

**BRIEF EXHIBITION GUIDE**  
**FOR**  
***THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX TEWAHEDO CHURCH:***  
***PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE***



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USA Center

## 1. Title

### THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX TEWAHEDO CHURCH:

#### PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE,

An exhibition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

By **Mahibere Kidusan,**

## 2. Description of the organization and Background

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Mahibere Kidusan, a predominantly intellectual based association of the Church, has been initiated in 1985 by few Addis Ababa university students and later strengthened by students trained in the *Zeway Hamere Berehan St. Gabriel Monastery* by the then Archbishop of *Shewa* province *Abune Gorgorios II*. The movement was officially accepted in 1991 with the blessing of Holy Synod and officiated by the name “*Mahibere Kidusan*” (i.e. an association in the name of Saints) under the auspices of the Sunday Schools Department of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. With guidance of the Holy Synod, Mahibere Kidusan currently manages 210 universities and colleges, 37 centers in Ethiopia and three in USA, Canada and Europe.

Ethiopia is an ancient Christian African country that prides itself of rich traditions, and affinities of religious habits and culture. More than half its 56.7 million (1996) population follow Christianity, fifty per cent of the inhabitants belong to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is numerically the largest of the five non-Chalcedonian Eastern Churches, the Coptic, the Ethiopian, the Syrian, the Indian, and the Armenian which are by the historian Adrian Fortescue called “The Lesser Eastern Churches”, but which others prefer to call “The Oriental Orthodox Churches”, to distinguish them from the Byzantine Orthodox Churches.

The cross which had been planted in what is now called Ethiopia by *Fruementius* was the sign of the Church, since 4th century, which proved the early advent of Christianity to this ancient land. Later on, after the coming of Islam, the Church with her cross became the

rallying point for desperate and fiercely independent highland people. Around her grew the Ethiopian empire, a Christian island in a Muslim sea. It resisted wave after wave of Islamic assault, to persist into our times. The Church has, thereafter gradually become fully indigenized and has survived the forces which wiped out Christianity from within and from without, in other neighboring areas. Hence, Ethiopia preserved its national adherence to Christianity, in a highly distinctive form.

The archaic form of Christianity, which the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church represent, dates back at least to the fourth century AD and still exerting a powerful influence on the lives of millions. It is a well known fact that this Church has received the spiritual and theological traditions of the Orthodox Church from its earliest days. In the long course of her history, the Church has been indigenized and has made the heritage which it thus received her own and even developed it in a unique way against the cultural and social background of Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church's uniqueness implies that she is not a copy of either the Coptic (meaning Egyptian) or any other church in the world, but original, i.e. the Orthodox Church of Ethiopia. She not only occupies a remarkable place in the country's history. The long history of indigenization of the Church has enabled her to develop unique features which show that she is more African.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church which has been thoroughly indigenized in the course of a nearly two-thousand year long history of Christianity, attained the status known as *Ethiopianism*, which is almost accepted as a contribution to African cultural nationalism and particularism based on a self-conscious cultivation of African indigenous values and attitudes. *Ethiopianism* is regarded as a nationalistic movement which is spreading among African Churches. It was basically not a political but a religious movement, expressing nationalistic aspirations in the Churches. The biblical source of *Ethiopianism* comes from Psalm 68:31, "Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands to God." The prophecy nurtured the hope of all Africans, of future glory for the Negro race, and of a Christian theocracy embracing the entire continent. African Churches which were founded between 1880 and

1920, established new religious organizations that were run by Africans as religious protest movement based on the idea of *Ethiopianism*.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is unique firstly for its isolation from other Christian centers for quite a good number of centuries (except for loose cooperation with the Church of Alexandria which profoundly shrunk with the advent of Islam to Egypt in the 7th century). Secondly it preserves many ancient features on one hand and the strong influence of African traditional religion and Judaism on the other. This peculiar trait of religious syncretism which is embodied by the Ethiopian Church offers her remarkable identity.

The exhibition is planned and executed by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Mahibere Kidusan. Mahibere Kidusan, a predominantly the intellectual members of the Church, has been initiated in 1985 by few Addis Ababa university students and later strengthened by students trained in the *Zeway Hamere Berehan St. Gabriel Clergy Training Monastery* by the then Archbishop of *Shewa* province *Abune Gorgorious II*. The movement was officially accepted in 1991 with the blessing of Holy Synod and officiated by the name “*Mahibere Kidusan*” (i.e. an association in the name of Saints) under the auspices of the Sunday Schools Department of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. With guidance of the Holy Synod, Mahibere Kidusan currently manages 210 universities and colleges, 37 centers in Ethiopia and three in USA, Canada and Europe.

### **3. Description of the Exhibition**

The Exhibition has housed the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church as a base and source to reach out to the Ethiopian community and the socially diverse residents of the DC Metropolitan area and have been designed in a way it will be educative and inspiring. So this section will elaborate the content, media, and formal characteristics of this Exhibition. The exhibition presents the social and religious history of the Ethiopian Church to be followed by its artistic heritages, unique calendar, spiritual artifacts, evangelical activities abroad, and its opportunities and threats in the coming years.

There are seven sections in the Exhibition as listed below.

History section deals:

- Ethiopia in the Old Testament,
- Ethiopia in the New Testament with the birth of the first African Church in the 34<sup>th</sup> year after the birth of Christ until Christianity becomes national religion in the 4<sup>th</sup> century,
- The consolidation of the indigenous Church with the coming of evangelists from the Orient and the expansion of monasticism,
- Furtherance of evangelization and Christianization of ancient Ethiopia by Ethiopian saints and important personalities,

Arts section deals with:

- Church iconography,
- Church Music,
- Church Architecture,
- Ancient Ge'ez literature and paleography,

Religious Artifacts:

- Materials the Church uses for its day to day services,
- How they are made and their religious meanings,

The Ethiopian Calendar:

- The Ethiopian philosophy about time,
- Origin and development of the Ethiopian calendar,
- Basic principles in the Ethiopian calendar system,
- Indigenous knowledge in the development of the current calendar,
- The current status of the calendar and its difference with the Gregorian calendar, etc.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Missionary activity in Diaspora:

- The beginning of Ethiopian missionary,
- Ethiopian Missionary in African continent, Asia, the Middle East,

- Problems encountering the missionary activity,

The exhibition will be presented with slides, pictures, statistics, video clips, animations both in English and Amharic. Each section will further be elaborated by assigned presenters, and questions will also be entertained by other church scholars. Exhibition road map, brochures and free DVDs will also be provided to enhance the impact.

As this Exhibition is one of its kinds, it will connect the Ethiopian community and culture to the socially diverse residents of the DC metropolitan and therefore develop strong relationships among diverse groups. Moreover, it will enhance the improvement of the quality of life for African born constituents by being a pride to all colored people.

Institutions that serve as a liaison between the Africans society and government agencies will obtain a great opportunity to introduce its service in the society.

### Contact Information

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**Mahibere Kidusan** is a registered 501 (c) (03) tax-exempted organization. All contributions are all tax-deductible. Our Tax ID# 84-1600968

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**For online contribution:**

[www.mahiberekidusan.org/exhibition](http://www.mahiberekidusan.org/exhibition)