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# Certain Peculiarities of the Liturgical Tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in Comparison with the Coptic Orthodox Church

## Abstract

This paper deals with some selective distinctions between the liturgical traditions of the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. In addition to presenting the liturgical rules and practices that they have individually developed and maintained, it explores the reasons for their distinctiveness, refraining from judgement. Its aim is also not to make a comparison in order to admire one and blame the other, but to discuss systematically the aims and mentalities that both churches have followed in developing these peculiar traditions. It is intended to help the reader to recognise the varied ways in which



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common themes can be interpreted and understood across the different liturgical traditions.

### Keywords

Anaphora, Celebrant, Eucharistic Bread, Gospel, Liturgical Tradition

### Introduction

The Coptic Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahədo Church (EOTC) are among the most ancient churches in the world. Both have their own historical background which beautifully demonstrates to the rest of the world their importance and pride, including the great contributions they have made to their countries and peoples.

Both are members of Oriental Christianity, sharing identical dogmas and apostolic successions. They were also part of the same apostolic see known as the See of St Mark until 1959 AD. The See is represented by the Synod, which, from the 11th century, had its seat in Cairo. The EOTC considered it its own synod until it established its own synod in Addis Ababa. The Amharic paraphrase: "*Marqos abbatachən eskəndrya ennatachən*" / Mark, our father, and Alexandria, our mother/, can be a confirmation of this truth.

This long-standing unity has enabled them to share many common historical facts. In particular, the EOTC received several biblical inscriptions and other Christian texts from the Coptic Church and translated them into Gəəz. The Egyptian bishops who headed the church for about 1600 years were also consecrated by the Coptic patriarchs.

In consideration of this strong connection, many imagine that all the sacramental rules and rites they perform are identical as

much as the doctrines they propagate. The truth, however, is that they developed various rules and rituals differ from each one another. One of the sacramental services where some peculiarities can be observed is the liturgical tradition.

The liturgy is the most significant and valued service in both churches, as it is in almost all Eastern and Roman churches. The strict rules, the arrangement of vestments, the mental and physical preparation of the celebrants and the attention of the congregation they pay for the service are almost the same in both churches. Nevertheless, there are some liturgical rules they follow and duties they accomplish in different ways. The difference lies mainly in the interpretation of the prayers they recite as well as in the symbolism of the vestments and the actions they perform in the celebration of the liturgy.

In fact, the EOTC still keeps various vestments such as the Ark of the Covenant, which is directly linked to the worship rituals of the Old Testament times. Such things can obviously make slight differences between the liturgical traditions of the two Churches. However, what is interesting is the presence of some unlike traditional features in the performance of similar rites in the churches, which many people may consider as one church. This prompts researchers to investigate these peculiarities and the reasons for them.

This paper also has the same excitement and explores what things are present in one and not in the other and what performance is done in a unique way by each Church. The point is not to single out all the different interpretations and performances or to determine what is right and what is wrong. Rather, it is about looking at the mentalities and tendencies that can be seen as factors in the occurrence of some selective distinctions.

The liturgical rules, rites and vestments used differently by the churches are probably numerous. Only a few of them are listed and discussed here.

## 1 Using the *Tabot*

*Tabot* is the Ethiopian term for the Ark of the Covenant, which has a close historical connection to the Ethiopian Church. As indicated in the Bible, the term refers specifically to the box made of acacia wood that was covered with pure gold and contained the tablets of the testimony (Geez - ጽላት *šəllat*). (Exo 25:10-21 Heb 9:4)

In the liturgical books of the Church, it is often mentioned in the place of the *šəllat*.

*Šəllat / Tabot* is the most revered sacred element in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. In every parish church there is at least one *šəlle / Tabot*. In many monasteries and parish churches it is regularly placed in the inner part of the altar, which is called in Gə'əz ከርሰ ሐምር *kärsä hämär*, apart from the time of the celebration of the liturgy. During the liturgy, the celebrant embellishes it with fine linen and places it on the altar. He then places the paten with the Eucharistic bread and the chalice with the Eucharistic wine on it and recites all the liturgical prayers and the prayer of thanksgiving. He also blesses and breaks the prosphara which is placed on the *Tabot*.

The following verse recited by the celebrant also confirms this:

“O the Lover of human beings, show Your face over this Eulogia and over this chalice which we have placed on this divine *Tabot* that belongs to You” (Lit. v. 49).

In addition, after the distribution of the Holy Communion, the celebrant returns to the sanctuary; places his right hand on it and recites the prayer called *'anbərotä 'əd* (አንብሮተ ጳጵ) to remind

the Lord that He laid His hands on the heads of the apostles and blessed them just before He ascended into heaven (Luk 24,50). According to the rites and canons of the Church, it is definitely wrong to celebrate a liturgy without a *Tabot*. Nor could there be a parish church without having a *Tabot*. However, this illustrates not only the importance of the *Tabot* for the celebration of the liturgy, but also its irreplaceable role for the consecration of the Church itself.

In the tradition of the Coptic Orthodox Church, there is of course also a sacred vessel called the Ark or Throne. But it is not an absolute equivalent of the *Tabot / šallat*. It is a small wooden box that is placed on the altar during the liturgy. The chalice is kept in it. Apart from this, it has no significant function and great importance and veneration in recognition of the most sacred vessel in which the Lord's grace always dwells, like the *Tabot* of the Ethiopian Church (Malaty, 1992: 14).

## 2 Number of Anaphora

The liturgy of both Ethiopian and Coptic Orthodox Churches can be roughly divided into two major sections: the Pre-anaphora and the Anaphora. In the Ethiopian liturgical tradition, the first section which we mention here as the Pre-Anaphora is known as *Šar'atä qaddase* (ሥርዓተ ቅዳሴ), which is invariably celebrated each day before the Anaphora which is selected to be celebrated together with it according to the order of *Gəššawe*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Gə'əz - ግጽዋ* (Book of Exposition) - one of the most important worship books, used mainly for liturgical celebration, prescribing to the celebrants which psalm verses to sing and which Bible verses to read during the liturgy. It also deals with the Anaphora, which can be celebrated on

The second section which includes the Anaphora, is known as *Ak<sup>w</sup>k<sup>w</sup>ätetä Q<sup>w</sup>arban* (አኩቲተ ቅርባን). More than 20 individual anaphoras are believed to exist in Oriental Orthodoxy. However, the number of anaphoras recognized by the Churches varies from Church to Church. The Syriac Orthodox Church has 13 canonized Anaphora, while the Coptic Orthodox Church recognizes only three, namely: the Anaphora of Basil, the Anaphora of Gregory, and the Anaphora of Cyril. Of these three, the Anaphora of Basil is frequently celebrated in all Coptic monasteries and parish churches (Budde, 310).

In the liturgical tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, fourteen distinct anaphoras are canonically permissible and are celebrated alternately. The Church claims that all these anaphoras were translated from foreign languages into Gəʿəz between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Century. If so, the anaphoras were most probably translated from Greek and Coptic languages like the other biblical and patristic literature translated into Gəʿəz in these periods.

In contrast, Prof. Getachew Haile explained that many of the anaphoras canonized by the Church were originally composed by local scholars who dedicated their literary works to popular saints. He extended his explanation and said that one reason for naming others for the works they wrote was their humbleness! However, he did not provide any solid evidence or mention any local scholar who did what he said (Getachew, 2017:18).

Such an assertion is not convincing, because the scholars who composed the anaphoras are highly renowned as holy men. How would it be possible to say that a certain holy man composed an anaphora and introduced it in the name of a certain apostle or a

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every day of the year, depending on the commemorative day that is observed on that day. See also 'Gəşşawe' by Emmanuel Fritsch in EAe II, 775).

highly revered church father? This would seem to imply that he was a liar and arrogant who overestimated himself. There is no doubt that Ethiopian scholars could compose, translate, and interpret texts at the highest level. Some could also use their nicknames or baptismal names, but they should not inappropriately use the name of other personalities for the recognition of their composition, as this is equal to dishonesty and breaking the law from the point of view of spiritual people.

Getachew, again, has claimed that local scholars attribute them to recognized saints because they know that their compositions would be rejected if they revealed their identities. As proof, he cited the story of St. Giyorgis of Gasæća (1364-1424 A.D), whose composition of the Horologium had been rejected by a certain abbot (Getachew, 1983: 384).

This clarification leads the reader to believe that Ethiopians do not readily accept indigenous compositions and that many of the available texts attributed to foreign authors may have been originally written by unknown Ethiopian authors. Again, it is not correct to cite the opposition of a single person as evidence, since a single person reflects his or her personal mentality and attitude, which may not be shared by the majority. The story is written in the miracles of the saint. In the narrative there is a statement that says: የሐምዮ፡ ወይጻርፎ፡ በቃለ፡ ጽዕለት፡ ዐቢይ፡ ዘኢይትከሀል፡ ለተነግሮ /he slanders him and blasphemes against him with the worst word of reproach, which is not right to say/. This statement is an obvious indication of the abbot's personal hatred for Abba Giyorgis. Possibly it is an inferiority complex. Therefore, this cannot be considered as evidence. Moreover, the history he mentions is not only indicative of his opposition but also of his later recognition (Haileegzie, et., 2011, 125-131).

Moreover, most existing witnesses contradict such an assumption. There is no report that proves the rejection of a composition

based on the nationality of the composer since the most important condition for the acceptance of a new composition or translation is its content and final message. The identity of the composer is the second issue that can be investigated to determine the connection between him and the subject he is addressing, and between him and the audience he is speaking. The availability of hundreds of manuscripts written by native scholars can be a good proof of this.

We can also examine some stories to support this idea. Let us take first the story of St. Yared (505-571 AD), to whom is attributed the first and most huge local composition called *Dəgʷa*. According to the section of the synaxarion dealing with his biography, there was no rite and experience of praying or celebrating the liturgy with melody before the composition of his hymns. On one day, he surprisingly recited his first hymn called *Aryam* in the church of Aksum Šəyon. The synaxarion describes the positive reaction of the congregation as follows:

“When they heard his voice, they came to him eagerly, the king and queen, the bishop with all the clergy, the officials of the state and the people; they spent the whole day listening to him. Then he prepared the *Maḥlet* structurally for every time of the year” (Synaxarion II, 266).

The second story we mention here is that of Abba Giyorgis of Gasəćca, who was one of the outstanding local scholars and author of over twenty books. The *vita*, dedicated to the memory of his spirituality and literary contribution, shows the warm acceptance and great appreciation of the elites and clergy for his new work called ፍካሬ ሃይማኖት *fəkkare haymanot* as follows:

“Once a certain governor and commander-in-chief of the army named Tewodros asked him about an Orthodox faith. He wrote a book for him called *fəkkare haymanot* (The meaning of faith). When they saw and read the book, the king and all the clergy said, “Truly, the Ethiopian John Chrysostom and



Cyril, the mouth of blessing, came into being in our time. Ethiopia resembled Constantinople and became equal to Alexandria” (Haileegzie, et., 2011, 77).

Also, in the Vita of *Abunä Zenamarqos* (13- early 14<sup>th</sup> Century) we find the admiration and appreciation of the monastic communities of *Däbrä-Bəsrat* and *Däbrä Hanta* for the *Maḥletä Śəge* written by two holy monks, *Abba Śəgebrəhan*<sup>2</sup> of *Däbrä-Bəsrat* and *Abba Gäbrämaryam* of *Hanta*. It is read as follows:

ወበይኃሪ፡ መዋዕል፡ ዘምስለ፡ አባ፡ ገብረማርያም፡ ዘደብረ፡ ሐንታ፡  
መምህረ፡ ሕግ፡ ደረሰ፡ ውእቱ፡ ጽጌብርሃን፡ አይሁዳዊ፡ ማኅሌተ፡ ጽጌ፡  
ዘእግዝእትን፡ ቅድስት፡ ድንግል፡ ማርያም፡ ወኮኑ፡ ፍቁራን፡ አባ ጽጌብርሃን  
ወአባ፡ ገብረማርያም በበይናቲሆሙ፡ ወይመጽእ፡ አባ፡ ገብረማርያም፡  
እምደብረ፡ ሐንታ፡ ውስተ፡ ደብረ፡ ብስራት፡ ሀገረ፡ አቡነ፡ ዜናማርቆስ፡  
አመ፡ እስራ፡ ወጎሙሱ፡ ለወርኅ፡ መስከረም፡ ዘውእቱ፡ ፀአተ፡ ክረምት፡  
ወይነብር፡ ምስለ፡ ጽጌብርሃን፡ እስከ፡ አመ፡ ሰሙኑ፡ ለወርኅ፡ ኅዳር፡  
ዘውእቱ፡ በዓሎሙ፡ ለአርባዕቱ፡ እንስሳ፡ ወበካልእ፡ ዓመት፡ የሐውር፡  
ጽጌብርሃን፡ ኅባ፡ ሀሎ፡ አባ፡ ገብረማርያም፡ ደብረ፡ ሐንታ፡ ወይነብር፡ እንዘ፡  
ይትቀነይ፡ ምስሌሁ፡ በማኅሌተ፡ ጽጌ፡ አርባዓ፡ መዋዕለ፡ በደብረ፡ ሐንታ፡  
ወደብረ፡ ብስራትኒ፡ ከማሁ፡ በበዓመት፡ በተባርዮ፡

Later, this Jew *Śəgebrəhan* together with *Abba Gäbrämaryam* of *Däbrä Hanta* composed the *Maḥletä Śəge* of Our Lady, the Blessed Virgin Mary. *Abba Śəgebrəhan* and *Abba Gäbrämaryam* were devoted to each other. On 25 *mäskäräm* (5 October), the last day of winter, *Abba Gäbrämaryam* comes from *Däbrä Hanta* to *Däbrä Bəsrat*, the place of *Abunä Zenamarqos*, and lives with *Śəgebrəhan* until 8 *Hədar* (15 November), the feast day of the Four Beasts (Cherubim). The following year,

<sup>2</sup> In the Encyclopaedia Aethiopica it was erroneously mentioned as *Śəge Dəngəl*. EAe III, 660.

Šəgebrəhan goes to Däbrä Hanta, where Abba Gäbrämaryam lived and lives, while celebrating with him *Maḥletä Šəge* forty days in Däbrä Hanta and in Däbrä Bəsrat, each year consecutively (72).

These witnesses clearly show that local authors should have no reason to conceal their names and that Ethiopians have no problem accepting indigenous compositions if they are suitable and acceptable. They would rather pay special respect and tribute to both the composer and the composition. In this context, it may suffice to recall that St. Yared was highly honoured by King Gäbrämasqäl (ca. 534-48) and Abba Giyorgis was appointed abbot of the most famous monastery of Däbrä Damo. Similarly, Abba Šəgebrəhan was appointed high priest over four parish churches by King Nəwayämaryam /King Dawit II/ (1382-1413 A.D) (Laekämaryam, 2006, 73).

Had these authors been rejected, they would not have been honoured in this way, nor would we have found their works today. On the contrary, the presence of numerous indigenous compositions, which preserve the primacy and dignity of the country in history and literature, is evidence of the appreciation of Ethiopians for indigenous compositions. Thus, Getachew's explanation is rather questionable and does not correspond to reality.

The anaphors that the Church recognizes and celebrates are the ones below:

1. The Anaphora of the Apostles (1<sup>st</sup> Century)
2. The Anaphora of our Lord (1<sup>st</sup> Century)
3. The Anaphora of John the evangelist (1<sup>st</sup> Century)
4. The Anaphora of the Nicene Fathers (4<sup>th</sup> Century)
5. The Anaphora of Athanasius of Alexandria (296 – 373 AD)
6. The Anaphora of Basil of Caesarea (330-379 AD)
7. The Anaphora of Gregory of Nazianz (329-390 AD)
8. The Anaphora of Gregory of Nysa (335-394 AD)

9. The Anaphora of Epiphanius of Cyprus (310-403 AD)
10. The Anaphora of John Chrysostom (347-407 AD)
11. The Anaphora of Cyril of Alexandria (376-444 AD)
12. The Anaphora of Dioscorus of Alexandria (390-454 AD)
13. The Anaphora of Jacob of Sarug (451-521 AD)
14. The Anaphora of St. Mary by Abba Cyriacus of Bahnasah (6<sup>th</sup> Century)<sup>3</sup>

Each of them has an additional designation, which usually comes from the initial words or phrases. The following list shows the designations and their sources. The anaphors are listed here in the order used in the printed liturgy book.

1. The Anaphora of the Apostles - ዘበደኅረ *zäbädähari* - the 7<sup>th</sup> word from the beginning
2. The Anaphora of our Lord - ነአኩተከ *naak<sup>u</sup>täkkä* - the initial word
3. The Anaphora of St. Mary - ጉሥዐ *g<sup>u</sup>äs‘a* - the initial word
4. The Anaphora of John the evangelist - ኅቤከ *habekä* - the initial word
5. The Anaphora of the Nicene Fathers - ግሩም *gərum* - the initial word
6. The Anaphora of Athanasius of Alexandria - አሰምዕ ለክሙ *‘asämmə‘ə läkəmu* - the initial word of after ‘Our Father’
7. The Anaphora of Basil of Caesarea - ህልው *həlləw* - the initial word after ‘Our Father’.
8. The Anaphora of Gregory of Nazianz - ነአኩቶ *näak<sup>u</sup>k<sup>u</sup>ato* - the initial word after ‘Our Father’
9. The Anaphora of Epiphanius of Cyprus - ዐቢይ *‘abiy* - the initial word

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<sup>3</sup> Conti-Rossini, 1909-1910, CSCO 54, p. 5 [text], and 58, p. 5.

10. The Anaphora of John Chrysostom – ናሁ ንዜኑ *nahu nāzennu* – the initial word after ‘Our Father’
11. The Anaphora of Cyril of Alexandria - ኅቤስ እግዚአ *ḥabekä ’agzi’o* - the initial word
12. The Anaphora of Jacob of Sarug - ተንሥኡ *tānsā’u* – the initial word
13. The Anaphora of Dioscorus of Alexandria - እምቅድሙ ዓለም *’emqadmä ’alām* – the initial word
14. The Anaphora of Gregory of Nysa - ነአኩተስ እግዚአ *naak<sup>u</sup>täkkä ’agzi’o* – the initial word (Ermias, 2019: 22).

Pintile added two more anaphors to the list he presented and increased the number of anaphors to sixteen. The anaphors that are not included in the liturgical canon of the Church but that he has added to his list are the “Anaphora of the Evangelist Mark” and the “Second Anaphora of the Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria” (Pintile, 2014).

The anaphora of St. Mary was cited in his list in the plural. This seems to indicate that there is more than one anaphora dedicated to St. Mary. He may have done this to mention the so-called *Mä’aza Qaddase* ሞዐዘ ቅዳሴ by Abba Giyorgis of Gasəćca alongside the anaphora of Saint Mary composed by Abba Kyriakos, for it is informally titled “The Second Anaphora of Saint Mary”. Indeed, this anaphora is a well-known composition, rich in impressive messages and metaphorical expressions, rhythmically composed and sharing several themes with the anaphora of Abba Kyriakos. The Church is not hostile to it; it is also used as a reference for theological dialogues. Nevertheless, she has not been officially canonized and is not included in the list nor in the service book published by the official and legal body of the Church (Ermias, 2021:4-6).

As far as authorship is concerned, Getachew Haile has revealed his approach, which is not in accordance with the church's

claims. He denied Abba Kyriakos of Bahnasah and gave the authorship to Abba Samuel of Wali. He stated that Abba Samuel composed the Anaphora, being inspired by the *Wəddase Mariam* of St. Ephrem of Syria (306-373 AD). He also stated that in connection with praying the Anaphora, at least three miracles occurred for him. In another work, he explained that before the 15th century, the Church had only two anaphoras, the Anaphora of Our Lord and the Anaphora of the Apostles; the other twelve anaphoras were used by the Church after the 15th century (Getachew, 1983, 28).

According to the exegesis of the anaphora of St. Mary, Abba Samuel (14-15<sup>th</sup> Century) was the one who brought the anaphora to the land beyond the Täckäzi River, perhaps to Waldəbba. This could lead to recognizing him as its introducer in a particular place but cannot be evidence to attribute authorship to him. Nor do the sections of his vita that he cites confirm that he composed the anaphora, unless they explain that he celebrated it on the feast day of St. Mary according to the Lord's will and command (Muluaem, 2019:60-61).

Behold, sixteen major phrasal notes<sup>4</sup> of the liturgy are originally taken from the Anaphora of St. Mary. This clearly ensures the certainty of the exegetical narration.

The exegetical narrative clearly explains that the Virgin Mary herself took Abba Kyriakos to the place called May Kirah, where St. Yared was living, and told him to say the anaphora to him word for word. He told him and St. Yared composed a liturgical

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<sup>4</sup> ጌሥዐ (ጌሥ), ወአነ አዮድዕ (ወአ ድዕ), በአማን (ማን), በእንተዝ ናፈቅረኪ (በእ ፈቅ), ጽላት ዘሙሴ (ጽላ ሙሴ), ጸናጽል (ጸና), ቲቶ (ቲቶ), ፊልሞና (ፊል), ወይቤለኪ (ቤለ), ቃል (ቃል), ዘበጸዳለ ብርሃኑ (ዘበ ዳለ/ ዳለ ሃኑ), ሙጠወ (ሙጠ), ባርክ ወፈትት (ባር ትት), ዮሴፍ (ሴፍ), ወጣዕሙ (ሙ/ ዕሙ), ታቦት ዘዶር (ታቦ ዶር). (Tənśāe zä-guba'e, 2001, 563-589).

melody for it. It also means that St. Yared extensively composed a melody for the rest of the anaphoras, and for this reason there are several important musical notes (*šaräy* ሥረይ) of the liturgy in the Anaphora of Saint Mary (Tənsäe zä-guba'e, 1990, pp. II, 7-8).

Moreover, some manuscripts clearly prove the availability of the anaphora before the appearance of Abba Samuel. The Vita of Tadewos (12) is one of the manuscripts that provide witness. Its witness reads as follows:

ወበዕለተ፡ ሰኑይሂ፡ ተረክበ፡ ከማሁ፡ በመሶበ፡ ወርቅ፡ ዘቀርባን፡ በዕለተ፡  
 በዓለ፡ ልደታ፡ ለእግዝእትን፡ ማርያም፡ ወተክህን፡ አባ፡ ቀውስጦስ፡ በቅስና፡  
 ወውእቱኒ፡ አባ፡ ታዴዎስ፡ ኮን፡ በዲቁና፡ ወአባ፡ ተስፋሥሉስ፡ ከመ፡ ንፍቀ፡  
 ቀሲስ፡ ወቀደሱ፡ በውእቱ፡ ኅብስት፡ ዘወረደ፡ እምሶማያት፡ በጸሎተ፡  
 ቅዳሴ፡ እግዝእትን፡ ማርያም፡ ዘደረሰ፡ ላቲ፡ አባ፡ ሕርያቆስ፡  
 ወመጠውዎሙ፡ ለአቡን፡ ተክላሃይማኖት፡ ወለታዴዎስ፡ ወኮኖሙ፡  
 ሲሲተ፡ እስከ፡ ለዓለም፡ ወጠፍዐ፡ ሎሙ፡ ረሀበ፡ ሥጋ፡ እምላዕሌሆሙ፡  
 እስከ፡ ዕለተ፡ ዕረፍቶሙ።

Likewise, it (the Eucharistic bread and wine) was found in the pot (*mäsobä wärg*) on Monday, the day of the Feast of the Nativity of Mary, the mother of God. Abba Qäwəṣṭos was appointed celebrant, Abba Tadewos was appointed deacon, and Abba Täsfaśəllus was appointed assistant priest; they presented the Eucharistic bread that descended from heaven and celebrated the Anaphora of Our Lady Mary that Abba Kyriakos of Bahnasah had composed for Her. They gave the prosphora to *Abunä* Täklähaymanot and Tadewos, and it became the last food for them. Human hunger disappeared from them until the day of their death (Vita of Tadewos Ch. 4 Ver. 19).

The Vita of *Abunä* Zenamarqos also contains some statements that expand this testimony. It reads as follows:

ወለአቡነ፡ ሕርያቆስ፡ ብህንሳዊ፡ ኤጲስቆጶስ፡ ዘቤተ፡ ክርስቲያን፡ ሞርዓተ፡ ሞርዓዊ፡ ሰማያዊ።

... and to Abba Cyriacus of Bahansah episcopate of the Church which is the bride of the heavenly bridegroom

ወእንዘ፡ አባ፡ ሕርያቆስ፡ ያነብብ፡ ቅዳሴሃ፡ ዘደረሰ፡ ላቲ፡ ወቅዱስ፡ ያሬድ፡ ያምዕዘ፡ በጣዕሙ፡ ዜማሁ፡ ወቅዱስ፡ ኤፍሬምኒ፡ ከማሁ፡ እንዘ፡ ያነብብ፡ ውዳሴሃ፡ ዘደረሰ፡ ላቲ፡ ወቅዱስ፡ ያሬድ፡ ያምዕዘ፡ በዜማሁ፡ ከማሁ።

While Abba Kyriakos reads the anaphora he composed for Her (and) Yared recites it beautifully with his melody. Likewise, St. Ephrem recites the eulogy he composed for Her (and) St. Yared recites it with his melody (Laekämaryam, 2006, 77).

So, if the Anaphora was well known and celebrated before Abba Samuel's birth, how could it be said that Abba Samuel composed it? However, there is certain evidence that clearly refutes such unproven assumptions and forces us to accept the tradition and analytical explanation provided in the written documents mentioned previously.

### **3 Number of Celebrants**

The Liturgical tradition of the Coptic Church allows unlimited number of clergies to come into the Sanctuary and concelebrate the mass standing around the altar. However, only one bishop or a priest recites the prayers of the Institution Narrative and Epi- clesis (Mikahil, 2016, 101-123).

In contrast, the number of celebrants in the EOTC is canonically regulated. It should be either five or seven or twelve or twenty-

four. This is reasonably regulated because each number symbolizes at least one important theological theme or figure. it is as follows:

**Five** symbolizes - the five nails with which Christ was nailed.

- the five dogmatic lessons called *'ammästu 'a'amadä mäsṭir* አምስቱ አዕማደ ምሥጢር /The five pillars of mystery/

**Seven** " - the seven sacraments (ሰባቱ ምሥጢራት ቤተ ክርስቲያን *säb'attu mäsṭiratä betä krastīyan*).

- the seven archangels

**Twelve** " - the twelve apostles

**Twenty-four** " - the twenty-four heavenly priests

However, the most reasonable and practical number of celebrants is five. Two of them are bishops or priests, and the remaining three are deacons. The first priest (*šära'i kahän / gäbare-šännay kahän*) has the task of presiding over the entire celebration and distributing the Eucharistic bread. He recited most of the liturgical prayers. The assistant priest (*näfq kahän*) also has important parts to recite and some other duties to perform as a concelebrant. The first deacon (*šära'i diyaqon / gäbare-šännay diyaqon*) holds the Asrykar cross and recites the verses intended for the deacon. Regarding the story that tells of the benediction of the first church dedicated to St. Mary in Philippi, many scholars affirm that the celebrant symbolizes the Lord, while the priest-assistant and deacon symbolize St. Peter and the martyr Stephen, respectively, since the story asserts that on the day the Lord sanctified the church, He celebrated a mass as celebrant and St. Peter and Stephen assisted as priest-assistant and deacon (Tənśae zä-guba'e, 1990, P. I, 209).

The second deacon (*näfq diyaqon*) also has a small role in reciting and reading inscriptions. He usually holds a light and rings the



bell. Likewise, the third deacon (*'abri diyaaqon*) holds a light and a church screen (Ermias, 2019, 60-62).

The Church's rite allows a priest to conduct the service in place of a deacon when a deacon is absent but does not allow a deacon to replace a priest and assume his offices, including incensing the incense. Nor is a deacon permitted to touch the altar. Rather, he stands a short distance away from the altar (ibid, 63, 101).

The Coptic tradition does not forbid this. Rather, it commands that the deacon, together with the priest, cover the gifts on the altar and finally kiss the altar (Mikhail 2016, 109).

#### **4 Reading of the Gospel**

The liturgical celebration includes the reading of selected passages from the Gospel, the Acts of the Apostles, and the letters of the Apostles. According to the rite of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, four of the five celebrants (with the exception of the third deacon) are assigned to read the verses in succession. The first deacon reads Paul's epistle facing west. Then the second deacon reads either the Epistle of the Four Apostles or the Revelation of John facing north. Then the assistant priest reads the Acts of the Apostles facing south.

After the deacon and congregation sing the psalm verse /*ጌላሳገሳ ማሳባ*/ in succession, the celebrant priest takes the Arykar cross and light from the deacon and reads the Gospel text chosen for the day or occasion facing east. The first deacon holds the Gospel with both hands until the priest finishes the reading (Ermias, 2019, 128).

Conversely, Coptic liturgical tradition entrusts the deacon with the task of reading the Gospel, as he is seen as a symbol of Christ (Mikhail, 2016, 102-103).

## 5 Preparation of the Eucharistic Bread

In almost all Christian churches that maintain the rituals of the liturgy and the administration of the Lord's Supper, the sacramental bread is carefully prepared from the finest wheat flour. According to the rites of both the Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches, the dough for sacramental bread is prepared in a special, separate room where it is later baked. The room is called Bethlehem, representing the actual city of Bethlehem (Ermias, 2019, 174; Tadros, 1992, 19).

In Ethiopia, the Bethlehem is built separately at a short distance behind the sanctuary. The gap that exists in between could symbolize the distance between Bethlehem, where Christ was born, and Jerusalem, where he was crucified. The path of the celebrants bringing the prepared sacramental bread and wine from Bethlehem to the Shrine symbolizes the Lord's journey to Golgotha on the Friday of the Crucifixion. The persons who may enter Bethlehem are only priests and deacons. Lay people are not allowed to enter it before or after preparing the sacramental bread and wine.

The wheat (*mägäbbäriya* ሙገበረያ) needed for the preparation is ground into flour by a nun (*ʿaqabit* ዐቃቢት) in a small room near Bethlehem. Then she hands the fine flour (*räqiq* ረቂቅ) to the *abridiyaqon*, who is responsible for making a dough and baking the offering. In the Coptic Church, this task is not specifically assigned only to deacons.

However, the bigger difference between the liturgical traditions of these two Churches regarding the preparation of the oblation is the use of a yeast. The Coptic Church uses a yeast in the preparation of the dough and offers a leavened bread. The use of yeast is to remind people of their sin, which the Lord bore for their salvation, as yeast symbolizes sin. The Eastern churches have the

same ritual; they claim that the leavened bread represents the resurrection of the Lord (Tadros, 1992, 45).

This is done for at least two reasons. First, it reminds us that the Israelites ate unleavened bread when they left Egypt. Second, it conveys that Christ was born of the Virgin Mary without an earthly father. In any case, yeast is not added to the dough because it is a symbol of human seed, and the addition of yeast to sacramental bread is considered a denial of Christ's fatherless birth and, at the same time, of the purity and virginity of Saint Mary (Ermias, 2019, 175).

However, this difference between the rites and practices of the churches depends only on the different ways they symbolize the sacramental rules and practices. Nevertheless, such a difference cannot affect their unity, and no one can conclude that this is right or wrong because the declarations they make are recognized by both, even if they maintain different customs. Again, what they have in common is much more than what they do not share. For example, if we look briefly at the liturgical tradition of the Syrian Church, we find a unique rite and custom of putting salt and oil in the holy bread. As the Church explains, the four elements of wheat flour, water, oil, and salt represent the four natures from which man was created: Earth, Water, Air, and Fire. The sacramental wine also symbolizes the soul, and in general, their combination represents the unity of soul and body (Syriacpatriaricate.org).

The dialogue between *Abba* Giyorgis of Gasə́ća and a certain Armenian priest reported in the Book of Mystery (*māšḥfā mašṭir* መጽሐፈ ምሥጢር) confirms this unambiguously. It is reported that *Abba* Giyorgis had questioned the priest:

ትወድዩኑ፡ ያወ፡ ወዘይተ፡ ውስተ፡ ቊርባንክሙ፡ በከሙ፡ ሥርዓተ፡  
ቊርባን፡ ዘሰርዖ።

Do you put salt and oil in your prosphora, as the offering ordinance of the Syrians? (Chap. 30 Verse 31)

This implies that the Syrian Orthodox Church has kept this tradition since ancient times. However, this is not practicable in both the Ethiopian and Coptic Orthodox Churches.

The dialogue adds another important piece of information about the Apostles' experience of offering a holy bread baked without salt and oil and a fresh wine mixed with water. It read as follows:

እምአመ፡ መጠዎሙ፡ እግዚእ፡ ለአርዳኢሁ፡ በሌሊት፡ እንተ፡ ባቲ፡ ይእኅዝዎ፡ ኅብስተ፡ ወወይነ፡ እንዘ፡ ይብል፡ ዝ፡ ኅብስት፡ ሥጋዮ፡ ወዝ፡ ጽዋዕ፡ ደምዮ። እም፡ አሜሃ፡ ኢነሥኡ፡ ሐዋርያት፡ ቅድሳተ፡ ምሥጢር፡ እስከ፡ በዓለ፡ ደብረ፡ ታቦር። ወበበዓለ፡ ደብረ፡ ታቦር፡ ሄምዎ፡ ለያዕቆብ፡ እኅሁ፡ ለእግዚእነ፡ ኤጲስቆጶስ፡ ዘኢየሩሳሌም፡ ወአዘዝዎ፡ ከመ፡ ያዕርግ፡ ቍርባነ። ወአዕረገ፡ ውእቱኒ፡ ውስተ፡ ምሥዋዕ፡ ኅብስተ፡ ንጹሐ፡ ዘእንበለ፡ ዪው፡ ወዘይት፡ ወቶስሐ፡ ማዮ፡ ወወይነ፡ ወሦጠ፡ ውስተ፡ ጽዋዕ፡ ወአቍረቦሙ፡ ለሐዋርያት፡ በከመ፡ ገብረ፡ እግዚእነ።

After the Lord gave bread and wine to his disciples on the night he was caught (by the Jews) and said, “This is my body, and this is my blood,” the apostles had not partaken of Holy Communion until the Feast of Configuration. On the Feast of Configuration, they appointed James, the Lord's brother, and bishop of Jerusalem, and commanded him to offer sacrifices. (And) he placed pure bread without salt and oil on the altar, mixed water and wine, drew it into the cup, and then gave it to the apostles as the Lord had done (ibid).

This testimony indicates that the Orthodox Church of Armenia has also kept this apostolic tradition like the Ethiopian and Coptic Churches. Nevertheless, the Syrian Orthodox Church is indeed the sister Church of these three Churches even though it preserves such a unique practical tradition.

## **6 Distribution of the Holy Communion**

According to the liturgical rules of the EOTC, once the Eucharistic bread is presented on the altar and the *Tabot* at the beginning of the mass, no one then is allowed to hold as well as to touch it with hands except the celebrant. The distribution of the holy bread to the concelebrants and the partakers is his proper duty. The assisting priest assists him by distributing the sacramental wine to the concelebrating deacons within the curtain. When they come out to the congregation, the first deacon takes the chalice from him and gives it to the partakers standing beside the celebrant on his right. The partakers first take the Eucharistic bread (the body of Christ) from the celebrant's hand, then come to the deacon to take the Eucharistic wine (the blood of Christ) from his hand.

In contrast, the liturgical rule of the Coptic Orthodox Church gives the priest the authority to distribute both the Eucharistic bread and the wine, considering him the symbolic body representing Christ.

## **Conclusion**

The liturgy is a highly valued service celebrated daily in the Coptic Orthodox and Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Churches. Many believe there are no differences between their traditions in celebrating the Mass, as they have had a close historical connection for a millennium and a half. In fact, many sacramental rules and rituals still link them together. Nevertheless, including the number of anaphors they keep and use all the time, there are certainly differences in certain liturgical rules and rites. Some im-

portant parts of the celebration of the Mass are performed in different ways in each church. The interpretation of some rituals and the use of vestments they explain differ in some respects. This does not permit one to conclude that the liturgical tradition of the two churches is absolutely identical and that one has taken over its tradition completely from the other. It rather leads to the recognition that each church has cultivated its own rites and its own tradition of celebration. These differences did not occur in recent times. Some manuscript evidence confirms that they existed in ancient times when they still maintained an episcopal unity. Some of them are, of course, discussed here, but due to the broad scope of the topic, further research would be advisable.

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