. Later, after the Apostles prayed and fasted, the Lord returned his mother's body to the Apostles for burial on 16 Nahase. Three days later she was raised to heaven.

<sup>466</sup>The introductory rules in the book of Miracles mention the birth date of the Virgin as 10 Maskaram; other traditions go with 1 Genbot (May 1 Julian C.). The Ethiopian Orthodox Church accepts the latter date in agreement with the patristic writers (Sa'atat or Horologium, p. 391).

- 21 Hamle, monthly commemoration.

It seems that the present order of Marian feasts has been a common tradition in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church ever since the reign of King Zara Yaqob. Four of them are particularly esteemed by the Ethiopian faithful: the Nativity of Mary, her Presentation in the Temple, her Dormition, and her Assumption.

Since antiquity the Ethiopian faithful have expressed their devotion in a number of ways both somber and joyful. Both fasting and feasting have been a traditional part of Ethiopian life to this day. It is through acts of good will such as feeding the hungry, clothing the needy, visiting the sick, and comforting the sorrowful during the Marian feasts that believers live out their love for the Virgin.

### FASTING

In the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition, every festal celebration is preceded by fasting and prayer as preparatory acts. In this respect, the Ethiopian practice is part of the larger Judeo-Christian tradition in which fasting has always played an important role as a moral and spiritual discipline. In the Judaic tradition, fasting was generally associated with times of mourning, calamities or crisis, and with urgent supplication. It was also practiced in connection with spontaneous private or



public observances.<sup>467</sup>

The Church inherited and preserved the practice of fasting from the Judaic tradition. Around the time of our Lord, fasting was also rigorously practiced by the disciples of John the Baptist (Mark 2:18). In Christian practice, fasting consists in refraining from food, drink and worldly things in order that one might pray more easily and be at peace with God.<sup>468</sup> Thus, fasting means not only to fast with the body but also with the soul. It is regarded as a deed of virtue, an exercise to defeat the desires of the body and to strengthen the will, and a form of repentance. Fasting as an offering, a voluntary refraining from that which one is otherwise allowed, springs from the love and respect which one feels for God. It also serves as a means of taming the will of the body--a visible sign of our zeal and perseverance in the struggle to become more like God and the angels who do not need food. Moreover, fasting keeps the body healthy. "Do not have an insatiable appetite for any luxury, and do not give yourself up to food; for overeating brings sickness, and gluttony leads to nausea. Many have died of gluttony, but he who is careful to avoid it prolongs his life," says the wise Jesus, son of Sirach (Sirach 37:29-31).

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ himself fasted forty days and forty nights in the wilderness before beginning to preach the

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<sup>467</sup>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), Vol. II, pp. 241-242, article on "Fast, fasting."

<sup>468</sup>Fetha Nagast, op. cit., pp. 219-220.

Gospel (Matthew 4:2; Luke 4:2). He taught his disciples how to fast (Matthew 6:16-18) and told them that demons cannot be driven out except by fasting and prayer (Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29). The Apostles also fasted, as did their disciples (Acts 13:2-3; 2 Cor. 6:5), and set an example for all Christians. In the early church, regular weekly fast days were widely held on Wednesdays and Fridays, as indicated in the Didache: "Your fasts must not be identified with those of the hypocrites; they fast on Mondays and Thursdays, but you should fast on Wednesdays and on Fridays."<sup>469</sup> The polemic here is against the practice of the Pharisees.

The Ethiopian orthodox tewahedo church has affirmed this practice of spiritual discipline throughout the ages. The discipline usually includes strict observance of fasting, dedication to extended prayer, to alms-giving, reflection and meditation. Even worship itself serves as a kind of spiritual discipline in that it requires long periods of standing in the practice of the Ethiopian Church. While the exercise of spiritual discipline is customary in many churches throughout the world, nowhere is the ordinance of fasting so rigorously observed as in the Ethiopian orthodox tewahedo church.<sup>470</sup> From the age of seven, every child is required to participate fully in the fasts in preparation for the feasts. In fact, many families expect

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<sup>469</sup>C. C. Richardson, tr. and ed., "Didache 8:1", Library of Christian Classic, Vol. I: Early Christian Fathers (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1970); Clement of Alexandria, Les Stromateis 75.2 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1951).

<sup>470</sup>Hyatt, The Church of Abyssinia, p. 157.

their children to practice all spiritual disciplines required of adults including confession, penance, and the abstinence from meat, eggs, and dairy products.

In the Ethiopian tradition, prescribed fasts regularly precede the major religious holidays in which feasts are observed. A definition and a list of all prescribed fasts is given in the Fetha Nagast, a venerable and important book of canon and civil law.<sup>471</sup> There are also unprescribed fasts which are not included in the Fetha Nagast but widely observed by monastic communities, devoted individuals, and those under the discipline of penance. It can be said without exaggeration that the Ethiopian church year with its numerous, often simultaneous periods of fasts of daily, weekly, or monthly duration literally moves from one fast to another. In fact, almost two-thirds of the days of the year are devoted to some form of fasting.<sup>472</sup>

For Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Christians fasting is a serious obligation. The canon law defines fasting as "an abstinence from food, observed by the people at certain times

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<sup>471</sup>The Fetha Nagast ("law of the Kings") is an authoritative collection of canon law and civil law which is sometimes claimed in the Ethiopian tradition to be the work of the Fathers of Nicea. Its present form goes back to an Arabic original compiled for the Coptic Church under Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria (1235-1243) by Ibn al-Assal. In Ethiopia it was enforced since the reign of Emperor Zara Yaqob, revised under Yasu the Great (1682-1706), and honored by both spiritual and secular authorities. For a survey of the content see Hyatt, The Church of Abyssinia, pp. 225f. The great Italian scholar I. Guidi prepared a Western edition with an Italian translation: Il Fetha Nagast o Legislazione dei Re 2 vols. (Rome, 1897 and 1899).

<sup>472</sup>Hyatt, The Church of Abyssinia, p. 157.

determined by law in order to attain the forgiveness of sins and much reward, thus obeying the one who fixed the law. Fasting serves to weaken the forces of concupiscence so that the body may weaken the desire of the flesh and thus strengthen the spiritual good-will through obedience to the rational soul."<sup>473</sup> God honors the fast of those who first empty themselves of all impurity, fasting with a clean heart and conscience.

Fasting then is more than mere abstinence from certain foods. It involves a certain kind of sensory deprivation which isolates the various parts of the body from disturbance or distraction so that a person may devote himself or herself in full attention to God. It also helps to strip away excesses and indulgences in order that one may stand before God in utter dependence and humility. Thus, eyes are to fast from seeing evil, hands from doing harm, tongues from gossip, and ears from rumor; feet are to be still, and the body should be wholly attentive to God.

The Fetha Nagast prescribes seven fasting periods throughout the year. In addition, the Church also observes some unprescribed fasts generally known as the forty days fasts of Queskuam which are held in the months of Tekemt and Hedar (October-November W.C.).<sup>474</sup> The list of the prescribed fasts is as follows:

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<sup>473</sup>Fetha Nagast, p. 216.

<sup>474</sup>Dabra Queskuam ("Mount of Queskuam") is the ancient monastery in Egypt where, according to tradition, the holy family took refuge during their flight from Herod.

- The forty-three day fast preceding the Nativity of Our Lord and lasting from 15 Hedar to 29 Tahsas (November 25-January 7, W.C.).<sup>475</sup>
- The eve of Christmas and the eve of Epiphany (Gehad) in honor of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's birth.
- The fast of Jonah, also called Ninevah, which is observed two weeks before Lent for three days and recalls the repentance of the people of Ninevah as a result of Jonah's preaching.
- The fast of Holy Lent, lasting fifty-six days in preparation of Easter. It is the oldest, longest, and most important fast of the Ethiopian orthodox tewahedo church.
- The fast of the Apostles, beginning on the Monday after Pentecost and concluding on 5 Hamle (July 12, W.C.) with the feast of St. Paul and St. Peter. It lasts for a maximum of forty-five days and a minimum of fifteen.
- Wednesday and Friday fasts observed every week except for the fifty days between Easter and Pentecost.
- The fifteen-day fast preceding the Feast of the Assumption of the blessed Virgin Mary. It begins on 1 Nehase (August 7, W.C.) and continues through 15 Nehase (August 22, W.C.), the day of preparation for the Feast.

We will look in more detail at this last period of fasting which is an integral part of the celebration of the most important Marian feast of the year.

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<sup>475</sup>Also known as the "fast of Adam" and the prophets who faithfully fasted and prayed in order that God might fulfill His promise to save Adam and his children, this period commemorated Adam's repentance and thus the true spirit of fasting.

RITUAL DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSUMPTION (FILSATA):

THE PRE-FEAST DEVOTIONAL PERIOD

The Ethiopian tradition maintains that the fifteen-day pre-Assumption fast was instituted by the Apostles. As an apostolic fast, it is particularly revered by the clergy and the monastic communities. Although the entire church participates in the fast, the clergy experience a special historical connection with their apostolic predecessors.

The fifteen days are commonly referred to as "the little Lent"; it is a sober and earnest time in which people of all ages participate. Even small children under seven years of age, the sick, and the sojourner, who are normally exempt from the discipline, maintain the fast of the Assumption.<sup>476</sup> The fast demands strict abstinence from all meat and eggs. As a rule, the staple diet consists of fruit, baked beans and uncooked food.

In the somber mood of this holy season, the abstinence from food extends to the abstinence from all worldly pleasure and merry-making as well. No joyful feasts, not even weddings, are permitted during this time, nor is any other kind of public merry-making. Some people subject themselves to additional discipline by leaving home and spending the fifteen days in isolation in order to devote themselves to undisturbed, solitary meditation. Some elect to abstain from conversation with anyone and to subsist for the fifteen days on as little as a handful of

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<sup>476</sup>Fetha Nagast., p. 219.

beans. Such devotion is common in this season signifying the reverence and love of the faithful for every aspect of the life of the Virgin Mary.

The "positive" side of abstinence means attention to the disciplines of self-examination, meditation and attendance at public worship. These forms of fasting are not merely external performances but include attention to the true acts of justice, the active doing of good works. During the pre-Assumption fast days an atmosphere of good-will and a heightened sensitivity to the needs of others permeates the country. There is an acute awareness of one's own part in the problems and dilemmas of the day. A quiet soberness, even somberness, pervades the attitude of the people during this time.

Many congregations conclude each fast day with the celebration of the divine liturgy and the partaking of Holy Communion. No one may receive communion without having fulfilled the necessary disciplines, especially fasting. Fasting prior to the reception of the Holy Eucharist is a rule in the Ethiopian orthodox tewahedo church which dates back to the early centuries. Canon law threatens with excommunication anyone who partakes without first fasting.<sup>477</sup> In addition, certain rules are given concerning personal hygiene; it is expected that all believers concern themselves with physical as well as spiritual purity. Compliance with these disciplines is usually monitored by the family priest or "father confessor" who is responsible for the

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<sup>477</sup>Fetha Nagast, p. 203

people of his parish.

### THE VIGIL AND MAHELET

Each evening during the fifteen days preceding the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, the faithful gather for worship. Across the land, one can hear the joyful ringing of the church bells inviting the people to join in the all-night prayer and praise to God. Beginning at midnight and lasting till dawn, these vigils are generally well-attended.

The vigil service itself is taken from the standard prayer book, Saatat-za lelit woza negeh or "Horologium of the Night and Day Hours," attributed to Abba Giyorgis of Gascha in the fourteenth century.<sup>478</sup> Invocations for the dead, the sick, the sorrowful, as well as supplications for peace and rainfall, are found within its pages. In addition, there are many prayers and praises addressed to the Virgin Mary and to the angels and saints of heaven. Also included is a devotional lesson for every day of the year's holy days.

We have spoken already of the many different hymns in honor of Mary, most of which are chanted or recited in communal prayer during the vigils and at other times as well as in private meditation. Although the worshipper acknowledges at the beginning of each all-night vigil that "not even the tongues of the cherubim and seraphim in heaven can exhaust the telling of

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<sup>478</sup>see above, (chapter 1), p. 65b.



the wonder of the blessed Virgin Mary, whose exaltation is higher than the highest mountain, whose womb is broader than the width of the sky, and whose face shines brighter than the light of the sun," the hymns present an exuberant tribute to her name.<sup>479</sup> Like a harmony of love arising from the hearts of the faithful, the chorus of voices catches the worshipper in a state of ecstasy.

For fifteen consecutive evenings the voices of the worshipping community can be heard outside the churches of Ethiopia as one continuous song of praise, supplication and prayer. Some people choose to spend each evening alone in prayer and meditation on the grounds surrounding the church, although most participate in the communal worship. Each night the congregation remains standing throughout the entire service which lasts from six to nine hours and includes after the all-night vigil the full morning service.

Following the solemn fourteen-day period of fasting and self-examination, the faithful make a final preparation for the celebration of the Feast of the Assumption. On the fifteenth evening, the sequence of the all-night vigil, followed by the morning service and the service of the divine liturgy, is broken. At this time there is a new spirit of joy and excitement as families get ready to welcome the Feast. The solemnity of the previous fourteen days gives way to shopping for food and new clothing. The whole family co-operates and participates in the

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<sup>479</sup>Sa'atat the Lelit Woza-Negeh, pp. 13-14.

preparation which includes cleaning the house and cooking the food. The preparation is also spiritual preparation; it includes cleaning and preparing the body for the reception of the Holy Eucharist. Those who have spent the past fourteen days in solitude and meditation come out from their isolation to mingle with the others, preparing themselves for the imminent Feast.

Around 5:00 p.m. on the eve of the Feast, church bells begin to alert the people that it is about time to gather for worship. It is customary to arrive early for the service which begins by 7:00 p.m.. Two services are held simultaneously, namely the all-night vigil or the Office, and the Mahelet, which is chanted by the debteras. The people can choose between these two: the vigil which is solemn in tone, or the Mahelet which is more joyful and full of emotion. In the Mahelet, every piece of equipment is used: prayer sticks, sistrums, drums. The musicians wear lively costumes including turbans. They also perform their rhythmic movements, a kind of sacred dance. At certain moments during the service the congregation joins in the spirit of celebration by clapping their hands and uttering high-pitched trills as acclamations of joy, thus adding to the excitement and vitality of the occasion. Each of these services continues until midnight, though many individuals still remain in solitude or seek the quiet corners of the church as they continue their private meditations.

THE MORNING SERVICE (READING OF THE BOOK OF MIRACLES)

The Morning Service during the pre-Assumption devotional days includes a great deal of reading from the Miracles, but also the Prayer of the Covenant and the recitation of the Weddassie Maryam. The reading of the Miracles is further divided into two parts, the introductory rite and the Miracles themselves.

As we have pointed out earlier, the introductory rite forms a prelude to the reading of the Miracles whose intent it is to prepare the hearts of the worshippers first by describing Mary's essence and second, by giving instruction concerning one's approach to the hearing of the Miracles. Apart from the introductory rite, the focus of the book of Miracles is less on a description of Mary's theological importance, but rather on specific acts and events--"miracles", as the title suggests, which are connected with her earthly life. The readings during this pre-feast period give special prominence to the stories of the conception of Mary, her birth, the annunciation, the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the flight into Egypt, her receiving of the Covenant of Mercy, and of course, her death and assumption.<sup>480</sup>

Prior to the reading of the Miracles, toward the end of the introductory rite, a highly ritualized ceremony occurs in order to prepare the hearts of the worshippers further. It begins with the highest presiding member of the clergy offering a blessing

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<sup>480</sup>See above, pp., 49-52 (Chapter I)

over the congregation as he turns to the North, East, South and West. He then prostrates himself three times before the Ark of the Covenant and offers incense saying, "Glory and honor be unto the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, henceforth and forever more. Amen." He walks to the images of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and the Holy Virgin Mary, His Mother, and censes their icons three times saying, "Glory, honor and worship is due to the Holy Trinity; rejoice, O thou who are full of grace, God is with thee! Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. Do make supplications and intercede with thy beloved Son, so that He may pardon our sins."

After the blessing of the four corners of the world by the priest, all the clergy together chant: "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! We worship the Father of Light, and His only Son, and the Holy Spirit, the paraclete, three persons in one," and then three times: "Salutation unto Mary, the Queen, the true vine, uncultivated and pure, on which thou shalt find blessed fruit. The Son of God indeed became man from her, and she has given birth to Him who saves and pardons us all our sins. Because the Son has come down and taken upon Himself her human nature she has found grace, and all speak highly of her great honor." It is only after this brief ritual that the book of the Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary is taken up and read. During the reading, the priest censes the Ark of the Covenant including the icons of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and the Virgin and all the saints as well as the people, encircling the Holy of Holies in

the center of the sanctuary.

In a previous chapter we have already reviewed the sources of the rich store of traditional narratives and legends about the Virgin Mary and some of their content. Thus, we need to mention here only some highlights.

Especially beloved by the people are the stories of Mary's childhood. On 7 Nehase or August 13 (W.C.), the story of Mary's conception is read. It recounts how Mary's father Joachim and her mother Hanna, both righteous people, walked with God but had no offspring. Yet they persisted in hope, never doubting that one day God would give them a child. Both Joachim and Hanna withdrew and spent their time in continuous prayer and fasting, prostrating themselves with weeping and lamentation and entreating God to remove from them the shame of barrenness. Soon after, the angel of the Lord appeared and told Joachim and Hanna that God had heard their prayer. The grateful couple promised to offer its child to the service of the sanctuary. They rejoiced with great joy and gave thanks unto the Lord their God.

When Hanna had passed nine months, she brought forth a daughter. At the birth of Mary, miracles took place as many people afflicted by various diseases were brought to Hanna and healed by her touch. But there were others who were unhappy and murmured about this miraculous birth, trying to bring harm upon the family. However, the angel of the Lord protected Joachim and Hanna with their child, removing them from the reach of their enemies. The people marvelled, saying they had never seen a

child so full of grace. Joachim and Hanna named her Mary and continued to pray and fast, growing in their thankfulness for all the things God had done for them.

When the maiden was three years old, her parents brought her to the Temple of God, according to their promise. The priest and all those in the House of God came out to meet them and received Mary and blessed her saying, "God shall magnify her name in that day wherein He shall appear from her." Then he established her in the sanctuary, and all the priests and elders and the children of Israel blessed her, while God made great joy to come upon her. Then her kinfolk left and returned to their house in great joyfulness praising the Lord God because she had not clung to her parents when they brought her to the sanctuary. Mary dwelt in the House of the Lord like a pure dove, and the angel of the Lord visited her with food and drink continuously.

As we saw, the story of the Virgin's departure from this earthly life is recounted in several elaborate and colorful versions in the Ethiopian tradition. According to some, the Virgin is buried immediately following her death; in others, she is immediately taken into paradise and placed under the Tree of Life, an event witnessed by all the disciples. Yet in another version this immediate assumption is only witnessed by St. John; it is this version which has special significance for the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary because it is read on the first day of the Feast itself:

The Apostles were on their way to a place called Gethesemane with the body of the Holy Mother of God, to bury

her there. But they were confronted by the Jews who were unhappy with the Christians' claim that the Virgin's son had resurrected and ascended into heaven, and who worried that the Christians would claim that the Virgin also resurrected and ascended into heaven. So, they decided to burn the Virgin's body, and started toward the Apostles. And a strong man from among the Jews named Tawefania seized the bed on which the body of the Virgin was being carried. But, at that moment, an angel of the Lord punished Tawefania, cutting off both his hands.

After this, the angel of the Lord lifted up the body of the Virgin, together with the Apostle John, and placed the body in paradise at the foot of the Tree of Life. After John witnessed this event, he returned to the Apostles who asked him what had happened to the body of the Blessed Virgin, and he witnessed what he had seen. The Apostles, wishing to witness the same mystery, began fasting on the 1st of Nehase (or August 7--W.C.). The mystery they sought was revealed to them on the 14th of Nehase (or August 29--W.C.) when the Lord gave them the body of the Blessed Virgin which they buried the very same day. On the third day, she resurrected, and that is why it is said, "(Mary) resurrected in the same manner as her Son."<sup>481</sup>

According to the Ethiopian Church, John's witness of this event remains the principal cause for the pre-Assumption fasting and praying which follows the disciples' example. For seven months after the Virgin's departure from this earthly life into heaven, on the first of Nehase, (August 7 W.C.) the disciples began fasting and praying that the Lord might allow them to see what John had seen. After fourteen days of fasting and praying, the Lord answered their prayer and gave them the body of the Holy Mother which they buried on the same day, a Sunday. The Lord, then, raised her on the third day, Tuesday, which is celebrated as the day of the Feast of the Assumption.<sup>482</sup>

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<sup>481</sup>Weddassie Maryam, (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press 1943), pp. 209-210. Budge, Legends, p. 165.

<sup>482</sup>Ibid.

Following the reading of these stories, the Morning Service continues with the worshippers chanting, "Blessings be upon this our Lady, the Holy Virgin Mary, who gave birth to our salvation; greetings to her who is the door of the East which brought forth eternal light; greetings to her who has given birth to the Creator and who resembles the rod of Aaron which blossomed with flowers and fruit, yet without being cultivated."<sup>483</sup>

#### PRAYER OF THE COVENANT

The hymn of blessing is followed by a final prayer known as the Prayer of the Covenant. The standard morning prayer for each day of the year is known as ልክላ ገረጺ ገጽ ገጽ ገጽ : the Prayer of the Covenant; its text comes from the Ethiopian version of the "Testament of our Lord."<sup>484</sup> In the liturgical practice it is divided into three parts, the recitation of each being prefaced by the same introductory prayer, and each part being assigned to a specific time of the day:

- Part I: midnight prayer of the Covenant
- Part II: morning prayer of the Covenant
- Part III: evening prayer of the Covenant

In the daily Morning Service during the Assumption fast, all three parts are recited together. When the service of the divine liturgy is held at midnight, only Part I of the prayer of the

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<sup>483</sup>Budge, W. The Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Life of Hanna, pp. 10-11.

<sup>484</sup>Meshafa Kidassie ("The Book of the Liturgy"), p. 157.



Covenant is recited; in the morning, Part II is recited; and in the afternoon, Part III.

The Trisagion opens the introductory prayer. The priest turns his face toward the altar, facing eastward, and sings in a loud chant in the mode of Ararai: "Holy." The people follow with the traditional response:

God Holy Mighty, Holy Living, Immortal, who wast born from the Holy Virgin Mary; have mercy upon us Lord. Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Living, Immortal, who wast baptized in Jordan and crucified on the tree of the cross; have mercy upon us Lord.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Living, Immortal, who didst rise from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven in glory, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father and wilt come again in glory to judge the quick and the dead; have mercy upon us, Lord.

Glory be to the Father, Glory be to the Son, Glory be to the Holy Spirit, both now and forever, world without end. Amen and amen, so be it, so be it. Holy Trinity, Living God, have mercy upon us.<sup>485</sup>

It is noteworthy that the Holy Virgin is mentioned already in the opening line. Because of her role in the divine mystery of the incarnation, she becomes worthy to be mentioned at this high point of worship and praise, for her name is inseparable from the mention of the Incarnation. Her humanity guarantees that the true humanity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is like ours.

#### THE WEDDASSIE MARYAM

In the tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church,

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<sup>485</sup>Daoud, M. The Liturgy of the Ethiopian Church, p. 41.

each service of the all-night vigil during the fifteen days preceding the Feast of the Assumption is followed either by the service of the divine liturgy or by the recitation of the Weddassie Maryam. On Saturdays and Sundays the Weddassie Maryam follows the service of the divine liturgy; on other days it precedes it.

We mentioned earlier that the Weddassie Maryam is the most popular form of private prayer. During the fifteen pre-Assumption fasting days, however, and only at that time, the Weddassie Maryam is recited communally each day of the week. Clergy and congregation gather inside the church or outside, depending upon the size of the crowd. In their midst, a deacon sits at the feet of a learned scholar, (lin, or member) holding an open manuscript of the Weddassie Maryam. After the priest opens the occasion with prayer, the deacon begins to read, one verse at a time. Then the scholar recites from memory the meaning of the text as he has learned it from the Church's tradition. Absolute silence is maintained during his explanatory comments, and great attention is paid to him by the faithful as they seek to understand more of the traditional teaching on the prayer's inner meaning and relevance for their daily lives. The scholar is respected for his great responsibility. He does not speak from his own insight but from the honored tradition which has been entrusted to him, passed down through centuries of teaching and scholarship. The interpretation which he gives is full of touching analogies and stories which illustrate the

holiness, mercy and tender-heartedness of the Mother of God. Through his explanation, a deep love, devotion and knowledge is awakened and renewed in the hearts of the faithful listeners.

On the Feast day the Prayer of the Covenant is followed immediately by the divine liturgy, climaxing in the reception of the Holy Eucharist and the breaking of the fast. The worship celebration concludes around 5:00 or 6:00 a.m. at which time people return home. On their way home, however, most families invite any less fortunate or poor persons or any stranger they encounter to share their first meal with them. By hosting the poor and strangers they believe to receive grace in the eyes of God, remembering the Word of the Lord, "Whatever you do unto the least of these you do unto Me." (Matthew 25) In the same spirit it is customary that later in the morning the faithful also visit other less fortunate people, including the sick in the hospitals and those in prison, bringing food, clothing or whatever is needed. With this gesture they express their wish for the sick to get well, the imprisoned to be released, and the sorrowful to be comforted so that in the coming year they might celebrate together. Following another custom the family which has plenty prepares what is necessary for the feast and then goes to the home of another family which has less, considering it their honor to share this meal with them. Everyone experiences that on this day of the greatest Marian feast of the Ethiopian orthodox tewahedo church an atmosphere of love and compassion reigns, when people's hearts are open one to another.

IMPORTANCE OF THE FEAST FOR ETHIOPIAN BELIEVERS

Ethiopian Orthodox Christians have a striking loyalty to their faith which is easily observed during such seasons as the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God. This devotion is expressed, as we have seen, through the rich and varied hymns and prayers dedicated to the Virgin, in addition to the splendid titles and the poetic imagery which are associated with her. Thus, Ethiopians have retained a sense of the mystery and miracle of the incarnation of God, God's relationship with humanity, the divine maternity of Mary, her favor with God, and her identity with the people of God throughout the ages. Almost every facet of the Ethiopian Orthodox liturgy and worship is an elaboration of the grace of God extended to humanity in the mystery of the incarnation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ through the holy Virgin Mary. In this respect, Ethiopian Christians see the election of the Virgin by God as the instrument for the work of salvation.

The Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary is important for Ethiopian Orthodox believers for several reasons. For one thing, much of the life of the Orthodox is spent in recitation of the prayers and of the devotional literature honoring the Virgin Mary. Throughout their lives, they listen time and again to the stories of the Virgin's life and hardships, joys and sorrows contained in the apocryphal gospels and The Book of the Miracles,

as well as others. These stories form a part of the Orthodox Christian's very consciousness; they strengthen his or her identity and experience in its similarity to the Virgin Mary. From the beginning of their Christian life, the Orthodox believers are assured that Mary, in so far as she is a human being, is their sister; and because she has suffered in a fallen world like all human beings, she is their Mother, well acquainted with the pain and agony of this world and ready to comfort and save. Finally, because the Virgin is above all the Mother of God, she is their hope, for through her our salvation has become accessible in her Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Thus, the celebration of the Feast of the Assumption is not merely an interlude between engagements; for the Ethiopian Christian, the annual Feast of the Virgin is the ever-repeated culmination of a life-time of teaching and learning, listening and believing. In this Feast, the believer celebrates all that the Virgin Mary has come to mean to him or her. It is here, in the context of her Assumption, that the faithful affirm the attributes of the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary. She is to them the intercessor, the virgin mother, the sister, the Lady of Sorrows, the queen--seated beside her Son, our Lord and Saviour, in heavenly glory.

In addition, the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary emphasizes the nature of God, God's concern for the world which He created, His desire to redeem and save it through the willing participation of a humble woman, the two-fold Virgin Mary, who was pure in body and in soul. In this respect, the Feast of the

Virgin represents a celebration of God's love and charity. God gave His only Son to the world that the world might live through Him; the Virgin Mary willingly chose to participate in that salvation, and to bear to the world God Himself! Thus, the Feast of the Assumption is a time when the faithful express their gratitude to Mary through the works of charity, i.e., feeding the hungry, clothing the naked; visiting the sick; comforting the sorrowful, welcoming the stranger. In this way, they hope to express something of the unconditional love of God as expressed in the life of the Virgin Mary, His Mother. Indeed, the very name of Mary, understood within the context of the life of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, has come to be associated with the kindness, the tenderness, the love, and the mercy of God Himself.

The Feast of the Assumption is also a time when the faithful examine their lives in light of the purity, holiness, and obedience of the Virgin. Remembering her faithfulness to God and sacrificial love for her precious Son, the faithful are reminded of their own relationship to Him, or lack thereof. In this spirit one fasts, one prays, one dedicates anew his or her life to God. The Virgin Mary is associated with all of this. In her, the Orthodox see the purity of her virginity, and thus, the willingness and capacity for serving God. In the purity of her obedience to God expressed in her response to the angel's message, "Behold, I am thy handmaiden, let it be done to me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38), they see her faithfulness;

and in the purity of her gratitude and love for God--"For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name!" (Luke 1:49)--they see the meaning of humility and thanksgiving. Mary is the expression of what God intends for them; she is the one, though human, who expresses the perfect will of God; she is humanity par excellence. One could say that like the Apostles before them the faithful fast in order to see and perceive the attributes, the holiness, the purity, the wonder of the Virgin Mary.

Finally, the celebration of the Feast of the Virgin is clearly a celebration of God's victory over death as expressed in the assumption of the Virgin Mary and of the eschatological assurance that what Mary now enjoys, eternal life in heaven's glory, is that to which we can look forward in the future. Because the Virgin Mary shares in our death and has assumed her place in God's kingdom, we have the sure hope that we will one day share her victory over a world of sin, decay, and corruption. She is the first-fruit of God's eternal kingdom. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has received her in the heavenly places; He has made a place for His blessed Mother. For this reason, we, too, await the day when we will be joined together with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Mary who is in every way a human being, like ourselves a daughter of Adam, assures us of our hope. In a sense, one could say that for the Ethiopian Christian, Mary is the guarantee of the promise of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER IV

### UNDERSTANDING MARIAN THEOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX TEWAHEDO CHURCH

#### PATRISTIC BASIS

When the Word of God became incarnate, and went forth, He was not concerned with the kind of bed in which He would be cradled; or the kind of clothes which He would wear, or food which He would eat. One thing, however, did concern Him: namely the woman who would be His mother.<sup>486</sup> It is this point that Cyriacus, author of the Anaphora of St. Mary, stresses: "Truly God the Father looked down from heaven towards the east, the west, the north, and the south, and towards all the ends of the earth. He breathed in every savour and found none like unto the Virgin Mary. He approved her savour and loved her beauty and so sent to her His Son whom He loveth."<sup>487</sup>

In Christian interpretation, the virgin birth was anticipated long ago by the prophet Isaiah who prophesied, "Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel."<sup>488</sup> Another prophetic text from Ezekiel was understood to announce the perpetual virginity of

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<sup>486</sup>J. B. Carol, Mariology, Vol. I (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1955), p. 51.

<sup>487</sup>Daoud, The Liturgy of the Ethiopian Church, p. 106.

<sup>488</sup>Isaiah 7:14 (LXX).



Mary: "...(God) brought me back the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary which looked towards the East; and it was shut. Then the Lord said to me: this gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it; for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it; therefore, it shall remain shut. Only the prince himself shall sit in it..."<sup>489</sup> For Ethiopian Orthodox believers, Ezekiel's vision of the sealed gate remains a symbol of Mary's perpetual virginity.<sup>490</sup> Her virginity is important for a proper Christological understanding of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who, being not of this world, was born from on high, the Son of God. Therefore, the virgin birth forms a principal element in the creed of the early church in that it reveals the person and nature of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: "...Who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven, was made man and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and from the Holy Virgin Mary."<sup>491</sup>

St. Ignatius of Antioch stated that the virgin birth is one of the great mysteries of all time: "Now, Mary's virginity and her giving birth escaped the notice of the prince of this world, as did the Lord's death - those three secrets crying to be told,

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<sup>489</sup>Ezekiel 44:1-3.

<sup>490</sup>A. Tamerou, "Ethiopia Tabetseh Edewiha Habe Egziabher" ("Let Ethiopia Hasten to Stretch Out her Hands to God") (Addis Ababa: Unpublished Document, 1986), p. 7.

<sup>491</sup>Daoud, The Liturgy of the Ethiopian Church, p. 122.

but wrought in God's silence."<sup>492</sup> Elsewhere, he writes, regarding the virgin birth, "For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary, in God's plan being sprung both from the seed of David and from the Holy Spirit."<sup>493</sup> The importance of these texts for Marian theology resides in their affirmation of Mary's virginity and the significance of her role in God's plan of salvation. In addition, they affirm the power of God who comes to us without aid of human seed or ingenuity in the womb of a virgin, and therefore they point away from human effort or merit to the divine grace bestowed as God's free gift of love to the world at large. For this reason, the virginal conception of Mary is a symbol of our human poverty and of the need for a humility which waits upon the Lord. In Mary, we witness the grace of God which makes rich such poor creatures as we are. The virginity of Mary is also a real symbol of our inability as human beings to work out our own salvation or bring into existence, on our own, the one who has the power to save us.<sup>494</sup> In no way, however, can the virginity of Mary be construed as mere passivity: God did not force Himself upon Mary, nor did she conceive Him unwillingly, but she actively accepted God's gracious invitation

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<sup>492</sup>Ignatius, "Ephesians 19:1," Library of Christian Classics, Vol. I: Early Christian Fathers, edited by C. C. Richardson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), p. 93.

<sup>493</sup>Ignatius, Ephesians 18:2, op. cit., pp. 92-93; cf. Ephesians 7:2.

<sup>494</sup>M. Thurian, Mary: Mother of the Lord, Figure of the Church, trans. by N. B. Cryer (London: Faith Press, 1963), pp. 31-32.

to be a participant in His saving work. The divine incarnation was completed in the humble acceptance and obedience of the Virgin Mary.

Christologically, the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ from the womb of a virgin points to the new Church in which virginity is the law of the kingdom, while marriage is restricted to the present world. The kingdom of God first appeared in this world in the person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who declared: "...In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven (Matt. 22:30)." The fruit of marriage, the procreation of children, ensures the continuity of human life on earth with each succession of a new generation. In God's world, however, there is no death, and therefore no need of marriage or its fruit. Virginity, then, is the state of all creatures in the kingdom of heaven. In an anticipatory way, the virginity of Mary at the incarnation of the Son of God represents the heavenly kingdom's advent among the human race; as such, it symbolizes the new life to which the people of God are called. St. Paul speaks of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as the second Adam in whom humanity is restored to its rightful place. (Romans 5:14-20; 1 Cor. 15:45) Justin the Martyr, whom the Church regards as the most important Greek apologist of the second-century, adds to the our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ-Adam parallel as a counterpart the contrast between Mary and Eve. In his Dialogue with Trypho, Justin writes:

(The Son of God) became man by the Virgin in order that the disobedience which proceeded from the serpent might receive its destruction in the same manner in which it derived its origin. For Eve, who was a virgin and undefiled, having conceived the word of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy, when the angel Gabriel announced the good tidings to her that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her, and the power of the Highest would overshadow her: wherefore also the holy thing begotten of her is the Son of God; and she replied, 'Be it done unto me according to thy word.'<sup>495</sup>

Here again, we see the christological significance of the virgin birth in the thought of St. Justin. This emphasis was later adopted and developed by St. Irenaeus, in an important passage explaining the parallel and contrast between Eve and Mary:

Just as (Eve) was led astray by the word of a devil, so that she fled from God when she had transgressed his word; so did the latter (Mary), by an angelic communication, receive the glad tidings that she should sustain God, being obedient to His word. And if the former did disobey God, yet the latter was persuaded to be obedient to God, in order that the Virgin Mary might become the patroness (*advocata*) of the virgin Eve. And thus, as the human race fell into bondage to death by means of a virgin, so it is rescued by a virgin; virginal disobedience having been balanced in the opposite scale by virginal obedience.<sup>496</sup>

St. Irenaeus argues the same point elsewhere by writing:

...Mary the Virgin is found obedient, saying 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to thy Word.' But Eve was disobedient; for she did not obey when as yet she was a virgin. And even as she, having indeed a husband, Adam, but being nevertheless

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<sup>495</sup>St. Justin, "Dialogue with Trypho," The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I: The Apostolic Fathers-Justin Martyr-Irenaeus, edited by A. Roberts, and J. Donaldson (New York, 1899), p. 249.

<sup>496</sup>Irenaeus, "Against Heresies V.19.1," The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I, (New York, 1899), p. 547

as yet a virgin..., having become disobedient, was made the cause of death, both to herself, and to the entire human race; so also did Mary, having a man betrothed, and being nevertheless a virgin, by yielding obedience, became the cause of salvation, both to herself and to the entire human race.<sup>497</sup>

Thus, according to St. Irenaeus, Mary played a distinctive role in the saving work of God: in her free consent to the will of God, expressed in her obedience, she became the advocate of the virgin Eve. Mary's consent has a soteriological character in that its result was not simply the incarnation, but an incarnation recognized as redemptive for all humanity.

Using the same comparison with an emphasis on Mary's faith, Tertullian writes in his treatise, The Flesh of Christ:

For it was while Eve was yet a virgin that the ensnaring word had crept into her ear which was to build the edifice of death. Into a virgin's soul, in like manner, must be introduced that Word of God which was to raise the fabric of life; so that what had been reduced to ruin by this sex, might by the selfsame sex be recovered to salvation. As Eve had believed the serpent, so Mary believed the angel. The delinquency which the one occasioned by believing, the other by believing effaced...God therefore sent down into the virgin's womb His Word, as the good brother, who should blot out the memory of the evil brother...<sup>498</sup>

The author of the Weddassie Maryam insists that on account of Eve the door to the Garden of Eden was locked fast, but through the

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<sup>497</sup>Irenaeus, "Irenaeus Against Heresies, III.22.4.," The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I, p. 455.

<sup>498</sup>Tertullian, "On the Flesh of Christ, 17," The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. III: Apologetic, Anti-Marcion, Ethical (New York: Charles Scribner Son's, 1924), p. 536).

Virgin Mary the door to paradise has been opened once again to us to whom it has once again been allotted to eat from the Tree of Life...<sup>499</sup> Incomparably sensitive to the implications of the Eve-Mary analogy, the hymn expresses the root of humanity's dilemma and dignity in describing humanity's lovable glory, lost through Eve's disobedience but restored through the obedience of Mary. Death arose on account of Eve, but life by means of Mary. Through Mary, specifically through her virginal child-bearing, Eve's debt of sin has been paid and the primordial curse against woman lifted. She is the woman promised in paradise: the serpent which struck the heel of Eve, Mary has trampled underfoot (Gen. 3:15).

Later Fathers, among them St. Cyril of Jerusalem and St. Epiphanius of Salamis, also emphasized Mary's obedience and the restoration of humanity from the curse brought about by the disobedience of Eve. By the time of the fourth century, the concept of Mary as the counterpart of Eve had taken firm root in the soteriology of the Syrian Church and had become a commonplace in theology in the Greek-speaking world.<sup>500</sup>

#### HERETICAL DIVERGENCES REGARDING MARY'S MATERNITY

The Early Church developed the dogma of St. Mary's

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<sup>499</sup>Weddassie Maryam, IV.2; Budge, Legends, p. 289; cf. pp. 282 and 284.

<sup>500</sup>Carol, Mariology, vol. 2, p. 94; O'Carroll, Theotokos, pp. 139-141.

motherhood in order to emphasize christological tenets which various heresies sought to undermine. Of particular import was the teaching that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was genuinely born of the Virgin Mary; He was not a phantom, but took on real flesh from a real mother, while at the same time being the eternal Son of God who has no beginning.

The heretical threat was most visible in the docetic groups which expressed various forms of Gnostic heresies. Gnostic teaching characteristically distinguished between the "demiurge" or "creator god" and the supreme, remote and unknowable divine being. The demiurge, driven by a long history of emanation, represents the immediate source of creation and rules a world viewed as evil. Into the constitution of some people, however, there had entered a seed or spark of divine spiritual substance which, through gnosis, could be rescued from entrapment in its evil material environment and returned to its true home in the divine being. Such people were designated as "spirituals" or  $\pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\iota$ , while others without this divine seed or spark were considered merely fleshey or material,  $\sigma\alpha\rho\kappa\iota\kappa\omicron\iota$ . A third intermediate class of people was designated as psychics, or  $\psi\upsilon\chi\iota\kappa\omicron\iota$ ; much of the elementary Gnostic teaching was directed to them.

According to Gnosticism, the purpose of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was to come as emissary of the supreme God, bringing gnosis. As a divine being, he neither assumed a properly human

body nor did he die.<sup>501</sup> Many Gnostics refused to accept that the Redeemer became flesh or was born of a woman. Saturninus, as recorded by St. Irenaeus, declared "that the Saviour was without birth, without body, and without figure, but was, by supposition, a visible man...They declare also that marriage and generation are from Satan."<sup>502</sup> Yet another second century Gnostic, Valentinus, taught that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ united Himself with the man Jesus either at his conception or his baptism, disappeared shortly before the crucifixion, and brought with him the saving knowledge (gnosis) of his origin and destiny.<sup>503</sup>

Marcion's Christology was likewise docetic. According to the teaching of Marcion, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, an emissary of the Father, suddenly appeared one day preaching and teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. Although his passion and death were the work of the just creator God, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ did not really die because he did not have a real human body. Thus, Marcion was convinced that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was not the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament; he was not born of the Virgin Mary because he had neither birth nor growth or any semblance of it. Since his sudden appearance as a prophet at Capernaum, our Lord and Saviour

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<sup>501</sup>The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 573.

<sup>502</sup>Irenaeus, Against Heresies, I.24.2 (The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, p. 349).

<sup>503</sup>J. N. D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines (2nd. ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1960), pp. 140-142.



Jesus Christ's humanity was a mere semblance which he kept until his mock death on a cross.<sup>504</sup>

The Fathers of the Early Church, among them Ignatius, Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen, warned Christians against such docetic doctrines and many of them openly opposed these heresies emphasizing the real motherhood of St. Mary, and therefore the real humanity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the mystery of His incarnation. St. Ignatius, for instance, writes to the Christians of Tralles:

Be deaf then to any talk that ignores Jesus Christ, of David's lineage, of Mary; who was really born, ate, and drank; was really persecuted under Pontius Pilate; was really crucified and died, in the sight of heaven and earth and the underworld. He was really raised from the dead...<sup>505</sup>

Indeed, Ignatius leaves no room for any misunderstanding regarding the manhood and divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: "Our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary, in God's plan being sprung both from the seed of David and from the Holy Spirit. He was born and baptized that by His passion He might hallow the water."<sup>506</sup>

Justin confirms the christology of St. Ignatius when he writes, regarding the incarnation of God by Mary:

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<sup>504</sup>J. Quasten, Patrology, Vol. I (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1984), p. 270; Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, p. 142.

<sup>505</sup>Ignatius, "To the Christians of Tralles," Vol. 9. Early Christian Fathers, edited by C. C. Richardson, (Library of Christian Classics, Philadelphia, 1953), p. 100.

<sup>506</sup>Ignatius, "Ephesians 18:2," Early Christian Fathers, pp. 92-93.

...the Father of the universe has a Son, who being the Word and First-Begotten of God is also divine. Formerly he appeared in the form of fire and the image of a bodiless being to Moses and the other prophets. But now in the time of your dominion he was, as I have said, made man of a virgin according to the will of the Father for the salvation of those who believe in him, and endured contempt and suffering so that by dying and rising again he might conquer death.<sup>507</sup>

And Irenaeus echoes these thoughts by insisting that if God's birth from the Virgin Mary is deemed unreal, then our own redemption as Christians is unreal. He writes:

Those, therefore, who allege that He took nothing from the virgin do greatly err... For if He did not receive the substance of flesh from a human being, He neither was made man nor the Son of Man; and if He was not made what we were, He did no great thing in what He suffered and endured...Superfluous, too, in that case is His descent into Mary; for why did He come down into her if He were to take nothing of her? Still further, if He had taken nothing of Mary, He would never have availed Himself of those kinds of food which are derived from the earth, by which that body which has been taken from the earth is nourished...<sup>508</sup>

No less outspoken is Clement of Alexandria who calls the Virgin Mary "the mother of the Lord", and observes that the "Son of God... took flesh and was carried in a virgin's womb."<sup>509</sup>

Another offshoot of the Gnostic tradition in Persia, founded by Manes or Mani and known as Manichaeism, was based on a radical dualism that taught that reality consists of two great forces

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<sup>507</sup>Justin, "First Apology," Early Christian Fathers, pp. 284f.

<sup>508</sup>Irenaeus, "Against Heresies III.22.1-2," The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I, p. 454.

<sup>509</sup>Carol, Mariology, Vol. II, p. 118.

eternally opposed to each other: Good (ie., God, Truth, Light) and Evil or Darkness (the latter being identified with matter). According to the Manichaeans, humanity as it exists is tragically entrapped in the material order, fallen and lost, although in reality it contains particles of light belonging to the transcendent world. The object of religion is to release the trapped particles which Satan stole from the world of light and imprisoned in the material world, through the help of Jesus, Buddha, the prophets and Manes--all sent to assist in this task. The appearance of Adam, according to the Manichaeans, only further entrapped the light, keeping it imprisoned through reproduction. Jesus, "the brilliant light", however, redeemed Adam by a vision. Thus, the Manichaean practices of abstaining from eating meat and from marital intercourse were the means of continuing the process of gradual liberation.<sup>510</sup> It is, therefore, not surprising that the Manichaeans did not consider our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ the child of Mary. Both St. Alexander, Pope of Alexandria, and his successor, St. Athanasius, refuted Gnostic and Manichaean beliefs, defending the true humanity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and hence the true motherhood of St. Mary, saying: "The body of the Lord was real...because it was the same as ours, for Mary is our sister."<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>510</sup>Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, pp. 8-9; F. C. Burkitt, The Religion of the Manichees (AMS Press, reprint, 1979).

<sup>511</sup>Malaty, T.Y., St. Mary in the Orthodox Concept, Book IV (Alexandria: St. George Coptic Church, 1978), pp. 34-35.

Yet another principal heresy which misunderstood the nature of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and touched on the maternity of Mary is that of Arianism, named after Arius (250-336), a priest in Alexandria. Arianism maintained that the Son of God was not eternal, but was created by the Father from nothing as an instrument for the creation of the world. Therefore, He was not God by nature, but a changeable creature whose dignity as the Son of God was bestowed upon Him by the Father on account of His foreseen abiding righteousness.<sup>512</sup> Contrary to the Gnostic and Manichaeian thinking, the Arians categorically denied that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the son of the Virgin Mary, is the uncreated eternal Son of God, one with the Father in divine essence. Thus, in denying the divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they denied the maternity of Mary as the Mother of God, or Theotokos. For this reason, such Alexandrian Fathers as Peter, Alexander and Athanasius gave to the holy Virgin Mary the title "Theotokos", in direct confrontation with the Arians.<sup>513</sup> In the belief that the Arian error was derived from the subordinationism of Paul of Samosata, St. Alexander declared that the Son of God was not made "from things which are not" and, that there was no "time where He was not," but that He was begotten of the Father. He is equally with the Father, unchangeable and

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<sup>512</sup>Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, pp. 226-231.

<sup>513</sup>Malaty, St. Mary, p. 35.

immutable, wanting in nothing.<sup>514</sup> St. Alexander goes on to confirm the maternity of Mary as the Mother of God by calling her for the first time, "Theotokos." He writes, "After this we know of the Resurrection of the dead, the first fruit of which was our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who in very deed, and not in appearance merely, carried a body of Mary, Mother of God (Theotokos).<sup>515</sup> Thus, the first to use the term "Theotokos" in describing the holy Virgin Mary was St. Alexander; however the term flows from his pen so naturally that it seems to betray an everyday usage, long established and uncontroverted.<sup>516</sup>

St. Alexander's argumentation against the Arians was confirmed by the first Ecumenical Council at Nicea which met in 325 A.D. There the opponents of Arianism defined the orthodox faith regarding the co-equality of the Father and the Son in their use of the term "homoousios" to express their consubstantiality.<sup>517</sup> St. Athanasius further argued that, while our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's birth is of the Father, He took His humanity from the unploughed earth, the ever-virgin and theotokos<sup>518</sup> and that "Scripture contains a double account of the Saviour; that He was ever God and is the Son, being the Father's

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<sup>514</sup>Quasten, Patrology, Vol. III, p. 18; Malaty, St. Mary, p. 35.

<sup>515</sup>Quoted in Quasten, Patrology, Vol. III, p. 19.

<sup>516</sup>Carol, Mariology, vol. 2, p. 120; O'Carroll, Theotokos, p. 342.

<sup>517</sup>Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, pp. 231-237.

<sup>518</sup>Malaty, T.Y., St. Mary, p. 36.

Word and Radiance and Wisdom; and that afterwards for us He took flesh of a virgin, Mary, bearer of God (ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΥ), and was made man."<sup>519</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem also preached to his catechumens that it was the Son of God Himself who was born of the Virgin Mary: "Believe that He, the only-begotten Son of God, He Himself was again begotten of a Virgin. Believe the evangelist John when he writes, 'And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.'"<sup>520</sup>

It is clear that many Fathers of the Early Church up until the time of the Council of Ephesus taught and used the term "Theotokos" in describing the holy Virgin Mary; their number included Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Epiphanius of Salamis, Didymus of Alexandria, and Gregory of Nazianzus. Through the latter, the term "theotokos" became a touchstone of orthodoxy:

If anyone does not believe that saint Mary is the Mother of God (Theotokos), he is severed from the Godhead. If anyone should assert that He passed through the Virgin as through a channel, and was not at once divinely and humanly formed in her (divinely, because without the intervention of a man; humanly, because in accordance with the laws of gestation) he is in like manner godless. If any assert that the manhood was formed and afterwards was clothed with the Godhead, he too is to be condemned. For this would not be a generation of God, but

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<sup>519</sup>Quoted in Quasten, Patrology, Vol. III, p. 75; Malaty, St. Mary, p. 36.

<sup>520</sup>Cyril of Jerusalem, "The Catecheses, XII.4," A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. VII: Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, edited by P. Schaff and H. Wace (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), p. 73.

a shirking of generation.

If anyone introduces the notion of two Sons, one of God the Father, the other of the mother, and discredits the unity and identity, may he lose his part in the adoption promised to those who believe aright...If anyone assert that His flesh came down from heaven, that is not from hence, nor of us but above us, let him be anathema...If anyone has put his trust in Him as a man without a human mind, he is really bereft of mind, and quite unworthy of salvation. For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved.<sup>521</sup>

It appears that Gregory of Nazianzus regards the dogma of St. Mary's motherhood as the pivot around which the Church's christological and soteriological confession revolves.

The controversy regarding the term "Theotokos" became more intense during the time of Nestorius, the opponent of St. Cyril of Alexandria, who was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. Born of Persian parents, Nestorius received his theological education through the school of Antioch. He was the second Antiochene theologian to be elevated to the See of Constantinople, an eminent position bestowed a generation earlier on St. John Chrysostom.<sup>522</sup>

Nestorius strictly distinguished divinity and humanity in the incarnation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For this reason, Nestorius also rejected the term "Theotokos" as a

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<sup>521</sup>Gregory of Nazianzus, "Epistle 101," quoted in Quasten Patrology, Vol. III, p. 253; Carol, Mariology, Vol. II, pp. 120-121.

<sup>522</sup>Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, pp. 310-317. An account more sympathetic to Nestorius is presented by Young, Frances, From Nicea to Chalcedon (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), pp. 229-240.

description of the maternity of Mary. When called upon to indicate the suitability of the title "Theotokos", Nestorius declared that the term "Christotokos" (Christ-bearer) would be more suitable to describe Mary's maternity. This, in turn, led St. Cyril of Alexandria to oppose him and the Council of Ephesus to anathematize him as a heretic and declare him deposed.<sup>523</sup>

Antiochian in his Christology, and a follower of the Word-Man type, Nestorius wanted to protect the reality and completeness of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's humanity and insisted that God cannot have a mother. Mary's maternity, rather than being the motherhood of God, consisted in the motherhood of man. Nestorius argued that the Godhead could not have been carried for nine months in a woman's womb, nor been wrapped in swaddling clothes, nor have suffered, died and been buried. Nestorius charged his enemies that, in calling Mary "Theotokos", they preferred the Arian tenet that described the Son as a creature, and the Apollinarian idea that the manhood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was incomplete.<sup>524</sup> But in rejecting the term "Theotokos", to describe Mary's maternity, Nestorius himself was in danger to deny the inherent union, or consubstantiality, of the humanity of Jesus Christ with the divine Logos. The Greek term which best expressed his idea of union was  $\kappa\alpha\tau'\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\kappa\iota\delta\upsilon\omicron\varsigma$  "moral union", as opposed to  $\xi\nu\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$   $\kappa\alpha\theta'\ \acute{\upsilon}\pi\omicron\sigma\tau\alpha\sigma\iota\upsilon$  or "real union",

<sup>523</sup>Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, p. 211; Young, F., From Nicea to Chalcedon, pp. 234-235.

<sup>524</sup>Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, p. 311.



taught by the Alexandrian Fathers, especially St. Cyril of Alexandria.<sup>525</sup>

Nestorius insisted that as Jesus possessed a rational soul, he was a complete human individual. St. Cyril, however, while maintaining the reality of the rational soul, insisted that, the Word having personally united to Himself flesh animated by a rational soul, the result was a true organic union: are our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, one son. The Word did not unite Himself with a human individual, but united the human nature to Himself and made it one.

...We do not say that the nature of the Word was changed and became flesh, or that it was converted into a whole man consisting of soul and body; but rather that the Word having personally united to Himself flesh animated by a rational soul, did in an ineffable and inconceivable manner become man, and was called the Son of Man, not merely as willing or being pleased to be so called, neither on account of taking to himself a person, but because the two natures being brought together in a true union, there is of both one Christ and one Son.<sup>526</sup>

In the tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, it is this defense of orthodoxy against Nestorianism that makes St. Cyril of Alexandria one of the most prominent figures in ecclesiastical and dogmatic history. He does not override the distinction of the properties of the united nature. But against the Nestorian objection to speaking of God being born and dying,

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<sup>525</sup>The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, op. cit.,  
p. 962.

<sup>526</sup>Epistle of Cyril to Nestorius, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. XIV, pp. 197-198.

and of Mary's bearing of the divine Word, he emphasized:

...Since for us and for our salvation, He personally united to himself a human body, and came forth of a woman, He is in this way said to be born after the flesh; for He was not first born a common man of the holy virgin, and then the Word came down and entered into Him, but the union being made in the womb itself, He is said to endure a birth after the flesh, ascribing to Himself the birth of His own flesh. On this account, we say that He suffered and rose again. Not as if God the Word suffered in his own nature.... for the Divine Nature is incapable of suffering, inasmuch as it is incorporeal, but since that which had become his own body suffered in this way, he is also said to suffer for us.<sup>527</sup>

St. Cyril asserts the necessary distinction of the properties of the Godhead from those of the manhood, but he insists on the greater necessity of preserving the unity:

...For between Godhead and manhood I also allow that there is great distinction and distance. For the things which have been named on the principle of manner of existence are clearly different, and in no point like one another. But, when the mystery in Christ is introduced among us, the principle of union is not oblivious of difference, but rejects division, not by mixing or commingling the natures with one another, but that, after the Word of God has partaken of flesh and blood, He is even so understood and named as one Son.<sup>528</sup>

St. Cyril of Alexandria saw in Nestorius' teaching not only an attack on the "Theotokos", but on the very meaning and mystery

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<sup>527</sup>Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>528</sup>Against Nestorius II.6., as quoted by Severus of Antioch, Letter 1 to Occumenius, Patrologia Orientalis, ed. by E. W. Brooks, Vol. XII (Paris: Librairie de Paris, 1919), p. 178

of the incarnation. From a Nestorian point of view, he argued, the incarnation was nothing more than an illusion--a matter of mere appearance and empty words--thereby abolishing the meaning of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's redemption. Nestorius was robbing the Eucharist of its life-giving force, reducing communion to an act of cannibalism, as not the body of God, but the body of a man, was lying on an altar.<sup>529</sup> St. Cyril counters with the formula that God, who existed outside the flesh, unchanged in His deity, now became embodied,<sup>530</sup> "one incarnate nature of God the Word." God the Word became incarnate, and in becoming incarnate, He individuated manhood in union with Himself and made it His very own; thus, the incarnate Word is one person.<sup>531</sup>

In St. Cyril's view, this union was absolutely real and, in his words, "natural." The humanity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ never existed as an independent individual, but from the moment of its conception in the womb of Mary existed in relation to the Word, who made it His very own. Thus, St. Cyril understood the Word as the Son of God by nature and at the same time as the natural son of the Virgin Mary, conceived in her womb, being therefore, essentially and inalienably human as well

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<sup>529</sup>Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, p. 318.

<sup>530</sup>Ibid., p. 319.

<sup>531</sup>v. C. Samuel, "One Incarnate Nature of God the Word," An Unofficial Consultation Between Theologians of Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, The Greek Orthodox Theological Review, X (1964-65), pp. 37-51.

as divine. For St. Cyril, Immanuel is the Lord made flesh, and as such, to be worshipped with singular and indivisible adoration.<sup>532</sup>

On June 22, A.D. 431, the third Ecumenical Council, the Council of Ephesus, met to re-affirm the title "Theotokos", Mother of God, for Mary, and to pass judgment upon the teachings of Nestorius. St. Cyril of Alexandria presided, the sentence reads:

We discovered that (Nestorius) had held and published impious doctrines in his letters and treatises, as well as in discourses which he delivered in this city, which have been testified to. Compelled thereto by the canons, and by the letter of our most holy father and fellow-servant Coelestine, the Roman bishop, we have come with many tears to this sorrowful sentence against him, namely, that our Lord Jesus Christ, whom he has blasphemed, decrees by the holy Synod, that Nestorius be excluded from the episcopal dignity and from all priestly communion.<sup>533</sup>

Following this sentencing, the second letter of St. Cyril's was read aloud; his twelve anathemas against Nestorius confirmed; Nestorius' christological doctrine condemned; and the title "Theotokos" solemnly recognized and affirmed as the title of Mary.<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>532</sup>Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, p. 320-322.

<sup>533</sup>Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Second Series, vol. 14, p. 218. On the proceedings: see O'Carroll, Theotokos, pp. 112-113.

<sup>534</sup>Malaty, St. Mary in the Orthodox Concept, p. 39.

ETHIOPIAN DIVERGENCES AND THE ORTHODOX RESPONSE

Ethiopia, herself, has not been immune to misunderstandings and heretical theologies regarding the person and nature of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and the maternity of Mary. Many such heresies, as in the case of the "Unctionists", were the result of foreign intrusions while others, such as the teachings of the "Za-Mikaelites" and "Stephanites" were the result of tensions between Church and state or between official Church doctrine and popular, albeit heterodox interpretations. Such controversies were important for the development of the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia; they served to strengthen its foundation based primarily on the first three ecumenical councils. This basis is commonly affirmed in the "Prayer of Absolution of the Son" of the pre-Anaphora when the priest recites:

Out of the mouth of the 318 Orthodox Fathers that assembled in Niceae to condemn Arius, and out of the mouths of the 150 Fathers that assembled in Constantinople to condemn Macedonius, and out of the mouths of the 200 Fathers who assembled in Ephesus to condemn Nestorius...<sup>535</sup>

This adherence is supplemented by the fact that the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, like her sister churches, shares in the Apostolic heritage of faith witnessed to in the New Testament, a heritage which is set against the background of the Old Testament. Like the early Christian churches, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, which had so many early links to

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<sup>535</sup>Mashafa Kiddasse, p. 59; Daoud, The Liturgy, p. 27; Mercer, The Ethiopic Liturgy, p. 316.

Judaism, has taken many of the Hebraic traditions and interpreted them in a purely Christian context.<sup>536</sup>

It seems that a number of major theological controversies within Ethiopian Orthodoxy occurred in the early part of the reign of Zara Yaqob (1434-1468). Some of these formative conflicts over matters of theology and Church doctrine were probably due to reactions to the king's religious reforms. From the outset of his rule, Zara Yaqob was intent on ridding the country of popular belief in magic and customs based on commonly held pagan superstitions.<sup>537</sup> His attack against such practices was strong and uncompromising, as expressed in his mandate: "If you see anyone sacrificing to Satan, kill him with a spear, or with a staff, or with stones..."<sup>538</sup> An advocate of strict orthodoxy, Zara Yaqob was concerned to keep intact the orthodox doctrine of Akalat and Getsat or "Persons and Faces" of the Holy Trinity--a doctrine bitterly opposed by Za-Mikael, Athska, and their followers.<sup>539</sup>

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<sup>536</sup>K. Sarkissian, The Witness of the Oriental Orthodox Churches (2nd. ed.; Antelias: Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, 1970), p. 31.

<sup>537</sup>Tamrat, T., Church and State in Ethiopia, pp. 231-242.

<sup>538</sup>Ibid., p. 240; Hyatt, H., The Church of Abyssinia, p. 99.

<sup>539</sup>Mashafa Berhan, in: Conti Rossini, C. and Ricci, L., Il Libro della luce del Negus Zara Yaqob. Louvain: Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptorum Aethiopicum, 1965), Vol. LI, p. 126. Ephraim Isaac, who discusses the heterodox groups of the Za-Mikaelites, the Eustathians, and the Stephanites, thinks that all of these go back to the convictions of the older Jewish Christians in Ethiopia whom Zara Yaqob forced into submission to Orthodoxy: A New Text-Critical Introduction to Mashafa Berhan, pp. 53-75.

According to the sources, the Za-Mikaelites denied the idea that God has an "image", a resemblance, to humanity or that God created humanity in His image and likeness. Instead, they maintained that God alone knows His image, and, therefore, it cannot be symbolized or expressed by the image of a creature, i.e., humanity. Different from the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, they claimed that it is impossible to give an image or "face" (getsawie) to the Holy Trinity. Since man does not truly resemble God, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in his human nature does not either, although, as the divine Son, He is like the Father.<sup>540</sup> Zara Yaqob responded with a Synod held in 1439 to produce proof to Za-Mikael and his followers from the Old Testament, the law and the prophets, the gospels and the letters of the Apostles that God indeed possesses an image and likeness that is expressed in His creation, namely humanity (Gen. 1:26; 5:3; 9:3-9). Yet, Za-Mikael and his followers remained unconvinced. Zara Yaqob added the denunciation that Za-Mikael and his followers denied the Holy Trinity and its image, and addressed a series of questions to them:

Was the Christ not incarnate then? Was He not born  
with the perfect image of man? Did He not grow  
little by little until He became the perfect size  
of man? Did He not die on the cross for our sake?

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<sup>540</sup>Mashafa Berhan VI, in: Conti Rossini, p. 129. Isaac, A New Text-Critical Introduction, p. 56, gives an English translation: "(Za-Mikael) continued to contend that God has no image like a human being and that God did not create Adam in his own image or likeness. (Za-Mikael argued) God cannot be seen, as John (4:12) says, 'there is none whatsoever who has seen God;' so if none has seen him whatsoever, how can I speak about the image or form of God?"

Did He not rise from the dead? Did He not ascend into heaven? Does He not sit at the right hand of His Father? If He sits at the right hand of the Father, is not the Son of God, the perfect image of man which He took from a perfect Virgin? Does the image of the Father and of the Holy Spirit, who are not incarnate, resemble the image of man which is the Son, or does it differ from Him?<sup>541</sup>

Unable to respond to these fundamental questions, Za-Mikael and his followers remained silent and afraid. In denying the image of God, the Synod told them, they added a fourth member to the Trinity--an image of humanity which does not resemble the image of the Father or the image of the Holy Spirit; and in so doing, they made the one Son two persons,<sup>542</sup> thereby distorting the words of John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father." The Synod ruled that Za-Mikael and his followers should be excommunicated and, as in the case of Abba Giyorgis, imprisoned.<sup>543</sup>

The rejection of the teachings proposed by Za-Mikael and his

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<sup>541</sup>Mashafa Berhan, in: Conti Rossini, p. 129; Isaac, A New Text-Critical Introduction, p. 55 and 57.

<sup>542</sup>Mashafa Berhan, in: Conti Rossini, pp. 129-130; Isaac, A New Text-Critical Introduction, pp. 57-59.

<sup>543</sup>Isaac, A New Text-Critical Edition, p. 59; Taamera Maryam ("The Miracles of Mary") (Addis Ababa, 1961), p. 132. Ethiopian Orthodox tradition maintains that Abba Giyorgis, while he was in prison, saw a vision of his heretical teacher Za-Mikael suffering in hell and with him another sorrowful monk named Abba Nove who, though outwardly a righteous man, harbored in his heart mockery for the miracles of the Holy Virgin Mary. Giyorgis was told in his vision that it was Za-Mikael who was responsible for Abba Nove's deplorable condition. It is said that this vision accounted for Giyorgis later repentance and conversion; ibid., pp. 132-136.



followers is well attested in such texts as the Dersana Sellasie, or "Homily for the Holy Trinity," a treatise refuting anti-trinitarian doctrines such as those of Arius and Za-Mikael and upholding the doctrine formalized at Nicea;<sup>544</sup> and the Sayfa Sellassie, or "Sword of the Trinity", a homiletical collection and prayer book arranged for the days of the week, refuting Sabellianism, Za-Mikael, and all who seek to make the Holy Trinity "One Face." The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church affirms as central to its faith the trinitarian doctrine of "The three in One"; there is no other image of God the Father except the image of man which He created "after His own image and likeness." The image of God the Son is like the image of the Father, and the image of the Holy Spirit is like the images of the Father and the Son. All three are co-equal, omnipotent without limitation, with one complexion.

Another heterodox movement was to appear in the Tigre district of Agame not far from Axum with the Stephanites, a monastic group named after its founder, Abba Istifanos.<sup>545</sup> Only the protection of the governor of Shira appears to have kept Istifanos and his followers from suffering harm; it was here that Istifanos established his new monastic community. Many prominent

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<sup>544</sup>Macomber, W.F., and Getachew, A Catalogue of Ethiopian Manuscripts, vol. 5, pp. 393-394, 372.

<sup>545</sup>See above, pp. 34-36; Kaplan, S., The Monastic Holy Man, pp. 41-44; Isaac, E., A New Text-Critical Edition, pp. 68-73. The important article by Tadesse Tamrat, "Some Notes on the Fifteenth-Century Stephanite 'Heresy' in the Ethiopian Church," Rassegna di Studi Etiopici, No. 22 (1966), pp. 103-115, gives a detailed account of Abba Istifanos' life based on the sources.

men of noble birth were among the Stephanite leaders. Despite this fact, Istifanos was eventually disgraced and exiled, taking refuge in Agame toward the end of his life.

The controversy had to do with the Stephanite monks' refusal to give what they regarded as undue reverence to the cross, the icons of the Madonna and the Child as well as the King. It seems that much of their opposition was politically motivated, directed at the claims of the Solomonic dynasty. But the charges against them consistently include their refusal to "bow to the cross and to the Virgin Mary." A history of the Stephanites written in Geez says that Zara Yaqob tortured Istifanos' followers and called them enemies of Mary, likening them with the public to the Jews.<sup>546</sup> A note in the Mashafa Berhan expresses the same criticism: "And the evil Stephanites who say, 'We do not worship Mary, the twofold Virgin, and the holy cross,' say so in the word of their lie."<sup>547</sup> In another passage they are denounced as "Jews who refuse to worship Mary and the cross."<sup>548</sup> They may indeed have been followers of older Jewish Christian beliefs in Ethiopia which the King wanted to abolish. But it seems that their negative attitude toward the required prostration before the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Cross was not so much an expression of a dogmatic conviction as a criticism of religious

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<sup>546</sup>Kaplan, The Monastic Holy Man, p. 43; Budge, A History of Ethiopia, p. 309.

<sup>547</sup>Isaac, E., A New Text-Critical Edition, p. 70.

<sup>548</sup>Ibid.

innovations introduced by Zara Yaqob. It was their refusal to submit to the royal authority at this point which prompted their cruel persecution by the King who sought a religiously and politically united nation.<sup>549</sup> However controversial and harsh may have been some of Zara-Yaqob's dealings with resistance to his measures, he is generally remembered in Ethiopia as a pious emperor, whose efforts to stabilize and unite the manifold religious strands represented in his kingdom into a sound integrity between church and state earned him the respect and admiration of many.<sup>550</sup>

One of the worst aberrations occurred, according to the tradition, during the reign of Emperor Susenyos (1607-1632) when a Jesuit missionary by the name of Mealem Peter (Pedro Paez) is said to have taught that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was the Son of Grace by unction, and that he had not one birth, but three. Mealem Peter's disciple, Sangua Eustathiwos, formed a second group which taught that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by the unction of the Holy Spirit, came to be the (adopted) eternal Son of God. These two groups later came to be known as "Adoptianists," who advocated the "Son of Unction" and the "Son of Grace".<sup>551</sup> Each group taught that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ had three births, one from the Father, one from the Virgin

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<sup>549</sup>Budge, A History of Ethiopia, p. 309.

<sup>550</sup>Tamrat, T., Church and State in Ethiopia, pp. 231-246.

<sup>551</sup>Admasu Gembere, Medlote-Amine ("Scale of Faith"), (Addis Ababa: Tensaie Zagoubaie Press, 1954), p. 292.

Mary, and one from the Holy Spirit the latter occurring at the banks of the river Jordan or in the womb of the Virgin Mary, respectively. Thus, He received from the Father His divinity, from the Virgin Mary, His manhood, and from the Holy Spirit the right to be called the "Son of God by Grace" or "The Son of God by Unction." Unctionists and Adoptionists believed that, when the Son became man, He forfeited His divinity for the sake of humanity; the anointing by the Holy Spirit re-established, as it were, His eternal status as the Son of God (by unction or adoption).<sup>552</sup> In this way, both the Unctionists and Adoptionists violated the union of the Trinity as affirmed by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, claiming that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is one nature and one person rather than two natures (human and divine) in one person and that He is the Son of God not by nature, but by "adoption."<sup>553</sup> The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church deems anathema the teachings of the Unctionists and Adoptionists; it upholds the doctrine that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is fully human and fully God in one person by unity (or "Tewahedo" or "Union"), not by the anointing of the Holy Spirit.<sup>554</sup>

The Ethiopian Orthodox liturgy describes the mystery of the incarnation by saying that God the Son united to Himself humanity

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<sup>552</sup>Tamerou, Ayallew, Meche Telemedena Katequella Zemdena (Addis Ababa: Tensaie Zagoubaie Press, 1953), p. 226.

<sup>553</sup>Abba Gorgorious, The History of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, p. 107.

<sup>554</sup>Gembere, A., Medelote Amine, pp. 191-193.

and made it one with His Godhead without mixture or confusion, without division or alteration. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's Godhead was not separate from His humanity, "even for an hour, or for the twinkling of an eye."<sup>555</sup> In the Anaphora of Dioscorus, the celebrant describes how God the Son descended without being separated from His Godhead in obedience to His Father, sojourned in Mary, and was born of her, who was a pure virgin. After his birth, He grew unto manhood and maturity. At the age of thirty, He was baptized in the river Jordan. He was tempted by the devil.<sup>556</sup> He came to know hunger even as he fed so many; He came to know thirst even though He had the power to change water into wine. He was beaten as a slave, yet, through Him, all prisoners of sin are freed. With His spittle, He cured the blind. And to us He gave the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>557</sup>

The one who has the power to forgive our sins was accused by us as a sinner. The Judge of judges was judged by the people. He was crucified on a tree as a criminal in order to take His place among the righteous. Dying, He destroyed death. Raising from the dead, He gave to us the assurance of eternal life. Through Him, the dead live, the impure are cleansed, the sinners forgiven, the scattered re-united. All who turn to Him are

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<sup>555</sup>Tamerou, A., Meche Telemedena, p. 82.

<sup>556</sup>Daoud, The Liturgy, p. 233.

<sup>557</sup>Daoud, The Liturgy, p. 233.

clothed with His glory and His honor.<sup>558</sup>

All fourteen anaphoras of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church portray our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's divinity and humanity without division or confusion. He is at once God and human. He is one our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God the Son, in whom humanity and divinity are indivisibly united. As to the reality of His suffering and death, the texts leave no room for doubt. In the Anaphora of St. Jacob of Serugh, the celebrant recites:

O Lord, thou wast struck with the hands  
of a servant, beaten with sticks, pierced  
with a sword, and they caused thee to drink  
bitter gall with vinegar. While thou wast  
God, able to prevent them, thou didst not  
prevent them, thou didst become patient  
even unto death; all this thou didst  
accept for the love of humanity.<sup>559</sup>

In the Anaphora of St. Dioscorus, the celebrant again confirms the reality of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's humanity when he declares: "He was laid in the manger of the cattle, received the presents of His Kingdom, and wept as infants do, asking for food from the breast of His mother."<sup>560</sup> The anaphora goes on:

They crucified Him on a tree, nailed Him  
with nails, beat Him on the head with sticks,  
pierced His side with a spear; to Him who  
gave drink to the Israelites from a rock,  
they gave gall mixed with myrrh to quench

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<sup>558</sup>The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama, p. 50; Daoud, The Liturgy, pp. 202-203 (Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom).

<sup>559</sup>Daoud, The Liturgy, p. 223.

<sup>560</sup>Ibid., p. 233.

His thirst. The immortal died, died to  
 destroy death, died to quicken the dead  
 as He promised them with the Word of Covenant.<sup>561</sup>

This death, however, was not the end of His dispensation: our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ rose from the dead without corruption and set us free from the yoke of sin. Triumphant over death and decay, the risen our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven and is seated with the Father.<sup>562</sup>

Throughout the liturgy the real divinity and real humanity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is affirmed and celebrated. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is both God the Son in His incarnate state and fully human, born from the flesh of the Virgin Mary. Thus, for the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, a proper understanding of Mariology is contingent on one's Christological convictions. Without the status of full humanity, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's birth from the Virgin Mary is minimized or disregarded altogether. And yet, it is this miracle of the power (and ability) of God working with the willing participation of a human being--the Virgin Mary--that forms the basis for the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

As we have seen, the Virgin Mary's active participation in accepting the will of God is critical to God's saving work for the world, namely His incarnation. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church teaches that the almighty God expressed His Holy

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<sup>561</sup>Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>562</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

Will to save the world in two ways: through His only-begotten Son, the incarnate Word, and through the creature whom He favored, namely the Virgin Mary. This choice is eternally decisive, embracing the past, present and future: for God determined before all ages, that among all creatures the Virgin Mary should be the Mother of our salvation.<sup>563</sup> In the Anaphora of St. Jacob of Serugh, the celebrant affirms the necessity of the virgin birth of God the Son for the fulfillment of the will of God:

And Thou didst send Him into the womb of a virgin. He was conceived in the womb, was made flesh, and His birth was made known by the Holy Spirit...being born from the virgin, so that He might fulfill thy will and hallow a people unto thee.<sup>564</sup>

Thus, for Ethiopian Christians, the meaning of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's incarnation is intimately related to the willing co-operation and blessed maternity of the Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

THE ETHIOPIAN TRADITION IN THE HAYMANOTE ABEW  
("TEACHING OF THE FATHERS")

The doctrinal position of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church about the incarnation and the maternity of Mary, a position which was clarified through controversies like those

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<sup>563</sup>Taamera Maryam ("The Miracles of Mary"), p. 9.

<sup>564</sup>Daoud, The Liturgy, pp. 222-223.



described above, has also found expression in a number of traditional texts which are used in the context of theological education where the tradition is explained and handed on to monks and priests. Foremost among these is the Haymanote Abew ("Faith of the Fathers"), a compilation of patristic materials which contains teachings attributed to

- our Lord, Jesus Christ
- the holy Apostles
- the Council of Nicea (325)
- the Council of Constantinople (381)
- the Council of Ephesus (431)
- the Church Fathers before Chalcedon
- the Church Fathers of the Alexandrian persuasion writing after Chalcedon.<sup>565</sup>

Translated from Arabic into Geez and partially at the time of the unctionist controversy into Amharic, the Haymanote Abew is divided into two major sections. The first deals primarily with the doctrine of the one God and the mystery of the Holy Trinity. It rejects those who deny the trinitarian doctrine, such as the Jews, the Sabellians, and the Muslims. It also rejects those who deny the divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit such as Arians and Macedonians. The second section deals with the doctrine of the incarnation. It rejects those who hold that the Son of God was a created being; that his incarnation was in mere appearance; that His humanity lacked a soul; that He was of two persons (hypostases) in two natures; or that He was one person in two

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<sup>565</sup>Budge, A History of Ethiopia, p. 573; Heyer, F., Die Kirche Aethiopiens, (Berlin: Water De Gruyter, 1971), pp. 136f. The Ethiopian edition used here is Haymanote Abew ("Faith of the Fathers") (Addis Ababa: Tensaie Zagoubaie Press, 1967). There is no translation available.

natures; that He possessed two wills; or that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

The Haymanote Abew describes the teachings of St. Irenaeus as asserting that the prophets anticipated the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ from a virgin;<sup>566</sup> and of St. Ignatius speaking about the mystery of the Incarnation: while the Son of God dwelled within the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Father and the Holy Spirit are not described in this capacity.<sup>567</sup> Similarly, St. Gregory the Great (Gregory of Nyssa) confirms, according to the Haymanote Abew, that God the Son has taken our flesh from the holy Virgin Mary, willingly making it His own; yet without separation or alteration. He remained one with the Father while becoming human--the same as us.<sup>568</sup>

The Haymanote Abew also notes the Church Fathers' teachings regarding the virginity and maternity of the blessed Virgin Mary. St. Athanasius, for instance, is quoted as asserting the perpetual virginity of the Virgin Mary while affirming her maternity as the "Theotokos" in whom the fleshless Word of God, existing before the ages, took flesh from her own body without changing her virginity. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was incarnate from the blessed Virgin not as a mere human in whom God was pleased to dwell, but rather as God who was well-pleased to

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<sup>566</sup>Ibid., pp. 29-30.

<sup>567</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>568</sup>Ibid., p. 43

become human.<sup>569</sup> Abulidis (Leo I), the Archbishop of Rome, is recorded in the Haymanote Abew as affirming that the Virgin Mary, having given birth to the Word of God in the flesh, is indeed "Theotokos," the Mother of God.<sup>570</sup> Abulidis continues that with this virgin birth came the salvation of the entire world.<sup>571</sup> For Epiphanius, the doctrine of the incarnation is summed up in the description of the Son of God, who by nature is unchangeable, but united to Himself human flesh, was conceived in the womb of the holy Virgin by the Holy Spirit and was made man.<sup>572</sup> St. Cyril, in another text quoted in the Haymanote Abew, maintains that He who created the flesh of the Virgin Mary has been born of her:<sup>573</sup> God from God, Light from Light, the Creator and Sustainer of all. Thus, He who became human for our sake, is still truly God.<sup>574</sup>

The Haymanote Abew concludes with a strict warning. Anyone who claims that the holy Virgin Mary did not give birth in the flesh to the Word of God, or that He to whom she gave birth has no divinity will be anathematized.<sup>575</sup> The same holds true for anyone who claims that Emmanuel is not perfect God, or that a virgin did not give birth to God in the flesh so that He became

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<sup>569</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>570</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>571</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>572</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>573</sup>Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>574</sup>Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>575</sup>Ibid., p. 560.

perfect man.<sup>576</sup> Thus, the Haymanote Abew affirms the full and perfect humanity and divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ without any qualifications.<sup>577</sup>

Patristic teachings regarding our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's incarnation are also contained in the Gebre Hemamat ("Servant of Sorrows"), a book of readings for Holy Week, the bulk of which consists of Old and New Testament passages, extra-canonical writings such as the miracles of Jesus and His mother Mary, and selected hymns.<sup>578</sup> During Passion Week, a solemn time of rigorous self-examination, fasting, continual meditation, prayer, and prostration, the reading of the Gebre Hemamat plays an important part in the all-night vigils held throughout the week between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m.

The Gebre Hemamat reminds the faithful of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's miraculous birth from the womb of the holy Virgin Mary, and of the mystery of her perpetual virginity and motherhood. That the Virgin Mary did give birth to God and is therefore truly the "Theotokos," Mother of God, is repeatedly stressed throughout. In addition, various Church Fathers are adduced as affirming this mystery. St. John, Patriarch of Alexandria, for instance, is quoted as saying that God descended from heaven without separation from the throne of His majesty,

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<sup>576</sup>Ibid., p. 563.

<sup>577</sup>Ibid., p. 582.

<sup>578</sup>Budge, A History of Ethiopia, p. 570; Heyer, F., Die Kirche Aethiopiens, p. 87.

abiding in the womb of a pure virgin; incarnate from her by the Holy Spirit, God at once wore the flesh of her humanity and the glory of His divinity.<sup>579</sup>

The Gebre Hemamat also stresses the perpetual virginity of Mary. Theodosius of Antioch teaches that God the Son, born from God the Father without a mother, was incarnate from the flesh of the holy virgin without a human father, and even after giving birth to her Son the blessed Virgin Mary remained the Virgin Mother of God the Word.<sup>580</sup>

In addition to the doctrinal compilations, The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church has greatly benefited from the work of specific theologians in its past. One of the most important such writer was Abba Giyorgis of Gascha. Born in the late fourteenth century, Abba Giyorgis is said to have lived at the royal court where his father served as a chaplain. Later he studied at the monastery of Hayq and composed a number of doctrinal and service books. Among them are the Arganone-Weddassie, the Mashafa Sibhat ("Book of Praise"), the Mashafa Sa'atat ("Book of Hours.") and his greatest work, the Mashafa Mistir ("Book of Mystery").<sup>581</sup>

It was the Mashafa Mistir which gained Abba Giyorgis recognition as being one of the great defenders of Orthodoxy.

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<sup>579</sup>Gebre Hemamat ("Passion Book") (Addis Ababa: Artistic Press, 1955-56), p. 125.

<sup>580</sup>Ibid.

<sup>581</sup>Budge, A History of Ethiopia, p. 304; Tamrat, Church and State in Ethiopia, pp. 222-225, 230, note 4; Kaplan, The Monastic Holy Man, pp. 47, 61, 104.

The book contains Abba Giyorgis' refutation of such heresies as Sabellianism, Appolinarianism, Arianism, and others, but also particular homilies directed toward the strengthening of the people in the Orthodox faith.<sup>582</sup>

The Mashafa Mistir refers often to the Old and New Testaments ("We assembled from the entire Pentateuch and the prophets, from the Gospels and the Apostles"), but rarely refers to the Senodos (Synodicon).<sup>583</sup> Abba Giyorgis refutes Sabellius who taught that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one person and thus failed to do justice to the independent substance of the Son;<sup>584</sup> the teaching of tritheism, the belief that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each a separate substance without unity;<sup>585</sup> the Appollinarian tenet that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was not body, soul and spirit in one person but only body and soul, the spirit being replaced by the divine Logos, which violates the Orthodox teaching that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ possessed the complete manhood, redeeming the whole of human nature and not its spiritual elements only;<sup>586</sup> the teaching

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<sup>582</sup>See the detailed analysis according to a manuscript written in 1968 and preserved at Holy Trinity Cathedral in Addis Ababa, in Macomber, W.F., A Catalogue of Ethiopian Manuscripts, vol. 4, 1979, pp. 141-143.

<sup>583</sup>Ibid., p. 141. The Senodos is the old standard compilation of church law; Heyer, F., Die Kirche Aethiopiens, p. 134.

<sup>584</sup>Ibid., MS pp. 19-37.

<sup>585</sup>Ibid., MS pp. 38-53.

<sup>586</sup>Ibid., p. 142; MS pp. 299-312.

of Arius who denied the true divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, claiming that the Son of God was not eternal but was created by the Father as a supreme instrument for the creation of world; our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ would therefore not be God in nature but a changeable creature whose dignity as Son of God was bestowed upon Him by the Father in the foreknowledge of His abiding righteousness;<sup>587</sup> the teaching of Nestorius that the Son was one of the prophets until He became God by grace at the river Jordan;<sup>588</sup> the teaching of Photinus who believed that the existence of the Son of God originated with Mary and not in eternity.<sup>589</sup> In addition, Abba Giyorgis discusses and rejects the heresies which claim that the Word of God was transformed to be only flesh and blood and bone and hair;<sup>590</sup> that the existence of the Holy Spirit began after the baptism of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;<sup>591</sup> that, as Origen maintained, the Son is inferior to the Father and the Holy Spirit is inferior to the Son, and the inferior cannot see or comprehend the superior.<sup>592</sup> Abba Giyorgis also attacks Origen's philosophical argument that the Son is divine in a lower sense than the Father while the Father is superior in His divinity, and

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<sup>587</sup>Ibid., p. 141; MS pp. 54-80.

<sup>588</sup>Ibid., MS pp. 81-115.

<sup>589</sup>Ibid., MS pp. 116-160.

<sup>590</sup>Ibid., MS pp. 171-180.

<sup>591</sup>Ibid., p. 142; MS 181-185.

<sup>592</sup>Ibid., p. 141; MS pp 161-171.

that prayer can only be addressed to the Father through the Son. He rejects the teaching of the Antidicomarianites who believed that Mary, after giving birth to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, lived in union with Joseph, thus defiling her virginity;<sup>593</sup> the heresy of Eutyches that our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ's flesh was not as weak as humanity and therefore did not experience real suffering; and that of Mani who taught that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's body was not real matter but only the semblance of such.<sup>594</sup>

While the Mashafa Mistir represents an almost exhaustive catalogue of refutations against heretical thought, Abba Giyorgis also included in its pages many homilies intended to strengthen and enrich the faith of Orthodox believers. One of them, entitled "The White Bird with the Silver Wings and Green Torso"<sup>595</sup>, like so many others, is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, Mother of God. Following the psalmist, Giyorgis compares Mary to "the wings of a dove covered with silver, its pinions with green gold" (Psalm 68:13). This image is also recorded in his hymn written in praise of the blessed Virgin under the title, Yeweddesewa or The Angels Praise Her.<sup>596</sup> It is a lovely hymn that tells of the vision which the Virgin's parents, Joachim and

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<sup>593</sup>Ibid., p. 142; MS pp. 224-235.

<sup>594</sup>Ibid., MS pp. 266-288 and 342-353.

<sup>595</sup>Ibid., MS pp. 185-196.

<sup>596</sup>Mezmure Dawit ("Psalm of David"), (Addis Ababa: Berhannena Salam Printing Press, 1965), p. 63.



Hanna, saw in answer to their prayer that they be given a child by God: They saw a white bird coming forth from the heavens, and thirty days later, on the seventh of August, Hanna conceived our Lady the Virgin Mary.<sup>597</sup> Giyorgis refers to Mary as a dove in yet another hymn known as the Sebhata-Fekur or The Praise of Love in which Mary is compared to a dove who consoles, a dove meek and innocent.<sup>598</sup>

Throughout his works, Abba Giyorgis, displays his loyal propagation of the traditional teaching of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. In defense of Orthodox Christology and Mariology, he stresses the true humanity of the holy Virgin Mary, identifying her as the daughter of Adam, and thus, our human sister, as well as the true humanity and divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, perfect man, and perfect God. Everywhere he upholds the Orthodox teaching regarding the unity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's nature, the perpetual virginity of Mary, and Mary's right to the title "Theotokos". Abba Giyorgis marvels at the mystery of God's incarnation and the strength of Mary's virginity to contain God in the narrowness of her womb. How difficult, he writes in the Arganone Weddassie, for fire to merge with water and dwell in peace! How difficult for a white lamb (the Virgin Mary) to embrace a roaring lion (God incarnate) in her bosom! How

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<sup>597</sup>See Budge, Legends, p. 6.

<sup>598</sup>Sa'atat Za-lelit Woza Negeh ("Hours of the Day and of the Night"), p. 179.

difficult for milk to flow from the breasts of a virgin! How difficult for the fullness of heaven and earth to dwell in the simplicity of a manger!<sup>599</sup> Thus, in the richness of his poetic images, Abba Giyorgis captures the miracle of the incarnation and the praise of Orthodox Christians for the blessed Virgin's role in God's economy of salvation.

In our discussion of the writers who were influential in the formation of Ethiopian Orthodox doctrine and piety, we cannot overlook the Emperor Zara Yaqob himself.<sup>600</sup> We have mentioned already his far-reaching religious reform program. While the veneration of the Virgin Mary in Ethiopia probably reaches far back in the history of the country, Zara Yaqob displayed a special devotion to her and encouraged her cult in every way possible, making it the hallmark of a distinctive Ethiopian piety. When the famous monastery of Mitmaq in Egypt was destroyed by the Muslims, he built a new church in the district of Tagulat and named it Dabra Mitmaq in honor of the Virgin.<sup>601</sup> Tradition attributes to him personally a number of religious writings, among them the Mashafa Berhan ("Book of Light"), the Mashafa Milad ("Book of Doctrinal Collections"), Taamera Tesbet ("The Miracle of the Incarnation"), Kiddata Saytan ("Way of the

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<sup>599</sup>Budge, Legends, p. 301.

<sup>600</sup>Tamrat, Church and State in Ethiopia, esp. pp. 221-246; Kaplan, The Monastic Holy Man, pp. 103-108.

<sup>601</sup>Pankhurst, R.K.P., The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles (Addis Ababa and elsewhere: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 36; Budge, A History of Ethiopia, p. 307.

Devil"), Mashafa Bahery ("Book of Nature"), Egzi Aber Nagsa ("God Rules in Majesty"), and Ta'aqwo Mistir ("The Reservation of the Mystery").<sup>602</sup>

In his zeal for Orthodoxy, Zara-Yaqob reaffirmed the importance of the clergy and its role in teaching and shepherding the people. On Saturdays and Sundays, for instance, every Christian was required to attend church; priests were to teach the Orthodox Faith regarding the worship of God, His commandments, and the Sabbath observances. Every Christian was to have his or her own "father confessor" without whose approval participation in Holy Communion was forbidden; this practice is still widely observed today in Ethiopia, particularly in the country-side. To solve the problem of a shortage of religious books, Zara-Yaqob mandated the establishment of a library in every church. Requiring a clear and unequivocal expression of an Orthodox Christian faith from his people, Zara Yaqob further insisted on the abolishment of all forms of pagan worship, including consultation of witch-doctors and other magical practices.<sup>603</sup> Many of his decreed fasts and holy days are still observed in Ethiopia today.

We have seen already that Zara-Yaqob encouraged open theological discussions and public debates--out of which, for instance, Abba Giyorgis' work, "The Book of Mystery," emerged. In addition, the emperor mandated public affirmations of faith.

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<sup>602</sup>Tamrat, Church and State in Ethiopia, p. 243, note 4.

<sup>603</sup>Ibid., pp. 238-239.

One decree required every Christian to bear an inscription on the forehead saying, "Belonging to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Also, fillets were required to be worn on the arms saying, "I am the servant of Mary, the Mother of the Creator of the world."<sup>604</sup> Zara-Yaqob also established the observance of many of the festivals celebrated today in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. Among them are the festivals of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, held on the 29th of each month; the thirty-three festivals of our Lady Mary, observed as strictly as all Sundays; and monthly festivals honoring St. Michael, the nine archangels, the four celestial beasts, the prophets, and the Apostles.

He decreed that in all churches one altar was to be dedicated to the holy Virgin Mary. We remember that it was Zara-Yaqob who had the Book of the Miracles of the Holy Virgin Mary translated from Arabic into Ethiopic and who required every altar to have an icon of the holy Virgin, a requirement existing up until this day in Ethiopian churches.<sup>605</sup>

Zara Yaqob's love for the blessed Virgin Mary is apparent everywhere in his writings. He can say that the holy Virgin Mary existed in the mind of God before the creation of the world;<sup>606</sup> of all creatures, none is to be more highly honored than Mary;

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<sup>604</sup>Budge, A History of Ethiopia, p. 305.

<sup>605</sup>Ibid., pp. 309-310.

<sup>606</sup>Mashafa Berhan, in: Conti Rossini, C. and Ricci, L., Il libro della luce II (CSCO, vol. 51), p. 35.

for only God is greater than she.<sup>607</sup> For the Emperor, the holy Virgin Mary is the Mother of God to whom no one from among the children of humanity before her or after her can compare.<sup>608</sup> She is two-fold virgin, i.e., virgin in soul and body, who has committed no sin either in her thoughts or her flesh.<sup>609</sup> And while no one is free from sin, not even for an hour, Zara Yaqob praises the purity of the two-fold Virgin in whom God Himself was pleased to dwell:<sup>610</sup> He who dwelled on Mount Sinai, whose glorious Light shone upon the assembly of Israel and upon the entire world, was pleased to be born from the pure flesh of the Virgin Mary for the salvation of the world.<sup>611</sup>

Like others before him, Zara-Yaqob affirmed the humanity of the holy Virgin, describing her as the daughter of Adam, and the sister of humanity; yet, above all women the Holy Virgin was blessed and chosen for a high and glorious purpose: to be an active instrument of God's saving work. Repeatedly, Zara-Yaqob stressed the purity and holiness of the Virgin Mary, purified and sanctified by God. She is the two-fold Virgin of body and soul; and she is the perpetual Virgin whose virginity is unchanged either before, during or after our Lord and Saviour's birth.

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<sup>607</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>608</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>609</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>610</sup>Il libro della luce I (CSCO, vol. 47), p. 46.

<sup>611</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

THE SCOPE AND MAIN THEMES CONNECTED WITH  
MARIOLOGY IN THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX TEWAHEDO CHURCH

The basis for all Christology, the study of the person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, begins with the life and testimony of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Himself as witnessed in the holy scriptures. Christology is concerned with the mystery of the incarnation as a question of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ's personality, namely his humanity, his divinity, and their unity in relation to one nature and one person, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This divine-human personality forms the basis of our understanding of the redemption, reconciliation, and reunion of humanity with God.

In the Patristic period, christological doctrine developed chiefly in response to the fourth-century Arian heresy. The creeds of Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), and Ephesus (431) re-affirmed our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's full deity and full humanity. Ethiopian Christology developed in strict adherence to the teachings of these first three Ecumenical Councils.<sup>612</sup> Thus the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church bases its faith and teaching on Holy Scripture, the Apostolic tradition, and the teachings of the Early Church Fathers. Fundamental to it is the teaching of the one God, as expressed in

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<sup>612</sup>For the following sketch, I am drawing on a traditional source, the Mezgebe Haymanot ("Treasure of Faith") which has been edited by Cerulli, E., Scritti Teologici Etiopici dei secoli XVI-XVII, Studi e Testi, (Citta del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1960), no. 204.

Scripture: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one God, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart, and you shall teach them to your children" (Deuteronomy 6:4-8).

Also fundamental to the confession of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church is the doctrine of the Trinity, expressed in the Orthodox Confession of Faith: "Before all else, we believe in the Three Persons and One God, who are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."<sup>613</sup> For the Ethiopian Orthodox, God the Father is none other than He who begets the Son and from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds. The Son is none other than He who was begotten from the Father, from whom nothing is begotten and nothing proceeds. The Holy Spirit is none other than He who proceeds from the Father, from whom nothing is begotten and nothing proceeds. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three in Akalat (Persons), three in Asmat (Names) and three in Getsat (Faces). They are united in Selthan (authority), Agezaz (in ruling), Baherye (in essence), and Malakot (in divinity). The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church affirms that humanity is made in the likeness of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>614</sup> Likewise, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit resemble each other. Furthermore, the Father is Father from eternity to eternity; the Son is the Son from eternity to eternity; and the Holy Spirit is Holy Spirit

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<sup>613</sup>Mezgebe Haymanot, in: Cerulli, Scritti, p. 3.

<sup>614</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-4.

from eternity to eternity.<sup>615</sup> To say that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son is for the Ethiopian Orthodox creed heretical and opposed to the teaching of Holy Scripture. It is also heretical in light of the fact that to say that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son necessitates the Son proceeding from the Father and the Holy Spirit.<sup>616</sup> The Orthodox faith affirms that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, and the Son is begotten from the Father. They are three in one and one in Three: Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity.<sup>617</sup>

All that the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church believes, affirms, and teaches is an expression of this confession of the triune God. V. C. Samuel, in an essay entitled "The Faith of the Church"<sup>618</sup>, gives a summary of that confession and its importance for the life and worship of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church:

The unity of God is not conceived in the sense of an arithmetical digit nor of a solitary condition, but in that of an all-inclusive perfection. So the One God is also eternally three. He is "three names and One God; three prosopa and one appearance, three persons and one essence."<sup>619</sup>

In other words:

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<sup>615</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>616</sup>Ibid., pp. 4-5.

<sup>617</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>618</sup>The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama of History and Spiritual Life (Addis Ababa: E.O.C., December 1970), pp. 43-54.

<sup>619</sup>Ibid., p. 45.



God is eternally Father, eternally Son and eternally Holy Spirit.<sup>620</sup>

In the Anaphora of John, Son of Thunder, the priest recites the following prayer to express the nature of this triune God:

None knows thy beginning or end; infinite art Thou nor can any find thee, and none can know thee or see thee. Thou knowest Thyself, thy Kingdom is without end, thy power is immutable, thy greatness is infinite, nor is thy glory hidden. To all thou art unseen, yet all is seen of thee.<sup>621</sup>

God is, therefore, the Creator of all. Having made all, He continues to sustain His creation. Or, as the anaphora expresses it: "The Lord is high; yet, all were created through His grace, and all live through His kindness."<sup>622</sup>

In the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, this unity of the One triune God, all powerful, all infinite, all-knowing, is confessed as the unity of Godhead, as Melekot; the one Godhead is shared equally and eternally by the three persons or Akalat. This is important as Ethiopian Orthodoxy has had to do its share of contending with various heretical interpretations of the Trinity, specifically those which refused to accept the personal distinctions in the one Godhead and those which insisted that the three persons were three, separate gods. The Church therefore confesses, "We believe that the Father who sends is Father in his nature. We believe that the Son who is sent is Son in his Nature, and we believe that the life-giving Holy Spirit is Holy

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<sup>620</sup>Ibid.

<sup>621</sup>Daoud, The Liturgy of the Ethiopian Church, p. 89.

<sup>622</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

Spirit in his nature. Three names, but one God."<sup>623</sup> Or, in the words of V. C. Samuel:

The Father is different from the Son and the Holy Spirit only in that He alone is Father. The Son alone is Son, and the Holy Spirit alone dwells in us and makes God known to us. So the priest who celebrates the Anaphora of St. John says in prayer, 'But Thy living Holy Spirit knoweth the depth of thy godhead. He has declared thy nature, and told us about Thy oneness. He taught Thy unity, and helped to know Thy Trinity.'<sup>624</sup>

In everything that the Father does, the Son and the Holy Spirit are there with Him; in all that the Son does, the Father and the Holy Spirit are there with Him; in all the activities of the Holy Spirit, the Father and the Son are there with Him.<sup>625</sup> The Anaphora of St. Mary expresses the matter this way: "The Father, being Father, doth not give order to the Son; and the Son, being Son, is not exalted; and the Holy Spirit is equal. But the Divine Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God, one kingdom, one authority, and one government."<sup>626</sup> The priest continues: "Thus, we, without separating or dividing, believe and confess the oneness and unity so that it will not be divided or separated. Let us distinguish (between Trinity and oneness) so that it will not be confused. We do not say Three as we say Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but one in three Persons (Akalats). We do not say one

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<sup>623</sup>Daoud, The Liturgy, p. 109 (Anaphora of St. Mary).

<sup>624</sup>Samuel, V., "The Faith of the Church," A Panorama, p. 46; Daoud, Ethiopian Liturgy, p. 90.

<sup>625</sup>Samuel, V. C., p. 46.

<sup>626</sup>Daoud, Ethiopian Liturgy, p. 110.

like Adam the first creature, but three with one nature."<sup>627</sup>

Finally, the unity of the Holy Trinity speaks of God's infinite and boundless love. With infinite love, God creates and sustains the world. It is God the Father who brings all this into being; but it is accomplished in reality through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit. All this is one, continuous activity of God, seen in its different aspects. In His great love, God the Father sent His only Son into the world in order to accomplish its salvation; in the same love, God the Son came and worked out this salvation; and in the same love, God the Holy Spirit perfect the salvation thus given. All these are but different manifestations of the same loving activity of the one God in His relation to the world.<sup>628</sup> For the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, this unity and distinction of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is essential for a proper understanding both of Christology and Mariology.

#### THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

According to Ethiopian Orthodox teaching, 5,500 years after the world suffered from following the devices of Satan, one of the Holy Trinity, the Second Person, the Son of God, who resembles the Father and is co-equal and of one essence with Him, descended from heaven and dwelt in the womb of a virgin named

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<sup>627</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>628</sup>Samuel, V., p. 47.

Mary. She carried Him nine months in her womb, conceived by the Holy Spirit. He was born like all children; he sucked milk from the breast of his mother; he was fed like all infants and grew and became strong by the Holy Spirit. He fulfilled all laws except the law of sin.<sup>629</sup> The Christian doctrine of the mystery of the incarnation, as understood by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, affirms that the eternal Son of God took soul-animated flesh from His human mother, the holy Virgin Mary; and that the historical Jesus of Nazareth is both fully God and man. It is opposed to all theories of mere theophany or transitory appearance of God in human form. It asserts an abiding union in the person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ of Godhead and humanity without the integrity or permanence of either being impaired.

The Incarnation of God the Son is primarily for the salvation, i.e., the restoration of the world to its direct and unimpeded relation with God. As God made it, the world was very good (Genesis 1:31); however, into this world came evil. Thus, God, the Creator, ever-concerned and active for the world's salvation, desired to rescue His good creation from the clutches of evil, and to restore it to the destiny for which it had originally been created. St. Athanasius, in his treatise On the Incarnation, summarizes the situation as follows:

...God has made man, and willed that he  
should abide in incorruption; but men,  
having despised and rejected the contemplation

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<sup>629</sup>Mezgebe Haymanot, ed. Cerulli, E., pp. 5-6.

of God, and devised and contrived evil for themselves, received the condemnation of death with which they had been threatened; and from thenceforth no longer remained as they were made, but were being corrupted according to their devices; and death had the mastery over them as King, for transgression of the commandment was turning them back to their natural state, so that just as they have had their being out of nothing, so also as might be expected, they might look for corruption into nothing in the course of time.<sup>630</sup>

Yet, Athanasius believes that it was not God's desire to leave humanity in a state of corruption, separated from Himself:

...It was unseemly that creatures once made rational, and having partaken of the Word, should go to ruin, and turn again toward non-existence by the way of corruption. For it was not worthy of God's goodness that the things He had made should waste away, because of the deceit practiced on men by the devil...

...For neglect reveals weakness, and not goodness on God's part...it was, then, out of the question to leave men to the current of corruption...for His sake it was once more necessary to bring the corruptible to incorruption, and to maintain intact the just claim of the Father upon all... For this purpose, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God came to our realm.<sup>631</sup>

Thus, he argues that

...the reason of His coming down was because of us, and that our transgression called forth the loving-kindness of the Word, that the Lord should both make haste to help us and to appear among men.<sup>632</sup>

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<sup>630</sup>St. Athanasius, On the Incarnation of the Word III.3 (Schaff, P., and others, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, vol. 4), p. 37.

<sup>631</sup>Ibid., pp. 37 and 40.

<sup>632</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

Therefore, God the Son entered the earthly realm of existence in a unique way by taking upon Himself a perfectly real human life. This is the incarnation, by which God the Father, who created the world through God the Son and perfects it through God the Holy Spirit, manifests His saving work for the sake of the world.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church believes and confesses that the one born of the Virgin Mary is God incarnate of one essence, one person, one hypostasis, one nature. Yet it also holds that before this union, this incarnation, the divine nature was in the person of the Word of God while the human nature was in the person of humanity.<sup>633</sup> Thus, the one nature possesses the properties of two. The God-head and the man-hood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ are united, not in the sense of a mere combination of connection or junction, but in the real sense of the word union. How the properties of Godhead and humanity unite in one nature, without mixture, without confusion, and without alteration, is a vast and wonderful mystery. Yet, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church asserts that there is a kind of union which surpasses all human understanding and imagination<sup>634</sup> and is expressed in John 1:14 in these words: "The Word became flesh."

In the light of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's life of unbroken communion with God, the Church affirms the absolutely

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<sup>633</sup>Gembere, A., Medlote-Amine, p. 107.

<sup>634</sup>W. A. Girgis, The Christological Teaching of the Chalcedonian Church (Cairo: The Coptic Orthodox Theological University), pp. 6-7.

sinless nature of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Of one nature with God in soul and body, He entered into our battle with sin and evil as a man, falling victim to our death. By His resurrection from the dead, He reigns eternally in His natural unity with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit in His unbroken and indivisible union with humanity. In our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ we have the incarnate, crucified and glorified God the Son, who is Himself our brother, signifying the final destiny and fulfillment awaiting the human race.<sup>635</sup>

#### ORIGINAL SIN

According to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and its understanding of Holy Scripture, original sin is the state in which humanity has been held captive since the Fall. Though God's creation was good, it was perverted by the sin of Adam which is passed down through all generations. Though our first parents were endowed with bodily immortality, God imposed upon them death as a punishment for the transgression of His commandment. The consequences of this transgression, or fall, were numerous: suffering and sorrow entered the world; Adam lost his perfect knowledge of God; the human subjection to the dominion of Satan began; and Adam's sin was transmitted to his posterity.

The Old Testament attests to this universal sinfulness of

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<sup>635</sup>Samuel, V., "The Faith of The Church", Panorama, pp. 47-48.

humanity, (Gen. 8:21; I Kings 8:46; Ps. 130:3), to the fact that humanity is born into an inevitably sinful condition (Ps. 51:5; Job 15:14; 25:4), and to the impossibility for any human being to avoid this dreadful situation (Job 4:17; 14:4). St. Paul, in the New Testament, links this phenomenon to the story of the Fall. But he also affirms that, while all of humanity was once subject to the Fall of one man, so all of humanity is redeemed through one man, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Thus, the true significance of Adam is ultimately revealed in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:12-21).

Just as our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is heralded in the New Testament as the "second Adam", in contrast to the first Adam, and thus as the new head of His redeemed humanity, the Virgin Mary can be seen as the antithesis of Eve, with all that this implies. In an earlier chapter, we have quoted the texts from St. Justin the Martyr and St. Irenaeus.<sup>636</sup>

The same theme is taken up in the Ethiopian hymn of praise to the Virgin Mary, the Weddassie Maryam. Here, the Virgin is praised for bearing Him who delivered Eve from the curse of death: "God passed the decree of judgment upon Eve whom the serpent led astray...Nevertheless, His ear inclined to love for man, and He set her free."<sup>637</sup>

The hymn leaves no doubt that the holy Virgin Mary, the God-

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<sup>636</sup>See above, pp. 237-239.

<sup>637</sup>St. Ephraem, Weddassie Maryam, pp. 34-35; Budge, Legends, p. 281; see above, p. 61 (Chapter I).



bearer, has rightly become the object of boasting for all of humanity because through her the curse of old was destroyed. She has overcome the wickedness of Eve's disobedience; and the door to Paradise, shut by Eve's transgression, has been opened by the blessed Virgin's humble obedience.<sup>638</sup> The womb which God decreed should bring forth children in pain and suffering has, through the holy Virgin Mary, become the fountain of life, and the dwelling place of God Himself.<sup>639</sup> And the voice which once cursed Eve, exiled from the Garden, has become the voice of blessing: "Rejoice, O full of grace."<sup>640</sup> Thus original sin, brought about through the transgression of Eve is redeemed through the Mother of our Lord, the Virgin Mary.

### ESCHATOLOGY

Eschatology, the doctrine of the last things, comprises that part of systematic theology which deals with the final destiny both of the individual soul and humanity in general.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church teaches that the passing away of heaven and earth, the resurrection of the dead, and God's judgment upon the deeds of humanity are part of the eschatological reality toward which the world moves. This belief

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<sup>638</sup>St. Ephraem, Weddassie Maryam, pp. 121-122; Budge, Legends, p. 289.

<sup>639</sup>St. Ephraem, Weddassie Maryam, p. 125; Budge, Legends, p. 294.

<sup>640</sup>St. Ephraem, Weddassie Maryam, p. 168.

is summarized in the Apostolic Creed known as the "Amakniyou of the Apostles"<sup>641</sup> in which the congregation confesses:

...We also believe in the Resurrection of the dead, the righteous and sinners; and in the day of judgment, when every one will be recompensed according to his deeds.<sup>642</sup>

It is also part of the Creed of the Fathers of Nicea which opens the Anaphora of the Three Hundred:

...He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

...(We) wait for the resurrection from the dead and the life to come, world without end.<sup>643</sup>

It is the teaching of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church that there are places where the souls of the righteous and unrighteous go after death. Sheol or Gahannam correspond to the Roman Catholic conception of purgatory: it is a place of suffering where, after the private judgment of God, the souls of the unjust are detained until the last judgment. They may be delivered from this place of suffering through the prayers of the faithful, memorial services, and alms to the poor given in their behalf and then attain to paradise or Genet, where they dwell happily until the last judgment. Genet is the place of joy where the just, righteous, or holy souls wait for the judgment day when they will reach the eternal joy of Heaven, Mengiste-Semayat, the abode of God. Likewise, hell or Gahannam Esat is the eternal

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<sup>641</sup>This creed is said toward the end of the pre-Anaphora: Daoud, The Liturgy, pp. 51-52.

<sup>642</sup>Daoud, The Liturgy, p. 52.

<sup>643</sup>Ibid., pp. 122-123.

place of suffering for the unjust following the last judgment. For the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church the human soul under God's command to Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, is transmitted to children from parents in the same way as the body. There is, for the Ethiopian Christian, no separation of soul and body. Both body and soul together will be rewarded or punished as one inseparable entity, in accordance with the mode and manner of their traducianist origin.

In the Prayer, "Pilot of the Soul," which follows Holy Communion in the Anaphora of St. Jacob of Serugh, the celebrant expresses the eschatological anticipation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church when he says:

O Lord, this corruptible and transient world of hoping is not for us, thy Christian people; but we hope and wait for that which is to come...Thou didst say, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.'<sup>644</sup>

He continues:

Thou didst also say: The horn will be blown three times to awaken the dead.

At the first blowing of the horn there will be gathered the dust of bodies scattered through all the ends of the world, above and beneath, in the sea and on the land, that which is in the stomachs of the beasts and that which waxed old and perished after death, and the pieces of the body, fallen on earth, will be gathered in their previous position.

At the second blowing of the horn the bones will be joined with the flesh and blood and they will be perfect dead bodies without movement until the appointed time.

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<sup>644</sup>Daoud, The Liturgy, p. 229.

At the third blowing of the horn the dead will rise in the twinkling of an eye, the righteous and the sinners, carrying their works which followed them from the earth and which they did in all the days of their life, good or bad. Thou wilt make the righteous to stand at thy right hand, and the sinners on thy left hand.

Thou wilt answer thy elect with the words of blessing saying: Come to me, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom of heaven prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungry and you fed me; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came unto me and spoke on my behalf.

Afterwards thou wilt turn to thy left hand and rebuke the sinners with the word of accusation saying: Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels: For I was hungry, and you gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink; I was naked, and you clothed me not; I was sick, and you visited me not; I was in prison, and you did not speak on my behalf.

At that time every mouth and tongue which spoke mischief and deceit will be stopped. At that time there will be sorrow but vain sorrow.

At that time there will be a cry but a vain cry: at that time there will be wailing but vain wailing; at that time there will be lamentation but vain lamentation; at that time there will be tears shed like the water of winter which has no end and does not stop. There will be sent to them swift lightning and a fearful sound of thunder and a powerful flash which cuts, separates and divides--this is the portion of sinners.

At that time the earth will restore that which was entrusted to it and the mother will not hear the cry of her daughter. At that time there will be revealed the work of the soul which she did during the days of her life.<sup>645</sup>

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<sup>645</sup>Ibid., pp. 229-230.

Yet, even in this context the celebrant expresses the deep trust of the congregation in the mercy and forgiveness of the Lord and His Mother, the holy Virgin Mary, whose intercession does not cease but continues, even at the last judgment:

We have trusted on thy body which we have eaten and thy blood which we have drunk that thou at that time mayest have compassion and mercy upon us, because thou didst say, Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life.

We have also trusted on thy mother our Lady Mary, the shield of our race in giving birth to thee, because thou didst say to her, he who remembers thee and calls upon thy name will have eternal life.<sup>646</sup>

As noted earlier, memorial services and services of the divine liturgy are held for the dead at different times throughout the church year. According to the canon law of the Ethiopian Church, the prayers for the dead were regulated by the Apostles themselves. Such services are held accompanied by readings from the Holy Books and the Psalm, to say farewell to those who are asleep and who have believed in the Lord.<sup>647</sup> If the deceased is a priest, he is to be placed "before the altar of God", i.e., in the sanctuary; if he or she is a lay person, he or she is to be placed "under the altar of God," i.e., outside of the sanctuary. Memorial services are followed by offerings of incense and prayers to God in thanksgiving. Passages from the Psalms dealing with the hope of true resurrection are read as

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<sup>646</sup>Ibid., p. 230; the last reference is to the "Covenant of Mercy"; see above, pp. 27f. (Chapter I)

<sup>647</sup>Fetha Nagast ("The Law of the Kings"), pp. 273-274.

well as other passages from Scripture and the Ethiopian sacred books which speak of the confession of sin acceptable to God.<sup>648</sup> In this respect, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church follows the example of the New Testament Church in which prayers of confession, the anointing of the sick with oil, and the prayer for the resurrection of the dead appear to have been connected: "...The prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven." (James 5:13-16)

Commemorative services for the dead are held on the third day after their death signifying the day on which our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ rose from the dead; also, on the seventh day, the fourteenth day, the ninth and twelfth days, and on the fortieth day. In addition, a gift or sacrifice is to be offered on behalf of the dead on the day of burial, after one month, at the end of six months, and after one year. Alms are also to be given to the poor on behalf of the dead. Such acts are done in order that the joy of the deceased may be secured,<sup>649</sup> and the faithful be encouraged in expectation of the reward that awaits such good works. To this day, the practice of commemorative and memorial services and good deeds on behalf of the dead is widely observed in Ethiopia. In addition, anyone celebrating the

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<sup>648</sup>Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>649</sup>Ibid., pp. 275-276; Meshafa-Genzet ("Prayer book for the Dead"); (Addis Ababa: Tesffa Gabre Sellassie Printing Press, 1962), p. 2.

Ethiopian liturgy at any time and in any place prays the prayer of penitence on behalf of those who have died, saying: "Remember, Lord, all our fathers, brothers, and sisters who are asleep and resting in the Orthodox faith, and lay their souls in the bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."<sup>650</sup>

In all eschatological considerations, the role of the holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, is praised and honored by the faithful in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. God's salvation was made possible only through the holy Virgin Mary who bore the incarnate Son of God. Because of the blessed Virgin's willing participation in God's saving work, those who believe in the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ have the eternal hope of the resurrection and of eternal life with God. Mary's motherhood in the economy of grace continues from the time of her faithful consent at the Annunciation throughout her earthly life to the foot of the cross of our Lord, and to the everlasting consummation of all things before the throne of God. This continuing activity is recognized in the Anaphora of St. Mary during the prayer of the "Pilot of the Soul" which concludes the service of the Divine Liturgy:

O Virgin, remind Him who remembers, not forgetting anyone...Remind Him of mercy and not of destruction. Remind Him of compassion and not of anger. Remind Him of the sinners and not of the righteous;... of the impure and not of the pure.<sup>651</sup>

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<sup>650</sup>Daoud, The Liturgy, p. 64 ("Anaphora of the Apostles"); Mercer, The Ethiopic Liturgy, p. 359.

<sup>651</sup>Daoud, The Liturgy, p. 120.

The service of the divine liturgy ends with the congregation leaving the church with this assurance of the loving intercession and concern of the Holy Virgin Mary on their behalf, even at the last judgment.

**THE MEANING OF OUR DEATH AND  
ST. MARY'S DEATH IN THE ECONOMY OF SALVATION**

Death is the consequence of original sin (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:17-19; Romans 5:12-15). Therefore, all humanity, born in original sin, is subject to the law of death. Even those who, according to the Apostle Paul, will be found living at the second coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) must attain eternal life by means of a radical change which, in substance, is death, or the end of an individual's history (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; Luke 16:26). Yet, death, from a Christian perspective, is neither the end of human existence nor a mere transition from one form of reality into another. It is the end of time and the beginning of eternity. As the Psalmist says, regarding the death of God's faithful, "Precious before the Lord is the death of His saints" (Ps. 116:16); and "Turn, O my soul, unto the rest, for the Lord has been bountiful to thee (Ps. 116:17)

In the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church death is not referred to as death but as "rest". It is traditional to announce that one is "at rest" rather than dead: for those who have believed in the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ do not die, as



He himself said to the Sadducees (Mt. 22:23ff). Therefore, the bones of those who are living in the Lord are not despised or defiled; on the contrary, the bones of a pure and saintly person are believed to be endowed with restorative power, in analogy to the story of the prophet Elisha whose bones restored a dead man back to life upon his touching them (II Kings 14:20-21).

St. Athanasius affirms that since the death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ for the sake of humanity death has no longer the same effect and power over us except for the dissolution of our finite nature, and even that for the purpose of the renewal of life through the resurrection:

...Now that the common Saviour of all has died on our behalf, we, the faithful in Christ, no longer die the death as before, agreeably to the warning of the law; for this condemnation has ceased; but, corruption ceasing and being put away by the grace of the Resurrection, henceforth we are only dissolved, agreeably to our bodies' mortal natures, at the time God has fixed for each, that we may be able to gain a better resurrection. For like the seeds which are cast into the earth, we do not perish by dissolution, but sown in the earth, shall rise again, death having been brought to nought by the grace of the Saviour.<sup>652</sup>

That death is destroyed in the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is the message of the Apostle Paul who writes: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" (I Cor. 15:54-56) Henceforth, all Christians belong to no one but God, maker of

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<sup>652</sup>Athanasius, "On the Incarnation of the Word I.21," A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. IV, p. 47.

heaven and earth and giver of eternal life, through His Son our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who, seeing humanity's low estate, bowed the heaven of heavens, and came and dwelt in the womb of the Virgin Mary, becoming a man like unto us, with the exception of sin alone. He delivered us and redeemed us, and made us His own people forever.<sup>653</sup> For all who trust in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ there is no final death.

Like all daughters and sons of Adam, the holy Virgin Mary died as a result of Adam's sin. "Mary, sprung from Adam, died on consequence of original sin; Adam died in consequence of sin, and the flesh of the Lord, sprung from Mary, died to destroy sin."<sup>654</sup> There is no mention in Scripture regarding the death of the blessed Virgin Mary. The earliest testimonies speaking of her death are from such Eastern Church Fathers as Origen, St. Ephraem, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Epiphanius, and Hippolytus, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine in the West.<sup>655</sup> The only reference to the close of the Virgin's earthly life before the first Ecumenical Council of Nicea is found in the work of Origen: "With respect to the brothers of Jesus, there are many who ask how he had them, seeing that Mary remained a virgin until her

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<sup>653</sup>St. Ephraem: Weddassie Maryam, pp. 146-147; Budge, Legends, p. 292.

<sup>654</sup>Malaty, St. Mary in the Orthodox Concept, p. 117, citing St. Augustine, Homilies on the Gospel of St. John VIII.9.

<sup>655</sup>W. Burghardt, Testimony of the Patristic Age Concerning Mary's Death (Westminster: Newman Press, 1957); O'Carroll, Theotokos, pp. 117-118 ("Death of Mary").

death."<sup>656</sup> Later, in the writings of St. Ephraem, the Virgin's death is mentioned in passing as a self-evident phenomenon with no need of justification.<sup>657</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa elaborates further on the theme saying: "Death came near (the Virgin Mary) and was shattered on her. It first stumbled on the fruit of her virginity as on some rock."<sup>658</sup> Thus, while ordinary virgins destroy death's power by refusing to give it fresh victims, the holy Virgin Mary triumphed over death by giving birth virginally to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. St. Gregory does not deny the blessed Virgin's death: Death was "shattered on her"; yet, he affirms that the fruit of her womb crushed death by escaping the corruption of the tomb.

The one writer before the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.) to dwell at length on the subject of the Virgin's death was St. Epiphanius of Salamis. He warns those who hold the Virgin in high honor not to consider her to be beyond the limitation of a human being; instead, he stresses the humanity of Mary, describing how the Virgin Mary was begotten by a human father and brought forth from a human mother like all other folk. Yet, he acknowledged that, while the world suffered a sore loss by her death, heaven received a choice and glorious pledge.<sup>659</sup> Many

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<sup>656</sup>Origen, Commentary on John, Fragment 31; Burghardt, The Testimony, p. 3.

<sup>657</sup>Burghardt, The Testimony, p. 4.

<sup>658</sup>O'Carroll, Theotokos, p. 117.

<sup>659</sup>Budge, E. A. W., Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt, p. ixxxix.

theologians find it not difficult to see in Epiphanius the first theologian of the Assumption who possessed an intuition of the mystery of this event and was fascinated by it.<sup>660</sup>

We have already seen how the rich Ethiopian literature concerning the Transitus Mariae combines the tradition of Mary's death with the tradition about her Assumption into heaven.<sup>661</sup> These documents possess a high theological value in that they reveal the reaction of early Christian piety as it was confronted with the apparent fact of our Lady's, the Virgin Mary's death. They set forth a clear, unequivocal solution to the problem of Mary's destiny and to the meaning of death from the perspective of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For the patristic writers the Virgin's death represented her real humanity, testifying to the fact that she, though pure from personal sin, belonged to a fallen human nature; her Assumption was the sign of God's higher purpose for humanity.

In the Ethiopian tradition, therefore, the Assumption of the Virgin Mary is always seen in relation to the Incarnation. Because Mary is the Mother of God, Theotokos, sharing on earth in the sufferings of her Son, she is also the "Queen of Heaven", lifted up and clothed in the heavenly splendor of her Saviour, Lord, and Son. Because she is a woman and like all women

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<sup>660</sup>Carol, Mariology, vol. 2, pp. 139-144.

<sup>661</sup>See above, pp. 50-75. For the Feast of the Assumption, see also the text in Budge, The Book of the saints of the Ethiopian Church, vol. 2, pp. 523-527. A. C. Rush, "The Assumption in the Apocrypha," The American Ecclesiastical Review 116 (January-June, 1947), pp. 5-31.

acquainted with death, the grave is her earthly destiny; but, because she is unique among women, for in her womb God Himself has dwelt, she is the first-fruit of the resurrection from the dead after Easter. In Mary, one witnesses the eschatological fulfillment which awaits all people on the final day of judgment.

Here is the doctrine of the Assumption: we affirm that this resurrection of flesh which for us will take place at the end of the world, took place for Mary not long after her death, so that, like Jesus, the Virgin enjoys, from that time until now, the recompense which will be, at some future time, the recompense of all the just.<sup>662</sup>

Thus, for the Ethiopian Orthodox faithful, the Virgin's death reminds them not only of the commonality of all flesh, but of God's wondrous power over life and death attested in the bodily resurrection of the woman chosen to be His Mother. Though her bodily assumption is a consequence of her divine maternity, it is also a sign of the eschatological hope that awaits those who wait upon the Lord in faithfulness and obedience.

Mary died because her Son Himself willed her to die, because her nature is no different from our own, because her death was intended as confirmation of the reality of the Incarnation, she rose from the dead, was taken up to her Son, in the integrity of her human nature, because it was impossible for the vessel that had held God to be dissolved

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<sup>662</sup>Amba Alexander (Coptic Bishop of Assiut, Egypt), "The Assumption in the Liturgy of the Church of Alexandria," Eastern Churches Quarterly 9 (1951), pp. 93-101; 96. The same issue of the Eastern Churches Quarterly features two more articles related to the Assumption: "The Iconography of the Falling Asleep of the Mother of God in Byzantine Tradition," by Dom Edmund M. Jones (pp. 101-112), and "The Dormition in Slav Iconography," by Michael Graviloff (pp. 113-119).

in the dust.<sup>663</sup>

For the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church the Virgin Mary is the example par excellence of obedience and faithfulness to God. She is two-fold virgin, i.e., virgin both in body and soul, who, though not "immaculate" or free from original sin, yet was all-holy, pure, and chose to actively participate in the saving work of God, His incarnation. Her virginity is a sign that faithfulness. She is the Virgin to whom God gives a child. She is the humble handmaiden through whom God glorifies Himself. She is the faithful Virgin in whom the promises of God are manifest. Mary's virginity, then, is both a sign of the denial or death of self and of her absolute dependence upon the living God. The Ethiopian faithful see in Mary's virginity the "death" that overcomes the world. Thus, the feast of her Assumption is always preceded by active reflection on her life of obedience, virginity, and faithfulness through fasting, self-examination, and charity. In this respect, one cannot consider the Virgin's assumption apart from her dormition, just as one cannot consider our Lord's resurrection apart from His crucifixion. The Virgin's dormition and assumption must always be understood in relation to each other. The Virgin's death to the world, expressed in her virginity, is the requisite condition for her magnification by God; it is this relationship that guides and informs the practices and the liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church for the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God.

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<sup>663</sup>Ibid., p. 230.

## CHAPTER V

### TOWARDS AN EAST-WEST DIALOGUE: ECUMENISM AND THE VIRGIN MARY

#### THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY IN THE TRADITION OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in Roman Catholic theology and devotion issues from her unique position as the mother of the incarnate Son of God. In both Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, she is counted preeminent among the saints and honored for her marvelous participation in God's miraculous work of salvation.

Central to Roman Catholic Marian devotion and teaching is the belief that the Virgin Mary, from the first instant of her conception, was immune from the stain of original sin--a privilege the Roman Catholic Church refers to as "immaculate conception." Augustine prepared this idea in his doctrine of original sin which stated that ever since the Fall, the human foetus was contaminated through paternal generation which affects the rational soul at its infusion.<sup>664</sup> While prior to the twelfth century, little evidence exists of a wide-spread belief in the Virgin's immaculate conception, the idea gained prominence with

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<sup>664</sup>Kari Borresen, "Mary in Catholic Theology," Concilium, Vol. CLXVIII: Mary in the Churches, edited by H. Kung and J. Moltmann (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), p. 51. The immaculate conception is comprehensibly discussed in the volume, The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, History and Significance, ed. by O'Connor, E.D. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1958).

the appearance of the feast of the conception of Mary.<sup>665</sup> This feast, based on an interpretation of the phrase "...Joachim, Joachim, the Lord God has harkened to thy prayer; descend hence, for behold thy wife Anna has conceived in her womb" in the Protevangelium of James 4:2, celebrated the Virgin's supernatural conception in the womb of her mother Anna.<sup>666</sup> From this origin the idea of the immaculate conception began to grow as a doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church.

The modern Roman Catholic dogma declares the Mother of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to be absolutely free from the fall of Adam and its consequences. Like most dogmas, it was the result of a long development and embodies in its history the struggle between the Thomist and Scotist parties in the Roman Catholic Church, a struggle which was not resolved until 1854.<sup>667</sup> From the twelfth century on, school men such as St. Albert, St. Bonaventure, and St. Thomas Aquinas, refuted the idea of an immaculate conception on the grounds that in every natural conception the stain of original sin is transmitted. Since the

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<sup>665</sup>In the East, the evidence points to the sixth and seventh centuries. In the West, the feast spread from England in the eleventh and twelfth centuries; see O'Carroll, Theotokos, p. 180 ("Immaculate Conception").

<sup>666</sup>This reading seems to be the original one according to the earliest manuscript, the third or fourth century Papyrus Bodmer; see above, p. 46. Other manuscripts read: "thy wife Anna will conceive in her womb;" Hennecke, E. and Schneemelcher, W., New Testament Apocrypha, vol. 1, p. 376

<sup>667</sup>Carol, Mariology, Vol. I, pp. 360-370; O'Carroll, Theotokos, pp. 180-182; G. Miegge, "The Roman Catholic Marian Doctrine," The Virgin Mary (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), pp. 107-132.



Virgin Mary was conceived in a natural way, she was not exempt from the law of original sin. Duns Scotus, however, like most Franciscans from the fourteenth century on, opposed the idea of the Virgin's natural conception; the Dominicans sided with St. Thomas and his proponents.<sup>668</sup> The latter, while agreed on the fact of the Virgin's innocence regarding any actual transgression, differed on the terms of her basic condition. Was she, they asked, free from sin from the very moment of her conception? Or was she tainted by original sin at the time of her conception, and rendered immaculate at some later point while still in her mother's womb? The latter view was advocated by St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure who argued against the former on the ground that the conception of the body precedes its animation, that is, the first association of the soul with the body. Thus, they reasoned, bodily conception, the result of concupiscence, contaminates the body which in turn contaminates the soul upon contact with it. However, St. Thomas Aquinas believed that the Virgin Mary, while not immaculate, was sanctified within her mother's womb. He writes:

The sanctification of the Virgin cannot be meant to have happened before her animation that is, before her soul was united to her body for two reasons: first, because the sanctification of which we speak is none other than purification from original sin...But guilt cannot be cleansed except by grace whose subject is the rational

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<sup>668</sup>Cross, F.L., The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, pp. 692-693; Miegge, The Virgin Mary, pp. 116-119; E. D. O'Connor, The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception: History and Significance (Notre Dam: University of Notre Dam, 1958), pp. 161-212 (Balic, C.).

creature only. Therefore, before the infusion of the rational soul the Virgin was not sanctified. Secondly, because only the rational creature is susceptible to guilt, the offspring conceived is not capable of guilt before the infusion of the rational soul. And if the blessed Virgin had been sanctified in any way before her animation she would have had no need of redemption and salvation which are through Christ, of whom it is said in Matthew 1:2, "He will save His people from their sins. "It is not fitting, then, that Christ should not be the Saviour of all men, as is said in 1 Timothy 4. It stands, then, that the sanctification of the blessed Virgin took place after her animation.<sup>669</sup>

Duns Scotus, on the other hand, argued that Mary was exempt from hereditary sin from the very moment of her conception. Through the immaculate conception of Mary, he reasoned, God's grace is greatly magnified through the release of one individual from the taint of original sin. The miracle of the immaculate conception secured the unity and the bond between Mary and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ through the strongest ties possible and filled the vacancy in heaven left by the fallen angels.<sup>670</sup> Thus, the controversy over the doctrine of the immaculate conception became one of the major dividing lines between Dominicans and Franciscans, Thomists and Scotists.

The fifteenth century brought decisive developments. The Council of Basel (1439) affirmed the immaculate conception as a pious opinion in accordance with Roman Catholic faith, reason, and scripture. In 1476, Pope Sixtus IV approved the Feast of the

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<sup>669</sup>Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III.27.2 as quoted by Miegge, *The Virgin Mary*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>670</sup>Carol, *Mariology*, vol. 1, pp. 302-303; O'Carroll, *Theotokos*, pp. 320-321; Miegge, *The Virgin Mary*, pp. 123-125.

Conception of the Virgin Mary, giving it its own Mass and Office; by the early part of the eighteenth century, this feast was officially extended and even imposed as a feast of obligation. The Council of Trent explicitly declared in its decree on original sin that the state of original sin did not extend to the Blessed Virgin Mary.<sup>671</sup> To the frequently asked question: "Was the Blessed Virgin Mary sanctified before or after the infusion of her soul into her body?", the council voiced the opinion that the soul of Mary might have been sanctified at the moment of its creation. St. Bernard, they declared, overlooked this point of Mary's passive conception as did others who failed to see that Mary might have been redeemed by preservation or prevention. It was even suggested that St. Thomas missed the subtleties of this point, along with St. Albert and St. Bonaventure.<sup>672</sup>

It remained for Pope Pius IX to take the final step: that of defining the immaculate conception as a dogma of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>673</sup> In 1848, a commission of theologians was named to study the question whether the immaculate conception might be defined, and if such a definition was opportune. This study was followed by an encyclical sent out to all Roman

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<sup>671</sup>J. Neuner, and J. Dupuis, The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church (New York: Alba House, 1982), pp. 201-203.

<sup>672</sup>J. A. Hardon, The Catholic Catechism (New York: Doubleday, 1975), pp. 152-153.

<sup>673</sup>Carol, Mariology, vol. 1, pp. 22-24; O'Carroll, Theotokos, pp. 182-184 ("Ineffabilis Deus"); Miegge, The Virgin Mary, pp. 127-130; O'Connor, The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, pp. 308-319 (R. Laurentin).

Catholic bishops, seeking their view regarding the definability of the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary as a dogma. In the Pope's own words:

...there was in the entire Catholic world a most ardent and wondrous revival of the desire that the most holy Mother of God--the beloved Mother of us all, the immaculate Virgin Mary--be finally declared by a solemn definition of the Church to have been conceived without the stain of original sin.<sup>674</sup>

Nine-tenths of the bishops replied favorably; thus, another commission was appointed to work out the details regarding the text of the definition. The final bill not only promulgated the dogma, but included arguments in its favor. Finally, in 1854, Pope Pius IX defined the dogma of the immaculate conception, declaring:

...To the honor of the holy and undivided Trinity, to the glory and adornment of the Virgin Mother of God, to the exaltation of the Catholic faith, and the increase of the Catholic religion, we, by the authority of Jesus Christ our Lord, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own, declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary was preserved from all stain of original sin in the first instant of the conception by a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, in consideration of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, has been revealed by God and must, therefore, firmly and constantly be believed by all the faithful.<sup>675</sup>

Most Roman Catholic theologians assume that in these words of

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<sup>674</sup>W. J. Doheny, and J. P. Kelly, comp., Papal Documents on Mary (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1954), pp. 1-2.

<sup>675</sup>Carol, Mariology, vol. 1, pp. 22-23; the Latin is quoted on p. 23, note 52.

dogmatic definition the Pope was speaking ex cathedra that is, by his supreme infallible authority as Vicar or our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ which the Roman Church understands to be part of the deposit of divine revelation handed down through Apostolic tradition and therefore binding on every member of the Roman Catholic community. The document makes it clear that the truth of the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary does not depend on any explicit Biblical statement although, as it argues, both the Old and the New Testament<sup>676</sup> testify to it. Thus, the authenticity of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception rests ultimately on God's revelation as interpreted by the teaching office of the Roman Catholic Church.

Like the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary developed over a long time, yet without the fierce controversy which often surrounded the former dogma.<sup>677</sup> The presupposition underlying the Catholic doctrine of the Assumption is the Platonic notion of the immortality of the rational soul; if death only affects the physical body, resurrection is the resurrection of the flesh, not of the soul. Underscoring this belief was its aptness: the idea that the Virgin's body should undergo decay

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<sup>676</sup>Especially Genesis 3:15, but also the traditional Marian types of Genesis 6:9; 28:12; Exodus 3:1; Song of Songs 4:4 and 4:12; 1 Kings 8:10, in the New Testament, the texts are Luke 1:28 and 1:42; Doheny and Kelly, Papal Documents on Mary, pp. 17-19.

<sup>677</sup>Attwater, D., A Dictionary of Mary (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1955), p. 124; Carol, Mariology vol. 1, pp. 24-32; vol. 2, pp. 461-492; Miegge, The Virgin Mary, pp. 83-106.

after separation from her soul at death was a thought too lowly to be entertained. Indeed, for the Roman Catholic Church, the purifying and preserving sanctification which Mary received on account of her role in the incarnation made it unthinkable that her body should decompose in a grave. For this reason, the teaching of the Catholic Church developed the idea that the body of the Virgin Mary, after death, immediately reunited with her immortal soul, thus accounting for the immediate Assumption of her body and soul into the heaven of glory. For some theologians, this heaven into which Mary was assumed, was the heaven of the creatures; for others, it was the heaven above the angels; for still others, the heaven of the Holy Trinity.<sup>678</sup>

Thus, the Catholic dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary appears to be the direct consequence of the 1854 dogma of the Immaculate Conception. One question which the Catholic teaching on the Virgin's Assumption calls forth is whether or not the Virgin Mary actually died. When Pope Pius XII declares in his definition of the dogma: "Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory,"<sup>679</sup> one wonders if this "completion" of the Virgin's earthly life refers to an actual death or to a mere transition from one state into another. Although it seems to be the general opinion among theologians that Mary actually died before being assumed into heaven, there is no explicit statement to this

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<sup>678</sup>Borresen, K., "Mary in Catholic Theology," pp. 52-53.

<sup>679</sup>Doheny and Kelly, Papal Documents on Mary, p. 239.

effect in the definition of 1950. Indeed, some Roman Catholic theologians have maintained and continue to maintain that the Virgin did not die, an opinion which was given encouragement by Pope Pius XII's deliberate and ambiguous silence on this point even in the explanatory text of his Constitution "Munificentissimus Deus."<sup>680</sup>

The proclamation of the dogma of the bodily Assumption of the Virgin Mary came at the height of a movement of Roman Catholic piety and theology which centered on our Lady, the Virgin Mary. Literature on the subject increased significantly during this time, although very little attention was paid to the ancient Transitus literature which had been so important in promoting the spread of popular piety surrounding the Assumption in the East and the medieval West.<sup>681</sup> This time, the initiative came from a long line of popes from Pius IX to Pius XII who often referred to the Virgin Mary solely in relation to her Assumption. It was the latter who finally, on November 1, 1950, took the step to declare the Assumption a dogma:

Wherefore, after We have unceasingly offered Our most fervent prayers to God, and have called upon the Spirit of Truth, for the glory of Almighty God who has lavished His special affection upon the Virgin Mary, for the honor of her Son, the immortal King of the Ages and the Victor over sin and death, for the increase of the glory of that same august Mother, and for the joy and exultation of the entire Church; by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by Our own authority, We pronounce,

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<sup>680</sup>Attwater, A Dictionary of Mary, p. 17; O'Carroll, Theotokos, pp. 117-118 ("Death of Mary").

<sup>681</sup>O'Carroll, Theotokos, pp. 58-60 ("Assumption Apocrypha").

declare and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.<sup>682</sup>

In 1962, the Second Vatican Council reiterated the essential words of the definition in the Marian chapter of its Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium: "...having completed her earthly life, (Mary) was assumed in body and soul into heavenly glory."<sup>683</sup> In this way, the Council linked the doctrine with another theme, the typology of Mary and the Church. In the most holy Virgin the Church has reached its perfection, its intended existence without spot or wrinkle. This comparison of Mary with the Church finds its place in a Roman Catholic eschatology which assumes that in Mary the first flowering of the Church's ultimate glory is revealed in this present world through her role as the Mother of God. Mary is seen as a sign of the sure hope and comfort of the pilgrim people of God as they await the final coming of the Lord.<sup>684</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church has always asserted and affirmed the absolute holiness of the Blessed Virgin Mary connecting her original innocence (immaculate conception) with her great dignity and worthiness as the Mother of God.<sup>685</sup> Indeed, the dogma of the

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<sup>682</sup>Doheny and Kelly, Papal Documents on Mary, p. 239.

<sup>683</sup>Lumen Gentium, VIII. 65 and 68. O'Carroll, Theotokos, p. 58.

<sup>684</sup>O'Carroll, Theotokos, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>685</sup>Carol, Mariology, v. 2, pp. 297-324; O'Carroll, Theotokos, pp. 172-174 ("Holiness of Mary"); Miegge, The Virgin Mary, pp. 130-132.



Immaculate Conception of 1854 begins with the affirmation that God prepared for Himself a mother whom He loved above all other creatures, bestowing on her exceedingly great gifts beyond those of any other creature, both human and angelic. First among her virtues is her immunity from the "incitement" of concupiscence and from any actual sin whatsoever. In addition, the Blessed Virgin Mary possessed all virtues as part of her condition--the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, and the moral virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance in the sense that they were infused into her by grace in the first instant of her life.<sup>686</sup> Hers were all the gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, intelligence, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and the fear of God (Isa. 11:7-9). Consequently, she also evinced all the fruits of the Spirit according to Galatians 5:22: love, joy, peace, patience, meekness, goodness, long-suffering, mildness, faith, modesty, chastity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. To her must be attributed the eight beatitudes: poverty of spirit, mildness, hunger and thirst for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, a peaceful spirit, and persecution for righteousness sake, and the holy graces or the charismata of 1 Corinthians 12:7-10: the word of wisdom and knowledge, the gifts of faith and healing, of miracles and prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues and interpretation. According to Roman Catholic teaching, Mary possessed all of these virtually and actually, as appropriate to her condition and mission. Finally, the Virgin

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<sup>686</sup>Miegge, The Virgin Mary, p. 131.

Mary is described as possessing knowledge to a most excellent degree in addition to an infused knowledge which is proper to the angels. Most probably she was gifted with the "blessed knowledge," the direct vision of God, which is proper to God Himself.<sup>687</sup>

The Blessed Virgin's essential role in the work of salvation and her ceaseless, heavenly activity on behalf of all humanity is clearly affirmed and taught by the Roman Catholic Church. For this reason, she is sometimes referred to as "Reparatrix" and "Mediatatrix" or "Mediatress"-- terms often misunderstood and overinterpreted. Indeed, the mediating role of the Virgin Mary has been a fundamental theme in the teaching of the modern papacy from Pius IX to Pius XIII. In 1921, Pope Benedict XV authorized a special Office and Mass for May 31 in honor of the Virgin Mary, Mediatatrix of all grace.<sup>688</sup> At the first International Mariological Congress held in Rome during the "Holy Year" of 1950, the following statement was adopted:

Since the principal personal attributes of the Blessed Virgin Mary have already been defined, it is the wish of the faithful that it should also be dogmatically defined that the Blessed Virgin Mary was intimately associated with Christ the Savior in effecting human salvation, and accordingly, she is a true collaborator in the work of redemption, spiritual Mother of all men, intercessor and dispenser of graces; in a word,

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<sup>687</sup>Carol, Mariology, v. 1, p. 32-40; v. 2, pp. 377-425 (Corredemptrix) and 426-460 (Dispensatrix of All Graces); O'Carroll, Theotokos, pp. 238-245 ("Mediation, Mary Mediatress"); Miegge, The Virgin Mary, pp. 133-154.

<sup>688</sup>Carol, Mariology, v. 1, p. 32.

universal Mediatrix of God and men.<sup>689</sup>

In a famous passage of its Marian chapter in the decree on the Church, the Second Vatican Council reaffirmed the title, "Mediatrix," together with Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and added the sentence: "These, however, are to be so understood that they neither take away from nor add anything to the dignity and efficacy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ the One Mediator."<sup>690</sup> With these words, the Council sounded a caution which, while not clearly expressed there, already found expression in the formulation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854:

Hence, just as Christ, the Mediator between God and Man, assumed human nature, blotted out the handwriting of the decree that stood against us, and fastened it triumphantly to the cross, so the most holy Virgin, united with Him by a most intimate and indissoluble bond, was, with Him and through Him, eternally at enmity with the evil Serpent, and most completely triumphed over him, and thus crushed his head with her immaculate foot.<sup>691</sup>

The blessed Virgin's mediation can only be seen in relation to this "indissoluble bond" existing between herself and her Son. It is derived from the fact of her divine Motherhood.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the Virgin Mary, in her role as Mediatrix, is the spiritual mother of all

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<sup>689</sup>O'Carroll, Theotokos, p. 242.

<sup>690</sup>Lumen Gentium, VIII. 62; on the discussion at the Council see O'Carroll, Theotokos, pp. 242-244.

<sup>691</sup>Doheny and Kelly, Papal Documents on Mary, pp. 17-18.

humanity.<sup>692</sup> She who bore our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, also bore all who believe in Him. Indeed, the Roman Catholic tradition asserts that the whole human race is entrusted to the Virgin Mary's motherly care. Such was the commission given to the Virgin by her Son on Calvary when he commended to her motherly affection his beloved disciple John, and through him, all humanity (John 19:26-27). The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the Virgin Mary loves and cherishes all--those who do not know the Redemption of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as well as those who enjoy the benefits of His redemption.<sup>693</sup> Thus, even the souls in purgatory still benefit from Mary's motherly care.

Finally, the Roman Catholic Church honors the Blessed Virgin Mary with the title, Queen of Heaven. Though it is the kingship of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ which is the official teaching of the Church and is anchored in its liturgy the queenship of Mary is understood to be parallel, subordinate to her Son's office as king.<sup>694</sup> Mary is called "Perfect Queen", "Royal Virgin", and "Queen of heaven and earth." Catholic iconography often portrays our Lord seated on the right hand of the Father in heavenly glory, and His blessed mother sitting or standing alongside Him. Pope Pius XII, known as the "Pope of the Assumption" and the "Pope of the Consecration of the World to the

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<sup>692</sup>Carol, Mariology, vol. 1, pp. 40-44; O'Carroll, Theotokos, pp. 253-256 ("Mother of Divine Grace").

<sup>693</sup>Carol, Mariology, Vol I, p. 43

<sup>694</sup>O'Carroll, Theotokos, pp. 301-302 ("Queenship"); Carol, Mariology, vol. 1, pp. 45-50; vol. 2, pp. 493-549.

Immaculate Heart of Mary" is also regarded as the "Pope of our Lady's Queenship." According to his pronouncements, the Virgin is not only queen in the sense of her exaltation over all other creatures; she is queen in the strict sense, that is, with real authority and power handed down to her by her Son in His Kingdom of grace. The Blessed Virgin's authority as queen is based on her divine maternity and co-operation in God's work of redemption. In this sense, Mary's kingdom is co-existent with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's. In the words of Pope Pius' XII famous radio message of May 13, 1946:

...Jesus is King throughout all eternity, by nature and by right of conquest; through Him, with Him and subordinate to Him, Mary is Queen by grace, by divine relationship, by right of conquest, and by singular election. Her kingdom is as vast as that of her Son and God, since nothing is excluded from her dominion.<sup>695</sup>

#### THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY IN THE TRADITION OF THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

Central to Protestant theology and teaching is the supreme importance of the sovereignty of God and the sole mediation of His Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For this reason, the Reformers of the sixteenth century, in accord with their theology of the communion of saints, denied a privileged place for the veneration and intercession of Mary, and in practice discouraged or abandoned her invocation. Neither did they admit what for Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches is an important element of

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<sup>695</sup>Carol, Mariology, vol. 1, p. 49.

Marian theology, namely the Virgin's Assumption, emphasizing instead the "communion of saints" this side of heaven. The prayers of the living are, for Protestants, more concerned with the Church militant here on earth, rather than with the church triumphant in the eschatological glory of heaven. One could say that very soon in the Protestant churches, Mary was dethroned. Protestant Reformers reacted strongly against the prominence of Mary in Roman Catholic devotions: some Puritans went to the extreme of giving up not only the singing of the Magnificat, but even the public use of the Apostles' creed simply because the name of the Virgin occurred within it.<sup>696</sup>

This is not to forget, however, the high honor and respect attributed to Mary by many of the early Reformers. Erasmus, of Rotterdam, an Augustinian canon and ordained priest, had a significant influence on Protestant Reformers who adopted many of his polemical arguments against the cult of Mary and the saints. But he started out fully Catholic in his devotion to the blessed Virgin, calling her the only ornament of heaven and most certain help of earth, the one with whom our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ willed to share His kingdom and whose name is invoked at all times and in all places. While affirming that the veneration of Mary is inescapably linked to the worship of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the early Erasmus was deeply devoted to the Virgin Mary. However, in later years, his tone changed, and he

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<sup>696</sup>C. Hastings, ed., Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. VIII (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 479.

accused the Roman Catholic Church of a mere external piety devoid of any truly religious or moral content. It was this critical reaction of Erasmus and his caustic polemic against Marian devotion that many later Protestant Reformers endorsed and adopted.<sup>697</sup>

Yet, it is noteworthy to remember that many in the first generation of Reformers did not completely abandon their devotion to the Virgin Mary, though their principles finally led to this. The young Martin Luther, influenced by the Scotist tradition, could refer in 1516 to Mary (playing on the etymological interpretation of her name as stilla, drop) as "the only pure drop in the ocean of human perdition."<sup>698</sup> In 1521, in his moving exposition of the Magnificat, Luther dwelt on the humility of Mary, the handmaiden of God.

Mary does not glory in her worthiness nor yet in her unworthiness, but solely in the divine regard which is so exceedingly good and gracious that he deigned to look upon such a lowly maiden, and to look upon her in so glorious and honorable a fashion.

Mary does not desire to be an idol; she does nothing, God does all. We ought to call upon her, that for her sake God may grant and do what we request. Thus also all other saints are to be invoked, so that the

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<sup>697</sup>O'Carroll, Theotokos, pp. 136-137 ("Erasmus").

<sup>698</sup>Martin Luther, Sermon 36 on the Feast of the Conception of Mary (WA 1, p. 107), as quoted in H. Duefel, Luthers Stellung zur Marienverehrung (Kirche und Konfession, Vol. XIII) (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), p.80. On Luther and Mary, see also O'Carroll, Theotokos, pp. 227, 228; Hilda Graef, Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion, Vol. II (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), pp. 5-10.

work may be every way God's alone.<sup>699</sup>

Though neither Luther nor Calvin would admit any contribution to salvation on the part of humanity, Luther did acknowledge the Virgin's power, as real as that of any other saint, to intercede on behalf of those in need. Yet, for Luther, humanity remained totally sinful before God and, therefore, totally dependent on the grace of God. Calvin, who believed that salvation and damnation were predestined from all eternity, was even more skeptical. Intercessory prayer for others is commanded by God, but neither Mary nor the saints have any special power and influence with the Lord God. Yet, Calvin appears to have retained a great deal of traditional Catholic teaching about the Virgin Mary which was only later jettisoned by his successors. It is recorded that Calvin even preached on the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in a manner very similar to many contemporary sermons on the same subjects.<sup>700</sup>

While Luther, in his thinking, retains the idea of Mary's perfect virginity and praises her perfect abandonment which rules out any pride or possessiveness regarding the tremendous honor with which God has adorned her by making her His Mother, he remained vehemently opposed to addressing her as "Mediatrice". Mary, like all humanity, is wholly dependent on the grace of God and possesses nothing in and of herself. On the other hand,

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<sup>699</sup>Martin Luther, "The Magnificat," Luther's Works, Vol XXI (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), pp. 314 and 329.

<sup>700</sup>Graef, H., Mary, vol. 2, p. 7.



Luther firmly believed that, by God's grace, Mary was in fact free from sin, and therefore unique among all women. However, this status was a God-given grace to which Mary could contribute nothing of her own merit. In this sense, she was suitable and foreordained to give birth to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, just as the wood of the cross was suitable and foreordained to bear His body. In his later years, Luther carried this idea even further; commenting on her Nativity, he affirmed that:

We are just as holy as she, for that she has a greater grace is not due to her merit. We could not all be the Mother of God; but, otherwise, she is just the same as we are.<sup>701</sup>

In his reform of the liturgy, Luther wanted to reduce the number of Marian feasts but chose to keep the Feasts of the Purification, the Annunciation, and the Visitation, due to their relationship to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and their biblical basis. He also retained the Feasts of Mary's Assumption and her Nativity, at least temporarily, because he felt their abolition would upset the people. Near the end of his life, Luther preached much less about the Virgin Mary; yet, his belief in her perfect virginity and divine motherhood and his personal attachment to the "holy Mother of God", the "tender Virgin", never wavered.<sup>702</sup>

Martin Luther rejected all excessive honorific titles for the Virgin Mary or any other saint. Thus, he denied her the

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<sup>701</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>702</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-12; O'Carroll, Theotokos, p. 228.

title "Queen of Heaven" because he believed that it detracted from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's sole mediation between God and humanity; but he never denied to Mary the title "Mother of God", which some believe has disappeared from Protestant faith and worship in our time. Luther always defended Mary's virginity before, during, and after the birth of our Lord. He insisted that she had no other children, and condemned Helvidius who taught otherwise. Throughout his life he seems to have affirmed the immaculate conception, although some texts from his later years throw doubt on the persistence of this conviction. There is no evidence that he ever shared personally the belief in the bodily Assumption of the Virgin Mary.<sup>703</sup>

Like Luther himself, the first Lutheran confessional writing, the Augsburg Confession of 1530, is quite explicit in affirming both Mary's virginity and divine maternity:

Our churches also teach that the Word--that is, the Son of God--took on man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary. So there are two natures, divine and human, inseparably conjoined in the unity of his person, one Christ, true God and true man, who was born of the virgin Mary...<sup>704</sup>

The same profession of faith which speaks of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God is contained in the Formula of Concord, the last of the Lutheran confessional writings:

Therefore we believe, teach, and confess that Mary conceived and bore not only a plain, ordinary, mere man but the veritable Son of God; for this reason she is

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<sup>703</sup>O'Carroll, Theotokos, pp. 227-228.

<sup>704</sup>Tappert, T., ed., "Augsburg Confession, art. 3," The Book of Concord (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp. 29-30.

rightly called, and truly is, the mother of God.<sup>705</sup>

If Luther had a rather ambiguous understanding of the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Calvin did not acknowledge any intercessory role for her at all. Calvin not only rejected the intercession of the blessed Virgin, but considered all prayers addressed to her as going against scripture. "Many prayers have been forged full of terrible blasphemies, such as those which request the Virgin Mary to command her son and exert her authority over him, and which style her the heaven of salvation, the life and hope of those who trust in her."<sup>706</sup> To call her, as Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians do, "our hope, life, etc." is, for Calvin, to turn her into an idol; and to regard her as an advocate is also blasphemous, for she, Calvin argued, needed our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's mercy as much as any other human being.

Yet, while remaining hesitant about the title, "Mother of God" for fear of superstition, Calvin fully recognized the dignity of the Virgin Mary's divine maternity and acknowledged that by electing and destining Mary to be the mother of His Son, God bestowed upon her the highest honor. He also affirmed Mary's perpetual virginity, arguing that after the Annunciation all intercourse with men was excluded forever but he remained steadfastly opposed to the idea that she ever made a formal vow.

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<sup>705</sup>Formula of Concord, Epitome VIII.7; cf. Solid Declaration VIII (*ibid.*, p. 488).

<sup>706</sup>Calvin, *Treatises*, tr. by H. Beveridge, as quoted in O'Carroll, *Theotokos*, p. 94.

It is important to note that, although Calvin rejects the cult of the Virgin Mary, he encouraged his followers to respect and praise her, seeing in her a teacher who instructs them in the commandments of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.<sup>707</sup>

Indeed, the Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century, following both Luther and Calvin, never denied that Mary was the Mother of God. Although they rejected her role as a mediatrix, they never held the Gnostic principle that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ had no real body, and therefore no real mother, nor the adoptionist position that sees our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as a mere man gifted with the Spirit in a special way, and therefore denies Mary's divine maternity. On the contrary, the early Reformers speak of our Lady as the Mother of our Lord, truly Theotokos, Mother of God. Neither Luther, Calvin (or Zwingli and Cranmer, for that matter) hesitated to give Mary special praise and honor as the Mother of God. Thus, while most Protestant theologians rejected the idea of Mary's mediation, they retained the traditional teaching concerning her divine maternity and virginity.<sup>708</sup>

Contemporary Protestant denominations generally affirm the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God, although no formal cult exists in honor of the Virgin within Protestant denominations. There are, however, tendencies to diminish the theological importance of Marian themes further and to go even beyond the polemical

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<sup>707</sup>O'Carroll, Theotokos, pp. 94-95.

<sup>708</sup>Carol, Mariology, vol. 3, pp. 426-427.

stance of the sixteenth century Reformers. Many Protestants today reject the perpetual virginity of Mary on grounds of biblical interpretation, assuming that she had other children after our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ("brothers" and "sisters" of Jesus), or even the virgin birth. Others have constructed a theology in which Jesus' divinity is no more than a symbolic expression of the fact that the man Jesus reveals God to humanity. In this case, Mary reveals nothing to us. She has no place, no significance for such thinking. For the theologian Paul Tillich, for example, Mary is a mere symbol from the Catholic past which has lost its meaning in the concrete circumstances of twentieth-century Protestantism.<sup>709</sup>

It should be noted, however, that the term, "Protestantism," covers a wide spectrum of opinion, especially on a question such as this one. Beginning with the Oxford movement in the 19th century, for instance, there has been a steadily growing interest in Marian theology within the Anglican Protestant communion. Here, Marian piety and devotion continue to have an important place and a home.<sup>710</sup> Elsewhere in Protestantism, in the Evangelical Churches of Germany, there has been a revival of interest in some aspects of Mariology spurred by such reform movements as the Brotherhood of St. Michael which grew out of the

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<sup>709</sup>p. Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 128; T. A. O'Meara, Mary in Protestant and Catholic Theology (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), pp. 317-322.

<sup>710</sup>O'Carroll, Theotokos, p. 29 ("Anglicanism").

Berneuchen circle, and the "Hochkirche" group, an ecumenical association which was led by Friedrich Heiler of Marburg.<sup>711</sup> Pointing to the Reformers of the sixteenth century, these Protestant Christians insist that one cannot stand in adoration before the Son of God without giving also due honor to His earthly mother. This attitude is perhaps best exemplified in the work of Hans Asmussen, one of the Lutheran leaders of the Confessing Church during the Nazi era, whose book on Mary, the Mother of God (1951) was widely read and discussed in Germany.<sup>712</sup> Asmussen endeavoured to revive an orthodox Protestantism against the spirit of the liberal theologians and has done much to challenge his Lutheran brothers and sisters to re-think their theology regarding the Virgin Mary. Against the Protestant charge that Catholics pay too much homage to the Virgin Mary, Asmussen asks whether this is worse than paying too little. He concludes that the role of the Virgin must be given greater consideration in Evangelical thought. "One does not have Jesus Christ without Mary." He accepts the mediatorial role of the Virgin, but rejects the Roman Catholic teaching of Mary as mediatrix because he believes it compromises the mediation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Mary, according to Asmussen, represents the first among the witnesses of the grace of God. As

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<sup>711</sup>Bodensieck, J., The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), p. 1306 ("Liturgical Renewal in the Protestant Church").

<sup>712</sup>O'Meara, Mary in Protestant and Catholic Theology, pp. 317-322.

Mother of God, she takes part in the divine economy of salvation, but she does not stand between humanity and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Yet, like Luther, Asmussen is not afraid to speak of the Virgin's prayer of intercession and does not think it idolatrous to honor her.

Karl Barth, the leading Protestant theologian of our time, defends the incarnation of the Son of God and His virgin birth against liberal Protestant thought. He writes:

The expression Mother of God applied to Mary is good, just, legitimate, and necessary in Christology, on the condition that one reserves for it an auxiliary role.<sup>713</sup>

Barth considers his theology regarding the Virgin to reflect a Christological interest and not, what he calls a Mariological interest. According to Barth, an independent Mariology "was and is one of those characteristically Roman Catholic enterprises against which there has to be an evangelical protest, not only for their arbitrariness in form, but also for the precariousness of their content".<sup>714</sup> Barth argues that Mariology is an arbitrary innovation, compared with scripture and the tradition of the earliest church, and that it is based on a misunderstanding of Christian truth. He views Mariological dogma as a distraction from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and

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<sup>713</sup>K. Barth, Dogmatics in Outline (London: SCM Press, 1949), pp. 97-98. On Karl Barth and Mary, see also O'Carroll, Theotokos, pp. 68-70 ("Barth, Karl"); O'Meara, Mary in Protestant and Catholic Theology, pp. 205-224.

<sup>714</sup>K. Barth, Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God, Vol. I. 2. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), p. 139, and the entire excursus on Mariology, pp. 138-146.

argues that the New Testament, like the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, takes a Christological, and only a Christological, interest in the person of Mary.

Barth agrees with Luther that in the New Testament the greatness of Mary consists in the fact that all interest is directed away from her to the Lord. It is the Virgin's low estate and the glory of God which encounters her, not her own person apart from God, that can properly be made the object of special consideration, doctrine and veneration. Mary is simply a woman to whom God's miracle of revelation occurs. Though she is indispensable to the Biblical proclamation, every word which makes her person the object of independent attention is an attack upon God's miracle of revelation. For Barth, it is first and foremost the divine glory of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ which needs to be established before one can grasp the Virgin's role in the glory of God. Barth suggests that even the perpetual virginity ascribed to Mary was the result of a Christological, not a Mariological interest.<sup>715</sup> Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Barth contends that an orthodox Protestantism can never admit creaturely co-operation in the work of revelation and reconciliation since these are exclusively the work of God. Yet, he does affirm the reality of the incarnation in which he would admit, the created humanity of our Lord shares in God's revelation and reconciliation.<sup>716</sup>

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<sup>715</sup>Ibid., p. 140; also vol. IV.2, p. 45.

<sup>716</sup>Ibid., p. 146.



THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY  
IN THE TRADITION OF THE EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH

The Eastern Orthodox Church includes in its ecclesia all the people of God who lived either before or after the Incarnation of the eternal Logos. Saints of the Old Testament are honored as much as the saints of the New Testament. The Eastern Orthodox church services commemorate the lives of the saints, with numerous Sundays of the ecclesiastical year put aside for specific groups of Church Fathers.<sup>717</sup> For Orthodox Christians, the saints and Church Fathers constitute the conscience of the Church. Touched by the living flame of the Holy Spirit, they were people who experienced the presence of Christ in their lives and bore witness of this fact to the world. Thus, the Orthodox Church teaches that the Church's saints and holy men are always present in the faith and life of their church. They are the perpetual teachers of the Gospel and the supreme personification of the life of Christ, whose faith and lives the faithful are urged to imitate.

Among all the saints, the Blessed Virgin Mary holds a special place in the life of the Eastern Orthodox Church. She is the most honored and exalted among any of God's creatures, "more honorable than the cherubim and incomparably more glorious than the seraphim," superior to all created beings. The Orthodox

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<sup>717</sup>D. J. Constantelos, The Greek Orthodox Church: Faith, History and Practice (New York: Seabury Press, 1967), p. 102.

Church reverses the Blessed Virgin as the Mother of God who, without replacing the one Mediator, intercedes before her Son on behalf of all humanity. Love and veneration for the holy Virgin Mary is the soul of Orthodox piety,<sup>718</sup> for the perfect unity of the divine and human in Jesus christ is directly related to the sactification and glorification of human nature expressed in the Virgin Mary, Mother of God. Without this concept, the incarnation threatens to shrink to the function of no more than the means to an end, a bitter necessity for redemption because of sin, and the Virgin Mary id reduced to a mere instrument which is laid aside and forgotten when the need has passed. Orthodoxy never separates the relationship between Mother and Son. In adoring the humanity of Christ, the Orthodox Church venerates His Mother from whom He received His humanity and who in this way represents the whole of humanity as the positive condition of God's incarnation.<sup>719</sup>

The Eastern Orthodox Church teaches that the long process of purification and enlightenment of the people of Israel so vividly described in the Old Testament reached its culmination in the Virgin Mary, Theotokos. In her, the faith and heroism of many generations of the chosen people found fulfillment:

The name of the Mother of God contains all the history of the divine economy in this world. The divine economy preparing the human condition for the Incarnation of the Son of God is not a unilateral

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<sup>718</sup>S. Bulgakov, The Orthodox Church (London: Centenary Press, 1935), p. 137.

<sup>719</sup>Ibid., pp. 137-138.

one; it is not a matter of the will of God making a tabula rasa of human history. In this saving economy, divine wisdom is adopted to the fluctuations of human wills and to the different responses of men to the divine challenge.

It is thus that wisdom has built herself a house through the generations of the Old Testament righteous men: her house is the all-pure nature of the Holy Virgin, whereby the Word of God will become co-natural with us. The answer of Mary to the angelic Annunciation, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy Word' resolves the tragic problem of human liberty since the Fall is accomplished. And now the work of redemption, which only the Incarnate Word can effect, may take place.<sup>720</sup>

In the divine economy of salvation, the Virgin Mary was not merely a passive instrument, but a willing, freely choosing participant who cooperated in the unique personal revelation of God in history:

The Incarnation was not only the work of the Father and of His virtue and His Spirit, it was also the work of the will and faith of the Virgin. Without the consent of the all-pure one and the co-operation of her faith, this design would have been as unrealizable as it would have been without the intervention of the three divine Persons themselves.

Only after teaching and persuading her, does God take her for His Mother and receive from her the flesh which she wills to offer Him. Just as He voluntarily became Incarnate, so He willed that His Mother should bear Him freely, with her own full and free consent.

The Orthodox Church, however, honors the Blessed Virgin not only because of her role as Theotokos, but also because she is Panagia, "All-Holy", and worthy to be praised. Among all God's creatures she is the prime example of co-operation between the

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<sup>720</sup>v. Lossky, "Panagia," in: The Mother of God, edited by E. L. Mascall (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1951), pp. 29-30.

purposes of the deity and the free will of humanity. As our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ represents the new Adam, Mary represents the new Eve whose freely chosen obedience counterbalances Eve's disobedience in paradise. "...The knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed through the obedience of Mary; for what Eve, a virgin, bound by her unbelief, Mary, a virgin, unloosed by her faith."<sup>721</sup>

Yet, Eastern Orthodoxy does not share the Roman Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception which teaches the Virgin's exemption from original sin. According to the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Blessed Virgin is truly human, sharing the original sin which is part and parcel of humanity, and its inherent infirmity which ultimately expresses itself in natural death. However, the force of original sin (which, according to Orthodox teaching, varies from person to person) is reduced in the Virgin Mary to a mere possibility never to be actualized. The all-pure Virgin, while under the reality of original sin, is free from all personal sin.<sup>722</sup> Nikos Nissiotis, an Orthodox theologian, sums up the Virgin's status this way:

The immaculate conception can only be praised, but it cannot be made the subject of dogma. The sinfulness becomes inactive, while original sin remains with Mary as human being. As a repentant sinner, she is cleansed to become the Mother of God though she remains in solidarity with the human race in the face of God, pre-figuring the fact that the Logos of God will

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<sup>721</sup>Irenaeus, "Against Heresies III.22.4," The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I, p. 455; see above, p. 238.

<sup>722</sup>Bulgakov, The Orthodox Church, pp. 138-139; S. Bulgakov, The Wisdom of God: Brief Summary of Sophiology (London: Williams and Norgate, Ltd., 1937), pp. 173-175.

carry the sin of the world, because God has made Him to be sin, without, however, becoming a sinner.<sup>723</sup>

It is not in virtue of a privilege received at the moment of her conception that the Eastern Orthodox Church venerates the Mother of God more than any other created being. Though holy and pure from her mother's womb, the Virgin Mary did not possess a sanctity which would place her outside the rest of humanity. Nor did she exist in a state like that of Eve prior to the fall at the moment of the Annunciation. Born under the law of original sin, the blessed Virgin shares with all other human beings a common responsibility for the Fall even though the sinful heritage of the fallen race had no mastery over her.<sup>724</sup> Indeed, for Eastern Orthodoxy, Mary, too, must be counted among the redeemed. She was as much in need of salvation as any other human being; the Virgin's Son was as much her Redeemer and Saviour as He is the Redeemer and Saviour of the world.<sup>725</sup> Original sin, the common and general condition of the human race, was only destroyed on the tree of the cross. The incarnation by itself did not destroy it--although the incarnation marked the inauguration of our Lord's redemptive work and new creation; our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Himself had to pass through the

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<sup>723</sup>N. Nissiotis, "Mary in Orthodox Theology," in: Concilium, Vol. 168: Mary in the Churches, edited by H. Kung, and J. Moltmann, (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1983), p. 31.

<sup>724</sup>Lossky, "Panagia," p. 31.

<sup>725</sup>G. Florovsky, "The Ever-Virgin Mother of God," in: The Mother of God, edited by E. L. Mascall (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1951), pp. 51-63; p. 55.

gates of death to enter fully into His glory. Thus, for Eastern Orthodoxy, the theological emphasis regarding the exalted state of the Virgin Mary is not on her conception, but on her divine election as the Mother of God.<sup>726</sup> The phrase, "the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee" (Luke 1:35), conveys to her the "theophanic presence" in the fullness of grace and the Holy Spirit. Thus, the holy Virgin Mary was truly "full of grace," and the Annunciation was nothing less than her "anticipated Pentecost".<sup>727</sup>

The Eastern Orthodox Church affirms that the unique position of the Virgin Mary as Theotokos was not due to her own achievement, nor a reward for her merits, nor even the result of the fullness of grace bestowed on her, but the sheer free gift of God. But while the election of the Virgin Mary was final and eternal, it was not unconditional; in that it was conditioned by, and related to, the mystery of the incarnation.<sup>728</sup> Thus, the Eastern Orthodox Church does not venerate the Virgin Mary in isolation but always in relation to her Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The Fathers of the Council of Ephesus insisted upon calling Mary "Theotokos" not because they desired to glorify her apart from her Son, but because by honoring Mary they wanted to safe-guard a correct doctrine of the person of our Lord and

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<sup>726</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>727</sup>Ibid., pp. 55-56.

<sup>728</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

Saviour Jesus Christ. For the Eastern Orthodox Church, Mariology is simply an extension of Christology,<sup>729</sup> or, as Vladimir Lossky puts it: the dogmatic subject of the Theotokos is Christological before it is anything else.<sup>730</sup>

This relationship between Mother and Son, according to eastern Orthodox theology, does not cease with the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The two remain inseparably united just as the divine and human remain united in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Throughout her earthly life, from her Son's nativity to the cross at Golgotha and the empty tomb, the Virgin Mary participated in the life of her Son. In this sense, the Blessed Virgin represents the center, invisible but real, of the Apostolic Church. Not even death could separate her from her precious Son. Thus, Orthodoxy teaches that, upon her natural death, the Virgin Mary was not subject to corruption, but was raised up by her Son to eternal life.<sup>731</sup> She has already passed beyond death and judgment and lives in glory in the age to come. But she is not thereby separated from the rest of humanity. Even in her glorified eternal life, the Virgin Mary remains the mother of the human race for which she prays and intercedes.<sup>732</sup> At the Last Judgment, she still will intercede for others before her Son, appealing to His mercy and forgiveness.

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<sup>729</sup>Ware, T., The Orthodox Church, pp. 262-263.

<sup>730</sup>Lossky, "Panagia," p. 24.

<sup>731</sup>Bulgakov, The Orthodox Church, p. 139.

<sup>732</sup>Florovsky, G., "The Ever-Virgin Mother of God," p. 63.

For the Eastern Orthodox Church the reality of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a given fact. Yet, unlike Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy has never sought to dogmatize the Assumption of the Virgin, dogmas being generally reserved for trinitarian, christological and sacramental teachings which bear on humanity's redemption.<sup>733</sup> To be sure, Eastern Orthodoxy believes that the Virgin was translated bodily into the hands of her divine Son. Thus, she lives in incorruptible bodily glory, standing before Her Son and God, a true and glorious queen of heaven and earth.<sup>734</sup> This glory is both the free gift of God and the free act of consent on the part of Mary. By her free consent, the Blessed Virgin received the gift of the Holy Spirit and conceived the Son, thus becoming Theotokos, Mother of God.<sup>735</sup> The sanctification of the Virgin Mary began with the descent of the Holy Ghost; it continued throughout her earthly life, and was completed at Pentecost by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. For Orthodoxy, this last event signifies Mary's final preparation and consecration for her ultimate glory received from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and given to Him by the Father. It is in the light of this process of sanctification and glorification that the resurrection

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<sup>733</sup>Minas Charitos, The Repose of our Most Holy and Glorious Lady the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary and Her Translation to Heaven (Chicago: The Orthodox Christian Education Society, 1963), pp. 3-4; Ware, T., The Orthodox Church, p. 264.

<sup>734</sup>Charitos, The Repose, p. 9.

<sup>735</sup>Bulgakov, The Wisdom of God, p. 175.



and assumption of the Mother of God must be understood.<sup>736</sup>

The Eastern Orthodox Church considers the Virgin Mary to be the heart of the Church. She is its center and personal embodiment. In relation to the Father, she is called daughter; in relation to the Word, she is mother and unwedded bride of God; in relation to the Holy Spirit, she is the Spirit-bearer. Though numbered among Eastern Orthodoxy's saints, she towers above them, seated at the right hand of her Son as a participant in the mystery of the incarnation.<sup>737</sup> Through the authority of her Son, she has been given power as queen over heaven and earth. Yet, she is not identical with her Son. His power belongs to Him as the divine person of the God/man; hers is given by Him to her as a participant in His glory and His life. Through Him, the Virgin Mary is appointed intercessor for the human race, and while her resurrection is already accomplished and her glory complete, she continues to act in this capacity in virtue of that loving self abasement which is so peculiar to her.<sup>738</sup>

#### A CRITIQUE FROM AN EASTERN ORTHODOX VANTAGE POINT

The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, holds a striking place in the liturgies of the Orthodox Churches. Veneration of the Virgin is sometimes expressed in ways and terms which a

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<sup>736</sup>Ibid., pp. 176-178.

<sup>737</sup>Ibid., pp. 180-181.

<sup>738</sup>Ibid., pp. 181-182.

Western Christian may, at first, find disconcerting. It is not marked by the restraint and sobriety of the Roman rite, nor by the critical restraint so evident in Protestant Churches. The Orthodox liturgy which so exuberantly celebrates the Theotokos, Mother of God, may surprise those whose theological tradition and cultural temperament differ from that of Eastern Orthodoxy. Yet, in spite of a remarkable audacity of language, a proper balance is maintained, and devotional exaggeration and subjectivism are kept in check by the firmness of the theological foundation and setting in the Eastern Orthodox context. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and Mary are of the East. Their cult arose in the East. The wealth and beauty of Eastern Orthodox hymns and prayers to our Lady is overwhelming and awe-inspiring. Three-fourths of the Ethiopian and Syrian Liturgies consist of hymns, the better part of which are composed in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and in all the liturgies of the Eastern Churches, the Virgin Mary occupies a prominent place. Eastern Christians everywhere give to her this special veneration, agreeing that the Virgin Mary's divine maternity lifts her above all creatures. Orthodoxy maintains that the true church of both East and West will never cease to praise the all holy Virgin Mother of God, to multiply hymns, praise, prayers, thanksgiving, and feasts in her honor, for in so doing the Church glorifies God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Creation is said to be completed, its end achieved, in the resurrection and assumption of our Lady the Virgin Mary. Because of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God,

the world is made glorious, divine, and worthy of the regard of God.

At this point, other Christians may ask: "Is this not frankly exaggerated?" Does not the elaborate veneration of the Virgin within Eastern Orthodoxy introduce the figure of a goddess into Christian worship? To such questions, Eastern Orthodoxy responds by saying that however exalted, however honored, however praised the Virgin Mary may be, she remains a human woman. Though the Mother of God, she is not changed into a divine being; she is human. But out of the whole of humanity past, present and future God chose Mary as the one through whom He wanted to manifest His greatest work: the redemptive mystery of the incarnation. The Eastern Orthodox Church calls the Virgin Mary blessed because God Himself has chosen her to be born of her. The very humanity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ belongs to the humanity of Mary. Thus, Eastern Orthodox iconography always portrays the Mother of God with her child to express this mystery. To separate our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ from His Mother or to overlook her altogether is a violation of the meaning of God's incarnation. In the understanding of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, any tradition which refuses to include the holy Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, in its theology and liturgical life is deficient.

As we noted earlier, Martin Luther preached in fiery opposition to the devotion of the Virgin Mary, saying that Christians should not put their trust in Mary, giving to her the

service which belongs to God alone. The Virgin Mary, he said, belongs to the rank of the saints; but with great anger he rejected her role as mediatrix, pointing to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and humanity. In so doing, Luther expressed the general sentiment among Protestants in the Church today, the fear that veneration of our Lady, the Virgin Mary, would lead one away from devotion to God. Protestant critics of Marian devotion express this sentiment in this way:

What is important--and it is impossible to exaggerate the importance--is that the heart of the Catholic Mass is oriented not towards an authentic manifestation of the divine, but toward the pure humanity of the Virgin Mary. It must be said that by all the traditional religious canons this is the essence of idolatry. The worship of Mary is a comprehensive transfer in the psychological sense from the person of Jesus to that of His Mother, taking over to her the sentiments of affections, trust and dependence.<sup>739</sup>

If this is, indeed, the Protestant understanding of the churches which maintain the cult of the Virgin Mary, one can appreciate why Mary does not find a place in Protestant worship and piety. The Protestant argument against Marian devotion issues first and foremost from the conviction that devotion must be centered on our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and on Christ alone. Among the list of offenses which in Protestant eyes detract from Christocentric worship, Protestant theologians cite the accumulation of Marian prayers, rituals, and petitions which risk focusing the

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<sup>739</sup>Miegge, G., The Virgin Mary, p. 183.

attention on the Virgin apart from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and give the impression of placing Mary between our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and the Church rather than within the Church. Furthermore, Protestantism takes issue with parts of the Roman Catholic liturgy which seem to separate Marian devotion from the eucharistic service as a whole. These are serious concerns and valid questions which Protestantism poses to other traditions. Nevertheless, many Protestant theologians are beginning to recognize the danger of their purely negative Mariology and to struggle with the vital significance of Mary, the Mother of God, for Christian theology and liturgy. There is much to suggest that "Protestantism is being challenged to deal more intensively with these questions, and to give a more thoughtful response than it has done up to date".<sup>740</sup>

The main problem here can be traced back to the problem of authority. The Protestant Churches recognize only the authority of Scripture and tend to view with suspicion those patristic, liturgical and devotional sources which both the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church hold to be authoritative. Lossky writes that it is impossible to limit oneself to only one of the three authoritative sources (biblical, apostolic and patristic) when it comes to the relevance of scriptural, dogmatic or devotional data.<sup>741</sup> The three primary sources of authority are indissolubly

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<sup>740</sup>G. Maron, "Mary in Protestant Theology," in: Concilium, Vol. 168: Mary in the Churches, edited by H. Kung, and J. Moltmann (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), pp. 40-48; p. 45.

<sup>741</sup>Lossky, "Panagia," p. 24.

linked together in the life of the Church; and devotion, scripture and dogma are present simultaneously in all theological thought that seeks to grasp the entirety of the Church's theological and liturgical tradition. It is impossible to separate dogma from life, scripture from tradition. According to eastern Orthodox understanding, the Christological dogma obliges one to recognize the divine maternity of the Virgin; scriptural evidence teaches that the glory of the Mother of God does not reside merely in her bodily maternity of having carried and fed the incarnate Word; and Church tradition, based upon the collective memory of all who hear the Word of God and keep it, gives to the faithful the assurance that the Mother of God is worthy of exaltation, unlimited glory being ascribed to her. Without the insight of the Church's tradition, theology would remain dumb on the subject of the Blessed Virgin Mary's exceeding virtue, and thus unable to justify her astounding glorification. For Eastern Orthodoxy, this is the explanation why Christian communities which have difficulties with the idea of tradition are also alien to the cult of the Mother of God.<sup>742</sup>

The Eastern Orthodox Churches are convinced, however, that there is a universal and ecumenical authority in the very name, Theotokos, Mother of God. The virgin birth is clearly attested in the New Testament and has played an integral part in the tradition of the church Catholic throughout history. The creedal affirmation, "incarnate by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin

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<sup>742</sup>Ibid., pp. 24-26.

Mary", is as much a historical statement as a solemn profession of faith. Likewise, the name "Theotokos" is more than a mere designation or a honorific title. It is a doctrinal definition encompassed in one word which has been a touchstone of the true faith down through the ages and a distinctive mark of universal orthodoxy.<sup>743</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus already warned that anyone who does not acknowledge Mary as Theotokos is estranged from God. Certainly, the Nestorian controversy proved the truth of Gregory's words and caused the Church officially to attribute the title Theotokos to the Blessed Virgin Mary. In this way, it affirmed that the study of Mariology is and remains inseparable from the study of Christology.<sup>744</sup>

Indeed, Mariological questions should be put forward as the ultimate test of Christological orthodoxy--to be used, as it were, as a doctrinal shibboleth in the Christological discussion. Eastern Orthodoxy maintains that Christological doctrine can never be accurately or adequately stated unless an accurate and adequate teaching regarding the Mother of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has been included in its formation. Orthodox theology is convinced that all the Mariological doubts and errors of modern times are in the final analysis a matter of Christological confusion, revealing an unresolved conflict in Christology itself. On the other hand, the person of the Blessed Virgin Mary can only be properly understood in a Christologically

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<sup>743</sup>Florovsky, G., "The Ever-Virgin Mother of God," p. 51.

<sup>744</sup>Ibid., pp. 51-52.

sound context. In a reduced Christology, there simply is no room for the Mother of God. Yet, to ignore the mother means to misinterpret the Son. For this reason, the Eastern Orthodox Church insists that Mariology belongs to the very essence of Christological doctrine. The mystery of the incarnation necessarily includes the Mother of the Incarnate One.

#### IN SEARCH OF A UNIFYING MARIOLOGY

We have set the perimeters of the ecumenical contribution of Eastern Orthodoxy to the development of a sound Mariology for the sake of, and in the context of, a sound Christology. No docetic reduction is permissible in the case of Mariology, just as doceticism is to be avoided elsewhere in Christology. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Eternal God, was incarnate from the Virgin Mary. She is the very Mother of God apart from whom no genuine incarnation of God would have been possible. Nor is her role in the life of our Lord a merely accidental; the Virgin Mary represents for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ one particular person to whom He is in a very special relation, not only as Lord and Saviour, but as Son. On the other hand, the holy Virgin's human maternity is of no less import than the mystery of her divine motherhood. Yet, she is not just an ordinary mother, but the Mother of God whose child is God-Incarnate. To regard the Virgin Mary as a mere instrument through which our Lord took flesh would be a serious impoverishment. Such a



misinterpretation is excluded by the explicit teaching of the earliest Church that the Virgin Mary was not a channel through which the heavenly Lord passed through, but the human mother from whom He took His full humanity.<sup>745</sup>

Without continuous attention to the person and role of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the history of salvation, one cannot formulate an accurate theology regarding the incarnate Son of God. An ecumenically oriented theology that does not make reference to Mary is necessarily crippled, unable to penetrate the hearts and minds of those seeking a fuller unity in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ through the Church Catholic. Mariology challenges theology to take seriously the biblical and kerygmatic witness of the universal Church regarding the interpenetration of the divine and human element in full reciprocity and unbroken co-belongingness.<sup>746</sup>

Ecumenical co-operation on the way toward unity entails an ongoing discussion which must include both Mariological and Christological considerations. Common to all discussion and to the Christian faith as a whole is the affirmation and confession of our risen Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Christology must be the starting point for any Mariological inquiry which, in turn, must be informed by Christology.

All who claim that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, is their Saviour, need to understand His

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<sup>745</sup>Florovsky, G., "The Ever-Virgin Mother of God," pp. 54-55.

<sup>746</sup>Nissiotis, N., "Mary in Orthodox Theology," pp. 25-26.

life, death, and resurrection in the full light of the meaning of the incarnation. This is a matter of Christology, a matter which was of great importance for the misunderstanding that originally divided the one Catholic and Apostolic Church. Still, it is Christology which is the common ground of all Christian traditions. The fact that the Third Ecumenical Council, concerned primarily with Christological dogma, affirmed the term "Theotokos" as the proper corrective to Christological divergences from orthodoxy remains truly remarkable.

In the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches, through the World Council of Churches, a series of four joint consultations was organized between 1964-1971 in Aarhus, Bristol, Geneva and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Held in an effort to renew understanding and deepen ties between the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Churches, the consultations had their initial basis in a common statement affirming the "mystery of the union of perfect Godhead and perfect manhood in our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>747</sup> Beginning with the meeting at Aarhus in 1964, the common christological foundation between Eastern and Oriental Churches served as a corrective to the original rift existing between these churches. In defining who our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is, the participants came to a remarkable conclusion, after centuries of misunderstanding:

Through the different terminologies used by

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<sup>747</sup>"Agreed Statement," Study Group of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Theologians; Bristol, July 29, 1967; in: The Greek Orthodox Theological Review 13:2 (Fall, 1968), p. 133.

each side, we saw the same truth expressed. Since we agree in rejecting without reservation the teaching of Eutyches as well as of Nestorius, the acceptance or non-acceptance of the Council of Chalcedon does not entail the acceptance of either heresy. Both sides found themselves fundamentally following the Christological teaching of the one undivided Church as expressed by St. Cyril.<sup>748</sup>

At Bristol in 1967, both the Eastern and Oriental Churches continued to find agreement on broader areas of Christological affirmations and confession, including soteriology, the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, ecclesiology, spirituality, and the liturgical life of the Church. The difference was in the use of certain terms to describe the union of the human and divine in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; however, the intention and meaning of each was generally the same:

Ever since the fifth century, we have used different formulae to confess our common faith in the One Lord Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect man. Some of us affirm two natures, wills and energies hypostatically united in the One Lord Jesus Christ. Some of us affirm one united divine-human nature, will and energy in the same Christ. But both sides speak of a union without confusion, without change, without divisions, without separation.<sup>749</sup>

In addition, the Bristol statement proposed certain steps to help facilitate communion between the churches. These included:

-a joint declaration of common faith in  
'the One Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ whom we all  
acknowledge to be perfect God and perfect Man.'

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<sup>748</sup>"Agreed Statement," Study Group of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Theologians; Bristol, July 29, 1967; in: the Greek Orthodox Theological Review, Vol. XIII, (Fall, 1968), p. 133.

<sup>749</sup>Bristol Statement, The Greek Orthodox Theological Review, p. 133.

-an examination of canonical, liturgical, and jurisdictional problems involved on both sides.<sup>750</sup>

This list was expanded in 1970 at the consultation in Geneva where it was suggested that:

- a joint committee be established to examine areas of mutual agreement and disagreement and to identify past areas of dissension.
- a statement reflecting "a common Christological agreement...held on both sides for centuries, as is attested by the liturgical and patristic documents."
- clarification of certain terminology, such as that used in the four later Councils and in patristic and liturgical texts.
- more contacts, including visitation and study, between the Churches on various levels.

In addition, the consultation at Geneva identified more of the areas of difference existing between the two families of churches, such as the authority of certain Councils, the lifting and retaining of anathemas, the patterns of territorial autonomy, the limits of pluralistic the patterns of territorial autonomy, the limits of pluralistic. Finally, in 1971, the last of these informal consultations was held in Addis Ababa, while the Ethiopian Church was hosting the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches.<sup>751</sup> Again, the meeting expanded on what the three prior consultations had explored, including the lifting and retaining of anathemas, an examination of the "true intention of

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<sup>750</sup>Ibid., pp. 134-135.

<sup>751</sup>The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama of History and Spiritual Life, p. III.

(those anathematized) teachings," an examination of partisanship regarding the teaching of Church history and theological literature, editing of liturgical and hymnic condemnations, deeper study of the definition of sainthood.<sup>752</sup>

In many ways, the four consultations of Aarhus, Bristol, Geneva and Addis Ababa conserve as models of ways of approaching an ecumenical dialogue. Such an endeavor within the families of Protestant churches, for instance, might well revolve around the term "Theotokos" and its Christological as well as Mariological implications. Rightly understood, the term points to the reality and fullness of the divine human hypostatic union, accepted and endorsed in classical Protestant theology. As a common ground for an approach to an ecumenical discussion of Marian theology, the Virgin's role as "Theotokos" might challenge Protestant theologians to reflect in a new context on the meaning of God's grace in relation to human co-operation and the meaning of freedom to choose for or against God. Understanding Mary as a fully involved, active participant in the salvation of the world (rather than a mere passive instrument) has implications for Protestant feminist theologians as well as others seeking a fuller understanding of the relationship between God and humanity and of the integrity of human co-operation and choice. The benefits of an on-going ecumenical dialogue regarding these

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<sup>752</sup>"Summary of Conclusions," Study Group of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Theologians; Addis Ababa, January 22-23, 1971; in: The Greek Orthodox Theological Review, Vol. XVI, (Spring and Fall, 1971), pp. 211-213.

matters cannot be over-emphasized or exhausted. The role of the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God is a dimension of the incarnation often understated within the Church and yet of great importance, beauty and depth. Mary's divine maternity not only sheds light on the meaning of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's humanity, but illuminates the meaning of God's gracious dealings with humanity and the completeness of our freedom within that grace. In the blessed Virgin Mary, the full dignity of humanity is expressed in obedience to God. Thus, a Mariological anthropology, within the horizon of christology could help the Church as a whole. In her obedience, the Blessed Virgin Mary is the primary model of the humility that waits upon the Lord. In her perpetual virginity, one sees the glory of the Lord who fills all in all, for whom "nothing is impossible;" in the virgin birth of our Lord the promise and the prophecy of the Old Testament are fulfilled, and the old chains that bound Eve are loosed by the obedience of Mary; and in the Virgin's humble response to the angelic message, "Behold the handmaiden of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy Word (Luke 1:35)," one witnesses the magnificence of the living God in His most wondrous saving act: His incarnation. The Virgin Mary magnifies the Lord. Yet, it is through her flesh, her blood, her maternity, that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ shares in our humanity.

A re-evaluation of the Virgin Mary's role as the Mother of God both for an adequate understanding of the incarnation and for the unity of the Church can only enrich and enhance the

theological and liturgical foundations of every tradition in Christendom. Ecumenical dialogue regarding the Virgin Mother can help to open another horizon in the discussion of the community of men and women in church and society.

Indeed, elevation and exaltation of the Mother of God can open new and constructive approaches to the priority of the feminine, both in the Church, and in the world at large. And finally, the life of the Virgin Mary, Theotokos, exemplifies most strikingly the way we are called to go as our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's Church in approaching our common ecumenical task: reflecting the Virgin's humility, faithfulness, and obedience in mutual repentance and reconciliation, one with another, before the face of God. Such an endeavor requires courage, trust, and the honesty to evaluate who we have been, who we are, and who, in the fullness of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we have yet to become. We can all learn from the diversity and the treasures that each of our unique traditions bring to the Body of Christ. Nikos Nissiotis expresses his hope for the unity of the Christian Church in this way:

In the eyes of an Eastern Orthodox believer, the return of Roman Catholicism during and after the Second Vatican Council to a genuine Christological Mariology that avoids dogmatic exaggerations and reaffirms her solidarity with the Christian community, is very encouraging, as is also the renewed interest that Reformed theology has in ecumenical circles to return to teachings of the great Reformers about the important ecclesiological significance of the Virgin Mary for today, by stating the idea of Mary as a symbol of the Church...It could remind (the Reformed Churches) of a dimension they have largely lost. As a symbol of the Church, Mary reminds us that the community of faith is not simply a community

in the present moment only, but one which continues through the centuries...<sup>753</sup>

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church has much to contribute through its rich and deep veneration of the Virgin Mary, both theologically and liturgically. Yet, each of our traditions who believe in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and confess Him as Lord and Saviour has much to contribute to the unity of His Church.

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<sup>753</sup>Nissiotis, N., "Mary in Orthodox Theology," p. 36.



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