

Chapter- 1

GOSPELS: AN INTRODUCTION

Holy Bible is the history of encounter between God and human beings. It accounts God's intervention in human life from the very beginning of creation until now. In the previous grade, we have dealt with its canonization, ideology, infallibility, and its relation with our Syrian Orthodox Church. Let us now learn about the New Testament books in detail.

The Syrian Orthodox Church has formulated its liturgy on the basis of the Holy Bible and tradition. Therefore, the bible stands significant in the Church. According to the church tradition, it was mandatory for every deacon to memorize the entire Psalms. Unless they recited it fluently, they would not be ordained. Even today in Syria, only those who have learnt the liturgy of Holy Qurbano by heart are permitted to enter the sanctuary as altar assistants. They barely depend on the Order of Holy Qurbano while it is being celebrated. At a glance, the main objective of Sunday School training is to create a generation who, like the ancient tradition and the present Syrians, considers the bible and liturgy as an inevitable part of their day to day life.

Relevance of this Study

The current social and economic conditions prevail in Kerala has hastened the immigration of a huge mass of youngsters to all around the world. The young generation, because of their tiring and complicated living conditions, are struggling to read the bible on a regular base as well as to attend the church. In outside India where our churches and congregations are least available, the bible becomes the only source of spiritual formation. We do experience this same situation in Kerala today, especially among the IT professionals who also have to depend on bible reading, personal prayer and meditation for their spiritual nourishment. Yet, we have to be aware that salvation is possible only through the Holy Communion and Holy Sacraments.

Nowadays people prefer reading the New Testament than the Old Testament. Though the church considers both the testaments equally important, youngsters are attracted more towards the Psalms and the gospels. Since the gospels comprise stories, parables and miracles done by Jesus himself and encompass his direct words, obviously they deserve meticulous attention and learning. And this might be the reason behind why gospels gained much fascination from every sphere, irrespective of one's religious ideology. The father of our nation Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda and social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy are some examples for those who had special interest in pondering on the gospels. Thus, the study of gospels has prime importance in our society even today.

Why should we Learn the Gospels?

Gospels are the books which narrate the person, teachings and ministry of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. They are the information recorded directly by the people those who had

first-hand experience with him. Besides, these books depict the divine vision of human beings. Rather than mere words, the gospels represent the practicability or praxis of such vision. The fame of the gospels attains its peak because of the simple fact that ‘Jesus’ words were his deeds’.

In our day to day life, though we hear many wise sayings, we fail to implement them practically. Unlike this scenario, the gospels give clear evidence about our Lord’s enactment of his own words in his life. Hence, gospels are the accounts which reveal a model of life for the common people to practice in their daily life. They are neither collections of unpractical philosophical principles, nor unreasonable ideologies; instead virtual evidences of the execution of divine purposes which provides mercy, compassion and solace to our co-beings. This model could be followed in our daily life very easily. That is the reason why our church demands us to keep learning the gospels as a part of our lives. Beyond learning, the gospels should become a part of our routine. Being transformed from a form of word to a form of action, gospels in our lives should console our co-creation those who are struggling and suffering. Only then we could enjoy the experience of the Kingdom of God even on this earth. The words of the Lord – “For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21) – will be fulfilled only through this.

What are Gospels?

Gospels are the written presentation of Jesus by his disciples who had followed, seen, heard and knew him directly. Whatever they had seen or heard from the mouth of their master they stored them in their minds. Later with the help of scribes they put it into written form with necessary redactions. These hand written copies were distributed all around. Precisely, Gospels are the life history of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The General Understanding of Gospels

On the one hand every disciple of Christ did not attempt to record his life history, and on the other every book written on Jesus was not gospel. Among the disciples St. Matthew and St. John were the only disciples who wrote gospels. The other two gospels were written by St. Luke and St. Mark, the renowned evangelists among the seventy two. According to the New Testament canon, these are the only four gospels accepted widely by every church all around the world.

Apart from these four gospels, there are other gospels written by St. Peter, St. Thomas and St. Bartholomew. In addition, several gospels were circulated in the name of St. Jacob and many others among the seventy two evangelists. It was investigated that all these gospels were written later by some detractors in order to spread wrong ideologies and to attain selfish interests. (These books are known as Pseudo-gospels.) When it became a serious threat, the church in order to discuss and clarify about various gospels, called for a Synod at Nicea in 325 CE, and confirmed the gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John as the only four accepted gospels. It was Mor Athanasius of Alexandria who expressed his firm opinion regarding the number of gospels in the bible. When

numerous gospels were spread around, the church fathers realized and declared that these four are the only true gospels of Christ.

Even though the aim, idea and history of the four gospels are the same, they have their own differences in their language, order, genre, style and structure. While St. Matthew wrote in Aramaic and Hebrew, others recorded the story of Jesus in Greek. The incidents are more or less similar in all the gospels, yet their order is different. This clearly illustrates the statement that every author composed it according to their own conviction, memory and purpose. We have already dealt with its composition in the previous grade.

Gospel: Etymology and Definition

The word *Gospel* is derived from the Old English word *Godspell*. But its real meaning is translated from the Greek word *Evangelion* (euaggelion) which connotes literally *gospel* or *good news*. The Malayalam term *suviseshamis* also formed from the meaning of *evangelion*, i.e., *good news*. In classical Greek this term refers to *good news of victory*. Indeed, gospel is also the proclamation of Jesus' victory of tolerance. Even in Syriac *evangelionis* the term used for *gospel*. But in the Old Testament, Hebrew term *Mebasser* (מְבַשֵּׂר) is used for denoting *good tidings* which could be seen very frequently in the book of Isaiah (40:9; 52:7).

The Basis of Gospels

The birth, death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord were proclaimed for the first time in the Book of Acts (1:6-11; 2:32,33). Gospels are the extended and written form of this proclamation. Having commissioned by Jesus, the disciples went out all around the world and propagated the good news – their master's life and message. The believers who had received faith and inspiration from the disciples began to spread the same good news. The enthusiasm of the early church in proclaiming the gospel was recorded by St. Paul in his letters.

“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:4-6). The disciples, who tried to present their Lord as the fulfilment of Jewish Torah (Law), had attempted to proclaim the gospel in the light of Old Testament prophecies. By quoting verses from the Old Testament they proved that ‘Jesus was the Messiah’.

When there arose a situation that the Son of God who had become a part of the salvation history was limited only for Jews, God raised apostles like St. Paul who proclaimed Jesus as the light of the entire world. They preached that the incarnation of Jesus could not be confined within the limits of Jews, rather it was the way of salvation for the entire creation. But at the same time, apostles like St. John attempted to preach the gospel philosophically and theologically.

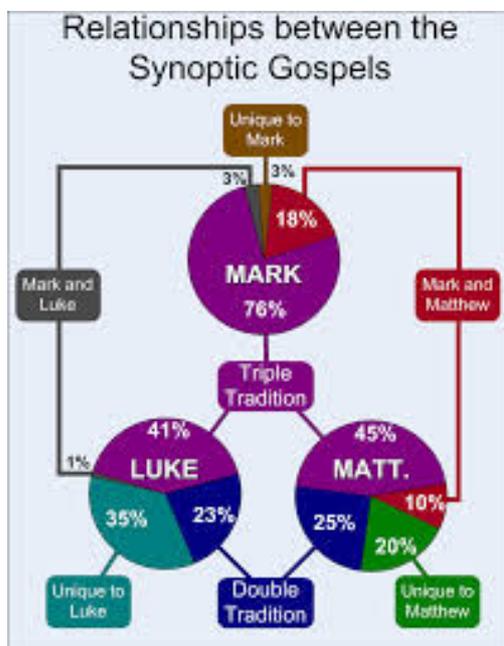
Thus the world could hear the same message in variant angles and outlooks. Those who had first-hand experience with the apostles could clarify all their doubts clearly. But later when the disciples of the apostles became the instructors, they were not able to clarify various doubts up to full extend because of the reason that they did not have direct experience with Jesus. Thus there emerged an urgency of a written complete life history of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. At the same time the timely persecution and murder of the disciples urged the inevitability of a historical text which could survive for years. Hence, the gospels were written in order that the early believers could pour out Jesus to future generations equipping them to attain the eternal life. According to St. John, “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (Jn. 20:31).

Synoptic Gospels

The first three Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark and St. Luke which have many similarities in their content, style and structure, are altogether known as the Synoptic Gospels. If we write them in three parallel columns, we could easily notice their close relationship that their structure, genre and order are more or less the same.

According to source critics, St. Mark was the first one to write about the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. St. Mathew and St. Luke followed St. Mark in writing their Gospels. So it is believed that these two latter gospels had their prime source from the gospel of St. Mark.

Source critics have also proposed that apart from St. Mark, the two latter gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke had their own other source. Such source which exclusively had the written form of Jesus’ own sayings is named by German theologians as *Quelle* meaning *source*. *Quelle* is abbreviated and generally used as *Q*. In other words St. Matthew and St. Luke recorded their writings depending on both St. Mark and *Q* source. Nevertheless, the passages taken from *Q* differentiate St. Matthew and St. Luke from St. Mark, their primary source.



Fourth Gospel

Because of the differences in its contents, the Gospel of St. John stands significant from the Synoptic Gospels. St. John attempted to present his gospel more philosophically than a simple narration. *There exists a viewpoint that in his old age the apostle John read the other Gospels and decided to supplement them with his own meditative memories resulted in the final form of the Fourth Gospel, but different from the Synoptics. A detailed study is given later in this chapter.*

In narrating the gospels, the four gospel writers depended on the direct sayings of Jesus, their own personal experience with him, descriptions of the experiences of the witnesses, and oral traditions. They were able to explain their writings and prove their reliably, according to the context to which it was written. Instead of narrating a mere life history of Jesus, their endeavour was to establish the true faith based on the historical reality.

Gospels: A Brief Study

The Gospel according to St. Matthew

This book was written in Aramaic (Syriac) language by the apostle St. Mathew (Lavi). But the original copy in Aramaic was lost. The Gospel what we have today is the translated version from Greek. The majority view of scholars dates this Gospel to the period 70 – 80 CE. It mainly comprises five different sermons of Jesus (5-7; 10-13; 18; 24-25). Apart from this categorization some scholars classify it into five like the Pentateuch by Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy), as it follows:

- i. Sermon on the Mount (5:1 – 7:29)
- ii. Declaration of the Mission (10:1 – 11:1)
- iii. Parables (13:1-53)
- iv. General Principles (18:1 – 19:1)
- v. Final Discourse (24:1 – 26:1)

All these speeches are concluded by citing, “...when Jesus had finished these sayings...”

St. Mathew introduces Jesus Christ as the ‘promised Messiah’ on the basis of the Old Testament prophecies. Here Jesus is presented as a greater prophet than Moses. The main audience of this gospel seems to be the converted Christians from Judaism. Subsequently it mostly encompasses the familiar language, ideas and instructions of Jewish Synagogue.

The Gospel according to St. Mark

The general understanding is that St. Mark wrote his Gospel in 70 CE. Even though the size of this Gospel is small when compared to the other Synoptics, every idea is clear and vibrant. He introduces and explains the subject directly to his audience. As Jesus’ passion and death form the core of the Gospel, he gives priority to elucidate the suffering and death of Christ. He expounds the idea that a true disciple should follow Christ in every aspects of his/her life.

The Gospel according to St. Luke

St. Luke's Gospel is known as the Gospel of the poor. It is believed that he might have written this Gospel mainly for the gentiles in 80 CE. Unlike the Jewish tradition and belief, this Gospel discloses the promise of 'salvation to entire humanity'. Without giving much significance to Jewish Law and tradition, the author was conscious enough to address the gentiles in his work. Thus he made his aim very clear.

St. Luke introduces Jesus as the connecting factor between the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament church. As he was a doctor and a historian by profession, he tried to depict the complete life history of our Lord. Besides, he had described various unique incidents such as the events prior to Jesus' birth, the announcement to St. Mary, the Magnificat (Song of St. Mary), the birth of John the Baptist and so on.

The Gospel according to St. John

Theologically the Gospel of St. John is given more importance than the Synoptic Gospels. While the Synoptics designate Jesus as Master (Rabbi) and performer of miracles, the Fourth Gospel pronounces him as 'the Word which took human flesh'. Furthermore, it includes various differences when compared with the Synoptics. The Synoptic writers are silent about five different miracles (signs) which are given much significance by St. John. adds five miracles (signs) which are not present in the Synoptics. They are as follows:

- i. Jesus turns water into wine at Cana (2:1 – 11)
- ii. Jesus heals an Official's Son (4:46 – 54)
- iii. Jesus heals a paralytic at Bethesda (5:1 – 9)
- iv. Jesus cures a man born blind (9: 1 – 7)
- v. Jesus raises Lazarus from death (11: 38 – 44)

Moreover, St. John prefers the term 'signs' for the *miracles* performed by Jesus. He writes the phrase 'God's only begotten Son' with much significance. The 'I am Sayings' of Jesus based on Ex. 3:14 ("I am who I am.") is mentioned only in this Gospel at seven different occasions ("I am the bread of life" (6:35); "I am the light of the world" (8:12); "I am the gate" (10:9); "I am the good shepherd" (10:11); "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25); "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (14:6); and "I am the true vine" (15:1)). He states clearly that the aim of his book is to encourage the faith of everyone in Jesus, the Son of God and Messiah. "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (20:31).

Practical Implications

Remembering and meditating the cardinal incidents in the Bible would improve one's spiritual edification and concentration of mind. We have already discussed about the tradition

of memorizing biblical verses in ancient times. Still we do have people amidst us living in this tradition. Learning biblical verses by heart, reciting them frequently and helping others to learn them are considered to be divine services. Obviously it is a tough task to remember all the verses. However, in this era where printed copies of the Bible are easily available, it is necessary for everyone to locate the verses and passages correctly in the Bible.

We might have heard the following verse very frequently: **“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”** Could anyone say its reference in the Bible quickly? Before groping all around, let us come to some inferences.

- i. Right after hearing this verse, one could easily realize that it is said by Jesus; and hence one could make sure that it is from the New Testament.
- ii. Since it is told by our Lord, most probably it should be from the Gospels.
- iii. We have already learnt the specifications of all Gospels. This particular verse speaks about the Jewish Law; and therefore, we could infer that it should be a part of a Gospel which gives priority to Jewish Law and tradition, i.e., either St. Matthew or St. Mark.
- iv. Now we have to think about the pericope or situation in which it is said. According to its nature, it could be told during the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. Matthew 5 – 20 and Mark 2 – 7 are the chapters which account Christ’s public ministry; and hence it could be found in these sessions most probably.
- v. As the comparatively smaller Gospel is St. Mark, let us examine it first. And we can find this verse in Mark 2:27.

This is a simple example for tracing out biblical verses; yet it could not be applicable for all verses. One needs to have at least a minimum knowledge of each book – its content, genre, order and structure. In order to have a general understanding of the four Gospels, a simple classification is given below which every student is supposed to memorize it.

1. The Gospel according to St. Matthew

- i. Genealogy and Birth of Jesus (1:1 – 2:23)
- ii. The Public Ministry of Jesus (3:1 – 10:42)
 - a) Beginning of the Ministry (3:1 – 4:25)
 - b) Sermon on the Mount (5:1 – 7:29)
 - c) Performing Miracles (8:1 – 9:38)
 - d) Proclamation of His Mission (10:1 – 42)
- iii. Ministry in Galilee (11:1 – 18:35)
- iv. Ministry in Judea and Jerusalem (19:1 – 25:46)
- v. Jesus’ Passion, Death and Resurrection (26:1 – 28:20)

2. The Gospel according to St. Mark

- i. The Public Ministry of Jesus (1:1 – 13)
- ii. Ministry in Galilee (1:14 – 6:29)

- iii. Ministry outside Galilee (6:30 – 9:50)
- iv. Ministry in Judea and Jerusalem (10:1 – 14:31)
- v. Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus (14:32 – 16:20)

3. The Gospel according to St. Luke

- i. Personal Implications and Birth of Jesus (1:1 – 2:52)
- ii. The Public Ministry of Jesus (3:1 – 4:13)
- iii. Ministry in Galilee (4:14 – 9:50)
- iv. Ministry in Judea and Jerusalem (9:51 – 22:38)
- v. Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus (22:39 – 24:53)

4. The Gospel According to St. John

- i. Witness of John the Baptist (1:1 – 51)
- ii. The Word which Transforms the Entire Creation (2:1 – 10:42)
- iii. The Word which Transforms Humanity (11:1 – 17:26)
- iv. Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus (18:1 – 21:25)

Another classification is given below:

1. The Gospel according to St. Matthew

- i. The Genealogy and Birth of the King (Ch. 1 – 2)
- ii. The King announced, anointed and declared His Constitution (Ch. 3 -7)
- iii. The display of the Kingdom in its sufficiency for Human, but of Man's unfitness for the Kingdom (Ch. 8 – 12)
- iv. The Kingdom of an absent King entrusted to the hands of Humans (Ch. 13 – 20:28)
- v. The Triumphal Entry of the King seen as rejected by the leader and He rejecting them (Ch. 20:29 – 23)
- vi. The Coming of the King in Final Glory announced in reference to Israel, the Church and the World (Ch. 24 – 25)
- vii. The King Crowned with Thorns, and by His death and resurrection making good all His purposes of blessing for His Kingdom and the World. (Ch. 26 – 28)

2. The Gospel according to St. Mark

- i. The Beginning of His Service – the more Personal Aspect (Ch. 1 – 5)
- ii. The Rejection of the Servant and Prophet in which those who are connected with Him are associated (Ch. 6 – 10:45)
- iii. Prophetic testimony fully declared, and service reaching its climax in the cross, leading on to resurrection (Ch. 10:46 – 16)

3. The Gospel according to St. Luke

- i. The Man Christ Jesus (Ch. 1 – 4:13)

- ii. His Ministry of the Gospel of Peace (Ch. 4:14 – 18:34)
- iii. The Sacrificial Work by which God is made known to Human and Human beings are brought back to God (Ch. 18: 35 – 24)

4. The Gospel according to St. John

- i. The Word, the Only Begotten Son of the Father, Declaring Him – the Eternal Life in the Person of Christ (Ch. 1 – 2:22)
- ii. Eternal Life communicated, seen in His birth, communion and power, with the various stages of opposition, and provision for His own by the way (Ch. 2:23 – 17)
- iii. The Offering up of the body of Jesus Christ once where by all the Will of God is effected and its results made known by the Risen Lord (Ch. 18 – 21)

By memorizing these classifications one could easily identify the reference and could use the Bible accordingly. This classification is done according to the Orthodox Study Bible. Apart from this, there exist many other categorizations. A further research would be helpful to find out the easiest and appropriate classification.

Chapter - 2

PATROLOGY: A STUDY OF CHURCH FATHERS

Introduction

All those who have contributed to the growth of the Church and its witness through their relationship with Christ who is the central point of the church tradition, are Church Fathers. But some of them are exceptional because of their saintly life and selfless service. The objective of the study of the Church Fathers is to become acquainted with some such outstanding leaders and their contributions.

Church Fathers: Appropriate Indication

Some reformists hold that the appellation ‘Fathers of Church’ is a heresy. Their opinion is based on Matt. 23:9 where it is said, “Do not call anyone on earth ‘father’, for you have one father and he is in heaven” (But they themselves call their begetter ‘father’ and some predecessors in their tradition ‘pilgrim fathers’). If the words of Jesus Christ are taken literally, a man cannot call even his own begetter father because it is written, “do not call anyone on earth father.” If Jesus had in mind the literal meaning, then in his own words and in the words of the evangelists and apostles there would not have been a single instance in which the word ‘father’ was used for man. But note that in the following verses the word ‘father’ is used for man. Matt. 4:21,22; 10:21,35,37; 15:4; Luke 11:11, 15:18; Acts 7:2; Rom. 4:12; James 2:21. Moreover, not only the word ‘father’, but ‘teacher’ (adviser) and ‘master’ also are also forbidden, according to St. Matthew (Ch. 23). But these terms are used in the New Testament for men, especially for the apostles: Matt. 6:24; Mark 13:35; Luke 14:21; Acts 13:1; Rom. 2:20; Col. 4:1; 1Cor. 12:28; 2 Tim. 1:11; and Eph. 6:9. It is clear from this that when Jesus Christ said the above verse (Matt. 23:9) he had in mind a particular situation and not the literal meaning. The whole of St. Matthew Chapter 23 is a tirade by Jesus Christ against the hypocrisy of the

Pharisees and the Sadducees. They liked to be called 'father', 'teacher' and 'master', and it was to discourage this trend that Jesus said the above verse.

It is the fundamental position of the church that there should not be an earthly father who claims the position of the heavenly father, and a master or teacher or shepherd (pastor) who claims the position of Christ. But the New Testament writers used in a limited sense these terms for men. In like manner, terms like 'father' and 'malpan' (teacher / adviser) are used in the church tradition. It is a very ancient practice to call bishops and heads of monasteries 'father.' In course of time the term 'father' to mean spiritual father or confessor father became common. Simultaneously in the church tradition, "the church fathers" was given a definite meaning.

All the church leaders, malpans and writers who lived hitherto do not come under the category of 'church fathers'. The church fathers must first accept the divine revelation through Jesus Christ and witness that truth. Secondly, they must possess integrity and saintliness of life of the highest order. Thirdly, they must have made distinct contributions to the growth of the church, and fourthly, they must be recognised by the church as possessing the above three facts. Hence, those who are not 'fathers of church' may be builders of church tradition.

Didache

This book is known as the teachings of twelve apostles (*didache tondodekaapostolon*). But its full form is 'The Lord's teaching to the gentiles through the twelve apostles' (*didachekyrioudia ton dodekaapostolontoisethnesin*). The authorship of the book is not clear from the work; neither the title is pointing to the apostolic authorship.

This is an important document of the apostolic period. It is also the oldest source of the Church Canon. In A.D. 1873, Philotheos Bryennios discovered this document from a monastic library in Constantinople. In 1056 a writer named Leo copied this manuscript. This document provides ample information about the early church period.

The collection of moral codes is the main content of this work. It also contains the teachings about social order and liturgical practices. This includes laws on Christian life order in the second century. It also provides a model of later church laws.

Structure

This book has sixteen chapters in two parts. While chapters 1 - 10 give instructions on liturgical practices, 11 - 15 account disciplinary instructions; and the last chapter contains Christ's second coming and proposed Christian morals.

First part (1- 6) containing the teachings for the baptismal candidate is liturgical portion. Teaching on moral codes are explained in an interesting manner. There are two paths, path of life and path of death. There are lot of differences between these paths (1:1). The following session is

the explanation of both the paths (1:2, 5:1). Hellenistic synagogues had received such teachings of two paths from the Greek which became common in Judeo-Christian regions (e.g. Letter of Barnabas 18-20).

Baptism (Chapter 7)

Chapter seven to ten is helpful in studying the history of liturgy. They begin with instructions on baptism. One should be baptized accordingly, that, after giving proper instructions to the candidate, baptize him/her in flowing water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. But if running water is not available, baptize in other forms of water. If it cannot be performed in cold water, use warm water. During scarcity of water, instead of immersing, pour water three times on the head in the name of the Trinity (7:1-3). Baptism by pouring water on head was also done at emergency situations. The baptism by pouring water on head was mentioned for the first time in the Didache.

Didache instructs that the candidate and the baptizer should fast before baptism (7:4), Christians are instructed to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, while Jews on Mondays and Thursdays (8:1). Didache also instructs to recite the Lord's Prayer at least three times a day.

Holy Qurbana(Chapters 9, 10 &14)

Chapter nine and ten become important as they comprise the oldest Eucharistic Prayers (Thanksgiving Prayers). In the Eucharist, it is instructed to give thanks in such a way that firstly concerning the Chalice that, "Our Father, we thank You for the Holy Wine of David Your Son, which You made known to us through Your Son, Jesus Christ. To You be the glory forever." Then concerning the broken bread that, "We thank You, our Father, for the life and knowledge which you made known to us through Jesus Your Son. To You be the glory forever. Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Your kingdom. To you be the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever." Allow no one to eat or drink of your Eucharist, unless they have been baptized in the name of the Lord. For regarding this our Lord has said, "Do not give what is holy to dogs" (Matt. 7:6) (9).

This portion is concerned with the Holy Qurbana, but not related to the prayer at feast. Here the Holy Baptism and the Holy Qurbana are discussed together. A non-baptized person should not receive Holy Qurbana. There is a prayer after receiving the Communion, which says, "After the Eucharist when you are filled, give thanks, that, "We thank You, Holy Father, for Your Holy Name which You enshrined in our hearts, and for the knowledge, faith and immortality that You have revealed to us through Your Son, Jesus Christ. To You be the glory forever. O Almighty Lord! You have created everything for the sake of Your Holy Name. You provided food and drink to all people for their survival, that they might give thanks to You; but to us You freely gave

spiritual food and drink, and eternal life through Jesus, Your Son. Before all things we thank You because You are Mighty. To You be the glory forever (10:1-4).”” Didache calls Holy Qurbana as spiritual food and drink. It also adds, ”let the sanctified approach and others repent”. It is clear both from the occasion and from other parallel documents that here the discussion is on baptism before the feast of Easter and the candidate’s first partaking of the Communion.

Chapter 14 discusses about ordinary Sunday worship. “On the Lord’s Day, gather yourselves together and break bread and offer the Eucharist, after confessing your transgressions so that our sacrifice may be pure. Let no one who has a quarrel with his brother join you until he is reconciled, lest your sacrifice be defiled. For this is that which was proclaimed by the Lord: ‘In every place and time let there be offered to me a clean sacrifice. For I am a great king, and my name is wonderful among the gentiles’ [cf. Mal. 1:11]” (14:1-3).

Mentioning the Holy Qurbana as sacrifice (thoosiya), quoting prophetic book of Malachi (1:1) and instructing forgiveness of sin is necessary before receiving Holy Qurbana are noteworthy. This explains the forgiveness of sin during the Holy Qurbana (10:6). Chapter 14:1 mentions about the confession of sins prior to the payer in the church: “Confess your sins in the Church; you should not pray with a sinful mind.”

Church Leaders

Didache calls the leaders of the community as *episcopoi* and *diaconoi*. The document is not clear about whether the *episcopoi* includes only priests or it exclusively meant for bishops. Besides, the Didache hardly mentions about presbyter. Nevertheless, it says, “Elect for yourselves, bishops and deacons, men who are an honour to the Lord, of gentle disposition, not attached to money, not attached to money, but honest and well-tried; for they, too render you the sacred service of the prophets and teachers. Do not despise them, after all, for they are your honored ones, together with the prophets and teachers (15: 1-2).

Prophets

Prophets had an important position in the early Church. They (Prophets) are your high priests (13:3). Permit them to celebrate the Holy Qurbana and to make thanksgiving (eucharistein) as much as they desire (10:7). Every first fruit, therefore, of the products of vintage and harvest, of cattle and of sheep, should be given as first fruits to the prophets. If you bake bread, take the first loaf and give it according to the commandment. If you open a new jar of wine or of oil, take the first fruit and give it to the prophets. If you acquire money or cloth or any other possession, set aside a portion first, as it may seem good to you, and give according to the commandment (13:3-7). People were not supposed to judge the prophets (11:11). Criticizing prophets was considered to be sin. If any prophet speaks in the ecstasy (in the Spirit), you shall not try or judge him; for every sin will be forgiven, but this sin cannot be forgiven (11: 7).

Didache gives importance to brotherhood and social activity. Doing charity is appreciated. But everyone has to live out of his hard work. Only those who are not capable of doing work can receive charity.

“If he who comes is a transient, assist him as far as you are able; but he should not remain with you more than two days, or, if necessary, three. If he wants to stay with you, and is a craftsman, let him work for his living. But if he has no trade, use your judgment in providing for him; for a Christian should not idle in your midst. If he is dissatisfied with this sort of an arrangement, he is a Christ peddler. Watch that you keep away from such people (12:2-5).

Ecclesiology

Church is universal. Didache envisions a church which can include everything. The term ecclesia denotes not only the faith community coming together for prayer but also a new community established on the Kingdom of God- a new Christian community. Church is One and Holy. Broken bread is the symbol of unity of the Church (9:4). Prayer for the Church is noteworthy:”Remember, Lord, Your Church. Deliver her from all evil and make her perfect in Your love, and gather her together in her holiness from the four winds to Your kingdom which You have prepared for her. For Yours is the power and glory forever” (10:5).

Eschatology (Last Days)

The idea about the last days has an important place in the Didache. This is clear and transparent in the prayers of Eucharist. “Let grace come, and let this world pass away. Our Lord, come (Maranatha)” (10:6). Early Christians were believed that the second coming of the Lord is near, but the time is not clear. So the faith community believed that they should frequently come together and discuss about the elements of their spiritual life. Didache gives warning for the last days:”For in the last days false prophets and corrupters will be plenty, and the sheep will be turned into wolves, and love will be turned into hate. When the lawlessness increases, they will hate and persecute and betray one another, and then the world-deceiver will appear claiming to be the Son of God, he will do signs and wonders, and the earth will be delivered into his hands, and he will do iniquitous things that have not been seen since the beginning of the world. Then the humankind will enter into the fire of trial, and many will be made to stumble and many will perish; but those who endure in their faith will be saved from under the curse itself. And then the signs of the truth will appear” (16:3-6). So the Didache suggests that all Christians should be prepared. “‘Watch’ over your life, that ‘your lamps’ are never quenched, and that ‘your loins’ are never unloosed. Be ready, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming” (16:1). The last chapter is completely discussing about the last days.

Date

The date of its writing is not clear from the book. The person who prepared the Didache brings together the then liturgical and social laws and practices. S/he did not tried to bring them as a single entity. The two path teachings of Didache can be seen in many other ancient writings. Its

original form is developed between A.D. 50 and A.D. 70. The present form is considered to be written between A.D. 100 and A.D. 150 in Syria. Many ancient writers include Didache in the New Testament. But Eusebius (Church history, 3, 25,4), Athanasius (article 39) and Rufinus (Commentary on Apostle's Creed) opposed its canonisation and argued that it was only an apocryphal literature, and therefore, it could not be included in the Bible.

The Syriac Didascalia, the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus, and the Apostolic Constitutions followed the model of the Didache. St. Athanasius says that it was used for teaching the baptismal candidates.

The Didache is developed in the Judeo-Christian context. It underwent many changes during its development to the present form. Two path portion is in Judaistic form. This type of teaching was prominent in the Qumran community. The literary form of the Didache resembles with the disciplinary law of Essene Community. Baptism in the running water and the daily three times prayer (8:3) are much similar to the Essene laws. Prayers of Eucharist is related to and originated from the Jewish traditions (9-10). The importance of prophets given in the didache is taken from the Judeo-Christian traditions. The apocryphal book of 'Ascension of Isaiah' (3:27) and the 'Shepherd of Hermas' (Order 11:7-9) also give similar significance to the prophets. The Didache, written in the Syrian context, contains Aramaic words like Hosanna, Maranatha, and Amen.

St. Athanasius

Birth and Childhood

Athanasius was the great soldier of faith who fought bravely for truth. St. Basilius describes him as 'the divine doctor given to the church'. St. Gregorios of Nazianzus depicts him as the 'pillar of the church'. His life was eventful and he became famous as the fighter against Arius' heresy.

Athanasius was born in Alexandria around A.D. 295. Since Alexandria was a great centre of learning, he was able to get acquainted with the prominent schools of learning. He came to know about various Christian heroes who had faced persecution with unflinching courage. Having motivated from the lives of saints and celibates who lived in the deserts and forests of Egypt, Athanasius decided to become a Christian full of saintliness, knowledge and faith.

Education and Training

Metropolitan Alexandrios made Athanasius stay with him and taught him theological books, logic and physical sciences, and gave him training in spiritual life. Subsequently Athanasius decided to have firsthand knowledge of the ascetic life of African forests and deserts. He went in search of St. Antony with the blessings of Metropolitan Alexandrios. He met him and stayed with him for quite a time as his disciple and helper, which helped him to come up with his work, 'The Life of Antony'. Alexander, returned to Alexandria, showed great enthusiasm in spirituality, true faith and

saintly life, which received the admiration of his Metropolitan Alexandrios who ordained him as a deacon in A.D. 319 and appointed him as his secretary. It was at this time that he produced the works 'Against Heathens' and 'About Incarnation'.

Against Heresies

Those were the days when Arius' heresies were stunning the church. Athanasius realized that Arius' denial of Christ's divinity will ruin the basis of Christian faith. Immediately he started using his tongue and pen against Arius. He argued that the basis of Christian faith is that God saved man by incarnation, and that if Jesus Christ is not God, we have not been saved. In the end, Emperor Constantine convened the Synod of Nicaea to resolve the faith issues.

In the Nicene Synod

Athanasius also attended the synod as the secretary of Metropolitan Alexandrios. The synod lasted for three months and Athanasius' voice reverberated in it. It was very difficult to take decisions against Arius. Athanasius stood firmly for the phrase '*Homoousion to Patri*' to qualify the Son ('of the *same* substance with the Father'). He was not ready to accept even the phrase '*Homoiousion to Patri*,' (of the *similar* substance with the Father) suggested by moderates like Eusebius of Caesarea. The core of the Creed about faith in the Son of God was written in the Nicene Synod under the leadership of Athanasius.

Metropolitan of Alexandria

It was the last wish of Metropolitan Alexandrios that Athanasius should be his successor, and his wish was fulfilled. When Athanasius became the metropolitan, he visited the churches under his jurisdiction and confirmed the believers in true faith. The problems created by Arius and the Meletianschismatic sects were a head-ache to him. (Meletius was the bishop of Lycopolis in Egypt, who claimed the position of the Metropolitan of Alexandria and created a dissenting group meddling the affairs of the diocese of Alexandria. His followers are commonly known as Meletian Schismatics.)

The Plaintiff becomes the Defendant

Arius had highly influential persons with him. They influenced the emperor and brought forward many allegations against Athanasius. At last the exiled Arius and his companions were called back. Athanasius was accused of theft, adultery and murder. But they failed to prove their allegations. Later he was accused of treason and false witnesses were presented against him. The allegation was that Athanasius blocked the ship bringing corn from Egypt to Byzantium. Hearing the words of the false witnesses the Emperor ordered Athanasius to be exiled to Trier.

Persecutions and Banishment

Then followed the days of insecurity for Athanasius. He was banished four times and brought back four times according to the disfavour or favour of the rulers who succeeded the Emperor

Constantine in the East and in the West. During his banishment he got ample time to visit the sages who lived in the deserts of Egypt. It was at this time that he wrote many of his works. The followers of Arius who seized the churches wanted to bring him to the Cathedral of Constantinople with great celebration. But Arius' stomach burst and he died before entering the cathedral. Athanasius had to spend seventeen years in banishment suffering persecution. But he was not prepared to give up his faith or compromise it in any adversity. Once someone told him, 'the whole world opposes Athanasius'. But he retorted, '*Athanasius contra Mundum*' ('Athanasius opposes the world').

Works

Though Athanasius wrote commentaries on many books of the Old Testament, only the commentary on Psalms is available now. His books 'Against Heathens' and 'About Incarnation' are among his early works. It is from his notable work against Arius and his followers that we get a clear picture of his Christological thinking. Other works by Athanasius include, 'The Declarations of the Synod of Nicene', 'The Spiritual Biography of St. Antony' and certain other articles.

Theological Contributions

The greatest theological contributions of St. Athanasius are his explanation about Jesus Christ's divinity, and his declaration that Jesus is equal to the Father in divinity. He also explains rationally how sin affected human beings and how Jesus remedied it. He says in his book about Incarnation, "He became man to make us divine, he was seen in body so that we might see the glory of the unseen Father, he suffered cruelty by man so as to enable us to enjoy the right to immortality".

Return and Death

People realized the way in which Arius and his followers abused Athanasius and they prevailed upon Emperor Valence to call Athanasius back (A.D. 366) and entrusted him the administration of Alexandrian church. Thereafter, Athanasius enjoyed peace in his life. The great Athanasius consecrated Peter as Metropolitan to succeed him and died on 2nd May 373.

St. Ephrem (A.D. 306 – 373)

St. Ephrem, the great, was born in the town of Nisibis or its nearby place in Mesopotamia. Nisibis is presently known as Nusine and situated in south west Turkey. Ephrem's father hailing from Nisibis and mother from Amid (Diyarbakir) were faithful Christians. Ephrem had a sister. Even from his childhood, he was trained spiritually by his bishop Mor Jacob of Nisibis (303-338). Ephrem, even before his younger age, received baptism and joined the monastic group known as 'Children of Covenant' (BnieKyomo). It was Mor Jacob who baptized him and later ordained him as a deacon.

Around 326, Mor Jacob appointed Ephrem with a title 'MipshKaano' as the principal of Nisibis religious school. Gradually this institution became famous and contributed much to the Church. Ephrem had worked under various bishops such as Mor Jacob (303-338), Mor Babovai (338-350), Mor Vologos (350-361) and Mor Abraham (361). His contributions could not be confined within

religious sphere. When the Persian King Shapur II (309-379) attacked Nisibis for three times in 338, 346 and 350; the city defended all the attacks successfully and the Persian army had to withdraw from the city. Ephrem, a deacon, worked hard in leading the defensive and relief works.

Unfortunately in the next Persian War of 363, the faithful Emperor, Julian was killed. As per the agreement of the Emperor Jovian to retrieve the imprisoned Roman army, the City of Nisibis had to be bestowed to the Persians and all the Christians had to leave the city. Ephrem, after staying back in Amid for some days, migrated to Edessa where he wrote his majority of works. During A.D. 371-372 when severe poverty and pestilence struck Edessa, Ephrem formed a service society for caring the poor patients and burying the dead. The society collected money from the rich in order to help the poor, to construct hospitals and orphanages for the vulnerable, and to provide them food. These intense endeavours impacted Ephrem's health harmfully and he passed away on 9 June 373. The Church commemorates Mor Ephrem on the first Saturday of the Great Lent along with Mor Theodoros.

Mor Ephrem did his service as a deacon throughout his life. Eventually lot of anecdotes regarding his biography had developed in the Greco-Latin Churches. Thus history slowly slipped into stories. In the Syrian Church too, no biographical works of Mor Ephrem were formed for many years. Even though after the sixth century, several fairytales regarding his life were composed even in the Syrian Church, it lacked historical truths as per the opinion of scholars.

Mor Ephrem is the greatest Church Father of the Syrian Church ever. He is also famous as a patristic poet, a committed liturgist, and a generous deacon. He is renowned as the Universal Church Teacher (Malpan). He was a theologian as well as a poet who exhibited clearly that 'how theology could be explained poetically'. He was filled with the qualities of love, affection, reliability and faith. He enriched the hope of eternal life by living his life as a poor and a holy person. His strong belief in God made him exceptional as a synonym for love who cared the victims of pestilence until his last breath.

Writings

Mor Ephrem who is known as the Harp of Holy Spirit had written about different subjects which could be compared to the boundless sea. He used many literary styles to compose his writings.

- i. Prose (*Turgamo*): This includes biblical commentaries and some writings against heresies.
- ii. Combination of prose and poem (*Memro*): *Memro* can be translated as sermon, homily, statements, essays etc.
- iii. Poem (*Madrosho*): Most of his writings are poems which include refrain songs (*Oniso*), lullabies (*sugiso*), praising songs (*theshbuhto*), prayer songs (*bovooso*), and intercessory songs (*sebelto*). *Madroshos* are homilies in poetic form used for meditation by singing.

Later lot of false works were identified with Ephrem, the great universal teacher. But the investigations of Syriac scholars could separate the original works from others. After ample research, Edmund Beck, a Benedictian monk from Germany has recently published several books about the writings of Mor Ephrem.

Biblical Commentaries

i. Commentaries on Genesis and Exodus:

Mor Ephrem was the first Syrian to write a commentary on Genesis in Syriac language. His close acquaintance with the Jewish literature of Genesis which was translated to Armenian even in the first century itself, led Ephrem to compose his commentaries eloquent in its literary style, 'direct speech'. *Pooshako* (Commentary on Genesis) and *Turgamo* (Explanation of Exodus) are the Syriac names of his commentaries. Even though the first six chapters of Genesis are elucidated completely in his commentary, the later chapters are sketched fragmentally. But chapter 49 is explained well. At the same time, explanations on Exodus are comparatively short and incomplete, ending by chapter 32. Both of these commentaries mention not only many Jewish traditions, but also refer the extra Jewish texts such as *Targums*. However many scholars argue that Ephrem had written commentaries also on other books of the Old Testament, majority confirm his authorship only to the first two books. Nevertheless the commentaries on Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles are available in Armenian, but it is assumed that none of those was written by Ephrem.

ii. Commentary on *Diatessaron*:

Its original is available in Syriac and translation in Armenian with slight differences. (The meaning of the Latin term *Diatessaron* is 'Made of Four'.) Ephrem's commentary on *Diatessaron* - the Harmony of Four Gospels - by Tatian is popular widely; and it is his most admired and important literary work. It is not a commentary on the entire work, rather an explanation of various selected pericopes (portions).

Diatessaron starts with the explanation of Christ's incarnation. As the rivers find its fulfilment by running into the sea, the symbols, prophesies, models, parables and imageries are running into Messiah. In Messiah they find their complete meaning. Old Testament was waiting for its fulfilment in Messiah. Through this Ephrem, opens the treasury of the mystery of incarnation.

Diatessaron is a beautiful commentary. For example, Ephrem speaks about 'Jesus Calming the Sea' (Luke. 8: 24) that 'they woke up the sleepy, he made the sea sleep. That is to show his never sleeping divinity through the gentleness of peaceful sea (6, 25). Regarding the women with haemorrhage who touches the Lord (Mark. 5: 25-34), Ephrem says that she who had touched him spiritually could touch the untouchable divinity through the touchable humanity (7, 5). He further mentions Abel that, 'whether there had the heart of earth where Abel killed?' (11, 3); and the Queen of South that, 'she will judge them (Matt. 12:42), she symbolized the church that as she had come to Solomon, the Holy Church came to our Lord' (11, 4). He explains the good news to Mary

(Annunciation/ *Sooboro*) that 'death entered through the ears of Eve, thus life entered through the ears of Mary' (20, 32).

This book contains many thought-provoking sayings as well. All those who live are not alive, and all those who buried are not dead (15, 12). The rich came to the judge with the bribe of sweet tongue, through flattery (15,1). Children (Jews) saw only the wealth of their fathers; but they did not consider their righteousness. But the gentiles did not see their wealth, but saw their righteousness (15, 15). Energetic people who became lazy out of lack of job and masters were taken by a voice and awoken by a sound (15, 15). Ephrem writes while narrating the parable of vineyard, that, he fenced them (Law); dig for the grape presses (altar); built a tower there (church)...(16, 19). The scene of raising Lazarus is touching. Lazarus who was like a wheat seed wet with his tears was sprout into new life from the tomb of earth. This shows a theological articulation filled with poetic skills. Ephrem shows his skills also in creating the characters. 'Thou start with a manger and ends with a donkey. In Bethlehem with manger, and in Jerusalem with donkey' (18,1). If Jesus enters into this world through the manger, his entry into the city was on a donkey. It is also a warning to those who believed that everything came to an end like a life of donkey.

Combination of Prose and Poem (*Memro*)

i. Homily of our Lord

It is a beautiful work explaining the salvific act of Christ. He came down from the highest to the lowest and travelled until the hell. From there he ascended with countless prisoners. This is divided into 59 portions or paragraphs. The first section deals with the incarnation of our Lord and the salvation mystery (1-13). Then, explains the incident of forgiving the sinful woman at the house of Simon the Pharisee (14-24). 'How peacefully our Lord behaves to sinners' is portrayed. Sometimes darkness spread on eyes like Paul (25-33); but it is the reflection of his love. Afterwards Ephrem elucidates the divinity and humanity of Christ (34-35). Again, narrates the incidents that happened at the house of Pharisee (41-49). Last portion connects Simon the priest and Simon Peter (50-58). Ephrem explains how the Old Testament prophet-hood and priesthood came into Christ. He added that Christ was found to be peaceful and humble in order to show a model for us.

Ephrem explains the birth of Christ that, he was born from the Father; everything was created through him; body delivered him; he killed all bodily temptations; he had born out of baptism, which whitens our stains through him; he had born out of the hell, he plundered its treasures.

ii. The Letter to Publius

This is a meditational imagery concerning the Last Judgement. This starts by depicting the holy Gospel as a mirror. Those who have a pure eye can see the kingdom of heaven in this mirror. The wicked people will see themselves suffering in the Gehenna (hell) where they deserve to dwell for eternity. Then, it explains the portrayal of sheep and goats, and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Different names of the Lord could be seen in this book. St. Ephrem visualises the dwelling

place of righteous in heaven and saying, "I saw there virtuous people and I longed for their beauties, I saw the places where on the good were standing and I earnestly desired their dwellings. I saw there bridal chambers on the opposite side into which no one who did not have a lamp was allowed to enter. I saw their joy and I sat mourning the fact that I possessed none of the deeds that were worthy of that bridal chamber. I saw that they were arrayed in a garment of light, and I was distressed that no noble garments had been prepared for me. I saw their crowns, which were adorned with victory, and I was grieved that I had no victorious deeds with which I might be crowned. I saw there virgins knocking at the gate, and there was no one who would open it for them, and I wailed because I lacked the deeds of that blessed ointment. I also, like them, had always taken refuge in His name and had been honoured in His honours and had always wrapped His name like a cloak over my hidden faults. And when I saw these things in that bright mirror of the holy Gospel of my Lord, my soul became weak and my spirit was at an end and my body was bent down to the dust."

iii. Hymns on the Virginity

It is a collection of songs discussing about different subjects. A few songs are discussing about the virginity. It shows certain imageries of virginity from the Old Testament. The virgin is a shoot grafted onto the tree of life. She is also bride and temple and also a castle. She contemplates continuously the lasting beauty. Virginity is the bird that builds her nest high above the earth and flies on height. Ephrem portrays the Samaritan woman not as an immoral person but as a noble lady like Sara and Tamar. She symbolises the Church. Jesus reveals her secret. She represents the humanity that God saves step by step to higher level. Ephrem describes three harps of Lord; they are the harp of nature and the two harps of the Scripture – Old Testament and New Testament. He depicts how Christ is hidden in these three harps. The hymns written by Ephrem, the theologian, poet and spiritual leader, are a treasure to the students of theology.

iv. The Hymns on the Nativity

They are probably gathered together and entitled "lullabies" by Ephrem himself. Most of them are sung by mother Mary to Jesus. Ephrem would have probably composed these hymns for the liturgical use of the church at the feast of Epiphany, Christ's birth. The first four hymns were written by Ephrem himself, while the remaining ones were added later by an anonymous author. The last eight hymns were added yet later. The incarnation of the Son of God is a wonder. It was an act of self-emptying of God. Theological symbols are clearly visible in the hymns. Thus Ephrem demonstrates how theology can be expressed poetically and imaginatively through hymns.

v. The Paschal Hymns

The Paschal Hymns expound the unleavened bread, and crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. The Syriac liturgy has adopted many elements from these hymns.

vi. Hymns on Paradise

Even before the origin of Christianity, there emerged among the Jews an array of the thought of Paradise seen in Genesis. Ephrem envisages Paradise symbolically as a mountain; which is in circular shape. This conical mountain encircles the big sea, enclosing both land and sea. The flood

reached only up to its foothills. The Cherubim safeguards the foothill fence with the 'flaming and turning' sword. This fence is the lowest portion of paradise. Halfway up the mountain is the tree of knowledge. It functions as a spiritual boundary; this is a high place. Adam and Eve were forbidden to go beyond this point. The tree of knowledge is the curtain or veil of the sanctuary which hides the entrance to the inner sanctuary or the Holy of Holies. The divine presence is on the peak of the mountain. Paradise is the symbol of temple of Jews and Christian Church. Ephrem realizes that all these were not to understand in literal sense. Paradise is different, higher and transcendental than our world. Paradise is the dwelling place of righteous ones after resurrection. We can enter there only through the resurrection. Body and spirit together enter into the Paradise.

Trees of Paradise are described in an imaginative way. When Christ was pierced by the lance at Calvary, the fence around the paradise and the 'flaming and turning' sword were removed from the gate of Paradise. Ephrem links Ephesians 2:14 with Genesis 3:24. The sacrificial death of Christ gave back the robe of glory which Adam lost. At baptism, by "putting on Christ" every individual Christian puts on the 'Robe of Glory' (Rom 13:14, Gala 3:27). In order to clothe the humans with the robe of glory, God himself took the human form. At His Baptism, Christ laid the Robe of Glory in the river Jordan, making it available once again for humanity to put on at baptism. All the righteous will enter into the Paradise with the robe of glory at their resurrection. The very idea of Christ's incarnation is to restore the glorious position of Adam. Everlasting life and Godly knowledge is that position. In human form itself Man should achieve divinity. Man wished to be Godlike. God sanctioned his desire through the incarnation of Christ. Ephrem says that "He gave us divinity; we gave Him humanity" (Song of Faith).

Theology

Ephrem stands outstanding among the versatile ingenious theologians. Church Fathers of Greco-Roman period were heavily influenced by the Greek philosophy. But for Ephrem the foundation always was the Holy Scripture. His Christo-centric approach relies on the divine revelation and the apostolic tradition. When we explore and seek the root of our belief we should end up in the true fountain which is God.

Mor Ephrem wrote his commentary on the Holy Bible in a Jewish-Christian background. He perceived the Holy writings by studying them. He was referred to be the skylark of the Holy Scripture. When he interprets Bible in Semitic style, Biblical world and Ephrem's conceptual world merges and it is difficult to find the dividing line. St Ephrem is the strongest interpreter and accepted spoke person of the Christian theology which is ancient, original and apostolic in contrast with the Greco-Roman doctrine. He proved that the Semitic theology could stand independently. This finding gives a message independent of time and is universal in nature.

Divine revelation is for humankind, in human language, but from the original source, God the Almighty. So it is very difficult for the humans to comprehend it, seek it and reach it. Ephrem's

depiction of God is far away from the divine concept proposed by human intelligence. Even though one cannot measure God by intelligence, s/he can realize it and enjoy it. His concepts, in an ornamental language and in a complete integral way based on symbols and metaphors, reach a philosophical state. Those who research to find a contemporary applicability of the universal Christian theology could find a rich treasure in Ephrem's writings.

His writings reveal himself as a happy and contented monk. Theologians, in general are not humorous, but Ephrem had a very good sense of humour. It was easy for him to ridicule himself. His description of satanic vigour and failure break the readers into laughter. He is able to provide descriptions that invoke smile even when he deals with deep and abstract theology. While he argues against heresies like a warrior with thousand tongues, Ephrem sharpens his intellect to defeat his enemies with his humour oriented oration. He compares himself as a dog feed on the crumbs from the abundance of a rich feast. At the same time he resembles to a hound that chases the wolf of heretics. He doesn't mind even to be the assistant of the shepherd. He has fought with added vigour against the heretics like Marcion, Bardaisan, and Mani. His satire against heretics especially against Arian made them silent and defeated. He presented strong points to defend Neo-Arianism.

Ephrem portrays himself as an uneducated fool even when he could confuse scholars in the race of knowledge. By saying that he had not studied Greek philosophy, he reveals that he had no obligation to it. Since the uneducated Ephrem becomes a challenge to the educated scholars who ridicule the unschooled, he stands as the mediator of the truth-seekers, sober students and worldly scholars. In his writings certain concepts are hard and difficult to understand even for the scholars. Yet Ephrem presents great ideas in structured language, but through his silliness a face of humble wise could be observed. He stands with a thousand faced mirror of theology.

Some have ridiculed Ephrem for repetition in his writing style. But Ephrem's composition was mainly for the uneducated common mass. His repetitive style ensured that the true message sunk deep in to the minds of the common people in the midst of the mad ideas of the scholarly heretics; this is a Semitic style. He tried to create an enthusiasm with symbols, imageries and literary style which is unbounded in thoughts and unending repetition. His poetic thoughts are wide with deep thinking like roaring tides. He opined that only when the tides of heart and spirit get calm down, only then the heart and spirit could ride the ship of faith in the ocean of divine thought. And Ephrem travels on that ship. He is known as the theologian of praise of God as he holds the harp of divine praise.

Ephrem observes divine presence in everything in the nature – in flowers, grass, animals, birds, human beings, sand and bricks. He sees God's fingerprint in anything and everything in the universe. The mighty forces in the nature, the beauty of earth, the order of universe etc. reveals God. He paints the concept of God using the vocabulary that fits the common man. He makes the transcendental as well as immanent God visible to them by clothing God using the appropriate language and words. One can only awe in astonishment seeing the images he draws. Many a time the earth dwellers will not understand much when Ephrem rises to the zenith of his literary style.

The scientific thought seen in his writings earned Ephrem the distinction of a theologian among the Church fathers. He is known as a profound scholar of Marian theology. The scholar Ephrem has endless designations like Prophet of Syrians, Lion of Syria, Pillar of the Church, Second Moses, Ephrem the great, Harp of the Holy Spirit, the Greatest Theological Poet of the Christian world, Poet among Theologians, Eagle among Doves, Euphrates of the Church etc. He unites mysticism and theology by combining prayer and faith proclamation.

Style of Scriptural Interpretation

The theology developed by Ephrem is the result of his deep meditation and constructive pondering of the Holy Bible, i.e., a result of his Christo-centric meditation of Holy Scripture. Ephrem's theology leads human mind and soul towards prayer and divine adoration. It makes one to prostrate before God in all humility. His theological thoughts which founded its tent in the Holy Scripture advance every moment towards the Holy Scripture, resembling the apostolic period.

Ephrem, tries to explain the Scripture using scripture itself without considering the Old Testament and New Testament distinctively. It is very evident in the *Diatessaron*. He starts with a word or a sentence or an event or image from the Bible. The progression of interpretation is never predetermined, but advances freely and spontaneously. It grows like the mighty Euphrates capable of flowing into multitude of streams. The whole deluge is pure and keeps the true spirit of the scripture. At times, he just quotes a scripture reference and gives no more explanation. Here the Word is clear and straight demanding no more explanation. In certain cases he adds independent thoughts to the portion. It goes to a level that one cannot really separate out biblical verses and his theological thoughts. Ephrem dives into the ocean of scriptures keeping the unstinting faith in God as his life boat. His intellect, logic, imagination and insight will be ready and operative to fly to greater heights like an eagle perching on the mast of the ship to take off to the skies. His language is rich with quotations, beautiful adage, images, types, metaphors and sense of humour. Poetic beauty can be observed even in his prose. Ephrem develops multiple interpretations to a scriptural portion. He likes to present the ideas that help the readers to grow in spiritual life. Examples from *Diatessaron* are noteworthy. Peter the Simpleton and Coward, series of marriage proposals around the well, encounter with the bleeding women, women caught in adultery, blunder of the rich man, Jesus waiting at the well in Samaria, Passions of Christ etc. are presented with a mix of humour, devotion and mercy, which kindles spirituality in the readers.

Word of God needs to be interpreted and studied in humility, prayerfulness and with obligation to God. Knowing the limitation of our understandings and realizing that they are too little and limited, allows for better understanding. Boundary of our knowledge should be continuously growing. Ephrem set no limit to the horizon of knowledge. Every time you plunge into the Word of God it gives newer and deeper understanding. One should not close this possibility. In his entire writings one can find the important concept of 'revealed and hidden' and 'similarity and difference'. He always says "there is more to know". The word of God has many shades of meaning just as those who study it have many different points of view. The Lord has coloured his word with many hues. He has hidden many

treasures in his word so that each of us is enriched as we meditate on it. If the words of the scripture had only one meaning the first researcher would find it. For the rest of the readers then there is no effort of seeking and no joy of new finding. The word of God is multifaceted. Depending on the ability and context of the listeners it has multilevel meanings.

There are worldly intellectuals who pick portions of the Bible according to their fondness and convenience, to attack other portions or to misrepresent the Word of God. This is what devil does. Heretics do exactly the same. They select portions seemingly supporting their false doctrines and ignore the words inconvenient to them. Ephrem call them devilish and they are the disciples of Satan.

Theology of Incarnation

Ephrem does not lean on the conventional philosophy to explain incarnation. God took flesh, wore weakness; He ate when hungry and drank for thirst. He got tired on the end of the day and He needed rest. The Passion of Jesus Christ is the basis to understand the mystery of Incarnation. His passions were not simply play acting. He bore the pain as would any other normal human would. No one should say Jesus paid the Ransom for our sins without pain. Jesus revealed every step of his mission for the human salvation. Ephrem says that Jesus is the protector of truth because the blameless Christ was tortured and suffered for truth. He was silent before Pilate. When others win at the court through vociferous arguments Christ was silent. The silence of Christ is more glaring than the shouts of the mob and it really won the case and bore fruit.

Ephrem uses a variety of piercing imageries to describe the thoughtless action of men in persecuting Christ. They spit on his face who blew Holy Spirit and life into them. The whole creation including humanity is leaning on Him for existence, but they gave a weak rod of reed to him for support. The verdict of Pilate and others were sealed by that rod; Jesus wrote with that rod and drove the demons with it. Adam, formed out of the lifeless mud, was given life by God by blowing on his face. He gave the Holy Spirit to the disciples by blowing on their face. Now the same God bowed down his head so that the foolish could spit on that face. As the humankind lost its energy and vitality due to sin, and was about to fall, Christ gave them the support. He showed deepest mercy to the sinful woman but no leniency to those hard-hearted businessmen who polluted the holiness of the temple. He showed that he saves the sinners but punishes the arrogant ones quite justly.

The most beautiful and theologically rich interpretation of ‘the piercing of Jesus by one of the soldiers’ is written by Ephrem. By reading this passage alone, one gets familiarized with the gorgeousness of his composition elegant in theology, biblical knowledge, poetry and mysticism. Ephrem pairs the lance typologically with the flaming sword guarding the way to Paradise. Willingness of Christ, to be pierced by the Roman soldier, reversed the curse of the flaming sword, and re-entered humankind into Paradise. Out of the pierced side of Jesus the Church is born in the

form of the water of baptism and the blood of the Eucharist. The readers are captivated by his language and imageries. He says that one should see the inner glow of scriptures. It is a very bright world once one gets into the spirit of scriptures. Otherwise s/he will be fenced out and without knowing the true meaning s/he will only be squabbling. The nature the book, the Scripture, and Christ the key are the means by which one can enter the divine arena.

The Paschal Lamb

St. John and St. Paul influenced Ephrem vastly more than any other apostles. Nevertheless, Ephrem presented his Christology in Semitic-Judean-Christian background. He had great knowledge regarding the uniqueness of the New Covenant inaugurated by the paschal lamb. Having observed the indications of Christ-mystery in the Old Testament and its images in the nature, he composed his Christology poetically. Christ is the fulfilment (*shulmono*) of the Old Testament, and the Old Testament is relevant only if it is Christo-centred. Only then it becomes the Book of Christians. The Old Testament signs that are fulfilled in Christ are no more significant (regarding unleavened bread). But to understand the New Testament, Old Testament is inevitable; and the most important task is to find out the true meaning of such Old Testament symbols. Ephrem shows how the New Testament realities are in agreement with the Old Testament prophecy. Deep rooted faith in God and love towards the Church are his guide lamps for the interpretation of the scripture. He wrote the poems for liturgical use which touch everyone's heart and intellect together. The Paschal lamb is an important imagery in Old Testament. Based on this image Ephrem creates an in-depth theology of salvation for human race. The Paschal Lamb slaughtered in the evening in Egypt is the pointer to the true lamb of the New Testament, Jesus Christ. Slaughtering of the Paschal Lamb, sprinkling of the blood and the Exodus indicate the birth of Israel, the people of God. It symbolizes the upcoming freedom, victory, and attainment of the Promised Land. Until then, the Feast of Pascha (*Pesah*) was the remembrance of freedom and the promise of salvation through Messiah.

The sacrifice of Christ and His blood liberate the new Israel from death, from prangs of sin and from the bondage of Satan. It gives life and freedom. The entire Christ-event is remembered in the Holy Eucharist (*Qurbana*). It is the guarantee for future liberation. The Paschal Lamb became materialized in Christ in a threefold way, namely, the Last Supper, His Sacrifice on the Cross and the Sacrifice of the Church – the Holy Eucharist. In the last supper the true lamb offers his body to the disciples, which signifies the bloodless sacrifice representing the life-giving sacrifice on the cross. Upper room became the first church and the table over there the first altar. The symbolic lamb and the true lamb merge together here. The prophecy became fulfilled and the imagery gives way to reality at this table. In the last supper Christ became the unleavened bread and the new Paschal Bread. Christ is the True Lamb and the Bread and the Cup of New Pesaha.

Christ was the true lamb sacrificed on the cross. He became a wholesome ransom by merging the priest and sacrificial lamb within himself. At the same time he was the Good shepherd and the true lamb who willingly gave his life for the sake of his flock. His blood of Christ saved the new

Israel from death and led them to life. His own sacrifice on the cross negated the animal sacrifices observed by Jews and Gentiles. Salvation is now only through the blood of Christ and is exercised through the Holy Eucharist in the church today. The Holy Eucharist is the completion of true Pesaha and Christ is the lamb. His priesthood has made all other symbolic priesthood obsolescent. As the reality moved in, shadows moved out; and darkness gave way to true light. In the Holy Eucharist Christ become the bread for us. This should not compare with the bread of Jews. This bread of life leads Christians towards the pilgrimage to the Promised Land called Paradise. This bread reforms internally and provides life by killing the death. As the unique power of this bread comes from the Holy Spirit, it enablesthe people of God to have deep relationship with Christ even in this world itself. It becomes the guarantee for the future glory. Ephrem says that “the foreshadowing was in Egypt, but the reality in the Church and its completion in the Kingdom”.
Forerunner

Renewal in Christ

The purpose of incarnation of Christ was to clothe the first man with the garment of glory which he lost out of his freewill. God wanted humans to have everlasting life, Godly glory and true knowledge. Christ bought the humans back to life with the medicine of His life and re-entered them to the Paradise. Ephrem says that the life in this world is a journey to the Paradise and is possible only through Jesus Christ. That’s why Jesus is called the door and the way. Christ himself is our garment of glory. He is our light and brilliance. He delivered us from the slavery of sin and death. Thus the human salvation history is a journey from the tree at Paradise to the tree at Calvary. The journey does not end there; rather it extends from Zion to the church and to the kingdom of God. Through the Holy Sacraments, the Christ-event is being made real in the church. Humankind re-enters to the Paradise. Church is the new paradise and Christ is the tree of life. The blood and water (St. John 19:34) indicate baptism and Holy Eucharist. Humans enter the Paradise through Jesus Christ.

Through his baptism in Jordan River Jesus deposits his soul into the water and thus purifies all the water bodies. At Jordan the Old Testament and the New Testament merge, and all the ancient practices were fulfilled by the baptism of Christ. Through water baptism human attains purification, glorification and everlasting life by the Holy Spirit. Baptism gives rebirth; it is the second birth, it provides the garment of glory. The lost image and likeness of God is given back in baptism. In other words baptism reaffirms the entry to paradise. It gives an unseen seal of life, and permits to eat from the tree of life again. The heavenly feast could be tasted in advance though baptism. Baptism removes darkness and gives shining. Wearing the garment of glory means wearing Christ; Christ himself is our garment of glory enabling us to enter the wedding chamber at the end. The image that everyone receives is the image of Christ and the royal seal is his seal. Everyone becomes new creation and receives the guarantee of immortality. The mortal body becomes the dwelling place of God; gets united to God and thus become the children of God.

Ephrem describes Holy Eucharist (*Qurbana*) as bread, spiritual food, blood of Christ, body of Christ, medicine of life, new mystery, living sacrificial matter, chalice of salvation etc. Holy Qurbana is a life-giving holy mystery. The healing act of Jesus becomes fruitful in Eucharist. Ephrem observes the signs of Holy Eucharist in the miracles such as feeding the five thousand with five loaves of bread, the miraculous catch at the Sea of Galilee, his healing miracles (Luke 7: 36-50), the story of leavened dough (Mat 13: 30), and the miracle at Cana. Such signs are also visible in the paschal lamb, paschal supper, unleavened bread, and in Eden. The medicine of eternal life, the Holy Eucharist makes everyone pure and holy, delivers from the yoke of sin and gives everlasting life. Christ reveals his light and shine like sun in the Holy Eucharist. Those who partake in the Eucharist get everlasting life and own the treasury of life. This bread gives life to the body and soul of man. Body of Christ is the fruit of the tree of life. If the tree at Paradise led towards death, the tree (cross) at Calvary delivered everyone from the yoke of death. Holy Eucharist is the new fruit in the paradise of Church. This fruit leads everyone to paradise. Therefore, anyone receives the communion should prepare themselves in order to attain the Kingdom of Heaven. True faith, purity in heart, reverence, virtuousness, respect and brotherly love are inevitable. Hence this Cup becomes the spring of life. The biggest gift from Jesus Christ to the Church is the Holy Eucharist. It is his life giving body. His body gave us healing and purification while he was on earth. In a similar way the body in Eucharist gives us healing and life.

The deliverance won by Jesus Christ has to be earned individually by everyone with his/her own discretion. Control of lust and corrective actions are necessary for the remission of sins. Repentance and penitence are essential for the re-entry to the Paradise. All these actions should lead to Godly love. The remission of her sins became possible only when the woman washed Jesus' feet. Penitence is the symbol of true repentance. Fasting and tears of repentance make us acceptable to God. Night vigils and fasting prayers are meant for repentance and fellowship with God. A life isolated from the world like a monk is not necessarily a Christian way. Such a life should go with repentance. The desire to worldly pleasure, positions and wealth should be controlled. One should desire and anticipate God whole heartedly and look forward to His kingdom. Ephrem considers celibacy as the most helpful way of life to attain this state. Yet all believers should reach such a state from their own living circumstances.

St. Baselious, the Great (A.D. 330 – 379)

Introduction

During the 4th century, the heresy called Arianism developed in Alexandria had created great turbulence in the church of Asia Minor. But standing as strong pillars, three renowned scholars from the church of Cappadocia in Asia Minor saved the church from the heretical teaching of Arius. They were Mor Baselious (Basil) of Caesarea, his friend Mor Gregorios of Nazianzus (Gregory - A.D. 329–389) and Mor Gregorios of Nyssa (Gregory - A.D. 332–395).

Three of them were together known as Cappadocian fathers. The continuity, growth and perfection of the theological thoughts of Mor Athanasius could be seen in their teachings. Arianism came to end before their demise. They have succeeded in clearly explaining and teaching the Nicene Creed. The influence of these three is remarkable that they could find a solution for how Hellenism and Christianity could develop Christian theology. They spent their whole life in order for the development and welfare of the church. The three were intimate friends until their last breath. Yet, each of them had their own personality. They were individually recognized in separate designations that, Mor Basil was known as duty-bound, Mor Gregory of Nazianzus as good orator, and Mor Gregory of Nyssa as philosopher. We are discussing only about the first and the last of the three Cappadocian Fathers in this chapter.

Out of the Cappadocian Fathers, Basil is the only one to known as 'Great'. His contributions as a church leader, a good organizer, a good translator of Christian ideology, Second Athanasius in protecting true faith, father of eastern monastic tradition, reformer of liturgical order etc. gave him the position, "Great".

Basil was born in Caesarea of Cappadocia, in A.D. 330. Parents with strong foundations in Christianity, high living conditions and wealth gave Basil a good start. Basil's father, Basil the Elder was a famous rhetor of Neocaesarea of Pontus. His mother, the grandmother of Great Basil, St. Macrina, was a follower of St. Gregorios, the miracle-worker. Basil had his basic education from his father. Basil's mother Emmelia was daughter of a martyr. Three of the ten children of Basil the rhetorician and Emmelia become bishops – Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Peter of Sebaste. Their elder daughter St. Macrina became a good example of monastic life. Thus Basil's family was a family of saints.

Basil received formal education in the art of rhetoric from Caesarea and Constantinople. In A.D. 351 he studied in Athens too. There he met Gregory of Nazianzus and that was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. In A.D. 356 he returned to his place and started working as a lecturer like his father. As he was not at all interested in his job, he had decided to quit his job and devoted himself to God. Basil says, "I wasted my time on follies and spent nearly all of my youth in vain labors and devoted to the teachings of wisdom that God had made foolish (1 Corinthians 1:20). Suddenly, I awoke as out of a deep sleep. I realized the wonderful light of gospel truth and recognized the nothingness of the wisdom of the leaders of this world (1 Corinthians 2:6). I wept out for my destroyed life. I prayed for a leader who can teach me devotional principles."

The first step was Baptism. After the Baptism he travelled around various places such as Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia to find out genius hermits. Their life kindled the Holy Spirit in him. "Their principles in life and dedication to work attracted me. Their regular prayers and piety called me out. Without conceding to natural needs, they led a life focusing on the spiritual needs. They lived in hunger, thirst, cold and nudity. But they never conceded to their body, neither wasted their time longing for that. They worked for their heavenly citizenship by leading a life in a

body not of them. Their lives pulled me towards them. They were showed as bearing the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on their body. Therefore I call their life as blessed life. I prayed for the grace to imitate them with my capacity,” Basil says.

After returning to his home, Mor Basil distributed his wealth among the poor and left for a lonely life near Neocaesarea. Many of his friends followed him, seeking loneliness and started staying there. In 348, when Gregory Nazianzus visited him, both of them together compiled the writings of Origen and prepared an anthology called *Philokalia*. Basil developed two rules and become the legal provider of Greek monastic rules. While he was leading a monastic life, he was active enough and established several monasteries. Eusebius, the metropolitan of Caesarea, desired to utilize the talents of Basil for the welfare of the church and encouraged him to become a priest. Accepting the same, Basil became a priest. He assisted the bishop as a helper and a supporter in every matters of the diocese. Gregory of Nazianzus’ comments about Basil is significant that he was, “A good adviser, an able assistant, an interpreter of the Word of God, a person who points out duties, a stick on oldness, a pillar of faith, faithful than any other priest, experienced than any laity leader.” In 370, when Eusebius died, Basil became the metropolitan of Caesarea.

Basil quickly attained the affection of everyone. He concentrated on establishing hospitals for the sick, building home for the poor, hosting aliens etc. He stood against Arianism to keep true faith and worked courageously against King Valens and other authorities. The Prefect Modestus compelled him to accept Arianism and threatened him with deportation and forfeiture. Basil stood firmly as a real child of the church. Basil’s reply is really remarkable, as stated by Gregory of Nazianzus, that, “If you take away my possessions, you will not enrich yourself, nor will you make me a pauper. You have no need of my old worn-out clothing, or of my few books, of which the entirety of my wealth is comprised. Exile means nothing to me, since I am bound to no particular place. This place in which I now dwell is not mine, and any place you send me shall be mine. Better to say: every place is God’s. I am just a servant of him. I would be a stranger or sojourner. Who can torture me? I am so weak, that the very first blow would render me insensible. Death would be a kindness to me, for it will bring me all the sooner to God, for whom I live and labor, and to whom I hasten.” The official was stunned by his answer and replied, “No one has ever spoken so boldly to me.” Again Basil added, “Perhaps you have never before dealt with a bishop. Where God is mocked and condemned everything is supposed to be lacked and we are concentrating on Him only. We are considering fire, sword, wild beasts and iron rods that rend the body, serve to fill us with joy, rather than fear. Inform the Emperor that nothing can lead us to false theory (Arianism). Threat is of no use here.” Hearing this, the emperor himself turned back from his attempt.

On 1st January 379, Mor Basil passed away. In Wednesday morning’s Sheema prayer, the holy church remembers Cappadocian Fathers; and commemorates them every year on 1st January.

Writings

Despite all his responsibilities and activeness, Basil was an ingenious theological thinker. He is the most prominent among the universal Church Fathers. Even in his lifespan itself, his writings gained prime applause; and were admired not only by Christians, but also by the people of other religions too. His writings could be classified as theological (dogmatic), spiritual (exegetical), and instructional (homilies), and liturgical. Fortunately, our church could collect many of his homilies and letters.

i. Theological Writings (Dogmatic Writings)

All his dogmatic writings were written against Arianism.

- a. **Against Eunomius:** These were written between A.D. 363 and A.D. 365, against the book named 'Apologia' written by an Arian leader Eunomius in the year A.D. 361. The **first book** concludes that the divine essence is not born (*Agennesia*). Therefore it refutes the argument of Eunomius that 'the Word is not the Son of God, he was born, not different from any other creation'. The **second book** interprets the Nicene Creed and proves the consubstantiality of the Word with the Father (Homoiousia). The **third book** explains that the Holy Spirit is worshiped and glorified with the Father and the Son; and equal in godliness and essence.
- b. **About the Holy Spirit:** The 'unity of the substance' of the Son and the Holy Spirit towards God is explained here. Obsolete the previous doxology used in the church that, "Glory to God through the Son in the Holy Spirit," Basil introduced the new phrase in common worship – "Praise to God with the Son and the Holy Spirit". Unfortunately, some of the believers accused Basil that he has done a renovation in the doxology. Nevertheless, he could manage the situation by convincing everyone. He said, "Both the doxological phrases are literally the same. This is not a new doxology; rather it was prevalent in the church years before. And therefore, there is no point for contempt." As the Son and the Holy Spirit are of the same essence of the Father, they are also worthy of equal praise. The Bible and the tradition teach the same. Moreover, Basil's writings about the Holy Spirit motivated St. Ambrose to compose his work, "On the Holy Spirit," and hence, the theology of Basil had crossed boundaries and reached the Western world.

ii. Two Monastic Rules

These were written to clarify the doubts of hermits of monasteries visited by Basil. The first of which is known as 'long rules', comprising various principles of monastic life explained in 55 subheadings. The latter, called 'short rules', is meant for the daily life of monastic community in 313 subheadings. They are in interrogative form – of questions and answers. These were written in the light of conversations with hermits. The influence of Eustathius of Sebaste, who established a monastic community in Asia Minor before Basil, is visible in the first section of rules. The two sets of rules proposed by Basil are still in effect in the Greek monastic community. By the end of 4th century, the Latin translation by Rufinus spread these rules in western countries. Apart from that, the pioneers of western monasticism Cassian and Benedict were influenced highly by these two rules of Mor Basil.

iii. **Instructions to the Youth**

This book enlightens the issue of acquiring knowledge from the writings and studies of non-Christian writers. Even though this is written as an instruction to his nephews studying in Greek universities, the value of Greek Classics is written as evidence. In spite of the fact that the Greek classic is in a much lower level than Bible, its instructions are significant. When the points which spoil the spirit of youngsters are avoided, there is valuable information in Greek classics. He advises that one, who reads it, should accept the honey and throw away the poison.

iv. **Homilies**

Basil has not written any versions of the Bible. But the proficiency in language and literature (moral teaching) can be seen throughout his homilies. Even though the Basilian homilies are typical examples of the art of lecture of his period, Basil, unlike his colleagues, had hardly shown much interest in art and style of lecturing. Anyone could attract his/her audience through volubility; but Basil was interested in touching the hearts of his audience.

a. **Narration of the Six Days of Creation:** This was done before 370, when he was a priest. Six days of creation is specified here (Gen. 1:1-26). This lecture was made during a week of a Lenten season. In some days he addressed his audience both in the morning and in the evening. These speeches were considered precious in the East and the West. There are no writings in Greek literature comparable with these sweet speeches. St. Ambrose had used these homilies abundantly in his writings, related to the subject. The Latin translation of the same has been done around A.D. 440. Basil said clearly that he was not at all interested in indirect interpretation of Genesis works. Against the description of world by non-Christians and followers of Manichaeism, he attempted to give the real description of world, and to show the Creator behind creations. Many ideas were taken from Aristotle, Plato and Posidonius. The influence of Plotinus could also be traced from Basil's narration.

b. **Homilies on Psalms:** Based on various Psalms, 18 homilies are outspread in the name of Basil; out of which 13 are authentic. He proves that the aim of the preacher is not merely the exaggerated interpretation; instead it should be virtuous sayings. The Commentary on Psalms by Eusebius of Caesarea is cited widely in his homilies.

c. **Interpretation on Isaiah:** The homilies on Isaiah from chapters 1 to 16 are based on the Eusebius' commentary on Isaiah. Other than his homilies, 23 other speeches are also known to be in the name of Basil in which various subjects are discussed. Lectures made on the commemoration days of our Lord and other saints are praise-oriented as well as practical-oriented.

v. **Letters**

Basil's knowledge and language conversance are more evident in letters than in homilies. They became the models of letters. Once, a Nicobulus came to Gregory of Nazianzus requesting

sample letters. Gregory directed him to Basil. Basil gave him a collection of his letters. Benedictine monks of St. Moor published around 365 letters. Most of them were those letters sent to Basil by his contemporaries. This collection can be classified into three (1) written before being a Metropolitan (357-370), (2) written as a Metropolitan (370-378) which comprises two third of the collection and (3) period could not be ascertained. The activities of the 4th century Eastern Church, especially that of the Cappadocian Church could be understood easily from these letters. Letters are also classified as written to friends, recommendation letters, consolation letters, canonical letters based on moral and monastic values, theological letters, and letters on historical discussion.

vi. Liturgical Order

Gregory Nazianzus says that Basil tried to modify the liturgical order of Caesarea, even when he was a priest. People accused Basil that he renewed the liturgical order. In Greek Church, there is a Liturgical order named 'Liturgy of St. Basil'. His liturgy has prominent place also Sicily and Italy. It was translated to different languages. In 9th century St. Cyril and St. Methodius translated it into Slavonic language and in 987 St. Vladimir to Russian language. Coptic Liturgy of St. Basil is a shorter version in Greek.

Theology of St. Basil

Basil declared and taught Nicene Creed firmly against various Arian groups. This goal was the foundation of a lifelong friendship with Athanasius. Basil considered the Alexandrian metropolitan as a pillar of true faith. Further Basil told, "No one is allowed to add anything to the Nicene Creed. But we have only added the praising of the Holy Spirit, as per the advice of our Church Fathers." Basil could frame a theology of Trinity by crossing one step ahead of Athanasius.

Holy Qurbana

The partaking of the Holy Qurbana is explained in his letter written in 372 to a Patrician lady named Caesaria. It is said that, the laity could keep the elements of the Holy Qurbana in their house, if needed, for their communion. The partaking of the communion on every day, the belief of the presence of flesh and blood of Christ in bread and wine etc. are explained in this letter:

"To communicate each day and to partake of the holy Body and Blood of Christ is good and beneficial; for Jesus says quite plainly: "He that eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood has eternal life" (John 6:55). Who can doubt that to share continually in life is the same thing as having life abundantly? We ourselves communicate (receive the Eucharist at Mass) four times each week, on Sunday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday; and on other days if there is a commemoration of any saint. It were needless to point out that for anyone in times of persecution to be obliged, in the absence of a priest or deacon, to receive communion by his own hand is certainly not a serious offence, because long custom sanctions this practice in such cases. Indeed, all the solitaries in the desert (hermits), where there is no priest, reserving Communion at home, receive

it from their own hands. In Alexandria and in Egypt, everyone, even the laity, reserves Communion in his own home and receives by his own hand whenever he is pleased to do so. For when once the priest has completed the offering, and given it, the recipient, participating in it each time as entire, is bound to believe that he properly takes and receives it from the giver. And even in the church, when the priest gives the portion, the recipient takes it with complete power over it, and so lifts to his lips with his own hand. It has the same validity whether one portion or several portions are received from the priest at the same time.”

The assumption is that they have brought to their homes the consecrated elements, formerly bread, when there was no other means to receive Communion.

Confession

In olden days, confessors were separated from worshippers. Four types of confessors were discussed here: weepers (one who weeps outside the church), hearers (who are allowed to hear gospel and speeches only), prostrators (one who kneels down at the time of prayer), and standers (even though allowed to participate in worship, they are not allowed to accept Qurbana).

Basil and Monastic Life

Basil the great is the father of Greek monastic order. One who leads worldly life is worried due to different difficulties. But a hermit can lead his life through a relationship with God. Loneliness of Monastic life helps to destroy the roots of evil thoughts and to grow in sacredness. Monastery is a place where a group of people solely joined by divine unity. Basil could join the lonely life and communal life together. Basil established many monasteries and home for lonely people. Basil's group was a society which combined prayer, studies and work. Hermits have the responsibility to improve the growth of others while concentrating on the completion of their own life.

Basil and Social Works

Running away from world, rely on monastic life and making regular contacts with God are meant to return to the world with more strength. Being a perfect social worker, Basil could not hide in a cave or wall. Monastic life becomes complete, only when a hermit is able to serve poor and needy people. He taught that a monk should turn towards people who suffer from hunger and thirst and who bears ailments and pain. He criticized and blamed the rich and the hoarder.

Hunger is the most pathetic disaster, and death out of hunger is the most tragic death. The sharp edge of the sword ends our life in a minute; incisor of wild beast and burning fire is also the same. But hunger is a long and slow torment of hell. It is a never ending sacrifice. Death usually is an approaching and spreading disease; but in the case of hunger, it goes away. Body gets dehydrated and body temperature goes down. Body shrinks and its power losses. The colorless flesh adheres to the bone like cob web. As blood decreases, the brightness of skin reduces and it dries out. The body

paled of poverty becomes darker by scratches. The knee has no ability to hold the body. It can be moved only by external power. Sound is not coming out. Like dried nuts clung to its shell, weak and useless eyes are situated in cave like pits. The vacant and shapeless stomach shrinks and clings to the backbone. What do you think the punishment to one who passes by a hungry man, even without a loving glimpse?

You are not a miser. You won't grab anybody's belongings. But you treat, what is entrusted for others, as your own. Do we call a person who steals the gown of others as a thief? But if one is capable to dress up his naked brother and if he is not doing that, what shall we call him? The bread you hoard is owned by poor starving people. The clothe you wear is of naked people. The money you buried is of poor people. The slippers worn in your room is of barefooted. If you are capable to give and not giving, then you are guilty.

Shall I ask you, which reward you need? Is it the reward of your life time or after death? During your life time you were immersed in luxury, and reluctant to look at the poor. What a dead can do after death? Which of your deeds deserve rewards? Show your goodness and ask for rewards. Realize the fact that there is no time for pious life after death. If you give even a little, you receive a big reward. By giving food, you lighten the first sin; since Adam gave the right of sin to his descendants by breaking the rule. When we consider the hunger and need of our brothers, we punish the food which defeated Adam.

Basil didn't realize that rich people were these much misers and heartless. His heart was broken out of their actions without kindness and mercy

. He sold the property inherited from his father and distributed to the poor. He travelled around Caesarea, met the wealthy people and compelled them to donate food, clothes and wealth to the poor. If you take as much as you need for your living and donate the rest of your wealth to the poor, then there will not be any poor and rich. But nobody listened it. In all his lectures he motivated people against the lust of money. He said to the poor, "as you own nothing; lend to God what you own." He clearly taught that love and brotherhood are present more among the poor than the rich.

If you have only one piece of bread and a beggar knocks at your door, you lift up your hands to heaven and pray, "Lord! As you know only one piece of bread is here, hunger is hiding for me, but I hold your commands, more than anything. I give this simple food for my brother who is suffering from hunger. Won't you help your servant who is in need? I am relying on your kindness. I have faith in your mighty. Please do not turn your face from me. Kindly shower mercy upon me by thy goodwill." If you do this, the bread you donated in your poverty shall be turned into a prosperous harvest.

Basil had fed the poor by his own hands, he washed their feet, he travelled around the village wearing filthy clothes to visit the hungry people. He was entirely different from others.

That made him great. A fraction of mercy that the Heavenly Father showered through His Only Son, has been exhibited in his life which made Basil a saint. He is known as great. How different today's world is!

St. Gregorios of Nyssa

Biography

St. Gregorios (Gregory) is the third of the Cappadocian Fathers who is referred to as the 'Shining Star of Nyssa'. If Baselious, his elder brother was a workhorse and the loving Gregorios of Nazianzus an ardent orator, Gregorios of Nyssa, the younger, was an icon of divine character. He was known for his inner voice which spoke even in silence and his zealous spiritual outlook.

He was born to Basil the Elder, a renowned philosopher and teacher in rhetoric in Caesarea of Cappadocia and Emilia, a devout and pious woman around 335 A.D. His father and elder brother, Baselious the great took prime responsibility in his education. Gregory used to refer Baselious the great as his mentor and guide. He did not receive any higher education.

Gregory used to visit and stay at the monastery established by his brother Baselious the great quite often. His brother was always encouraging and inspiring him and thus he became a deacon. However, he soon turned away and became a tutor in rhetoric. During this time, it is rumoured that he married a woman named Theosebia. He soon realized that a worldly job and family life were not satisfying his inner spirit. It was during this time Gregory received letters from Baselious and his friend Gregory of Nazianzus. The contents of these letters made Gregorios to choose the life of an ascetic. He moved to a monastery on the shores of Iris. There his life was transformed through spiritual experiences and was enlightened. He had ample time to read, learn and write.

It was at that time Mor Basil appointed Gregory as the bishop of Nyssa, a small town near Caesarea. Gregory, who was a beginner in leading and negotiating, found it difficult to manage the ruling affairs as a bishop. However, he worked tirelessly to uplift the faith of the people and to keep the faithful in strict adherence to the faith established at the Council of Nicaea. This was not pleasing to the followers of Arianism and they indicted Gregorios from his position as bishop. He left Nyssa for a short while when his life was threatened. He returned to Nyssa on the death of Emperor Valencia, a staunch follower of Arianism. Gregorios was given a royal welcome by the faithful of Nyssa.

Gregorios was given the additional responsibility of the large diocese of Sebastia. He played a pivotal role along with his friend Gregorios during the Council of Constantinople in A.D.381. He was often invited to the emperor's palace at Constantinople as a state guest and spiritual advisor. Gregorios passed away in A.D.394 because of physical illness.

Writings and Contributions

The writings of St. Gregorios are known for their poetical beauty and spiritual richness. His works can be classified into five distinct categories: 1) Exegetical (Writings and Interpretations on the Holy Scriptures) 2) Theological (Writings and Interpretations on the Christian faith). 3) Spirituality and Ascetical writings, 4) Sermons and homilies 5) Correspondence (Letters).

His significant exegetical works include writings on the “Creation of Man”, “The Life of Moses”, and rhetoric on the Songs of Solomon. In his theological writings refutation of Eunomius and Apollinaris and book on Spirit and Resurrection are important. (Regarding his writings on ascetics, “On Virginity” is very popular).

It can be truly remarked that there has been none among the Oriental church fathers like St. Gregorios who has given a visionary remark and detailed discourse on human freedom. In his view, humankind has been bestowed with ability to be godly and this is evident in the creation of humans where God has given them freedom. The mystery of humans being created in the likeness and image of God indicates the fact that humankind is given stewardship in the freedom and grace of God.

St. Gregorios’ discourse on virginity highlights the need for inner spiritual renewal and growth. A portion of the homily is given below:

“We return to our true being and to whatever deserving, when we abolish everything inappropriate from us. This means that we are meant to return to the original state to which God created us. This initial state is having our being in likeness to God. However, to be in likeness to God is not governed by our own strengths and merits. It is the abundant mercy of God, for it is He who has granted us this image during creation. All that lies in our efforts is to remove the stains of sin from our lives and to let the spirit shine again in its original beauty to which God had created it to perfection.”

Excerpt from “The life of Moses”(Exodus) Written by Mor Gregorios

This is a lesson of illumination for every spiritual journey. Our spiritual food is the body of the lamb, whose blood was poured on the doorposts to grant us salvation from the angel of death. It is necessary to follow firm discipline, adherence and reverence when partaking in the body of the lamb. It shall not be in likeness to those who find delight at feast tables. Unfit dressing, impromptu feet and lazy hands shall not partake of this food. Nonetheless as a voyager, one shall prepare himself with the armour of the Lord – having his feet strapped with shoes, girdles for the loins and staff as shield against animals.

The flesh of the Passover Lamb is one prepared on fire without any other ingredient. It is to be eaten swiftly. The entire lamb except its inner portions is eaten up. Breaking the bones of the animal is to be understood in detail. Everything that remains is burnt in fire.

These lead us to profound thoughts regarding food habits and partaking of the Passover lamb. Is there a need to follow such strict discipline in having food? What difference does it make if the feet are revealed or covered with shoes? What difference does it make if the loins are girdled or loosened? Is it necessary to hold the staff? What if it is left resting?

It is necessary to study in detail of certain belongings of a voyager. The present life is momentary. We are lead to our passing away from our very birth itself. It is utmost essential to carefully prepare our hands and feet for this journey.

The shoes that cover exposed feet resemble guarding our feet and spiritual self from being wounded by thorns of sins of this world. Shoes symbolize a life of spiritual self-restraint and discipline. They trounce thorns, block and terminate sins that often enter our lives without our knowledge.

The inner robe that extends to the feet indicates orderly life style. The girdle to the loins represents a life of vigilance. The staff bears with it a message of hope. It strengthens and upholds the spirit in its weakness, and shields us from the evil that panics our soul. (Church Fathers teach that this represents the cross of our Lord).

The food prepared in fire is a symbol of faith. It is tender enough to be taken swiftly. Yet there are portions that are hard to consume. This portion that involves deep reasoning is given into the fire. Extreme curiosity is not attached to this portion.

What is the righteousness of God? What was the form before creation? What is outside the universe? Why is everything happening as it is now? We submit such matters beyond understanding to the Holy Spirit of God. As St. Paul remarks – ‘the spirit discerns everything, even unto the depths of God’ (1Cor. 2:10).

The word of God teaches us that fire signifies the Holy Spirit of God. Abandon efforts to understand what is concealed to human minds, that is, the hard bones of the sacrificial animal shall not be broken. There is no necessity to try to perceive of what is mysterious and hidden to us.

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Chapter - 3

MODERN CHRISTIAN FAMILY

History of Family

Family is an old institution which has its antiquity even from the beginning of human creation. Every culture and civilization has contributed its inputs to this institution. Likewise, all the different religious beliefs have their own conceptions regarding the peculiarities, sanctity and divinity of family. According to the Jewish and Christian traditions, the institution of family gains an uppermost position in the society. Christian marriage and family could be better comprehended only by understanding the mystery of Christ. As per the Bible accounts, marriage and family are bloomed in the Holy Salvific Act of God. The Book of Genesis portrays the story of the very first family on the earth. “So God made man; in the image of God He made him; male and female He made them. Then God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish

of the sea, over the birds of heaven, and over every living thing that moves on the earth”” (Gen. 1: 27,28). According to the Yahwistic tradition (J source), God first created Adam. Then the LORD felt that it was not good for the man to be alone; and thus He took one of Adam’s ribs and created a companion (helper) for him. When the first man saw his companion, he said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2: 23,24). This biblical perspective of marriage and family stands significant from the views of other cultures and doctrines. In Genesis, we could see the principle credo that ‘the relationship between man and women is established by God’. During the first wedding ceremony on the earth, it was God Himself who joined man and woman together; and thereby kindled a new family life. Therefore, whenever there is a wedding and the establishment of this holy institution, there occurs a process of sanctification by the grace of God. Even this notion was the stronghold of Israelite’s family life.

In the Bible, the marriage relationship of a man and a woman is compared to Yahweh’s relationship to Israel. As Israel, with a grateful heart, is obliged to submit themselves completely and wholeheartedly to Yahweh, a man and a woman are commissioned to dedicate each other mutually. Both of them should receive each other with mutual love and affection. According to the Old Testament, the fundamental core of marriage and family is the mutual dedication, love and respect of the wedded couple. This self-denying mutuality of man and woman is the attainment of the Salvific Act of God. Thus, the Bible illustrates that a couple will never be a part of the Salvific Act without their mutual love and dedication.

The Bible also gives an account of how this blessed relationship could be vitiated and mutilated by human sin. From the very moment itself when man and woman conjointly decided to sin against the divine commandment and provision, their relationship began to stagger. After eating the forbidden fruit, one person started to deny the other (Gen. 3:12). Adam who was supposed to love and nurture his wife had begun to dominate her (Gen. 3:16). At the same time instead of becoming her husband’s companion and helper, Eve became the key for his fall. Both of them tried to lead a successful life by keeping them away from God. Consequently, instead of attaining joy, happiness and satisfaction from their family life, they had to taste pain and mutual alienation. Hence, the Bible proves that when a couple begins to live together, the divine presence in their family is inevitable throughout in order for its joyful subsistence and nourishment.

The New Testament recognizes and reaffirms the Israelite concepts of marriage and family. God makes a new covenant with humans through His only begotten son Jesus Christ. Christ gave Himself completely to the church. He loved His bride, the church by pouring out His own blood and giving His own life on the cross. Nobody could measure the depth of His relationship with his church. It is a great mystery beyond human perception. Nevertheless, this mystery could be understood to a certain extent through the covenantal relationship of marriage. Family is an

archetype of the relationship between Christ and the church where mutual love, accord, trustworthiness, self-denial and dedication sustain for ever. The significant pericope of the Letter to Ephesians (5: 21-33) could be understood in relation to this. Just as Christ loved the church and the church maintains her trustworthiness to her bridegroom, Christian couples are owed to love each other, to keep mutual uprightness, and to dedicate themselves mutually.

Marriage and Family Life:A Divine Call

According to Christian belief, 'marriage and family' is a divine call to sanctity. In accordance with this call, every Christian has to ponder upon God in search of whether s/he has a true divine call and the necessary qualities in order to lead his/her family life successfully. Once a person has realized such call, s/he has to prepare himself/herself and to be very keen in choosing his/her partner. In this selection of one's companion, the material qualities of wealth, fame, external beauty etc. have to be given up so as to attain a sacrificial and trusted love, mutual respect, and to take independent decisions. In a marital relationship based on love which recognizes mutual humanness, the key factor is 'trustworthiness'. This mutual fidelity is inevitable so that the intimacy of both the families of the bride and the groom could be maintained, peace and integrity of the family could be sustained, and a future generation with clear social objective could be moulded. Only a matured couple with realistic wisdom is able to preserve the marital trustworthiness in their life. For this reason Jesus Christ stated that the institution of marriage and family is a divine call exclusively for those 'to whom it has been given' (Matt. 19:11). Our society, today, is in need of families who witness Christ in every sphere of their life, and live united until the end with mutual love and reliability even in situations of joy as well as sorrow.

The Sacrament of Matrimony anoints every couple with sufficient grace to fulfil their responsibilities for maintaining a sound familial relationship. Through this sacrament, the spirit of Jesus enters deeper into the hearts of the couple and strengthens their faith, hope and love. Hence, they are acquainted with the abilities to nurture their marital fullness, to become the mutual complimentary factors for their sanctity, and to worship God in unison. Furthermore, the sacrament of marriage helps them to realize this call as God's plan in their life and to respond to it accordingly. Sufficient training and regular preparation are essential for a proper response. Success in married life is not accidental, instead it has to be achieved through proper and practical conscience. Proper communication, resolution of issues, parental care and training, coping up of work and family intermutually, and maintaining relationship with relatives are some of the areas where one needs proper training. The sincere love of a couple has certain peculiarities, such as, it is human; it is sacrificial; it is reliable; and it is reciprocal. Moreover, their love gives birth to new lives; it is physical, emotional, spiritual, and a union of elements beyond nature. Nobody is allowed to enter into their privacy; it is exclusively meant for the couple.

The establishment of a healthy society depends on its basic element called family. The important fact is that family is the cradle of mutual love and support. It is the gathering of persons having blood relationship with different responsibilities to perform. We all are born in families

and it is our foundation. All of us have experienced the emotion of love for the first time from our family; and hence family is the place where one begins to experience all divine emotions. (God is love.) In whatsoever sectors we work today, a family atmosphere is inevitable in order that the divine love will exist there. The basic cause of various issues around us is the discord within our family. So one needs to understand that human family is the realization of a divine truth; i.e., the life of Triune God is depicted in it. The invisible life of the Trinity takes flesh in human family; where God the Father's love is visible in the love of parents towards their children, God the Son's love shadows the children's love towards their parents, and God the Holy Spirit's love binds husband and wife together. Literally, the Triune God is the core and foundation of human family.

Family is the unique arena of individuals' love, affection, intimacy and association. The couple learns not only physical sharing, but also their soul and spirit. Gradually they become firm in their unity and accord. Compassion, self-dedication, mutual understanding with patience, trustworthiness, reliability and nobility are the peculiarities of this relationship. Husband and wife have to renew regularly the spirit of the Sacrament of Matrimony so as to enrich themselves with these divine qualities.

Family receives life. It is the duty of the church to commission and prepare the couple to receive and celebrate a responsible motherhood and parenthood. Therefore, every couple is accountable to the church in obedience and obligation. The artificial separation of the act of love and the act of procreation is unlawful according to the Scripture. At the same time it is erroneous to abort the new-born life. Christian society must realize its importance. They have to accept both the emotion of love and procreation as the gifts of God.

Family is also the primary place of education. Indeed, it is a complex process which urges the united efforts of parents, instructors, and the entire society. The response of the children is vital in this endeavour. Only a family having good atmosphere could attain the prime goal of education which aims for human maturity and development based on Christian values. According to Mahatma Gandhi's famous opinion, "Every home is a university and the parents are the teachers."

Challenges Faced by Family

Family, the elementary component of every society, is challenged everywhere around the world by various factors. Many families are at the edge of extinction. Some of such challenges are internal, while others are external. Our society, like others, is also under the threat of the same situation. Medias report even daily about various domestic violence, intense sexual abuses, poverty stricken families, misuse and persecution of children, alcoholic and drug addiction, suicides, militant activities, robberies, murders and different types of exploitations.

The world and family travel in the same path. A family defines the world. In other words, the establishment of a sound world depends on the existence of a sound family; and in vice versa, a disturbed family creates a disturbed world. Family is the basic unit.

Society depends on family very much; but at the same time it influences every family immensely. The depth and negative impacts of social, economic, and psychological atmospheres affect the existence of each and every family. The main reason for the failure of familial relationships today is the unawareness of the heaviness of such modern influences on families. Therefore, everyone must try to recognize these factors as the challenges faced by families in this postmodern world.

Within a family, the negative qualities such as lack of communications, various provocations, uneasiness, detachments, exploitations and so on are increasing day by day. Depending on its social setting, every family is compelled to be submissive to various influencing factors, resulting in the destruction of its unity and harmony. The gap between the individuals increases predominantly; and they experience sleepless nights. The reasons for such unsoundness could be the unfortunate demise of a person, old age, alcoholic and drug addictions, physical illness, failure of job, sexual depression, or unexpected diseases. Most of the families are incapable of facing such troublesome situations. And at this juncture, such families have to depend on the help from their church, society, friends and relatives. Sometimes they would be in need of professional assistance such as family counselling in order for a reconciliation and resettlement of their relationship.

To a great extent, the lack of preparation results in the destruction of a familial relationship. In our society, individuals are hardly aware of such preparations. We should not ignore the fact that it happens in a society where everyone gets training for everything.

i. Embarrassing Changes

We live in a world where occur sudden changes. In 1970, Alvin Toffler, an American writer and futurist prophesied, "Like a wild wave, changes will occur vigorously with uncontrollable pace and unpredicted impacts." Changes are turning values and lifestyles upside down. Higher age of marriage, decreasing birth rate, increasing abortions, transition from joint family to nuclear family, increasing divorces, unemployment, culture of consumerism, ignoring the grownup and so on contribute enormously to the destruction of a healthy family life.

ii. Erroneous Concept of Freedom

This is an era of individual freedom. Obviously, the admiration of individual freedom has certain advantages. Yet it has to be evaluated that whether individual freedom contributes to a family constructively or destructively. Every member of a family should stand for its unity and concord. But when the individual freedom goes beyond its border, it becomes impudence resulting in discordance of family members and leads to divorce. The other consequences of the misuse of individual freedom are the hesitation to care the aged, strongly arguing for women freedom, independent and experimental marriages, physical abuses etc.

The wrong concept of sexuality is yet another challenge faced by the family. Sexuality is being considered today as an expression of enjoyment, joyfulness, entertainment, and amusement. It is also used as a means to defeating, bargaining, relaxing, punishing, and exploiting. However, it

is the responsibility of the church to aware the young generation regarding the sacredness of sexuality in family life as well as the importance of keeping mutual trustworthiness and respect among partners. Pre-marriage Counselling Courses will be helpful in this regard.

Married life or family life is a continuous psychological negotiation. It is unavoidable in order to develop a satisfactory relationship. When a married couple face those challenges boldly and respond to it with a united heart, then only they will success in their life.

iii. Abuses

A research is required in another area of family life where various types of abuses are prevalent. Because of different reasons or motives, everyone in a family from the youngest to the eldest has become the culprit and victim of physical as well as mental exploitation. Verbal abuses are being done as a means of oppression, harassment, blaspheming, and humiliation. It is a fact that *words* are strong enough to hurt one's emotions very deeply. Many families today are undergoing such kind of abuses where children try to rebuke their parents and vice versa. Scoffing, scolding, deliberately insulting, accusing etc. are other ways in which one can injure others by words.

iv. Culture of Consumerism

Today, the culture of consumerism reigns every society all around the world. In order for luxury and extravagance, people go behind purchasing things on credit card or loan even without considering their financial setup. This has become a culture nowadays. Only those things which are enjoyable and utilizable are considered good and significant. Unfortunately, children as well as the aged are considered as hindrance to lead an enjoyable life, and they are neglected and avoided. This is an indication of the entry of this culture into family life.

v. Negative Influence of Media

Media (television, cinema, internet, mobile phones, newspapers, social media etc.) creates a new culture. This new culture disgraces the sanctity of familial values such as mutual trust, concord, oneness, sharing, and commitment. Moreover, it portrays these marital values as obstacles of individual growth and freedom as well as burden of life. Besides, media discusses various matters which obstruct the peaceful life of family members. They influence them widely resulting in negative consequences. Therefore, media workers are responsible for avoiding all innovative activities which may disturb the sustenance and equilibrium of family life.

vi. Globalization

Globalization imports not only commodities, but some immoralities too. It also introduces a culture which disrupts the rhythm of ethical standards and familial values. Same-sex marriage (gay marriage), abortion, euthanasia (mercy killing), independent behaviour of spouses, premarital sex, extramarital affairs, etc. are some of the examples. Our economy is fluctuating always because of globalization; and its aftereffects are faced mainly by farmers who comprise 70% of the population. The victims of such exploitation, the common people, have to undergo the bondage of mental agony and unrest, and thereby end up their life in suicide. The percentage of suicide in Kerala is far ahead when comparing to the other states.

In the context of familial degradation, the biblical based instructions of the church seem to be a suitable guideline for the entire humanity. As we all are created by God who Himself is love, we are called to love each other. The church proclaims the basic reason for human glory that we are created in the own image of God. It is in family where every individual's glory has to be accepted primarily. Else, it would create negative impacts not only in individual's personality, but also in the entire family's nature. The basic foundations of the unity, concord and beauty of a Christian family are two relationships, such as, the relationship between the couple, and the relationship between the parents and children.

Family: The Foundation of Life

In a family, parents demonstrate the personality of God to their children, especially during their childhood. God's love is materialized through parents. The church instructs about the value of human life even from the initial stage of pregnancy. Whatsoever receives first will last forever. Parents are obliged to develop both the physical and spiritual life of their children. They are the first evangelists to their children. It is supposed to be done not by their mere words, but by implementing the divine love in their daily activities.

Family: A Domestic Church

According to the context of the early church, this particular attribute of family – a domestic church – is significant. The early church was family-centred; and it was established in the framework of family. In Ephesus, the church was founded at the house of the couple Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16:5); and in Colossia, it was started at the house of Philemon (Phil. 4:22; Philem. 1:2). John Chrysostom invites everyone, "Make your homes the church." Obviously, a Christian family is a portrait of the church where Christ is the head and the members of the family its body. And if there is no faith, there is no church. Therefore, every member has to live in mutual faith in order to make the family a church.

The church has its viewpoints and outlook regarding the mission and role of parents in a family. Parents are the first messengers of the Gospel through educating their children and by making themselves a witness. They are supposed to sustain their family alive by gradually developing its spirituality through family prayer, Bible reading and meditation. The day-to-day activities of the parents, whether it is in home or in society, would remain as a witness in front of their children; and it becomes the foundation for the development of the children. Parents pour out faith to children through their own lives. Since the learnings of the children in their childhood will remain for ever, the 'family evangelism' or 'gospel teaching' should be a decision from the part of the parents. Hence, a Christian family should be a place where the Word of God is regularly proclaimed and a space where divine love is being experienced. Moreover, family determines the future of the church and the world. It is the entrance of a person's historical appearance. Family should be maintained as the core of life.

Spirituality of Family

The spirituality of a family is based on the smooth accomplishment of its daily marital and familial responsibilities. Spirituality of a family should give priority to relationships. Divine love and human love must go hand in hand. It has to be the occasion of complete dedication, submission and gratefulness to the Eternal Father by considering the situations of joyfulness, sorrows, celebrations and departures as God's loving interventions. Thus the family could grow in spirituality. Family is the essential element in the mission of the church for the establishment of the Kingdom of God on the earth.

In a Christian family, the primary responsibility of parents is to create an atmosphere of love. The deepness of parent's love never let the children go astray. Love is not dangerous. In the parable of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:11-32), even though the son insulted his father and went away, it was only because of his father's love, patience and prayer that the son came back. Parents have to choose the appropriate way in which they could express their love; there are no other alternatives. They are advised to behave accordingly depending on the stages of the physical as well as psychological developments of their children. Proverb says, "He who spares the rod hates his son" (13:24); and "Do not withhold instruction from a child, for if you should strike him with a rod, he would not die; for you shall strike him with a rod and deliver his soul from death" (23:13,14). And St. Paul instructs that the Christian life of children should nurture in the charming love of parents (Col. 3:21; Eph. 6:4). It is also understood from the Letter of St. Paul to Titus that parents should be great models while advising their children (Tit. 2:6-8). Moreover, parents must pray for their children like Job (Job 1:5).

Joyful Family

According to Leo Tolstoy, "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." If a Christian family like to be joyful, it has to develop a character based on fundamental principles. The good traditions and customs developed from such basic qualities would decorate one's family with delight and peace. A detailed study has to be made regarding the ways through which a Christian family could experience spirituality, unity and satisfaction.

The qualities of a joyful family are praying together, eating together, communicating together, spending time and resources together, trying to maintain mutual faithfulness and respect, granting freedom and privacy to children as they grow, realizing the mutual responsibilities, and maintaining hospitality.

A good family accepts Jesus as its master. The members consult each and every important familial matters with their master in prayer. In dusk and dawn, everyone joins together for family prayer and dedicates themselves to the mighty hands of the Lord. The foundation of the worship of a Christian family is the concept that 'God is their father'. When the entire family recognizes themselves as the sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father and love each other, then only that family becomes the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Praying individuals gather up a praying

community. The domestic church becomes much prosperous through its prayerful life, Bible reading, meditation, singing of hymns and intercessory prayers.

Apart from that, if everyone in a family could gather together, at least for a single meal daily, it would certainly be helpful for the sustenance of its unity and concord. Special attention should be given for their mutual interaction while eating.

Today, there are very few people who think about and consider the seriousness and sanctity of marriage. Priority is given to material provisions and pomp while selecting one's partner. Those who realize and learn the responsibilities of marriage commissioned by God could experience the divine fullness in their lives. Prayer, preparation and learning are essential to achieve this. Marriage is a call and a sacrament to participate in the divine love of Christ.

The church firmly affirms the following facts such as 'marriage is the symbol of the relationship between Christ and his Church'; 'the mutual acceptance of the partners initiates their marriage'; and 'the qualities of procreation, trustworthiness and indivisibility decorate their family life'. Marriage is a contract between man and woman, i.e., the representation of the covenant between Christ and his Church. It is a salvific, complete, fruitful and everlasting union of two individuals; the union of love and life. It is a relationship between husband and wife as well as between the couple and God. The ability of human beings to participate in the artistic work of God to create human beings in His own image is sacred. Husband and wife have to dedicate this ability mutually and receive the granted one. And this is the core of the marriage covenant.

The mysterious unity of Christ and his Church, and the unity of husband and wife have close association. It is this relationship which enablesthe act of marriage to gain the status of sacrament.

Biblical Basis

In the Old Testament, the relationship between Yahweh and His people, Israel is explained through the marital relationship between man and woman. Thus marriage has been elevated to a divine position. On the other hand, in the New Testament the sacramental significance of marriage is explained through the Letters of St. Paul. The Letter to Ephesians elucidates the nature of spousal love. St. Paul instils the couple that their mutual love should be similar to the love of Christ who accepted the church as his bride, loved her and gave himself up for her, suffered and died for her. Likewise, husband and wife should love each other unselfishly and dedicate one another wholeheartedly (Eph. 5:21-33).

Marriage is a contract. Like any other contracts marriage also begins with mutual consent. The ultimate aim of marriage is to love each other and to procreation through mutual sharing. Marital love is divine, i.e., a transformation occurs during the Holy Sacrament of Matrimony. It is not external, but internal. It never aims for material benefits. Through the Holy Sacrament the baptized man and woman declare their mutual love in public, and thereby taking the responsibility to witness the love of Christ in their lives. Only when their life is shaped in the love of Christ,

then only their marriage becomes valid, meaningful and fruitful. The inspiration for this love is internal; and it is attained through the Sacrament of Marriage. The internal transformation of husband and wife, achieved by the Sacramental blessings, would reflect in their outward relationship too. Marriage becomes a valid sacrament only when the couple weds each other according to the tradition of the church. Then it becomes the visible representation of the love of Christ.

Peculiarities of Marital Love

- i. It is human. Human love attains its fullness. Never rooted in mere sexual emotions, it makes the couple blessed and enables them to lead their life in accordance with the expressions of the Sacrament of Marriage.
- ii. It is divine. The divine love equips the couple to dedicate each other freely and respectfully.
- iii. It is complete. Married couple dedicates one another completely; nothing is to hide from the partner. They have to share anything and everything mutually as Jesus loved his church and gave her even his last drop of blood. No place for selfishness in this relationship; the attitude of oneness has to be developed, i.e., ‘not I, but we’, and ‘not mine, but ours’.
- iv. It grows and develops gradually. It is not static; but it matures through mutual sharing and empowers them to have mutual freedom.
- v. It is fruitful. They love each other, but their love never ends within themselves. Instead it gives birth to future generations. Any marital relationship without this intention is invalid. They are supposed not only to love each other, but also to give birth to their offspring.

God has entrusted the married couple to continue His creation process (Gen. 1:28). The gift of sex is given for that. Sexuality is a divine gift which is sacred and loving (Gen. 3:16). It is the totality of human abilities granted by God to pour love and to give birth. And this responsibility is given only to the couple. Hence, sexuality is the expression of their mutual love, sharing and dedication. They should not have the negative feelings of sex as sinful or forbidden.

Divorce: A Sinful Act

Christian marriage is a sacrament. It is the sacrament which enables married couple to love and to procreation, and thereby witnessing the love of Christ. It is the *modus operandi* for the purification of both parents and children which could not be separated. Every culture and society accepts marriage as an unavoidable act for the union of man and woman. The man-woman relationship which demands wholehearted love affirms the moral statement, “One wife for one husband”. When Adam identifies Eve as ‘the bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh’ (Gen. 2:23), the concept of monogamy is described. The same thought is depicted when the relationship of God and Israel is compared to that of a married couple.

The New Testament explains the 'oneness of marriage'. The commandment of Jesus says, "...what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt. 19:6). With clear explanations, Jesus nullifies the Torah of Moses which demands divorce because of adultery (Mark 10:2-12). Further he says that it is the order even from the beginning of creation that 'the two shall become one flesh' (Matt. 19:5). Besides, St. Paul instils, "A wife is not to depart from her husband" (1 Cor. 7:10). All these biblical references point towards the oneness of marriage. The marital relationship, which begins from the divine love and sustains in the model of Jesus's union with his church, has to maintain that model throughout. It is a fact that eventhecommunities which allow divorce because of the failure of unity, concord and peacefulness, neither encourage it nor accept it ethically.

Drawbacks of Divorce

- i. Divorce destroys the elements essential for the development of couple – their mutual love, unity and sharing.
- ii. Divorce impacts the children negatively that they have to face an inexplicable void.
- iii. For the existence of a noble society, stronghold families are necessary. Then only the proper education and discipline of future generation will be possible.
- iv. The foundation of marriage is the never-ending love of Jesus and his church. As the union of Christ and his church sustains for ever, marital union is also supposed to endure eternally. But divorce ends up this 'mystical union' (as explained by St. Paul), and thereby strain the individual relationship of the couple towards his/her church and traditions.

A Christian married life is not a single sacrament; rather it is the conjoining of other sacraments. Other sacraments like the Holy Qurbana and the Holy Confession play vital roles in fulfilling the Holy Sacrament of Matrimony. The Holy Communion influences Christian marital life to a great extent and makes it a path for the couple to attain eternal glory.

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Chapter - 4

INFLUENCE OF MASS MEDIA IN CHRISTIAN LIFE

“Then the word came to the king of Nineveh; and he rose from his throne, removed his robe, and put on sackcloth, and sat upon ashes. And it was proclaimed and spoken in Nineveh by the king and by his great men, saying, “Let not the men, cattle, oxen, or sheep taste anything, eat, or drink water.” (Jonah 3:6-7)

In ancient times the kings used to instruct their subjects through public announcements. The king’s men read the royal declaration aloud on busy streets; and they beat huge drums in order to catch public attention. Some tribal communities used musical instruments to communicate ideas. This could be considered as the beginning of public communication.

Definition of Media

The various means we use to convey an idea are regarded collectively as media. This comprises all the methods of communication beginning from the ancient musical instruments to the modern electronic equipment.

Role of Mass Media

Media holds significant position in today’s society. At the same time it could lead people in right path as well as wrong direction. Media functions as a sword with two sharp edges. In this background, those who approach media should go further only with consciousness of discernment, i.e., the ability to differentiate between what is to be accepted and what is to be rejected. We could not rely on every media today. A person who depends exclusively on a single media may miss the truth. Therefore, we should approach only those media who keep their ethics firmly.

In general, the primary duties of media are to know, to inform, to educate, to delight, to detail incidents, to aware and so on. Lead society in the right path, provide appropriate insights, and guide in the right sense of direction are also its responsibility. It is natural that human beings are curious to know and to spread news. Even the Bible accounts several incidents of transmitting news. The good news of the birth of Jesus was heard by four groups of people. The entire Jewish community, who all were expecting their Saviour, could not hear the news; rather it was only communicated only to St. Mary, the shepherds, the Magi (wise men), and Herod. And the same news created four different responses. It was propagated by heavenly angels.

Negative Role of Media

Prime importance is given to those mass media which transmit real and true news. Media is designated as the ‘fourth pillar of democracy’. The modern democratic society considers media as equal to the position of legislature, executive and judiciary. Media has to undertake this great responsibility and function accordingly. And the society’s response to the reported news should

come out of careful and mature thinking. We, the public, usually respond to it emotionally. In this rapidly changing world, media not only broadcasts information and news, but also it creates responses with deliberate efforts. Today, the news appears in the larger screen of television to the minute screen of mobile phones, which penetrate directly into human minds. Unlike the previous decades, media is not keeping its carefulness, attention, enthusiasm and accuracy – a state of revealing every secrecy where nothing is kept hidden or scrutinized. And it forgets the fact that it is being watched by people in different age groups, having dissimilar level of mental consciousness with distinct realms of living situations.

The unhealthy competition between several broadcasting agencies may result in telecasting the news in an immature manner. A crime happens somewhere, but its response would be raised by each and every viewers. Because of the technological developments, the reporters could present in rapidity whatever they have seen or more, figuratively. It is very difficult to obstruct this dangerous advancement. Moreover, mass media (mass communication companies or broadcasting agencies) are highly-invested businesses which in return offer immense profit as well as fame. As a result, they forget the primary lessons of broadcasting.

The statement of C.P. Scott, the well-known British journalist, publisher and politician, is relevant even today. He argued that the “primary office” of a newspaper is accurate news reporting, saying, “Comment is free, but facts are sacred”. However, today we have several examples of distorting the truth, sensationalizing the reality, and commercializing the projects.

Precisely, we have to say that mass media misguide the public. The victims of the ‘media effect’ include people who consider the stories of serials as real life to those who do not believe the existence of life beyond the deeds of human gods. On one side there stands those media which cultivate aggressive nature in children and make them inactive; while on the other stands those media which spoil human psyche and mislead the younger generation by exhibiting naked human body. Such media crime is countless. Visual media leads the ladder in misguiding the public followed by print and audio. These crimes will end up the public in murder, suicides, divorce and spendthrift.

Sacred Values

The values and relations which we have considered sacred are changed now. Mass media, which is supposed to be the messengers of virtues, has become the agent of destruction. They cause mental distress and dilemma by entertaining and startling the minds of audience. Even the familial relationship gets transformed. Man separates what God has joined together. Children forget the Bible verse, “Obedience is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam. 15:22). Besides, media encourage the use of alcohol and drugs. The picture is more vulgar when anything and everything could be sold and supplied in the name of fashion, which is accompanied and motivated by advertisements.

The time reserved for education, livelihood and worship is being stolen by media. People spend hours before television, but blindly. Though the common man streams from channel to channel for hours, but ends up with nothing learned.

First of all, we must understand that every programme we watch through media is deliberately and carefully prepared by a group of professionals. It is not real life; but it has several good and bad elements related to life. Therefore, we need a careful selection. No one should be afraid of choosing watching programmes, especially through media.

Sometimes media pollute languages. Because of its influence, there occurs deformity in the style and expression of language. Most of our body language is formed in accordance with the influence of media.

However, media is not troublesome entirely. The former American President, Thomas Jefferson reminds us, "The press is the best instrument for enlightening the mind of man, and improving him as a rational, moral and social being." Media has to transform themselves in order to fulfil this aim. Doing anything and everything for profit is not a good journalism.

Media: A Good Teacher

Media must keep the inner conscience of the nation. The public interest should be reflected through it. At the same time it has the responsibility to purify the entire society. Diverse and active media is a public property of a nation. Media points out possibilities, solutions, and compensations for various issues around the globe. Media also plays a vital role in proposing policies and in their implementations. Yet, they are facing a lot of challenges today. Apart from telecasting 'breaking news' and 'sensational headlines', they have to participate in nation building and to propagate valuable standpoints.

Media has the responsibility to introduce ideas for discussion without prejudice and to propose them fearlessly. Newspaper media must maintain high moral values and work hard to sustain the well-being of the society. Both the aim and the way should be right alike.

Newspapers are available only to 14% of the Indian population. Nearly nine crores of the printed newspapers are sold out every day. Nevertheless, the other media are better available to huge number of population than newspapers. Unfortunately, such media play significant role in misleading the public. Who will correct them? They have to correct themselves. If not, the public should have the courage to avoid such media. Beyond commercial equations and interests, individuals and groups must think about the moral benefits of media.

In a society, media has to play the role of a good teacher. The American historian, Henry Adams saying has become common statement that, "A good teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops." It is a prolonged influence from generations to generations. A society which turns towards good media will receive this effect. The receiver must be courageous and openness to choose the right media.

According to the principles of communication, receiver gains prominent priority like the other components of communication such as sender, media (message) and response. Even though they are important in the process, most of the times receivers fail to maintain adequate media consciousness.

Bravery, honesty and interest in social transformation are the siblings of value based communication. Apart from the mere process of formation of opinions, media and its crew should grow to a level of liberation similar to the concept of the statement, "Truth will set you free". Likewise any other activities, media also needs to have a human face. We need a reliable and tolerant media culture which responds positively and stands along with justice and righteousness. Mahatma Gandhi said, "A fearless journalism is possible only when the fearless voice of conscience is presented gently." Newspaper certainly is the 'fourth estate'. It is a strong power; and misusing this power is obviously a crime.

Positive Influence of Media

- i. The significant role of media is to enlighten the people. They could be entitled as the strong and supportive pillar of democracy. It warns the government and political leaders, and collects public opinion. The public came to know about the recent corruption in India only through public media.
- ii. Media tries to sustain the harmonious setting of a society, especially in the context of a religious pluralistic nation like India.
- iii. Media contributes widely in the field of education.
- iv. Media interferes strongly in social issues and stands as powerful armour against social evils.
- v. Media intensively influences for the sustenance of our environment. In a context where our cultivable lands are being exploited, media takes a stronghold stand to protest against such cruelties.
- vi. Media takes the initiative to help and support those who suffer because of natural calamities like drought, flood, or earthquake. They also encourage others to participate in such rescue activities.

Negative Influence of Media

If the media, which is supposed to interfere in any issues actively and righteously, propagates untruth or exaggerations, no doubt, it would lead the society into a wrong direction.

i. Politics of Media

Unlike ancient times, today every media is associated with political interests in one way or the other. Though they are supposed to analyse facts sincerely without prejudice, they become the ladle of political parties or persons with vested interests. Some people utilize media for attaining their hidden motives. Therefore, facts are being distorted in accordance with their selfish agendas. For example, Nazism and Fascism, as history witnesses used media only for propagating their ideologies. The pioneers of media business like Rupert Murdoch and other

owners of journals and television channels consider media as a means for protecting their vested interests. Most of the political parties today have their own channels and dailies; and these media could not survive without propagating the interest of their respective parties.

ii. Profit Intended Activities

The main aim of the commercialization of media is to gain better profit. Its social commitment is questioned because of this. Since advertisements are the major source of its income, every media goes behind them. And it resulted in a drastic change from media responsibility to advertisement responsibility. In order to satisfy the sources of advertisements, most of the times media deviates from its ethical values. It is the public who are being cheated by media through its presentation of the fascinating prices and favours of various products. And the advertisements ultimately aim for getting the attraction of viewers through its eloquent statement and visuals without evaluating anything objectively.

iii. Constructing News

By introducing the 24 hours news channels, media aims for telecasting every incident around the globe in every hour with much rapidity. But it is not necessary that every hour has new incidents. If an accident happens, while the ordinary people try to rescue the victims, the news reporters compete themselves to telecast it first through their channel. Several incidents in Kerala are proved to be exaggerated by media.

iv. Problem in Preference

Usually media gives preference to 'sensational' incidents than the touching issues of the public. It is pitiful that the discussions and debates telecasted by media never maintain justice to the daily life of the public. In order to increase its rating, media is interested to show the privacy of some film celebrities, their love and illegal connections etc. We cannot blame the public when they think that the media ethics is being surrendered. It is the failure of today's media to portray the costumes of celebrities as the signs of public courtesy and conduct.

v. Non-accountability of Media

In the beginning, communication projects were under the control of certain agencies like Associated Press (A.P), United Press International (U.P.I.), and Reuters etc. But today the situation is different that anyone could create news and telecast it. Consequently, social accountability of media has diminished enormously. Without considering their ethical values, majority of media are in search of their new equations of survival. When media try to please the governing authorities or elite communities, it is quite natural to deviate from its basic principles and values.

vi. Work within a Framework

Media could be the prompting inspiration of today's culture. If media could advance themselves by accepting timely changes and perform accordingly, the public will accept it as the 'new voice of change'. It will encourage the people to develop good conduct and positive attitude.

But today, media works according to its vested interest. It gives a wrong message to the society. Media never tries to accept reality when they present the routine, costumes, or food of a minority group as those of the entire society. Scholars opined that today's advertisements and serials will result in the degradation of moral values. We should not forget the fact that the younger generation accepts wrong model from this. To certain extent, this kind of media culture is one of the reasons for family issues today.

vii. Health as a Causality

Today, many people felt that media affects our health; not directly, but indirectly. Health is being affected mainly of those who have the habit of eating while watching visual media. Such people are addicted to the media and spend prolonged hours in front of it, but consuming fried chips and other foods without considering their appetite. Laziness and wastage of time are also its aftereffects. If the heroes of television programmes have the habit of smoking and drinking, no doubt, it would influence children negatively. Though the visual media gives warning against such visuals, in reality it is of no use.

viii. Cultural Imperialism

Every society has its own culture; where one's behaviour, dress code and food are a part of it. But today we live in a world of cultural globalization. It results in mistreating one's culture and its values. It is not a part of good conduct to consider one culture inferior to the other.

ix. Hyper Reality

Media has to become the mirror of the world, i.e., to present things as it is. The artificial portrayal of celebrities (presenting them as supernatural) would influence the society negatively. Today, the 'Reality Shows' are being telecasted with extra enthusiasm, which may result in inviting harmfulness rather than benefits.

x. Increased Tolerance for Violence

Modern studies prove that media influences at least indirectly towards creating violence in our society. The live telecasting of violence, the increasing cruelties in movies, and the modern techniques used for trapping enemies would sow the seeds of hatred and evil even in the minds of small children.

xi. Internet: The Web Trap

'Science is my shepherd; it makes me lie down in the pastures of computer programmes; internet restores my soul' – seems to be the prayer of several students today. Internet is full of several traps. Even the small children today are under the clutches of internet and mobile phones. Friendship which begins from a mere missed call would lead into wrong paths. Sexually explicit pictures and videos would lead young generation into the depths of immorality and depression. Parents should be aware of the fact that in the recent crimes and treacheries mobile phones and internet were the main culprits.

Christian Values and Media Discrepancy

You have studied about Christian values and behavioural patterns in plus one grade. In this session, let us examine whether media has any influence on Christian values.

Christian Values	Changes due to Media Influence	
1.	Love	Hatred
2.	Peace	Violence
3.	Truth	Falsehood
4.	Contentment	Greed
5.	Social Welfare	Profit Making

Christian ethics teaches us to love even our enemies. In contradiction, a generation influenced by media, is growing up with hatred and violence. Christians, the followers of their Master who prayed for His enemies while crucifixion, should aware of this media trap.

Jesus came to the earth by offering His peace to all. If we, his followers, propagate violence and hatred instead of peace, we must have to realize the fact that media has played a vital role in transforming us. The unwanted preference given to criminals directly or indirectly encourages violence. Media tries to hide the truth or to exaggerate it in favour of their selfish motive. When we notice the broadcasting of our church issues in Kerala, we can easily understand the abovementioned fact. Some media, in order to protect their vested interests hide the facts and propagate untruth as truth.

Our conscience is being prepared to buy all those things we see on media advertisements. As a result, instead of giving thanks to God for all his blessings, we become greedy and haughty to attain all such material goods, even though they are not essential.

When media functions only for reaching commercial feasibility, their priority is to make profit instead of social commitment. This influences the public negatively, and develops a behavioural pattern to neglect social well-being and encourages profit making.

Media has vested interests and motives. They are against Christian values. We are living in an era of scientific and technological advancements where new channels are being established on daily basis. These channels neither consider media ethics nor keeping their standards in outlook and sincerity. Media is the tongue of truth. Unfortunately, at least for some occasions, it deviates from its path. Those who create false news, spoil the ethics and morality of entire media.

Media Ethics

Every society has its own values and ideologies. Likewise there are some basic principles which control media. The most important among them is the principle of social welfare, based on social ethics. Printing press during its initial decades functioned according to its ethics and values. Before independence, some of the newspapers in our country used to encourage truth and nonviolence. Unfortunately, today's media concept is entirely different from that. When liberalization, globalization and privatization influenced every sphere of human involvement, media also has become its servant. Thus the society today witnesses the ethical deviation of the 'fourth pillar of democracy', media.

Rational Approach to Media

It is impossible to avoid media from our day to day life. But we could better try to develop a rational approach by responding actively to the incidents happening around us. We have to be bold enough to evaluate media critically and to realize its profit motives. An independent assessment should be done regarding the influence of media on society. Moreover, we have to develop a rational and careful approach towards media. Therefore, whenever we approach media, we should:

- i) realize which media is right and which is wrong,
- ii) be selective in choosing programmes and reading articles,
- iii) recognize its vested motives and evaluate it critically,
- iv) not be attracted towards faulty advertisements,
- v) manage our time especially when we deal with visual media like internet,
- vi) give up unwanted messages, phone calls, mails etc.,
- vii) not expose our privacy before media,
- viii) understand whatever we see and hear are not completely true.

A Word to Parents

Majority of parents complain that mobile phones and internet mislead children to a wider extent. In such context, a small advice to parents is that they should not forget the fact that a healthy family atmosphere stands as a shield to protect any external influences. Certainly, modern mass media creates huge dilemmas today. But above all, the approach of its user determines its aftereffect. So parents have to be careful in nurturing a generation having proper wisdom and maturity. Children who have learned a life of morality and prayer will never go astray. As we see in Christian families today, deciding the time of prayer in relation with television serials or movies would convey a wrong message to children.

Conclusion Majority observes media as a means which encourages education and imparts knowledge. Surely, it functions accordingly. But the media that tries to hide or exaggerate the

truth spoils its ethical values and social commitment. It may lead to increasing violence, insecurity and anarchy. Media should aim for the achievement of an ethically developed objective. Christian life should be nurtured in Christian values. Not only modern media, but also the teachings of our Church Fathers, the moral values of our tradition, and the biblical oriented instructions of our church may help us to attain this goal.

Further Projects

- i. Evaluate a television programme which deals with women and their issues. Notice carefully how the media deals with violence against women.
- ii. Collect a recent news related to our church reported in different newspapers. Make an assessment of their approaches.
- iii. Compare and contrast the ethical values of a commercial channel and a religious channel.

Chapter - 5

PECULIARITIES OF THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Introduction

The Syrian Orthodox Church, the ancient church in the world established by our Lord Jesus Christ, is blessed with many peculiarities. The meaning of the term 'orthodox' is 'true faith'. The true faith doctrines of the apostles which overcame several heresies are being followed by the church even today. As St. John mentions, "...worship in spirit and truth" (Jn. 4:24), it is essential for the church to sustain its true faith.

The early church, established in Jerusalem, was scattered to various places right after the death of Stephen. The majority of the early Christians from Jerusalem migrated to Antioch, and subsequently Antioch became the centre for Christian activities. It was at Antioch that the disciples were first called 'Christians' (Acts 11:26). St. Peter, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, took the responsibility of the church in Antioch and established his throne there in A.D. 37. The mission centre of the early church was at Antioch (Acts 14:26,27). The worship tradition and true faith of the early church was followed by the Antiochian congregation. Since the Holy Syrian Orthodox Church maintains and lives in this faith tradition, it is also known as the Antiochian Church. This chapter is a brief account of some of the significances of the Syrian Orthodox church.

i. Episcopal Church

Episcopal Church means a worshipping community centred on an Episcopa (Bishop/Elders). Every individual parish is under the jurisdiction of Episcopa. He is the symbol of divine authority and the protector of true faith of the church. St. Ignatius of Antioch said, "Where there is an episcopa, the church is complete there; and where there is no episcopa, the church is

incomplete.” The consent and recognition of the episcopa is necessary for any mission of the church. And that is why we cannot accept the congregations which do not have an episcopate.

In the church, episcopa signifies the apostolic succession. The authoritative centres of the early church were the apostles (Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:19). Since they had seen, heard and learned directly from Jesus, they became the centres. Therefore, the permission and consent of the apostles were inevitable for the functioning of the early church (Acts 15:24; Gal. 1:9). They give their authority to episcopas through ordination by laying their hands on their heads (1 Tim. 4:14). Hence, the unbroken apostolic succession is one of the greatest peculiarities of our church.

ii. Position of Peter and His Special Entrustment

The priesthood and episcopate of the church are closely related to the special commissioning of Peter. In the early church, the apostolic community bear special position and entrustment as seen in Mk. 8:29; Matt. 8:21; Lk. 12:41 and Jn. 21:15-17. The church is founded on the rock of faith (Matt. 16:18). Christ has given Peter the special name ‘Kepha’ and entrusted him His mission and church. Therefore, Peter is the centre and leader of the apostles. Like all the other apostles participate in the mission of Peter, all the episcopas of the church participate in this very mission. Hence, every Patriarchs of Antiochian throne is the successor of Peter. In what so authority Peter remains as the head of the apostles, in that same authority every Patriarch remains as the head of episcopas. The Antiochian throne is interpreted in this context. Besides, the special designation of Peter and his authority are well elucidated in the liturgy and tradition of the Syrian Orthodox Church.

iii. Worship Centred

One of the main significances of our church is that it gives priority for worship centred spirituality. Worship is the exhibition of the entire expression of the church. Having a well-ordered liturgy helps us to stand differently from other church communities. The fundamental obligation of humanity is to give unceasing praise and worship to the Almighty. This theological viewpoint is the basis of our liturgy. We could comprehend the liturgy of Syrian Orthodox Church through the following descriptions.

- a) The central focus of the liturgy is the Holy Qurbana (Holy Mass / Holy Eucharist). All worship services and sacraments are getting fulfilled only through the celebration of the Holy Mass. Hence, the Holy Qurbana is known as ‘the liturgy of liturgies’. In the New Testament, the term ‘church’ designates those believers who gather together to participate in Holy Mass (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:18-30). Church is complete only where the celebration of the Eucharist is being done; and it is incomplete where there is no Eucharistic celebration. Holy Qurbana is the re-enactment of our Lord’s human incarnation.
- b) The liturgy of our church is the interpretation of the Bible. Therefore, it is the ministry of word. Our liturgy comprises biblical ideas, incidents and personalities. This inseparable relationship of the Word and the liturgy helps the faithful to participate in the Word and the liturgy simultaneously.

- c) Liturgy is also the theology of our church. The prayers and songs of our church reflect the biblical and theological aspects even from the beginning of creation until redemption. That is why it is being said, “What we believe and what we pray are the same.” Liturgy is also the medium for teaching the church doctrines and creed. One of the significant components of the true faith of our church, the Nicene Creed, is an inevitable part of our liturgy. Every member of a liturgical community has to have the same true faith or creed. Acts 4:32 denotes that the believing community had same mind and same spirit.
- d) Liturgy of our church is Trinity-centred. Every prayer begins with the salutation of the Triune God. Holy Trinity is the basis of divine revelation. The ‘creation and salvation’ of the entire universe is the conjoint action of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, our liturgy is a collection of praises (Halleluyas) and thanksgiving to the Holy Trinity.
- e) Our liturgy is eternal. The worship of a believer never ends by his/her death; instead it continues eternally (Psalm 115:17 [In VishudhaGrandham Psalm 114:24]). The eternity of liturgy is another peculiarity of our church.

iv. Syriac Language

Yet another significance of our church is the perpetuation of Syriac language as its liturgical language. It was the liturgical language used by the early church in the first century AD. Moreover, it was the spoken language of our Lord, His disciples and the first Christian community. The following examples found in the Gospels illustrate this fact: “*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*” (Matt. 27:46); “*Talitha, cumi*” (Mk. 5:41); “*Ephphatha*” (Mk. 7:34); “*Abba*” (Mk. 14:36); and “*Rabboni*” (Jn. 20:16). The usage of Syriac language joints us towards the early church.

v. Sacramental Spirituality

Holy Sacraments occupy significant role in the liturgical tradition of our church. They are the visible acts of invisible Means of Grace poured out to the believers. Through each sacrament, every faithful receives the divine grace and approaches further to God. Sacraments are essential for human salvation. Along with the Word of God, sacraments also play vital role in everyone’s spiritual life. All the seven sacraments of our church are intended for spiritual edification of its members. The reception of every sacrament becomes an unavoidable experience in the life of a true Christian.

vi. Importance of Tradition

The true faith of our church is founded not only on the basis of the Bible, but also on the apostolic tradition. Traditions are those true faith, structure, values, and customs received by the apostles directly from Jesus, and later taught by them to generations. Therefore, the church does not depend solely on the Bible as the foundation of its faith. Everything related to Jesus was continued by the apostles. Church is founded not from the Bible, but the Bible is formulated from the Church. The Bible is written for the church by some of its members. Hence, along with the Bible, the church identifies the apostolic tradition as the foundation of its true faith. It is written by St. Paul to Thessalonians, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle” (2 Thess. 2:15). On the basis of this particular verse, both the teachings (oral) and letters (written) of apostles are the basis of our true faith.**ii. Universality or Catholicism**

Church is not merely a fellowship of those who are alive; instead it is a community of living, dead and the future generations. This point of view regarding church is taken from the New Testament. St. Paul says in his Epistle to Romans, "...Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be the Lord of both the dead and the living" (14:9). Those who have joined to the church through the sacrament of baptism are never expelled out because of death (Rom. 8:35). The communion with Christ continues for ever (2 Cor. 5:8-9). Therefore, the living and the dead are united with the church of Christ. And according to this perspective, the living and the dead gather together in the liturgy of our church. From the denotation of a great cloud of witnesses in Hebrew 12:1, it is clear that the church has visible and invisible levels. The unity of the living and the dead is established through prayer. On the basis of this fact, the church instigates the intercessory prayer to St. Mary and prayer for departed ones.

Another aspect of the church's catholicism (universalism) is that it cannot be confined within the border of any nation. The church comprises people having different nationality, language, and culture. Therefore the claim of a particular national independent church is not valid. There is neither native nor foreigner in the church. All are one in Christ. Church is global. **viii.**

Importance of the East

The liturgy of the Syrian Orthodox Church is always being done facing towards the East. It is significant and related to the eschatological (end of the ages or second coming) interpretation of the church. Salvation is interpreted as the re-entry to the paradise. As explained in Genesis 2:8, God created the Garden of Eden in the east. And the first parents were expelled out from the east. Garden of Eden in the east reminds the nostalgia of human's fellowship with God, the Father. The act of facing towards east while praying is based morally on the re-entry to Eden. Besides, it is founded on the hope of Jesus' second coming, which will be from the East, as per the account of St. Matthew (24:27).

ix. Lent and Repentance

The Syrian Orthodox Church gives much priority to observing lent and to repentance in order for spiritual edification. Lent and fasting leads believers to repentance. Repentance is an unavoidable prerequisite for the Kingdom of God (Matt. 3:1,2; 4:17) as well as for one's salvation (Jn. 3:3). There are five major Lents in the church. Apart from those every Wednesday and Friday is observed as Lenten day. Lent purifies a believer spiritually and gives victory against evil.

Conclusion

The Syrian Orthodox Church has many peculiarities as it follows the traditions and liturgy of the early church. A few of them are described here. Its theological depth, meaningful prayers and biblical interpretations escalate the beauty and glory of our church. Let us adore God for enabling us to become the members of this church.