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The Biblical Canon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church

1) Introduction

The topic of Biblical canon formation is a wide one, and has received increased attention in the last few decades, as many ancient manuscripts have been discovered, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the question arose as to whether the composition of the current Biblical canon(s) should be re-evaluated based on these and other findings. Not that the question had actually been settled before, as can be observed from the various Church councils throughout the last two thousand years with their decisions, and the fact that different Christian denominations often have very different books included in their Biblical Canons. Even Churches who are in communion with each other disagree over the question of which books belong in the Holy Bible.

One Church which occupies a unique position in this regard is the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church. Currently, it is the only Church whose Bible is comprised of

81 Books in total, 46 in the Old Testament, and 35 in the New Testament.¹ It is also the biggest Bible, according to the number of books: Protestant Bibles usually contain 66 books, Roman Catholic Bibles 73, and Eastern Orthodox Bibles have around 76 books, sometimes more, sometimes less, depending on their belonging to the Greek Orthodox, Slavonic Orthodox, or Georgian Orthodox Church.²

And although the Ethiopian Orthodox Church belongs to the group of Oriental Orthodox Churches which are in communion with each other, there is no common consensus among them as to which books make up the Biblical canon; for example, the Coptic Orthodox Church has the same canon as Western Protestant Churches, with the addition of the two Epistles of Clement in the New Testament (a total of 68 books).³

This paper will present the Biblical canon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church, and the various canons produced by synods and Church Fathers which have influenced the collection of Biblical books in this particular Church.

2) The Bible in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church

As mentioned above, the Bible of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church consists of 81 books, 46 in the Old Testament, and 35 in the new.⁴ With this, the Ethiopian Orthodox

¹ Cherenet Abebe. *Meseretawi yemetsehaf kidus atenan zede*. (Foundational Bible Study). Addis Abeba, 2011. p.91-92, 162-163

² Wikipedia, *Biblical canon*. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_canon (accessed November 26, 2011)

³ Wikipedia, *Development of the New Testament canon*. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_of_the_New_Testament_canon (accessed November 26, 2011)

⁴ Cherenet Abebe. *Meseretawi yemetsehaf kidus atenan zede*. (Foundational Bible Study).p.91-92, 162-163

Church has the most extensive collection of Biblical books considered to be canonical of all the major Christian denominations.⁵ The number of books as well as the exact titles are laid down in the *Feteha Negest* (Law of the Kings), a book of law used in Christian Ethiopia since at least the 16th century, based on an Arabic manuscript written by a Christian Egyptian in 1238, which lists the books of the Bible. In Section 2, it states the number is to be 81; the actual titles of the books are mentioned in the text as well as in “Reading and Explanation of the *Feteha Negest*” (a kind of commentary).

It should not come as a surprise that most of the “additional” books (those not accepted by all or most other Churches) are books that either have been considered canonical Scripture by one or more of the other Churches at some point, and/or are summarized as Apocrypha or Pseudepigrapha by them today, meaning that they constitute the books about which there always has been a certain amount of discussion as to whether they actually should be considered as canonical or not. However, some of the books that we find in the Ethiopian Biblical canon do not fulfill these criteria, either, but are completely unique to that particular Church.^{6 7}

Yet another curious thing is that, although the number of books in the Ethiopian Orthodox Bible is always 81, this number is most commonly reached in two different ways (although other ways did and do exist).⁸

⁵ Wikipedia, *Biblical canon* (accessed November 26, 2011)

⁶ Wikipedia, *Biblical canon* (accessed November 26, 2011)

⁷ R. W. Cowley, The Biblical Canon Of The Ethiopian Orthodox Church Today, in: *Ostkirchliche Studien*, 1974, Volume 23, pp. 318-323.

⁸ R. W. Cowley, The Biblical Canon Of The Ethiopian Orthodox Church Today, p. 318-323.

Furthermore, there is currently no distinction at all between the books that are referred to as protocanonical and deuterocanonical. Whereas the Ethiopian Orthodox Church understands and uses these terms when referring to the respective books in, for example, the Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Church, or in the ancient writing, like the Festal Letter of St. Athanasius (see below), it does not differentiate in its own Bible between proto- and deuterocanon. All books accepted into the Bible are considered equally inspired, equally the Word of God, and equally instructive (albeit for different situations and circumstances).⁹

a) Books of the Old Testament

In the official rendering, the number of the Old Testament books in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is 46, divided into four sections. Those books include^{10 11}:

- **Books of Law (the 5 Books of Moses):**

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy

- **Books of History**

⁹ Cherenet Abebe. *Meseretawi yemetsehaf kidus atenan zede*. (Foundational Bible Study). Addis Abeba, 2011. p.47-61

¹⁰ Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church. *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church: Faith, Order of Worship and Ecumenical Relations*, Addis Abeba, 1996. p.45-47

¹¹ Cherenet Abebe. *Meseretawi yemetsehaf kidus atenan zede*. (Foundational Bible Study). p.91f.

- Joshua
- Judges
- Ruth
- 1st and 2nd Samuel
- 1st and 2nd Kings
- 1st and 2nd Chronicles (2nd Chronicles includes the Prayer of Manasseh)
- Ezra and Nehemiah
- Ezra Sutel and 2nd Ezra
- Tobit
- Judith
- Esther
- 1st Meqabeyan
- 2nd and 3rd Meqabeyan
- Joseph Ben Guriyon
- Jubilees
- Enoch
- **Books of Psalms (Songs) and Wisdom**
 - Job
 - Psalms
 - Proverbs
 - Reproof (“Tsegats” in Ge’ez)
 - Ecclesiastes

- Song of Songs
- Wisdom (of Solomon)
- Sirach
- **Books of Prophecy**
 - Isaiah
 - Jeremiah (including Lamentations, the Remainder of Jeremiah, and Baruch)
 - Ezekiel
 - Daniel (including Susannah, the Prayer of the Three Children, and Bel and the Dragon)
 - Hosea
 - Amos
 - Micah
 - Joel
 - Obadiah
 - Jonah
 - Nahum
 - Habakkuk
 - Zephaniah
 - Haggai
 - Zechariah
 - Malachi

It should be noted that the three books of “Meqabeyan” are not identical with the books of “Macabees”, although there is a certain overlap regarding content.

As mentioned above, this is the official rendering. In the actual Bible which is currently on the market, the arrangement is somewhat different: 1st and 2nd Samuel have been printed as individual books in it, similarly 1st and 2nd Kings, 1st and 2nd Chronicles, and 2nd and 3rd Meqabeyan. Also, Ezra and Nehemiah have been separated, as have Ezra Sutuel and 2nd Ezra. All the writings of Jeremiah, which are one book in the official rendering, have been separated in the actual printing: Jeremiah, Baruch, Lamentations, and the Remainder of Jeremiah; there is also a book titled “the Remainder of Baruch”. The book of Joseph Ben Guriyon has been eliminated. In the actual print version, therefore, the number of Old Testament books is 54. The order also varies; in the print version it is: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1st and 2nd Samuel, 1st and 2nd Kings, 1st and 2nd Chronicles, Jubilees, Enoch, Ezra, Nehemiah, Ezra Sutuel, 2nd Ezra, Tobit, Judith, Esther, 1st Meqabeyan, 2nd Meqabeyan, 3rd Meqabeyan, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Reproof, Wisdom, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Sirach, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Baruch, Lamentations, Remainder of Jeremiah, Remainder of Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.¹²

¹² Ethiopian Bible Society. *Metsehaf Kidus* (The Holy Bible, Amharic version). Addis Abeba, 2007.

b) Books of the New Testament

As for the New Testament, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church receives the following books into its canon (in that order)^{13 14}:

- **Gospels:**
 - Gospel of Matthew
 - Gospel of Mark
 - Gospel of Luke
 - Gospel of John

- **History:**
 - Acts (of the Apostles)

- **Epistles of Paul:**
 - Romans
 - 1st Corinthians
 - 2nd Corinthians
 - Galatians
 - Ephesians
 - Philippians
 - Colossians
 - 1st Thessalonians

¹³ Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church. *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church: Faith, Order of Worship and Ecumenical Relations*. p.45-47

¹⁴ Cherenet Abebe. *Meseretawi yemetsehaf kidus atenan zede*. (Foundational Bible Study). p.162f.

- 2nd Thessalonians
- 1st Timothy
- 2nd Timothy
- Tito
- Philemon
- Hebrews
- **Other Epistles**
 - 1st Peter
 - 2nd Peter
 - 1st John
 - 2nd John
 - 3rd John
 - James (called “Yaqob” in Ge’ez)
 - Jude
- **Prophecy**
 - Revelation of John
- **Books of Church Order** (based on the “Apostolic Constitutions” and the Epistles of Clement)
 - The Order of Zion
 - Commandments (Te’ezaz)
 - Abtils
 - “Gitzew”
 - 1st Book of Covenant

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- 2nd Book of Covenant
 - Clement
 - Didascalia

Except for the books of Church Order, the canon agrees mostly with that received by other Churches. As we see, in this official rendering, the number of books is 35, making a total of 81 with the 46 books of the Old Testament. In the actual printing, however, the 8 books of Church Order are not printed (as they are generally not widely available), so that in the printed version, the number of New Testament books is 27, making again a total of 81 with the actual 54 books of the Old Testament.

How the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church came to accept those 81 books, and which ancient canons played in a role in that decision will be the topic of the next few sections.

3) Canons influencing the Biblical Canon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church

There are two types of canons that mainly influenced the discussion in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as to which Books of the Bible should be considered canonical. Those are canons issued by the various synods and councils, for one, and canons proposed by Early Church Fathers in their writings.¹⁵ (Canons available in Ge'ez tend to be

¹⁵ Dibekulu Zewde. *81 Kidusat Metsaheftena Minchoch-Kenonat* (The 81 Holy Books and the Sources – Canons). Addis Abeba, 1995. p. 35-61

translations and/or compilations of these, not actually canons written by local Church scholars.)

a) Synodical canons

As for the canons issued by synods and councils, there are three which are considered to have had a major influence on the Ethiopian Church, not only in regard to Biblical books, but also regarding Church Law in general: the 85 Apostolic Canons, the Synod of Laodicea, and the Synod(s) of Carthage.¹⁶

i) The 85 Apostolic Canons

The Apostolic Canons are defined by the Encyclopedia Britannica as:

[A] collection of eighty-five rules for the regulation of clerical life, appended to the eighth book of the Apostolical Constitutions (q.v.). They are couched in brief legislative form though on no definite plan, and deal with the vexed questions of ecclesiastical discipline as they were raised towards the end of the 4th century . At least half of the canons are derived from earlier constitutions, and probably not many of them are the actual productions of the compiler, whose aim was to gloss over the real nature of the Constitutions, and secure their incorporation with the Epistles of Clement in the New Testament of his day . The Codex Alexandrinus does indeed append the Clementine Epistles to its text of the New Testament . The Canons may be a little later in date than

¹⁶ Dibekulu Zewde. *81 Kidusat Metsaheftena Minchoch-Kenonat* (The 81 Holy Books and the Sources – Canons). p. 35-48

the preceding Constitutions, but they are evidently from the same Syrian theological circle.¹⁷

Note that it states here that one of the goals of these canons was to have the Apostolic Constitutions and the Epistles of Clement included in the New Testament. This was at least partially successful in the Ethiopian Church, which does include the eight Books of the Constitutions (with the Epistles of Clement worked into them), and in its sister Church, the Coptic Church, which still lists the two Epistles of Clement as canonical in its New Testament.

Another encyclopedia defines the Apostolic Canons a little more neutrally:

The Apostolic Canons or Ecclesiastical Canons of the Same Holy Apostles^[2] is a collection of ancient ecclesiastical decrees concerning the government and discipline of the Early Christian Church, first found as last chapter of the eighth book of the Apostolic Constitutions and belonging to *genre* of the Church Orders.

These eighty-five canons were approved by the Eastern Council in Trullo in 692 but rejected by Pope Constantine. In the Western Church only fifty of these canons circulated, translated in Latin by Dionysius Exiguus in about 500 AD, and included in the Western collections and afterwards in the "Corpus Juris Canonici". Canon n. 85 contains a list of canonical books, thus it is important for the history of the Biblical canon.¹⁸

The work in which they are found, the Apostolic Constitutions (also called the Constitutions of the Holy Apostles), “contains eight treatises on Early Christian

¹⁷ *Apostolic Canons*. In: Encyclopedia Britannica, Volume V02, p. 201. Cambridge University Press, 1911

¹⁸ Wikipedia, *Canons of the Apostles*. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canons_of_the_Apostles (accessed November 25, 2011)

discipline, worship, and doctrine, intended to serve as a manual of guidance for the clergy, and to some extent for the laity. It purports to be the work of the Twelve Apostles, whose instructions, whether given by them as individuals or as a body.”¹⁹

The article continues to state:

The Church seems never to have regarded this work as of undoubted Apostolic authority. [...]. The Quinisext Council in 692 rejected most part of the work on account of the interpolations of heretics. Only that portion of it to which has been given the name *Canons of the Apostles* was received in the Eastern Christianity. Even if not regarded as of certain Apostolic origin, however, in antiquity the Apostolic Constitutions were held generally in high esteem and served as the basis for much ecclesiastical legislation. The Apostolic Constitutions were accepted as canonical by John of Damascus and, in a modified form, included in the 81 book canon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.²⁰

The already mentioned 85th, the last, canon, lists the Books of the Holy Bible that should be considered canonical:

Let the following books be esteemed venerable and holy by you, both of the clergy and laity. Of the Old Covenant: the five books of Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy; one of Joshua the son of Nun, one of the Judges, one of Ruth, four of the Kings, two of the Chronicles, two of Ezra, one of Esther, *one of Judith*, three of the Macabees, one of Job, one hundred and fifty psalms; three books of Solomon—Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs; sixteen prophets. And besides these, take care that your young persons learn the Wisdom of the very learned Sirach. But our sacred books,

¹⁹ Wikipedia, *Apostolic Constitutions*. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostolic_Constitutions (accessed November 25, 2011)

²⁰ Wikipedia, *Apostolic Constitutions* (accessed November 25, 2011)

that is, those of the New Covenant, are these: the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the fourteen Epistles of Paul; two Epistles of Peter, three of John, one of James, one of Jude; two Epistles of Clement; and the Constitutions dedicated to you the bishops by me Clement, in eight books; which it is not fit to publish before all, because of the mysteries contained in them; and the Acts of us the Apostles.²¹

A comparison between this and the other canons, and the list of canonical Books in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, will follow in a later section.

ii) The Synod of Laodicea

Another council which is considered influential in determining the Ethiopian Biblical Canon is the Synod of Laodicea. This was a regional synod of approximately thirty clerics from Asia Minor that assembled about 363–364 AD in Laodicea in Phrygia.

The major concerns of the Council involved regulating the conduct of church members. The Council expressed its decrees in the form of written rules or canons. Among the sixty canons decreed, several aimed at:

- Maintaining order among bishops, clerics and laypeople (canons 3–5, 11–13, 21–27, 40–44, 56–57)
- Enforcing modest behavior of clerics and laypeople (4, 27, 30, 36, 53–55)
- Regulating approach to heretics (canons 6–10, 31–34, 37), Jews (canons 16, 37–38) and pagans (canon 39)

²¹ Philip Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers (ANF) Vol. 07, Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004. p. 759

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- Outlawing the keeping of the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday) and encouraging rest on the Lord's Day (Sunday) (canon 29)
 - Outlining liturgical practices (canons 14–20, 21–23, 25, 28, 58–59)
 - Restrictions during Lent (canons 45, 49–52)
 - Admission and instruction of catechumens and neophytes (canons 45–48)
 - Specifying a Biblical canon (canons 59–60).²²

In regard to the determination of the Biblical Canon in the Church, the canons of interest are of course canons 59 and 60, which read as follows:

Canon LIX.

NO psalms composed by private individuals nor any uncanonical books may be read in the church, but only the Canonical Books of the Old and New Testaments.

Canon LX.

THESE are all the books of Old Testament appointed to be read: 1, Genesis of the world; 2, The Exodus from Egypt; 3, Leviticus; 4, Numbers; 5, Deuteronomy; 6, Joshua, the son of Nun; 7, Judges, Ruth; 8, Esther; 9, Of the Kings, First and Second; 10, Of the Kings, Third and Fourth; 11, Chronicles, First and Second; 12, Esdras, First and Second; 13, The Book of Psalms; 14, The Proverbs of Solomon; 15, Ecclesiastes; 16, The Song of Songs; 17, Job; 18, The Twelve Prophets; 19, Isaiah; 20, Jeremiah, and Baruch, the Lamentations, and the Epistle; 21, Ezekiel; 22, Daniel.

And these are the books of the New Testament: Four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; The Acts of the Apostles; Seven Catholic Epistles, to wit, one of

²² Wikipedia, *Council of Laodicea*. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Laodicea (accessed December 14, 2011)

James, two of Peter, three of John, one of Jude; Fourteen Epistles of Paul, one to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, one to the Galatians, one to the Ephesians, one to the Philippians, one to the Colossians, two to the Thessalonians, one to the Hebrews, two to Timothy, one to Titus, and one to Philemon.²³

The authenticity of Canon 60 is widely questioned^{24 25}, but is matched by a list drawn up by Cyril of Jerusalem around 350 AD.²⁶

iii) The Synod(s) of Carthage

Over time, several synods were held at the North-African city of Carthage, but in regard to the question of the Biblical canon, a crucial one was the Synod of 397 A.D., which issued a canon of the Bible reading as follows:

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua son of Nun, Judges, Ruth, 4 books of Kingdoms, 2 books of Chronicles, Job, the Davidic Psalter, 5 books of Solomon, 12 books of Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Tobias, Judith, Esther, 2 books of Ezra, 2 books of Macabees, and in the New Testament: 4 books of Gospels, 1 book of Acts of the Apostles, 13 letters of the Apostle Paul, 1 letter of his to the Hebrews, 2 of Peter, 3 of John, 1 of James, 1 of Jude, and one book of the Apocalypse of John.

²³ Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2-14, Synod of Laodicea*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004. p. 253f.

²⁴ Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2-14, Synod of Laodicea*. p. 253f

²⁵ *Council of Laodicea*. Available from: www.bible-researcher.com (accessed December 16, 2011)

²⁶ *Cyril of Jerusalem on the Canon*. Available from: www.bible-researcher.com (accessed December 16, 2011)

McDonald and Sanders consider that the Apocalypse of John was added during a later council at Carthage in 419 AD.²⁷

The decisions of this synod also go together with the Synod of Hippo in 393 AD, in the same region. This council is best known for the fact that for the first time a council of bishops listed and approved a canon of the Bible that corresponds to the modern Roman Catholic canon, if not the (Eastern) Orthodox canon (including the books classed by Roman Catholics as deuterocanonical books and by Protestants as "Apocrypha").²⁸

These three councils (Hippo 393 AD, Carthage 397 AD, Carthage 419 AD) were also the ones that Augustine of Hippo called on in regard to canonicity of Biblical books.²⁹

b) Canons of Church Fathers

Some individual Early Church Fathers have set forth in their writings also lists of books they considered as canonical for the Holy Bible. Among those, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church mainly recognizes St. Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, and Amphilochius of Iconium.

²⁷Lee McDonald and James A. Sanders, *The Canon Debate*. Hendrickson Publishers, 2002. Appendix D-2, note 19

²⁸ Wikipedia, *Synod of Hippo*. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synod_of_Hippo (accessed December 16, 2011)

²⁹ Wikipedia, *Christian Biblical Canons*. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_biblical_canons (accessed December 16, 2011)

i) The 39th Festal Letter of St. Athanasius

St. Athanasius was the 20th Bishop of Alexandria. His long episcopate lasted 45 years (June 8, 328 AD – May 3, 373 AD), about one third of which was spent in exile. He is considered to be a renowned Christian theologian, a Church Father, and the chief defender of Orthodoxy against Arianism of the fourth century.³⁰

In 367 AD, Athanasius wrote his Easter Letter, the 39th Festal Letter, in which he outlines the books that he considers to be canonical for the Church. It reads:

There are, then, of the Old Testament, twenty-two books in number; for, as I have heard, it is handed down that this is the number of the letters among the Hebrews; their respective order and names being as follows. The first is Genesis, then Exodus, next Leviticus, after that Numbers, and then Deuteronomy. Following these there is Joshua, the son of Nun, then Judges, then Ruth. And again, after these four books of Kings, the first and second being reckoned as one book, and so likewise the third and fourth as one book. And again, the first and second of the Chronicles are reckoned as one book. Again Ezra, the first and second are similarly one book. After these there is the book of Psalms, then the Proverbs, next Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. Job follows, then the Prophets, the twelve being reckoned as one book. Then Isaiah, one book, then Jeremiah with Baruch, Lamentations, and the epistle, one book; afterwards, Ezekiel and Daniel, each one book. Thus far constitutes the Old Testament.

Again it is not tedious to speak of the [books] of the New Testament. These are, the four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Afterwards, the Acts of the Apostles and Epistles (called Catholic), seven, viz. of James, one; of Peter, two; of John,

³⁰ Wikipedia, *Athanasius of Alexandria*. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athanasius_of_Alexandria (accessed December 14, 2011)

three; after these, one of Jude. In addition, there are fourteen Epistles of Paul, written in this order. The first, to the Romans; then two to the Corinthians; after these, to the Galatians; next, to the Ephesians; then to the Philippians; then to the Colossians; after these, two to the Thessalonians, and that to the Hebrews; and again, two to Timothy; one to Titus; and lastly, that to Philemon. And besides, the Revelation of John.³¹

One should note that, as far as similarities go,

Pope Damasus I, the Bishop of Rome in 382, promulgated a list of books which contained a New Testament canon identical to that of Athanasius. [The] synod in Hippo in 393 repeated Athanasius' and Damasus' New Testament list [...], and [the] synod in Carthage in 397 repeated Athanasius' and Damasus' complete New Testament list.³²

ii) The canon of Gregory Nazianzen

Gregory Nazianzen (also called Gregory of Nazianzus) (329 AD – January 25, 389 or 390 AD) was a 4th-century Archbishop of Constantinople, a contemporary of St. Athanasius. He made a significant impact on the shape of Trinitarian theology, and he is therefore remembered as the "Trinitarian Theologian". Much of his theological work continues to influence modern theologians, especially in regard to the relationship among the three Persons of the Trinity.³³ As for the Biblical canon, toward the end of his life, he drew up a list of canonical books in iambic verse:

³¹ Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2-04, Letter of Athanasius*. p. 1127

³² Wikipedia, Athanasius of Alexandria (accessed December 14, 2011)

³³ Wikipedia, *Gregory of Nazianzus*. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregory_of_Nazianzus (accessed December 14, 2011)

The divine oracles should always on the tongue and in the mind be rehearsed. For God will indeed give a reward for this labor, so that you may obtain light from anything hidden, or, what is far better, that you may be spurred by God to greater purity, and thirdly, be called away from the cares of the world by such study. But let not extraneous books seduce your mind. For many malignant writings have been disseminated. Accept, o friend, this my approved number. These are all twelve of the historical books, . of the most ancient Hebrew wisdom: First there is Genesis, then Exodus, Leviticus too. Then Numbers, and the Second Law. Then Joshua and Judges. Ruth is eighth. The ninth and tenth books [are] the acts of Kings, and [the eleventh is] Chronicles. Last you have Ezra. The poetic books are five: Job being first, then [the Psalms of] David; and three of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Canticles and Proverbs. And similarly five of prophetic inspiration. There are the Twelve written in one book: Hosea and Amos, and Micah the third; then Joel, and Jonah, Obadiah, Nahum also, and Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, Haggai, then Zechariah, and Malachi. All these are one. The second is of Isaiah. Then the one called as an infant, Jeremiah, Then Ezekiel, and the gift of Daniel. I count therefore, twenty-two of the ancient books, corresponding to the number of the Hebrew letters. Now count also those of the new mystery. Matthew wrote the miracles of Christ for the Hebrews, Mark for Italy, Luke for Greece; John for all, the great herald, who walked in the heavens. Then the acts of the wise apostles. Of Paul there are fourteen epistles. , And the seven catholic, [which include] one of James, two of Peter, three of John also; and Jude is the seventh. You have them all. And if there are any beyond these, they are not genuine.³⁴

Concerning the Old Testament, he agrees with Athanasius, but as to the New Testament, he differs by placing the Catholic Epistles after the Pauline Epistles and, more

³⁴ J.P. Migne *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 37, cols. 471-474 (*Carmina Dogmatica, Book I, Section I, Carmen XII.*)

significantly, in omitting the Revelation of John. However, Gregory knew of the existence of the Revelation of John, and on rare occasions in his other works he quoted from it.

iii) The canon of Amphilochius of Iconium

Amphilochius of Iconium was a Christian bishop of the fourth century, son of a well-known Cappadocian family, born perhaps at Caesarea, around 339 or 340 AD, and died sometime between 394 and 403 AD; he is considered to be first cousin to Gregory Nazianzen.³⁵ A poem called “Iambics for Seleucus” is traditionally attributed to him; it lists the books to be considered canonical for the Church:

For this reason I will state for you the divinely inspired books one by one, so that you may learn them clearly. I will first recite those of the Old Testament. The Pentateuch has Creation, then Exodus, and Leviticus, the middle book, after which is Numbers, then Deuteronomy. Add to these Joshua, and Judges, then Ruth, and of Kingdoms the four books, and the double team of Chronicles; after these, Esdras, one and then the second. Then I would review for you five in verse: Job, crowned in the contests of many sufferings, and the Book of Psalms, soothing remedy for the soul, three of Solomon the Wise: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Canticle of Canticles. Add to these the Prophets Twelve, Hosea first, then Amos the second, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, and the type of Him who three days suffered, Jonah, Nahum after those, and Habakkuk; and ninth, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Zechariah, and twice-named angel Malachi. After these prophets learn yet another four: The great and fearless Isaiah, the sympathetic Jeremiah, and mysterious Ezekiel, and finally

³⁵ Wikipedia, *Amphilochius of Iconium*. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amphilochius_of_Iconium (accessed December 14, 2011)

Daniel, most wise in his deeds and words. With these, some approve the inclusion of Esther. Time now for me to recite the books of the New Testament. Accept only four Evangelists, Matthew, then Mark, to which Luke as third add; count John in time as fourth, but first in sublimity of dogma. Son of Thunder rightly he is called, who loudly sounded forth the Word of God. Accept from Luke a second book also, that of the catholic Acts of the Apostles. Add to these besides that Chosen Vessel, Herald of the Gentiles, the Apostle Paul, writing in wisdom to the churches twice seven epistles, one to the Romans, to which must be added two to the Corinthians, and that to the Galatians, and to the Ephesians, after which there is the one to the Philippians, then those written, to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians two, two to Timothy, and to Titus and Philemon one each, and to the Hebrews one. Some call that to the Hebrews spurious, but they say it not well; for the grace is genuine. What then is left? Of the Catholic epistles some say seven, others only three must be accepted: one of James, one of Peter, one of John, otherwise three of John, and with them two of Peter, and also Jude's, the seventh. The Apocalypse of John, again, some approve, but most will call it spurious. This would be the most unerring canon of the divinely inspired scriptures.³⁶

The common thread of the synodical canons and the canons issued by the Church Fathers seems to be, in the end, the council of Trullo (Quinisext Council), held in Constantinople in 692 AD. During this council, the following lists of canons were endorsed: the Apostolic Canons, the Council of Laodicea, the third Synod of Carthage (397 AD), and the 39th Festal Letter of Athanasius. This hardly served to clarify things, since the canons do differ, as shown below. Why the Ethiopian Orthodox additionally considers Gregory Nazianzen and Amphilochius of Iconium as authoritative is currently

³⁶ *Amphilochius of Iconium*. Available at: www.bible-researcher.com (accessed on December 16, 2011)

open to speculation; one reason might be simply geographical obstacles: Ethiopia, being relatively far from the other Churches, would probably not receive all decisions on all Church councils, and all writings. So, it could be that it would simply rely on those with it did receive and which fit into its theological beliefs and concepts.

4) Biblical canons in Ge'ez (Ethiopic)

The main foundation for most of the Biblical canons found in Ge'ez (or Ethiopic, as Ge'ez is sometimes wrongly called) are the Apostolic Constitutions, and the 85 Apostolic canons found therein (see above). Those were used both in their original forms as well as in modifications and combinations with other canons.

a) Feteha Negest – the Nomocanon

The “Feteha Negest” (Law of the Kings) is the Ethiopian nomocanon, a collection of ecclesiastical law that contains elements from both Civil Law and Canon Law.³⁷ The Feteha Negest itself was originally compiled around 1240 AD by a Coptic Egyptian writer, Abdul Fada'il Ibn al-'Assal. It was later translated into Ge'ez in Ethiopia (probably around 1450 AD during the reign of Emperor Zera Yaqob), and numerous local laws were added. Ibn al'-Assal took his laws partly from Apostolic writings, and partly from former law codes of Byzantine rulers. The first part deals with Church Law, including the Church hierarchy, sacraments, and so forth. The basis for it were the Bible, writings of Early Church Fathers (such as St. Basil and St. Hippolytus), and various

³⁷ Wikipedia, *Nomocanon*. Available from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nomocanon> (accessed December 19, 2011)

canons adopted at the Council of Nicea, the Council of Carthage, and others; these canons also include in particular the 85 Apostolic Canons. There is also a considerable overlap with the Books of Synodos discussed below (mostly because they are based on a lot of the same canons) . The second part of the *Feteha Negest* covers secular issues, such as family law, debt, civil administration, and the like.³⁸

In Part I, Paragraph 2, the canonical Books of the Bible are listed as:

The five Books of the Law, Joshua the son of Nun, the Book of Judges, the Book of Ruth, the Book of Judith, the First and Second Book of Kings, the Third and Fourth Book [of Kings], the First and Second Book of Chronicles, the two Books of the writer Ezra, the Book of Esther, the Book of Tobit, the two Books of Meqabyan, the Book of Job, the Book of the Psalms of David, the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon, the Book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, and the Wisdom of Baruch. [Further] The 16 Books of the Prophets, [among them] the four major one, who are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. The 12 minor ones are Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. [Also] The Wisdom of Sirach, given by his (grand-)son Jesus for the instruction of children. Further also the Book of Joseph Ben Guriyon, which is a Book of the Meqabyan.

From the new Books [i.e. the New Testament], the four Gospels of the preachers Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the Acts of the Apostles; seven Books of the Apostles, the Epistles, which are two from Peter, three Epistles from John the Evangelist, one Epistle of

³⁸ Wikipedia, *Fetha Negest*. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fetha_negest (accessed December 19, 2011)

James, one Epistle of Jude. Fourteen Books of Paul, his Epistles, and the Book of the Revelation of John.³⁹ (Translation mine)

This is the list we find in the original Feteha Negest text, comprising 73 books; however, as basically every other authoritative book used in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Feteha Negest has its own commentary, called “The Reading and Explanation of the Feteha Negest”. In this commentary, the list of canonical books differs from the list given above in the New Testament: it adds eight additional books, referred to as Books of Church Order. These books include the four books of “Sinodos” (The Order of Zion, Commandment (Te’ezaz), Abtils, Gitzew), two “Books of Covenant”, “Clement” and “Didascalía”.^{40 41} The last two are also called “Ethiopic Clement” and “Ethiopic Didascalía”, since there is quite a difference between them and the manuscripts traditionally referred to as Clement and Didascalía.

The addition of the eight books in the commentary explains a discrepancy in the original text: it states explicitly that the number of books in the Bible is to be 81, but then goes on to list only 73. The 8 Books of Church Orders as given in the commentary make up the missing 8 books.

³⁹ *Feteha Negest (Law of the Kings)*. Tesfa Gebreselassie Printing Press, Addis Abeba, 1999. p.23f.

⁴⁰ Wikipedia, *Development of the New Testament Canon* (accessed November 26, 2011)

⁴¹ Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church: Faith, Order of Worship and Ecumenical Relations*, Addis Abeba, 1996. p.47

b) The “Synodos” – a collection of canons

The Book(s) of Synodos represent a collection of Church canons; sources claim that all of the canons were originally based on the 85 Apostolic Canons, but, as they were translated from the original into Ge’ez, changed in number due to contractions or expansions/divisions of certain canons.⁴² This “Synodos” is not to be confused with the Books of Synodos among the Books of Church Orders in the Ethiopian New Testament. Although there is of course considerable overlap (some of them even have the same or similar names in Ge’ez), the Books are nevertheless distinct.⁴³ (Please note that the book titles of the Book(s) of Canons are literal translations from Ge’ez)

The interesting thing for the topic at hand is that all of these Books of Synodos contain canons listing the canonical Books of the Bible, with marked differences among them.

(1) Canons of the Church (57) (“Te’ezaz” or “Restedj”)

The first among the Books of Synodos, and therefore the first of the four Ge’ez translations/compilations, it contains 57 canons which are claimed to have come from the 85 Apostolic Canons. Canon 56 lists the books of the Bible considered to be canonical.⁴⁴

Of the Old Testament:

⁴² Dibekulu Zewde. *81 Kidusat Metsaheftena Minchoch-Kenonat* (The 81 Holy Books and the Sources – Canons). p. 93ff.

⁴³ Dibekulu Zewde. *81 Kidusat Metsaheftena Minchoch-Kenonat* (The 81 Holy Books and the Sources – Canons). p. 93ff.

⁴⁴ Dibekulu Zewde. *81 Kidusat Metsaheftena Minchoch-Kenonat* (The 81 Holy Books and the Sources – Canons). p. 96-99

1. The five Books of Moses
 - 1.1. Genesis
 - 1.2. Exodus
 - 1.3. Leviticus
 - 1.4. Numbers
 - 1.5. Deuteronomy
2. The Law of Joshua, son of Nun
3. Judges
4. Ruth
5. Books of Kings, 4
6. Chronicles, 2
7. Books of Ezra, 2
8. Book of Job
9. Book of Esther
10. Book of Tobit
11. Ecclesiastes
12. Reproof (consisting of the Proverbs, chapters 25 to 31)
13. Psalms of David, 150
14. Proverbs of Solomon
15. Song of Songs
16. The 12 minor prophets
 - 16.1. Hosea
 - 16.2. Amos

- 16.3. Micah
 - 16.4. Joel
 - 16.5. Obadiah
 - 16.6. Jonah
 - 16.7. Nahum
 - 16.8. Habakkuk
 - 16.9. Zephaniah
 - 16.10. Zechariah
 - 16.11. Haggai
 - 16.12. Malachi
 - 17. The 4 major prophets
 - 17.1. Isaiah
 - 17.2. Jeremiah
 - 17.3. Daniel
 - 17.4. Ezekiel
 - 18. Wisdom of Solomon
 - 19. Books of Meqabyan, 2
 - 20. Wisdom of Sirach
 - 21. Judith
 - 22. Jubilees
- Of the New Testament:
- 1. The 4 Gospels
 - 1.1. Matthew

- 1.2. Mark
- 1.3. Luke
- 1.4. John
2. Epistles of the Apostles, 7
 - 2.1. 1st Peter
 - 2.2. 2nd Peter
 - 2.3. 1st John
 - 2.4. 2nd John
 - 2.5. 3rd John
 - 2.6. James
 - 2.7. Jude
3. Acts of the Apostles
4. The Epistles of Paul, 14
 - 4.1. Romans
 - 4.2. 1st Corinthians
 - 4.3. 2nd Corinthians
 - 4.4. Galatians
 - 4.5. Ephesians
 - 4.6. Philippians
 - 4.7. Colossians
 - 4.8. 1st Thessalonians
 - 4.9. 2nd Thessalonians
 - 4.10. 1st Timothy

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- 4.11. 2nd Timothy
 - 4.12. Tito
 - 4.13. Philemon
 - 4.14. Hebrews
 5. Apocalypsis, as seen by John
 6. The Epistles of Clement and 8 collections of canons:⁴⁵
 - 6.1. The First Orders of Clement
 - 6.2. The Second Orders of Clement
 - 6.3. The Third Orders of Clement
 - 6.4. The Fourth Orders of Clement
 - 6.5. The Fifth Orders of Clement
 - 6.6. The Sixth Orders of Clement
 - 6.7. The Seventh Orders of Clement
 - 6.8. The Eighth Orders of Clement

Note that the number of books does indeed add up to 81 (45+36), the number prescribed by the Feteha Negest.

⁴⁵ Note: this is what it says in the 85th Apostolic Canon, where it mentions both the Epistles of Clement and the eight Books of Orders; however, in this list, only the eight Books of Orders are found. They are also called here “Orders of Clement”, since they were originally thought to have originated from Clement. Cf. Philip Schaff, *ANF Vol. 07, Constitutions of the Apostles*, p. 759.

(2) Canons of the Holy Apostles (82) (“Abtilisat” or
“Reste-a”)

This is the second book in Ge’ez claiming to be a translation/compilation of the 85 Apostolic Canons, containing 82 canons. It might be considered to have a slightly higher status than the others, since it is the only one of the books that we mention during Holy Mass, in the Preparatory Service: “Kämāz māharunä Hawaryat bAbtilisomu” – “The Apostles have taught us this in their canons.”⁴⁶ In this collection, we find the list of canonical Biblical Books in the 81st canon.⁴⁷

Of the Old Testament:

1. First Book of the Law, Genesis
2. Exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt
3. Leviticus
4. Numbers
5. Deuteronomy
6. Joshua, son of Nun
7. Judges
8. Ruth
9. Jubilees
10. Kings (4 Books)

⁴⁶ *The Liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church*. Tensae Publishing House, 2010, Addis Abeba. p. 35

⁴⁷ Dibekulu Zewde. *81 Kidusat Metsaheftena Minchoch-Kenonat* (The 81 Holy Books and the Sources – Canons). p. 102-104

11. Chronicles (2 Books)
12. Books of Ezra (2 Books)
13. Book of Job
14. Psalms of David
15. Books of Solomon (5 Books)
 - 15.1. Proverbs of Solomon
 - 15.2. Ecclesiastes
 - 15.3. Song of Songs
 - 15.4. Wisdom of Solomon
 - 15.5. Reproof (see above)
16. 4 major prophets
 - 16.1. Prophecy of Isaiah
 - 16.2. Prophecy of Jeremiah
 - 16.3. Prophecy of Ezekiel
 - 16.4. Prophecy of Daniel
17. 12 minor prophets
 - 17.1. Prophecy of Hosea
 - 17.2. Prophecy of Amos
 - 17.3. Prophecy of Micah
 - 17.4. Prophecy of Joel
 - 17.5. Prophecy of Obadiah
 - 17.6. Prophecy of Jonah
 - 17.7. Prophecy of Nahum

- 17.8. Prophecy of Habakkuk
- 17.9. Prophecy of Zephaniah
- 17.10. Prophecy of Haggai
- 17.11. Prophecy of Zechariah
- 17.12. Prophecy of Malachi
- 18. Book of Judith
- 19. Book of Tobit
- 20. Book of Esther
- 21. Book of Meqabyan (1 Meqabyan)
- 22. Book of Sirach

Of the New Testament:

- 1. The four Gospels
 - 1.1. The Gospel of Matthew
 - 1.2. The Gospel of Mark
 - 1.3. The Gospel of Luke
 - 1.4. The Gospel of John
- 2. Acts of the Apostles
- 3. Epistles of the Apostles, 7
 - 3.1. Epistles of Peter, 2
 - 3.2. Epistles of John, 3
 - 3.3. Epistle of James
 - 3.4. Epistle of Jude
 - 3.5. Epistles of Paul, 14

- 3.5.1. Romans
 - 3.5.2. 1st Corinthians
 - 3.5.3. 2nd Corinthians
 - 3.5.4. Galatians
 - 3.5.5. Ephesians
 - 3.5.6. Philippians
 - 3.5.7. Colossians
 - 3.5.8. 1st Thessalonians
 - 3.5.9. 2nd Thessalonians
 - 3.5.10. 1st Timothy
 - 3.5.11. 2nd Timothy
 - 3.5.12. Tito
 - 3.5.13. Philemon
 - 3.5.14. Hebrews
- 4. Apocalypsis
 - 5. Eight Orders of the Apostles with Clement (eight Books of Clement)
 - 5.1. 1st Book of Clement
 - 5.2. 2nd Book of Clement
 - 5.3. 3rd Book of Clement
 - 5.4. 4th Book of Clement
 - 5.5. 5th Book of Clement
 - 5.6. 6th Book of Clement
 - 5.7. 7th Book of Clement

5.8. 8th Book of Clement

5.9. Epistle of Clement

Also in this canonical list, we reach the number of 81 Books, although this time with 45 Books in the Old and 36 Books in the New Testament.

(3) Constitutions of the Apostles (80) (“Sere-at”)

The third of the Ge’ez translations/compilations, this one contains 80 canons in total.

The last canon, the 80th, gives the list of canonical Bible Books as follows.⁴⁸

Of the Old Testament:

1. Genesis
2. Exodus
3. Leviticus
4. Numbers
5. Deuteronomy
6. Joshua
7. Judges
8. Ruth
9. Kings (4 Books)
10. Chronicles (2 Books)
11. Books of Ezra (2 Books)

⁴⁸ Dibekulu Zewde. *81 Kidusat Metsaheftena Minchoch-Kenonat* (The 81 Holy Books and the Sources – Canons).p. 106f.

12. Psalms of David

13. Books of Solomon (3 Books)

13.1. Proverbs of Solomon

13.2. Ecclesiastes

13.3. Song of Songs

14. Book of Job

15. 12 minor prophets

15.1. Prophecy of Hosea

15.2. Prophecy of Amos

15.3. Prophecy of Micah

15.4. Prophecy of Joel

15.5. Prophecy of Obadiah

15.6. Prophecy of Jonah

15.7. Prophecy of Nahum

15.8. Prophecy of Habakkuk

15.9. Prophecy of Zephaniah

15.10. Prophecy of Haggai

15.11. Prophecy of Zechariah

15.12. Prophecy of Malachi

16. 4 major prophets

16.1. Prophecy of Isaiah

16.2. Prophecy of Jeremiah

16.3. Prophecy of Ezekiel

16.4. Prophecy of Daniel

Of the New Testament:

1. The four Gospels
 - 1.1. The Gospel of Matthew
 - 1.2. The Gospel of Mark
 - 1.3. The Gospel of Luke
 - 1.4. The Gospel of John
2. Acts of the Apostles
3. Epistles of the Apostles, 7
 - 3.1. Epistles of Peter, 2
 - 3.2. Epistles of John, 3
 - 3.3. Epistle of James
 - 3.4. Epistle of Jude
4. Epistles of Paul, 14
 - 4.1. Romans
 - 4.2. 1st Corinthians
 - 4.3. 2nd Corinthians
 - 4.4. Galatians
 - 4.5. Ephesians
 - 4.6. Philippians
 - 4.7. Colossians
 - 4.8. 1st Thessalonians
 - 4.9. 2nd Thessalonians

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- 4.10. 1st Timothy
 - 4.11. 2nd Timothy
 - 4.12. Tito
 - 4.13. Philemon
 - 4.14. Hebrews

This is the one collection in Synodos where the number of Books does not add up to 81. Here, we have 37 Books in the Old Testament and 26 in the New Testament, making up a total of 63 Books.

(4) Canons of the Apostles (81) (“Abtilis”)

The fourth and final Ge’ez translation/compilation based on the 85 Apostolic Canons, it lists the books of the Ethiopian Biblical Canon in canon 80.⁴⁹

Of the Old Testament:

1. Genesis
 2. Exodus
 3. Leviticus
 4. Numbers
 5. Deuteronomy
 6. Joshua, son of Nun
 7. Judges
 8. Ruth
-

⁴⁹ Dibekulu Zewde. *81 Kidusat Metsaheftena Minchoch-Kenonat* (The 81 Holy Books and the Sources – Canons). p. 108-111

9. Jubilees
10. Kings (4 Books)
11. Chronicles (2 Books)
12. Books of Ezra (2 Books)
13. Book of Job
14. Psalms of David
15. Books of Solomon (5 Books)
 - 15.1. Proverbs of Solomon
 - 15.2. Ecclesiastes
 - 15.3. Song of Songs of Solomon
 - 15.4. Wisdom of Solomon
 - 15.5. Reproof (see above)
16. 4 major prophets
 - 16.1. Prophecy of Isaiah
 - 16.2. Prophecy of Jeremiah
 - 16.3. Prophecy of Ezekiel
 - 16.4. Prophecy of Daniel
17. 12 minor prophets
 - 17.1. Prophecy of Hosea
 - 17.2. Prophecy of Amos
 - 17.3. Prophecy of Micah
 - 17.4. Prophecy of Joel
 - 17.5. Prophecy of Obadiah

17.6. Prophecy of Jonah

17.7. Prophecy of Nahum

17.8. Prophecy of Habakkuk

17.9. Prophecy of Zephaniah

17.10. Prophecy of Haggai

17.11. Prophecy of Zechariah

17.12. Prophecy of Malachi

18. Book of Judith

19. Book of Tobit

20. Book of Esther

21. Books of Meqabyan (2 Books)

22. Wisdom of Sirach

Of the New Testament:

1. The four Gospels

1.1. The Gospel of Matthew

1.2. The Gospel of Mark

1.3. The Gospel of Luke

1.4. The Gospel of John

2. Acts of the Apostles Epistles of the Apostles, 7

2.1. Acts of the Apostles

2.2. Epistles of Peter, 2

2.3. Epistles of John, 3

2.4. Epistle of James

-
- 2.5. Epistle of Jude
 - 3. Epistles of Paul, 14
 - 3.1. Romans
 - 3.2. 1st Corinthians
 - 3.3. 2nd Corinthians
 - 3.4. Galatians
 - 3.5. Ephesians
 - 3.6. Philippians
 - 3.7. Colossians
 - 3.8. 1st Thessalonians
 - 3.9. 2nd Thessalonians
 - 3.10. 1st Timothy
 - 3.11. 2nd Timothy
 - 3.12. Tito
 - 3.13. Philemon
 - 3.14. Hebrews
 - 4. Apocalypse
 - 5. Eight Books of Clement

Here again, we reach the prescribed number of 81 books, with the common (and also current) division of 46 books in the Old Testament, and 35 books in the New.

**c) *The Council of Scholars of the Ethiopian Orthodox
Tewahdo Church***

Such a council of scholars of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church meets usually once or twice a year. Historically, that has not always been possible, due to war, natural calamities, and the like. However, as many times as they could, these scholars would meet and settle doctrinal and canonical issues for the Church. In previous times, those decisions would mostly be communicated to the clergy, who would then pass it on to the laity on a need-to-know basis. With the rise of Emperor Haile Selassie I, however, who was a very religious man, changes started to happen; in particular, he started printing these decisions of the Church councils. The major printings are from the years 1918, 1929, 1947(1953), and 1980.⁵⁰

However, as to the canonicity of Biblical books, these proclamations (just like the various canons) do not agree with each other, but they do account for some so far inexplicable details. For example, the Ethiopian Bible contains a book titled Ezra Sutuel (sometimes also referred to as 3rd Ezra), which did not appear in any of the canons so far, including the Ge'ez compilations. The inclusion of this book in the Ethiopian Bible was actually ratified by the council of Church scholars. They also clarified and specified what was meant by the "Eight Books of Church Order" (or Eight Books of Clement), and permitted their inclusion in the Bible. However, these scholars of course did not operate

⁵⁰ Dibekulu Zewde. *81 Kidusat Metsaheftena Minchoch-Kenonat* (The 81 Holy Books and the Sources – Canons). p. 118

simply by themselves; they would also mainly rely on the Books of Synodos as mentioned above regarding questions about the canonicity of certain Biblical books.⁵¹

The current list as accepted by the council for Church scholars for the canonical books of the Bible is:⁵²

Of the Old Testament:

1. Genesis
2. Exodus
3. Leviticus
4. Numbers
5. Deuteronomy
6. Joshua, son of Nun
7. Judges
8. Ruth
9. Kings (4 Books)
10. Chronicles (2 Books)
11. Books of Ezra (2 Books)
12. Ezra Sutuel
13. Book of Nehemiah
14. Book of Tobit

⁵¹ Dibekulu Zewde. *81 Kidusat Metsaheftena Minchoch-Kenonat* (The 81 Holy Books and the Sources – Canons). p. 119-121

⁵² Dibekulu Zewde. *81 Kidusat Metsaheftena Minchoch-Kenonat* (The 81 Holy Books and the Sources – Canons). p. 121-123

15. Book of Judith
16. Book of Esther
17. 1st Meqabyan
18. 2nd Meqabyan
19. Book of Job
20. Psalms of David
21. Proverbs of Solomon
22. Reproof
23. Wisdom (of Solomon)
24. Song of Solomon
25. Wisdom of Sirach
26. Prophecy of Isaiah
27. Prophecy of Jeremiah
28. Prophecy of Ezekiel
29. Prophecy of Daniel
30. Prophecy of Hosea
31. Prophecy of Amos
32. Prophecy of Micah
33. Prophecy of Joel
34. Prophecy of Obadiah
35. Prophecy of Jonah
36. Prophecy of Nahum
37. Prophecy of Habakkuk

38. Prophecy of Zephaniah

39. Prophecy of Haggai

40. Prophecy of Zechariah

41. Prophecy of Malachi

Of the New Testament:

1. The Gospel of Matthew

2. The Gospel of Mark

3. The Gospel of Luke

4. The Gospel of John

5. Acts of the Apostles

6. Romans

7. 1st Corinthians

8. 2nd Corinthians

9. Galatians

10. Ephesians

11. Philippians

12. Colossians

13. 1st Thessalonians

14. 2nd Thessalonians

15. 1st Timothy

16. 2nd Timothy

17. Tito

18. Philemon

-
19. Hebrews
 20. Epistle of James
 21. Epistles of Peter, 2
 22. Epistles of John, 3
 23. Epistle of Jude
 24. Apocalypsis – Revelation of John
 25. Eight Books of the Covenant
 - 25.1. 1st Book of the Covenant
 - 25.2. 2nd Book of the Covenant
 - 25.3. Order of Zion
 - 25.4. Te'ezaz (Commandment)
 - 25.5. Gitzew
 - 25.6. Abtilis
 - 25.7. Didascalia
 - 25.8. Book of Clement

Once again, we reach the number of 81 Books with 46 Books in the Old Testament, and 35 Books in the New Testament. This is the current official list of the Biblical canonical books for the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church. However, as mentioned in the section “The Bible in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church”, in actual printings, the Eight Books of Church Order (or Eight Books of the Covenant) do not show up; this might be due to the warning given by Clement himself, in the 85th Apostolic Canon, where he says: “And the Constitutions dedicated to you the bishops by me Clement, in eight books; which it is not fit to publish before all, because of the mysteries contained in

them.”⁵³ In the printed versions, other changes are also made (for example, the Book of Joseph Ben Guriyon is not in the list – it is however found in the current Amharic Bible, as are the Book of Jubilees and the Book of Enoch).

5) Similarities and differences between the various canons **(synodical, Church Fathers, Ge’ez canons)**

First, we compare the synodical canons with the canons of the Church Fathers that we discussed. The Old Testament Books list as follows:⁵⁴

85 Apostolic Canons	Council of Laodicea	Council(s) of Carthage	St. Athanasius	St. Gregory Nazianzen	Amphilochi- us of Iconium
Genesis	Genesis	Genesis	Genesis	Genesis	Genesis
Exodus	Exodus	Exodus	Exodus	Exodus	Exodus
Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus
Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers
Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy
Joshua	Joshua	Joshua	Joshua	Joshua	Joshua
Judges	Judges	Judges	Judges	Judges	Judges
Ruth	Ruth	Ruth	Ruth	Ruth	Ruth
1 st Kings	1 st Kings	1 st Kings	1 st Kings	1 st Kings	1 st Kings
2 nd Kings	2 nd Kings	2 nd Kings	2 nd Kings	2 nd Kings	2 nd Kings
3 rd Kings	3 rd Kings	3 rd Kings	3 rd Kings	3 rd Kings	3 rd Kings
4 th Kings	4 th Kings	4 th Kings	4 th Kings	4 th Kings	4 th Kings

⁵³ Philip Schaff, *ANF Vol. 07*. p. 759

⁵⁴ Dibekulu Zewde. *81 Kidusat Metsaheftena Minchoch-Kenonat* (The 81 Holy Books and the Sources – Canons). p. 62-64

1 st Chron.	1 st Chron.	1 st Chron.	1 st Chron.	1 st Chron.	1 st Chron.
2 nd Chron.	2 nd Chron.	2 nd Chron.	2 nd Chron.	2 nd Chron.	2 nd Chron.
1 st Ezra	1 st Ezra	1 st Ezra	1 st Ezra	1 st Ezra	1 st Ezra
2 nd Ezra	2 nd Ezra	2 nd Ezra	2 nd Ezra	2 nd Ezra	2 nd Ezra
(Nehemiah	Nehemiah	Nehemiah	Nehemiah	Nehemiah	Nehemiah)
Esther	Esther	Esther	Esther	---	Esther
---	---	Judith	Judith	---	---
---	---	Tobit	Tobit	---	---
1 st Meqa.	---	1 st Meqa.	---	---	---
2 nd Meqa.	---	2 nd Meqa.	---	---	---
3 rd Meqa.	---	---	---	---	---
Psalms	Psalms	Psalms	Psalms	Psalms	Psalms
Job	Job	Job	Job	Job	Job
Proverbs	Proverbs	Proverbs	Proverbs	Proverbs	Proverbs
Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes	Ecclesiastes
Song	Song	Song	Song	Song	Song
---	---	Wisdom	Wisdom	---	---
Sirach	---	---	Sirach	---	---
Hosea	Hosea	Hosea	Hosea	Hosea	Hosea
Amos	Amos	Amos	Amos	Amos	Amos
Micah	Micah	Micah	Micah	Micah	Micah
Joel	Joel	Joel	Joel	Joel	Joel
Obadiah	Obadiah	Obadiah	Obadiah	Obadiah	Obadiah
Jonah	Jonah	Jonah	Jonah	Jonah	Jonah
Nahum	Nahum	Nahum	Nahum	Nahum	Nahum
Habakkuk	Habakkuk	Habakkuk	Habakkuk	Habakkuk	Habakkuk
Zephaniah	Zephaniah	Zephaniah	Zephaniah	Zephaniah	Zephaniah
Haggai	Haggai	Haggai	Haggai	Haggai	Haggai
Zechariah	Zechariah	Zechariah	Zechariah	Zechariah	Zechariah
Malachi	Malachi	Malachi	Malachi	Malachi	Malachi
Isaiah	Isaiah	Isaiah	Isaiah	Isaiah	Isaiah

Tito	Tito	Tito	Tito	Tito	Tito
Philemon	Philemon	Philemon	Philemon	Philemon	Philemon
Hebrews	Hebrews	Hebrews	Hebrews	Hebrews	Hebrews
James	James	James	James	James	James
1 st Peter	1 st Peter	1 st Peter	1 st Peter	1 st Peter	1 st Peter
2 nd Peter	2 nd Peter	2 nd Peter	2 nd Peter	2 nd Peter	2 nd Peter
1 st John	1 st John	1 st John	1 st John	1 st John	1 st John
2 nd John	2 nd John	2 nd John	2 nd John	2 nd John	2 nd John
3 rd John	3 rd John	3 rd John	3 rd John	3 rd John	3 rd John
Jude	Jude	Jude	Jude	Jude	Jude
---	---	Apocalypsis	Apocalypsis	---	Apocalypsis
1 st Epis. Cl.	---	---	---	---	---
2 nd Epis. Cl.	---	---	---	---	---
1 st Clement	---	---	---	---	---
2 nd Clement	---	---	---	---	---
3 rd Clement	---	---	---	---	---
4 th Clement	---	---	---	---	---
5 th Clement	---	---	---	---	---
6 th Clement	---	---	---	---	---
7 th Clement	---	---	---	---	---
8 th Clement	---	---	---	---	---
36	26	27	27	26	27
Total: 78	Total: 67	Total: 70	Total: 72	Total: 63	Total: 65

From those comparisons, we can observe a number of things. Regarding the Old Testament, the 85 Apostolic Canons and the Council(s) of Carthage are the most inclusive ones, recognizing the Books of Meqabyan (three and two, respectively), which the other canons are entirely leaving out. On the other side, it is the canons of Laodicea and St. Athanasius who include the additional books of Jeremiah: Baruch, Lamentations,

and the Epistle of Jeremiah, which all the other canons are ignoring. We also see that the other highly contested books were Esther, Judith, Tobit, the Wisdom of Solomon, and Sirach – included in some canons, excluded in others, with no clear pattern observable.

In the New Testament, we also see the trend that the acceptance of the Revelation of John, or Apocalypse, was disputed for a long time, so some canons accept it, while others refuse it. A special place is taken by the Books and Epistles of Clement, which are only mentioned in the 85 Apostolic Canons, but then in none of the others.

Keep in mind that the Council of Trullo, the Quinisext Council (692 AD), ratified all the Apostolic Canons, the Canons of Laodicea, the Canons of Carthage, and the canon found in the letter of St. Athanasius – despite the obvious differences among them.

Let us now compare the 85 Apostolic Canons with the five Ge'ez translations/compilations (including the Feteha Negest), as well as with the list of the council of Church scholars of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

First, the Old Testament.⁵⁵

85 Apostolic Canons	Te'ezaz 57	Abtilisat 82	Sere-at 80	Abtilis 81	Feteha Negest	Council of Church Scholars
Genesis	Genesis	Genesis	Genesis	Genesis	Genesis	Genesis
Exodus	Exodus	Exodus	Exodus	Exodus	Exodus	Exodus
Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus
Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers
Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy
Joshua	Joshua	Joshua	Joshua	Joshua	Joshua	Joshua

⁵⁵ Dibekulu Zewde. *81 Kidusat Metsaheftena Minchoch-Kenonat* (The 81 Holy Books and the Sources – Canons). p. 124-126

---	Reproof	Reproof	---	Reproof	---	Reproof
---	Tobit	Tobit	---	Tobit	Tobit	Tobit
---	Judith	Judith	---	Judith	Judith	Judith
Sirach	Sirach	Sirach	---	Sirach	Sirach	Sirach
---	---	---	---	---	Joseph Ben	---
---	Jubilees	Jubilees	---	Jubilees	---	---
42	46	45	37	46	46	45 (+1)

The canon of the council of Church scholars additionally lists Ezra Sutuel (or 3rd Ezra), which does not appear in any other canon. The Book of Nehemiah, mentioned separately by the council, is usually considered as part of Ezra in the other canons.

The New Testament books compare as follows:⁵⁶

85 Apostolic Canons	Te'ezaz 57	Abtilisat 82	Sere-at 80	Abtilis 81	Feteha Negest	Council of Church Scholars
Matthew	Matthew	Matthew	Matthew	Matthew	Matthew	Matthew
Mark	Mark	Mark	Mark	Mark	Mark	Mark
Luke	Luke	Luke	Luke	Luke	Luke	Luke
John	John	John	John	John	John	John
Acts	Acts	Acts	Acts	Acts	Acts	Acts
Romans	Romans	Romans	Romans	Romans	Romans	Romans
1 st Corin.	1 st Corin.	1 st Corin.	1 st Corin.	1 st Corin.	1 st Corin.	1 st Corin.
2 nd Corin.	2 nd Corin.	2 nd Corin.	2 nd Corin.	2 nd Corin.	2 nd Corin.	2 nd Corin.
Galatians	Galatians	Galatians	Galatians	Galatians	Galatians	Galatians
Ephesians	Ephesians	Ephesians	Ephesians	Ephesians	Ephesians	Ephesians
Philippians	Philippians	Philippians	Philippians	Philippians	Philippians	Philippians
Colossians	Colossians	Colossians	Colossians	Colossians	Colossians	Colossians
1 st Thess.	1 st Thess.	1 st Thess.	1 st Thess.	1 st Thess.	1 st Thess.	1 st Thess.

⁵⁶ Dibekulu Zewde. *81 Kidusat Metsaheftena Minchoch-Kenonat* (The 81 Holy Books and the Sources – Canons). p. 126-128

2 nd Thess.	2 nd Thess.	2 nd Thess.	2 nd Thess.	2 nd Thess.	2 nd Thess.	2 nd Thess.
1 st Timothy	1 st Timothy	1 st Timothy	1 st Timothy	1 st Timothy	1 st Timothy	1 st Timothy
2 nd Timothy	2 nd Timothy	2 nd Timothy	2 nd Timothy	2 nd Timothy	2 nd Timothy	2 nd Timothy
Tito	Tito	Tito	Tito	Tito	Tito	Tito
Philemon	Philemon	Philemon	Philemon	Philemon	Philemon	Philemon
Hebrews	Hebrews	Hebrews	Hebrews	Hebrews	Hebrews	Hebrews
James	James	James	James	James	James	James
1 st Peter	1 st Peter	1 st Peter	1 st Peter	1 st Peter	1 st Peter	1 st Peter
2 nd Peter	2 nd Peter	2 nd Peter	2 nd Peter	2 nd Peter	2 nd Peter	2 nd Peter
1 st John	1 st John	1 st John	1 st John	1 st John	1 st John	1 st John
2 nd John	2 nd John	2 nd John	2 nd John	2 nd John	2 nd John	2 nd John
3 rd John	3 rd John	3 rd John	3 rd John	3 rd John	3 rd John	3 rd John
Jude	Jude	Jude	Jude	Jude	Jude	Jude
---	Apocalypsis	Apocalypsis	---	Apocalypsis	Apocalypsis	Apocalypsis
1 st Epis. Cl.	---	1 st Epis. Cl.	---	---	---	---
2 nd Epis. Cl.	---	---	---	---	---	---
1 st Clement	1 st Clement	1 st Clement	---	1 st Clement	---	---*
2 nd Clement	2 nd Clement	2 nd Clement	---	2 nd Clement	---	---*
3 rd Clement	3 rd Clement	3 rd Clement	---	3 rd Clement	---	---*
4 th Clement	4 th Clement	4 th Clement	---	4 th Clement	---	---*
5 th Clement	5 th Clement	5 th Clement	---	5 th Clement	---	---*
6 th Clement	6 th Clement	6 th Clement	---	6 th Clement	---	---*
7 th Clement	7 th Clement	7 th Clement	---	7 th Clement	---	---*
8 th Clement	8 th Clement	8 th Clement	---	8 th Clement	---	---*
36	35	36	26	35	27	35
Total: 77	Total: 81	Total: 81	Total: 63	Total: 81	Total: 73	Total: 80

Here, the canon from Matthew up to Jude seems quite fixed; indecisiveness occurs regarding the Apocalypsis/Revelation of John, the two Epistles of Clement, and the eight Books of Clement. Please note that in the list of the council of Church scholars, those

eight books do occur, although under the names that are currently used (two Books of Covenant, Order of Zion, Gitzew, Te'ezaz, Abtils, Clement, Didascalia).⁵⁷

Overall, it can be seen quite clearly that the Ge'ez translations/compilations seem indeed to originate mainly from the 85 Apostolic Canons; also the council of Church scholars follows them quite closely. Yet, there are several books in many of the Ge'ez versions which are not found in the 85 Apostolic Canons. A quick cross-check though allows us to see that these books mostly did come from other synodical canons or canonical list of Church Fathers, as discussed above. This is particularly true for the Old Testament, and the Books of Wisdom, Reproof, Tobit, Judith, Sirach, and Baruch. Jubilees is a special case, still highly debated, and goes beyond the scope of this paper.

6) Conclusion

Overall, it can be said that the method of acceptance of books into the canon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church seems to have been a rather inclusive one. If one compares the various lists of books in the canons and writings of Church Fathers that the Ethiopian Church accepts with the current official list of Biblical Books, it seems almost that any book which has ever been accepted by at least one of the considered councils and Church Fathers has indeed been included in the Biblical canon – plus some others which have never been mentioned in any of them, such as the Book of Jubilees, or the Book of Enoch. Also, the Church does vary its own list according to purpose: whereas the official list from the council of Church scholars claims certain 81 books to be canonical, the

⁵⁷ Dibekulu Zewde. *81 Kidusat Metsaheftena Minchoch-Kenonat* (The 81 Holy Books and the Sources – Canons). p. 123

current printed Ge'ez/Amharic Bible also contains 81 Books, albeit slightly different ones than on the council's list.

In general, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church has quite a broad view as to which books it accepts as inspired, or holy. Since the Bible in this Church is supplemented by a number of books that are also considered to be holy and inspired, although not canonical, the distinctions are not all that clear, and quite definitely, the question of canonicity in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is all but closed.

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