

# CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE AND LIVING

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## Introduction to Christianity

Christianity is a religion of love<sup>1</sup> because God has done everything for man based on love. God's creation of man in his own image shows how God has loved and blessed man. His love to man is also manifested by His saving of man by sending His Son. That is why we say that the history of our religion started and ended in love.



The ancient followers of Judaism taught that salvation could be possible only by doing the deeds ordered by the Law (given to Moses) and as a result strongly opposed the Gospel teachings of St.

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<sup>1</sup> Here love refers not to the love that man has for God but the love that God has for man. It is this divine love that gave us redemption for us from our sins and became the basis for our salvation (1John 4:10; 14:16). The kind of love that Christians show to God and other fellow mankind is a positive response to the divine love. We have to note that the kind of love that Christians have for God or mankind is not the kind of love that we traditionally call love. The Coptic Church of Egypt teaches that, "God's relationship with man is the story['history'] of love in which God took the initiative." H. H. Abune Shenouda III, *God and Man*. (Cairo, Dar El Tebba El Kwamia, December 2000), pp. 84 ff.

Paul. St. Paul gave the appropriate reply by teaching that man can be saved by his faith in Jesus Christ and His salvation works. God has prepared a way in which man can be saved and become righteous by his faith in God because man could not do what the Law orders and because the Law could not save man. As a result, it became that man is saved by God's love and grace and his faith in Jesus Christ. (*Ephesians. 2:8-9*)

## **A faith that works with Christ through love**

It is said that the basis for our salvation is faith, but faith does not exist alone as it is written in the Holy Scriptures. Although Christianity is different from the customs and traditions of the Law and the Pharisees' customs and work of Law, it is not different from a work of love ordered by Jesus Christ. The faith of salvation that we got from Christ is not separated from a work of love but from the work of Judaism. That is why St. Paul said that (*Galatians 5:6*). This verse describes the nature of our faith.

The phrase "with Christ" describes and limits the nature of the work of love to be performed. If this phrase was not included, the nature of the love and the work would remain unknown. If we are with Christ, we can understand the mysteries of Christianity, but if we are not, we cannot and we have left the road aside. The question of to be or not to be with Christ is crucial at this point. We pray that all of us decide, respond and act affirmatively to this question.

To live with Jesus Christ means to be one with Him in love like the vine stem and its branches. When we live with Him, our faith becomes one that works and bears fruits in love with Christ. This is because God Himself is love and He ordered us to love one another (*1 John 15:1-17*.) We have been ordered to love others so that we know God and live in His love. *He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. (1 John 4:8)* So, if we have this faith that works through love, we can do all the good things that we need to do for man and God. Christianity cannot be separated from good deeds (*James 2:14-26*).

It is necessary for Christians to know and act accordingly and do not separate faith and action. Faith comes first, and as a result, education on religion is presented first in this book. Nevertheless, Christianity does not end in studying and researching about faith because, as already mentioned, faith means one that works through love with Christ, not just faith at the level of knowledge.

## **What is our relationship with Christ?**

Different people have different relationships with God. HH. Abune Shinouda states that,

*"The relationship of some people may be one of ideology. God to those is a mere thought which they examine and discuss. They argue about God's existence, attributes and work. God to them is part of a philosophy to be discussed... Some others have a formal occasional relationship with God. Those*

*remember God only in His feasts (such as Christmas or Easter), or on some occasions as funerals... All such people, actually have no relationship with God. The relationship with God is a heart-to-heart relationship. This sort of relationship may be called the meeting with God. Through this meeting... one comes to know God truly and practically, and comes to experience Him, and be attached to Him, becoming one with Him in love and Will.*"<sup>2</sup>

Christianity is not just a faith that is written and exists as an idea or concept, but a faith that is tied to work Christ's salvation. The relationship that we have with Him is not like a relationship that a man has with the subject matter studied like mathematics or philosophy.

The faith relationship that we have with Christ, who has become man through incarnation, is based on love and promise. The relationship with Christianity looks like a contract between two parties, but with very strong spiritual relationship because the relationship is based on the blood of Christ who has loved us and given His life to save us. Because He loves us, He sacrificed Himself to save us, and in return we believe in Him, abide by Him and do good deeds through love. If we just believe in Him, but do not work through love, then we are like trees that do not bear fruits. We have said that we need to have a Christian love, which is not love just in words and expressions but in action just like that of Christ's love for us, which has been manifested in action. The Law of the Gospel is written as follows: *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.* (1 John 3:16-18).

As we have mentioned earlier, the faith relationship in Christianity is a human, divine and spiritual relationship unlike the relationship that one has with the subject matter he studies or with his wealth or with his knowledge. Because the faith relationship in Christianity is like the one between a father and a child or a husband and a wife; In the Old Testament God was taken as a father and Israel as a child explicate God as a husband and Israel as a wife. (*Deuteronomy 1:31; 32:6; 2 Samuel 7:14; Jeremiah 3:14-22; 31:9; Isaiah 54:5-8*). God's being the father and the laity being the children and the relationship between the church and God in Christianity; which is again exemplified as the one that exists between a father and a son, and between a bridegroom and a bride (*Romans 8:14-17; Ephesians 5:21-33; Revelation 21:2; 9-11*). So, when we discuss Christianity, we say that it goes with work through love of humanity and Christ's salvation work due to love.

In order to make our Christianity complete and to enable it bear fruits, we need to follow Christ in action by having faith in him and do all the kindness, politeness and patience He has done. Jesus' coming to this earth was for two purposes: to save and to set an example so that we could follow Him. We have to believe in Him and follow His examples to be one with Him. *Be ye*

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid pp. 246-247

*therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. (Ephesians 5:1-5)*

It is not only not believing and doing bad deeds that hinder us from entering the Kingdom of Heaven but having faith but not doing good deeds when we are able to do so. Even if we have faith that can move a mountain, if we do not feed the hungry, give a drink to the thirsty and give clothes to the needy when we are capable of doing so, then we will not escape the final judgment. God will judge us saying, “*You did not feed me when I was hungry, did not give me a drink when I was thirsty...*” (Mathew 25:31-46)

So, what shall we do? We have to ask ourselves “What shall I do to get eternal life?” like the lawyer asked our Lord. We get the answer from God. The answer is to abide by the commandments of love in faith; it is to help the needy in our capacity (Mathew 19:16-22). What is a true and pure religion like? *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the word* (James 1:27).

## **Preface**

### **Is A religion from man or God?**

*“The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?”* (Mark 11:30)

This was the question of our Lord. The question was addressed to the ancient leaders of Judaism, administrators of temples, priests of the Law, Scribes and Pharisees, who did not know Christ and opposed Him when they were told about Him. After discussing the question with each other, they replied, “We do not know,” an answer given with a cruel intention.

Today in this world, there are several religions whose sources are men. Identifying between a religion which has come from God and a religion which has come from men helps us understand our religion better. When we know that our religion has come from God, we will have the courage to endure up to the end with the true faith in and love of God. The objective of this preface is to help us understand this fundamental point so that we could learn the mysteries, sacraments and dogmas with undivided attention.

Men, following their own senses and ideas, have established their different faiths and orders of worship. St. Paul taught many people who believed in different gods and who adhered to different philosophies. One group of the people whom the apostle taught were the Athenians. To them, he said, *“Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are superstitious. For as I passed by, and behold your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Who therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you.”*(Acts 17:22-23).

The road has been prepared since the ancient times to help all people move from the religion that men created themselves to the true faith that has come from God. The apostle has taught how to reach the Known God not only for the Athenian philosophers but also for all of us. He taught that the people who lived before the Israelites lived by the rule of conscience, and the Israelites lived by the religion revealed by the prophets. The apostle gave his witness that the true light of religion, Christ, came to this world and Christ was revealed to him. In other words, God, who is unknown in His character, has made Himself seen in His wonders and might at the time and place and for the people he chose.

So far we have seen the base for and the difference between our faith, whose source is God Himself, and other faiths which have been created by men. In the next section we learn about Christianity.

### **The Nature of Religion**

*“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen... But without faith, it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him”* (Hebrews 11:1, 6).

John Chrysostom, the Golden Mouth, teaches *“Faith is the base, and the others are the buildings and walls,”* telling us that faith comes before doing good deeds. As the base supports the walls and the building, faith is the base for the good deeds. A building cannot stand without its base. Good deeds cannot also exist without faith. So, we will start with the definition of religion before all the other lessons. We will try to explain what religion is, especially Christianity, which is the part that comes before all the spiritual activities.

In general, religion or faith means believing that there is God, whose character cannot be seen and felt, and that God is the creator of this world, its feeder and its savior, and believing this from the bottom of one’s heart, without any doubt. The term also denotes accepting God’s promise and believing that it will be done without any doubt. In this way, the fathers of the Israelites pleased God.

In the house of the Israelites, the faith of the true God and His promise, the history of His care and protection, and the prophesy about the messiah is recorded in their faith and history. All the prophesy and promise was fulfilled by Jesus Christ, who has taken the flesh and blood of man.

He, in His deeds and life, His education and miracles, His passion and death, His resurrection and ascension, and by doing miracles that had never been seen before and after that time, established Christianity. So Christianity, like other monotheistic faiths does not just teach that there is a creator and feeder for this world. It also believes in the founder of Christianity, Jesus Christ, because He is the founder and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:1-2). Christianity has been established on the Father and on the Holy Spirit because the mystery of the Holy Trinity has been revealed through the Son. In general, Christianity is a religion which believes in one God- the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Christianity believes in the teachings of the Holy Scriptures and the creed.

One of the ways in which we express our religion in our church is through the creed. The creed has twelve articles and explains about of the nature of God, the promise, the cannons of the New Testament and the Gospel in short. It is the Law of the religion<sup>3</sup> for the Church by which Christianity abides. It is used as an instrument to identify the true faith from the false teachings. Even today, a research conducted by the Department of Religion and Faith of the World Council of Churches ranks the creed of the council of Nicaea first because it is ancient, historical, ecumenical, has clear and decisive articles, covers a lot of contents, has depth, and includes explanations of the basic principles of Christianity.<sup>4</sup>

Based on the method followed in this preface, we set to explain Christianity, which is revealed by a divine mystery, by looking into the faith which is discovered by conscience (inquiry). In order to achieve our objective, we have the responsibility of identifying between the earthly and the heavenly, between the secular and the spiritual, and between the true and false faiths. We can do this by investigating the nature of different faiths.

A builder builds his house on a strong base. A house that is built on a weak base cannot stand long. Christ has laid the foundations of our religion on a strong base-on a rock. Christ said, *“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church,”*(Mathew 16:18). The ‘rock’ stands for Peter’s<sup>5</sup> strong faith.

If one asks about the nature of the faith that has been referred to as a rock, the answer is that it is a faith based on knowing and believing in the true nature of Christ. Christ Himself asked the

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<sup>3</sup> The dogma of the Christianity has been presented in the Five Pillars (Mysteries) of the Church. Dogma refers to the doctrine of the religion, which has been decreed by the councils of the church based on what is written in the Holy Scriptures and what has been revealed and given by God. Dogma can be described as an instruction for Christians, which was entrusted to the apostles of the church, and that lets Christians know that it is their duty to know their religion “which was once delivered unto the saints”(Jude 1:3) and keep it, keep themselves from false teachings.

<sup>4</sup> Apostolic Faith Today. Edited by Hans George Lank (Geneva: World Council of churches, 1985), pp7-19, 201-ff.

<sup>5</sup> Peter’s name was Simon. Christ called him ‘Kefa’ in Aramaic, and ‘Peter’ is its translation in Greek. In both languages, it means ‘rock’.

disciples *“Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* (Mathew 16: 13-16). We learn from this verse that many people have different opinions about the nature of Christ. The right and correct answer is what Peter replied. Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us that Peter’s faith is one that is not from flesh and blood, but from heaven (Mathew 16:17).

The faith that has been referred to as rock is the one that is based on the right and correct nature Christ. Based on this faith, God has established the church. The term church also refers to the Christians, who believe that Christ is God and the Son of God. That is why Paul wrote to the Ephesians, *“And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”* (Ephesians 2:20-22).

Understanding and believing in the true nature of Christ is not only the basis of our Christianity but also a point of difference with other sects. People had different answers to the question *“Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?”*(Mathew 16:13). Today the question is still being answered by different sects differently. Bishops of Churches in the world held a council in Nicea to make clear to Christians the true and correct nature of Christ. We Christians believe that Christ is the Son of God and the creed of the Council of Nicea is our identity. If anyone does not know the true nature of Christ, he/she will not reach the true Christianity, and he/she may be susceptible to be deceived by false teachings. But one who knows the true nature of Christ will be able to learn the Mystery of Trinity and will get God’s grace and the blessings of the apostles.

### **Contents and organization of the preface**

After showing the basis of religion, especially Christianity, our next step is to see religion in general. More or less, the thought of religion is part of the mentality of man, and this is manifested in their lives. Man could reach to the belief in God through his knowledge, conscience, and this has been witnessed in the history of mankind. It is the existence of religion in mankind that enables one to see that man is created in the example of God. Unless one leaves the idea of religion intentionally due to negligence, ignorance and arrogance or is under the influence of addiction of different things it is God who created the mind, any creature created with the mind and in the example of God has the ability to reach his/her creator.

It is recorded that many Gentiles knew God through their inquiry using their conscience. Ancient Greeks, Romans, Persians, Babylonians had different philosophies and follow different faiths. The same is true for present day Indians, Chinese and Japanese. Some of the major philosophies, especially the Greek ones support monotheism and as a result this phenomenon has been related to Christianity. Relating monotheist philosophy with Christianity has resulted both positive and

negative effects. We will mention the positive result here leaving the negative effects for later discussion.

It is believed by many people that the philosophy that existed during the time of the apostles helped the spread of Christianity. Clementius, teacher at Alexandria's Commentary School, was one of the supporters of this idea- that monotheist philosophy helped the spread of Christianity. According to him, *“As the Old Testament brought up the House of Israel and delivered them to the Gospel of Christ, it is the philosophy of the nonbelievers which lead them to Christ.”*<sup>6</sup> Some Greeks in the ancient times believe that their religion was philosophy, but today their religion is Christianity. The contemporary culture and civilization, especially their language, which was an international language, had helped the spread of the teachings of the Old Testament and the New Testament to reach places which were under the rule of Greece and then under the Roman Empire.<sup>7</sup>

Though many believed in God with the help of their monotheistic philosophies and their conscience, many others went into doubt and not believing in God. God has wanted men to know the true religion so that they can identify between the good from the bad and avoid doubt. To this end, He has shown the way He has prepared to save man through the people he has chosen. The revelation of God was told to the whole world first in the House of the Israelites and then in the church. First it was told in prophesy, history and example. Later it was seen to the world in reality. The church always calls for all those who always toil to reach to the truth to come to God, who has revealed Himself in the flesh to the world. The church calls them to come and get peace of mind, get rest in the faith and blessings of God, and tells them that they will get the greater promise and happiness. The Church teaches that salvation is possible via Christianity but not via philosophy.

Knowing the nature of God also requires knowing what God likes and what He does not. One who knows his father's likes and dislikes and does things accordingly will please his father and can get whatever he asks for. Christians should also know what God likes and what God dislikes and do only what he likes so that they become the true children of God and God will hear their prayers and pleas. God's children should act like their father-God- as the Holy Bible says: *“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”*(Mathew 5:48) *“Be ye holy; for I am holy.”* (1 Peter 1:16)

The truth value of the knowledge and faith that man gets in reaching to God through seeking in the conscience is not validated by an external entity. The man who seeks God by His conscience just believes that that should be true as far as his knowledge goes. The religion that comes due to

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<sup>6</sup> Abba Gorgorios, *History of the Church in the Face of the World*. (Tinsae Zegubae Printing press, Addis Ababa, 1978 E.C.) p. 77 [Written in Amharic with the title, የኢትዮጵያ ታሪክ በዓለም መደረክ.

<sup>7</sup> Several books were translated from Hebrew to Greek by the seventy scholars beginning from the time before the birth of Christ. The spread of these books in different countries by the Jews who were dispersed to many countries paved the way to the spread of Christianity teachings.

God's revelation of Himself, however, is the one that God Himself has shown and is superior to any other religion or knowledge. It is not appropriate to compare it with other types of religions because it is unique in its wonders, education, contents and messages. Man should accept this faith with great respect and happiness because the mystery of God's manifestation is related to the salvation of man. The doubt that has come due to ignorance is cleared due to God's revelation to this world. What should we pay to God for all what He has done for us? We should believe in Him and be thankful to Him.

In the next sections we will discuss about seeking God by conscience and believing God, who has revealed Himself to the world.

### **Religion by seeking God in conscience**

*And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. (Acts 17:26-28)*

St. Paul, in the above verse, teaches us that seeking God in conscience could lead people to believe in God. But he also put the term 'if' to show that the knowledge they reach at through seeking their God by conscience may not be perfect and it may happen that they do not find their God not because He does not exist but that they may fail in their search (we know that God is found for those who truly seek him).

God created man above all other creatures. He has prepared the land in which they live the clothes which they wear, the plants, rivers, oceans, crops and all that are needed and make man happy. God made all these and gave it to man whom He created in His example so that man could seek Him, love and obey Him. God loves man and calls man to come to Him. Man can get the true happiness only when he reaches God. At that time, he believes that all that he needs will be fulfilled. However, as God has given man his personal freedom, man may not keep on seeking for his god, and he may forget his creator for several reasons including stupidity, arrogance and ignorance. History has witnessed such times when man forgot his creator. We see this fact even today in this world.

Unless man falls under the influence of different things or intentionally leaves the idea of seeking God (for man is free to do whatever he likes whether it is right or wrong), man has natural ability to reach to God through seeking God by conscience. It is believed that man is endowed with a mind that thinks and a morale that helps him identify between right and wrong. Using his power of thinking, man has been involved in thinking about nature for many years now. Many great philosophers and scholars both in the past and present say that nature does not exist as an entity that exists alone as a single unit; rather, there is a harmonious system in nature and this system has a ruler that is knowledgeable and powerful. But because it is not possible to reach to the true ruler in this philosophy, different groups of people interpret it in different ways and as a result there are several types of faiths.

There are different ways that help us know the existence of God. One of them is by looking at creation. The other one is by looking into the nature of man. There are different types of faiths

that man follows due to the different emotional, natural and social factors such as fear and pain, natural disasters etc.

Literature tells us that there are three groups of people based on their faiths: some believe in God, some believe in creatures and some believe both in God and creatures. Those who believe in God are said to have the basic knowledge of religion. One can reach a higher level of knowledge based on this fundamental knowledge, but the ultimate knowledge is attained by God's mysterious way of saving this world. That is why St. Paul thought that *"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*

Let us see the two ways that help man know the existence of God.

### **A. God is known through His creatures**

There is no man who does not admire the nature of creatures- their life, their movement, their characters etc. The prominence of the sun during the day time and the moon in the night time, the beauty of the moon in the calmness of the night, the order that nature has all make people wonder about nature. The vastness of the sky, the greatness in number and variety of the stars, the cycle of seasons, the variety of the animals –that walk on foot and that fly in the sky- and the variety of the plants in this world present a great deal of pressure for a thinking mind.

A person with a thinking mind asks himself several questions like a student of creation who is standing on a clear field. What are these wonderful things that I see? Where did they come from? How did they come? What is their beginning and end? Where did I come from? Where am I going? What is the objective of living? Many scholars of this world have tried to understand the puzzle of nature. Those scholars and philosophers who have concluded that this world is created with an intention and very complex plan believe that there is a certain super power that has the ultimate knowledge and created this world. They believe that a cause for anything for nothing is arbitrary, and thus there is a prime cause for this world. For instance trees move because of the wind. The wind is caused by some other thing. There is this chain of cause and effect in nature and the list goes on. Finally, there is one cause which has started the first movement and that cause is the unmoved mover. It is possible to reach to this unmoved mover with the help of logic and an inquisitive mind.

Let us take an example. We are human and we see people. Where did they come from? The answer is their parents. Now where did their parents come from? The question goes on until we reach the first parents. Where did the first parents come from? From the earth. Some philosophers may end their enquiry here but many continue. Where did the earth come from? This question helped philosophers to arrive at the conclusion that there is a supernatural power

that has no beginning and end in his existence and that can do all things, that is the cause of everything but not caused by anything.

Many philosophers<sup>8</sup> before and after the birth of Christ have researched about the creatures in this world and have reached to the conclusion that there is God. Many of those known for their strong faith sought God through His creatures. Abraham and Moses the Black found God by inquiring into His creatures (see the Commentary of Romans 1:20). However those who fail to find God through His creatures are nothing and shall be judged because they could not find the creator of the sun and the moon. (Wisdom13:1-10)

God is close for the kind hearted. Kind hearted people can learn from the creatures to reach to their God. *“But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this?(Job 12:7-9)* St. David also teaches *“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.”(Psalm 19:1-3)*

Some of the scholars convinced those who believed in different creatures and idols and converted them to Christianity by teaching them using the creatures of God as examples. John Chrysostom (the Golden Mouth) *“As the soul cannot be seen but known through the movement of the body, God is not seen but known and manifested by His will and work. Any man who sees a ship moving forward in a sea should know that there is a captain in it who controls it. So, even if God cannot be seen with our eyes of the flesh, one should understand that it is God who is leading all.”* (Gospel Commentary of John Chrysostom, Romans 1:19-20).

St. Paul believes that knowing God through His creatures is a blessing given to mankind. As a result he taught, *“Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:”(Romans 1:19-20)* But people chose not to do what is clear and very logical to them. So, St. Paul wrote, *“Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.”* (Romans 1:21-23) And because they *“changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things,... God gave them up unto vile affections.”* And he listed the vile affections ( Romans 1:25-26).

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<sup>8</sup> From the west philosophers like Socrates and Immanuel Kant, from the East Indian philosophers have concluded that there is God. For more on this see **Dictionary of Fundamental Theology**, edited by Rene Latourelle Rino Fisichella,( Crossroad Publishing Company, new York, 1994) pp. 364 ff.

All these things are not past history. Even today it is being performed by many. It is even widespread among those who claim that they are Christians, but are so only in name. In different ways and either in the open or behind close doors people are kneeling to the cow made of gold. The first commandment from the Ten Commandments says, “*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*” (Exodus 20:3) We have mentioned that good deeds cannot exist without true faith, and we see here that because they did not believe in the true God, they did all the bad things which are against the rules of nature.

### **B. God is known through the nature of man**

Though man is one of the creatures, there are a lot of things that make him unique and thus be treated separately. It is known that all the knowledge, all the subject matters we learn at school, all the researches and technologies are the results of human mind. Man, who is the owner of all these, ought to research and study about himself before he researches into those outside him, namely plants, animals, earth etc. Socrates, understanding this, said that the appropriate lesson to man is man himself. He taught people to know themselves before they try to learn about other things.<sup>9</sup> Currently man is conducting researches in the fields of psychology, sociology, government, and ethics and so on. Yet the results of the studies on the psychology and soul of man have not produced satisfying results.<sup>10</sup>

When man studies himself, he finds that his existence is beyond the physical being that has mass and takes space. Though he is created from what is traditionally said to be the four elements<sup>11</sup> and though he is supported by and makes use of them, man controls all the elements because he has a super ability than the four elements. Our question is not only “Where does this ruler nature man come from?” but also “Is man the result of the elements found in this world only?” It is not possible to measure the width, mass, length, shape and colour of the emotions, identity, love, humanity, and spirituality of man. It is known that it is not the physique or mass that makes humans human. As a result we understand that there is a ‘soul’ which is independent of the mass and physique of humans and which has the ability to think, and is wise and understanding.

Now let us see the answer to the question “Where does this soul come from.” Again traditionally, we know that man is made of seven elements four of which are characters of the flesh (wind, fire, water and earth ) and three of which are characters of the soul (ability to think, ability to speak, and ability to stay alive). It is easy to see the source of the four elements that make up the flesh- it is from the elements of this world. But what is the source of the three characters of the soul –the ability to think, the ability to speak and the ability to stay alive- and all the other spirituality, etc. ? It is difficult to believe the

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<sup>9</sup> Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*, (Published by pocket books, Printed in USA, 1961) p. 6

<sup>10</sup> C.E.M. Joad. *Philosophy*, London: English University Press LTD (Teach yourself books) 1960. Joad says about psychology, “*Psychology, albeit with marked lack of success, seeks to describe the constituents and workings of the human mind.*”

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, one of the ancient philosophers, and his followers believed that there were four elements: wind, fire, water and earth (soil). We now know that there are more than 100 elements. When we say characters of the flesh, we are referring to the general earthly nature of human beings.

soul is the result of the mixture of the elements of the flesh as a certain element produces entities similar to it, not entirely a different thing. Thus it is easy to see that soul of man cannot be caused by the substances or physical entities.

Hence, if we cannot find the source of the soul of man from the physical entities, we should search the source outside the physical elements. The source should be something special that has similar characters but with supernatural power. Then we can arrive at the conclusion that there is a supernatural spiritual power with these characters and this power gave the soul to human beings. We then believe that this super spiritual and abstract power which has created humans in His own example is God.

As we reach to God through the characters of the soul, we reach to the conclusion that there is a just judge who is the owner of justice and truth through the justice that exists in the conscience of man. We learn from the justice practices of our ancient fathers who had had no religious teacher to teach them about right and wrong that they had great knowledge of justice and law in their conscience. It is amazing that a moral law that makes him identify between what he should and should not do is written in human mind. Immanuel Kant once wondered, "*the starry heavens above, the moral law within*,"<sup>12</sup> looking at the stars above and comparing them with the moral law in the human mind.

The philosophy of ethics (morality) is based on the moral duty in the human mind. When one does what he ought to do, he will be filled with happiness and a feeling of success. When one does not do what he ought to do, he will be filled with a feeling of sadness, guilty. Where does this sense of duty come from? Joad wrote, "*Kant thought of it as a community of blessed spirits of which ourselves are members ... there is an order of reality other than that of the familiar world, it is an order which contains the values of morality such as right and good, and it is an order of which we, in respect of a certain part of ourselves - namely, our moral wills - are members.*" This ethics in our mind will lead us to God. "*Ethics, in fact, passes over into theology precisely because if we take the fact of morality seriously, it is found to imply the existence of God.*"<sup>13</sup>

St. Paul wrote that Gentiles, while they did not have prophets and they were not given the Law, were doing according to the Law due to their conscience. "*For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.*" (Romans 2:14-15) There are many who have given their witness of the existence of God by the moral law in the mind. And man is seen to manifest the characters of God, who created man in His example, in his life and actions.

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<sup>12</sup> Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*, (Published by pocket books, Printed in USA, 1961) p. 291

<sup>13</sup> Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*, (Published by pocket books, Printed in USA, 1961) p. 166

## **Historical evidence**

It is not only the historical documents and books that witness that human beings have been worshipping those things in which he believe but also he preserved worship cites and buildings, obelisks, paintings and sculptures. St. Paul, having looked at their city and their worship of gods including the one whom they do not know taught the Athenians about God, whom they do not know. In his stay in Athens, St. Paul met many philosophers including the Epicureans Stoics. (Acts 17:16-34) When St. Paul healed the crippled man in Lystra, the people there wanted to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas saying that they were gods in the flesh of men. Nevertheless, Paul and Barnabas prohibited them from offering sacrifices and preached to them that they were just people like them, and they (the Athenians) should worship God only. This shows the contemporary attitude and practice of people regarding faith.

From Egypt to Babylon to India and China, from west to east, people in all countries around the world have orders of worship though in different ways and forms. Some believed in philosophy, others in idols and the rest in witchcraft and different bad cultures. History shows that all these have existed in the world and the reason is because man is a spiritual creature which wants to find his creator.

## **C. Summary and concluding remarks**

There are different philosophies that oppose the existence of God that can be reached through seeking God by conscience. One of these philosophies is atheism, which holds that there is no God. The proponents of this philosophy once prohibited people from following their conscience in seeking their God.

The other philosophy that doubts the existence of God is skepticism. Skeptics are known for their doubt on everything- not just on the existence of God. They doubt the existence of themselves. They always ask 'What is the proof of this?' and add to the answers they find 'What if I am wrong?' A father of our church once answered to the skeptics, "*Even if I am wrong, I exist as I am, because a person that does not exist cannot be wrong. How can I be wrong if I believe that I exist*"<sup>14</sup> Descartes, a philosopher himself, opposed skeptics by saying that "*I think, therefore I exist.*"<sup>15</sup>

The third type of philosophy against the existence of God is agnosticism. Agnosticism is a midway between atheism and skepticism and has won the hearts of many scholars. Agnostic philosophers say that the existence of God cannot be proved or disproved. The proponents of this philosophy promote negligence to religion and ethics. Though agnosticism seems to oppose atheism, their opposition is only on the existence of God, and there are issues on which both philosophies agree. Agnosticism has a different agenda than Socrates, who that said he knew that he did not know because he knew that God exists. He was sentenced to death because he taught that the idols that the people were worshipping were not the right God, but false gods, and that

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<sup>14</sup> St. Augustine, *City of God*, XI, 26

<sup>15</sup> Descartes believed that the presence of the notion of the perfect existence in the imperfect man shows that the source is god. He stated that skepticism helped his research as he used it in a systematic way.

there exists a true God, who is above all creatures. Agnostics follow a methodology that does not treat all entities because it looks like a scientific experiment. This type of methodology is incomplete and cannot be taken to be serious in philosophical inquiries on bigger topics such as religion.

Though atheism, skepticism and agnosticism all oppose the existence of God in one way or another, the majority of the peoples of the world believe in God. They worship Him in their own languages and cultures. The church also believes and teaches that God is known to His creatures through His creatures.

*“Basically philosophy and Christianity have no relation both in history and objectives. Philosophy means an instrument that is used to see the inside of a thing that is veiled and to know it well. It is like pair of pincers that is used to take out something that is hidden. ... Philosophy has the limit of the contents of the minds of man and the nature of creatures. It does not know about the miraculous actions of God. Philosophical knowledge is like a drop in an ocean, and with such very limited capacity it tries to know the existence of God by investigating the nature of creatures.”*<sup>16</sup>

We have seen that it is possible to investigate the nature of creatures and know the existence of God. But in this way, it is not possible to know about the nature of God, the life and objectives of man's life, resurrection, ascension, eternal life and so on. These are beyond the laws of nature and hence we need the ‘revealed religion’. Due to His love and kindness, God has manifested Himself to this world and has made us learn about His true nature, the hope and salvation of mankind, and all other things. We have been toiling to reach him through our 'little philosophical inquiry. We thank God that He has made us pass from ignorance to knowledge, from falsehood to the truth, from doubt to certainty, from non-believing to believing and from darkness to light by loving us and let us know as per our limited capacity.

### **3. Religion is given by the revelation of God.**

*“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”* (1 Timothy 3:16)

So far we have seen man's journey to God. In this section we see God's journey to man. Christianity is a revealed religion. God has revealed Himself by being born from man so that man can understand His mysterious wisdom and be attracted by His love.

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<sup>16</sup> Abba Gorgorios, *History of the Church in the Face of the World*. (Tinsae Zegubae Printing press, Addis Ababa, 1978 E.C.) p. 86 [Written in Amharic with the title, የቤተክርስቲያን ታሪክ በዓለም መድረክ .

Many people who follow a religion of philosophy claim that God's wisdom has been revealed to them as well. Actually what they call 'the revelation of God's wisdom' is any instance of a new idea into their mind-whatever the idea may be. Such an idea cannot be compared to the revealed wisdom of God at all because it is authored by the people themselves. We should identify between what is authored by man and what has been revealed by God using a criterion or reference. The revelation from God is accompanied by heavenly witnesses- miracles. The religion authored by philosophers has no evidence but speculations. That is why the latter changes now and then. Even if it does not change and stay intact for a relatively longer period of time, it might be because of the prevalence of the social, cultural, economical and political powers that have support and use it for their agenda or it may be because it has once become instilled in the traditions of the society. Nevertheless a long life of a philosophical religion could not be taken as a criterion to qualify for a revealed religion because it does not have a heavenly witness. The heavenly witness of the true revealed religion is Christ, who has been revealed in flesh by the wisdom of God, who has proved His teachings with the miracles He performed, who has cured people of their illnesses with His wonders, who has defeated death, the biggest enemy, by resurrecting from the death. This religion is not established based on any secular advantage or agenda for popular legend, but by divine wisdom, heavenly truth and love. The Holy Bible says, (2 Peter 1:16-21).

*Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.*

In the next sections we will see the revealed religion in detail starting from the revelation of God's mysterious wisdom.

### **A. The revelation of God's mysterious wisdom.**

God's wisdom is not accessible to all because it is not like the secular wisdom that all people can get. It is mysterious and only known by God and those to whom God has revealed (1 Corinthians 2:6-7). We learn from St. Paul that it is the Mystery of Incarnation- which God has prepared for man to be a road for salvation, righteousness, and eternal life- that is referred to as God's wisdom: *“But we speak the wisdom of god in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known [it,] they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath*

*prepared for them that love him.*” (1Corinthians 2:7-9). This mystery which had been veiled has been revealed by our fathers and the prophets, and finally completed by Christ.

God revealed His plan of salvation to Adam first when Adam failed and became hopeless (Genesis 3:15). Then God was revealed to Noah to make the ship to save mankind from the flood that came due to man's sin. After He has saved them, God has promised them not to destroy mankind with such type of flood again (Genesis 6-9). Then God was revealed to Abraham and his children. He revealed to them the wisdom and mystery of salvation. The mystery of the lamb that was sacrificed instead of Isaac was an astonishing phenomenon (Genesis 22:1-8). It became God's will to be called the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob (Exodus 3:15). And the revelation of one God's promise and faith was given to Abraham and his seeds.

After this God has revealed Himself to the Israelites in great power and miracles and saved them from the slavery in Egypt and took them to the Promised Land. God has revealed Himself in flame, cloud and thunder. He gave them His commandments and promised them that if they abide by His commandments, He would save them from all evils. We know from history that the Israelites did not abide by His commandments all the time. At times they were worshipping idols and they were involved in rebelling against God. Yet, God in his kindness and mercy kept them hopeful of the coming of the messiah by teaching them through the prophets, priests and revealing Himself in different ways through the kind kings and other messengers.

God's salvation work was not revealed and completed at once. God has revealed the mystery of salvation gradually in the ways people could understand. What was told in prophesy and done in examples in the Old Testament was later completed by the revelation of God in the New Testament. During the Old Testament when God revealed Himself to the ones He chose, it was in a dream, in the angels, in flame and in vision. In the New Testament God was revealed in His Son Jesus Christ by taking flesh and blood from mankind (Hebrews 1:1-4).

God's revelation in the Mystery of Incarnation has become a puzzle to many people, and that is because understanding the mystery is not given to all. Understanding this mystery is given to the apostles and the church. Those foreign to church have eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear the mystery of God (Mathew 13:10-17).

Even those who understand the mystery understand it as much as the ability of man can take, not all of it, because man has a very limited power of thinking and cannot understand all the miraculous actions of God. Hence, it is inappropriate to enter into unnecessary debate and research; rather, one should believe and thank that God has made it to save mankind.

Though the true wisdom of God is not accessible to the secular philosophers and wise people of this world, it was revealed to the people who followed Christ and who are symbolized by children. That is why Christ said, *“I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.”* (Luke 10:21)

God has started His work with people who have no wisdom of this world and revealed His wisdom to them and gave them His power to show the wise and powerful people of this world that their wisdom is nothing. St. Paul tells us,

*But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.(1 Corinthians 1:27-31)*

We have so far seen that what is referred to as wisdom which is not understood by this world is Christ. *“But wisdom is our savior, who saved us in the sacrifice of His flesh, shed His blood to befriend us, and has chosen us for His kingdom, amen.”*<sup>17</sup>

## **B. The true revelation of God in Christ’s coming to this world**

All the revelation in action and word before Christ, though was directed to the people then, had the ultimate objective of telling about the coming of the messiah, Christ, to save mankind. St. Paul has written us how God has talked to people since ancient times:

*“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”(Hebrews 1:1-3)*

The apostle tells us that all the revelations before Christ were examples and symbols for the true revelation (Hebrews 8:5-13; 9:9-10; Colossians 2:16-17). The True revelation is Christ’s coming to this world.

*Christ is God’s Son. In Greek the term is logos, which means ‘word’. Christ is thus the Word of God. The Holy Bible tells us that Christ, the Word is God. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.(John 1:-3)*

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<sup>17</sup> See *the Mass according to Discorious*.

All that has been done during the Old Testament was done by God's Word. God was not seen in His power to anyone. *"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."* (John 1:19)

The mystery of our salvation was revealed when God came to this world as a baby born from mankind as prophesied. This is the beginning of our happiness. And because of this happiness, men and angels thanked God together (Luke 2:8-14). And this salvation work, which started during His birth, was completed during His crucifixion. He was revealed as mediator of the New Testament (Mathew 26:28; Hebrews 12:24) because He is the one who mediated between God and man while He was on the cross, as St. Paul writes, *"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."* (1 Timothy 2:5-6)<sup>18</sup> This means, while on the cross, which was higher than the earth and lower than the sky, He mediated between the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit as God refers to God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

When Christ came to this world, a new era began. Before Christ, when God spoke, only the Word was heard. But Christ was seen, not just heard only. God was seen to man through Christ when the prophesied time came. God was revealed to man in physique and people saw Him. Many prophets, kings, righteous people wanted to see God, but they did not see Him. Only those people who lived during the time of Jesus Christ saw him in flesh and blood and they were blessed (Mathew 13:16-17; Luke 10:23-24). One of the witnesses, John the apostle, writes the following witness in his first epistle.

*"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us; That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."* (1 John 1:1-3)

This witness proves that the Word of Life, Christ, came to this world in flesh and blood that can be seen and felt. Nevertheless, some do not want to believe and understand this. Some think that it is inappropriate to God to be born as human as it degrades Him. Some say that this is completely impossible. This is just people's ideas. It is the love that God has for man that make Him come to this world. Man was lost because he sinned. Man was in vain when He departed from God. Man fell prisoner to his enemy. God love man so much that He did not want man to live like that, and thus He saved man in His own unique mystery. That makes God loved and respected, not degraded, by any means.

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<sup>18</sup> Christ during His crucifixion was between God, who is in the heavens, and man, who lives on earth, to show that a mediator stands between the two parties being mediated (See the Scholar's Commentary of 1 Peter 2:24). He is also said a mediator because He has one character out of the two. He is a Perfect God because He is God, and He is a perfect man because he was born of man. We say that Christ has one character out of being God and being man, and that is what makes Him to be referred as a mediator (See **ameknio** of the apostles).

Interfering in the plan and work of God is the work of those who disobey. No one can tell what God should and should not do. Christianity is established on the power and wisdom of this God's divine revelation. Christ's salvation work has been completed once and for all. There will be no such revelation until Christ comes back for judgment. If anyone claims that Christ is revealed again, it is a false teaching, and we should keep ourselves from these false teachers and pseudoprophets (Mathew 24:24).

There are some who claim that heavenly wisdom is revealed to them in their dreams and visions. This is a great temptation for them and we advise them to be careful and understand that even Satan comes in the form of God's angel (2 Corinthians 11:14). Christ defeated Satan by quoting the verses in the Old Testament. Christ did this to set an example for us and we should follow His example. Nevertheless, there are true Christians who have been endowed with such ability. These Christians have fought a great fight with our enemy and did wonders as Christ did. The church venerates them as saints and righteous so that we could follow their examples. The fact that we have miracles in our church proves that the revelation of the heavenly mystery is still with us.

We should be careful, however, to identify between the good and the bad spirit. There are wolves in the skin of sheep and until the last false messiah comes to this world claiming he is Christ, there will be a lot who will deceive us and lead us out of the Kingdom of God. These foxes are currently ruining our vines (Song of Songs: 2:15). False teachers are cheating people, deceiving them as believers when they are not, looking like they are prophets when they do not know God. The only way to keep oneself from these false teachers is one: to know and understand the Mystery of Incarnation, believe and live in it.

*“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. {4:2} Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: {4:3} And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that [spirit] of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”(1 John 4:1-3)*

Once one has believed in Christ, and baptized, he should teach the mystery according to what has been revealed to Him by the church. There were and are many people who mix up God's Word with many other things (2 Corinthians 2:17). For instance, Gnostics<sup>19</sup> accepted Christianity and then mixed their philosophy with it. They became a source of different sects because of the different interpretation that they gave to the Mystery of Incarnation. Starting from Simon (Acts

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<sup>19</sup> Gnostics believe that they join the kingdom of heaven because of their knowledge (gnosis). Their faith is syncretic. Their faith has elements from the witchcraft of Persia and Babylon, Greek Philosophy, Hinduism, Judaism, paganism and Christianity. Their teachings have been identified and rooted out from the Church.

8:13-24), they remained an internal enemy of the Church until they were condemned by the Church. Liberal Protestants and theological scholars have also been a source of confusion since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They mix up philosophy, science and Christianity, which is not in line with Christianity teachings. They claim that they do that so that the contemporary generation could understand it better.

It is true that Christianity has spread in to the different corners of the world in different languages. The apostles have been given the ability to speak in different languages so that they could preach Christianity to speakers of different languages. So using a simple language that the people could understand is encouraged. Nevertheless, mixing up Christianity and philosophy and making Christianity just a branch of philosophy is inappropriate and unacceptable.

Gnostics believe that salvation is through knowledge, but not through faith. The apostles taught that the Gnostics' way is wrong and this worldly knowledge has no role in being saved. "*O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane [and] vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: Which some professing have erred concerning the faith.*"(1 Timothy 6:20-21) The Church is established on the revelation of God to man and on divine knowledge and wisdom. Divine knowledge comes from the Incarnated God, the Word.

Because God's word is not only the source of divine knowledge but also the word of life, Christians are responsible for keeping it pure and uncorrupted. St. Athanasius<sup>20</sup> put us an example by rooting out the corrupting philosophy that says the Church should interpret the Holy Scriptures by themselves without considering the teachings of Christianity in the Alexandrian and **Ansokian** schools.<sup>21</sup> He also clearly stated that Christianity is established on soterology, which means God's salvation work.

### **C. Divine revelation for the salvation of mankind**

The Church's teaching of god's coming to this world to save mankind is not based on human philosophy but on the divine revelation that God has given. All that God has done in His revelation was for the salvation of mankind. We have seen earlier that all the revelation that God has made to humans during the Old Testament was tied to the salvation work of Christ in the new Testament(Hebrews 7-10).

We should not forget, then, that the objective of God's revelation has been to save mankind from the sin man has committed and make him participate in His kingdom (2 Peter 1:2-21). Because

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<sup>20</sup> St. Athanasius is famous worldwide in the Christian world for his contribution in the creed of the Council of Nicaea and his teachings on the salvation works of Christ. He is also referred to as Athanasius the apostolic because of his teachings of the Gospel (which is different from the contemporary philosophy of many who surrounded him) because of his martyrdom and because he resembled the apostles in his deeds. St. Athanasius was also the Patriarch who appointed the first bishop to the Ethiopian church.

<sup>21</sup> Abba Gorgorios, *History of the Church in the Face of the World*. (Tinsae Zegubae Printing press, Addis Ababa, 1978 E.C.) p. 91 [Written in Amharic with the title, የቤተክርስቲያን ታሪክ በዓለም መድረክ .

the Church is established on this truth, it is referred to as “*the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*”(1 Timothy 3:15) The Church will continue its salvation work that has been given to it by God.

The one that is referred to as the salvation work is Christ’s crucifixion for the redemption of man from his sin. The church always does this salvation work, which is the objective of God’s revelation, everyday, through the Holy Communion. We should eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ to be saved as that is the end of what is done for the salvation of man. The Holy Scriptures, the apostles and our fathers have taught that one cannot be saved without participation in the Mystery of the Holy Communion.

Many, however, do not understand this and try to interpret the Holy Bible in different ways as it comes to their minds. The major cause for the multiplication of different sects is this interpretation of God’s revelation. There is only one way that Christ has revealed to us, and the righteous way, the true way for our salvation is that way (John 14:6). There is only one religion(Ephesus 4:5), there is only one church that Christ has established. So, Christ’s revelation could not be interpreted in different ways, but only in one way. So, we advise our brothers by reminding them a verse from the Holy Bible(Proverbs 3:5-7), “*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. .*”

Because God has come to this world to save us, it does not mean that He has become less. He has taken flesh and blood from His creature (man), and He has born all our illnesses because of His love, kindness and humbleness. Salvation means saving man by taking away the sins he has committed and giving eternal life instead. It is only God, who can give that. God has saved us in this way and by doing so, He never has and will be less. Those who believe God has become less because of His salvation work have not understood what salvation means at all, and are considered to have not received the religion.

We, however, believe that God has descended from the heavens to save man, that He was born from St. Mary, that He has found the lost sheep and saved it, and that He has saved all who were lost. His name is Jesus as “*He shall save His people from their sins*”, and the meaning of his name in Hebrew means, “*Saviour*” (Luke:2:11). “*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*” (Acts 4:12). That the basis of or Christianity religion is the salvation work of Christ, and it is the basis for our hope, salvation and happiness, is proved by the Gospel. This is put in the creed in Article 5 as follows: “*for the sake of our salvation He descended from the heavens*”. The Holy Bible says,

*“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ*

*might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (1 Timothy 1:15-17).*

#### **D. Witnesses of the divine revelation**

There are different witnesses of revelation of God and Christ’s salvation work.

##### **The church’s testimony**

The church is the first and earliest witness of the revelation of Christ. The true witnesses of Christ, from His birth to His ascension, are St. Mary, His mother, and the apostles (His disciples). They are called ‘the first apostolic church’. He has prepared them to be witnesses of His salvation work. God’s establishment of the church on the apostles and Peter was not only to declare and testify His revelation and salvation work to the entire world but also to give the church the authority to do the salvation work itself because it is the body and representative of Christ. The church does this salvation work until Christ, who established it, comes for judgment.

The church always teaches about Christ, salvation and confession to save this world. In its mass, it teaches that Christ came to this world, and gave us His Flesh and Blood, and tells the world to eat the Flesh and Blood of Christ to be saved. This action of the church proves that the church testifies the revelation of the Lord both in words and in action. We understand from this that the church is not only a witness of the Lord’s revelation, but also the result and participant of the revelation.

The first church taught about Christ in words and did the salvation work by baptizing and giving the Holy Communion, and gradually wrote the Gospel and the different epistles and gave the New Testament books to its faithful. The church has done this to testify the salvation work of Christ in writing as well. The church has been doing this salvation work both in words and in action with the help of the Holy Spirit for many centuries, and it will keep on doing so.

##### **The Holy Bible’s testimony**

The testimony of the Holy Bible becomes clear to all once it is interpreted and taught to the people. It should be interpreted properly in order to get the true witness, and the task of interpreting the Holy Bible is given to the church. The Holy Bible remains a witness of the divine revelation because it contains writings of the history of God’s creation of this world and His salvation work, His prophecies and teachings.

According to the Holy Bible, the revelation of God started since the time of Moses and the prophets and was realized when Christ came to this. The divine revelation was when the Holy Spirit descended. There will be no other revelation until Christ comes again (Titus 2:12-13; 1 Timothy 6:14).

God revealed Himself in the flame of fire in the midst of the bush and told him His name “I AM THAT I AM”, “*I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.*” (Exodus 3:2-15). Later God revealed Himself to more than 1 million Israelites on Mount Sinai. He gave them the Ten Commandments and promised them (Exodus 19; 19:16-20). He made them His people, and He became their God, and they become the people of God. All the miracles and revelations were done to the then Israelites temporarily, but it was done symbolizing what has to come in the New Testament- the divine revelation.

Both the revelations (in the flame and in flesh) are divine revelations and thus recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The books of the Old Testament, which were written many years before the birth of Christ, testify the actions that have been done in the New Testament. They are living witnesses of the divine revelations and the salvation work of God for anyone who reads both the testaments crossreferring them. In addition to the Holy bible, there are several history books and other documents that testify the divine revelation.

### **The witness of the creatures and angels and other miraculous testimonies**

If there was no divine revelation, it would not be possible to know about the true Saviour and God. That is why it was written that except for few philosophers, the world was filled with people who worshipped idols. Idolatry was wiped out first by the House of Israelites and later by Christians because of the revelation of the true Lord. Though God can be known through His creatures, history tells that God’s salvation work was known to the world due to the divine revelation and His miraculous deeds. The revelation of God in different miracles for the sake of humans is also witnessed. For instance the star that the seventy scholars saw during the birth of the Lord, and the seven miracles that were seen when Christ was crucified on Good Friday-all are witnesses of the revealed God (Mathew 2:1-12; 27:45-54; 14:22-23).

The revelation of the angels coming from the unknown world is a great witness of our faith. The angels completed their mission by revealing themselves to the prophets and fathers in the Old Testament and for the apostles and many Christians. For instance, the angel of the Lord revealed and talked to Balaam and his donkey in the Old Testament and to Cornelius, the Roman soldier (Numbers 22:21-35; Acts 10:1-6). The angels that were revealed to shepherds to tell the birth of Christ gave their testimony of the salvation and lordship of the baby sleeping in a manger by praising Him saying “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*” (Luke 2:8-14). They also were revealed to many people during the resurrection and ascension of Christ.

Starting from the fathers, prophets and apostles gave their testimony together with doing some kind of miracle. God did not send them alone when He sent them to preach about Him and the Gospel. He gave them the power to exorcise evil, cure the sick, and resurrect the dead (Mathew 10:7-8). After His resurrection, He gave them the power and blessing of the Holy Spirit to preach the confession and forgiving of sin in His name (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1-2). Accordingly, they

taught in different languages in different countries, did many miracles and converted many from idolatry into Christianity. For those who believe in Him and follow Him, He gave the following miraculous testimony: *“And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”* (Mark 10:16-17).

The present day church is the one that Christ has established and given the power and Christ is with the church till the end. The church uses the power that Christ gave it and the blessings of the Holy Spirit till the end. And as a result different signs and miracles are have been done among its faithful. Because of the founder and witness of the church, it has become a different and unique religion in the world. While some other religions celebrate their leaders at the tombs where their dead bodies have been buried, Christ is celebrated in His resurrection and ascension. Christ’s tomb is seen open and is testifying Christ’s resurrection among the dead (John 20:1-9; Acts 2:29-36; Mathew 28:1-10).

Christ was seen by many people after His death and resurrection. This was the major and last point for which God has been revealed. This was the point where the power of death was taken out, man became hopeful once again, believed in resurrection of the dead, and knew the goal of his life. And he has been given the Holy Spirit to live with him, *“Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.”* (2 Corinthians 5:5) What would be the faith and hope of mankind if this divine revelation did not happen? But God has revealed Himself in His Son’s incarnation in His kindness and greatness of His wisdom without considering our ignorance and wickedness. What shall we give our Lord for revealing us the truth except for being thankful?

#### Psalm 115: 3-9

Here we should like to remind that there is a different lesson in this book which is related to God’s revelation. God was revealed to Abraham not as weak but as powerful, able to do anything. Because of this God is called El Shaddai. The character of God is beyond the thinking power of man, and we have learned, to our capacity, more about God’s character in the New Testament from Jesus Christ. We have presented some of the characters of God in section in section 3)

#### **4. ‘We believe’ what is revealed from God**

The term ‘we believe’ is the beginning of the creed and the end of this preface. The ancient church has been saying “we believe in one God ...”, which was used by the 318 scholars who prepared the creed at the Council of Nicaea. We hold on to our faith which we have received from our fathers because it is the religion that has been revealed by God. This revealed religion together with work through love is the basis for salvation and righteousness.

But before that we have to understand the source of the revelation in order to comprehend the revealed religion because it has been said, *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”* (Romans 10:17). We have to know and hear about what has been revealed from God before we believe in the religion what has been revealed. After we have understood the faith, we have to obey and believe in from the bottom of our hearts and up to the end in the Gospel, that has come from the revealed religion (Romans 1:3-5; Galatians 5:7; Ephesus 1:13).

#### **A. Let’s know who is revealed and hear His Word**

We have learned that the religion we get through seeking God by conscience is not as perfect as the revealed religion. We can liken these two with the sun and the moon. We saw that the sun has its own light but the moon reflects the sun’s light because it does not have light by itself. The religion that is revealed from God is greater than the one we arrive at through research because the former is proved by God Himself but the latter has no proof except our conclusions.

So who has the true light? Who can give light in the darkness without being won by it? Who has the light that lights the world but the world does not know? (John1:4-5). It is the sun of righteousness, Jesus Christ. He is the greatest of all. He has no comparison. His life is the divine revelation. The divine light. His miracles and wonders, His defeating of the death, testify His divinity. That is why the Holy Bible says, *“Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful [in] praises, doing wonders?”*(Exodus 15:11)

When we say that we believe in the revealed religion, we have to know what is revealed and what it is like. Christianity is established on the religious knowledge that is gained from the divine revelation. The source of the divine revelation before or after the birth of Christ is Christ’s Spirit ( also God the Father’s because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the God the Father and the Spirit of God the Son. *“All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”* John 1-3). The witnesses of the divine revelation are the prophets and apostles for whom the Holy Spirit was revealed and who taught and told the Word of God. We have already mentioned earlier that the apostles were the eye witnesses of the incarnation of the Word.

The apostles have written, with the help of the Holy Spirit, different holy books and epistles expressing what they saw and heard so that their testimony can pass from generation to generation. These books are referred to as “books of divinity”<sup>22</sup> because they explain about the Lord. These books are the books of the Old Testament and New Testament. They are also referred to as the ‘fundamental’ books because they are the base for good deeds, prayer, mass, songs and different religious books. The books of the Old Testament and New Testament are also called the ‘parent books’ and have many derivatives which have been written based on them

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<sup>22</sup> What we call the Holy Books in the Holy Bible are referred to as “books of divinity” by the *‘Law of the Kings (Fetha Negest* in Geez) a book about the spiritual and secular justice that should be delivered to Christians. The *‘Law of the Kings’* in Article 2 says that there are 81 “books of divinity” that are accepted by the church.

and look like them. These books that have been written based on the parent books are called ‘children’ books. But care should be taken not to confuse some other books with the children books as there are books which are not real children of the books of the Old and new testaments.

All the actions and words regarding the divine revelation are recorded in the books of the Old and New testaments, and thus we ought to respect these books. Even greater is the Gospel of Christ, who is the author and finisher of the divine revelation. The interpretation and symbolic meaning of the books of the prophets are revealed by the Gospel of Christ. The mysteries of the church- the Mystery of Trinity, Mystery of Incarnation, Mystery of Baptism, Mystery of Eucharist, Mystery of Resurrection- and the sacraments of the church all are known by the Gospel. Thus, we should believe that the Gospel is the true source of the knowledge of the divine revelation and there is no other such source than the Gospel.

That is why the church always calls for the laity to learn the Gospel. Priests are ordered by Christ to learn the Gospel and other books that the canons<sup>23</sup> of the church prescribes in order to teach and baptize Gentiles in the name of God (Mathew 28:19-20). The laity should learn the true lesson from the church lest they will be taken away by false teachings.

The laity should understand that the lesson about the divine revelation that is written in the Holy Scriptures is interpreted and elaborated by the apostolic church, which received it from Christ. The church is the result of the divine revelation. The church would have not been there if Christ had not come to this world. It is established by Christ, and on the love and salvation works of Christ. The church received the order from Christ to do His salvation works – teaching the Gospel, baptizing, forgiving the sins of confessors, giving the Eucharist, keeping the sheep, administering the people, and testifying Christ’s being savior and God. The church is doing these since its establishment and will be doing so until the end.

The present day church reveals the knowledge and faith that it has received from the apostles orally and in written form and keeps it pure and uncorrupted and transmits it the generation through its teachings, mass, good deeds and orders of faith. Because it is the witness that testifies the divine revelation in words and action, it is special and the only one of its type. People go to the church to get the water of life and the church goes to the people to give them the water of life. The church gives the blessings of the Holy Spirit. Thus, let’s us learn the divine revelation, about what has been done and what will be done from the church, and it will teach us the Holy Scriptures.

## **B. Let us believe in the one revealed in flesh and be saved**

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<sup>23</sup> The ‘*Justice of Kings*’ in Article 6: 212 says “One who does not know the good books of the Lord[the books in the Holy Bible] particularly the four gospels should not be a priest.”

It is not enough to say that we know. We also have to believe. Hearing comes before believing. We do not believe that all those who hear the word also believe. There are many teachers of theology and people in other religions who know a lot about the divine revelation. They learn and teach religion just as a philosophy but they do not believe in it. This means they do not abide by the faith that works through love (Romans 1:5). Their knowledge is one that is separated from the love and unity of God- a faithless knowledge.

A religious education or the knowledge about God will not have power if it is just a mental activity that involves thinking only.

*“Actually books lectures, or information alone are not sufficient. Those only fill the mind with ideas but the heart remains empty, with no feeling, no love, ... truly said one of the fathers: ‘What will you benefit if you know everything about the holy Trinity without having the Holy trinity abiding in you or you in Him?’ It is mere intellectual knowledge, in the mind not in the heart. It is the knowledge of a scholar not a worshipper nor a lover. Such knowledge may turn into theological arguments and strives, or to a philosophy that is comprehended only by the most learned.”<sup>24</sup>*

So we understand that to know and to believe are different things. Hearing or reading the Word of God, then studying and knowing it, and the believing in it and putting it in action- these three steps show the spiritual development of a man step by step.

The first step is hearing or reading the Word of God. All hear or read the Word of God, but they do not pay attention. So those who pass to the next step are quite few. It is only very few that believe in and put what they know into action of because it is not easy to believe the Word of God and do accordingly. One can say he truly believes in the Word of God when the believer has a positive thinking and when there is the grace and blessing of God. If these two do not meet, the faith will be hypocritical. It is true that there are many who look like believers for the sake of winning their daily breads, but this kind of faith will not serve the soul but the flesh.

But the hope and benefits of the true faith are many. Those who lived in Christianity faith have got salvation from the condemnation of the soul and the flesh. For those who believe in Christ, who came in love to save this world, have been given the grace of salvation and the hope of eternal life. Though they die in their flesh, they will live forever in their soul in Eden, and their flesh and soul will be united later in the Judgment Day and join the righteous on God’s right.

So far we have seen the true religion that has true hope and benefits for mankind. We believe that the revealed religion is the true religion and is greater than the one that is discovered by the

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<sup>24</sup> H. H. Abune Shenouda III, *God and Man*. (Cairo, Dar El Tebba El Kwamia, December 2000), pp. 237 ff.

research of the conscience. And this true faith is found written in the Holy Scriptures. So any book that is written to teach Christianity should be written on the basis of the Holy Bible.

The creed that we use in this book has the support of the holy Bible. We have mentioned earlier that this creed has a higher place in the church due to the depth, coverage, global acceptance of the contents of the Creed. The true word of life is stated in the Creed and we should understand that the creed contains the principles of the Christainity faith we follow.

If we abide by the revealed religion, the Gospel, we will participate in the hope and blessings that are attained from the faith. Thus let us first be humble and do what the faith orders to do. If we believe in Christ, who is revealed to us, we will be save d]from any evil that is to come and will get righteousness. We pray to God that we keep our faith and not to get out of the way. And the creed should be part of our daily prayer.

The witness given about the revealed God, Christ, is not fiction. St. Peter , when he teaching about this, said:

*“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:” (2v Peter 1:16-19)*

St. Peter tells us these so that we will not get lost in the darkness. The light that lights in the darkness and the light that darkness cannot win is Jesus Christ (John 1:4-5). This revealed light can live with us when we are one in faith with Christ. We should keep our faith and endure up to the end so that this light will net leave us.

We believe and give our testimony that our religion that has been a secret for a long time but that is revealed now, that we get from the Incarnated God, Christ, is the greatest. And we thank “God who was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” in songs and hymns (1 Timothy 3:16).

*“Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations*

*for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.” (Romans 16:25-27)*

***May the grace of God be with us***