



IN THE RIGHT WAY OF LIFE

(Orthodox Churches – A Study)

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Divyabodhanam Books Series 15

Statement

Dear ones,

By God's abundant grace, the first stage of Divyabodhanam program has concluded successfully. The preparation of ten books on our faith related topics itself is a good achievement.

The program that commenced only in 1984 had 49 centres associated with it. There were 130 women and 210 men who participated in this exercise. His Holiness Catholicose is distributing certificates on August 9, 1986 to those who have completed the course (10 subjects).

Now, we are coming to the second stage. Apart from accepting participants for the second batch of the preliminary stage, new courses are being formulated for those who have completed first stage.

The target for the second stage too is to deepen the knowledge of church members in their understanding of faith. This would be useful equally for parents and youth possessing basic education. This process is a basic requirement for all Sunday school teachers.

What is being looked forward to is ten thousands of members completing this course within the next few years resulting in an all-round progress in the faith centred life of our people. Let these books be instrumental in Holy Spirit to experience the love of God that is expressed with the God coming down as a human in Christ. Let there be showering of Blessings from the Almighty to all of you.

Kottayam,

July 2, 1986

Dr Paulose Mar Gregorioso, President, Divyabodhanam

Fr C. C. Cherian

After graduation, GST Diploma was taken from Old Seminary and BD from Serambur University followed by B Lib Sc in Library Science from the University of Kerala, and served Old Seminary as its Librarian from 1974. Crucial role was played in organizing and implementing Divyabodhanam teaching programme for the laity of the Church as its Coordinator and Registrar, from the very beginning. After completing M. Th. (Post Graduation in Theology), had the opportunity to have specially trained from National Archives at Delhi. Also, did serve the Editorial Board of Thiruvachanabhashyam as its General Coordinator and retired from Old Seminary in 2014.

Fr. Dr. Johns Abraham Konatt

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PREFACE

Our Church as a community has been qualified 'Orthodox' for the reason that we have been maintaining the Christian faith in the right way from the apostolic days. Though explanations to matters of faith have been modified contemporarily, Orthodox Churches hold on to a tradition that the basic doctrines formulated in the first three Synods is protected in their purity. Orthodox Churches hold high their national leadership and independent character; they also merge with the cultural background of their locale and give stress to localised culture while engaging in worship and interpreting faith related issues. Thus, a new face for Christian Church has to be developed familiar to our Indian cultural scenario. The true Christian culture of India got pushed back with the encroachment of foreign missions after 16th century. The endeavour of Orthodox Church should be to carry out Christian mission effectively within the Indian cultural background. Through this text, we are making an attempt to enlighten the readers of this book in such a direction.

It is a tough task to brief the readers with the historical background of all Churches across the world; being aware of such limitations, we have introduced only those matters which are very crucial and significant for our preset purpose. Again, we are not including 'unitary' churches due to paucity of space. Though not a part of Oriental fraternity, we are making a mention of the Chaldean Church of the East considering its close geographical proximity to us. The statistics of membership given herein may not be very accurate. It is not at all easy to have a reliable statistics from Churches within Communist countries.



We had made an endeavour to work out a book like this only for the reason that L/L HG Dr Paulose Mar Gregorioso, who was the authority in matters of these sorts, had been too short of time. Being students of His Grace, we have been fortunate to learn a lot from him through his classes, speeches and writings which have been of valuable help in our exercise. Our honoured Guru Fr Dr V C Samuel has also helped us a lot by giving suggestions while examining the manuscript. As of now, both these noble personalities rest in peace in Divine presence. L/L HG Mathews Mar Barnabas who had guided us after scanning through the manuscript too rests in peace in Divine presence now. Respected Fr Dr TJ Joshua, as he has been doing for all books in the Divyabodhanam series, has been with us and helped us in the refinement of language, accuracy of facts and so on. We are offering our gratitude to all these great personalities and respected teachers. Originally published in 1988, as directed by the Divyabodhanam committee, the revised edition has been worked out. We are happy to present this text before the Divyabodhanam learners with all our humility.

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Orthodox Seminary

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



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Unit 1

Orthodox Faith and Views

Lesson 1

Orthodoxy and other Faiths

Preface # Study of Faith is needed? # How did other faiths get formulated? # What is Orthodoxy? # Orthodox Faith and its Relevance

Preface:

The foundation of Christian faith is that pattern of life in total commitment to a proclamation of faith that Jesus of Nazareth is Christ, the Son of living God. While accepting the scriptural verse, “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9), we are also committed to the word, “But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13) as the base for studying lessons of true faith. When we argue that the fullness of God is there in Jesus Christ, we have to admit in all humility that we could not understand this totally. It should be possible for us to accept an approach like, “I do believe: help me overcome my unbelief” (Mark 9:24). Christian life gets nourished not in the strength of one’s faith, but in one’s dependence on God’s mercy.

Each one of us has a responsibility that we should share with others what we learn and assimilate and practice as also the fundamental factors and the reliability behind such doctrines or truths. “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Colossians 4:6), as St Paul reminds us. Likewise, St Peter asks us, “Always, be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have, but do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15). In short, when we are preparing to learn facts about our true faith, we have to be vigilant that we are firm in the fundamentals of Scriptures and are depending totally in Holy Spirit who leads us through all truth; we have to submit ourselves to the mercy of God rather than valuing our intellect or logic. Such efforts from our side shall never enter into mere arguments, but scriptural truths should be handled truthfully in all seriousness relying on Holy Spirit. It has to be kept in mind that Divine mysteries are not subjects to be casually discussed or argued with whenever one feels. When we go deep into faith related matters, these facts should be in our mind always.

Study of Faith is needed?

History reveals that many of the controversies in understanding faith grew up in the Church consequent to simple arguments and unwarranted discussions. During the first three centuries, believers had been suffering from cruel persecutions mainly from the Roman rulers. But the believers, in spite of such hard time, could sustain themselves in their deep rooted faith that was sharp and firm; this sharpness and firmness of their faith stand as the foundation for our faith even today. Those were days when Church was not divided into many fragments. We can re examine the general approach to issues during those days and from there, if we can have a start up and a



focused study on doctrines and rituals of faith, the subsequent schisms in the Church can be realistically evaluated to a certain extent. If such an exercise is carried out without any preconceived notions and with an open mind, certainly we can arrive at some uniformity of opinion as well as diffusion of differences of opinion.

How did other faiths get formulated?

Sharpness and firmness in faith has been the character of the Church during the early days. But the dilution in devotion, slowness in spirituality, stress on intellectual strength and attraction towards comfortable living styles were all factors that contributed towards the decline of true faith. This paved the way for heresies entering the Church. The Church definitely had the responsibility to nurture true faith among the believers, but the eternal truth necessary for the sustenance of the Church was backtracked under those circumstances. For the moment, let us not go into the historical backdrops of such changes. National, political, cultural and linguistic factors can be influential to take proper care of Christian values but the paradox is that the very same factors were also causes behind schisms within the Church that led to fragmentation. These factors were certainly influential while matters related to faith were discussed and presented in various forums which ultimately led to the separations in the fifth century (AD 431, 451), eleventh century (AD 1054) and sixteenth century (1531) and are continuing even this day holding on to differing viewpoints.

The divisions within the Church in the fifth and eleventh centuries caused the Western Church and Eastern Orthodox Churches (Oriental and Byzantine) to separate. Later, the reformation movement in the Western Church gave rise to the formation of Protestant Churches which thus separated from Roman Catholics. Each Church would have their own defensive arguments to sustain them, but one can neither accept nor reject such stands totally. Yet, evaluating them based on factual realities would be a good exercise. However, a proper and acceptable criterion has to be worked out for such an evaluation process.

What is Orthodoxy?

The term 'Orthodox' has various meanings in Greek language. 'Ortho' means 'straight' or 'right' and 'doxa' means 'glory' as commonly accepted. Thus 'Orthodox' can mean straight or true worship or glorification or standing. In other words, worship that is straight or right. The present Orthodox Churches have accepted this name for the reason or tradition that these Churches have retained most of the characteristics of the early century Church without much of a dilution. It is in this sense that Orthodox faith is qualified as faith possessing the right way of glorifying. Therefore, Orthodox Church can be understood to be a Church of worship that is true.

All usual dictionaries express the meaning of the word 'Orthodox' as: 'holding usual opinions', 'holding accepted opinions', 'generally approved', 'conventional', 'strictly traditional' and the like. Here, 'conventional' or 'traditional' has been wrongly interpreted as 'old fashioned' by many. However, in Christian context, the term 'Orthodox' is not traditional or old fashioned; instead, what is to be understood is that Orthodoxy protects true faith through the years without detaching it from the original root. Therefore, the leadership has been allowing development of a Church life that is in line with national, linguistic and contemporary culture. It is unfortunate that those who are blindly attracted to western culture find Orthodoxy as out dated. This has to be seen as the consequences of wrongly directed approaches catalysed by interference of foreigners. It shall not be seen lightly

that even Orthodox members are occasionally neglecting the basics and showing interest in other patterns thereby, making Orthodoxy itself misunderstood at large.

Once we think of an Orthodox canon or criterion, there is another side that has to be looked into. It is a need of the time to have an objective introspection as to whether Orthodox Churches world over are keeping the principles of Orthodoxy within themselves. Political or communal or cultural or national or linguistic issues come up occasionally and while lending ears to such issues, there are instances that Christian values are neglected or diluted quite often as we understand from history of Churches. Unless focussed efforts are there to evaluate incidents of these sorts and corrective measures are initiated wherever necessary, 'Orthodoxy' would be misunderstood and wrongly represented. Even in our India too, whatever 'other' things are added to Orthodoxy have to be identified and eradicated and effective steps are to be ensured that such erroneous facets are not mixed with Orthodoxy; there must be ongoing processes put in place to take care of these. Orthodox Churches should have within them a sustainable system to monitor these efforts to be fruitful. Such a system has to be based in the principles of Orthodoxy and holding the true tradition.

Orthodox Faith and its Relevance:

The reformation ideas of Protestants were the consequences of faith related rituals added up by Roman Catholic Church during the later days diluting or modifying what used to be there from the beginning. At the same time, if everyone makes attempts to study the doctrines or rituals of Orthodoxy, it would be seen that there is nothing to protest or contradict when viewed in line with the progressive growth of the Church from the early centuries. However, it is quite unfortunate that most of the known Orthodox Churches these days practice rituals and systems those are not in line with true Orthodoxy. As such, it is necessary for us to understand what Orthodoxy is in its true sense. There must be consensus among the Christian community in this matter.

Orthodox Churches understand that all the apostles are having equality of rights and authority (Throne). As such, there is no concept of individual centred supremacy within Orthodox Churches. Community is given more importance than individuals. So there is no infallibility for any one; instead, Orthodox Church looks forward to providential guidance thorough the Church as a whole, which is the body of Christ. The clergy and the baptised believers join together in Holy Qurbana where one experiences the wholeness of Church. In Orthodox Churches, no rituals or no worship is carried out by priests alone or believers alone. Everything rests with the body of Christ that is the Church which alone holds authority. This authority comes from love and suffering. All national churches are independent within themselves. (Had the Patriarch of Antioch realised this truth, there would have been lasting peace within Malankara). Orthodox Churches give prime importance to worship and spiritual life; prayers, lent and fasting are followed with the seriousness they are bound with. There are intercessions with departed saints; we pray for them; we seek their prayers for us; in worship and rituals, regional cultures are respected; day by day, Orthodox Churches maintain their freedom to present doctrines and rituals looking into periodic needs.

Questions:

1. Point out the needs for studying faith in the backdrop of other faiths.
2. What do you mean by Orthodoxy?
3. Evaluate Orthodox faith and its relevance.

Lesson2

Orthodoxy Faith at a Glance

Preface # Faith in God # God # Holy Trinity # Church # Church and the Departed # Redemption Through Continuous Transformation # Spiritual growth Through Holy Sacraments # Priesthood # Believers in the Church

Preface:

The term 'faith' is often a misunderstood one. We understand this word 'faith' to mean something about which concrete evidence is not possible. In the Orthodox view point, faith has its base in worship of God. It happens to be a feeling that cannot be translated into words, but it is a reality that one experiences slowly through his devotional life and deeds of love. It has never been a narration of some truth that can be explained or expressed as if originated through the intellect of someone. Instead, it is something that has eternal sustenance; it is something we can rely upon; it is an ultimate reality with which human mind can maintain a consistent relationship and a continuous search seeking that reality. Thus it is also an incessant revelation that is the true faith. This search and revelation is a parallel and ongoing process. Proclamations of faith and doctrines can express this process to a large extent, but they are all media of periodic significance. As such, the mind of a living community that lives in God, that grows in Christ and that being led by the Spirit assimilate faith, evaluate faith, interpret faith and present faith in the light of written doctrines.

Faith in God:

'We believe in one true God who made all, visible and invisible'. Faith grows through our worship of God, who makes and preserves all realities visible and invisible. The understanding that all creations are from Him and to Him leads man to worship Him. Man can only worship God, who is the root cause of sustenance of all that is good and joy; man cannot investigate Him and get convinced of Him fully. However, as God reveals Himself, man can understand himself; man can identify himself with the Image of God and get to know the might of God thereby experiencing Theosis.

Through Genesis 1: 26, 27 God reveals that man is made in His nature and image. The wholeness of this nature and image is revealed in Jesus Christ; in other words, the fullness of manhood is revealed in Jesus Christ, Son of God. And faith raises man to this model of wholeness. This indeed is the meaning of faith as well as the fruit of faith. Thus, if your faith does not help you grow up to the head of Christ, such a faith is no faith at all; even you have claims of signs and miracles.

Holy Trinity:

Once we understand in its totality these facets of truth we can call it 'Triune Faith': (a) God is the Father (b) Son of God is revealed in Jesus Christ in the true nature of that Father (c) Holy Spirit leads our history to that revelation being active from the beginning forever and ever. This explanation



shall not be looked into as an open intellectual narration, but Orthodox Church views this as a mystery to guide the believers in worship. True faith can reveal only through a worship that is based in purity of life followed by a transformation, but not through intellectual exercises.

No human mind has the inherent strength to assimilate the Essence of God in its wholeness; as such divine revelations are the only source for us to rely on. Thus, understanding divine deeds to the extent possible, one has to be in full submission to such inferences. The Essence of God is filled in Jesus Christ in such fullness that the maximum revelation is possible in him. But, human beings have not yet reached that level of comprehension to understand the wholeness of God in its entirety. Man needs to have a 'growth' to such an extent. This is a continuous godly act. Jesus Christ, Son of God, took flesh and became man subject to limitations of laws of nature and has been in God's image to overcome death and corruptibility surpassing the laws of nature. Thus, the door to endless possibilities of incorruptibility or eternity is opened to the mortal man inviting him to the experience of immortality. Jesus Christ, being God himself, took flesh to wear the image of man and being a man, paved the way for all men to grow into the image of God through his taking flesh. Orthodox Church sees this unique fellowship of man with the 'human and divine nature' that is in Jesus Christ as the straight path to salvation (2 Peter 2:4; Hebrews 2:10 – 14; 1 John 3:1 – 10).

The Spirit of God is the third person in Holy Trinity; he provides life, purifies it, completes and renews it; he is God who is invisible, without beginning, non ending and he acts as indeterminable God. Holy Spirit cleanses man from the stains of sin and reconciles him with God; thus, man is made congruent to God. He fills man with true life and nurtures him in Divine grace. He is present in all creations as a limitless entity; he leads the Church in the true way; he acts through the Holy Sacraments of Church and has been continuously engaged in leading man through the path salvation.

Our God lives in history as three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He acts unified; he acts eternal. 'Triune God' is not an intellectual concept or doctrine, but an ultimate truth that has to be worshipped. This eternal truth can neither be explained nor be interpreted but one has to simply worship it. Indeed, this has to be understood as the core of Orthodox faith.

Church:

Church is the resultant impact of Jesus Christ having taken flesh and become man. This Church has been live even this day as the body of Christ to implement expressively the redemption deeds as an instrument in the hands of God. The transformation of the entire creation has to take place through this Church, which lives in Christ and witnesses him and in which Christ lives. To earn redemption of all, Holy Spirit enlivens all his acts continuously through this Church. Its boundaries are invisible. Church is never an entity consisting of those men who are alive today, but it is a commune of witnesses where those who are in Christ and would be in Christ right from Adam up to the second coming of Christ ,who are alive , who are departed and who are to born are included. This Church that is Catholic, One, apostolic and Holy has been having an existence that is limitless, but a regional community that joins together in Holy Qurbana enjoys the wholeness of the Church as taught by the Orthodox Church.



Church and the Departed:

It is the above faith that makes us pray for the departed and seek their intercession. One is in Christ not only until such time he lives in this world. The very same God who shows mercy on the living takes care of those who are departed. A believer, even after his death continues his growth in Christ where he is in need of divine mercy and therefore, we remember them and pray for them. Generally, all believers are called holy; but in specific sense, there are saints, male and female, being canonised from time to time in the Church. Orthodox Church venerates St Mary, Apostles, Apostolic Fathers, Martyrs and those who fought for sustenance of faith and feasts are observed for them to retain their memories in the church. Through these feasts, what we do is to worship and honour God who live in these saints eternally.

Redemption through Continuous Transformation:

Many among us look at salvation as a process to make an entry somehow into the heavenly kingdom. There is a simple doctrine to encourage them in this line that it is sufficient to believe in Christ who is capable enough to save us. As far as Orthodox Church is concerned, redemption is not something that can be earned as a lottery at one stroke. Redemption is the transformation of one, staying away from sin and growing in virtues. In other words, Theosis leads one to redemption. The basics of redemption are that one shall grow continuously in love of God, wisdom of God and Grace of God. An intellectual doctrine alone is not sufficient for this redemption. Being born again is a beginning only; there is no sense in being born unless there is growth. Continuous spiritual growth should accompany the process of being born again. Here, we should realise the relevance of the interference of Holy Spirit.

Spiritual growth Through Holy Sacraments:

Generally, Sacraments are defined as visible means of invisible graces. Each of the Sacraments earmarks us for God in execution of His Divine plans. In Orthodox traditions, we do not restrict Sacraments to a specified number. Each of our prayers, our kneeling down and all such rituals are in total submission to God.

Symbolic acts through which heavenly virtues are gifted to men by the interference of Holy Spirit are sacraments. The term Sacrament has come from Western tradition; Orthodox Churches use the term Mysteries for Sacraments. Baptism, Mooron and Holy Qurbana are mysteries performed by the Church as a whole. These are considered visible symbols of our eternal relationship with Christ. Remission of sins, Confession, Matrimony, Priestly Ordination and Anointing the sick are all being done by us as Holy Mysteries.

Priesthood:

Though the Mysteries are to be performed by the Church as a whole, there are authorised priestly title holders having apostolic succession of authority such as Bishops, Fathers and Deacons. They are ordained to priestly positions within the structure of the Church as permanent title holders. Priesthood being a sacrament or Mystery, Orthodox Church values its indelible character. No Church can claim wholeness without priestly title holders. Also, there is no priesthood outside the Church. The unified status of these two namely priesthood and Church can be said to be the reasons for integrity and peculiarity of orthodoxy.

Believers in the Church:

All members of the Church are believers. The two categories in the Church are priests and laity or laymen. Be it in the general activities of the Church or in celebration of Holy Mysteries, priests cannot perform anything without participation of laity. In the governance of the Church, particularly in matters related to faith, priesthood and discipline the final authority rests with the Holy Episcopal Synod; such Episcopas are chosen and ordained by the Church; yet, the matters decided by the Holy Synod are made effective only after the Church in its wholeness accept and implement them. Once we go through the history of Church, it can be understood that most of heresies have risen from priestly title holders. On all such occasions, believers have fought vigorously as the guardians of true faith.

As such, Orthodox Churches give prime importance to educate their laity in matters of faith and practicing them in their day to day life. For this, there are Sunday Schools, spiritual organisations and other learning systems.

Questions:

1. How do you present Triune God in Orthodox faith?
2. In the redemption of men, what is the role of Holy Spirit through the Holy Mysteries of the Church?
3. Evaluate the unified Church life of priests and laity in the Orthodox view point.

Lesson 3

Orthodox: Considerations and Emphasises

Preface # Church is a Worshipping Community # Interceding for the entire Creation for Redemption # Theosis or Christian Transformation # Orthodox Spirituality # Disciplined Community that is customised # Church and the Nation

Preface:

Usually, reformed Churches state the mission of Church as preaching the Word or proclaiming the Gospel or witnessing experiences in public and so on. But Orthodox Church thinks differently; for us, the mission can be briefed as to steward the community through the guidance of Holy Spirit to live in

Christ giving specific accent to true faith, worship, spiritual life and philanthropy. Those who are brought up in the western spiritual model having lenience to that type of missionary actions often blame that Orthodox Church doesn't have any missionary zeal. This allegation has born out of their ignorance of Orthodoxy coupled with our own laziness. Once an attempt is made to understand Orthodox points of view and priorities, many of such misunderstandings would disappear. Under such circumstances, it is better that we have a discussion on what we consider and what we emphasise.

Church is a Worshipping Community:

Any Church where there is no worship is dead as a Church. What is true worship? Does it confine itself to singing a hymn, reading a portion from the Bible, a sermon and a prayer oral or otherwise? All these are facets that lead us to worship, but Orthodox Church sees true worship exclusively in Holy Qurbana. All the above facets are very much present in Holy Qurbana, but the real emphasise lies with the participation of believers in the stance of Jesus Christ, in the crucifixion and resurrection. Without the believers being participants in the redemption deeds of Jesus Christ, redemption of the universe is not complete. Such participation cannot be limited to the feeling of a mental satisfaction or an intellectual retention. Such participation indeed is a hope filled participation of the believers where mind, body and soul join together in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ within a community where the presence of Holy Spirit is live and active. Preaching the Word of God or delivering a sermon shall not be an exercise that is detached from the union of man and God in the experience of reconciliation and peace. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ has to be proclaimed in the true worship. "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Thus, Church considers the true mission as to growing in transformation day by day in fellowship with Christ, living in Christ and in resemblance to him.

Interceding for the entire Creation for Redemption:

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the worship where believers are part takers are intended for the redemption of the whole creation. The Orthodox view point attaches importance to the redemption of creations in their entirety rather than individual growth and redemption. God so loved the world that he gave His begotten son to the world. Therefore, our approach shall never be, 'my faith and growth led me to eternity', but it shall be, 'I need to believe and worship that the entire creation has to grow and be redeemed'. This is the Orthodox concept. Holy Qurbana is a sacrificial participation of all individuals in the Church so that the whole creation is redeemed. Most of the prayers during the celebration of Holy Qurbana are for the creation in their wholeness. Our Church life, be it in worship or spirituality or witnessing or philanthropic, it shall never be individual centred; it shall always be for the growth and redemption of the whole community and the entire creation.

Holy Qurbana is an experience where the whole creation worship before the Creator; here, the crown of the entire creation, the man, offers his thanks giving before the creator for whole of the creation. God, the Creator desires to have the intercession of man that the entire creation is transformed. The High Priesthood service of the Church has to be understood in this backdrop. Church, the body of Christ, stands before God for the creation and stands before the creation, representing the Creator, wearing the image and nature of God. It is a very important mission of the Church that it intercedes as a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2: 5 – 10). This is the true mission of Church.



Theosis or Christian Transformation:

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him” (Genesis 1:27). However, with the fall of man, this image has been blurred; but through the redemption in Christ, it started kindling. Any believer who is born again through Baptism is growing continuously in Christ earning life in abundance and thus keeping his image and likeness of God intact. By being part of the body of Christ, the believer grows in Christ’s image in partnership with eternal life. Each and every believer, through his Church life, grows into the wholeness of the godly man revealed in Jesus Christ. This growth continues right up to the second coming of our Lord. By this sort of growth and transformation, salvation of the entire mankind and whole creation becomes possible.

In effect, what is to be understood by the term ‘salvation’ is transformation to the nature of God. When man uses qualifications about God such as good, omnipotent, loving, freedom, source of wisdom and so on, what is thereby expressed is the ardent desire of man to be in God’s nature. In other words, whatever virtues are possessed by God as man could understand within his limitations, God has provided man the possibility to own all such virtues and grow in congruence with God; this can be said to be the ‘likeness of God’. Through baptism or being born again, man’s progressive growth to the fullness of likeness in God commences. This fullness as an unending possibility goes on till eternity. And, another important mission of Church is making an entry to the process of being in the likeness of God to express natures such as Divine love, wisdom, freedom and so on. Orthodox Church does not believe that the true mission of a Church can be accomplished by the activities of missionary organisations or spreading good news through media of different sorts. What is important is transformation of all individuals and the community as a whole into the nature of Christ. In case the media can contribute towards such transformation, they can be welcomed. Failure of Church happens when the goal is sidetracked to replace it with the route. Church has to be transformed as a community of hope and custom where the simplicity of Good News, holiness of worship, firmness of faith, expressions of love and guidance of Holy Spirit are in a state of congruence with each other; otherwise, whatever is done in a Church would turn out to be ‘a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal’.

Orthodox Spirituality:

The main emphasis of Orthodox spirituality can be summed up as:

- a. The Christian goal of life is unification with God and transformation through Theosis
- b. Divine Grace and human mind have to act together to achieve this goal. Sincere submission to God is the basis to experience Divine blessings
- c. Devotion and discipline help us rising to divine segments; this is achieved through the guidance of Holy Spirit thereby we are getting strengthened in our asceticism and mysticism. Prayer, introspection, silence are all factors leading us to spiritual transformation.
- d. Spiritual growth is accomplished through the Holy mysteries of the Church
- e. Communion with saints sustains spirituality. Like statues being used in Roman traditions, we, Eastern Churches use Icons in our worship; Icons are media helping a believer be in relation with the invisible world in a visible form. We have prime importance to the mother of God in Orthodox spirituality
- f. Virtuous deeds or praxis too leads us to spirituality; through meditation one can be matured in intelligence (state of theoria) and to control passions to grow into the fullness (telios)

enlightened in divinity (Theologia); these are all various stages of spirituality explained by Fathers of our Eastern tradition.

(Ref. Orthodox Spirituality, SPCK, 1945. Note that there is a detailed study of these factors in the next lesson as also in the Book 'Christian Spirituality' for the GOCE Course)

Disciplined Community that is customised:

Could it be possible for the Church be a community of individuals who progress in Christian spirituality? For such a process of transformation, we may need strong organisational set up, financial backup, technical knowhow and committed workers. The established system of Church governance and disciplinary life as well as spiritual nourishment programmes are all needed to be utilised here. All our members should be led to an active participation in Holy Qurbana; those members who are leading a wayward life in the community spreading messages against true Christian witnessing should be tapped and with proper guidance, be brought back to the main stream of Church life. Church should be rich in spiritual strength that like what was being done in the early century Church life, suitable punitive actions should be initiated against those who are living with wrong orientation and if needed, they should be excommunicated (1 Corinthians 5:1 - 5).

Orthodox Church always encourages members of the Church to carry on hourly prayers, private prayers, short prayers, fasting, lent, celebration of feasts, philanthropic activities and so on which are helpful for their progressive growth from holiness to holiness through the Holy Mysteries. Church has the goal here that a believer who has Christ in him becomes like Christ to be in the experience of transformation. All these are aimed at being a part taker in Christ's life. Through Holy Baptism, a believer turns out to be an organ of Christ's body; by the anointment of Holy Mooron, the believer joins Christ in his priesthood, in his kingship and in his prophecy. He partakes in the supreme sacrifice of Christ through Holy Qurbana. Our daily worship makes us participate in the eternal mediation of Jesus Christ. By our participation in the feasts through the liturgy year, we share various incidents of Christ's life. By observing the feasts of saints, we are joyful in the blessed experience of the eternal life in Christ with hope. Thus, all the systems we have in the Church makes us be with Christ in a state of congruence with him so as to grow progressively for the benefit of the community at large.

Church and the Nation:

During the early Church days, Orthodox Church never held a separatist view of Church and nation. May be there would have ruled a feeling that Church is eternal whereas nation is not; yet, there used to be close coordination between them during early days and thus, growth of the Church was in a very cordial atmosphere. However, in the modern era, most of the Orthodox Churches are confined to communist nations; there have been discordance in the smoothness of the relationship pointing towards the need of developing a new insight to Churches so as to retain a congruency with the socio political scenario. The autocephaly and self governance system of Churches are seen to be a classic sign to align themselves within their national backdrop. May be it is a weakness that most Churches in their anxiety to retain their ethnic character are slow in being a matching reality to their nationality. Even in India, the prevailing tendency is to follow Syrian systems rather than Indian cultural systems. This would be causing difficulties for the Church to play a constructive role in the socio – political scenario.



On examining the history of Orthodox Churches the world over, it can be seen that there used to be a threefold relationship between Church and nation. (1) The situation where the Head of the nation was a member of the Church like ancient Byzantine, Edessa and the like (2) Minority Churches those were confronting political persecution like Greek, Syrian, Egyptian Churches under Turkish regime. (3) Those Churches not receiving any help from the nation, but maintaining a peaceful relationship under the political governance system like the Indian Church. Among these, the second and third models may not be conducive to establish a strong Christian influence in the society. However, the first model is very much helpful in this direction. Churches of Edessa, Ethiopia, Armenia, Georgia are all example of encouragement in good relationship where by cultural, linguistic, health wise, literary, histrionic, social, educational, and economic development were quite visible. At the same time, there used to be exploitations and moral devaluation elsewhere like what happened in Russia during a certain stage of their history.

Questions:

1. Discuss: 'Church is a well disciplined community that is born in Christ and is growing in Christ as well as continuously interceding for the whole creation'.
2. Explain: 'Redemption is Theosis and Christian Transformation'.
3. Discuss: 'Orthodox spirituality and a customised community is needed for the growth of Church'.

Lesson 4

Spirituality and Socialising: an Eastern Approach

Preface # Western and Eastern Views: a Comparison # Spirituality: with God and between men # Love and Justice: Basis of Spirituality # Asceticism and Spirituality # Spirituality and Family Life # Spirituality Founded on Church Life

Preface:

There are differences of opinion in defining spirituality, socialising and the relationship between them. Today we have among the Christians varying thought processes such as the western spiritual tradition where individuals are in focus, the eastern spiritual tradition where the focus is on community, the separatist groups which detach spirituality from material life as well as the liberation groups arguing that spirituality rests with community development activities. Under such circumstances, what is being attempted here is to present and evaluate the Orthodox view on the subject.

Western and Eastern Views: a Comparison:

- (i) The westerners value intellectual coordination of thoughts and written doctrines very highly whereas the easterners give emphasis to the guidance of Holy Spirit above intellect and logic.
- (ii) Western thought processes on spirituality are more individualistic, but eastern tradition has corporate spirituality in the forefront.
- (iii) Western Churches have spirituality where the emphasis is on those truths comprehensible objectively thereby discarding such truths which are beyond the limitations of senses. On the other hand, Eastern Churches ensure participation of all senses as well as invisible truths too though not intellectually or logically comprehended and are considered as symbolic integration into the worship.
- (iv) The teachings in western tradition is that man being a sinner maintains a wide gap with God and waits for remission of his sins; the teachings of Fathers of the East are different in this context; God has taken flesh and lived among us to reconcile men with God and thus, the image of God had been reinstated in men making them children of God. As such, nearness to God and union with God are the Christian goals.
- (v) There is an emphasis among the western thoughts that Christ has forgiven the sins of men and therefore man has to make attempts to pay back his obligations through gospel work and personal submission. But, eastern thoughts are quite different here; Christ has come to redeem the whole world; we have to live in him and through his body, the Church, be part and parcel of common worship and engage in activities of philanthropic nature; we have to have a stress on these sort of deeds in our life and that is spirituality in eastern thoughts.
- (vi) Westerners view spirituality and theology in two levels. But eastern tradition has theological thoughts based in spirituality. The revelations and evaluations of individuals who are progressively growing in spirituality would be instrumental in formulating the theological process of the Church as a whole, but any approach from such individuals standing in alienation, is not acceptable to the Church. In other words, spirituality and theology are experiences of individuals and Church in a unified manner.
- (vii) Again, western thoughts have a separation between secular and sacred. Eastern teachings are that Jesus Christ, son of God took flesh and lived as a man there by divinity has been merged with humanity and this process is being continued even today through the Church.

Spirituality - with God and between men:

There are two arguments prevailing from time to time. One is that the basis of spirituality is the vertical relation man has with God; on the other hand, it also argued that the relation man has with God is determined on the basis of horizontal relation between man to man. Among these, the former one confines spirituality into worships and rituals whereas the latter argument views spirituality in philanthropic activities and social development processes. This can to a certain extent be compared to the views expressed by St James and St Paul on acts or praxis and theory. One has to comprehend the relation between praxis and theory at its full depth. The former of the above two arguments holds a view that unless man makes himself a true man by a desirable relation with God, he would not be good enough to serve the community; therefore, it would be necessary that one



has to have a personal transformation, through his commitment and faith in God, before he attempts to transform the community. This is coming to a stand that individuals have to do a witnessing to the community through Church life and family life. The other argument is that individuals are nourished by the community and therefore community has to be transformed in the first place without which individuals cannot grow into wholeness. Indeed, Jesus Christ has been involved in community reformation and thus, led the community to redemption; even today, redemption comes through a politico economic refinement. Probably, such a reformation within the socio political scenario is needed, even a sort revolution is needed; if so, can we call Jesus Christ the first revolutionary? (Luke 4:18, 19).

On comparing the above two views, influence of East – West spiritual thoughts are prevalent; yet, the material liberation of individuals having a role in human redemption is a reflection of western thoughts. At the same time thoughts related to social reformation as need for human redemption can be attributed to eastern thinking. The Church of India has to have an approach where the positives of both these thoughts are involved.

Love and Justice - Basis of Spirituality:

The early Church was successful to a very good extent to maintain equilibrium between spirituality and worldly interests. Further, the early Church was quite prompt in expressing true love in all its reality through a spirit of sharing that was finding a sense of justice to all. The early Church community was one where there were no maintenance of individual assets or wealth; there were no personal earnings; everyone was treated equal to all; all the earnings were placed at the feet of Apostles and engaged in worship of God and service of community (Acts 2: 44 – 47). But we learn subsequently that this system did not sustain long and had fallen apart because there were no concerted effort jointly to develop the society. The Greek had started expressing discordant voices against the Hebrews (Acts 6:1). To address these problems, it is seen that some sort of make shift arrangements were put in place. Anyhow, it is a true fact that three factors are absolutely necessary for a healthy growth of the society; (a) a worshipping community (b) a sharing community (c) a community that works together for the society. Under circumstances like these, monastic movements and Dayaro systems developed in the Church in the course of time.

Asceticism and Spirituality:

Monastic movements gradually came into being with great expectations looking into factors those were found conducive to rebuild the Apostolic Christian community. The expanded growth of materialism and the sluggishness of spirituality were encouragement for a few to rebuild a customised community so as to retrieve the lost or distorted Christian values and they chose to be in deserts in total meditation. Neo Platonic spirituality was very live by the 4th century as a consequence of increased popularity of Greek culture and many of the Christian fathers made attempts that this spirituality took roots in the Church also. Fathers of the Eastern tradition namely Mar Gregoriose of Nyssa, Mar Gregoriose of Nazianzus, Mar Dionysius the Areopagite, Augustine of Hippo were all followers of neo platonic spirituality. (Of these four, Augustine of Hippo belongs to western tradition). The founder of this spirituality namely Plotinus of the 3rd century taught that every individual possesses a bit of the Spirit of God (Nous) and this had to be in communion with God thereby one's growth to fullness commences; but there are obstructions to this growth process namely the world, the flesh and thus worldly thoughts were treated as sin; to achieve fullness in life,



one has to totally detach from world and worldly desires. Viewing this spirituality in an overall perspective, this encouraged only one side of spirituality that is the relation between God and man alone and therefore ended up in alienating man from man in their relationship.

Asceticism was a movement that grew up in Church where the emphasis on the glory of the social life of early Church was a dominant factor. Some among the early fathers had chosen asceticism with the thinking that world and flesh were evil; they also had their goal to attain fullness in life individually as reason to resort to this. But, gradually, further monastic systems came up where the emphasis was on humility, brotherhood, holiness, customs, obedience, hard work and serving mentality as in the early Church. St Pachomios and St Antonius along with others coordinated monks who were leading solitary lives and formed communities of monasteries. Based on these, many monastic movements were successfully formulated in later years which were all concentrating their efforts in Church life and witnessing. Such developments were there in both Eastern and Western traditions. The general dictum that spirituality can develop only through community life was accepted in family life, Church life as well as in ascetic communities. For spirituality to grow there shall be a community which values love, justice, equality, service and discipline.

Spirituality and Family Life:

According to the thought processes inherent in Indian cultural tradition, family life also is a part of monastic life. A monk is one who sacrifices or in other words one leading a customised life. Custom is something that is essential in family life too. When we view family as a micro unit of the community, it has to be accepted that there is no way that the spirituality in family life can be diluted. During the Old Testament days as well as in the Indian tradition, family life has its own purity. But these days, there are people who view family relationship as some sort of a temporarily material arrangement which in effect spoils the greatness of family. Our inclination to imitate western culture has been causing deterioration to Indian traditions; it is a fact that only through good family set up, the Church can nurture a generation in Christian values; therefore, we have to ensure that spirituality akin to a good family life has to be properly taken care of. Church should always be capable of emphasising the greatness of a family life.

Spirituality Founded on Church Life:

Christian spirituality has been formulated and is progressively growing through the active participation in the Church that is the body of Christ who has taken flesh and has become a man (John 1: 1- 18). Jesus Christ is the only foundation for incorruptibility in this corruptible world. By our growing in the grace of God, we are able to witness the real truth revealed in Christ. By wearing Jesus Christ, Son of God we become children of God and thus we can witness the real truth. Our growth to fullness takes place when we practice justice, mercy and love of God in our life. Church indeed is an instrument in this world that raises this temporary universe to eternity and transforms it.

Spirituality is being trained by the active participation in the Church which is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:3 – 2:10). Each believer has the opportunity to grow into holiness with his Baptism. The spiritual life in the Church enables one to be born again in Spirit and progressively grow in Spirit from holiness to holiness. Those who are living subject to the guidance of Holy Spirit are being shown the way to fullness in life as individuals and as a community through the Sacraments of the Church.



Church shall not be viewed as a temporary arrangement to accomplish a set mission, but it is the dwelling place of God. The foundation of spirituality is the experience of Christ being in us and we in Christ. It is a continuing process of transformation to eternity. Church sustains its reality as the fullness or Pleroma of Christ filling everything in relation with Christ, in communion with Holy Trinity and in the visible and invisible, temporary and eternal presence and progressive growth in Christ. This service of the Church has been aimed at the transformation of all creations eternally beyond the limits of time and space. Church carries out this mission looking forward to the reality expected in eternity and not for any short term gains. Such a hope has to be developed through the spirituality that is nourished by in the Church life.

To formulate spirituality like this, a working style has to be developed emphasising Christian values in worship and service. Through our participation in Holy Qurbana and other Holy Mysteries we have to become part and parcel of Christ as a community thereby transforming the world. Hourly prayers, lent, fasting, short prayers, meditation, personal prayers, public prayers, philanthropic deeds and social obligations are all needed for spiritual growth and Christian transformation in addition to common worship. At the same time, there must be proper awareness of what to do in the society for its welfare. Nazareth Manifesto of Jesus Christ has to be implemented practically (Luke 4: 18, 19). There must be personal transformation also. Relation between man and God should lead to a relation between man and man; such should be the spirituality and social life we have.

Questions:

1. Compare and evaluate East – West approaches towards spirituality.
2. Discuss: 'spirituality progressively growing in the relation between God and man based on love and justice'
3. Explain how do the social foundation of spirituality is expressed in ascetic life and family life.



Lesson 5

Authority and Law: the Orthodox View

Preface # Authority through Law # Law: written and unwritten # Holy Bible and Tradition # Authority of Church # Indian Law and Christian Tradition

Preface:

The term 'authority' is one that is very eye catching these days. The authority being executed by ministers, officers, leaders, and even family heads are deeply discussed. Taking over authority, handing over authority, misuse of authority and clashes between people holding authorities as well as tussles between the public and authorities are all usual incidents influencing the progressive growth of a community positively or negatively. Things are no different when it comes to the Church Scenario as well. These point out to the need to have a proper understanding and acceptance of authority and law which would help sustenance of the Church or community and their growth in a healthy manner. During his public ministry, whatever Jesus Christ initiated were not acceptable to Jewish leadership because they didn't see adequate backing of authority and law behind him. When the Jewish leaders question him, "under what authority you are doing these?" Jesus responded with a counter question indicating the purposefulness of his deeds. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18; 7:29; 9:6; John 5:30; Romans 13:1). Christ indicates that he has come not to impose authority, but to implement the will of God. This approach of Christ is the foundation of authority within the Christian Church. [The book Light of the People – Book no 5 – has discussed the topic of Authority in unit 2, lessons 3 & 4].

Authority through Law:

The early Church community which was attracted towards the pieces of advice from Christ and his life accepted Old Testament, the scripture for Jews as their book of law and authority. They followed the Jewish synagogue worship as a model for their worship. The apostolic Church accepted Old Testament prophecies as law of authority that can be used to present Jesus Christ before the Jews. But the Christian approach had its differences in comparison with Jewish interpretation of law. The days of fasting were modified as Wednesday and Friday different from Monday and Thursday observed by Jews as we read in 'Didache'. As days and years progressed, Church got spread to Greek and Latin cultures giving rise to new thought processes in the Church. The Apostle St John succeeded in developing a Christology adopting the Greek concept of 'logos'. Later, further viewpoints developed as the Church expanded and regional culture of Antioch and Alexandria contributed a lot to the growth of Church. Thus, East West division, reformation movement and such developments made lots of changes in the Church in its global perspective. The present differences we see in the Church world across are due to varying interpretations of the authoritative laws prevailed in the Church.

Law: written and unwritten:

We can see reflections of relationship with the Old Testament in the thought processes of Jews, Muslims and Christians. While interpreting scriptural texts from Old Testament and evaluating them, each of these religious segments are seen to protect their interests and doctrinal approaches which, no doubt, is only natural. Therefore, the acceptance of written Old Testament texts depends on how



such written texts are expressed and understood. Jesus had not come to discard Old Testament, but to accomplish it. This is a truth Christians accept and believe, but Jews and Muslims may not. Because of these reasons, the faith and interests of a community are very significant while they accept and interpret written laws and doctrines. Setting aside these factors, any community or any church cannot sustain itself however hard they argue they could. In Christian community, there are reformative Churches who take stands that only the written doctrines (Holy Bible) are enough; but differences in interpretations would lead to new inferences which become their reformed doctrines. Therefore, whatever written doctrines are there, they have to be interpreted by the Church where dwells the Holy Spirit guiding us in all the truths. This alone can be accepted by the Church in fullness thereof.

The Jews have been considering Old Testament alone as laws and doctrines and therefore they could not identify Christ that was the essence therein; likewise, those who stay firm with the written Bible alone as scripture, they would not be able to be congruent with the interference of Christ in history of man or his revelations and would remain 'blind' to truths in their community. The interpretations of scripture have to be associated with the thought processes of Church in unison. The authority to interpret scripture has to be with the Church only. Once we can accept that such an authority is vested with the Church, what all cannons and models are formulated by that Church in unison would not be dismissed as manmade 'false traditions'.

Holy Bible and Tradition:

Jesus Christ is the true 'Word of God' or Logos. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). This Word is what the prophets have prophesied and recorded in writing; that 'Word' or Jesus Christ is living even today and that 'Word' is God. Nobody can understand or express God in fullness of its essence. Jesus Christ did not write anything, nor did he entrust anyone to record anything as written documents. What Jesus did was to coordinate a community of people who followed him. Scriptures in a written format would be helpful to a reasonable extent to lead a non believer to enrich him in matters of true faith so that he experiences the nearness of God in a community that believes in Jesus and follows him. But true Christian faith would sustain only if Christ, the living Word is introduced to a non believer through a living community. Thus, from time to time, a Church that lives in Christ, the true Word, under guidance from Holy Spirit, alone succeeds in introducing Christ to the world. The way of life and living traditions within that community has to be accepted in the Church as unwritten doctrines.

Written texts of scriptures were formed many years after the early Church came into being. Even these were recorded relying on memory to a good extend and therefore, possibilities are there that some missing would have been here and there. As human mind is not capable to understand divine revelations in their wholeness, our Lord has taught us that such mysteries would be revealed by Holy Spirit as we read in John 16: 12, 13. The same Holy Spirit leads the Church even today. Days of New Testament are going on. The history of Israelites has been accepted as Old Testament; likewise, history and traditions of the new Israel till such time Jesus comes again, has to be accepted as doctrines those are under prudential guidance and inspired by Holy Spirit.

In short, the tradition of reformist Churches that the Christian writings in biblical form recorded as Word in the New Testament during the 1st century alone as authoritative doctrines are not acceptable as basis for authentic faith because they are denying the guidance from Holy Spirit. In the



same way, the Roman Church has taken a stand that their Pope has the authority to add new traditions in the Church which should be accepted on equal terms with the doctrines laid down in New Testament and all such proclamations from the Pope or the ex – cathedra declarations are as good as scriptural doctrines; this too is not acceptable. The Roman Church looks at scripture and proclamations of their Pope as two channels for divine revelations. Such a stand is totally rejected by Orthodox Churches.

The Orthodox teachings on this issue can be summed up as under:

- (a) The live tradition of the Church alone is the sole source of divine revelations.
- (b) Written and unwritten doctrines have to be accepted under consensus fidelium and implemented from time to time
- (c) Written scriptures are main part of the unitary live tradition of the Church
- (d) Holy Spirit guides the Church through all truth
- (e) The Church denies all traditions which are contradictory to Holy Scriptural truths

In other words, we can understand that written tradition is the Holy Bible; unwritten doctrines are traditions of the Church.

Authority of Church:

Christian doctrines are expressed as written documents in the Holy Bible; Church possesses the authority to accept these doctrines as its tradition and interpret and teach them to the members of the Church. Thus, similar to the early Church, the Church of today also has the authority to take care that there occurs no move for alienation or deviation or contradiction from the basic principles as also for formulating new traditions in these lines whenever the need arises. The Holy Bible has never been above the Church. The head and foundation of the Church is Jesus Christ, the living Word, who has been in submission to God, the Father and has been carrying out his deeds in relation with Holy Spirit. This Jesus Christ, who is Word having taken flesh, cannot be confined within the boundaries of recorded documents in the pages of history of the 1st century. That being the truth, what all Holy Mysteries and Sacraments are formulated over a period of time in Church, the body of Christ, becomes the base for Christian way of life.

True nature of God was revealed live in Jesus Christ which indeed is the core for authenticity. Jesus Christ has within him authority which he utilised in his deeds to love, to serve, to submit him, to suffer, and to sacrifice up to death. The early Church superiors too had their authority confined to love, serve, being martyrs and to sacrifice. It is a sad truth that in later days, there developed power struggles and quarrels in the Church similar to tussles in the royal, political and social scenario. But the real causes for disputes in Church are the arguments that such hunger for authority has to be seen as traditions guided by Holy Spirit.

It should be possible that the authority revealed in Jesus Christ as love, sacrifice, and sufferings forms a firm doctrine of authority for the Church. Whenever the members of the Church decline in spirituality, it would become a need to protect authority of Church in the material sense. However such criteria through which attempts are made to sustain laws and doctrines of the Church would not be cognisant for the proper growth and spiritual enlightenment of the Church.



To confront heresies and unchristian systems coming within the church once in a while, Church would need necessary power, laws, Synods and other bodies. But all such powers and authorities with the Church must result in the protection of 'authority of Jesus Christ' and for progressively nurturing the believers spiritually. The authority, laws, traditions and doctrines must be good enough to present Christ as living in the community. This should be the ultimate goal. Such authority for the Church has its base in love and sacrifice.

Indian Law and Christian Tradition:

A tradition that has been live in all respects developed through the years guided by Holy Spirit is the basis of authentic doctrines of the Church as we have seen through the progress through history. The Churches have been capable enough to grow forward by assimilating various facets from Jewish religion as well as from Greek, Slavonic, Latin, Syrian and similar cultures elsewhere. The Indian Orthodox Church as also other Churches having presence in India have a responsibility to grow likewise by assimilating the cultural riches of India. Thus, while a live Indian Christian tradition gets formulated, it has to be ensured that Indian religious texts or doctrinal rituals or cultural systems are dovetailed into the Church without any discordance to the true Christian traditions; the Christian values shall be integrated to the Indian cultural scenario to an optimum extent. Any objections to such initiatives shall be confronted tactfully, be such objections national or global. The Christian community that has been grown up within a national backdrop has to be developed as Church of that nation and each Orthodox Church has the authority for this which has been always respected by other Orthodox Churches. We, in India, have to progress a lot in this direction and let us wait for guidance from Holy Spirit to accomplish this.

Questions:

1. How can we say that authority and doctrines are the basis for Church life?
2. Catholic views point out Holy Bible and traditions are two channels of divine revelations; Protestant views suggest Holy Bible alone is sufficient. Evaluate these two stands through Orthodox thought processes.

Lesson 6

Autocephaly of the Church and Witnessing Nationally: Orthodox Basics

Preface # Autocephaly and Freedom # Indian Orthodox Church and Nationality

Preface:

Every Eucharistic Community is a Church in miniature. All Orthodox Churches claim freedom to witness Christ independently by being congruent with the nationality of that region containing their language, culture and religious back ground in fullness thereof. Autonomy and Autocephaly are the classic stands of any Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church in one country does not accept supremacy of any foreign Church whatever be the circumstances. Each of these independent national Churches have the authority to choose their Episcopas and the High Priest of that Church designated Catholicose or Patriarch and consecrate them to that position. No Orthodox Church has

an authority to reign over another Orthodox Church or impose an imported culture over others. This is the reason why Orthodox Churches do not permit foreign missionaries or Bishops to hold authority over a national Orthodox Church partially or fully in any form, be such a foreign Bishop from the Roman Church or a Protestant Church or even from another Orthodox Church. A foreign Patriarch or a Pope or missionaries are not allowed to interfere in the affairs of Indian Orthodox Church because such interference is not conducive to Orthodox traditions. We stand for national freedom for our Church in India retaining true Orthodox tradition to its core.

Autocephaly and Freedom:

What does the Church aim at when it takes a stand of national freedom? Being autocephalous, the Church, like all other similar Churches, has to present the Christian essence in line with periodic, national and cultural approaches through a concerted and united effort; this is what is all about autocephaly in its simple terms. Each of the Orthodox Churches is growing forward containing the peculiarities of that nationality maintaining identity and uniqueness in worship, rituals and religious views. Greek, Syrian and Egyptian cultures have contributed largely towards the progressive growth of those Churches, and in a similar manner, Indian Orthodox Church has to grow up containing peculiarities of Indian culture and thereby our Autocephaly would become realistic. In fact, only such a Church can be called Orthodox in its true essence. The Christian community in India has been progressing under the influence of Greek, Latin, Anglican, Syrian, Slavonic, Byzantine and such cultures and therefore, the term 'Orthodox' doesn't look suitable for the Indian Church. Therefore, if there has to be an Orthodox Church in India to take roots maintaining true identity and wholeness, there must be independent leadership and system of governance. Such a system should continuously encourage containment of regional nationality; then the Church can effectively witness Christ which would be fruitful witnessing.

[Book no 17, 'Path of Witnessing', by Fr Dr Jacob Kurian of the Divyabodhanam series and 'Is this an Indian Church?' by Fr Dr VC Samuel has detailed discussions on this issue]

Indian Orthodox Church and Nationality:

There are people who misunderstand Orthodox Church as a Church that retains all the ancient characteristics of the early Church without any deviation to its oldest mannerisms. But the fact is that Orthodox Churches do enjoy the freedom to contain them without diluting the principles behind basic doctrines and expressing them in contemporary contexts. These Churches do have their opportunities to adopt new approaches in worship and teaching of scriptures to carry out witnessing Jesus Christ effectively. Orthodox Churches give due importance to customised rituals but care has been taken to enrich them to be useful to the growing generation of the day. Perhaps, no other Church is equipped as much as Orthodox Churches to express Christianity as part of nationality retaining basic characteristics intact. Thus, when members of different Orthodox Churches engage themselves in worship, it is not uncommon that there are clear differentiations in the pattern of liturgy as also in performance of certain rituals.

For example, members of different Byzantine Churches having fellowship in Holy Qurbana have their own separate parishes and live as independent communities in the United States of America as it has been found necessary for them to retain their ethnic nature while carrying out worship. However, it



is an important aspect to be taken note that they experience congruence and feeling of unity with their own national scenario.

Whatever rituals and such systems having been formulated in the spiritual and intellectual background of ancient Greece gradually reached all the eastern countries including India. Most other eastern Churches adopted these systems, but dovetailing them with their own cultural heritage and progressively moved forward. However, what happened in India cannot be said to be in a similar line; we rather failed to understand or inherit the rich cultural tradition of which we were a part. There may be varying reasons behind this such as the colonialism under which we have been suppressed thereby forgetting nationality to a good extent or the socially, economically and politically oriented nationality would not have encouraged a religious congruence.

Our Church in India has not even made any attempt to understand the richness of our national culture which has been really nobler and greater than the Greek culture on many counts. There is no other reason why a theologically enriched community has not originated in India. Consequently, Indian Church lag behind others in strong traditions, be them liturgical or theological. Whatever concerted efforts we have initiated so far confine to maintaining autocephaly and protecting freedom in governance of the Church affairs. We have to move miles forward to formulate an Indian Orthodox Church congruent with the nationality of India.

There are two reasons why we missed out understanding the possibility within Orthodoxy to move ahead in a national streamline. One, the liturgical traditions and customs of the Syrian Church of Antioch though formulated before the 13th century have entered our conscience blindly to such an extent that to see an alternative or even to assimilate those systems at its full depth have not been prioritised in our mind set; we have had no opportunity at such an exercise as well. We have understood Orthodoxy as a customised system that has to sustain as congruent as possible with the Syrian tradition; or we have been made to understand so and this continues even today.

Second, the Roman faith and systems have been forced on us by the 17th century. This paved the way for Roman rituals and doctrines mixing up with Orthodox systems knowingly and unknowingly. Not that we mean Latin or Syrian traditions are not up to the mark, but these are to be viewed as other national traditions. By the encroachment of these alien traditions, the Church in India lost its opportunity to nurture an original Indian tradition within this Church; now, the task lying before us is to develop a true Indian Christian tradition and Indian theological thought processes like other known Christian traditions.

Let us try to be more transparent on this issue. All Orthodox Churches can claim the paternal faith and tradition of Christian Church to the same extent; each of the Orthodox Churches has taken efforts to coordinate faith related customs and systems in the background of national, periodic, cultural and contemporary issues and religious points of view to present them in such a codified and refined pattern before the believers. This has enabled them to formulate their own theological views and liturgy pattern. The Church in India too has to work out an Indian theology and Indo Christian liturgy. There used to be theological schools of thought in the early Church at Alexandria and Antioch, models we can still emulate. But our Orthodox Church has not been a position to play such a constructive role in the Indian context; the Roman Catholics and the Protestants in India who cannot take stand different from their foreign connections have formulated some sort of an Indian

Christian Theology which can be refined by the Indian Orthodox Church to retain the intrinsic worth of true faith; here, we have a crucial role to play.

Looking into the basics, only the Orthodox Church can actively involve with a national bearing. Any Church being overseen from abroad cannot go beyond their foreign influence in faith or doctrines or rituals. Thus, any Indian liturgy or Indian theology formulated by the Indian Orthodox Church would be different from any previous such thoughts put in place. It is time that we think aloud how this can be accomplished. Now, other Churches are branding Orthodox as old fashioned and there is no need to blame anyone for this. Indian Orthodox Church should be in a position to understand what true Orthodoxy is and present it in the right spirit so that the Christian witnessing in its absoluteness is made possible. Otherwise, there is no need for this Orthodox Church to be here. The Christian Mission should be present in its intrinsic absoluteness rather than being just a religion among many. We have to present the essence of Christ in India in an Indian scenario. Let us work together for this. Any foreign influence or interference standing as obstacles in the way should be dismantled. Unless we reach this goal, the Christian witnessing and ecumenism will remain in India as just a mirage.

Questions:

1. How sufficient are autocephaly and self governance to protect Orthodoxy?
2. Discuss: Indian Orthodox Church and national witnessing.

Unit 2

Orthodox Churches and Other Churches: Relations and Distances

Lesson 1

Splits in the Church: an Observation in a Historical Perspective

Historical Background # Chalcedon Definition # Seven Synods

Historical Background:

A brief narration as to how the Church used to be in the 1st century can be seen in the Holy Bible. The Book of Acts indicate Churches in different regional names like Galatia, Rome, Corinth and so on; however, all these Churches were one when it came to faith, rituals and doctrines. Though heresies cropped up in the Church, the learned fathers of the Church admonished such infiltrations and took care that true faith was not diluted. Till the Synod of Ephesus in AD 431, the reality of 'One Church' sustained. However, from this point onwards, we are seeing histories of splits within the Church one way or other. A Bishop named Nestor refused to accept St Mary as Mother of God and he was declared as heretic in the above Synod; but there were people to join hands with him and though a negligible minority, their stands can said to have initiated splits for the first time, though to a very small level for the time. Church fathers had stated later that whatever heresies were being spread in the Church by the followers of Nestor during the succeeding days were indeed not originated from Nestor in the first place. Whatever be that, the first split in the Church is attributed to the developments in the Synod of Ephesus in 431.

The next split was the result of sharp differences of opinion expressed in the Chalcedon Synod of AD 451 on the issue of the 'persons' in Christ. In this, Eastern Orthodox Churches known as Byzantine Churches and the Roman Church stood on one side and Eastern Orthodox Churches known as Oriental Orthodox Churches as a minority stood on the other side paving way for the second split. The reason for dispute then was the argument that Jesus was in 'one unified human and divine nature' whereas the other argument stood for 'differing human and divine natures'. Of these, the former stand was adopted by Coptic Church of Egypt and the Syrian Church of Antioch who were later joined by Armenian Church and Ethiopian Church. In the modern times, Malankara Church in India too joined this tradition. These Orthodox Churches of Egypt, Antioch, Armenia, Ethiopia and India known as Oriental Orthodox Churches are now mutually enjoying communion of fellowship in Holy Qurbana.

Till AD 1054, Byzantine Orthodox Churches also called Constantinople Church were in unison with Roman Church. Now, there arose disputes between them and the main reason propagated behind this was the doctrinal advice on the origin of Holy Spirit. All Eastern Churches vehemently believe and advise that Holy Spirit originated from the Father; but the Western Church or the Roman Church came with a theory that Holy Spirit originated from the Father and the Son. Many differences as well

as mutual distancing between the East and the West were the real reasons behind this split within the Church, but the disputes in faith were highlighted as reasons for separation.

This split of AD 1054 led to the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Pope of Rome excommunicating each other. However, this excommunication was withdrawn in 1964. In general, Eastern Orthodox Churches take care to retain their national character and leadership as well as their ethnic nature, language and culture. Most known Churches among them are Churches of Russia, Rumania, Greece, Bulgaria, Georgia, Serbia, Cyprus, Finland, Albania, Sinai and Poland. All these Churches have accepted the Chalcedon faith and therefore, they have no communion of fellowship with Oriental Orthodox Churches in Holy Qurbana. They are commonly known as Byzantine Orthodox Churches.

Later, in the 16th century, there arose a reformation movement in the Roman Church which resulted in the formation of different 'Protestant Churches'. Pope Leo X excommunicated Marti Luther in 1531 consequent to which reformist Churches were formed and they grew and expanded. The movement of reformation had its roots in England, Switzerland and Germany; now there are umpteen number of protestant churches in different names and styles throughout the world. In India too, reformist influence infiltrated into Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches giving birth to newly christened churches and these strategies of reformist caused confrontation and distancing among Churches.

For the fruitful implementation of ecumenical movement, there has to be an independent national Church in India that is free from all sorts of foreign connections and such varying interests and pieces of advices. The Orthodox Church in India can be said to be making efforts in that direction. Even the Syrian Christians within the Roman Catholic Church in India have started clamouring for freedom (Star of the East, June – September 1987). At the same time some Bishops and lay leaders born and brought up in India look forward to be submissive to the Patriarch of Antioch thereby surrendering free existence of this Church misguiding the ordinary men and women who are under their control. Rather than protecting the Orthodox principle that the free nature of the Church and national witnessing are to remain intact, such priestly and lay leadership concentrate on their personal agenda that their positions of authority shall not be damaged or diluted.

Chalcedon Definition:

Even before the Chalcedon Synod of AD 451, two strong Christological stands were developed within the Church namely, the Alexandrian Christology with eastern dominance and the Antiochian Christology with western dominance. [Refer Book No 4 of Divyabodhanam series namely 'In Theological Path' by Very Rev Dr Mathew Vaidyan Cor Episcopa] The Chalcedon Synod accepted the west oriented doctrines of Antiochian Christology under the initiatives and leadership of Pope Leo of Rome. The fathers who attended the session were compelled to accept and be a party to the doctrinal document called 'Tom of Leo'. Though this document was not in any way superior in essence to what was defined on Christology in the Nicene Synod of AD 325, the wordings used against heretics were by and large acceptable to most delegates. There was no dispute to the fact of total divine nature as well as total human nature in Jesus Christ. Even heretics have no difference of opinion on this. But the issue was how the divine nature and the human nature were mutually related.

Acceptable inferences from Chalcedon:

According to the teachings of Eutyches the human nature of Christ had merged with the divine nature in Christ. Against this, Chalcedon had brought the concept as 'not blended' in its definition. Apollinaris propagated the idea that at the place of a human mind Christ had Logos. Here, the definition stated 'without deviation'. Nestor had been teaching all over that the divine nature and human nature sustain in Christ separately; here the usage 'not divisible and not different' came to the definition. All these explanations or clarification were acceptable to all.

Unacceptable inferences from Chalcedon:

However, the usage in Chalcedon definition such as 'divinity and humanity of Christ in two natures' was not acceptable to fathers from Eastern Churches. They argued that this usage was nothing but the Nestorian doctrine in a different format. When Jesus wept at the grave of Lazar, his human nature was revealed and when Lazar was raised from death, his divine nature was revealed; this sort of thinking would lead one to accept that Jesus had a dual personality at the same time. Going ahead, this inference would get extended to the stand that Jesus was a medium that took flesh for representing two persons in two natures. Fathers from Eastern Churches believed that such a situation would lead to various heresies in the Church. Therefore, they insisted that the usage should be 'from two natures'. This was not acceptable to those who grew up in the West oriented Antiochian Christology and thus Pope Leo and those with him refused to be in line with what was proposed by fathers from the East. Thus, the Church got split vertically. Oriental Orthodox Churches held on to the principle that Christ was a unitary person where divinity in its fullness and humanity in its fullness were together. Clement of Alexandria had taught a definition explaining this: 'one incarnate nature of God the Word'. This was found acceptable among Oriental Orthodox churches.

What led to the split at Chalcedon was also due to the varying stands taken by fathers culturally, linguistically and politically. Consequently, Eastern Oriental Orthodox Churches decided to stand with the findings of the first three universal Synods alone whereas others took stands to accept the subsequent four more Synods till the second Synod of Nicaea in AD 787 and ultimately, landed up themselves to what is called the 'great schism' of AD 1054.

Seven Synods of Byzantine Churches:

We have briefly seen the first four universal synods namely those held at Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451). There were further Synods in 553 and 680 – 81 at Constantinople and in 787 at Nicaea. Byzantine Orthodox Churches and Roman Church accept all these seven Synods. Additionally, there were fourteen more Synods called by Roman Church. Thus, Oriental Orthodox Churches accept only the first three Synods. The Byzantine Orthodox Churches have the first seven and the Roman Church have all the twenty one Synods as acceptable.

The Second Synod of Constantinople in AD 553:

Theodore of Mopusuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus and Ibas of Edessa worked out a doctrinal document namely 'Three Chapters' which was totally contradicting the stands adopted by Clement of Alexandria. The Synod had condemned this document and the three who were behind working out

the same were cursed. The decisions taken at this Synod, called by Emperor Justinian, was signed by 165 Bishops. No specific canons were formulated in this.

The Third Synod of Constantinople in AD 680 – 81:

This was attended by Bishops who were under the Patriarchates of Alexandria and Antioch. There was a heresy then called Monothelitism which had been teaching that Jesus Christ had one and 'one will power' only. This teaching was dismissed by the Synod as a heresy. However, the decision of the Synod could be interpreted as stand favouring 'two will power'. The reason is that the inference of the Synod that the two 'will powers' had no physical unity, but only a unity of morality, the 'two nature' theory of the person of Christ was again being confirmed. In such a sense, there is nothing wrong to see this Synod as a repetition of Chalcedon. No canons were formulated here.

The Second Synod of Nicaea in AD 787:

This Synod was called by Empress Irene as desired by the Patriarch of Constantinople. The decisions taken here include using pictures and icons in worship. Though true worship was only for God, it needed to be encouraged if these media of pictures and icons could enrich worship of God. It was also decided to curse those who were objecting this. In addition, 22 canons relating to maintenance of discipline in Church were accepted here.

The above four Synods namely the 4th, 5th, 6th and the 7th were generally not acceptable to Oriental Orthodox Churches, but during later years, detailed dialogues were held between Churches of either divisions Orthodox fraternity to see what all decisions taken in these Synods could be accepted and what all could not be accepted; consequently, there had been efforts between Oriental and Byzantine segments to identify ways and means of unity between the two.

Questions:

1. Explain the background that led to splits in the Church.
2. Evaluate the definition given at the Chalcedon Synod. What were the factors leading to split in the church?
3. Explain briefly the 5th, 6th and 7th universal synods and their relevance.

Lesson 2

Oriental – Byzantine Churches in the Path of Unity

Background # Four Unity Dialogues # Areas where there are mutual acceptances # Objections to Unity as of Now # Future Plans towards Unity

Background:

Both divisions within the Church had accepted the conclusions of the first three universal Synods in general and had been retaining the same faith, yet situations led to schisms and split. In fact, the true reasons behind such schisms were not based on faith as we understand things in the right perspective. Based on the Chalcedon definitions, Churches within the Byzantine Empire itself separated into two as Greek, Latin cultures on one side and Egyptian, Syrian cultures on the other side. Existing tussles between them which were related to cultural, political and regional issues and catalysed by the lack of effective communications contributed substantially to the schisms. The agendas of the emperors and the influence generated by their political representatives and their interests had been quite crucial in formulations of doctrines of faith. Later days' church history reveals that these Churches had come to talking terms initiating attempts towards unity when an open stand was taken by either side based on politically, culturally and linguistically congenial circumstances.

Four Unity Dialogues:

After the split, both sides had made attempts to expand crossing their geographical limits. Greek Churches included Russian and other East European Churches in their fold. Oriental Churches too had their plans and expanded by adding Churches of Ethiopia, Armenia and India to them. All these Churches are members of WCC which as a movement has created conducive atmosphere for talks on unity. Comparing with other Churches in WCC, mostly of Protestant lineage, these two divisions realised the closeness among them in rituals and doctrines of faith as well as in the essence of their concept of Christianity, which has led to moves for conciliation and such efforts are ongoing. The Faith and Order Commission of WCC has played a good role in this regard. Consequent to all these efforts, from 1964 to 1971, four unofficial sessions of dialogues have taken place between the theological scholars of either division. The dialogues of reconciliation held at Aarhus in Denmark (1964), at Bristol in England (1967), at Geneva in Switzerland (1970) and at Addis Ababa in Ethiopia (1971) were quite fruitful. 57 delegates took part in these deliberations from both sides; 28 from Churches of Byzantine tradition such as Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Russian Orthodox Church, Greece, Rumania, Bulgaria, Alexandria and Cyprus and 29 from Oriental Orthodox Churches like those of Coptic, Syria, Armenia, India and Ethiopia; all these delegates actively participated and presented papers. The topics deliberated in detail and depth included matters related to Christology, importance of councils and their veracity, rejection and acceptance of fathers of the Church as also the geographical jurisdictions for Churches for independent governance. These exercises resulted in identifying many areas of acceptance and Agreed Statements on such issues were released. [Greek Orthodox Theological review, Volume X, No 2, winter 1964 – 65, The Oriental Orthodox Churches Addis Ababa Conference, January 1965]

Areas where there are mutual acceptances:

The main issue of dispute was related to the person in Christ (one nature – two natures). A general statement released at Aarhus in 1964 reads as under: “We recognize in each other the one Orthodox faith of the church. Fifteen centuries of alienation have not led us astray from the faith of our fathers.... On the essence of the Christological dogma we found ourselves in full agreement. Through the different terminologies used by each side, we found the same truth expressed.” [Quoted by Fr Dr V C Samuel in Star of the East, 1982, Volume 4, No 3] The mutual agreement recorded at Bristol in 1967 has greater clarity: “But both sides speak of a union without confusion, without change, without division, without separation. The four adverbs belong to our common tradition” (Ibid page 13). It is matter of great significance that this understanding has been reached on the words used at Chalcedon.

Simultaneously, an understanding was reached on the dispute regarding the will of Jesus Christ Monotheletism and Ditheletism. “All of us agree that the human will is neither absorbed nor suppressed by the divine will in the incarnate Logos nor are they contrary to one another” [Ibid page 13]. The Geneva conclave of 1970 recorded a mutual understanding on Christology like this: “On the essence of the Christological dogma, our two traditions despite fifteen centuries of separation, still find ourselves in full and deep agreement with the universal tradition of the one undivided Church” [Ibid page 13].

Thus, Geneva conclave has recorded the agreement between both sides that they have no dispute on the common traditions of the undivided Church. Worship, spirituality, canonical rituals and customs are areas where both sides have found that they can be together. Similarly, Holy Trinity, Christology, Holy Spirit, Ecclesiology, Priesthood, Holy Mysteries, Communion with Saints and the second coming of our Lord in full glory are all doctrines where mutual consensus need not be doubted.

Metropolitan of Mira, His Grace Chrisosthomos presented a paper outlining the efforts carried out for uniting Byzantine and Oriental Churches detailing the deliberations during various dialogues between the two in a gathering at Vienna in 1979 which was called by a Roman Catholic organisation named Pro – Oriente. [See EPISKEPIPSIS 19th November, 1979]. His Grace winds up his paper thus: “The unity we seek to realise in the future, and in which our two Apostolic Churches, in equality and mutual respect, will come again into full communication on the basis of the faith, the tradition and the ecclesial life of the undivided Church of the first four and a half centuries, shall be a real unity” [Star of the East, January 1980, page 27].

Objections to Unity as of Now:

In order that the efforts taken so far through unofficial dialogues turn out fruitful, there must be proper initiatives from official levels of both sides. Moreover, there are a few points yet to be sorted out of which the crucial ones are (1) relevance of Synods and their number, (2) norms to accept or reject fathers of Church and (3) the system that has to put in place regarding the governance of Church at regional level as also at global level.

Number of reasons can be pointed out why concerted follow up measures were not initiated for effectively implementing whatever were achieved towards conciliation through the above dialogues. Some of such reasons are: (1) geographical distance between countries, (2) political administration

that keep on changing, (3) interest or enthusiasm to ensure that the nationality and cultural scenario of each Church do not get diluted, (4) historical fact that many members from Oriental Orthodox Churches were forced to forsake their identity and get converted to Islam to escape torture and persecution from Byzantine Churches and the resultant hatred still persisting; non congruency between Oriental Churches themselves, (5) some sort of practical dilemma for joining together, (6) impropriety of individual Churches on either side joining together rather than the family of Churches in entirety and (7) the absence of permanent commission to coordinate and continue the conciliation efforts.

Future Plans towards Unity:

Whatever good moves had come up so far were in unofficial platforms and therefore they cannot be implemented officially. Therefore, it is necessary that each of these Churches should appoint a commission which should objectively evaluate the findings arrived at the unofficial dialogues and the inferences of these commissions should be deliberated at the respective Churches. Once such inferences of these commissions are found acceptable to the Churches, a joint Theological Commission from all Orthodox Churches should be formulated. This commission should be of a permanent nature and the administrative expenses for this Commission shall be met by all Churches. This joint commission should carry out more discussions and wherever agreements are there, an official document should be prepared for presenting to all churches which they can discuss and finalise so that steps can be initiated for implementing them in all Churches.

Roman Catholic Church and WCC are poles apart in theological matters; therefore unity among Churches following Orthodox faith assumes importance. Once this is done, efforts can be initiated to bring Roman Catholics and WCC closer to each other. In other words, a scenario where all Churches come closer can be conceived and Orthodox Churches can show the way. Let us hope, the Almighty uses 'Orthodox Church' to be the cause for true unity among Churches.

Questions:

1. Explain the efforts towards unity between Oriental Orthodox Churches and Byzantine Orthodox Churches.
2. What are the factors and situations those stand as obstacles in the unity of Orthodox Churches?
3. Evaluate the relevance and possibilities of total unity among Orthodox Churches.

Lesson 3

Oriental – Roman Churches: in the Light of Vienna Dialogues

Preface # Areas where chances for unity are bright # Issues where total conciliation may not be possible # Future chances for unity

Preface:

Efforts towards mutual cooperation and possible unity among different Churches have been in place for quite some time. There have been concerted efforts to analyse deeply the factors of similarity and discordance between Oriental Orthodox Churches and Roman Catholic Church as well as to understand each other better. Dialogues in these lines have been initiated by a Roman Catholic promoted ecumenical body called 'Pro – Oriente' centred at Vienna in Austria. There were four sessions in 1971, 1973, 1976 and 1978 in this direction. Though the dialogues didn't have any official character, the issues deliberated and the inferences came out signify crucial interactions in the history of ecumenism. Scholars in theology and church history participated in these dialogues representing Oriental Orthodox Churches of Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Syria and Armenia. There was equally good representation of scholarly luminaries in theology and church history from the Roman Catholic side also throughout each of these sessions. There were mutual understandings on many issues and common statements were released. Yet, areas are there where conciliation has to be attempted at. From either side, a total 26 papers were presented in these four sessions. In-depth study and discussions were carried out. A publication from Vienna namely, 'Wort and Wahrheit' has published details of these dialogues including full text of all the papers presented as doctrinal documents. A great achievement of these dialogues can be said to be the success in identifying such areas with mutual concurrence where discordance remain. Crucial areas of discordance were the person in Jesus Christ, the supremacy of Roman Pope and the infallibility of Roman Pope. Once these were understood, and the stands on these issues were expressed from either side, it came to be realised that full conciliation was not too far. The Vatican Council of Roman Church held during 1962 – 65 has been a clear indication that the mood of Roman Catholic Church had changed a lot as they modified many of their earlier stands. Yet, the dialogues had paved a way to the truth that for a unity in its true spirit, they had to come down from their established stands in more issues of significance.

Areas where chances for unity are bright:

Person of Jesus Christ:

This was the main point of dispute at the Chalcedon Synod of AD 451. There were mutual allegations branding oriental Orthodox Churches as Monophysites and the other side as Diophysites. However, the above referred dialogues had open discussions those were scholarly in nature and not politically oriented or motivated, which enabled either side to understand the other side in a realistic sense. Eutyches, the proponent of Monophysitism which came to be known also as Eutychianism and Nestore, said to be the proponent of Diophysitism which came to be known also as

Nestorianism were found to be denying the true doctrine of Christology and therefore, both sides understood mutually that neither accepted the above propositions.

The dialogues led both sides to understand that branding Roman Catholic faith as Nestorian and Oriental Orthodox faith as Eutychian was false thereby finding that there is no sense in staying distanced on matters of Christology. The Agreed Statement released in this context has recorded: 'We all agree in rejecting both the Nestorian and Eutychian positions about Jesus Christ' (See Fr Dr K M George, The West and East meet, Star of the East, July 1982, page 22). In short, the disputes between these two sides about the divinity and the humanity in their wholeness in Jesus Christ have come to an end.

'One incarnate nature of God, the Word ----- does not deny, but rather express the full and perfect humanity of Christ' (quoted by Fr Dr V C Samuel, The Vienna Consultations, Star of the East, January, 1979, page 9). It came to an understanding that differences between the two sides were due to the inadequacy of the usage of words and that there were no differences in the essence of the core sense of the terms. Fr Dr V C Samuel, who represented our Church in these deliberations, had played a very crucial role in formulating a mutual understanding as above. His opinion on the issue is worth noting: 'The two church traditions, then, conserve the doctrinal heritage of the pre – Chalcedonian Church unreservedly by means of, their respective terminologies' (See Star of the East, January 1979, page 7). Though it is not possible for men to contain the mystery of Jesus Christ and express it in words, both sides agreed to release a common doctrine about Christ; thus, a common communiqué was released as under:

"We believe that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is God the Son incarnate, perfect in his divinity, and perfect in his humanity. His divinity was not separated from his humanity for a single moment, not for the twinkling of an eye. His humanity is one with us, his divinity without commixture, without confusion, without division, without separation. We in our common faith in the one Lord Jesus Christ, regard his Mystery inexhaustible and ineffable and for the human mind never fully comprehensible or expressible" (The Star of the East, July 1082, page 22). Thus, it was proclaimed that both sides have come together as far as the core faith in matters of Christology is concerned.

Universal Councils or Synods:

A common communiqué was released to the effect that the decisions taken at the first three universal synods namely those at Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381) and Ephesus (431) were more wholesome in nature as they were of the undivided Church compared to decisions taken at synods those followed. This communiqué has also expressed the view that these decisions are generally concurred with: 'We find our common basis in the same apostolic tradition, particularly as affirmed in the Nicaea Constantinopolitan creed. We all confess the dogmatic decisions and teachings of Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus' (Ibid, page 23). Another agreed statement reads thus: 'We agree that the first three ecumenical councils had, because of their more general acceptance in the Church, a greater degree of fullness, which the later councils do not have' (Ibid, page 23).

Issues where total conciliation may not be possible:

Infallibility in Church:

The term 'infallibility' is not acceptable to Orthodox Churches. Orthodox side held the view that dependable or indefectible teaching authority rests with the Church in its wholeness that is the body

of Christ and guided by Holy Spirit in all ways and means; such an authority can never be concentrated in an individual or in a council. But the other side took a stand that Roman Catholic Church was the Church in its wholeness and therefore it possessed infallibility. As such, the sessions could not come to a common acceptable agreement on this. Yet, a statement was released that infallibility should be understood by Church as a whole and not by an individual: 'There was agreement that infallibility or as the Oriental Orthodox prefer to say, dependable teaching authority, pertains to Church as a whole, as the body of Christ, and the abode of Holy Spirit' (Ibid, page 23).

Is the Pope above Church or dependent on Church?

There is a traditional stand within the Roman Catholic Church that our Lord has entrusted his authority in its fullness to Peter and therefore, the Pope who claims to be the successor to Peter enjoys the whole authority of Christ; it may not be easy for the Roman Catholics to make a change to this stand all on a sudden, yet, through a common agreement, it was opined that the Pope was not above the councils of the Church: 'The principle of collegiality emphasised by the Second Vatican Council is appreciated as above in the right direction according to which the role of the Bishop of Rome – the Pope – is seen within the council and not above it' (Ibid, page 23 – 24).

Mutual excommunications:

An understanding could not be arrived at on this issue as to how past excommunications can be rectified. However, it was agreed that any statement of cursing appearing in the liturgy of any Church should be removed. It was found not necessary to compel Churches to accept those excommunicated earlier.

'Regional', 'Global' Churches:

Orthodox Churches believe that Churches located at various regions contain the fullness of the Catholicity of Church, but the Roman Catholic stand is that all regional Churches are only part and parcel of the global Church and therefore fullness can be achieved only when all come together; this being the traditional stand of Roman Catholics, they are not willing to make a total change here; yet, there was consensus at the dialogues that there was a fullness even at the regional level as stated in a common agreement: 'It is the same mystery of the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church, the body of our risen and ascended Lord, that is being manifest both in the 'local' Church and in the 'universal' Church'. It would be helpful to enforce proper governance in the Church administration through the decisions arrived at universal synods or councils, but if a Church does not be part of the global Church under a single head, there can be no lacuna to such a Church. It has to be recalled that from time to time priestly positions such as Kasheesha, Episcopa, Metropolitan and Patriarch – Catholicose were developed in Church as manifested by Holy Spirit and therefore a global head for the Church as a whole is not an averse proposal for Orthodox Churches; however, they are not agreeable that such a head shall be the Bishop of Rome and that he shall be designated Pope. Still, a common agreement was arrived at: "In the light of the newly emerging global perspective and pluralistic tendencies in the world community, the Churches should undertake afresh a common theological reflection on primacy with a new vision of our future unity' (Star of the East, January 1979, page 10). 'The structure will be basically conciliar. No single Church in the communion by itself be regarded as the source and origin of that communion, the source of that unity of the Church is the action of the Triune God' (Star of the East, July 1982, page 24).



Uniate Churches:

Roman Catholics are working hard to add all Orthodox Churches worldwide to their fold through Uniate movements. What they did in Kerala in 1930 that led to the formation of Malankara Rite as part of Roman Catholic Church was an action against the official synod decisions of Rome; therefore Orthodox Churches insisted that this sort of conversion to Catholicism should be stopped immediately. This resulted in a common agreement to be released reading as: 'The Oriental Orthodox Churches, according to the principles of Vatican II and subsequent statements of the See of Rome, cannot be fields of mission for other Churches'. Despite all these, the Roman Catholics in Kerala are still active in wooing Orthodox members to their fold, which rules the day like a paradox.

Future chances for unity:

The dialogue sessions were wound up after pointing out the need for further studies and discussions in the areas such as Immaculate Conception of St Mary, origin of Holy Spirit, authority in governance of Church, status of the Bishop of Rome, mutual communion in Holy Qurbana, independence of regional churches, autocephaly and global acceptance to regional synod decisions of Churches.

As a sequel to these positive developments, various Churches were expected to take initiatives for further follow up measures, but sadly, no decisions were forthcoming as looked forward to. In 1983, our His Holiness Catholicose had discussions with the Pope at Vatican and expressed mutual willingness to come together to total unity based on the previous dialogues (Star of the East, June 1983).

In 1986, Pope John Paul II met His Holiness Mar Thoma Mathews I at Mar Elijah Cathedral, Kottayam and expressed their desire to proceed further towards unity. It was requested that the efforts of the Malankara Rite within the Roman Church creating obstacles should be properly controlled. The Pope declared that he stood for unity (Star of the East, March 1980).

Let us look forward to a unity in its totality as manifested through Holy Spirit leading the Church in all truth to fullness thereof in all dimensions.

[There are efforts for unity between Byzantine Churches and Roman Catholic Church through dialogues. In a joint communiqué signed by Demetrius I, the Constantinople Patriarch and the Pope of Rome John Paul II, a joint commission was appointed in November 1979 to look into these matters. Due to paucity of space, the details are not being discussed here. Interested readers can make a reference to Star of the East, January 1980, pages 31 – 33. Based on these proceedings, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by them in 2003].

Questions:

1. Explain the areas where Orthodox Churches and Catholic Church can have unity based on the Vienna unity dialogues.
2. What are the areas where Orthodox Churches and Catholic Church remain distanced? What are the suggestions towards unity?

Lesson 4

World Council of Churches and Orthodox participation

World Council of Churches # Orthodox Participation in WCC # Orthodox Protestant relation in WCC # Areas where Churches can work in unison through WCC

World Council of Churches (WCC):

WCC has been formed as a fellowship of Churches across the globe. This council has no resemblance to or characteristics of the Orthodox or Roman Catholic councils or synods. Many sub wings of this body are usually under the leadership of Protestant majority. Most of the Oriental – Byzantine Orthodox Churches have joined WCC on different occasions. WCC have been standing towards achieving unity among Churches as their proclaimed goal, but of late, their emphasis seems to be to establish Christian influence in social, political and economic fields.

Though more than 300 Churches across the globe are members in WCC, Roman Catholic Church is yet to join. Unlike Roman Catholic Church, WCC doesn't have any formal characteristic or political stand or unity in faith or traditional heritage. Each Church gets a single membership; likewise, despite their global presence, Roman Catholics too would get just a single membership. Also, Roman Catholic Church doesn't appreciate too much of a fellowship with Reformist Churches whose faith and thoughts are distinctly different. Along with this, even WCC leadership fear lose of their say in deliberations and discussions once the powerful Roman Catholics step in; even they fear lose of leadership of WCC itself. Thus, WCC and Roman Catholics are for the time being quite content that the present scenario of the latter being just an observer is the best option. However, Roman Catholic Church is a member with the Faith and Order Commission of WCC and is very much active there.

WCC has official forums like Central committee and Executive Committee, but there are no national or regional organisations under it. NCC or National Christian Council in India and KCC or Kerala Christian Council are organisations having no direct link with WCC. One aspect worth noting with WCC is that they possess a representative character of women and youth of various Churches. It shall also be taken note that the decisions taken are not considered as official decisions of member Churches and there are no systems in place to implement them within different Churches. Because of these sorts of lacunae, WCC is not interfering in matters directly pertaining to member Churches but, emphasis is largely directed towards preparing Churches to address the issues cropping up in the society, by political influences or economic imbalances, in a true Christian way.

Orthodox Participation in WCC:

Many Orthodox churches, particularly those of Ethiopia and India are founder members of WCC. Not only that our Church was a member from the very beginning, many of our distinguished members have occupied positions of top leadership of WCC on many occasions.

Ms Sara Chacko happens to be the first woman President of WCC, who has been a member of Indian Orthodox Church. (She was the daughter of well known lay leader of the Church late Mr



M A Chacko, popularly called the 'Nazarene Lion'.) L/L H G Dr Paulose Mar Gregorioso has been serving as the Associate General Secretary of WCC during 1962 – 67 and as one of the Presidents during 1983 – 91 in distinguished manner. The role played by His Grace has been acknowledged as really noble and commendable in presenting our Church as a global entity to the knowledge of all and for organising dialogues with other Churches aimed at achieving conciliation in as many areas as possible. He has played his part effectively in the dialogues with other Orthodox Churches and with Roman Catholic Church as we discussed in the two previous lessons. His association with other Churches at the global level has contributed a lot in the development our Orthodox Theological Seminary to its present enviable position and for the formulation of teaching aids of the highest quality and the umpteen theological publications now we have in our Church.

During very early days of WCC, Alexios Mar Theodosios and Thoma Mar Dionysios used to represent Malankara Orthodox Church in WCC sessions. They stood in the front line and introduced our Church before all the Churches across the world. Mr C I Itty was the one who gave admirable leadership to the youth wing of WCC right from the beginning for about three decades, who is also from our Church. He is the very first member of an Oriental Orthodox Church to be appointed as an office staff of Protestant dominated WCC.

L/L H G Dr Philippose Mar Theophilos and Late Fr Dr V C Samuel were two of our leaders who represented Malankara Orthodox Church at various platforms of WCC and they succeeded in spreading our name as also of our Theological Seminary. Their services are counted as invaluable. L/L H G Dr Geevarghese Mar Osthathiose had been associating with the unit 'Mission' of WCC and his experience there made him provide new dimensions to the missionary deeds our Church has been engaged in. The services of L/L H G Philippose Mar Eusebios were also really commendable.

H G Geevarghese Mar Coorilose, Fr Dr K M George and Fr Dr Jacob Kurian are doing highly commendable service representing our Church currently at the WCC. Fr Dr K M George has been working as a Central Committee member and has been chairing their Programme Committee.

Orthodox Protestant relation in WCC:

All the Oriental Orthodox Churches are members of WCC; similarly, barring the Albanian Church, all other Byzantine Churches are also members. But these Churches quite often do not succeed in making the Orthodox voice prominent in the sessions due to the overwhelming presence of Protestant Churches. There are at least a few Orthodox Churches thinking in terms of withdrawing their full membership and standing as mere observers like the Roman Catholics. The purpose behind the formulation of WCC was to make available a platform for various Churches to mutually understand and come to terms of unity as much as possible. Being members in WCC, Orthodox Churches could use such opportunities to enter into dialogues with other Orthodox Churches as well as with Roman Catholic Church. However, WCC has been a failure to initiate fruitful dialogues between Orthodox Churches and Protestant Churches as also between Roman Catholic Church and Protestants. Even L/L H G Dr Paulose Mar Gregorioso had more or less understood that any conciliar dialogues with Protestants would be a futile exercise considering the respective stands on faith and matters of ecclesiology. His Grace has recorded: "The Orthodox Churches are now sufficiently clear that no dramatic new developments are to be



expected in Orthodox – Protestant relations. The possibilities have been explored. The ecclesiological difference is too great to be easily overcome by verbal formulae. The best we can hope for is a continuation of cooperation and conversation, especially in the field of service to the world, and on the issues that confront humanity as a whole” [Star of the East, January 1979, page 13]. In his article evaluating the General Assembly held at Nairobi, he writes thus: “Recent experiences in the WCC have so shocked and pained some Orthodox that a ‘reconsideration’ of Orthodox membership in the WCC is being advocated in certain quarters. ----- The WCC is being regarded increasingly by Orthodox and Catholics as a Protestant Organisation. The presence of Orthodox is being progressively marginalised. ----- In the General Secretariat all the three are Protestants often irritating to the Orthodox. ----- All in all, the WCC has been for some time in the process of institutionalisation and bureaucratisation” [See Star of the East, March, 1983, pages 33 – 36]. Orthodox Churches were considered in a better way at WCC Assembly at Vancouver and many Orthodox representatives were assigned official responsibilities. The fact that L/L H G Dr Paulose Mar Gregorioso was chosen as one of the seven Presidents of WCC has been an example that Orthodox members too could come to the forefront of leadership at WCC.

L/L H G Dr Paulose Mar Gregorioso had pointed out certain lacunae in the working style of WCC and brought out a few suggestive measures for a right orientation in its functioning [Star of the East, March 1983, pages 7 – 11]. (1) Formulate a commission that works towards all the reformist Churches moving together [Communion of Churches of Reformation – CCR] (2) Formulate another commission for bringing together Evangelicals and Sectarians (3) Make attempts at official levels to maintain fruitful relationship with Roman Catholic Church (4) Formulate a permanent system that would have to be in touch with all Orthodox Churches. It may not be practical to conceive that Churches would come forward to be in unison immediately; but each Church can present before others their liturgy and living style so that all can know each other better and come closer. Efforts could be made to strengthen prayer life and study of scripture as well as encouraging meditation, fasting and spirituality. If these types of working pattern are to be put in place, there should be four persons from the four ecclesiastical traditions at the top of leadership with equal representative character. This would enable all Christians to come together in a fellowship of love so that they can interact with the various ‘issues’ of the world transmitting Christian consciousness. Church has to work continuously to maintain peace and justice in the world while being engaged in the development and renewal of the Church.

In order to formulate an action plan like this and implement it effectively with a reorientation of the existing pattern, the participation of Orthodox Churches is inevitable and therefore Orthodox Churches have to be more active in their participation within WCC.

It is a good omen that the above criticism on the working style of WCC has started yielding results. The wing namely Special Commission for Orthodox Participation in WCC has commenced in 1998 and is doing well. It is also a positive sign that the functioning and agenda of WCC have been undergoing changes to ensure a total participation of Orthodox Churches.

Areas where Churches can work in unison through WCC:

Though there are many areas where Churches can work together, a few of them found to be very crucial are being listed out below:



- a. Economic field – poverty – social justice
- b. Highlighting humanity against discrimination based on caste, creed and colour
- c. Friendship between Churches as well as between religions
- d. Raising voice of peace and tranquillity globally against international preparations of war
- e. Raising voice against social inequalities and to encourage freedom of women
- f. Formulation of Christian response to challenges raised by science and technology
- g. Presenting a good model against deterioration of cultural and moral values
- h. Ensuring constructive growth in sectors of health and hygiene, education and employment generation in cooperation with government and semi government establishments.

Orthodox Churches do have excellent opportunities to encourage and prepare Churches to implement constructive programmes as mentioned above as well as being a strong partner of WCC in its efforts in these directions. Once Orthodox participation is withdrawn from WCC, the council would turn out to be a pure Protestant body; therefore, Orthodox Churches have a crucial role to play in WCC in formulating a global Christian workmanship strengthened with the traditions and styles of various Churches across the world. It is an achievement for Orthodox Churches to have made others understand the intrinsic worth and remarkable characteristics of Orthodoxy by their participation in WCC.

Questions:

1. Explain what WCC is.
2. Evaluate the participation of Orthodox Churches in WCC.
3. What are the areas where various Churches can work in unison through WCC?

Lesson 5

Indian Orthodox Church and Other Churches: In the Light of Dialogues towards Unity

Preface # Why the term 'Orthodox' became unknown? # Dialogues towards Unity (a) with Roman Catholic Church (b) with Syrian Church of Antioch (3) with Mar Thoma Church (4) with Anglican Church (e) with Lutheran church

Preface:

People of India may not be quite aware of the sub denominations within the Christian Church. However, they have in mind two denominations namely Roman Catholics and Protestants. But there is a doubt among many whether there is a Church called Orthodox, or whether this Orthodox Church has its presence in India? Even many Christians have this doubt. How come that the Indians are not aware of Orthodox Church which has been maintaining the character of Christianity at its origin and keeping its intrinsic nature to a very large extent? Even, does an Orthodox Christian know what is meant by Orthodox?

History of Indian Christian Church reveals that the Church in India, established by St Thomas is as ancient as any Church in the world. The members of this Church used to be called Mar Thoma Christians as also Malankara Nazarenes. This was a singular Christian community in India. However, since 16th century, foreign missionaries from Portugal, England, Syria, Rome and other western countries came here; the interference of such missionaries and Bishops paved way for formation of different denominations of varying faith and came to be known in one or other names.

Why the term 'Orthodox' became unknown?

- (1) By and large, Orthodox Churches enjoy total freedom in their respective countries. The principle of Orthodoxy doesn't permit setting up branches of Churches in other countries and therefore no one from outside India thought of coming here to establish an Orthodox Church.
- (2) Orthodox tradition doesn't have a 'gospel mission' in the modern western style and therefore the Churches never spread across crossing their own boundaries.
- (3) Other Orthodox Churches having progressively grown up in their own respective cultural background would not find it easy to establish themselves in conditions apparently alien to them.
- (4) By and large, Orthodox Churches are known in names linked to their nationality and therefore they would be reluctant to be under the shadow of some other nationality.
- (5) The Church in India was an Eastern Christian Community that was strictly adhering to the apostolic tradition till 16th century; but the foreign missionaries from Portugal, England Netherlands and other westerners tried to dissociate Indian Church from Eastern Orthodox character. The reason is that to propagate reformist ideologies, it was necessary for them to brand the ancient traditions and faith as senseless and uncivilised.
- (6) Even the Bishops who from Antioch showed no interest to introduce them as Orthodox though they were from the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch which has been part and



parcel of Oriental Orthodox fraternity. The reason behind this was a strategy that the characteristics of any Orthodox Church being its national image enjoying full freedom in that national jurisdiction, and if the Church in India was Orthodox, another Orthodox Church could not interfere in its administration or rule over here. Those Bishops being sharp in mind had understood this fact. W2

- (7) Western historians branded the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch as Jacobites and therefore, that became the name of the Church in India after the Mulanthuruthy Synod held in 1876. Thus members of Indian Church gradually came to be known as Romans, Jacobites, Marthomites and CSI. In short, the true name of this Indian Church as Orthodox failed to see light.

It is necessary that all those patriotic Christians of India should work hard towards reinventing the true identity of the Church in India that is free from all sorts of foreign supremacy and interferences by maintaining apostolic rituals, doctrines and traditions as an Indian Orthodox Church. Once such a national Church is formulated, the traditional Christian faith can be presented successfully in alignment with Indian culture, language, nationality and spirituality; this would help spreading the Good News in an effective and appealing manner. This would also discard all sorts of foreign influences and inspirations. All Christian communities in India would better work together to achieve this. This would also make it necessary to search for the true nationality and true Christianity in their purest forms. Those powers, be Indian or foreign, standing in the way of such a reinventing exercise, should be shown their place once for all and a Christian community congruent with the Indian spirit should grow up.

With this goal in mind, Indian Orthodox Church has been entering into dialogues with sister Churches quite often.

Dialogues towards Unity:

The different Churches separated at different times on account of varying reasons have once in a while entered into dialogues to explore possibilities of unity. However, those Churches deeply rooted in reformist ideologies are very adamant in their stands that it has been becoming increasingly difficult for Orthodox – Syrian – Catholic Churches to make any advances with them in terms a coming togetherness. Even entering into dialogues too has been found a very tough proposition because such Churches have grown up through foreign based reformist movement maintaining a zealous affinity to those thought processes. If a singular Indian Church in total unity and originality has to be re established, the foreign influence and domination on those Churches have to be thrown out for which Orthodox – Syrian – Catholic Churches have to work hard. The Orthodox Church can be said to have made some advances in this direction.

Between Orthodox Church and Roman Catholic Church:

The theologians from either side at the Vienna unity dialogues have inferred that there are agreements in many of the theological and doctrinal matters between Orthodox and Catholic Churches but the relations between these two Churches in Kerala as also in other parts of India cannot be said to be very cordial. The Catholic Rite movement formed in 1930 has made things too worse, but the one to one dialogue between the Pope of Rome and HH Moron Mar Baseliose Mar Thoma Mathews I at Rome in 1983 and at Kottayam in 1986 have shown



responses in a positive manner in as much as that ways and means may be opened for progressive discussions aimed at unity. The discordance that has been developed in the Roman Catholic Church in India would be creating obstacle for the time being, but it is expected that the chances of cooperation between these two Churches in India are very bright in the days to come. There is a sharp increase in members among the Catholics in India that the Church should dispense with the name 'Roman' and should be called Indian Catholic Church. They also clamour for reinstating the self governance powers used to be enjoyed during earlier days [Star of the East, June – September, 1987]. As Orthodox Church has been emphasising that principle, it would be a reason good enough for a coming togetherness becoming possible not too late.

Between Indian Orthodox Church and Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch:

These two Churches have no differences in faith, in rituals or in doctrines, but the differences are confined to matters of administration. The disputes those were sustaining for many years came to an end with the Peace Treaty signed in 1958 and moved as a united Church for a few years. Unfortunately, some people in India wanted to hold positions of authority, however limited, even at the cost of a direct control from abroad, which all developed out of sheer selfishness resulting in disputes reborn in 1972. The Court order in 1984 ended the open quarrelling and there was a final ruling from the Supreme Court of India in 1995. This order was in favour of the Malankara Metropolitan, but the secular government shied away from executing the order of Supreme Court. This has caused further legal and otherwise disputes and there are many cases still in various courts.

National character, autocephaly and self governance are the inborn principles of Orthodox Churches world across. This principle is an inborn right of the Orthodox Church in India too. But what is happening here is the administrative interference and overstepping the jurisdictional boundaries of authority by the Patriarch of Antioch who seemingly doesn't honour the above general principle of Orthodoxy. If the Patriarch of Antioch respects the reestablishment of the Throne of Catholicose that took place in 1912 and honour the constitutionally elected Catholicose and Malankara Metropolitan and turn back from interfering in the administrative affairs of the independent and autocephalous Indian Orthodox Church, there would be no cause for disputes. But this is easier said than done because the Patriarch has some supporters in India who have their own vested interests. Yet, we hope that there would be a prudential interference at the right time that things are normalised and peace restored within the Orthodox Church in India.

Between the Indian Orthodox Church and the Mar Thoma church:

Mar Thoma Church represents those reformists who left their parent Orthodox Church just about less than two centuries ago under the influence of Reformation Movement of the West. Initially, being members of Orthodox Church, they made attempts to reform the Orthodox Church by dispensing with many of the rituals and doctrines of apostolic traditions. Palakkunnathu Abraham Malpan was the one who took initiatives in this direction and gave them leadership. He advocated that whatever were taught by the early fathers were totally wrong with regard to the Holy Sacraments, Intercessions for the departed, Intercession to Saints, and Status of St Mary in the Church and so on. He wanted the Church to discard all such teachings and to modify the liturgies and worship suitably. However, theologians of later days in



the Mar Thoma Church realised that the stands adopted by Abraham Malpan had been crossing all reasonable limits and therefore, after a re - evaluation, they thought it would better for their future to move in alignment with the Orthodox Church. With this in mind, there were conciliar dialogues between the theologians of these two Churches which resulted in a better understanding of either stands on various issues. However, these dialogues could not progress further because of the basic theological differences on crucial issues. A union with the Mar Thoma Church may not be possible in the near future because they are a Church looking Eastern in its external attire, but inside, they are holding on to western reformist doctrines. The Mar Thoma Church had dialogues with Protestant Churches and the deliberations succeeded in identifying areas of mutual concurrence. As result, CSI – CNI – Mar Thoma Churches now stand in unison as a fellowship and thus Mar Thoma Church is in congruence with Protestants. Under such a background, they are seen to strengthen their reformist ideologies under the leadership of foreign missionaries and therefore, any possibility of our unity with them is a farfetched dream.

Between the Indian Orthodox Church and Anglican Church:

The Anglican Church has no presence in India worth mentioning, but there are Churches having close association with them. As an initial step, a delegation involving all Oriental Churches had discussions with a representation of Anglican Church which was headed by their supreme head the Arch Bishop of Canterbury at Vancouver in 1983 during the WCC assembly. Later, as a continuation, further discussions were held at St Albans in England in October 1985. Consequently the following suggestions were passed on to member Churches: (1) exchange of theological students at post graduation level (2) exchange of theological texts (3) formation of regional unity organisations (4) appointing a theological commission (5) studying the historical texts of either side (6) appointing a permanent commission to ensure implementation of these.

In 1985, our HH Catholicose received a letter from the Canterbury Arch Bishop Rt. Rev Robert Rancy for discussing the above suggestions and taking suitable decisions. Further, Rt Rev Henry Hill, the ecumenical officer of Canterbury Church visited Kottayam in 1986. L/L HG Dr Paulose Mar Gregorioso, Secretary of our Ecumenical Committee submitted a report based on all these deliberations in the Holy Synod of 1987, but there were no further progress in the matter.

Dialogue between Orthodox Church and Lutheran Church:

Lutheran Church has been maintaining cordial relations with other Churches and is having frequent discussions. In order to understand our faith and doctrinal stands and to identify areas where there could be mutual cooperation there have been discussions on many occasions at unofficial levels. The book, 'A Dialogue Begins' by Fr Dr KM George and Herbert Hoeffler published in 1983 discusses the details of deliberations we have been having with Lutheran Church since 1978. The following subjects are discussed in detail in various sessions: justification through faith, Virgin Mary, Holy Bible, tradition, authority in the Church, nature of the Church, approach to other religions, worship, Church and kingdom of God, apostolic succession, Nicaea Creed, Sacramental Mysteries, Theosis, salvation through Christ, Holy Baptism, Holy Qurbana, Service of Priestly Ordination. In the backdrop of these discussions, it is a gain for us that many of our doctrinal and matters could be recorded as a text.

Questions:

1. What were the reasons why the name 'Orthodox' was not known in India generally? What are your constructive suggestions?
2. Explain the relevance of unity talks with various Churches.
3. Evaluate objectively the possibilities of our Church in unison with any Church in India.

Lesson 6

Indian Churches on Way to Unity

Factors standing as Obstacles to Unity # Possibilities of Unity and Related Areas # Role of Malankara Orthodox Church towards Unity

Orthodox Churches mean consensus of faith in the first place followed by fulfilment of unity through Holy Communion in worship. We do not appreciate a believer holding differences in faith part take in Holy Communion with us. At the same time, those Churches who hold on to the same faith and thereby joining together in Holy Communion may have linguistic or cultural or ethnic differences, which are acceptable in Orthodoxy and are not viewed as against unity. For example, the Indian Church to have a Catholic faith (universal), they don't have to dilute their ethnicity. Orthodox Churches do not believe that a Christian tradition formulated in Rome or England or Syria has to be contained in its totality as a prerequisite to be holding 'true faith'. Wherever the congregation assembles in unison taking part in Holy Qurbana, the harmonious mind of that Church understands and interprets faith; thus, for having a unity among Churches in India, there must be congruence in differing minds to become harmonious. Indian Churches need to have open mind in understanding such differing minds and such harmonious minds. Joining together in worship holding on to differences in faith would not be congenial to unity in its true sense.

It is not our wish that all other Churches in India should congruent with Orthodox Church blindly for the sake of unity. But what is being suggested towards kindling the path of unity is that all Churches should take a look at and understand deeply the common history, rituals and traditions prior to the vertical split (at least up to 4th century) and present them in line with their contemporary circumstances. There ought to be an independent attempt from all sides for the growth of Church in the right way. Churches across all regions are responsible and are

possessing authority to contain basic values of global Christian tradition nationally and present them in a proper manner. Their relationship with foreign associates should not cause obstructions for carrying out such responsibilities. The Christian history of India reveals experiencing of differences after the encroachment of foreign missionaries following the events in 16th century which gave rise to divisions. Therefore, our emphasis should be on Church history and traditions; thus all Churches should move forward towards unison among them as Holy Spirit leads.

Factors standing as Obstacles to Unity:

1. Foreign interest, foreign influence and foreign dominance are factors those are standing in the way of efforts towards unity between Churches in India. Not that there shall be no relations with foreign associates, but what is meant is that such relationships should not result in vested interests causing hindrances to unity efforts.
2. Even there are differences persisting within Churches following Roman, Anglican, Syrian and Protestant traditions among themselves which cause obstacles for unity.
3. Of late, Churches pay more attention for institutionalisation and systems of governance resulting in dilutions towards emphasis in spirituality. This has effectively weakened even the Church leadership spiritually.
4. Another cause towards unity efforts not taking roots is a fear complex that the present leadership of various Churches may lose their positions in hierarchy once there is a single united Church.
5. The varying political, social and economic scenario has perhaps an adverse impact on unity efforts.
6. Whatever interference Churches make nationally or globally in political fields are by and large not welcomed; instead, they are subjected to sharp criticism too. These are also affecting unity attempts under certain situations.
7. The laity of Churches is extending cooperation among themselves in family and social welfare areas without bothering about matters related to their faith and such activities are on the increase; this has an indirect impact to under value the efforts to reach unity among Churches based on matters related to faith.

Possibilities of Unity and Related Areas:

1. Those Churches desiring to keep more or less similar faith, rituals and doctrines have to make attempts to come to a total unison. Orthodox Churches among themselves, different Rites within Roman Catholic Church and the factions among reformists can make efforts to sort out their mutual differences and initiate whole hearted attempts to be in unison totally.
2. An attempt has to be made at regional levels; for example look at the present scenario in Kerala. We have all those three segments mentioned above. Therefore, a Joint Theological Commission can be appointed with representative character which can carry out bi lateral and multi lateral dialogues to understand each other mutually and identify areas where there can be agreements, which should be propagated in all Churches.
3. This joint commission should conduct a joint study of the undivided early Church (first four centuries) and understand clearly the true nature and faith being held then. This commission



can place suggestions as to what could be the format of an Indian Church and how its progressive growth can be looked after.

4. It has to be thought over how an Indian Christian Church can be formulated that should be congruent with the socio, political and cultural atmosphere as well as the spiritual, doctrinal and religious approaches prevailing in India; for this it would be necessary to rewind the Christian atmosphere prevalent here before 16th century and evaluate the situations those were live then.
5. In order that the above suggestions are fruitful, all the Churches those have presence in India now should attempt to be liberated from their foreign suzerainty, if any. This doesn't mean to cut off cordial relations with foreign associates. But such association should never result in an authoritarian dominance from them.
6. Orthodox – Catholic – Protestant segments may not be able to come together united in faith at this stage; but platforms can be created where these three segments can jointly address socio political issues and respond to such issues as also taking part in social welfare activities in unison.
7. All Churches should extend their cooperation for fruitfully engaging in such activities regionally on a single platform; on such occasions of coming together, there shall be no ecclesiastical discussions or faith related studies or sermons or usage of prescribed liturgies which could, perhaps, cause discordance to surface. Without such initiations, mutual understanding has to be emphasised for which organisations like YMCA and YWCA can be made to associate with as platforms.
8. Once a scenario of mutual cooperation is created, a chosen group of people can visit another Church and attend their worship so that they can share their experience in their own Church; be needed, modifications can be suggested in their own liturgy for examination at higher level. Whatever reformation is needed within one Church, that has to come from inside and cannot be dictated by an outside source. This would slowly and steadily pave way for unison in liturgy as needed and Churches would come closer.
9. We will work towards a spiritual unison internally so that there is a true renewal with emphasis on the relation between believers and God rather than relying on intellectually written down definitions of faith being forced upon. The High Priestly prayer of Jesus Christ, "that they may be one as we are one; I in them and you in me" (John 13:23) is pointing to unity among Churches as stated by ecumenists very often. But it should be recalled when Jesus Christ prayed so, there were no Christian Churches or schisms as we have now. We have to understand the spirit behind that interceding prayer of Christ that the relation between Father and Son we see there shall be a model for us; if we follow the emphasis seen there, we can hope in the Almighty that all obstacles we have in our efforts of unity would disappear.

Role of Malankara Orthodox Church towards Unity:

Orthodox Church take has a mission to explain its stand to others as it claims to preserve the faith and tradition of the early Church intact. The Church should evaluate whether whatever is being followed now are in line with the traditions of early Church. Be needed, it should be possible to implement necessary amendments. There must be effective arrangements to have open dialogues with other Churches in India. Efforts must be there to understand the different Churches across the globe and there shall be attempts to identify areas of cooperation with

other Churches in India. If Orthodox Church is bold enough to evaluate all those rituals being blindly followed now on the basis of true Christian canon, we would have an opportunity take up a positive role assuming leadership of a true Indian Church. The administrative leadership of the Church should be strong enough to take decisions on recommendations suggested by the team that is engaged to have dialogues with other Churches.

We have to save our image, which has been distorted through unwanted tussles within the Church impairing true Christian witnessing, by evaluating the circumstances we have been through. Be it necessary, sufficient amendments have to be effected in our constitution.

The Orthodox Church that is autocephalous and enjoying freedom at the national level should take proper initiatives. Once things move in that direction, the 'imported orthodoxy' would give way for 'national orthodoxy'. There would be a facelift to some extent, no doubt. Are we ready for such a change? Let Holy Spirit lead us through all truth.

Questions:

1. What are the obstacles in the way of unity among Churches?
2. What are the possibilities leading to unity among Churches?
3. What is the role of Orthodox Church in taking up the leadership of an Indian Christian Church?

Unit 3

Eastern (Oriental) Orthodox Churches

Lesson 1

Coptic Church

Commencement of Christian faith # School of Theology at Alexandria # Monastic Movement #
After the Chalcedon Synod # Under Islamic Rule # Present Scenario #

The term 'Copt' simply means Egypt. However what is known as Coptic Church today indicates the Church of Egypt that has rejected Chalcedon Synod decisions. Alexandria used to be the head quarters of the Egyptian Church. The Patriarch of Alexandria has been holding a leading position among Christian Church globally right from the early days. As such, it can be said that among Orthodox Churches of the East, Coptic Church stands in the front.

Commencement of Christian faith:

St Mark, the Evangelist is considered to be the one who established the Church in Egypt. He was a disciple of St Peter. Mark had been to Rome to preach the gospel along with Peter, but the persecutions there were so terrible that they were forced to sail for Alexandria. They reached Alexandria in AD 43 as recorded by historian Eusebios. Peter preached at the southern most regions of Egypt for a while and then returned to Palestine. But Mark stayed at Alexandria and did his service among the Jews there and laid foundation of a Church and nurtured it. The first person baptised by Mark was a cobbler named Ananias. After a while Mark ordained Ananias as the first Episcopa of Egypt and went back to Palestine. Later, he made a further visit to Alexandria in AD 61; by then, the Church had grown quite well. Gentiles who were jealous at this rapid growth of Christianity attempted to persecute Mark and others; consequent to such persecutions, Mark turned a martyr in AD 68.

School of Theology at Alexandria:

The community at Alexandria was complex gathering people holding on to different philosophical thoughts. Each group took efforts to enter into dialogues with others attempting to prove the validity of their ideologies. No religion had a standing in Alexandria unless the essence of that religion is established before others intellectually. Therefore, Christians needed intellectual strength to address these challenges. It was under such a background that the School of Theology at Alexandria as set up. This school took initiatives to equip catechumens for baptism; apart from that, care was taken teach theological truths deeply that the believers are aware of the meanings of various mysteries as much as one could assimilate. Athenagoras, who belonged to another religion earlier and Panteenus, who had visited India were leading figures associated with this school during its early days.

This school had a tradition to interpret Holy Bible allegorically; Origen was the one who stood as a proponent of this. In all the universal synods as well as during the debates in 4th and 5th centuries, the fathers from Alexandrian tradition were taking the lead to formulate faith related issues of the Church. Till the synod of Chalcedon, Alexandrian school had been having only success stories; they



had been laying their emphasis on the indivisibility of the persons in Christ. Athanasius, who fought against Arius, and Coorilose who fought against Nestor were the products of this school. However, teachings formulated by this school on matters of Christology were rejected at Chalcedon and were branded heresies. Subsequent issues affected the normal conduct of this school and gradually, its relevance declined and the school came to a natural death. The present Theological Seminary of the Coptic Church was established in 19th century.

Monastic Movement:

The birth place of Christian monastic movements can be said to be Egypt. St Antonius, who had been under meditation in solitude, can be considered as the first among them to have assumed leadership. Those of his disciples who followed him were also trained in the concept of solitary meditation. During such solitary meditation they used to meet together only once a week.

It was St Pachomios who organised all those monks in solitary mediation as a community and he coordinated them by formulating specific rules and regulations to be followed. The Coptic Church is sticking on to this heritage even now. This Church gives importance to monastic movements these days also.

After the Chalcedon Synod:

Christians in Egypt objected to Chalcedon synod findings with their maximum strength. The reason for such strong objections was the excommunication of their favourite Patriarch Dioscoros. Out of 13 bishops who attended this conclave, only 4 had signed the findings as having agreed to. These four bishops ordained Pretorius in place of Dioscoros as Patriarch of Alexandria. However, the majority of laity did not accept Pretorius as their Patriarch. They saw Dioscoros as Patriarch till he was taken to heavenly abode. The emperor Marxian did not permit to ordain another Patriarch against Pretorius. However, after the death of the emperor, Timothy Eluras was ordained as Patriarch against the wishes of the government and therefore the rulers tried to take him captive; this led to bloodshed and the mob pressure was so strong that whenever he was captured by soldiers, they were forced to release him. After his demise in AD 477, Peter Magus took over the mantle of Patriarchate. By now, the government realised that there were not many among the public who supported Chalcedon and therefore retracted from further interferences. However, there used to be tussles and difficult days even after this.

In the 6th century, there was an internal discordance within the non – Chalcedonian segment which really put Coptic Church into deep turmoil. The new issue was a creation of Julian, who was from Halicarnassus. He started teaching that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was not corruptible. During those days, Severiose of Antioch was holding a prime position among the non – Chalcedonian segment and he strongly objected to this new thought process. But Julian received good support from Alexandria. They elected and ordained a Patriarch of their own and created problems in the Church. Though their influence and strength did not last long, the progressive growth of the Church was dampened for some time.

Under Islamic Rule:

By AD 642 itself, the Arabs had taken over Egypt. The Coptic Church initially welcomed the Arab rulers though they were from another religion under an expectation that they would be better than



the Roman Emperor who had been persecuting Coptic Church because of their not falling in line with Chalcedon. The relationship used to be quite cordial during the early days. Christians had full freedom to conduct their worship as well as to stabilise their Church. But there were winds of change by the 8th century. The Arab governors who came to govern Egypt started to initiate stubborn measures. Very shortly, Coptic language was abandoned. Now, this language is almost dead, just confined to liturgy only. Christians raised their voice against certain moves of rulers like Caliph Montawakkel and such reactions resulted in street fights and riots.

After the Arabs, it was the turn of Turks to rule over Egypt and their dealings were much cruel. They looted costly articles and beautiful pieces of art and took them away to Turkey. Till Mohammed Ali came to rule in the 19th century, the Coptic Church was passing through lots of difficulties. Many Christians lost their lives and many were forcibly converted to Islam. However, Mohamed Ali reacted positively in as much as that he made to involve Christians even in matters of governance. Though such proactive measures made the Coptic Church see their good days, they are even now facing lots of problems from the Islamic officials.

Present Scenario:

The administrative systems were in total disarray by the 19th century. There were allegations that the Metropolitans were misusing the assets of the Church. The laity started demanding a say in matters of administration of the Church. Consequently, a body by name 'Majlis Milli' was formulated in 1883 which included representatives from the laity also for managing the financial affairs of the Church. But all Metropolitans objected to this. In order to retain peace in the Church, many of authorities vested with this body had to be diluted later. Today, this body is nothing more than an advisory committee to the Patriarch. But this body is the one that selects the Patriarch. The efforts undertaken by Patriarchs Coorilose IV and Coorilose V in the 19th and 20th centuries to revamp the Church were quite effective. Education, particularly, education of priests assumed lot of importance. This resulted in the overall progress of the Church. Today, Coptic Church has two Seminaries for their priests, one at Alexandria and the other at Cairo.

This Church has more than 15 million believers spread over 53 dioceses overseen by more than 100 bishops and 2000 priests in 1300 parishes. Their liturgical languages are ancient Coptic and Arabic.

Even now there are discordance between Christians and Muslim fanatics. Patriarch His Holiness Pope Shenouda III was placed under house arrest in 1981 by the then President Anwar Sadat. Despite all these adversities, the church has to be appreciated for having retained its spirituality, which certainly is a good omen for the future. Monastic movement is being rekindled with renewed energy. There are seven active Dayaros for men and five for women now. His Holiness Pope Tawadros II now heads Coptic Church as the Patriarch.

Customs and Rituals:

Coptic Church gives lot of importance to Lents. Their Lents extend to about 250 days a year. Their Yeldho Lent goes for 43 days and their Big lent is a week more than ours. The excess one week is also called the Lent of Heraclius. This one week Lent commenced in 7th century praying to God for persuading the then Emperor Heraclius to protect Christians from Jews. They observe about 30 feasts remembering St Mary. However, they do not give much importance to the festival of

Transfiguration as also to the feast of Sneebo. They follow three orders for Holy Qurbana namely those of Coorilose, Gregorise of Nazianzus and Baseliore. Before partaking in the Holy Communion, Holy Confession is compulsory as well as three days' fasting. Therefore, most of the believers, though participate in the service of Holy Qurbana, accept Holy Communion only during the Lent periods. Like most of the Churches of the East, Coptic Church too observes their feasts on the basis of Julian calendar.

Questions:

1. What was the nature of relationship that existed between Coptic Church and the Islamic government?
2. What was the revolt arose within this Church after the synod of Chalcedon?
3. Write an essay on the Alexandrian School of Theology.

Lesson 2

Syrian Church of Antioch

Origin # After Chalcedon # Yacob Burdana # Church expands to Persia # Under Islamic Rule # Relationship with Westerners # Scenario at Present

Just like Coptic Church, representatives of the Syrian Church of Antioch too had participated in the synod of Chalcedon. But there was no resistance worth noting from the Church of Antioch compared to the stiff resistance from the Coptic Church on the findings at Chalcedon. There was a Nestorian community in Antioch who supported the Chalcedonian findings and this could be the reason why the resistance from the Church of Antioch turned very mild. During the period of Emperor Justinian, Chalcedon faith was forcibly thrust upon throughout the empire and thus majority of the Christians of Antioch accepted it. Later, the segment that was opposing Chalcedon findings declined in strength and ended up as a small community.

Origin:

There is no doubt that there used to be Christian Church at Antioch right from the days of Apostles. The followers of Christ were named 'Christians' at Antioch. Historian Eusebius witnesses that it was St Peter who set up this Church. Tradition says that Peter had been leading the Church of Antioch for seven years before proceeding to Rome.



Similar to the one at Alexandria, there was a School of Theology here also. But the basic ideologies of both these schools were different. The Alexandrians chose to interpret Holy Bible allegorically where as the school at Antioch preferred to carry out their interpretation in literal sense. Further, to emphasise the fullness of human nature in Christ, the scholars of Antioch taught that the two natures in Christ can be seen separately. Mar Ivanios of golden tongue is a product of this school.

After Chalcedon:

Maximus who was the Patriarch of Antioch during the time of Chalcedon synod and his successors Baseliuse, Acacius and Martyrius accepted the Chalcedon findings. The strong interferences from the Emperor in favour of Chalcedon made it impossible for those who were opposing these findings to do anything. In AD 468, the then Patriarch Martyrius made a visit to Constantinople and the non Chalcedon segment tactfully utilised the opportunity and ordained Peter the Fuller (Casoro) as Patriarch of Antioch. However, Martyrius returned and Peter was sent in exile. In AD 475, Emperor Basiliscus took over the reins and he allowed Peter to return. This process of Peter being sent in exile and his return based on the changes of Emperors had happened a few more times. In our Kauma, it was Peter, the Fuller who added the portion, "Crucified for us, have mercy on us".

The opponents of Chalcedon gained strength during the reins of Emperor Anastasius under the leadership of Severiose of Antioch and Phelixinose of Mabbug. The Syrian Church can never forget these two great fathers who had fought tooth and nail till their death against Chalcedon findings and authored many books pin pointing the erroneous elements contained in the findings at Chalcedon. However, Anastasius expired in AD 518 and the Church at Antioch started facing setbacks once again as the succeeding emperors spared no efforts in denouncing the stand of those opposing Chalcedon. There were cruel persecutions from the monarchy and gradually, the Church of Antioch declined further.

Yacob Burdana:

As an aftermath of continuous persecutions, those opposing Chalcedon were in deep trouble endangering even their survival in as much as that the priests and high priests were reduced to nominal numbers. It was found difficult to ordain priests in place of those who expired. It was under such circumstances Yacob Burdana stepped in to action. He was very strong as a monk. He was quite familiar in fasting and therefore could spend many days without taking any food. He had a very strong physique that he could walk miles and miles without getting tired. He was ordained a Bishop in AD 542. Thereafter, he was authorised to travel far and wide to ordain priests and bishops wherever the need arose. His hard work enabled Syrian church to rise from their erstwhile position of doom. The Emperor ordered capture of Yacob Burdana, but could not, as he was travelling in disguise. In about 35 years, he ordained about 80 Bishops and nearly 1, 00,000 priests. It was from his time, Syria's Chalcedon opponents were being addresses as Jacobites, in a mocking tone.

Church expands to Persia:

The Persian Church was dominated by pro Chalcedon believers, but there was a community who were against Chalcedon even during the time of Yacob Burdana. During his time, Yacob Burdana had been there to strengthen this community. By mid 6th century, one Ahudeme was ordained as Metropolitan of Persian Church. His hard work resulted in many Nestorians and even Arabs joining



the Church. By 7th century, a position called 'Maphriana' was established in Persia as the head of that Church. Athanasius Gamaliel, the then Patriarch of Antioch ordained Morooso as the first Maphriana of Persia and his head quarters was Tigris.

Right from the establishment of Maphriate, there were differences of opinion about the powers and authority of Maphriana. The Patriarchs of Antioch quite often ventured to rule over the Maphriana which caused ripples developing in the smooth governance of the Persian Church. A synod was called in AD 869 at a place called Cafarthootha for arriving at a consensus on this issue. It was decided by this Synod that the Maphriana had to be elected by those in the East meaning the Persian Church and should be ordained by the Patriarch of Antioch. But still differences persisted. A total freedom from the Patriarch was desired by Persian Church, but this was not allowed. However, this position gradually disappeared after Bar Abraya a highly efficient personality of 13th century reined Persian Church as its Maphriana.

Under Islamic Rule:

During the 7th, 8th and 9th centuries, the Syrian Church of Antioch did not suffer much from Muslim rulers. Caliph did not interfere in Church matters. However, whenever a new Patriarch was selected a concurrence from the Sultan was necessary which was called 'fir man'. These were days the Syrian Church was enjoying days of peace and tranquillity and therefore, the Church succeeded in raising a few great scholars. Yacob of Edessa, well known theologian and historian lived during this period. Yacob had taken appreciable efforts to give a final shape to Syrian liturgy. Muse bar Keepa was another great scholar lived in the 9th century. He had authored interpretations to Holy Bible as also of the Sacraments of the Church which are considered very valuable contributions even now.

By the end of 9th century, the tolerance level of Muslims started declining gradually. A strengthened Arab language resulted in the slow disappearance of Syriac. Christians were systematically discarded from administrative positions of the political system of governance. The Church started facing problems again by the 10th and 11th centuries. Syrian literature started re establishing later in the 12th century.

Well known scholars of unparalleled brilliance during these days were Dionysius bar Salibi, great historian Michael Rabo and the one who had all round excellence in most of the facets of human life Bar Abraya. It has to be noted that after the 13th century, Syrian Church could not achieve much in theological or ecclesiastical fields.

In the 14th century, Christians were forced to flee for their lives to save themselves from the attack of Timur and got scattered here and there. Many of them ran towards the mountainous region of Kurdistan. Initially, they were welcomed there, but later had been subjected to persecutions.

The policy followed by Turks was far from encouraging. Those succeeded in bribing the rulers were made Patriarchs. This had resulted in the compactness of the Church getting shattered; internal fights grew up within the Church. The membership of the Church declined. The Patriarchate was shifted to Mardin, then to Holmes and later to Damascus.



Relationship with Westerners:

Missionaries from Rome, America and England have worked among Syrians. Among these, those from Rome were most successful. The reason why they could succeed was the poverty prevailed in Syrian areas coupled with the frequent riots within the region which they exploited to their advantage well. Syrian Church could not overcome the Roman Catholics who were magnanimous in providing financial and educational assistance. However, it has to be seen as a great relief that the Church did not get merged with Roman Catholics.

The Protestants coming from America too extended financial help and assisted them in setting up educational institutions. They tactfully started taking the members of Syrian Church to their fold. The approach of missionaries from England was friendlier in nature. They stayed in Syria and understood their practical problems and showed interest in helping them in their difficulties.

Scenario at Present:

Now, the Syrians are staying as a scattered lot in Turkey, Syria, Europe and America. Syrians in Turkey are in great turmoil now. Though they are allowed to have services of worship, there is no other religious freedom. Speaking in their mother tongue Syriac is viewed as a crime.

Situation in Syria may be marginally better. However, this Church was once having more than 100 Bishops and millions of believers, but of late, there has been sharp decline to such an extent that the number of believers run into just 9, 00,000 or even less. Even among these, most of them are in Europe or America. Now they have only less than 20 Bishops. Though they have a Seminary, it is confined just to teach reading and writing Syriac; they have no facilities worth mentioning to impart training in theology. As they are lowly paid, priests are forced to engage in other employment activities for their survival. This Church follows a system to ordain many people as deacons, but most of them back out from serving the Church gradually; they are not even regular in attending worships. Though Church was very tight financially, now things are slightly better due to the assistance from members of the Church settled in Europe and America. The Patriarchate has been shifted from place to place and presently, it is understood to be at Beirut.

Questions:

1. Explain the activities of Yacob Burdana.
2. How did the position of Maphriana come to place? What were the disputes arose regarding this position?
3. Explain the activities of western missionaries in the Syrian Church of Antioch.

[Note: It has to be understood that due to the severe attacks from Turkey on Syria and the former encouraging divisive movements to destabilise the latter, the situation of the Syrian Church of Antioch is very pathetic; there have been brutal persecutions to such a level that many Christians have lost their lives. Even their Aleppo Arch Bishop Yuhanon Ibrahim Mar Gregorioso was kidnapped on 22 April 2013 and there in no news about him since then. So pathetic a life the Syrian Christians lead now.]

Lesson 3

Ethiopian Church

Origin of the Church # Coming of Nine Saints # Royal Dynasty of Solomon # Relationship with Westerners # Period of Reorganisation # Relationship with the Alexandrian Church # Scenario at Present

Before the Gospel of Good News reached Ethiopia, there were barbarian religions engaged in worshipping many gods apart from the presence of Jewish religion. Jewish religion was more powerful. Even today, the Christians in Ethiopia follow certain Jews rituals very promptly; for example, their men still do circumcision.

Origin of the Church:

In Acts 8: 26 – 40, we see Deacon Philippos baptising the eunuch of the queen of Ethiopia as early as during the days of Apostles. The Church of Ethiopia believes that it was this eunuch who brought the Good News to Ethiopia for the first time. But in a historical perspective, it can be presumed that the Church in Ethiopia was set up only in the 4th century. However, even before that, Christian communities had come and stayed here on account of commercial relations with Rome.

Let us see the narrations of Rufinus, the church historian on this matter. Two Christians hailing from Tyre, namely Frumentius and Aedesious, escaped from attacks of pirates and somehow managed to reach Ethiopian royal palace. In a short period of time the King was pleased with them and one of them was appointed as his secretary and the other as his goblet carrier. Later, when the King was about to die and his successor being too young, the responsibility of governance of the kingdom was assigned to Frumentius. At this stage, both Frumentius and Aedesious thought of preaching the Good News in Ethiopia. And thus they laid foundation of the Church of Ethiopia which grew fast. In AD 330, the prince in waiting accepted Christianity and thus, Christianity became the official religion of the country. Name of the king who accepted Christianity in the first place was Ezana.

Not much later, Frumentius proceeded to Alexandria and was ordained as Bishop by the Patriarch Athanasius and took over the reins of Ethiopian Church as its first Metropolitan. Since the Church, since its birth, was declared as the official religion of Ethiopia, there was progressive growth at a fast pace right from the beginning. Even now, among the Orthodox Churches in the East, this is the largest in terms of membership. Though the Church was established after Nicene Synod, Ethiopian Church accepted all the findings of this universal Synod in totality. Due to the strong influence the Patriarch of Alexandria had over this Church, teachings of Arius did not have any following here.

Coming of Nine Saints:

No information as to the happenings in Ethiopia for a century long period since mid 4th century is available to outside world. But the Church got energised with the coming of a group of sages called 'nine saints' by AD 480. Historians of modern times consider these sages as opponents to Chalcedon hailing from Syria. They would have eloped Syria due to the severe persecutions there against

opponents of Chalcedon. Ethiopian Church succeeded in rejecting Chalcedon because of the influence from these sages and the Coptic Church.

On reaching Ethiopia, these sages started learning 'geese', the local language and shortly, translated Holy Bible into this language. Za-Mikael Aregawi was their leader and they took steps to curtail the prevailing habit of worshipping gentile gods. Further, they translated many of the important books authored by fathers of the Church into local language. Their contributions to Christian literature and music are magnanimous. Yarit, the one who set music to liturgical hymns in Ethiopia was a disciple of these sages. Thus, the Ethiopian Church was strengthened in all respects and was made a strongly bound one with the efforts of these nine sages; Ethiopian Church owe a lot to them that they would never be forgotten. The Church can feel proud that they could develop orders of service and customised rituals in alignment to their regional culture from very early days.

These sages were those who sowed the seeds of monastic movements in Ethiopia. They set up many ashrams particularly in Northern Ethiopia. For a considerably long period, these ashrams were imparting education to Christians in Ethiopia. By 13th century, ashrams started growing towards the southern areas too. These ashrams established educational institutions which were mainly training their wards in scriptural subjects. The monks of these ashrams gave leadership in carrying out gospel work of the Church. Also, such ashrams were instrumental in getting many valuable books authored by the learned fathers of the Church translated into local language for the benefit of laity of the Church.

Royal Dynasty of Solomon:

Ethiopia was also not spared from Islamic attacks. The Ethiopian economy was based on trade through sea routes. However, as Muslims took control over all the major ports in that area, Ethiopian economy confronted problems. It was not even possible to establish any sort of relationships with outside world as they were almost surrounded by other religious forces. This situation persisted for quite a long period from 7th to 13th century. These were days for Ethiopians to have study Bible at depth and get inspirations for pulling on. They used to compare themselves with their experience of Israelites and tried to be in congruence with them. This paved the way for many of the Old Testament rituals taking roots in the Church. They even started their royal dynasty as if in relation to that of Solomon.

In 1270, Yikanno Amlak won the war and laid the foundation of a new royal dynasty, which was named Royal Dynasty of Solomon. By 14th century, they recaptured all their ports and the Christian nation Ethiopia started progressing aggressively. However, there occurred Muslim domination once again, but it did not last; in 1543, Galawdewos defeated Muslims hands down with strategic help from the Portuguese.

Relationship with Westerners:

Portuguese rendered sufficient help to Ethiopia for overpowering their enemies. They passed on western art and other new inputs to Ethiopians. However, the warm relationship being maintained started disrupting once the Portuguese stepped up as missionaries of Roman Church. The activities of Jesuit missionaries created many problems in Ethiopia. By 1632, these missionaries were thrown out of the country. But, in 18th century the missionaries returned and can claim to have succeeded in



their efforts to a good extent; some of the Ethiopians who were attracted by the teachings of these missionaries started raising faith related arguments within the Church and such discordance and uproar continued till 19th century.

Protestants too had their turn as they entered Ethiopia in the 17th century and encouraged Orthodox believers to join them. After 1944, the government imposed restrictions to missionaries coming from other countries. Though all were free to teach Christian faith, converting Orthodox Christians to other denominations were prohibited by law.

Period of Reorganisation:

The doctrinal disputes sowed by the missionaries from the west were there in one form or other till 19th century. In 1841, Abuno Salama was ordained as Metropolitan who succeeded in eradicating all sorts of dilutions in faith. With the help of the Emperor, he strongly established the indivisibility of the person in Christ once for all; strong actions were initiated against those propagating different doctrinal ideologies. Such measures were successful that all alien teachings disappeared from the scene. Once peace and tranquillity returned, the Church could concentrate their efforts towards gospel works in its true spirit. As the Church grew, it was not easy to manage the affairs by a single Metropolitan. In 1881, for the first time, four Metropolitans were ordained for Ethiopia.

Relationship with the Alexandrian Church:

We have already seen that Frumentius was ordained as the first Metropolitan for Ethiopia by the Patriarch of Alexandria. Holding on to this, all future ordinations of Metropolitans for Ethiopia were done by Alexandria. Moreover, such Metropolitans always used to be members of Coptic Church.

By early 20th century, Ethiopian Church wanted to have a change in this system. In 1926, they demanded that their Bishops should be Ethiopians and that they should have a Metropolitan from among themselves having authority to ordain Bishops as and when needed. After lengthy deliberations on the issue, Alexandrian Patriarch agreed that their Bishops could be from Ethiopia, but the Metropolitan who heads the Church overall should be an Egyptian. But the Ethiopians did not wind up their demand for full freedom and autocephaly. This led to bickering with Coptic Church for some time, but in 1951, all their demands were acceded to. Their Metropolitan was conferred with the title Patriarch from 1959. Thereafter, Coptic Church never claimed any right or authority over Ethiopian Church.

Haile Selassie, the Ethiopian emperor was a Christian and the Ethiopian church was under the protection and care of this Christian emperor. But Coptic Church in Egypt was under the authority of Nazar, a Muslim ruler. Based on this logic, Ethiopians were convinced that there is no need for a Muslim overseeing over Ethiopian Church, though indirect, and therefore, ordained Basilios I as the first Patriarch of Ethiopia on June 29, 1959. Since then, Ethiopian Church goes on as a totally independent Church. During that time, Mr Paul Varghese of our Church was an advisor to Emperor Haile Selassie and thus had contributed crucially to the efforts of freedom for the Ethiopian church. [Mr Paul Varghese later became a Metropolitan and is known world over as L/L HG Dr Paulose Mar Gregoriose].

Those were days when the clergy were not having proper education. So a Seminary was set up at Addis Ababa where Fr Dr VC Samuel, Fr KM Simon and others from our Church gave yeoman service. Even today, our Church members laity and clergy provide their service to this Seminary.



Customs and Rituals:

Ethiopian Church was in relation with Coptic Church since the very beginning and therefore both these Churches observe Lents and Feasts in almost similar lines. However, certain Jewish customs like circumcision has cropped into Ethiopian Church. They believe that it was one Menilek who brought Jews to Ethiopia for the first time. Menilek was a son of King Solomon born to Sheba, the queen of Ethiopia. There is a tradition in Ethiopia that Menilek once went to Jerusalem to visit his father and while returning, carried the tabernacle with him and placed it under proper secured sealing in a Church of St Mary at a town called Aksum. This is a strong belief among Ethiopian Christians. According to their custom, once in a year, the High Priest alone enters this Church and celebrates Holy Qurbana. A model of tabernacle is made and kept in all churches. The chancel and cup is placed on this for celebration of Holy Qurbana. On certain important feast days, Holy Qurbana may be celebrated outside the church also. Danaho feast is the most important one for them; this is also their national day. They have about 14 orders to celebrate Holy Qurbana. Of these, there are a few orders for using exclusively for feast days. [The tradition about tabernacle stated above contradicts Biblical narrations. Refer 2 Maccabeus 2: 1- 8]

Scenario at Present:

The Church has membership strength of about 30 million and 15,000 odd parishes. There are about 60,000 priests. Their custom is such that to celebrate Holy Qurbana, there must be two priests and 3 deacons minimum. As seen with other Churches in Africa, dancing is also a part of the service of Holy Qurbana. There are 250 days of fasting and Lent, but apart from clergy, observance of these is not mandatory for laity.

In 1974, Emperor Haile Selassie lost power in a resurgence which was a shock for the Orthodox Church. The new socialist government after taking over power had been causing problems for the Church on many counts. Very shortly after the passing away of the Emperor, Patriarch Abuno Theophilos and two other Metropolitans were imprisoned. They were charged with treason and all the assets including landed properties of the Church acquired during the reign of Haile Selassie were confiscated. The clergy who were relying on the generation of income from these properties for their day to day affairs were placed in difficulty as their source of income was blocked. Now there are 21 Metropolitans overseeing ecclesiastical matters and 13 retired Bishops. The languages used in worship are the ancient language geese and the modern language Amharic. By strength in membership, this Church can be said to be bigger than its mother Church of Alexandria and other non Chalcedon Churches namely Armenian, Indian and Syrian Churches all put together.

Eritrean Orthodox Church:

Among Oriental Orthodox Churches, this is the one came into being last. Eretria is an area lying on the South West coast of Red Sea. The ancient Christian empire Aksum was located here. We have seen earlier that Christian faith initially took roots in Aksum from where it started spreading across. Eretria was independent before the Turks annexed Ottoman in the 16th century. During 1890 – 1941 this was an Italian colony. Later, they went under British rule and became a part of Ethiopia in 1952. Again, in 1993, Eretria became totally independent.

Right from very early days, the Christian Church of Eretria was part of Ethiopian Church. But once they earned political freedom in 1993, their attitude started changing. They had discussions with Coptic Patriarch Shenouda III and started initiation of proceedings in 1993 to declare freedom for the Church too. They trained a few Metropolitan candidates in Coptic monasteries following which Patriarch Shenouda III ordained five of them as Metropolitans. In the same year, Ethiopian Patriarch also accepted their independence. Further, by joining in a memorandum of understanding, it was decided that among them, Coptic Patriarch would hold a position of first among equals.

After lengthy deliberations, Abuno Philippose, Bishop of Asmara was chosen as the Patriarch and he was ordained by Shenouda III on May 8, 1998. Abuno Antonius is the present Patriarch. They have membership of more than 3.5 million, about 10,000 priests and 1500 odd parish churches. Customs and rituals are exactly same as those of Ethiopian Church. The Synods of both these Churches maintain very cordial relations and they have joint sittings at least once in three years.

As of now, the Patriarch Abuno Antonius is under house arrest due to political reasons.

Questions:

1. When the Ethiopian Church was established? How?
2. What is the importance of the deeds of the 'Nine Saints'?
3. Explain the relation between Alexandrian church and Ethiopian Church in various stages.
4. Explain the origin and growth of Eritrean Church.

Lesson 4

Armenian Church

Good News Reaches # Armenian Church and Universal Synods # Under Islamic Rule # Internal discordance # Scenario at Present

Armenia is the very first nation to have declared Christianity as its official religion. This proclamation was made as early as in AD 301. What we are now studying is the history of a populace who had been in continuous fight for political and religious freedom. It shall be noted that the present Armenia lies divided in Russia, Turkey and Iran.

Good News Reaches:

It is not easy to specifically say when the Christian faith originated in Armenia. Traditions point out that Good News reached Armenia in the first century itself. Armenians see Bartholomew and Thaddeus as those who established their Church. It is said both these apostles were martyred in Armenia itself. However, modern day historians see these traditions as a combination of facts and imagination. Whatever may that be, it seems to be correct that the Church was formed in Armenia before the 4th century. Those countries lying to the South and West of Armenia had been the



beneficiaries of Good News much earlier and therefore from their neighbours, Armenians would have received it in course of time. Therefore, the origin of Church in Armenia cannot be thought as confined to one or two individual apostles. It looks as if the origin of the Church here can be attributed to the efforts of many evangelists for quite a period time.

By early 4th century, Gregory, the Illuminator came to the scene and led the Church to a progressive growth pattern. Gregory was one who was brought up under Greek culture and underwent theological studies in Caesarea before reaching Armenia. At that time Zoroastrian religion was popular and widespread in Armenia. To make them understand the Good News and lead to Christian way of life was a tough task. After his hard work over a period of time, Gregory succeeded in converting their king Tiridates to Christianity with which Christianity was proclaimed as the official religion of Armenia in AD 301. From this point onwards, the growth of the Church was at a fast pace. Shortly, he went to Caesarea and got ordained as Bishop in AD 302 and reined over Armenian Church. With him, a few Cappadocia monks also came to Armenia. These monks initiated the monastic movement and also helped Gregory in matters of management of Church. After Gregory, his son was ordained as the Metropolitan and the position of Metropolitan of Armenian Church was confined to this family for some time. This system of succession was not following a hereditary pattern according to Armenian historians, but it so happened that some one of that family was chosen to occupy the position.

Armenian Church was using service orders in Greek during their early days. As Armenian language had no scripts, it was not possible to translate orders of liturgy to their mother tongue. However, by the fag end of 4th century or early 5th century, one Mesrop Mastoc worked hard on this lacuna and succeeded to formulate a script system; once this was accomplished, Holy Bible and liturgical orders were translated into local language. As days progressed, Armenians introduced changes in the orders of liturgy in line with their cultural heritage and stamped their individuality on them.

Armenian Church and Universal Synods:

Armenians had not taken part in the Synods of Ephesus and Chalcedon which had deliberated on the nature of Christ's persons. However, the findings of Ephesus were communicated to them which they accepted and recognised the synod. As the Armenian Church leaders were favouring Alexandrian thought processes, they did not have any sort of reservations in branding Nestor as a heretic.

During the days of Chalcedon conclave, Armenians were engaged in live or die fight with Persians. Therefore, it was not possible for them to send their representatives to Chalcedon. Naturally, they could not evaluate the findings and arrive at a decision whether to fall in line with them or not. It was after about 50 years since Chalcedon, they officially rejected those findings. But it should not be presumed that they were ignorant of those deliberations during this half century period. There used to be discussions on the natures of Christ within the Church and their theologians had released papers and texts against Chalcedon findings during this period. In Armenia, the thoughts in line with Alexandrian theology were having predominant influence which had been emphasising the indivisibility of the natures of Christ. Therefore, their synod summoned in AD 506 at Dowin had no difficulty to reject Chalcedon findings without any lengthy arguments or discussions.

Under Islamic Rule:



As usual with all non Chalcedon Churches, Armenians too welcomed the Arabs very cordially. They were happy under the impression that there would not be any persecutions now onwards from the pro Chalcedon Greeks. However, after the initial friendliness, Arabs resorted to cruel dealings against Armenians. Once there was exorbitant increase in taxes, people got really wild and they assassinated the tax collectors. Naturally, the Arabs retaliated strongly. They started killing priests and destructing places of worship. As the persecutions increased manifold, the head quarters of the Church had to be shifted from one place to another many times. In short, their Catholicose, the head of the Church, had to remain as one with no permanent head quarters.

When the Turks took over, they were found more adamant than the Arabs. By end 11th century, a good percentage of Armenians migrated to Kilikya areas. In 1080, Prince Rueben annexed a few territories of Kilikya from the Turks and made Sis his capital. Thus, Reuben Dynasty ruled over these territories for some time and succeeded in maintaining cordial relationship with the western countries during these days. The Armenian Catholicose who was under the dilemma of having no proper head quarters made Sis as his centre. Later, this dynasty was overpowered by Turks in 14th century.

Internal discordance:

Rueben Dynasty was having close relations with the West. This made Armenians to move closer with Roman Church ecclesiastically. But those from the eastern parts of Armenia strongly objected to this relation on the ground that such a move was against the faith and traditions of the Church. However, dismissing these objections, the Catholicose initiated moves to unite with the Roman Church. A few Episcopas from Kilikya backed this move of the Catholicose. Ultimately, those who raised objections to such a move assembled at Aghthamar and ordained a new Catholicose. After continuous quarrels between the two segments, they decided to call peace in 1409; with this, both chose to continue peacefully in their areas of jurisdiction without excommunicating either and carried out their works independently.

However, there were quarrels again in the Church resulting in a third Catholicose being ordained at Etchmiadzin. As this was the centre of the Church during the time of Gregory, the Illuminator, the Catholicose here assumed more prominence and honour over a period of time. As days passed by, the position of Catholicose at Aghthamar gradually went into oblivion. The other two are still surviving. The Catholicose at Etchmiadzin has been considered as the supreme head of all Armenians. Consequent to the invasion of Turks, the Catholicose of Sis has been centred in Lebanon since 1921, and he too holds all rights as a Catholicose. But, authority to establish dioceses outside Armenia is vested with the Catholicose at Etchmiadzin only.

Apart from these two Catholicose, the Church has two patriarchs too. Of these two, the one at Constantinople was established in AD 1461. When the Turks annexed Constantinople, the religious and social governance over Christians were assigned to Christian Supremes. Under such a situation, the need for a spiritual head was found necessary for shepherding the Armenian Christians in Constantinople. It would not have been in the fineness of things to entrust this to an Episcopa and therefore the Metropolitan of Constantinople was designated Patriarch. The second Patriarch is for Jerusalem. In 18th century, a Patriarchate was established in Jerusalem for overseeing the monasteries of Armenian Church in Jerusalem and to look after the Holy spots. These two Patriarchs

do not possess the authority or rights of Catholicose. Though they are designated as Patriarchs, they are not authorised to consecrate Holy Mooron.

Scenario at Present:

Till 19th century, eastern part of Armenia was under Persians and the western part under the Turks. 19th century saw the entry of Russians. They annexed a major part of Armenia including Etchmiadzin which was under Persians. Feeling unbearable to carry on under the Turkish persecutions, many Armenians migrated to the Russian occupied territories. They had been dreaming of a day when they would set up politically independent Armenia. Though there were no persecutions from the Russians, their dreams seemed to be too farfetched. Under such an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity, it could be said that there was a spiritual enlightenment on the Russian occupied Armenia. But those who were remaining in the Turkish occupied area were forced to flee away to Syria, Lebanon as well as to other parts of the world by 1921.

By 1920, the Russian occupied territories expanded, but their dealings with Christians were not governed by any sort of reasonableness from the Communist rulers. They were denied all sorts religious freedom except their right to worship. But the situation underwent changes by the Second World War as the Communist regime realised that the Church could influence the subjects of Armenia and they started being compassionate. It was necessary to have support from the people to ensure unity of Russia during the days of war. Catholicose Kevork VI was allowed to initiate steps for the welfare of the Church. Shortly, a seminary was established.

As of now, there are more than six million Orthodox believers under the Catholicose of Etchmiadzin and another half a million plus under the Catholicose of Sis. Under Etchmiadzin, there are 33 Metropolitans and under Sis, whose Catholicose is centred in Lebanon, 14 Metropolitans.

Customs and Rituals:

Armenian Church is the sole Eastern Church that uses unleavened bread for Holy Qurbana. Also, they do not have the custom to mix water with wine. They have about 157 days of Lent a year. They observe Yeldho Feast and Danaho according to the ancient practices. They observe 50 days' Lent before Yeldho Feast and one week each before the Feast of Transfiguration, Ascension of Mother Mary and the Feast of Sleebo. Armenian tradition has nine hourly prayers. There are extra hours after Soothara and between Morning and Third hour. On certain Sundays and certain feast days, Armenian Church even now offers animal sacrifice. There is a separate spot close to the Church earmarked for this ritual. Further, for the ordination of Priest, Episcopa and Catholicose, anointment of Holy Mooron is repeated.

Questions:

1. Explain the reasons behind more than one Catholicose and Patriarch having come up in Armenian Church.
2. What were the situations of Armenian Church during the 19th and 20th centuries?
3. Explain the manner by which Armenian Church rejected the Chalcedon synod.



Lesson 5

Indian Orthodox Church

Establishment of Church # Relationship with Persian Church # Relationship with Roman Church # Relationship with Antiochian church # Church earns full Freedom # Malankara Church and Chalcedon Synod # Scenario at Present

Establishment of Church:

We believe that Apostle Thomas preached the Good News in India for the first time and set up the Church. There may not be any concrete historical records to substantiate this, but the tradition is strong behind this belief. The narrations in a text called 'Acts of Thoma', illustrate that Thomas had been to North India during the days of a king named Gondoforus as a carpenter and along with this, commenced gospel work also. The tradition we have in the South holds that Thomas came to Muziris port in AD 52 and was instrumental in setting up seven churches. He ordained priests from four families. After commencing his work in the South, it is believed that Thomas travelled right up to China preaching the Good News and returned to South India. He was martyred at Mylapore in AD 72. It is also believed that his mortal remains were transferred to Edessa in the 2nd century. Just because nobody who lived then recorded these in writing, one cannot dismiss these as false. As this tradition is strongly believed among Christians right from the early days till this date, it has its own authenticity. Also, there are evidences of Good News having reached the Malabar Coast during very early days.

Relationship with Persian Church:

Indian Church would have had its relationship with Persian Church as early as by the 3rd century. The coming of Kanai Thoma during AD 345 would have strengthened this relation. During the time of king Sapore II of Persia, persecution of Christians were really severe and to escape from this, Kanai Thoma and a group of people ran away from Persia through sea route landing up in our land. There was one Episcopa and few priests in this group. The ruler of this land at that time welcomed Kanai Thoma and conferred him certain rights recorded on a copper plate. Therefore, there is no further evidence needed to establish the truth behind this incident.

Cosmos Indicopleustes had recorded many events of those days in his text of history which has found acceptance by all modern day historians. He had recorded that during his visit of South India in the 6th century, he had seen widely spread Christianity as taught by Nestorians of Persia, in places he had spent time. He had affirmed as having witnessed such a Church in Malabar and that a Metropolitan ordained at Persia reigning over the Church at Kalian (Mumbai). This Persian relation so established here had continued till 16th century.

In AD 6th century, the Persian Church had one segment favouring Nestore and another opposing Nestore. (See the following lesson). Among these two, to which faction would have been our association? Majority among Persian Church had accepted Nestorianism by the 5th century. Thus,



those who opposed Nestore were a small minority who would not have been capable to ordain and send Metropolitans for India. They were formulated as an established Church only in the 7th century. As we have seen in Lesson 2, this was done by the Patriarch of Antioch. These inferences indicate that the Metropolitans who came to India before 7th century would have been sent by Nestorian Church of Persia as recorded by Cosmos.

Even after 7th century, those within Persian Church opposing Nestorianism were ruled by a Maphriana under the Patriarch of Antioch. In other words, the anti Nestorians of Persia were a part of the Church of Antioch. There is no evidence that Bishops were sent to India from Persia before 16th century by this segment. But there are recorded evidences that the Nestorian Church of Persia had sent Metropolitans to India. From end of 15th century till the Udayamperoor conclave, all Metropolitans we had in Malankara were Nestorians and this is seen in Portuguese records too.

Relationship with Roman Church:

Our association with Roman Church commenced with the presence of Portuguese in this land towards the end of 15th century. The Portuguese had accepted the supremacy of the Pope of Rome totally and had given him a commitment that wherever they reached, they would convert local people to Roman Church. Under such circumstances, when the Portuguese came here with commercial interests, they had with them a few missionaries too. As soon as they reached the coast of Malabar, they found that there was already a reasonably well organised Christian Church in place. They decided that this Church within India should be brought under the jurisdictional authority of their Pope. But the local Christians vehemently opposed all attempts from the Portuguese missionaries. However, the missionaries resorted to all sorts of strategies to achieve their goal which ended up with the infamous Udayamperoor conclave in 1599 conducted under the brutal supervision of Portuguese military forces and made our Church a slave of Romans. The conclave proceeded under their notion that the Roman Pope held authority all over the universe.

However, with the Coonan Cross Oath in 1653, most of the local Christians detached themselves from the Roman yoke. Those who broke away from the Romans were the major segment then, but the peculiar moves from the missionaries with support from their armed forces succeeded to lead most of them back to Roman fold. These sorts of acts from the Romans resulted in a vertical split within the Indian Church that was one till then.

The Portuguese did two things with support from their armed forces to cement their authority after the Udayamperoor conclave. The first of these two acts was to systematically annihilate all the service order books those were being used here for worships. The second was initiating steps to forcibly cut off our connections with the Persian Church totally. The impact of their actions in these lines was that those who opposed Portuguese attempts had no orders of liturgy for carrying out their worship and that the system prevailed till then to have Metropolitans here was broken.

Relationship with Antiochian church:

Our fathers who were holding on to the Coonan Cross Oath were in a great dilemma. They made efforts to get an Episcopal support from any of the Churches of the East and had been continuously writing to the Churches of Persia, Coptic and Antioch. A positive response to these came only from the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch. Thus we commenced our relationship with the Antiochian



Church. Within a few decades of Coonan Cross Oath and its aftermath, Portuguese were removed from secular power and India came under Dutch rule. During these days, in 1665, a Metropolitan of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch came to Malabar for the first time. This Metropolitan Abdul Jaleel Mar Gregoriose is said to be the Metropolitan of Jerusalem under the Patriarch of Antioch.

We cannot hide the truth that it was only the Church of Antioch who came forward to help us when we were in trouble. This relation materialised only in 1665. At the same time, it needs to be understood that there had been no relation between the Church in India and the Church of Antioch prior to this development. The service orders brought here by Mar Gregoriose were new for us. Our people could get congruent with these Syrian liturgical orders very slowly over a long period of time. Also, there were no alternatives before us. After Mar Gregoriose, many more Metropolitans from Antioch came here and part by part, we received service orders those were followed by the Syrian Church. We follow these orders even now. Yeldho Mar Baseliose who had been laid to rest at Kothamangalam and Mar Ivanios were notable among the Syrian Metropolitans who came during the early days of our commencement of association with Antioch.

However, the Metropolitans who came from Antioch later, particularly by 18th century, resorted to ways and means to bring the Indian Church fully under their supremacy. There were strong objections from us against these intentions of the Syrians. It was not possible for the Syrians to use political might against us as done by the Portuguese. Their strategy, therefore, was to bind us under their spiritual authority or place us under their spiritual slavery. There were some differences of opinion within our Church then which made matters worse. One group thought of accepting the Patriarchal supremacy with which they thought they can overcome their rivals within the Indian Church. In the meantime, there were legal battles with the reformist segment here who formulated a new Church namely the Malankara Mar Thoma Church. As a strategic move to win the legal battle against Mar Thoma Church, it is also a historical truth that all the elected office bearers of the Indian Church accepted the supreme authority of the Patriarch of Antioch albeit for a short period. This extreme step was a bare necessity for the survival of our ancient Church in the legal paraphernalia. The paradox behind this move was that our fathers then did not foresee that this would create problems in the days ahead. The problems arose with these are not yet fully resolved.

Nobody can dispute the truth that it was the Church of Antioch that came with a helping hand when we were in deep trouble. However, that can never be at the cost of our independence and autocephaly.

Church earns full Freedom:

Any Church that establishes her independence by detaching from the supremacy of another Church is through a self proclamation. In the 5th century, Persian Church became independent in this manner as explained in the following lesson. It was under the very same manner all the Greek Orthodox Churches became independent as described in the following unit.

Likewise, our Church comes under the reign of a Catholicose with full authority as the supreme head of our Church only in 1912. In 1934, we finalised our constitution through which our independence was cemented and thus all doubts were cast away. The Patriarch of Antioch accepted in totality this independence in 1958 and thus, the legal battles saw their end, though temporarily.

There is no lacuna that this Church could declare its independence so late because right from the very beginning, we were governed by Bishops from abroad. But we do not need any assistance from any foreign Bishop from 1912 onwards.

Malankara Church and Chalcedon Synod:

Nobody from the Malankara Church took part in the Chalcedon Synod of AD 451; perhaps, we might not have been even aware of such a thing till about 17th century. In the historical perspective, only after the Bishops from the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch came here, we turned out to be an Eastern Church that discarded Chalcedon findings. This illustrates the extent to which the Antiochian faith has been transmitted into us.

Scenario at Present:

All of us are aware of the present scenario as far as our Church is concerned. So let us confine only to certain statistics here. Presently, there are more than 2.5 million believers in the Church including those who stand separately under the direct governance of the Patriarch of Antioch. We have 30 dioceses, about 1800 parish churches, more than 1500 priests, 22 monasteries, 15 convents, 2 theological seminaries, 25 publications of various periodicity and with all these, the Church is showing its global relevance. We have our own parish churches at many foreign centres like UK, Canada, USA, Africa, Europe and gulf nations as our members are residing there engaging in business or other official assignments.

Questions:

1. Explain the relationship between the Malankara and Persian Churches.
2. At present, we follow Syrian liturgy in all our service orders. When and how did these orders of worship come into us?
3. Explain your view points about the independence of Malankara Orthodox Church.

Lesson 6

Other Churches of the East

Church of the East # Thozhiyur Syrian Church

Church of the East:

Preface:

This is a Church that was established during the very early days in Persia and accepted Nestorian faith; this Persian Church is also known as the Church of the East, the Chaldean Church and the Nestorian Church. This Church is not one among the Eastern Orthodox Churches, but being geographically centred in the East, a discussion on this is deemed fit for achieving a fullness in our



treatment of Churches of the East. Moreover, this Church used to be very closely associated with the Indian Church during early days which also points out the relevance of this discussion.

Origin:

Christianity had reached Persia in the 1st century itself or at least during early 2nd century. Traditions pinpoint Mari as the one who established this Church who was a disciple of apostle Thaddeus. However, in the historical perspective, it looks as if Christianity would have reached Persia from Edessa. Many prisoners of war who were sent here from different parts of Roman Empire also would have spread the Good News. Zoroastrian religion was popular here at that time. Presence of Jews was also there. Right from the beginning, their Church constitution and systems were not different from those of Churches in the Roman Empire. Their language of worship was Syriac.

Persecutions:

Persian Christians confronted persecutions for the first time during 4th century when Sapore II was the king. The reason behind such a move from Sapore II was that the Christians in Persia were friendly with Romans, who were enemies of the kingdom. As Emperor Constantine in Rome turned out to be protector of Christians, those in Persia too saw him as their benefactor. However, at this time, Sapore II was readying himself for a battle with Romans. The Christians in Persia looked forward to a victory for Romans and this was publicly expressed by their leaders like Afrath. There were no more reasons needed to brand Christians as traitors. A furious king ordered the worst persecutions on Christians in AD 340. Zoroastrian priests and Jews joined hands with the dynasty and started to destroy places of worships, to arrest priests and Bishops and to do forcible conversions. Following these, the king decided to annihilate Christians totally. These persecutions came to an end only in AD 379 with the death of Sapore II.

The respite was short lived as Baharam V who took over the reins in AD 420 too was very adamant in his anti Christian stand. Persecutions were the rule of the day once again for the Christians in Persia. There were systematic killings of Christians and the assets of the Church were confiscated. The persecutions ended only with the signing of a peace treaty between Persia and Rome in AD 422. One of the terms in the treaty was that Christians should be having religious freedom. Yazdgerd II, son of Baharam V remained friendly with Christians for some time, but he too turned a persecutor later.

Church becomes free:

During their days of tribulations, Persian Church had a lacuna that they were not having a proper leadership. There were many Episcopas, but a proper leadership was lacking. Apart from the Patriarch of Antioch in the East, the need for a Metropolitan with more powers was a real need for them considering the geographical distance between Persia and Antioch. In the course of time, the Metropolitan of Seleucia – Ctesiphon assumed this role of being ahead of others. The reason for this Metropolitan to grow as the one ahead of others can be attributed to the reasons that Ctesiphon was the capital of Persia and that the first church set up by Mari was at Seleucia. This move was recognised by the Synod of the Persian Church called in AD 410. Not only that, it was also decided that the Metropolitan of Seleucia – Ctesiphon should henceforth be designated Catholicose.

In AD 424, the Catholicose Dadyeshu called a Synod at Markabata. This synod declared the independence of Persian Church as complete. They proclaimed that henceforth, the Patriarchs of



Roman Empire would be brothers for them and that they would not have any authority over them spiritually or materially. There was a political underlining too behind this proclamation that it was a need for the Persians to ascertain that they were totally independent of Rome so that they need not be apprehensive of possibility of further persecutions from Persian rulers.

Nestorian Faith steps in:

The Synod at Ephesus in AD 431 which dismissed Nestor as a heretic had no participation from Persian Church. Therefore, neither did the Persian Church accept this Synod nor reject it. However, when the Romans started persecuting the followers of Nestor, they started fleeing to Persia to save their life. Thus the Nestorian faith made its entry into Persian Church. These Nestorians who crossed over to Persia did not keep quiet; they used their opportunity to teach Nestorian faith to the people of Persia preaching that theirs was the true faith. Thus, over a period of time, the Nestorian faith took roots in Persia and the Persian Church became a Nestorian Church in all sense. The Clergy of Persian Church were being educated in Ecclesiastical, Liturgical and Theological matters at the Edessa School of Theology which was under Nestorian control during the period 435 – 470. Later, this School was shifted to Nisibis. This also was a reason why the Nestorian faith found acceptance in Persia.

Bursauma was a Metropolitan in Nisibis who was successful to convert their king to Nestorianism and on the influence of this Metropolitan, the king had no second thoughts, but to assassinate the then Catholicose Babowai. From the time of the succeeding Catholicose Mar Acacius, Nestorianism became a basic dogma of Persian Church. The findings of their Synod held in AD 481 give sufficient proof for this. Thus, the majority of Persian Church accepted Nestorian faith, but there was a small segment opposing Nestorianism.

Monastic Movement and Missionary Work:

There is text named 'Historica Monastica' authored by one Mar Thoma of Margga which provides us valuable information about the monastic movement of Persia. It was one Egyptian monk namely Mar Augen who introduced monasticism to Mesopotamian areas for the first time in 4th century. He had brought with him 70 monks from Egypt. From 5th century, Monastic movement picked up in the Persian Church and started growing fast. The ashrams so established had enough monks over a period of time to suffice the need of the Church. They could thus preach the Good News to the extreme East of the universe.

The period from early 4th century to the end of 9th century can be considered as the golden era of Persian Missionary work. By 6th century itself, they had reached many parts of Arabia. They reached China in the 7th century and Japan by the 9th century. But as on now, there is not even a trace of Nestorians in Japan.

Though, a large number of people all over the Eastern nations accepted Christianity through the efforts of Nestorian missionaries during the early centuries, as of now, the Church does not have any large following of believers. The reasons behind this situation can be attributed to the religious persecutions as well as the interference from other Churches. From the days of Yacob Burdana, the number of Syrian Christians started multiplying in Persia. Moreover, many Chaldeans chose to fall in line with the Syrians. Similarly, the advent of Buddhism engulfed Christianity in China.

But the deeds of Islamic rulers were far more damaging. The Caliphs ruled in the 8th and 9th centuries namely Haroon and Montawakkel forcibly converted Christians to Islamism and killed those who resisted. The Caliphs assumed authorities to appoint Patriarchs and with the coming of Timur in the 14th century, the Persian Church almost reached a stage of annihilation. Many of the believers ran for their life to the mountainous regions of Kurdistan. They could return to lead a normal life after many years.

Scenario at Present:

The Church was forced to shift the centre of their Patriarchate from places to places from the 15th century onwards. Ultimately, in 1984, they could make Bagdad their head quarters. However, from the 15th century, the succession to the throne of Patriarch turned to be a hereditary exercise in favour of nephews of the incumbents. There were objections within the Church on this practice and Roman Church interfered to exploit the situation to their gain causing further dilemma in Persian Church. With these developments, one segment among the people chose to reconcile with Romans and they are now called Chaldeans. Though the Nestorian Church of Persia and the Church centred at Trichur are generally called Chaldeans, they do not relish being called so.

Shem'on Eshai XXIII, who was ordained Patriarch at a very young age according to the hereditary system prevailed then, shifted his residence from Bagdad to Chicago. Therefore Mar Thoma Darmo was ordained Patriarch at Bagdad resulting formation two Patriarchs in authority for this Church of the East. However, the segment of the Church centred at Bagdad is very backward in their membership. They are now called the Ancient Church of the East.

This Mar Shem'on Eshai XXIII announced his retirement from the Patriarchal throne in 1973 and married his secretary. This was followed by his assassination by an angry believer 1975. Thereafter, Mar Dinkha IV took over who abolished their hereditary pattern of choosing Patriarchs. He has been functioning with Chicago as his headquarters. On his demise, Geevarghese III took over and now, under him, the Church has more than 10 Bishops. Mar Addai II heads the other segment centred at Bagdad and he has 7 Bishops under him. Another Catholicose centred at Tehran also has an equal number of Bishops with him.

The Nestorian Christian community at Trichur:

As we have seen earlier, before the Portuguese landed in India, the Malankara Christian community was being ruled by Nestorian Bishops. What we have in Trichur as the Nestorian community is the true remnant of the Church that was here before the interference of Portuguese according their claim.

Even after the Udayamperoor conclave, Malankara Church had not totally detached its connections with the Persia. Bishop Gabriel from Persia had come here in 1709 and organised a small group here who were not willing to align with the Church of Antioch. However, there is no evidence that a Nestorian community survived here after his demise till 19th century. But the community at Trichur is claiming so. As inferred by Fr Dr VC Samuel, this community was born only in the 19th century. In the 19th century, a segment among the Roman Catholics desired that their Church should be sustained here as a true Eastern Church. During this time, a Bishop Rockos from that segment of Chaldean Church owing their allegiance to Roman Pope came here and after his demise, another Bishop

Mellus was also here. Both these Bishops were engaged in organising the above segment of Catholics laying the foundation of the Nestorian community at Trichur. After a period of time a local priest Antony Thondanadan was ordained as Bishop by the Nestorian Catholicose of Persia and thus commenced the history of this Trichur community.

Their present Metropolitan Mar Aphrem claims that they have membership strength of more than 10,000.

Thozhiyur Syrian Church:

This Thozhiyur Church is an independent Syrian Church having no differences in faith or doctrines or rituals with the Malankara Orthodox Church. This Church has their origin in 1772. The reason for this rests with the fact that Mar Gregorioso who came from Antioch ordained Kattumangatt Kurian Ramban as Episcopa. This was a consequence of the discordance that was prevailing between Mar Gregorioso and the then Malankara Metropolitan Mar Dionysius I which was tactfully utilised by Kurian Ramban who hailed from Mulanthuruthy. Mar Gregorioso succumbed to his tactful persuasions and ordained him as Mar Coorilose. This resulted in a tussle of war for authority between Mar Dionysius and the new Bishop Mar Coorilose. The stand of Mar Dionysius was that Mar Coorilose was ordained without the concurrence of the Church body here. The Dutch was ruling our land at that time who found the stand of Mar Dionysius as correct and therefore Mar Coorilose was forced to leave the boundaries of Travancore and Cochin provinces. He proceeded to the north and settled at Thozhiyur which was then under British Malabar jurisdiction. Even today, this Church survives as a small Church spread in Thozhiyur and surroundings. Once, Malankara Church had dismissed them as heretics, but during later days, their Metropolitans had been instrumental in ordinations here though very rarely. They have about 5,000 believers, six parish churches and ten chapels. The Mar Thoma Church is ordaining Metropolitans for them now. In the recent past, one of their Metropolitans Mar Phelixinose left them and joined Malankara Rite of the Roman church. Though many looked forward to the whole Church joining Malankara Rite following this, it was not materialised. Even today, they survive as an independent Church under one Metropolitan.

Questions:

1. Explain the persecutions confronted by the Persian Church.
2. When did Persian Church become independent? How?
3. How was the Thozhiyur Church established?

Unit 4

Byzantine Orthodox Churches

Lesson 1

Four Ancient Patriarchates

Preface # Constantinople Patriarchate # Alexandrian Patriarchate # Antiochian Patriarchate # Jerusalem Patriarchate

Preface:

The community of Eastern Churches which accepted the Chalcedon findings along with Romans are known as Byzantine or Greek Orthodox Churches. After AD 451, they have been continuing in a state of unity. Further, they had three more Synods together after Chalcedon.

However there were basic differences between these Romans who were from the West and the Greeks who were from the East. The former gave emphasis to basic discipline and practical aspects whereas the latter gave importance to Christian philosophical thoughts and the beauty of liturgy. The Roman stand that their Pope who succeeded St Peter had authority all over the universe was something the Eastern Churches could not digest. Certain developments since 9th century led to their separation ultimately.

In AD 800, the Roman Pope Leo III installed Charley Mein as an alternative to the incumbent Roman Emperor. This was not to the liking of Eastern Churches. This Charley Mein after commencing his reign of the empire started questioning many of the customs and rituals of the Eastern Churches. One major allegation raised by him was that the Eastern Churches did not say that the Holy Spirit was coming from both Father and the Son; Eastern churches objected this as this was a new thought different from what was stated in the doctrines of faith formulated at the universal synods of Nicaea and Constantinople The problems between the two grew up with Roman Church declaring this as their dogma of faith.

Another serious issue was the interferences of Rome into the governance of Churches. In the 9th century, Romans excommunicated Photios who was the Patriarch of Constantinople; again this was repeated in 1054 when the then Patriarch Michael Cerularius was also excommunicated. These actions of the Romans created more problems. Whatever be these, there was no justification of the Pope interfering in the matters of Eastern Churches.

The war of crosses commenced more or less this time when these discordances were surfacing more often than ever. Christian forces from the west came to the east on the guise of annihilating the Muslims, but they did not spare their brethren in the Eastern Churches. Those who took part in the 4th war of crosses entered Constantinople in 1204 and looted whatever they found handy. They destroyed the Sophia Cathedral totally which was a symbol of pride for the Geek Christians. Thereafter, there was absolutely no chance for any sort of initiatives for unity. Synods were held at Leon in 1274 and at Florence in 1438, but nothing came out positive.



Byzantine Churches of each country are totally independent and autocephalous. They recognise the Patriarch of Constantinople as a common Head, but he doesn't have any administrative or spiritual authority over other Churches. Now let us examine the history of each of these Churches one by one.

Constantinople Patriarchate:

What we have before us here is the history of a regional diocese being elevated to the highest echelon of authority in the course of time. The Episcopa of Byzantium, a little town, was not even a Metropolitan till mid 4th century. But this sleepy little town was chosen by Emperor Constantine as the new capital of Roman Empire by changing its name as Constantinople with which things changes dramatically. The status of the Episcopa of capital city started moving up and up. The second universal synod that was held here in AD 381 elevated this diocese as a Patriarchate. Later, the Chalcedon Synod of AD 451 gave further powers to this new Patriarchate of Roman Empire. This is one reason why none of the Patriarchs here chose not to disown the Chalcedon findings.

This Church has been well involved in mission works. It was the Greek missionaries who transformed the entire Slavic populace as members of Christian Church. Greek liturgy was in fact having a domination of other orders of worship. The Constantinople Patriarch was holding supremacy over all the newly formed Churches for quite a long period of time, but as of now, all those new Churches are independent.

The coming of Muslims was another reason for the status of Constantinople Patriarch to move upward further; once the eastern territories of the empire were annexed by Arabs, the Chalcedon Patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch declined in power and authority. They had, therefore, no other alternative, but to rely on Constantinople. Once the Turks overpowered Constantinople in the 15th century, the Patriarch grew in strength further as the victorious Mohammed Ali entrusted the entire social and spiritual governance of the Church to the Christian leadership. Thus, the Constantinople Patriarch turned out to be the supreme authority of all Christians under Turkey who accepted the Chalcedon findings.

However, there used to a check from the Muslim rulers that the Church was not to grow forward. They also undertook the responsibility to appoint Patriarchs from time to time and the policy was that whoever they liked for their own reasons used to be chosen. In these sorrowful states of affairs, the Byzantine fathers through their letters inspired the believers to hold on to their traditions and true faith.

As of now, the Constantinople Patriarch resides at Fener, a Christian centre in Istanbul. As days passed, the term 'Fener' turned out as one to indicate the Patriarch and his council. He is also holding the status of Ecumenical Patriarch and the first among equals. He takes initiatives to hold dialogues and deliberations of issues having common interest. His authority is restricted to dioceses within Turkey, but he is the one who ordains Metropolitans for Churches like those in Finland. Those Christians in Greek islands and the Monastic Island of Mount Athos come under his direct governance. Mount Athos is considered as the centre of spiritual enlightenment for Byzantine Churches. This is a republic where there is absolutely no entry for any being that is female in gender; they enjoy their independence to a certain extent though being a part of Greece. Most of the Churches of Byzantine tradition had set up Ashrams here at one point or other. Out of the 20

Ashrams they have now, 17 are of the Greek. There were 2,700 plus monks in this republic in 1952. It is understood that presently there are some 2,500 of them.

To enhance the status of Ecumenical Patriarch, he has been given namesake authority over dioceses lying north of Greece. Earlier, the Patriarch of Constantinople alone had authority to form dioceses in Europe and America; now the situation is different. All Churches have dioceses in western countries. Till 1922, the Patriarch of Constantinople had been exercising political authority also and therefore he was chosen by a body of clergy and laity. But now, he is chosen by a council of Metropolitans of the Patriarchate. Their membership strength is around half a million and has 96 Metropolitans as per a statistics of 1984.

Alexandrian Patriarchate:

We have learnt how the Good News reached Alexandria and how was Christianity originated there in our previous unit. Bulk majority of Alexandrians had discarded Chalcedon findings and therefore, the membership in the Byzantine Church is very few, at about 150,000. The coming of Muslims made them suffer a lot ending up with substantial decline in strength to an extent even to depend on the Constantinople Patriarch. The centre of their Patriarch was necessitated to be shifted to Constantinople and it was there from 16th to 18th century. The traditional liturgy orders of the Coptic Church were gradually taken over by Greek liturgy.

This Church that was on a trend of decline had a resurrection from the 20th century. Many Chalcedon believers migrated to Alexandria from Greece and Syria. They increased their membership through mission work in certain parts of Africa. Though the number of believers in the Church is low, they have about 24 Metropolitans.

Antiochian Patriarchate:

Once Antioch was the third biggest city of the Roman Empire; now it has declined to a small village in Turkistan. They were ranking 4th among Patriarchates of all Christian Churches during early days, but now the situation is that no Patriarch can stay here. The Antiochian Patriarch overseeing close to 300,000 believers now reside in Damascus.

Those who opposed Chalcedon findings in Syria were not as much as those in Egypt. However, post synod developments affected the growth of this Church. With the coming of Muslims, there was further decline. From 1724 to 1899, all the Patriarchs and Bishops were Greeks. Over a period of time, they discarded the Syrian liturgy and adopted Greek.

The training of clergy in this Church is just for the namesake even now. However, youth resurgence after the World War II caused a spiritual enlightenment. They have close to 30 Metropolitans and have dioceses even in western countries.

Jerusalem Patriarchate:

The Church of Jerusalem can really be considered as the mother of all Churches. But being a not so significant town of Roman Empire, the Metropolitan here was not conferred the title of Patriarch in the beginning. Even after being elevated to that status later, they were placed only 5th in ranking



among all Patriarchates. This Church was proclaimed as an autocephalous one at the Chalcedon synod and it was for this reason, the then Patriarch Juvenal accepted Chalcedon findings.

Now, the Patriarch of Jerusalem is 4th in position among Eastern Orthodox Churches. Area of his jurisdiction is too small. His main task is confined to being the custodian of the Holy places of Jerusalem for which there is a 100 odd member committee of monks chaired by him, most of whom are Greeks.

The recent fights between Israel and Palestine have caused the decline of this Church considerably. The membership in this Church is about 50,000 but they had 17 Metropolitans in 1984.

Questions:

1. What were the historical reasons behind the separation of Roman Churches and Byzantine churches?
2. What were the circumstances under which the Patriarch of Constantinople got raised to the leadership of all Eastern Churches from being just an ordinary Episcopa?
3. What were the reasons for the decline of Antiochian Patriarchate which held the 4th position among Christian Churches during early days?

Lesson 2

Slavonic Churches – 1

Bulgarian Church # Russian Church # Under Communist Rule

Bulgarian Church:

There arose a missionary zeal among Byzantine Churches during the 9th century and it was during these days, the Slavonic people embraced Christianity. Two missionaries Cyril and Methodius who completed their education at Constantinople are considered apostles of Slavonic people. They succeeded in transforming a large segment of people to be followers of Christianity including many in the royal family. Boris of the Bulgarian dynasty was one among them. He was baptised in the 9th century and Christian faith started spreading steadily.

Gradually, Cyril and Methodius formulated a script for Slavic language which turned out to be the language of liturgy for Slavic Churches. These two missionaries took initiatives to translate Holy Bible and orders of worship to Slavic.

During the infancy days of the Church, King Boris was in a dilemma that should they keep relationship with Eastern Churches or with Roman Church. This had caused intermitting shift in loyalties as well as occasional quarrels. Initially, they were more aligned to western Church though he was baptised by the Greeks. When the Constantinople rejected their demand for ordaining a Patriarch for Slavic Church, Boris turned towards western side. In 866, two Roman Bishops came to



Bulgaria for stabilising the Church. However, after about three years, the Bulgarian king decided once for all to stand with Constantinople and expelled the Roman bishops from the country.

It can be said that the Church became autocephalous in character by 13th century. However, with the invasion of Turks, Church once again had to be under the Patriarchate of Constantinople. This was because of the policy of the Turkish rulers to authorise Constantinople Patriarch to oversee all Greek Christians. Gradually, Greek Metropolitans reached Bulgaria to manage the affairs of the Church. However, the strategy of these Metropolitans to suppress Slavic liturgy and replace it with Greek orders caused bitterness ending up in serious problems. From 19th century, Bulgarian Church pressed for their freedom which was accepted by the Turkish Sultan very shortly in 19th century itself; however, the deck was cleared only in 1945 as the Patriarch of Constantinople was reluctant till then. Now Bulgarian Church is autocephalous.

Bulgaria being a communist nation, the Church had been going through a situation that was almost hostile. In 1946, religious education was banned in schools. Many priests and bishops were arrested and assassinated. The communist government put forward the condition that all clergy should be members of newly formed 'Patriotic Front'. Church leadership was also asked to fight against anti communist propaganda. But the synod neither agreed to this nor disagreed, but coolly ignored the demand. In 1949, the government imposed restrictions of many sorts on the Church.

However, since 1951, though to a limited extent, Church has been enjoying some sort of freedom which is seen a good relief. This situation has enabled the Church to initiate systems for educating the clergy as well as to release religious publications. There is a seminary now at a place called Ohrid.

The membership of this Church is estimated to be about 6 million. It is the Bulgarian synod that chooses their Patriarch. However, he has to be one among a panel of three proposed by the government. The Church has nearly 2,000 parish churches and the same number of priests along with some 24 Bishops.

Russian Church:

Among all Orthodox Churches, Russian Church is the one having maximum strength in membership. Though an accurate statistics is not readily available, it is understood that there should be about 50 million believers here.

It was in the 9th century, Byzantine missionaries entered Russia with Good News. Their works enabled formation of the Church that grew substantially by 10th century itself. With Princess Olga accepting baptism in 955 and Vladimir of Keeve in 988, Russians started getting baptised in bulk. Shortly, Christianity became the official religion in Keeve. From the very beginning, the Metropolitan of Keeve was recognised as the leader of other Episcopas in Russia. Due to attacks from barbarians, the centre of Metropolitan had to be shifted from Keeve to Moscow. Since then, till now, the Russian Church has its centre at Moscow.

In the 15th century, the Russian Church became autocephalous after discarding the supremacy of the Patriarch of Constantinople. In 1448, the Russians chose one Jonas as their Metropolitan and ordained him without any sort of assistance from Constantinople with which their autocephalous nature was proclaimed. With this, they took efforts to formulate their own regional scriptural texts

and service orders. The availability of Holy Bible and service orders in Slavic language by then was very helpful. The synod assembled at Moscow in 1551 declared many of their fathers who had been leading a life of Holiness as saints. In 1589, the then Patriarch of Constantinople Jeremiah II visited Russia and ordained Job as the first Patriarch of Russia with which the autocephalous nature of the Church earned universal recognition. This Patriarch earned the 5th position among Patriarchs after the first four which were formulated in the early Church.

The Church had some very tough time during the reign of Emperor Peter the Great. He started imposing reforms in tune with the western culture. After the demise of Patriarch Adrian in 1700, the throne of Patriarch was summararily wound up. In place of the Patriarchal throne, a committee named Holy Synod was appointed where a few Bishops and two or three priests were the members along with a representative of the emperor that was mandatory. Thus, Peter the Great made the Church a slave of the dynasty.

During the 15th and 16th centuries, the province Ukraine was not under the reigns of Moscow and therefore the Church of Ukraine too was not under the Russian Patriarch. During this period, the Church of Ukraine had been in unison with the Roman Church. However, being fed up with the unbearable nature of Roman supremacy, they chose to return to Orthodox fold. In 1686, Russian army overpowered Ukraine and thus Ukraine became part of Russia once again; thus their Church too returned to the authority of Russian Patriarchate.

During the period 1721 to 1917, Russian Church was in total submission to the authority of the dynasty. But the life of the Church was actively sustained even during these days also, which is a truth that is worth mentioning. These were the days when monastic movements picked up as an important field of mission within the Russian Church. The translation of many of the texts of Church fathers to Russian language enabled sustenance of spirituality in the Church. A theological academy was established in Moscow towards the end of 17th century. Apart from this, three more academies and seminaries were set up in addition to educational institutions by the 19th century. The Russian missionaries successfully spread the Good News in China and Eastern Siberia.

By early 20th century, the Russian Church initiated some reforms in the Church. A universal Synod of Russian Church was summoned at Moscow in 1917 after concerted efforts for a long period of time. This synod put in place a constitution for the Church and decided to re establish the Patriarchate. The role of laity in Church governance has been a new innovation in this constitution. Shortly after the Russian revolution on October 31, 1917, Tykhom was ordained as the Patriarch.

Under Communist Rule:

Carl Marx had once said, "Religion is the opium of the people"; the new political system in Russia that was holding on to the ideologies of Carl Marx had no mercy for the Church. In 1918 itself, the new regime detached all educational institutions from the control of the Church. Along with this, many political leaders came out openly against religion leading even to bloodshed. In the guise of scarcity of essential goods in 1921 – 22, government decided to confiscate all the valuable objects in possession of the Church. Though with reluctance, Church agreed to this leaving those blessed objects being used in the worship. The rulers were not satisfied and created issues one after another. In the meantime, one segment within the Church came forward supporting the government moves and decided to fight against the Church. They named themselves 'Living Church'

and managed to control the affairs of the Church for some period. However, gradually, they declined and their existence disappeared from the scene.

Once the Second World War commenced, there were positive changes in the relationship between Church and the government. Slowly, the rulers started allowing limited freedom to the Church. In 1944, Stalin held discussions with the Church and gave permission to elect a Patriarch. Church was not having a spiritual head since the demise of Patriarch Tykhom in 1925. Church got the freedom to reorganise themselves and also to release religious publications. In Russia, it is inevitable for the Church to keep on supporting the government and it is unthinkable for them to oppose any of the policy decisions. Despite passing through stresses like these, it is worth mentioning that among all Orthodox Churches, Russia has the highest membership. This is proof enough that the Good News of our Lord can never be destructed. There are about 90 Bishops and 25,000 parish churches in Russia. There are two academies and eight minor seminaries to educate the clergy. But government consent is needed for calling a synod. There are instances that Bishops and priests are arrested and assassinated. Though Church and the clergy have sources of finances they are not permitted to utilise them for mission works.

The National Church Assembly called with permission of the government is the body that chooses their Patriarch. All the Bishops participate in this assembly along with representatives of clergy and laity; the Patriarch has authority to appoint bishops.

Questions:

1. How did the Bulgarian Church earn its independence?
2. Who was instrumental to place the Russian Church under submission to the executive before the communist revolution? How was this done?
3. Explain the persecutions the Church was confronting under the communist regime.

Lesson 3

Slavonic Churches – 2

Serbian Church # Church of Poland # Czechoslovakian Church

Serbian Church:

St Sabbas was ordained as the first Metropolitan of Serbia or Yugoslavia in 1220. Right from then, the Church was virtually independent, but it was in 1346, they claimed to be totally autocephalous through a self proclamation. However, their independence was forcibly wound up in 1766 with Constantinople dismantling the Patriarchate. Later, in 19th century, five independent Churches were



formed in Serbia. They were Churches of Montenegro, Karlovci, Herzegovina, Serbia and Bosnia. In 1920, all these Churches united under a Patriarch residing at Belgrade, the Capital of modern Yugoslavia. This united Church was recognised by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople in 1922.

This Church had to face a lot of problems and tribulations from the days of Second World War. Germany annexed Serbia and many priests were arrested. Consequently, clergy and laity stood against the new regime. It is estimated that around 700,000 Serbians were killed during this period. During the reign of Tito, a few priests and bishops were assassinated barring which the democratic government which came to power after the war had not harassed the Church. The reason for occasional bloodshed here and there was due to the opposition expressed by the clergy on certain policy matters of the government. The political leaders planned to divide Serbian Church into many independent Churches with the motive of destabilisation, but their strategy did not meet with any success. However, there is one Church at Macedonia which has been independent partly since 1957; they have six Bishops.

Patriarch Vincent who came to power in 1950 dealt with the national leadership more tactfully than there had been improvement in the affairs of Church. However, the Church is yet to regain its relevance and strength it used to enjoy at the beginning of 20th century. At present, there are only two seminaries against five they were having in 1940. The Church has membership strength of about seven million and a half and thus, these two seminaries are far from adequate to train enough number of priests. There are about 25 Metropolitans and a Patriarch in the Serbian Church.

Their Holy Synod consists of the Patriarch and only six Metropolitans; Synod is the highest authority of the Church in matters of governance. Apart from Synod, there is an Episcopal Assembly where all Metropolitans are members; this assembly is empowered to take decisions on liturgical and doctrinal matters.

Church of Poland:

After the First World War, Poland became an independent nation and at that time, the Orthodox Church of Poland had membership strength of about four million. This Church was under the Patriarchate of Russia before the nation became independent. This system continued for some more time after independence but Polish government took initiatives to wind up this Russian supremacy over the Church. Russians opposed this move very strongly. Ultimately, the Church and the government who were bound to free the Church from Russian Patriarchate had no other alternative, but to seek the intervention of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. Thus, in 1924, the Constantinople Patriarch recognised the Church of Poland as an autocephalous one. But Russia again objected and went on for years without accepting the independence of the Church of Poland.

In 1939, Russian army entered Poland and the eastern part of the country was brought under their authority. There was substantial presence of Orthodox believers in this area. The dioceses here became part of Russian Patriarchate very shortly. After this, Russia did not want to rule over the remaining about 350,000 Orthodox believers. Ultimately, in 1949, the then Russian patriarch Alexis declared this Church of Poland as autocephalous. There are five Metropolitans in this Church apart from the Metropolitan of Warsaw, who heads them.

Czechoslovakian Church:

In Czechoslovakia there were more Roman Catholics than Orthodox Christians. In 1923, there were about 250,000 believers in this Church and they had Sebatios as their head. This happened through the initiatives of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. After about two years, one segment of believers left the Catholic Church and joined the Orthodox fold. The Serbian Patriarch ordained Gorozd to oversee this new community. Again in 1930, from the Catholic Uniate Church a segment of believers joined the Orthodox Church. Thus the membership strength increased quite substantially. In fact these three communities were not having any mutual relationships, but the Russian Patriarch initiated steps to join them as one Church. Shortly, Alexis, the Russian Patriarch brought this Church under his jurisdictional authority. Just like Poland, Russia invaded Czechoslovakia and annexed it with which a very large number of Orthodox believers became part of Russian Orthodox Church permanently. Russia accepted the remaining community as an independent Orthodox Church in 1959. The Metropolitan of Prague heads this Church. The membership strength is about just 150,000 only. In 1948, a seminary was established at Karlovci to train the clergy. There are three more Episcopos in addition to the Metropolitan of Prague.

Questions:

1. When was the Patriarchate of Yugoslavia formed? How?
2. How did the Church of Poland become independent?
3. Russia invaded Poland and Czechoslovakia and annexed their territories. How did this invasion affect the Churches in these nations?
4. Explain as you deem fit what should be the relationship between Church and nation.

Lesson 4

Rumanian Church, Georgian Church and Albanian Church

Rumanian Church # Georgian Church # Albanian Church

Rumanian Church:

The early Christians of Rumania were following western liturgical systems. By 9th century, they came under Greek influence. Gradually their Latin orders of liturgy gave way for Greek liturgy. Once disputes arose between Constantinople and Rome, they favoured the former and fought against Romans. Their Bishops used to be from foreign land for long, but started getting local persons as Bishops since 14th century.

From 1712, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople started interfering with the governance of Rumanian Church ending up with Rumanian Metropolitans losing their right to oversee their Church. Later, in 1864, Rumania attained national freedom which led to the independence of the Church also. The Head of the nation Cuza confiscated all the assets of Rumanian church and then proclaimed

the Church as a free entity. But the Ecumenical Patriarch did not agree to this initially. Anyhow, the Church was accepted as autocephalous after another 20 years in 1885.

The modern Orthodox Church of Rumania was formed in a manner similar to that of Serbian Church by merger of many small Churches. In 1864, they were autocephalous. The Church of Bukovina was another which had been independent since 1873. All such small Churches were brought under one umbrella and the Romanian Patriarchate was formed in 1925. Now Rumanian Orthodox Church has membership strength of about 15 million. Among Byzantine Churches, Rumanian Church is the second largest following Russian Church. They have 26 Episcopas with them.

In Rumania, the Church had very cordial relationship with the government before communists came to power. Once they took over the state, Church started facing problems. Immediately on assuming power, they imposed restrictions over schools conducted by the Church. An Episcopa had to take an oath that he would be loyal to the state without which he could not take up his assignment. There has been some improvement in the relationship since 1959. Though there are two seminaries to train the clergy, no one below age 18 could be imparted any sort of religious education.

One of the noblest achievements of the Rumanian Church was renaissance of monastic movement. There were about 7,000 monks in 1959. The ashrams served as media to uplift intellectual talents as well as to bring up spiritual enlightenment. There were allegations that monks could not be of any use to the state, but these monks were involving themselves very actively in social development.

However, all these good deeds and developments were suppressed with the stern steps initiated by the government in 1958. Many of the leaders of the Church including the Patriarch were arrested and a good number of monks and clergy were forcibly made laymen. The anti religious policies still continue.

Georgian Church:

Christian faith took roots in Georgia during the very early days. A young girl Neenah is considered as the one who established the Church in Georgia. She possessed an unusual personality and her deep faith along with a gift of healing made the king Merion and queen Nana highly impressed with her. Under her influence, both the king and queen got baptised in AD 303. This was followed by proclaiming Christianity as the official religion of the state. Later, they formulated a script for their language and translated the Holy Bible and orders of liturgy into their local language. Georgia was falling under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Antioch and therefore, initially, they were having Metropolitans from Antioch. Later, they came under the influence of Constantinople and since then, their relationship with Byzantine Empire and faith had been very strong. Therefore, they had no second thoughts in accepting Chalcedon findings; similarly, they had no hesitation to raise their strong objections against Roman Church as their loyalty was with the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

In the 9th century, Georgian Church became autocephalous under a Catholicose. They befriended Russians in 1801 to defeat Persians and this ended up with their becoming a part of Russia. With this, the autocephalous nature of the Church too ended. From 1817, Russian Bishops started their reign over Georgian Church. They forced Slavonic liturgical orders in place of Georgian liturgy. When Nicholas II was crowned Emperor, he called for religious tolerance. At this time, Georgian Church demanded the freedom of their Church back, but the Episcopa who went to the Russian Supremes

with this request was sent in exile. As a sequel to this, the Russian Metropolitan Nikon who came to Georgia to oversee their affairs was assassinated.

In 1917, during the days of Russian Revolution, there was meeting of Episcopas, priests and laity where Georgian Church made a self proclamation that they were independent henceforth. Within a few months, Kyrion was ordained as their Catholicose. The objections raised by the Russian Patriarch did not yield any results and by 1943, they too accepted the autocephaly of Georgian Church.

In 1921, Georgia became a part of Soviet Union. Since then, like Russian Church, Georgian Church too has been moving through adversities. In 1922, Catholicose Ambrose was arrested for the reason that he submitted a memorandum against the policies of the Government. He was detained in jail for life. From 1927, Church leadership initiated moves to be closer to the communist rulers. They were now not opposing government policies, but started even supporting them. This made some relief in persecutions, but occasional arrests of clergy and locking up of churches continued.

After the Second World War, Russia started to be little merciful to Christians as we have seen early. Georgian Church too started showing progressive growth from this time onwards. Yet, this Church having close to 3 million believers do not have a good seminary to educate the clergy. They have 19 Episcopas.

Albanian Church:

Good News entered Albania through its north and south regions. There was a time when there were a large number of Christians here, but with Islamic invasion, most of them were forced to be converted to Islam. Now, Christianity is a minority here. Among the Christians, those who are in the north are mostly Catholics and those in the south are Orthodox. From 18th century, all the Metropolitans who oversaw the affairs of Albanian Orthodox Church were sent by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and were Greek. After the First World War, the State of Albania became independent and therefore, the Church too clamoured for autocephaly. But Constantinople did not agree initially. In 1926, the Constantinople Patriarch set up certain conditions for autocephaly which were rejected by Albanian Church. Subsequently, in 1929, a Russian Bishop and a Serbian Bishop together ordained two Albanians as Episcopas and formulated a synod. This synod proclaimed autocephaly of Albanian Church immediately. Constantinople strongly objected to this and passed orders excommunicating the Episcopas of the synod. But, Serbian Patriarch recognised Albanian church as autocephalous. As there was no way out, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople too gave their consent to Albanian autocephaly in 1937. The communists came to power in 1944 with which persecutions started. Many believers were assassinated. As of now, they have barely 250,000 believers and four Metropolitans.

Questions:

1. How does the relationship between the Rumanian government and the Church go?
2. Since when did Christian faith get strengthened in Georgia? What were the reasons?
3. We have seen quite a few Churches so far. What are the common factors you have observed in their attainment of autocephaly?

Lesson 5

Church of Greece, Church of Cyprus and Church of Sinai

Church of Greece # Church of Cyprus # Church of Sinai

Church of Greece:

The community of Churches that has accepted Chalcedon findings have been called in general as Greek Orthodox Church, but what we discuss here is the autocephalous Church that is there in Greece today. There is no doubt that Good News has reached Greece during the days of apostles. We read in Holy Bible about the missionary sojourn of St Paul and his visit to Thessalonica, Corinth, Athens and such places to preach the gospel. The Greek Church feels proud on such traditions. They have a feeling while having dialogues with other Churches that their stands and teachings on Christian faith alone are right. Such an attitude from their side very often creates obstacles during discussions on ecumenism.

The Church of Greece is located at the Illyricum province of Roman Empire which was being reined over by the Patriarch of Rome till 8th century. But in the 8th century, the eastern areas of Illyricum became a part of Byzantine Empire and the authority of the Church here was assigned to the Patriarch of Constantinople by Emperor Leo III. Since then, the Christians here were under the Ecumenical Patriarch till an independent State of Greece was formed.

The State of Greece was liberated from the clutches of Turks in 19th century. Even the Episcopos of the Church had exhorted believers to wage war against the Turks who were Muslims and were active in the open struggle. In 1827, Greek was victorious in the battle field and the Turkish Sultan agreed to allow Greece to be independent. In 1833, a German was made king here, but his western style of governance was not satisfactory to the Greeks.

In 1833 itself, the entire community of Bishops numbering 33 proclaimed the autocephaly of the Church of Greece. As usual with their style of responses in such situations elsewhere, here again, the ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople objected to this. Only in 1852, Constantinople came to terms with the reality and recognised the autocephaly of the Church of Greece.

During the early days, Church of Greece was submissive to the State as was done by Peter the Great in Russia. This situation slowly started changing after 1850. Yet, there were occasional detention of priests and bishops. The Holy Synod was abandoned in 1923, but was reinstated after two years. Synod started enjoying greater freedom by mid 20th century. Now, Greek Orthodox Church is the official Church of Greece and play active role in the political governance too. But by mid 19th century, this Church had reached a state of total decline. At that time many improper and dirty customs had found place inside the Church and a monk Eusebios Mathopauolos criticised them openly. Another monk Makkarikis was solidly behind him. They vehemently opposed all the corrupt practices rampant in the Church such as payments for blessings from Holy Spirit and so on. But the fruits of their steadfast interventions were their excommunication from the Church handed out by the synod.



Further, they were exiled in 1879. However, not much later, the synod realised the truth and they were called back; actions were initiated against those who managed to be ordained as Episcopas by paying money. After this Eusebios was welcomed wholeheartedly in the Church and he did good work by travelling across the length and breadth of the country delivering sermons to orient people in the right direction. He organised a missionary community named 'Zoe' (which means life) mostly with the youth of the Church.

Though this Zoe community was formulated as a monastic one, they would stay together only one month a year. During the other months, they were to travel far and wide doing gospel work. This community advocates the importance of Sacramental life and the necessity of accepting Holy Communion regularly. Zoe community has been successful in implanting a sort of renewed renaissance in the Church of Greece. They publish a magazine by name 'Zoe' which is the most widely read publication in Greece.

There are other communities also in Greece more or less in the same line as Zoe. Their deeds are viewed by Episcopas in high esteem. Their main task is to prepare the Greek populace to keep the purity of Orthodox faith intact. Seeing their active role in the Church and the community, more and more people are now coming forward to join monkhood. Right from the early days of 20th century, many are moving to Mount Athos looking to a monastic way of life.

Orthodoxy being the official religion of Greece, all the schools are providing scriptural education also in addition to their normal syllabi. In this Church we have more lay theologians than clergy theologians. Most of those who graduate from the theological universities of Athens and Thessalonica are continuing as laity. Many among them join schools as teachers in scripture. The clergy are often being trained in small seminaries and therefore in a way, lay theologians are more respected. There are about 8.5 million believers in this Church. Metropolitan of Athens heads the Church and there are 107 Episcopas also. Similar to what we have seen in the Serbian Church, the supreme authority of the Church rests with a synod consisting of the head of the Church and another eight bishops. The Episcopal assembly has all Episcopas as members which elects the Patriarch.

Church of Cyprus:

The Church of Cyprus was established by St Paul and nurtured by St Barnabas. This became autocephalous at the Ephesus Synod of AD 431. Before that, they were under the governing jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Antioch. This decision of the Ephesus Synod was questioned by representatives from Antioch, but due to Constantinople Patriarch supporting the decision, Antiochian side could not do anything.

Cyprus came under the western rule by the 12th century. This made the Pope of Rome to interfere in the spiritual and material affairs of the Church. The Pope was attempting to transform them from the Greek system to western system. In 1213, Pope Innocent III sent two representatives to Cyprus. They resorted to persecute priests and monks who objected to western systems even leading to assassination of some.

The Turks reached Cyprus in the 14th century and overpowered the western rulers. This enabled the Church to be relieved of the persecutions of the western Church, but they had to undergo sufferings

from the Turks. In the 18th century, Turks assassinated the Arch Bishop of Cyprus and three Episcopas with him for the reason that they were helping the Greek in their struggle for independence. In 1878, Cyprus came under British rule, leaving them in some sort of relief.

After World War I, most of the Orthodox Christians in Cyprus demanded that the State should be brought under Greek rule. In 1931, there was even a mini revolution on this issue under the leadership of two Episcopas. They proclaimed that henceforth, Cyprus would be a part of Greece which in fact resulted in problems for the Church. Those two Episcopas were sent in exile by the British rulers. Consequently, the Church had no head for a period. In 1960, with the acceptance of a new constitution, Cyprus became independent which paved way for good days for the Church. Arch Bishop Makarios was chosen as the first President of the State of Cyprus. There are about 400,000 believers in the Church. Apart from the Arch Bishop, there are seven other Episcopas as members of the synod.

Church of Sinai:

The Orthodox Church of Sinai is just a community of monks; Sinai was the place where Moses received Ten Commandments from Jehovah. There were inhabitancy monks at Sinai from very early days. St Catherine Ashram was set up at the exact spot where Moses witnessed the 'burning bush', which is one of the most ancient of all Christian Ashrams. This Ashram is the head quarters of the Orthodox Church of Sinai.

In due course of time, the Abbot of this Ashram brought a few dioceses lying close by under his jurisdiction. Jerusalem Patriarch was ordaining Episcopas for this Church as and when the need arose. Though the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople accepted the autocephaly of this Church in 1575, Jerusalem Patriarch did not fall in line. Their Arch Bishop is always chosen by the community of monks at the Ashram, but even now his ordination is done by Jerusalem Patriarch. They have small Ashrams in nearby locations. The jurisdiction of this Arch Bishop is confined to these Ashrams only. With membership of about 300, this Church is the smallest among all Eastern Churches. They have a manuscript library which contains vary valuable texts of ancient days.

Questions:

1. How was the Zoe community formed in Greece? How do they function?
2. What is the system in place for theological education in Greece?
3. What sort persecutions were confronted by the Church of Cyprus from westerners and Turks?
4. When did the monastic community of Sinai become a Church? How did this happen?

Lesson 6

Autonomous Churches

Church of Finland # Church of Japan # Church of China # Churches in the process of being organised

Autonomous Churches are those relying on other Patriarchates despite enjoying freedom of governance. Churches those are totally independent in all respects are called autocephalous.

It was the Valamo monks of Lake Ladoga who persuaded the Finnish people during the mid centuries to forsake their barbarian religious practices and accept Christianity. As of now, most of the Christians in Finland are Lutherans. There are about 80,000 Orthodox Christians who are mostly Russians. Therefore, the Orthodox Christians in Finland are considered as totally Russians by other Churches. The State of Finland earned their independence from Russia in 1918 and therefore the tag of 'Russian' for their Church was found uncomfortable by them; they started working to remove this. Government of Finland also favoured such a change. In 1932, they decided under the leadership of their Arch Bishop Germanous Aab that they would be under the Patriarchate of Constantinople. But not heeding to the objections raised by Russian Patriarch, the Ecumenical patriarch declared the Church of Finland autonomous. Now, for choosing new Episcopas and calling synod, they need approval from Ecumenical Patriarch. Finnish Arch Bishop has no authority to bless Holy Mooron.

The relations between the government and Finnish Church used to be very cordial. Necessary support was always forthcoming from the government for the needs of the clergy and for schools run by the Church. But, Russia annexed a part of Finnish territory in 1939, which was damaging to the Church. Many of the parish churches and schools of Orthodox Church were located at those areas annexed by Russia. Gradually, most of these Orthodox Christians ran away from these places which helped the resurrection of the Church. Russian Patriarchate made one more attempt to bring Finnish Church to their fold, but realising that their agenda would not be successful, the autonomous status of this Church was accepted in 1957.

The young generation of Finnish Orthodox Church seems to be very active in ecclesiastical matters. Being participants in ecumenical programmes, they keep good relationships with other Churches. They have a theological seminary at Helsinki. Apart from the Arch Bishop, they have three Episcopas also.

Church of Japan:

It was a Russian priest named Nicholas Kasatkin who brought Orthodox faith to Japan in 19th century. In fact, he had gone to Japan as a Chaplain at the Russian Consulate; as soon as he took over the assignment, he commenced missionary work too. In 1871, a missionary community was formulated and Japanese were ordained as priests the very next year. In 1880, Nicholas was ordained as the first Bishop in Japan. He aligned his life totally with the Japanese and when there was war between Russia and Japan in 1904, he exhorted the people to pray for Japan's victory.

There were moves since 1939 to bring the Church of Japan under the supervision of the state government. The Church was asked to form a new constitution. Certain new clauses of the constitution were not acceptable and therefore the Arch Bishop Sergio resigned in protest and returned to Russia. In 1941, government recognised the new constitution and the Church became autonomous. It was after this, a Japanese priest was elevated as Episcopa. From 1945, this Church was brought under the Russian Metropolitan of North America. The atom bomb explosion caused many believers to die. Yet, there are about 40,000 Orthodox believers in Japan. There is a small seminary to train the clergy. To assist the Arch Bishop of Tokyo, there is one Episcopa also.

Church of China:

Good News reached China through the Nestorian missionaries of Persia. Orthodox faith came to China only in 17th century. The beginning of Orthodox Church could be linked to the Chinese Emperor bringing a gang of Russians as his body guards. This tiny community progressively grew as time passed and a mission centre was set up in 19th century. Following the Russian revolution, Orthodox refugees from Siberia moved over to China. It is presumed that there are about 20,000 Orthodox Christians here.

Once communism came to power in China, all foreign authorities of the Church were expelled. Most of the priests of the Church in China then were Russians who were forced to return. Shem'on Dew, a Chinese priest was ordained as their Bishop in 1950. Later, in 1957, another Chinese priest also was ordained as Bishop.

Churches in the process of being organised:

The Orthodox Church in the continent of America is one that doesn't have a clear perception even now as to how they should be governed. It was the Russians who reached Alaska in the first place. A school was set up for the Eskimos in 1794 by Russians. There was one John Veniaminov, who worked day and night for the welfare of this Church. A diocese was found necessary by 1840. From here, Orthodox faith spread across to other centres in America. In 1872, the head quarters of their Metropolitan was shifted to San Francisco and in 20th century, to New York. After the Russian Revolution in 1917, many Russians migrated to North America.

By the second half of 19th century, believers from other Orthodox Churches also started reaching America resulting in Good News being spread far and wide. Syrians, Bulgarians, Greek, Rumanians, Serbians Albanians and Ukrainians were there in this. As days passed, these different communities slowly came under the governance of Metropolitans from their own countries. Arch Bishop Tikhon succeeded in translating orders of liturgy to English paving way for foundation of an American Church. But there was no proper initiative in this direction. The reason for this is the lack coordination and unity among different Orthodox communities coming from various countries.

In 1927, Metropolitan Plateau worked out a constitution with a view to form an American Orthodox Church that was autocephalous; however, this did not find acceptance among all Orthodox segments in America and therefore, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople rejected it. There are dialogues in progress exploring ways and means of possible cooperation in areas of education, publications and so on. The number of Orthodox believers in both North and South America comes

to about three million and there are some 15 Metropolitans representing different Orthodox Churches. Barring the Greek, all others are following English as the language for orders of liturgy.

After the Russian Revolution in 1917, Church of Ukraine merged with Russian Church which was objected by one segment within the former and they remained as a separate entity. But considering that they were standing separate with no canonical reasons, other Byzantine Churches were not accepting them as a Church and have not been allowing them to participate in Holy Communion with others. Most of the believers of this segment reside in America and Canada. They are overseen by eight Episcopos.

By the end of 19th century, Russian missionaries reached Korea but could not meet with success as in Japan or China. The political developments after the Second World War had adverse impacts on the Church. In 1912, first priest from Korea was ordained. Now, this mission is looked after by the Greek Arch Diocese of America. However, despite adversities, the Church survived. There are some 15,000 odd Orthodox believers here. They are managed by two Korean priests. They have one hospital and a school.

Between the two world wars, many Orthodox believers happened to settle in Western Europe. With London as centre, a Greek diocese was formed in 1922. But most of those who migrated from Russia had chosen to move over to France. They made Paris their centre. The works carried out by these believers enabled many Germans and French to accept Orthodox faith. All these countries have Russian monasteries now. The St Sergio Theological Institute of Paris has been playing a crucial role in nurturing healthy and cordial relations between Orthodoxy and Roman Church.

Orthodoxy made its presence felt in South Africa also. The beginning was the decision of a segment of Anglicans in Uganda to move over to Orthodox faith in 1932. The Alexandrian Patriarch completed the formalities to take them in. There are some 20,000 believers in this community who is looked after by a priest from Africa.

Questions:

1. What is the reason that an American Orthodox Church is yet to be founded? What are the possibilities thereof? Explain.
2. What made the Church of Finland discard Russian supremacy and accepted the Patriarchate of Constantinople?
3. Explain the background why Orthodox faith got spread in Japan.



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