HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES IN ETHIOPIC ANDEMTA COMMENTARY TRADITION

Tibebu Teklu Sebetu
(Mekane Yesus Seminary, Addis Ababa)

Abstract: This article examines the hermeneutical principles of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) by critically analyzing its indigenous *Andemta* Commentary (*teregwame*) tradition. Cross-examining the scholarly debate between Roger Cowley and Mohammed Girma, this study critiques modern reductions of the *Andemta* tradition to mere homiletic application, arguing instead that it embodies a sophisticated, dual-edged hermeneutic that synthesizes historical realism with spiritual polysemy. This ongoing scholarly discourse raises a central question regarding the precise nature of Ethiopian biblical hermeneutics: to what extent does the Andemta commentary hermeneutical tradition reflect the literal-historical methodologies of the Antiochene tradition, as opposed to other patristic interpretive frameworks? Thus, focusing on the *Aqedah* narrative in Genesis 22:5–8[1] and the *Andemta* commentary's interpretation of the sacrificial ram, the study demonstrates how the *Andemta* tradition preserves the historical and contextual setting of biblical narrative while simultaneously employing allegorical readings to unveil deeper spiritual and theological significance of the Sacred text. Methodologically, the study uses this *Andemta* tradition synthesis to challenge the perceived historiographical binary conventionally constructed between the Antiochene literalism and the Alexandrian allegorism. It contends that while these patristic schools maintained distinct Christological trajectories, utilizing allegorical usage as a categorical metric for binary division oversimplifies patristic exegesis and obscures their functional convergence in Eastern traditions. Finally, the paper articulates a compelling proposal for contemporary EOTC scholars and homilists operating in a post-critical context: calling for a constructive retrieval of early patristic methodologies that appreciate spiritual polysemy, while maintaining hermeneutical self-scrutiny to ensure allegorical interpretations remain organically rooted in the literal-historical sense of biblical text.

INTRODUCTION

While the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) has long drawn the attention of historians and theologians for its ancient Christian heritage and the distinct hermeneutical framework preserved in the *Andemta* commentary tradition, this rich tradition of biblical exegesis remains largely misunderstood and underappreciated in the broader academic discourse despite foundational studies. In this article, the author demonstrates how the interpretative tradition of the *Andemta* commentary has been shaped by the interpretative methods employed by the early Church Fathers from both the Antiochene and Alexandrian traditions. Beyond the impact of early exegetes, it is essential to recognize that the *Andemta* commentary has developed within the EOTC tradition, preserving its Jewish-oriented and distinctive indigenous approach to interpreting Scripture. Therefore, the author of this article commences by providing an overview of the prevailing characteristics of the *Andemta* commentary interpretative tradition within its context, recognizing it as a living tradition that significantly shapes the EOTC's biblical interpretation and preaching. Subsequently, the author describes the sources that contribute to this interpretative tradition and then examines the impact of both the Antiochene and Alexandrian interpretive traditions.

ANTIOCHENE-ALEXANDRIAN INFLUENCE

Within early Christian thought, biblical exegesis served as a foundational pillar of patristic theology. The two predominant hermeneutical movements (the Alexandrian and Antiochene traditions) developed distinct frameworks for extracting the spiritual dimensions embedded in the Holy Scriptures. While it is commonly believed that the Antiochene School adhered to a literal interpretation of Scripture and the

[1] In the Hebrew tradition the word for *Akedah* stated in Gen 22: 5–8 refers to the binding of Isaac, the Son of Abrham, a narrative traditionally interpreted in Christian theology as a typological model pointing forward to the crucifixion and atonement of Jesus Christ.

Alexandrian School accepted only an allegorical interpretation, various studies suggest otherwise.[2] Both interpretative traditions sought to reconstruct the *Sitz im Leben* of the text under study and to project its historical setting into readers' lives and contexts. Through different interpretative approaches, they highlighted the spiritual significance of Scripture for readers, not only as a homiletic application but also as an integral part of the broader complex of God's divine Word.

Although the Antiochenes focused on the literal meaning of Scripture as the basis for interpretation, they also understood Scripture to be the inspired word of God, capable of reaching beyond the words' literal meaning. For example, Frances Young notes that Eustathius of Antioch accused Origen of Alexandria of being a literalist while reading 1 Samuel 28:1-25 about Saul's meeting with a witch woman who is a medium at En-dor. According to Eustathius, Origen took the text too literally because it allegorically teaches that the devil is using the witch's mind to control Saul. Nevertheless, for Origen, the witch is bringing Samuel back from the dead, and it should be understood as an actual historical occurrence.[3] St. Augustine believed that the historical sense of Scripture leads to its spiritual sense. He emphasized the reinterpretation of Old Testament books in the context of the New Dispensation. He recognized the divine and human nature of Scripture, with meanings intended by the Holy Spirit beyond the human author's intention.[4]

Consequently, patristic approaches to biblical interpretation recognized the necessity of analyzing historical contexts within the text, engaging in interreligious dialogue, and consulting Jewish scholars for textual and linguistic insight.[5] Most used allegorical and literal approaches in their interpretation of Scripture to discern the deeper and fuller spiritual meaning. Notably, the Alexandrians focused on the spiritual sense, while the Antiochenes prioritized the original audience's coherent discourse and sought out the spiritual meaning.[6] Both schools emphasized considering the influence of spiritual understanding on interpretation and recognizing the importance of historical events in the text.

Moreover, patristic biblical exegesis must be understood as a culturally embedded practice. The Church Fathers approached sacred texts through distinct contextual presuppositions, tailoring their interpretations to address the pressing pastoral, episcopal, and monastic needs of their respective communities. Rather than treating exegesis as an isolated academic and intellectual exercise, their

---

[2] See O'Keefe and Russell, *Sanctified Vision*, 3−5; see also Michael Graves, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 68. I completely agree with Michael Graves' statement about Origen's ideas. While there were certainly some controversial aspects to his teachings, particularly when his followers took them to extremes, it's hard to deny the impact that his writings had on the development of mainstream Christian doctrine, theology, and interpretation. Two of Origen's condemned teachings—the mystical preexistence of the human soul and his speculation about the apocatastasis, meaning the universal salvation of all creation—had little to do with his exegetical method widely practiced and followed even by those who condemned him. However, we note this nonetheless since, as Graves noted, it cast a pall for some time on his writings and reputation.

[3] Refer to Young, "Rhetorical Schools," 189, and 194−95. The Antiochene vs Alexandrian exegetical dichotomy falls short to consistently explain itself, especially when one looks at representatives from each school. See also O'Keefe and Russell, *Sanctified Vision*, 11; and Manlio Hughes Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 55−63; and also, Bertrand De Margerie, *An Introduction to the History of Exegesis.* Vol. 3 (Peru, IL: Saint Bede Abbey, 1991), 17, and 58−59. See also Tarmo Toom, *Patristic Theories of Biblical Interpretation: The Latin Fathers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2016), 97.

[4] De Margerie, History of Exegesis, 20−22. Augustine also talked about the necessity of charity when interpreting Scripture. For him, exegetes are required to follow the commandment of love in carrying out their interpretative task because "charity must be at once the source, the object and the purpose of exegesis, which should obey the most fundamental of all divine commands."

[5] To obtain a complete understanding of biblical texts, it is imperative to acknowledge the different approaches scholars take. In fact, some early Christian theologians even sought guidance from Jewish scholars to gain a deeper comprehension of certain aspects of the text. Please see Elowsky, "With a View to the End," 65; Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation*, 67−68; and see Thomas Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 35.

[6] Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 180−82. Frances Young correctly notes that Theodore of Mopsuestia was one of the best-known hermeneutical representatives of the School of Antioch, highlighting the fact that Pauline uses of allegory in the Book of Galatians did not eliminate the *historia*; instead, Paul believed that his allegorical interpretation was prefigured in the *historia*, and Theodore's effort to typologically read Messianic Passages in Psalms was mostly to reinterpret them historically. See also Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 21.

hermeneutical competence was deeply linked to spiritual formation: as these figures matured in their Christological faith, relied on pneumatological guidance, and internalized the nascent "*regula fidei"* (rule of faith), their critical and theological engagement with the Scriptural texts grew increasingly sophisticated.

The EOTC maintains a profound self-understanding rooted in its unbroken continuity with early Christian antiquity, evident in its dogmatic formulations, liturgical life, pedagogical traditions, and praxis. Central to this enduring continuity is its reception of an apostolic hermeneutical legacy; the EOTC's core theological framework derives directly from patristic methods of biblical interpretation. It remains an enduring interpretative approach distinctively preserved and articulated within its traditional *Andemta* commentary.

The overall interpretation of the *Andemta* commentary follows the use of the literary works of the Antiochene Church Fathers. The EOTC acknowledges the historical narrative of Scripture, and the commentary presents the literary and biblical-historical facts concerning the biblical authors' historical situation and the historical context in which Scripture was written. However, the commentary also extensively employs the Alexandrian method of exegesis, which primarily relies on an allegorical reading of Scripture.[7] The EOTC also has a long-standing historical similarity with the Alexandrian Church and shares common doctrine, particularly about Christology. At the same time, the Church maintains its unique *Tewahedo* (unified) doctrine in contrast to the Antiochene approach, which focuses on the distinction of the two natures in Christ.

On the other hand, certain scholars contend that the interpretive strategy governing the *Andemta* commentary largely mirrors the literal and contextual methodologies popularized by Antiochene patristic writers. For instance, Roger Cowley, based on his thorough studies, concluded that the EOTC biblical interpretation and exegetical tradition stands "in fundamental continuity with earlier commentaries, especially those of the 'Antiochene' tradition ... associated principally with the names of Lucian, Paulinus, Diodore, Eustathius, John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia."[8] For example, Theodore of Mopsuestia's influence is apparent. His approach to Psalm 1 exemplifies his method. Theodore interprets the "tree planted by streams of water" as a metaphor for the righteous man whose life is sustained by divine wisdom and grace, emphasizing the literal and moral aspects of the text. [9] Theodore also provides a detailed analysis of Psalm 22 (Psalm 21 in the LXX), focusing on the psalm's messianic and prophetic dimensions and arguing that it prefigures Christ's suffering and ultimate triumph.[10] His commentary on Psalm 45, which he views as a royal psalm celebrating the king's virtues and divine favor, reflects his allegorical approach while maintaining a clear historical and literal reading.[11]

These examples illustrate how Theodore of Mopsuestia's hermeneutical approach—specifically, his prioritization of the literal sense alongside nuanced typological and prophetic frameworks—directly informed the exegesis of the Psalms in the *Andemta* commentary. His influence is evident even though his name is not explicitly mentioned in the *Andemta* commentary, possibly because of his later condemnation in Constantinople.[12] Similarly, Kristine S. Pederson did outstanding work tracing the origins of the Ethiopian tradition, particularly the Psalms tradition, back to the Antiochene Fathers, among whom

[7] The AC presents allegorical *teregwame* [interpretation] regarding the worthy admission to the Eucharist in accordance with the doctrine of the EOTC (as Judaism mainly influences it) and the context of the implied readers as inhabiting the historic Ethiopian Orthodox religious context and tradition.

[8] Cowley, *Ethiopian Bible Interpretation*, 375; and see also Mohammed Girma's argument against Cowley's conclusion that the Ethiopian interpretive tradition has a close tie with the Antiochene interpretative tradition over against the Alexandrian interpretative tradition. Please see Girma, "Whose Meaning? 183−84.

[9] Robert C. Hill, trans. *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Commentary on the Psalms 1-81* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical literature, 2006), 11.

[10] Hill, *Theodore of Mopsuestia,* 241−43.

[11] Hill, *Theodore of Mopsuestia,* 555−99.

[12] An, *Ethiopian Reading of the Bible*, 132; and see also Kristine S. Pederson, *Traditional Ethiopian Exegesis of the Book of Psalms* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 199), 294. The Book of Psalms is one of the famous prayer books among followers of the EOTC. For the laity, ዳዊትን መድገም [reciting the Psalms] is vital to establish almost direct communication with God; and it is considered to be the significant stage of literacy in the traditional Ethiopian system of education for many years.

Theodore of Mopsuestia was an icon. Pederson's research underscores the continuity of Theodore's exegetical approach within the Ethiopian context, demonstrating the lasting impact of Antiochene exegesis on the interpretation of the Psalms.[13]

These scholars contend that the Antiochene tradition is characterized by a conceptual orientation and a rigorous attention to historical context, both of which are prominent features of the *Andemta* commentary. For Cowley, therefore, there is more literary continuity and commonality with the Antiochene interpretative tradition and interpretation in the *Andemta* commentary than with the Alexandrian. He further argues that there is no evident connection between Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and other Alexandrines. To him, it appears that the discussions regarding *allegoria*, *theoria*, and *tupos* from the Antioch and Alexandria schools have not been comprehensible in Ethiopia. Although the exegesis and interpretation have been passed down, the theoretical foundation and the underlying principles have been separated and forgotten.[14] Cowley observes that there are plausible allegorical types in the commentary, but the inclusion of such material may lessen the exclusivity of its Antiochene associations.[15]

Thus, according to Cowley and his proponents, the Andemta commentary explicitly honors the Scripture's historical narrative, offering a literal account of the socio-historical circumstances of the biblical authors and the broader context in which the text was composed.

Conversely, a closer examination reveals that the *Andemta* commentary goes beyond the limits of Antiochene exegesis by incorporating the Alexandrian tradition, which relies heavily on allegorical readings of Scripture. For instance, the narrative techniques utilized in the *Andemta* commentary on 1 Corinthians are guided by the communicative environment in which the commentary is formulated and cast an identifiable framework for the retelling of the source material. In other words, the *Andemta* commentary on First Corinthians uses its Ethiopian context to elucidate the biblical text, thereby developing a new narrative situation distinct from the clearly stated first-century environment. Let us look at one example from Paul's argument against the man of lawlessness stated in 1 Corinthians 5:1−12. The "outsiders" Paul mentioned in this text are translated and interpreted in the *Andemta* commentary as Muslims, and show that even the Muslim culture and tradition condemn the kind of sexual immorality found among Christians in Corinth.[16]

Despite the omission of Origen's name from the *Andemta* commentary, a probable consequence of his condemnation at the Fifth Ecumenical Council, his foundational ideas continue to leave a visible imprint on EOTC history. Like Origen, the EOTC believes that behind every literal word of Holy Scripture lies a spiritual sense. Therefore, it must be interpreted allegorically to uncover the text's hidden spiritual meaning.[17] For example, GebreAmanuel states that the *Ge'ez* text translation of 2 Corinthians 3:6 reads, "መጽሐፍ: ይቀትል: ወመንፈስ: የሃዩ" [The letter kills, but *interpretation* saves][18] and other texts, such as Deuteronomy 32:11, read, "God carried His people in His wings," and Matthew 5:29−30 reads, "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away."[19] The EOTC believes that unless such texts are interpreted allegorically, their literal meaning does not make sense.[20] This is the main reason the EOTC scholars worked hard to interpret allegorically and typologically and unveil the hidden spiritual meaning of a given text through the *Andemta* commentary, in accordance with the doctrine and traditions of the Church.

---

[13] Pederson, *Traditional Ethiopian Exegesis*, 8, 22−24, 58−61.

[14] Cowley, *Ethiopian Bible Interpretation*, 375 (and see n9 for further explanation about the term *theoria*, and *tupos*on page 376; and Ralph Lee also observes lack of direct association of the *Andemta* Commentary with Alexandrian figures such as Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and other writers from this tradition. Please see Lee, *Symbolic Interpretations in Ethiopian,* 37.

[15] Cowley, *Ethiopian Bible Interpretation*, 376.

[16] The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, *የቅዱስ ጳውሎስ መጽሐፍ ንባቡ ከትርጓሜው: Saint Paul's Book: Its Reading with Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam, 2007), 137.

[17] GebreAmanuel, *የኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ተዋህዶ ቤተክርስቲያን ታሪክ,* 176.

[18] The interpretation referred to here is allegorical interpretation. Hereafter, all translations of the Amharic texts are mine unless otherwise noted.

[19] GebreAmanuel, *የኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ተዋህዶ ቤተክርስቲያን ታሪክ,* 176.

[20] GebreAmanuel, *የኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ተዋህዶ ቤተክርስቲያን ታሪክ,* 176.

Mirroring the Alexandrian methodology exemplified by Origen, who treated biblical figures as typological paradigm cases, the EOTC affirms that allegorical reading is scripturally sanctioned.[21] Consequently, the tradition approaches canonical text under the premise that scriptural language is inherently multi-layered, admitting several complementary allegorical senses per passage.[22] Aba Gebre Amanuel argues that the EOTC's history provides examples of allegorical interpretations used by key biblical authors to communicate the spiritual meaning of Scripture to their audiences.[23] He mentioned, for example, that in Galatians 4:21−24 the Apostle Paul speaks of Hagar and Sarah as the symbol of the two testaments, 1 Corinthians 10:1−5 speaks about the rock from which Israelites drank water in the wilderness as a symbol of Christ, who is the life-giving water, and 1 Corinthians 9:9−12 speaks about not muzzling an Ox when it treads out the grain. The *Andemta* commentary itself interprets the Ox as a symbol for a messenger of the Gospel. The Alexandrian tradition found its interpretive schema in Scripture and thus felt justified in its allegorical approach; likewise, the EOTC believes Christ himself set examples of allegorical interpretation that can be considered foundational for the *Andemta* commentary allegorical interpretive tradition.[24] For example, the Church believes that, in Matthew 13:1−47, Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of heaven through six symbols or examples, interpreted allegorically so that the audience may understand the spiritual nature of God's Kingdom.[25]

Girma offers a compelling counter-critique of Cowley, arguing that the latter's framework systematically neglects the allegorical dimension intrinsic to the exegesis of the *Andemta* commentary.[26] He notes, "Cowley's blatant denial of the presence of allegory in the *Andemta* commentary tradition seems to be clearly short of hiding the presence of allegory in the EOTC interpretive philosophy."[27] He further notes that in addition to the long-lasting historical and traditional influence of the Alexandrian Church upon Ethiopia, the Church has adopted theological positions from this tradition, including those on Christology. However, it has also made efforts to indigenize them to fit the Ethiopian context. In his argument against Cowley's generalization, Girma notes, "It seems absurd to think that acquiring interpretive rules always hinges on explicitly constructed systems. For that matter, until recently, the EOTC was said to have very few, if any, systematically constructed theological treatises. This is because Liturgy (which is based on careful precision) and the lifestyle of the believers (i.e., prayers, fasting, and helping the poor) were and are the main theological documentations. Therefore, it would be interesting to ask if this absence of systematically construed theology would be a good reason to portray the EOTC as a Church without theology and/or philosophy. Liturgy and lifestyle are indeed two prominent media that have maintained the theology of the EOTC for over one and a half millennia with very little alteration, if any."[28] Thus, for Girma, the influence of the Alexandrian tradition on the EOTC's allegorical interpretive philosophy and doctrine is significant.

AQEDAH NARRATIVE IN GENESIS 22:5−8

The interpretive divide between Cowley and Girma crystallizes in their analysis of the *Andemta* tradition on the *Aqedah* narrative in Genesis 22:5–8. By interrogating the commentary's treatment of Isaac, each scholar uses this narrative of patriarchal sacrifice to advance their respective hermeneutical arguments. The commentary reads,

> Isaac is a likeness (*messale*) of this world; the sheep is a likeness of the Lord. Isaac is the likeness of the godhead, the sheep is a likeness of manhood, the knife is a likeness of the

[21] Karlfried Froehlich, *Sensing the Scriptures: Aminadab's Chariot and the Predicament of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 52−53; see Elowsky, "With a View to the End," 68−70.

[22] GebreAmanuel, *የኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ተዋህዶ ቤተክርስቲያን ታሪክ,* 175.

[23] GebreAmanuel, *የኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ተዋህዶ ቤተክርስቲያን ታሪክ,* 176.

[24] GebreAmanuel, *የኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ተዋህዶ ቤተክርስቲያን ታሪክ,* 175.

[25] GebreAmanuel, *የኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ተዋህዶ ቤተክርስቲያን ታሪክ,* 175.

[26] Girma, "Whose Meaning?" 182−83.

[27] Girma, "Whose Meaning?" 184.

[28] Girma, "Whose Meaning?" 183.

> authority of God, and the blade is a likeness of suffering and death. The thought of Abraham is a likeness of the grave; Isaac is a likeness of the Lord. The fire is a likeness of the Holy Spirit, the wood is a likeness of the cross, and the two servants are likenesses of the two brigands.[29]

Examining the precise text of the passage, Girma contends that the *Andemta* tradition applies clear allegorical exegesis,[30] directly countering Cowley's assertion that such readings represent 'homiletic application, not allegory proper.' [31] While Cowley could be correct in his own context, this particular text seems more like an allegorical exegesis, as the author of this article does not see any straightforward hermeneutical application that connects ethical and religious principles (of the scriptures) to readers' daily lives.[32] Homiletic applications usually draw out the moral implications of a text and place them in the context of the implied audience. Therefore, the above text is a clear example of allegorical writing, even if the allegorical message itself needs further explanation to help the audience understand it.

Elaborating on this passage, the *Andemta* corpus provides two further allegorical interpretations (*teregwame*) concerning the source of the sacrificial ram offered in Isaac's stead. The *Andemta* commentary on Genesis 22:5 notes,

> The ram is a symbol of the Lord, and Isaac is a symbol of the believers. The ram became a substitute for Isaac, and the Lord became a substitute for believers. They say the ram descended from heaven, and the Lord was to descend from the heaven of the heavens. That they say, it was found from the wood of the Thicket that he would be born from sealed virginity, from our Lady [St. Mary]. It is a symbol that because he came from the flock of Abraham, he would be born from the tribe of Abraham.[33]

Rather than asserting a definitive historical origin for the ram (whether as a miraculous creation or an animal drawn from Abraham's flock), the *Andemta* commentary presents a series of complementary allegorical *teregwame*. Crucially, this hermeneutical fluidity does not negate the text's historical grounding; the commentary preserves the event's literality as an actual occurrence within space and time. In other words, historical realism and allegorical depth are not mutually exclusive; rather, the actual event serves as the necessary foundation for its deeper spiritual meaning.[34]

Beyond its direct allegorical exegesis, the *Andemta* tradition integrates Old Testament narratives into a broader Christological matrix, mapping typological linkages that read Hebrew Scripture through an explicitly Messianic lens. For instance, passages such as Genesis 49, Isaiah 53, and Psalms 2, 8, 44, and 109, as well as texts from Ezekiel and Daniel, are given Christological interpretations with an apologetic focus. Some Old Testament texts, like Proverbs 7–8 and Isaiah 61:1–8, play a significant role in Christological debates. Furthermore, New Testament texts such as John 1:1, Romans 1:3–4, and Hebrews 6 are reflected in Patristic works, especially those by *Qerellos, Haymanota Abaw, Qedasse*, and *Yohannes Afework*.[35]

Building upon this evidence, the author strongly concludes that the EOTC hermeneutics cannot be reduced to a single interpretive stream; rather, it encapsulates a sophisticated synthesis of Alexandrian allegorical exegesis and Antiochene historical realism, as systematically mediated through the *Andemta* tradition. Upon careful examination of the document, it becomes clear that the interpretative traditions of the two schools are combined with elements of Ethiopian culture, tradition, and context. Early Church Fathers from both traditions were named, and their homilies were cited in the *Andemta* commentary. For example, St. John Chrysostom was cited in the commentary on Revelation 20:4: "Behold, John Chrysostom commented in his homily, which is read on the day of Palm Sunday, that he sat on the clothes

[29] Cowley, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation*, 376; Girma, "Whose Meaning?" 183.
[30] Girma, "Whose Meaning?" 184.
[31] Cowley, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation*, 376.
[32] Girma, "Whose Meaning?" 183.
[33] Lee, *Symbolic Interpretations in Ethiopian*, 52.
[34] Lee, *Symbolic Interpretations in Ethiopian*, 52.
[35] Cowley, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation,* 291, 59n.

which were upon the ass and her foal without being held by a strap or binding."[36] One can also see other Greek patristic sources, such as St. Basil of Caesarea, Severus, Mar Yeshaq, and Ephraim, along with translations of Syriac, Coptic, and Arabic sources in original Ge'ez compositions.[37] Thus, these multiple references show that the *Andemta* commentary draws its interpretative traditions and legitimacy from *Chalcedonian* and *Miaphysite* traditions.

The dual hermeneutical orientation of the *Andemta* tradition, which synthesizes contextual-historical exegesis with spiritual polysemy, subverts the conventional binary that artificially polarizes Antiochene literalism against Alexandrian allegorism, or vice versa. While these traditions maintained clear theological and Christological distinctions, using allegorical usage as a definitive criterion to establish a rigid hermeneutical divide between them remains methodologically untenable. After all, both schools have used allegory, figurative language, and symbolic interpretation of the Scriptures as they seek to apply the text to their readers' contexts.

Although the *Andemta* commentary's synthesis of Alexandrian and Antiochene methodologies reflects a highly nuanced hermeneutical framework, a rigorous analysis must still account for how each school maintains distinct emphases—particularly regarding the spiritual-typological and historical-moral dimensions of the biblical text. According to Keon-Sang An, there is a notable distinction between the Alexandrian and Antiochene traditions, one that extends beyond the common distinctions in Christology. The Alexandrians placed a significant emphasis on the spiritual progress of believers, regarding human existence as a pilgrimage towards divinity and the Bible as a navigational tool for the soul's ascent. Their interpretation of anagogy denotes "the upward movement from the physical realm to a spiritual realm." Consequently, Keon-Sang An asserts that the Bible is a conduit that aids the soul in its upward journey.[38] On the opposite end, "The Antiochenes had a strong moral, ethical orientation. The anagogy of Antiochene *theoria* was to lead people into a truly moral life that would continue into eternity as an existence free of sin. The Bible provided a map of the battle for the salvation of humans and a guideline for human education."[39]

The *Andemta* commentary's synthesis of Alexandrian and rabbinic interpretive frameworks reflects a dynamic textual flexibility; rather than constraining the narrative to a single reading, it maximizes the text's semantic density to accommodate whatever theological applications its linguistic structure allows.[40] Early references to the Scripture materials are even more numerous and pervasive. The Church believes that meaning is not determined or confined by the text's literal and historical context, though it does not deny the historical fact. After conducting comprehensive studies of the materials used in the *Andemta commentary*, Cowley was certain that the named sources were representative of all the actual sources. However, he also concluded that the *Andemta commentary* had digested them to the extent that analyzing their precise literary affinities was no longer feasible.[41] Similarly, Ralph Lee argues that the *Andemta commentary*'s interpretation of the sources is so extensive that it makes it difficult to identify their literary connections.[42]

Ultimately, a dynamic post-critical reading of Scripture within the EOTC requires that clergy and theologians thoughtfully reintegrate early patristic exegesis into contemporary preaching and scholarship. Crucially, however, a positive appropriation of allegorical methodologies must be tempered by a commitment to textual discipline, ensuring that spiritual readings remain organically anchored in, rather than decoupled from, the historical-literal meaning. Relying exclusively on the allegorical interpretation of Scripture can be problematic, particularly when EOTC documents place excessive emphasis on the role of the contemporary interpreter, potentially distancing the text's meaning from its historical context and syntactical structure. A faithful reading of Scripture requires interpreters to first understand the text in its

[36] Lee, *Symbolic Interpretations in Ethiopian*, 35.
[37] Lee, *Symbolic Interpretations in Ethiopian*, 35.
[38] An, *Ethiopian Reading of the Bible*, 140.
[39] An, *Ethiopian Reading of the Bible*, 140, and see also Froelich, *Biblical Interpretation*, 63.
[40] Taddesse Tamrat, *Ethiopian and the Bible*, 78.
[41] Cowley, *Traditional Interpretation*, 41.
[42] Lee, *Symbolic Interpretations in Ethiopian*, 40.

historical context before seeking to uncover the deeper spiritual meanings embedded in it. Ultimately, the interpretation and application of Scripture should align with and uphold the overarching message of the Gospel.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article demonstrates that the *Andemta* commentary tradition of the EOTC represents a sophisticated, indigenous exegetical system—one that challenges strict modern dichotomies in patristic scholarship. Rather than adhering strictly to a single interpretive school, the *Andemta* commentary organically synthesizes both Alexandrian allegorical-typological and Antiochene literal-historical modalities, reshaping them in service of an ecclesial identity heavily formed by the early church doctrine. As evidenced in the debate over the *Aqedah* narrative and the origin of the sacrificial ram, attempts to reduce the tradition's readings to mere "homiletic application" overlook its structural commitment to multi-layered spiritual meanings. The *Andemta* tradition operates on the core principle that concrete historical events are embedded with deeper spiritual significance requiring allegorical illumination. Yet, this hermeneutical fluidity consistently preserves the historical and contextual reality of the biblical text within space and time.

Ultimately, the EOTC's dual-edged hermeneutic establishes a tradition that permits as many spiritual readings of a passage as possible, bounded mainly by fidelity to the church's dogmatic boundaries. This historical-exegetical heritage continues to exert a central, formative influence on contemporary ecclesial practice, directly stimulating the homiletical work of priests and bishops today. Looking forward, as EOTC scholars, theologians, and preachers retrieve these patristic and indigenous interpretive approaches within a post-critical context, this constructive appropriation must be paired with strong hermeneutical caution, ensuring that the pursuit of allegorical depth remains organically anchored in, rather than decoupled from, the foundational literal-historical text.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

An, Keon-Sang. *An Ethiopian Reading of the Bible: Biblical Interpretation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church.* Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015.

Berkhof, Louis. *Principles of Biblical Interpretation.* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950.

Cowley, Roger W. *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation: A Study in Exegetical Method and Hermeneutics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

———. *The Traditional Interpretation of the Apocalypse of St John in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

De Margerie, Bertrand. *An Introduction to the History of Exegesis. Vol. 3: Saint Augustine.* Peru, IL: Saint Bede Abbey, 1991.

Elowsky, Joel. "With a View to the End: Christ in the Ancient Church's Understanding of Scripture." *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 70, no.1 (2016): 63−83.

Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. *የቅዱስ ጳውሎስ መጽሐፍ ንባቡ ከትርጓሜው: Saint Paul's Book: Its Reading with Interpretation.* 2nd ed. Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam, 2007.

Fröhlich, Karlfried. *Sensing the Scriptures: Aminadab's Chariot and the Predicament of Biblical Interpretation.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014.

GebreAmanuel, Mekere Selase, Beluy Seyefe Selase Yohanns, Berhanu GebreAmanuel, and Meleak Tabor Teshome Zerihun, *የኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ተዋህዶ ቤተክርስቲያን ታሪክ ከልደተ ክርስቶስ እስከ ፳፻ ዓ.ም (2000): The History of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church from the Birth of Jesus to AD 2000*. Addis Ababa: EOTC, 2000.

Girma, Mohammed. "Whose Meaning? A Critical Look at Wax and Gold Tradition as a Philosophical Foundation for a Unique Ethiopian Hermeneutics." *Sophia* 1, no. 50: 2011.

Graves, Michael. *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church.* Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017.

Hill, Robert C., trans. *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Commentary on the Psalms 1-81.* Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006.

Lee, Ralph. "Symbolic Interpretations in Ethiopic and Ephremic Literature." PhD thesis, SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies). University of London, 2011, 40−53.

_____. *Symbolic Interpretations in Ethiopian and Early Syriac Literature*. Vol. 24. Leuven, Paris: Peeters, 2017.

O'Keefe, John J., and R. R. Russell. *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Biblical Interpretation.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.

Pedersen, Kirsten Stoffregen. *Traditional Ethiopian Exegesis of the Book of Psalms.* Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995.

Simonetti, Manlio. *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis.* Translated by John A. Hughes. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994.

Toom, Tarmo. *Patristic Theories of Biblical Interpretation: The Latin Fathers.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Torrance, Thomas F. *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics.* Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995.

Ullendorff, Edward. *Ethiopia and the Bible.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967.

Young, Frances M. *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.