

PART IV- HISTORY OF THE CHURCH
LESSON 21
THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Aim: To Learn about the early stages in the development of the Christian church.

The earliest stage in the development of the Church, from 30 A.D. to 70 A.D., can be called the 'apostolic period'. Luke has written about some aspects of the history of the Church during this stage, in the book, 'The Acts of the Apostles'. Initially the Roman Government and the gentiles considered the early Christian Church as a modified form of the Jewish religion. Even after the ascension of Jesus Christ, the apostles and other believers used to go to the temple of Jerusalem for prayers (Acts 3:1). But after Stephen became a martyr, Christians started getting recognized as a separate group. As we know, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the strongest driving force behind Christianity. For the same reason, the Sadducees, who did not believe in resurrection, became enemies of the Christians. During this period the gospel was preached amongst the gentiles too. Saul of Tarsus, who was strongly against the Christians, was converted to Christianity. Later, he came to be known as St. Paul. He did a lot of gospel work among the gentiles. Decisions taken at the Jerusalem council in AD 51 encouraged the gospel work and the growth of the Church.

In AD 70 Romans destroyed the temple of Jerusalem completely. A large number of people were killed. Remaining people fled to distant places to save their lives. The period from AD 70 to AD110 can be called 'the apostolic disciple period'. The followers who learnt directly from the apostles led the church during this time. Most of the books of the New Testament were available during this time. With the downfall of Jerusalem the Jewish Christians were no more important. The largest cities in the world at that time were Rome, Antioch and Alexandria. These three cities became the important centers of the Christian church. These cities were in the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa respectively.

The Romans used to worship idols and also the emperors who ruled the country from time to time. The Christians who refused to do this were branded as atheists. The Christians who were denied the right to worship used to get together in secret places and worship at night. From AD 55, when Emperor Nero was the ruler, till the Edict of Milan issued by Emperor Constantine in AD 313 bringing the persecutions under Diocletian (and later Galerius) to an end, for two and a half centuries the Christian Church was persecuted continuously. The Christians who protested against making the slaves fight animals for the entertainment of the Romans were persecuted. Amongst the gentiles, Christian ladies were treated like slaves. Since the Christian Church was a prohibited establishment, it did not enjoy freedom of expression and worship, which other religions enjoyed. To be a Christian was a crime in itself. The Romans used to hate the Christians. During this period of persecution many Christians were murdered and many others were subjected to various tortures. In spite of all this the Church was growing every day. Since membership in the Church was a disadvantage financially, only the real faithful were members of the Church.

After the death of Emperor Diocletian, the Roman Empire was divided. Constantine, who was the chief of the army, became ruler of one part of the empire. During a war, Constantine saw the sign of the cross in the sky in a vision, while crossing the Milvian Bridge, and heard the voice, "With this you will win". Constantine believed in the vision and got the sign of the cross marked on all weapons and on the flags. He won the war that followed. Later he became the emperor of the whole of Roman Empire. Emperor Constantine removed all the restrictions imposed on Christians by his predecessors and made a proclamation in the town of Milan in Italy. This historically important 'Edict of Milan of AD 313' declared complete religious freedom to all the people in the country. All Sundays were declared public holidays. Following this, Christians started their day worship on Sundays.

Later Emperor Constantine became a Christian and the best thing he did for the growth of the church was to conduct the first ecumenical council in AD 325 in the city of Nicaea in Asia Minor (part of modern Turkey). From different parts of the world 318 bishops attended the various meetings of the council. Mar Osthathivos (Eustathius), Patriarch of Antioch was the president for many of the meetings. The heresy of Arius that denied the divinity of Jesus Christ was declared as accursed at the council of Nicaea. The council established the doctrine that God the father and God the son were of the same essence. It was decided that baptism of the heretics would not be accepted and that Easter would be celebrated only on a Sunday and not based on the date alone.

Under the leadership of Queen Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, a group of people went to Jerusalem and searched for the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified and found it. The Church commemorates this event on September 14th as 'Sleeba Perunnal'.

Emperor Constantine renovated the ancient city of Byzantium, which is situated in South Eastern Europe on the eastern shore of the strait of Bosphorus. To make his name part of history, he renamed the city Constantinople and made it his capital. The Christian church grew there also. This city is now known as Istanbul.

Macedonius, the bishop of Constantinople started teaching that though Son of God was of the same essence as God the Father, the Holy Spirit was not equal to the Father and the Son. The aim of the 2nd council at Constantinople in AD 381 was to officially rebuke this heresy of Macedonius. The convener of this council was Emperor Theodosius, who was the ruler that time and the president was the Patriarch of Antioch, Mar Milithios (Meletius). Since a regional council was going on at Rome at the same time, the Bishops from that region did not attend the Constantinople council. But the Pope in Rome later accepted the decisions taken at the council. While the council was in progress, Mar Milithios who was the president passed away and the rest of the meetings were conducted with St. Nectarius as the president. The wrong teachings of Macedonius were rejected as heresy and the true faith about the Holy Spirit was added on to the Nicene Creed. The Cappadocian Fathers have written in detail about the true faith.

Another heresy came up in the church a few years later. The Patriarch of Constantinople Nestorius, who had rejected the heresy of Arius and Macedonius, started the trouble this time. He taught that Jesus had two natures, one human and one divine, and that there were two persons in Jesus, one man and the other God. He further taught that the sufferings on the cross were undertaken by the man Jesus. He also said that it was wrong to call St. Mary, who was the mother of Jesus in his nature and person as a man only, as the mother of God (Theotokos). The most important person to oppose this heresy was St. Koorilose (Cyril), the Patriarch of Alexandria. It was to discuss this heresy that the ecumenical council was held at Ephesus in AD 431. Mar Koorilose was the president of the council. It was declared at this council that Jesus Christ, the Son of God was a single person with a single nature that was fully human and at the same time fully divine. It was also declared that it was right to refer to Virgin Mary as the mother of God.

Apart from these ecumenical councils, regional synods were held to solve problems that arose locally. When the dyophysite (double nature) argument that was declared as heresy at the council of Ephesus in 431 raised its ugly head again, the emperor convened another council in Ephesus to counter it. Mar Dioscorus of Alexandria presided over the council. In this council that was attended by most of the Church leaders, representatives from Rome also took part. Pope Leo of Rome sent a letter known in history as the 'Tome of Leo' to be read in the council. Since the contents of the letter were contradictory to the convictions of the previous councils, the president did not allow the letter to be read in the council. Therefore the Pope was angry with Mar Dioscorus.

Following this, as demanded by Pope Leo, Roman Emperor Marcian convened a council at Chalcedon in Asia Minor, in the year 451 A.D. Here Mar Dioscorus who was the president of the second council at Ephesus was rebuked in public and was declared guilty. The people under the administration of

the Patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria did not accept the decisions of the council of Chalcedon, since these decisions were seen as reintroducing, in a modified form, the dyophysite concepts which had already been rejected as accursed at the council of Ephesus. But the Patriarch of Constantinople remained as an ally of Rome.

Questions

- 1) Which are the years known as 'the apostolic period' and 'the apostolic disciples period'?
- 2) What benefits did the church enjoy during the reign of Emperor Constantine?
- 3) What is the significance of 'Sleeba Perunnal'?
- 4) What were the heretical teachings of Arius and Macedonius?
- 5) Why was Pope Leo angry with Mar Dioscorus?

LESSON 22 THE DIVIDED CHURCH

As capital of the empire and being a big city, Rome was famous and important from the beginning. The Episcopa of Rome was also important. When Constantinople became the capital of the Eastern Empire, that city also gained importance.

When the cities of Rome and Constantinople were important as centers of power and administration, Antioch and Alexandria became famous as centers of learning and knowledge. The learned theologians of Antioch and Alexandria took up the responsibility of establishing and explaining the faith and doctrines at the three ecumenical councils. Mar Athanasius and Mar Koorilose are to be considered the foremost among these theologians.

The European churches of Rome and Constantinople did not achieve a theological growth comparable to that of the churches of Antioch and Alexandria. Therefore, at the council meetings, when matters of faith and doctrine were discussed, the representatives from the European churches could not play an active part. The church in Rome, which was politically important, did not like this state of affairs.

When Constantine became the Emperor, the period of persecution for the Christians came to an end and the golden period started. Along with this, greed for power and rivalry among churches also grew. The church in Rome, which claimed more importance, tried in various ways to establish its supremacy over the other churches. They thought that this would give them an opportunity to grow equal to the churches of Antioch and Alexandria in the field of theology. Leo, the Episcopa of Rome was waiting for such an opportunity when it was decided to hold the second council at Ephesus in 449 A.D. to discuss about the heresy of Evuthikose (Eutyches). Leo saw it as an opportunity to establish a dominant position for Rome in the field of theology. Therefore though he did not attend, Leo sent an essay (Tome) through his representatives, to be read at the council. Mar Diascorus, the president of the council did not allow the 'tome' to be read at the council as many of the ideas in it were similar to those of Nestorius, which had already been declared as accursed at the council of Ephesus in 431 A.D.

For Leo, who was trying to establish the supremacy of the Roman church, this was a big blow. Leon's later efforts were to take revenge on Dioscorus. Leo wished to defeat Alexandria which was the leader in theology and to establish the influence and supremacy of Rome there also. To achieve this he decided to conduct another council and make all the churches agree to the 'tome'. His wish was not fulfilled during the reign of Emperor Theodosius II, who was the ruler at that time.

Emperor Theodosius died soon after and Emperor Marcian who became the next ruler agreed to Leo and convened another council. This council started in 451 A.D. at Chalcedon. (Instead of AD and BC present day authors prefer to use the terms CE (Christian Era) and BCE (Before Christian Era)). Aims of this council were:

- 1) To defeat Dioscorus
- 2) To accept the Tome of Leo
- 3) To establish the supremacy of Rome in the field of Theology.

The council publicly condemned Mor Dioscorus and declared him guilty. Leon's tome was accepted. So the Nestorian argument of Jesus having two persons in one body, which the council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. had rejected, was accepted with some alterations.

Nestorius had argued that Jesus Christ had two persons and two natures. The decision at the council of Ephesus in AD 431 was that Jesus Christ could not be considered as consisting of two persons, one man and the other God, and that he did not have two separate natures, one human and one divine. Mar Koorilose explains it as 'one nature of the incarnate word'.

Eutyches taught that human nature merges into the divine nature to become one nature. Our Church has not accepted this. Human nature does not become divine nature and divine nature does not become human. The human and divine natures neither become a mixture nor merge and become one. One nature does not destroy the other. Instead divine nature in completeness and human nature in completeness except for sin are inseparable in one essence. This is the teaching of our church.

Therefore after incarnation also Jesus Christ was complete man and complete God. After this inseparable union, actions and nature of Christ cannot be separated as some human and some divine. It is against the faith to teach that divine nature of Jesus raised Lazarus from death and that it was his human nature that lamented on the cross. In Jesus Christ there is inseparable union of divine and human natures in their completeness.

According to the Tome of Leo the human and divine natures of Jesus Christ are separate and all his activities can be divided into human and divine. This theory was completely against the convictions of the council of Ephesus of 431 A.D. So the churches of Antioch and Alexandria did not agree to the decisions of the Chalcedon council.

Regarding Christology, the four oriental churches including the Syrian Orthodox Church follow the faith declared at the Ephesus council of 431 A.D. After the Chalcedon council in 451 AD, which the Oriental Orthodox Churches never accepted, the Roman church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches which came under the Patriarch of Constantinople developed a misconception about the position of the Oriental Churches. They considered the Oriental Churches to be 'monophysites' and thus departing from the true faith. Recently the discussions which took place between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches have cleared the misunderstanding. In 1982, a common proclamation on Christology was made by the Pope, Supreme head of the Catholic Church and the Patriarch of Antioch, Supreme Head of the Syrian Orthodox Church.

The church which stood in one faith was split into two after the Chalcedon council. The Church of Rome and the Church in Constantinople accepted the Chalcedon council and the decisions taken there. (But the council held at Constantinople in AD 553 came to the conclusion that many of the decisions at the Chalcedon council were heretical and thus some decisions were modified and some were discarded). Churches in Antioch and Alexandria did not accept the decisions of the Chalcedon council. So the church was divided into two: (1) Those accepting the Chalcedon faith and (2) Those not accepting the Chalcedon faith. The Oriental Orthodox Churches have so far stood steadfast under the faith proclaimed at the three councils of Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus. But the Western church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches (Byzantine) held councils later and made changes to the faith and broke away from the ancient faith.

There are about fifteen Churches that are classified as Eastern Orthodox Churches. These include four smaller Churches in Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem that accept the dyophysite

(double nature) faith and eleven autocephalous Churches in Russia, Cyprus, Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria, Rumania, Georgia, Czechoslovakia, Albania, Poland and Sinai.

The Churches that did not accept the dyophysite theory are known as the Oriental Orthodox Churches today. Syrian orthodox, Coptic orthodox, Armenian orthodox and Abyssinian orthodox (Ethiopian) churches belong to this group. All these churches have the same faith and liturgy.

Questions

1. What are the teachings of Nestorius and Eutyches about the nature of Jesus?
2. In the Tome of Leo what is different from the decisions at the A.D. 431 Ephesus Council?
3. What is our faith about the nature of Jesus Christ?
4. Which are the orthodox churches not accepting the dyophysite faith?

LESSON 23

THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ANTIOCH

Syrian Orthodox Church is under the Holy Throne of Antioch. Of all the Patriarchal Sees organized at the Council of Nicaea (Antioch, Alexandria and Rome) the See of Antioch is the most ancient. It is important to note that the followers of Jesus Christ were called Christians for the first time in Antioch. Also it was at Antioch that St. Peter established his Apostolic See.

In the early centuries of the Christian era, Antioch was a very important place. Antioch was the third biggest town of the Roman Empire. E. S. Burchiar, in his book about the history of Antioch, mentions that in the 4th century, Antioch had 5,00,000 people living in 1,00,000 houses within a radius of 15 miles. Antioch in the 4th century was much bigger than many of the modern Indian cities.

Antioch was the center of Greek culture and learning. It was famous as a center of trade also. Prominent countries of that time like Greece, Egypt and Syria had trade relationship with Antioch. Since traders from various parts of the world visited Antioch, travel to and communications with other parts of the world were easy from Antioch. All these must have prompted St. Peter to establish his See at Antioch.

From 300 B.C., when Emperor Seleucus Nicator established Antioch, till the 6th century A.D. when Persia conquered it, Antioch remained famous. When the great Emperor Constantine became a Christian, he built a beautiful church in Antioch. Many Emperors after him followed the tradition. Also the rich Christians of that time built many beautiful churches. So till the Persians and the Arabs destroyed it, Antioch continued to be the center of Christian culture.

In the 5th century, the prominence of Antioch and its Christian Church began to decline. There were four reasons for the decline:-

1. Persecution from the double nature (dyophysite) group after the Chalcedon council.
2. The earthquake of the first half of the 6th century.
3. The Persian attack in AD 538. The city was nearly completely destroyed in this attack.
4. In AD 638 when Arabs invaded and conquered Antioch, it became isolated from the Christian world.

It was in AD 538, the same year of the demise of Mar Severius (also spelt Severus) that Antioch was destroyed completely. After Mar Severius, the headquarters of the Apostolic See was shifted from Antioch.

Dayara Movement

In the earlier classes, we learned about many Church Fathers, who lived before the time of Yacoub Burdana (Jacob Baradaeus) and suffered much in their endeavor to keep the faith pure. Most of these Fathers belonged to the Dayara (monastery) movement. At least from the 3rd century, Dayara movement was existent in the Syrian Orthodox church. Though, due to unfavorable circumstances the inmates in these Dayaras are small in number these days, for centuries the dayaras have been centers of spirituality, knowledge and service.

Dayara of Mor Mathai

The Dayara of Mor Mathai, situated near Mosul in Iraq, was founded in the 4th century and is an important one. Apart from Mar Mathai who established it, Abraham, Zaki and Daniel were the other prominent members of the Dayara in the beginning. One Arabic historian of the 13th century has recorded that about one thousand people lived there at that time.

In the middle ages, this Dayara was well known as a centre of learning. One of the most scholarly among the famous ascetics of the Syrian church, Maphriyano Bar Hebraya (Bar Hebraeus) lived here for a long time and wrote many books. Since the 10th century, for a long time it was the headquarters of the Maphriyanos. We have lost almost all the invaluable books of the famous library of this Dayara. They are now kept in places like the British Library, Vatican library and different institutions in Europe where ancient manuscripts are kept. Only a few original handwritten books of not much importance are available in the library now. Thousands visit the place as tourists and pilgrims.

Dayara of Mar Barsouma

Another important Dayara was the one established by Mar Barsouma who was called to eternal rest in AD 457. Mar Barsouma was a pious ascetic and was respected by everybody. Though he was not a Metropolitan he held a more important place in the church than many of the Metropolitans of that time. Emperor Theodosius specially invited him to take part in the Ephesus council of AD 449, to discuss the heresy of Eutyches. Of all the people who attended the council he was the only one who was not a Metropolitan. The church has acknowledged his purity and his name is included in the 5th Tubden (Diptych) where the deceased fathers are remembered, even though he was not a Metropolitan.

Since the 8th century (some historians say 9th century) till 1293 our Patriarchs lived in this Dayara. Michael the Syrian who wrote our church history lived in this Dayara (1166-99). Before becoming Maphriyano, Bar Hebraya also lived in this Dayara. In the middle of the 14th century the Kurd tribal people destroyed the Dayara. It has not been renovated.

Dayara of Mar Hananiya

Another important Dayara called 'Dayara of Hananiya' was established by Mar Hananiya, the Metropolitan of Mardin in AD 800. From the beginning itself, there were about 80 inmates there. The dayara is globally famous because of its library. From 1293 onwards the Patriarchs used to live here. From among the inmates of this Dayara, there have been 21 Patriarchs, 9 Maphriyanos and not less than 110 bishops.

There were Dayaras for nuns also. Most of them got destroyed though some still exist.

Apart from the people who lived together in Dayaras, there were ascetics who lived in caves. There were others who lived an ascetic life on high pillars. Such people were called Destuno (stylites). Mar.Semavoon Destuno (Simeon the Stylite), whose name is mentioned in the 5th diptych, was the first among them (389-459). Since he had special gifts and powers, people followed him everywhere. It was to avoid being disturbed by people while he was meditating, that he decided to meditate from the top of a pillar which was 60 feet tall. But soon the place was filled with people.

Once Emperor Theodosius sent a group of Metropolitans to Semavoon Destuno, requesting him to go and live in the palace of the Roman Emperor. He refused the request. He was interested in meditating in the most difficult way. While living in a Dayara, once he was sent out of the Dayara by the in-charge for inflicting severe injuries to himself. Later the in-charge regretted and called him back.

When Semavoon Destuno died in 459AD, six Metropolitans and 600 soldiers kept vigil over the body. The body was taken to a place called Kasiyanoos first. Later the body was taken to the headquarters of the Patriarchs and buried there.

Following his footpath many used to meditate standing on top of pillars. The practice was prevalent in African and European churches also. Mar Michael used to meditate from a pillar till his death

at the age of 105. In 19th century also there were ascetics who followed this practice. Syria and neighboring regions where people of a single faith lived came under the rule of the Arabs in the 7th century. With this the persecution from the Chalcedonians (the dyophysites) ended and there was peace in the church. The only condition of the Arab rulers was that the Christians should not work against Islam religion and its rulers. All non Muslims had to pay a tax also. This could not be considered a burden. Military service was compulsory for the Muslims. Because the Christians were exempted from this, they had to pay a tax instead. Priests and ascetics were exempted from this tax.

The Muslim rule before the Crusades helped the Christians in many ways. The Muslim rulers were keen to make use of the knowledge of the Christians. That was good for the Christians. Secondly since Syria, Persia and Mesopotamia got united politically, the gospel spread to many places where it had not reached till then.

Since the dyophysites (believers in double nature) lost their strength with the lack of royal support, the Church did not have to face their hostility any further. The peaceful atmosphere allowed the Syrian Christians to continue their pursuits in other fields. In fields like science, medicine, astronomy, history and theology, Syrian Christians made significant contributions.

The first Maphriyano Mar Marutha, Muse bar Keepa and Mar Yacoob of Edessa lived during this time.

Since Christians were more educated than the Arabs, they held important positions under the Caliphs. Their growth in the field of trade helped them financially also. In general till the Crusades, the period of Muslim domination was a time of peace and progress for the Christians, though a few rulers were against the Christians.

Questions

1. What is the importance of Antioch in the history of the Church?
2. Write about the ancient Dayara movement in the Syrian Orthodox Church.
3. What were the privileges enjoyed by the Christians during the Muslim rule?

LESSON 24 THE COPTIC CHURCH

The Patriarchal See of Alexandria was one among the three organized at the Council of Nicaea. Today, the Church which comes under this See is known as the Coptic Church. Most of the members of this Church are Egyptians. It is called the Coptic Church because the Coptic language is used for the liturgy. Till the 13th century this was also the spoken language. In 705 A.D., Caliph Abdul Malik banned the Coptic language and made learning of Arabic compulsory. Thus, by the 13th century, the Coptic language ceased to exist as a spoken language.

The land called Mizraim in Bible is the Egypt of today. This land has many connections with the Bible and the history of Israel. In the Bible there is a reference to Abraham going to Egypt and living there for a while. Israeli people grew in number while in Egypt. Further, following the instruction of the angel, Joseph and Mary took baby Jesus to Egypt. So this land had the fortune to be a refuge for the Lord Savior of the world. The traditional belief is that Mark the Evangelist established the Church in Egypt as instructed by Apostle Peter.

The achievements of the Coptic Church in theology and faith in the early centuries can be attributed to the school of theology in Alexandria. For centuries it remained as the theological capital of the world. This school gave birth to many eminent leaders.

Later, due to the persecution by the Arabs, this school became weak. A school similar to the School of Alexandria and learned people equal in status to the scholars of this school cannot again be found in the history of the Church. Regarding steadfastness in faith and in the Dayara movement this Church was always in the forefront. Kings who were idol worshippers, westerners with the double nature (dyophysites)

theory and later Muslim rulers tortured this Church enormously. With the famous Edict of Milan by Emperor Constantine, persecution from the Gentile kings came to an end. But the Coptic Church continued to be oppressed under the Arab rule. We have already seen about how the Coptic language ceased to exist as a spoken language.

Starting from the 13th century, there have been many attempts to bring the Coptic Church under the Roman Catholic Church. But a majority of the people resisted these attempts. In 1899, Pope Leon XIII of Rome ordained a Patriarch for the Coptic Church members. There are only very few members under this Patriarch.

The headquarters of the Church today is Cairo in Egypt. Though in the early days the Patriarchs used to live in Alexandria, for various reasons they shifted to the Dayara of Macarius in Nitria in the 6th century and later in the 11th century to Cairo. About a million people belonging to Egypt, Sudan, other African countries and neighboring Middle Eastern countries belong to this Church.

Unlike our Church, the Coptic Church celebrates Christmas on January 7th. Easter is celebrated on the Sunday following the Passover of the Jews.

Questions

1. How is Egypt (Mizraim) important in the Bible?
2. What is the importance of the theological school at Alexandria?
3. What did the Coptic Church mainly lose due to the Arab rule?
4. What are the differences in worship between the Coptic Church and our Church?

LESSON 25

THE ARMENIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Armenia was the first country to accept Christianity as the official religion. In A.D 313, emperor Constantine of Rome became a Christian. Much before that, in 301 A.D., the king, the officials and the people of Armenia accepted Christianity as their religion. The people of this country, the first ones to accept Christianity as the official religion, were also the first ones to suffer persecution. Even in the 20th century they were cruelly persecuted. During the First World War about one-third of the Armenian population was massacred. There cannot be such a large number of martyrs in any other Church. According to the traditional belief of the Armenian Church, apostles St. Thaddeus and St. Bartholomew were the apostles who spread the Gospel in Armenia.

Until the 4th century, the Armenian language had no script. Further, the conversational language was different in different places. Therefore the Church did not have its own liturgy in the local language. Greek and Syriac Bibles were normally used during this period. Due to the efforts of St. Isaac (St. Sahak / St. Sahag), when he reigned as the Catholicos, a script was made for the Armenian language and the Bible and other books of worship were translated into the Armenian language.

It was in the provinces of the Roman Empire that most of the early century Christians lived. Arguments and discussions regarding faith took place between people or Churches within the Roman Empire. Armenia which was not a Roman province was not much affected by these arguments. Though the council at Nicaea was the only one they attended, they consider the decisions of the councils at Constantinople and Ephesus as binding on them also. They do not accept the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon of 451 A.D.

Later during the 13th century when the Armenian Church established relationship with the Catholic Church it did not change the faith. It was the enmity towards the Arabs and the distrust in the Greeks that prompted the Armenians to have contact with the Roman Catholics. Even under this situation, the Armenian Church did not accept the dual nature (dyophysite) theory of the Roman Catholics.

In the 18th century with the help of the French, the Catholic Church again tried to bring the Armenian Church under the control of Rome. They kept trying to bring the Armenians under their control,

initially through peaceful means and when that failed using force. In 1742 Pope Benedict XIV ordained a Catholic Patriarch for the Armenian Church. But very few people accepted this Patriarch, who was a representative of the Roman Catholic Church. Even today, there is a small community under this Patriarch.

The Armenian Church suffered much due to the changes of regimes. During World War I, the Armenians were the victims of a genocide unprecedented in history. From a total Armenian population of 35,00,000 before the war, about 12,00,000 Armenians were massacred during the war.

The Armenian Church developed its liturgy based on the liturgies of St. Basil the Great and Mar Ivanios (St. John Chrysostom) with the golden tongue, and that of the Syrian Church. While all the other Oriental Orthodox Churches use leavened bread for Qurbana, the Armenian Church uses unleavened bread. They do not have the tradition of mixing water in wine. Priests wear black robes and caps. Dayara priests wear a head dress also.

In one year 157 days are for fasting. Christmas is celebrated on January 6th. Like in our Church, there is Qurbana on Sundays and on all maranaya feast days. In larger parishes there is Qurbana on Saturdays also.

Questions

1. Which was the first country to accept Christianity as its official religion?
2. What were the achievements of the Armenian Church during the rule of St. Isaac (St. Sahak)?
3. Write a brief note on the faith and traditions of the Armenian Church.

LESSON 26 ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

The Ethiopian Church is one of the oldest in the world. It is the largest of the Oriental Orthodox Churches. It is believed that long before they became Christians, even during the time of King Solomon, the Ethiopians were monotheists (believing in and worshipping only one God). Through Queen Sheba who married King Solomon, monotheism is believed to have reached that country.

The incident of Philip and the Eunuch points to the fact that the Gospel reached Ethiopia in the 1st century itself (Acts 8:26-40).

The missionaries Frumentius and Edesius laid the foundation of the Ethiopian Church. After initial missionary work in Ethiopia, Frumentius went back to his native city of Alexandria, met the Coptic Patriarch Athanasius and requested him to ordain a Metropolitan for Ethiopia. Athanasius anointed Frumentius as the first Metropolitan of Ethiopia. Frumentius was a member of the Alexandrian Coptic Church. So Ethiopian Church initially existed as a diocese of the Coptic Church. The Metropolitan known as 'Aboona' and ordained by the Coptic Patriarch used to rule the Ethiopian Church.

Though Ethiopia was geographically separate, faith, liturgy and administrative practices were the same as that of the Coptic Church. The Ethiopian Church had connections with the Syrian Orthodox Church also.

For centuries, Ethiopia was ruled by a Christian dynasty which traced its ancestry to King Solomon. The whole of Ethiopia was under this king. But the situation changed with the arrival of the Arabs in the 8th century. When their power increased the Christians migrated to the mountains and the Muslims occupied the plains. However, the Church did not have to face much persecution.

From the 13th century onwards there were attempts to bring the Ethiopian Church under the Roman Catholic Church. Many missionaries were sent to Ethiopia from Rome with this objective. These attempts saw the use of threats and violence over many centuries. Consequently, there is a small group under Rome in Ethiopia today.

In 1948, an Ethiopian was ordained as Aboona for the first time. Subsequently, in 1959, Baselius became the first Patriarch of Ethiopia. Today the Ethiopian Church is independent.

Faith and Practices

Since it was established by the Coptic missionaries and nurtured under their care, in faith and liturgy their tradition is followed. They accept only the three Ecumenical councils that are recognized by the other three Oriental Churches. There is unity with the Syrian, Armenian and Coptic Churches regarding the faith related to the Trinity and the nature of Jesus Christ.

But in rituals, the Ethiopian Church has its own special features. It is believed that when Menelik I came to Ethiopia, some Jews also went along with him. Probably due to this connection with Solomon there are many Jewish rituals in the Ethiopian Church. Like the Jews, Saturday is the Sabbath day for the Ethiopians also. Circumcision, purification, avoidance of forbidden food etc are practiced according to the Jewish Laws. Like the Levi people who danced in front of the Ark of the Covenant, a group of people called Debteras dance during processions. They dance holding a T shaped stick in one hand and a musical instrument in the other.

Members of the Church are very punctual about sacraments and fasting. About 250 days in one year are fasting days for the Church. Only vegetarian food is consumed during the fasting days. On a day of fasting, no food is eaten till 3 PM, except when it is a Saturday or a Sunday.

Primary education is related to the Church and the liturgy. Along with the most important subject mathematics, psalms, songs of praise to Jesus and St. Mary, and prayers in Geez language are taught. Geez is an ancient language of Ethiopia. It is important only as the language of the liturgy. The spoken language today is Amharic. About thirty million people are members of this Church. Addis Ababa is the headquarters of the Church. There are 53 ascetic groups in the Church. Christmas is celebrated on 7th January.

Questions

1. Who laid the foundation for the Ethiopian Church?
2. Describe the efforts to bring the Ethiopian Church under the Roman Church.
3. Describe briefly about the faith and practices of the Ethiopian Church.

LESSON 27

THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

Aim: To understand that everyone should be one in Jesus Christ.

John 17:21 says, “That all of them may be one, Father just as you are in me and I am in you”. Theologians describe this as the prayer of the High Priest for the universal church.

This verse touched the hearts of many faithful, and as a result the ecumenical movement started. The English word ‘ecumenical’ originated from the Greek word ‘oikoumenikos’. It means, ‘the whole inhabited world’. The root word is ‘oikos’ which means house, spiritual house, temple etc. Thus, by the middle of the 19th century, the word ecumenism attained a wider meaning: “Christian fellowship worldwide”. In the modern world, the ecumenical movement reflects the endeavor of the Christian Churches for a universal Christian unity and their desire to be witnesses of Jesus to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Over the centuries, Churches in different geographical regions accepted different rituals and ways of administration. Then each church focused more on the differences between themselves and the other churches. But the belief and hope that while individual differences in faith and liturgy and rituals are respected, different churches can work together in other aspects, led to the emergence of the ecumenical movement.

Translation of the bible into various languages helped this movement. When the British and Foreign Bible Society was established in 1804, the ecumenical movement got a lot of encouragement. Though the Bible society was started by the Anglican Church, from the beginning they allowed half of the

members of the director board to be from other churches. In 1816 when the American Bible society was started, members from different churches forgot individual differences and co-operated.

The Y.M.C.A which is now functioning all over the world started in 1844 in England and later spread to America and other countries. Y.W.C.A which started in 1872 in America also has branches worldwide. In 1895 S.C.A (Student Christian Association) started. These associations did not consider the individual differences between the different churches. Therefore all these associations got international recognition.

In 1948 the first World Council of Churches meeting was held at Amsterdam. Representatives of 147 churches belonging to protestant and eastern churches took part in this. Apart from the Roman Catholic Church, all the other major churches sent their representatives. The following is part of the prayer of the council, "We humbly accept that the factions in the church are against the wishes of Jesus Christ. We pray to the abundant grace of God that the number of divided days is reduced and that we are united and led into completeness in the Holy Spirit. "

So, for the first time in history an official independent association of churches came into existence. The fact that a meeting of the council was held in New Delhi in 1961 is a matter of pride for us.

By the middle of the 19th century, the word ecumenism acquired the wider meaning, "Christian fellowship worldwide". This word signifies the wish for unity among the divided Christians.

Questions

1. What is the meaning of the word ecumenism?
2. Which is the biblical verse that gave encouragement for the ecumenical movement?
3. What are the biggest achievements of the ecumenical movement so far?