

DOCTRINAL THEOLOGY

Contextual Analyses

Doctrinal Theology is a religious compendium highly beneficial to Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and appears to be unique in kind in many different ways. One aspect of them is that it is relatively wider and complete and covers almost all doctrinal teachings of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. Secondly, it is comparative in nature and provides definitive answers to many controversial questions.

The book has eleven chapters varied in width according to the context of teachings it deals with:

- 1) **OUR EXPERIENCE OF GOD:** The first chapter systematically defends the existence of God against atheists with reasonable philosophical and theological arguments.
- 2) **COSMOLOGY: GOD AND HIS CREATION:** The six days' visible and invisible creations of God which include the seven heavens, the earth, celestial angels and the nature and unique formation of humankind are incorporated in detail in the second chapter. The study of celestial beings appears to be wider and exceptional in approach.
- 3) **TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY:** The study of Trinitarianism denotes that all the Orthodox Churches (Eastern and Oriental) and some Protestant denominations follow the same approach in terms of dealing with God's nature of unity in diversity while the Roman Catholic Church differs from the rest due its teaching known as Filioque added to the doctrine of Trinity in the 15th century.
- 4) **CHRISTOLOGY:** In his Christological discussion, the author demonstrates the legitimate cause of the first Christian schisms (451 A.D) and tries to prove that "Orthodox Tewahedo" is an unconfused belief unanimously accepted by prominent theologians of the ante-Nicene period considered today common church fathers both by the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches.

Chapters V-X contains the following teachings in order:

- 5) **THE CHURCH OF GOD:** The Mystical Concept of the Church and its missions.
- 6) **MARIOLOGY:** The Veneration of the Mother of God and her role in human salvation.
- 7) **THE THEOLOGY OF INTERCESSION:** It includes the honor of Saints and the Heavenly Angels.
- 8) **RITUALISTIC PRACTICES IN THE ORTHODOX CHRUCHES:** Orthodox Rituals consisting of Veneration of Holy Icons and Incense Burring.
- 9) **SOTERIOLOGY:** The meaning and means of Human Salvation from the Orthodox perspective.
- 10) **HOLY SACRAMENTS:** The Seven Sacraments
- 11) **ESCHATOLOGY:** Signs and events preceding the Second Advent of Christ and the realm of human life after resurrection.

Contrasting Christian teachings among denominations without deviating from the Holy Bible makes sense to a genuine reader. If a person considers canonized Biblical teachings and practices superstition because he does not like them or appreciates his own non biblical doctrines in contrast because he favored to them, his irrational judgment does not make him free of guilt conscience nor can this make his denomination a true church. For example, there is a big difference between the Orthodox and the Protestant Churches about how salvation could be

DOCTRINAL THEOLOGY

attained although the Bible remains clear about it. All Christian teachings should be based on the Holy Bible and testified by Church fathers including the Holy Apostles and their immediate successors. For example, the offering of incense and the veneration of holy icons considered false beliefs by Protestants have been discussed in this book and are testified as God-given rituals based on the Bible and the patristic studies in chapter VIII. Among various doctrinal differences discussed in this book are the Roman Catholic doctrines of purgatory and predestination that are contrary to the Orthodox teaching of salvation. Chapter IX presents a detail analysis of it.

A special attention is paid to the last chapter, chapter XI, which deals with the end of the world, dreadful signs of the horrible time (doomsday), the false Messiah known as the Antichrist and the 666 code of the beast. Although all teachings about the second coming of the Christ remain mystical, end time signs have been designated chronologically according to the orders indicated in the Holy Bible.

In general, the work has two peculiar characteristics and these characteristics make it absolutely indispensable:

- 1) It is a complete doctrinal work entirely written in English and that makes it to be a reliable theological resource to the youth in Diaspora and others who are interested to know about the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and its doctrines.
- 2) Secondly, it remains exceptional in particular for dealing with controversial concepts considered uncomfortable to discuss and are avoided by many Ethiopian theologians as "Unresolved Topics."

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church is currently suffering from two contradicting internal movements: A hidden acceleration of Protestantism in the church and a wrong way of defending such a movement from the Orthodox side. Since Protestants pretend to be Orthodox to expand their teaching behind closed doors, the task of screening them out requires patience and wisdom. Unfortunately, the irrational style of defense being carried out by some Orthodox groups has made the process ineffective because it does not follow the spiritual orders of early Church fathers called apologists. Zealousness is something and conservatism another. This group considers itself zealous to Orthodoxy by irrationally labeling heretics (Tehadiso) well-educated theologians and those who raise questions on controversial concepts. Needless to say that the current Ethiopian generation has sadly lost its genuine tradition. Solemnly discussing on controversial issues has become of yesterday. Attempting to achieve ones' mission through violence and publicly disrespecting Church fathers have become common. Many were condemned and excommunicated without getting a chance to even express their faith. This irrational movement has not only silenced theologian to express their opinions in writings but also forced many to leave the Orthodox Church. This doctrinal work may therefore accelerate dialogue among the youth and provide an opportunity to know differences between Orthodox doctrines taught by church fathers and non-Orthodox concepts added to the Church in different circumstances.

Generally, despite the fact that it is written in English, 75 percent of the book contains the common doctrinal teachings of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church while the rest part (30

DOCTRINAL THEOLOGY

present) discusses controversial doctrines that have never been written by other Ethiopian scholars. As a doctrinal compendium written in English, the book consists of many Greek and Hebrew words that can never be meaningfully translated into Amharic. Lack of attaining appropriate meanings of these terminologies might change the whole context of a theological concept a reader may be trying to understand. So, the best solution is to contact the author and get detailed explanations from him. Yet, regardless of such contextual and terminological challenges, the some youth in America might have a surprising skill of reading and understanding things written in their own language. Thus, the author believes that "Doctrinal Theology" should be an ultimate spiritual gift or reward that can be given to children when they graduate from high school or University. It helps them identify Orthodoxy and remain unconfused, for many denominations try to impose their ideologies on them, especially in universities.

A theological book is an output of contemplation and a fruit of the Spirit. Test it daily and build your spiritual life, for scripture says, "Eat this volume, and go and speak to the children of Israel" (Eze.3:1). A theological book is a treasure of life that never gets older. Treasure it in your home and pass it unto your children with serious responsibilities. It is also an armor and a sword in which an Orthodox should equip himself with to defend his faith against those who dismantle the true faith in God.

"Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you" (1 Pet.3:15).

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16).

May the Holy Spirit enlighten your heart and mind to understand the truth about Christ through the prayers and intercession of the Mother of God, Amen.

God bless,
Fr. Zemene Desta