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LIGHT TO THE NATIONS

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(An elementary study of
Church, Ministry and Sacraments)

Fr. Dr. K. M. George

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GROWING IN THE WISDOM OF GOD

5

Unit 1

LESSON 1

JESUS CHRIST AND THE ORIGIN OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

1. *The Jewish background.*
2. *The chosen people.*
3. *Waiting for the Messiah.*
4. *New insights.*
5. *The Christian community: its focal point.*

'Who founded the Christian Church?'; the answer is unambiguous: Jesus Christ. It was, however, not in a vacuum that the early Church came into existence. The early Church had its own historical, cultural and religious roots.

1. The Jewish background

Most of those who believed in Christ and became members of the early Christian Church were Jews. The twelve disciples (apostles) whom Christ selected to spread the Gospel in the world were also Jews. Christ himself was a Jewish rabbi, well-versed in the Holy Scriptures and teachings of the Jewish tradition. Therefore, to understand the nature of the Christian Church, it is useful for us to know what constitutes the core of the Jewish faith.

2. A chosen people

The Israelites considered themselves a people chosen by God. They firmly believed that God had particularly entrusted them

with the responsibility of proclaiming the salvation wrought by Jehovah to the boundaries of the earth. They, therefore, held that they had certain special privileges and a certain degree of glory in God's presence, which the Gentiles did not have. This created a sense of false pride in many Jews and made them contemptuous of other peoples. The prophets exhorted them from time to time to get rid of this racial pride. They made it clear that the promise and calling offered to them through Abraham was to be employed for the redemption of the world. They repeatedly asserted that the Jews were chosen not because of any special qualities in them. All the same, as is clear from the Old Testament, the Jews paid little heed to the voice of the prophets. What is important to note here is that this sense of being a chosen people was one of the basic tenets of the Jewish tradition.

3. Waiting for the Messiah

The greatest expectation of the Jews, who suffered centuries of persecution and humiliation, was that Jehovah would send them a saviour who would liberate them from all miseries. The term 'Messiah' was used to refer to this Saviour. The Greek equivalent of the word is 'Christos', meaning the anointed. In the Old Testament tradition, when kings were enthroned or priests were consecrated, they were anointed with oil. In a general sense they were all anointed ones. The Jews expected that their Messiah would combine genuine royalty and priesthood in him. The Jews themselves had different concepts of the Messiah. While some thought of him as one like the Roman emperor, glorious and powerful, others envisioned him as a servant of God suffering humiliation and persecution for the people of God. Whatever be their individual ideas, the waiting with joyful expectations for a Messiah was another important characteristic of the Jews.

These two aspects, viz. their conviction of having been the chosen race and their having waited for the Messiah, helped to define the nature of the Christian Church in the early days. The apostles as well as the early Fathers of the Church laid stress on two points:

(1) Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary, was indeed the Messiah the Jews had been waiting for.

(2) The Christian community founded by Jesus Christ is the new Israel.

4. New insights

Besides these two affirmations, the apostles proclaimed some more ideas, not current in the Jewish thought:

1. Jesus of Nazareth is the realisation of the expectation of the Jews. He is the saviour not only of the Jews but of the whole world. By his birth what God gave was the great joy which He had promised to all people.

2. God has elected anew the community believing in Christ for the redemption of the world. The Israelites ceased to be the chosen race because they rejected and crucified Jesus who had come as the saviour of the whole World. Therefore, God chose a new Israel, i. e. the Christian Church, to proclaim to the whole world the love of God and His promise of redemption. In the New Testament as well as in the writings of the early Fathers of the Church the Christian community is repeatedly described as the new people, the new Jerusalem, the new race, the third race, etc.

This means that a community accepts Jesus Christ as the Son of God and that the saviour of the world is a new creation of God. The Christian Church is a symbol of God's act of raising humanity from the dark valleys of sin and death to the sublime heights of light and life, and of making humanity partake of the nature of God. God chose the new community through Christ, not because of any special virtues seen in the chosen people but because of His unlimited love and grace. The Church has been chosen to work for the salvation and wellbeing of the world instead of sliding back into false prestige and pride like the Israel of old. Individuals do not count as individuals in this community; on the other hand, each member of the community finds the roots of the faith in the community that has accepted Jesus Christ as the Lord and Saviour.

5. The focus of the Christian community

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ constitute the focal point of Christian faith. The experience of the apostles, who were witnesses to the unique life of Jesus Christ, His Crucifixion and resurrection, is the legacy of the Church. The basis of our faith is the apostolic witness to the resurrection of Christ. What the apostles spoke about Jesus and His Gospel, was that which they have heard, they have seen with their eyes, they have looked upon, and touched with their hands, concerning the word of life (I John 1:1-2).

It was the unique event of the resurrection of Christ that made the disciples, who had been dispersed at the time of His crucifixion, gather together and that made them strong enough to 'turn the world upside down' (Acts 17:6). It is the Christian Church existing in history that is the greatest proof of resurrection. The Church experiences this rich life offered through the resurrection of Christ and communicates this experience to the world. The life of resurrection is the signal feature of the Church. The resurrected Christ is the only wealth of the Church. If we substitute Jesus Christ, who died for the world and gave His life to it, for any individual, ideas, interests, riches or other goals, the fact of our being chosen and called will have no effect. Then God will reject us as he did Israel and will redeem the world through other means.

Exercise

1. Find out the significance of the word, "new", used in the verses mentioned below: Isaiah. 42:9, 48:6, 65:17, 66:22; Ezek. 11:9; Mt. 9:16; Mk. 2:22; Mt. 26:28; 1Cor. 11:25 Jn. 13:14; 2Cor.5:17; Eph. 4:24; 1 Pet. 2:2; Rev. 21:1, 21:5.
2. What are the two essential aspects of the Jewish faith? Explain.
3. Explain what constitutes the focal point of faith in Christianity.

LESSON 2

THE APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY AND THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

1. *Who is an apostle?*
2. *Faith, the foundation.*

1. Who is an apostle?

Christ's call to twelve people to join him as his chosen disciples lays the foundation of a new community, namely, the Christian Church. Although many became Christ's disciples, yet this small group of twelve, familiarly known as the apostles, had a special character. The Greek word *apostolos* means 'one who is sent forth'. The apostles who were specially delegated to proclaim the Gospel of the kingdom of God became the cornerstone of the Church. Christ "gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity" (Mt. 10:1). He "sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal" (Lk. 9:2). He said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mt. 4:19). He gave them special gifts "to know the secrets of the Kingdom of God" (Lk. 8:10). The apostles were a group who always remained with Jesus and understood the essential meaning of his life and teaching. They have also a unique position in that they are witnesses to the resurrection of the Lord.

After the fall of Judas this small community elected a new apostle in his place. The criterion for selection is given in Acts 1:21,22: "So one of the men who have accompanied

us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection". That is how Mathias was selected. Christ thought of the twelve apostles as the founding fathers of the new human race or the new Israel, namely, the Church, in the same way as the Old Israel was thought of and built upon twelve tribes. "You have been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20).

2. Faith, the foundation

Did all the apostles receive the same authority and power from Jesus? The answer is in the affirmative. The authority which Christ gave was given to the apostolic college, the community of the apostles. The Christian Church accepts all the apostles and gives them the same respect. Although there are certain special references to Peter, Jacob, John and Thomas in the Gospels, they do not stand apart from the others. Certain Churches, in the light of a few such references in the Gospels, teach that some apostles have more authority than others and they are superior to the others. But the Orthodox Church does not subscribe to this view at all. The Roman Catholic Church, however, insists that Christ gave special authority to Peter on whom he founded the Church and that the Pope, the self-styled descendant of Peter, has greater authority than the other heads of Churches. In support of this stand of the Roman Catholic Church, reference is made to what happens in Caesaria, Philippi where Christ asks his disciples "who do men say that the Son of man is?" and Peter answers, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God", and where Christ declares: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church." (Mt. 16: 13-20). The ancient Eastern Christian tradition has always rejected this interpretation. The Orthodox tradition is that Christ did not find in a single individual the foundation of the Church and that he founded the Church on a believing community.

It was on the cornerstone of faith that the Church was founded. Though Peter was the seniormost among the disciples in respect of his age, it was as their representative that he affirmed faith in Christ. No high priest or bishop of the later period can claim the same position as Peter had in the apostolic community. Every high priest or episcopos is a successor of the apostles in general; he is not a successor of any one particular apostle. The concept of linear succession does not conform to the actual Christian tradition. It was the Western Church that in later years made false claims regarding apostolic succession.

In short, Christ founded the Church on the apostolic community, which was a witness to his life, death and resurrection. The basis of our faith today is this community's witness to Christ and His message. And it is this faith and witness of the apostolic community that the Christian Church follows today.

Exercise

1. Read Matthew 10 and give a brief account of Christ's advice to the apostles.
2. What is the criterion for the selection of a new apostle? In what sense is St. Paul called an apostle?
3. Explain how the Orthodox Church views the interpretation of the Roman Catholic Church regarding the position of St. Peter among the apostles.

LESSON 3

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

1. *The Church and Pentecost.*
2. *The Spirit which gives new life.*
3. *Gifts of the Holy Spirit.*
4. *The Spirit of Truth.*
5. *The Church, the abode of the Holy Spirit.*

Although we discuss the origin and development of the Church from a historical perspective, yet according to many of our early Church Fathers the origin of the Church is not within the limits of the history of the universe. St. Paul has said, "He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:3—5). On the basis of this statement of St. Paul, Clement, a second century Bishop of Rome, claims that God founded the Church even before He created the sun and the moon. Also, this implies that the Church, the bride of Christ, has been with Him always. In the book called 'The Shepherd of Hermes' written in the second century the Church is described as a venerable old lady. The suggestion is that the Church was created even before the creation of the universe. Whatever it be, the concept that the Church is a deep mystery and that it not only embodies the visible community of believers but also includes earthly and heavenly spheres and that it encompasses the whole universe is an important one. This is the Church which St. Paul and many Church Fathers describe as the glorified body of Christ. We shall look into its diverse aspects later.

1. The Church and Pentecost

Historically speaking, if the resurrection of the Lord is the first stage in the formation of the Church, the next important stage is Pentecost. The experience of Pentecost is a central one to the Church. The Holy Spirit dwelt with visible strength in the early Christian community, showered various spiritual gifts on it and gave a physical structure to it. We read in the Gospels that the thoughts, words and actions of the early Church were guided by the Holy Spirit. The experience of the Spirit was such a lively one that the participants of the Jerusalem Synod felt so about the decisions taken at the Synod as is evident from Acts 15:28, where it is said, ".....it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us". It is the Holy Spirit that makes the life of the resurrected Christ available to the Church. It is the Spirit which leads the Church to the fullness of all virtues and truth according to the promise of Christ. The Church is the special realm of the Holy Spirit. Saint Irenaeus, the second century Church Father, realising this mystery, says: "Where there is the Church, there is the Spirit of the Lord. And where there is the Spirit, there is the Church and all divine gifts of God. The Spirit is the truth. Hence, those who are not partakers in the Holy Spirit do not drink the mother's (i. e. the Church's) milk or drink from the springs emanating from the Church, the body of Christ." Let us examine a few aspects of the role of the Holy Spirit in determining the nature of the Church.

2. The Spirit which gives new life

In our tradition the Holy Ghost is described as "the life—giving Spirit." It is the Holy Spirit that sustains the uninterrupted flow of fresh life in the Church. Since the Spirit rejuvenates the Church continuously, the descriptions of the Church, such as the new race, or the new people, are highly meaningful. It follows that the Christian community should always have the experience of the ever—renewing freshness of divine life. The Spirit redeems us from such meaningless rituals and traditions that stand in the way of our loyalty to Christ, the Saviour. The Spirit leads us

to life-styles which reflect the glory of God and to life-giving traditions that carry the stream of spiritual nourishment.

The Christian community has the responsibility to respond meaningfully and positively to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The fruits of the Spirit will be manifested in the Church only if we cleanse the Church continuously of the evils of strife, selfishness and pride, which block the influx of the Holy Spirit.

3. Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit gives diverse gifts to the members of the Church. Gifts of healing, ability to speak gracefully, talents for scientific research, gifts of social service, artistic and literary talents—all come from the Holy Spirit. But these gifts are not given to individuals as such. These are to be used in the building up of the society. And the distinction between genuine gifts and false ones depends on the answer to the question whether one uses one's gifts for the common good of the society or for the fulfilment of one's own personal desires (Acts 8:18—24).

According to St. Paul, the greatest of all gifts is the gift of love. The Holy Spirit can be said to work in the Church, only if there is the experience of love. All gifts other than love have their own limitations. Love makes everything complete and unites everyone with the Church, the body of Christ. In this sense, one of the supreme characteristics of the Christian Church is this gift of the Holy Spirit, namely, love radiating from the Spirit. It is through selfless love that the life of the resurrected Christ should become manifest in the Church. Love is also the means by which we can sift true gifts from false ones. All gifts leading to everlasting selfless love come from the Holy Spirit.

4. The Spirit of Truth

It is the Holy Spirit that guides the Church into all the truth (John 16:13). This in no way implies that the authorities in the Church have the gift of infallibility or that the dogmas and traditions of the Church express truth in toto. Truth is not

envisaged in its totality here and now. Truth can be compared to an infinitely large mansion with innumerable rooms and secret chambers. Our search for truth and our perception of truth, therefore, have to be a continuous process. New faces and facets, new levels and dimensions of truth are steadily unfolded before us by the Holy Spirit. The Church lifts up the lamp of the Holy Spirit and embarks on this everlasting quest for truth. Truth is not something that can be fully comprehended; for truth is like a mansion with countless rooms. Quest for truth is thus a continuous, endless process. What we ought to do is to move forward under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and with hopes and aspirations based on the unlimited love given to us by God through Jesus Christ. The Church does not look upon any person, book, concept or dogma as the full embodiment of truth. If we realise this fact in our personal lives as well as in the life of the Church and act accordingly, the Holy Spirit will liberate us from idolatry of all sorts and from distorted, meaningless traditions. Moreover, the Spirit will also reveal to us ever new dimensions of truth. The Church firmly believes in the words of our Lord, Jesus Christ: "I am the way, the truth and the life".

5. The Church: the abode of the Holy Spirit

The Church receives the Holy Spirit for the sake of the world. St. Paul tells us that the Church becomes the abode of the Holy Spirit for the whole world (Eph. 2:22). But it should be understood that it is not possible to confine the Holy Spirit within the Church alone. The Spirit which acted at the commencement of creation acts even now within the whole of creation. The Spirit works both within and outside the Church. But the Church has the ability to discern the Holy Spirit and seek help from the Spirit. The world, in general, does not have this ability. The Church has been entrusted with this special privilege of pouring out the gifts of the Spirit to humanity as well as to all the creation and of discerning the Spirit and teaching the world about the acts of the Holy Spirit. Even as personal

gifts are to be used for the good of the community in general, the gifts of the Church are to be used for the benefit of the whole world. The Church is indeed the sacred abode of the Holy Spirit.

Exercise

1. Read the 12th, 13th and 14th chapters of "The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians" and understand the relation between the Holy Spirit and the Church.
2. What benefits are derived from the Holy Spirit's work in the Church?
3. How is the Holy Spirit's work in the Church different from that in the world?

LESSON 4

THE CHURCH—THE BODY OF CHRIST AND THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

1. *The Church as the body of Christ.*
2. *Prayer, the life-giving oxygen.*
3. *The two aspects of the Church.*
4. *Body as the temple of the Spirit.*
5. *The Church as the bride of Christ.*

1. The Church as the body of Christ.

St. Paul and the other New Testament authors have used various images to make clear the nature of the Church. The most important of them is the image of the Church as the body of Christ (1 Cor.12:12-28, Eph.1:23, Col.1:18).

The human body is an amazing phenomenon. The body consists of various organs, big and small performing different functions. The brain co-ordinates and regulates all activities. Blood flows into all the organs. There is also the great mystery called life which activates and invigorates all the organs. The above basic requirements enable every organ to function in unison with the other. For example, if a toe is injured, the rest of the body is at its service. Every organ exists for the fitness of the whole body. No organ finds fault with or is contemptuous of the other. The whole body shares both pleasure and pain alike.

St. Paul has obviously all this in mind when he says that the Church is the body of Christ and that Christ is the head and

we are the organs/members of the body. The life of Christ fills the whole body through the Holy Spirit. Because we, as members, are organically connected to Christ, the head we take care of and love one another. The members of this body are not only those living now but also those who are spiritually active, though physically dead. Therefore, when we worship God, the whole community of believers, including the apostles, the Virgin Mary and the Christian saints, is present with us. And even as every organ lives for one another and for the whole body, this physically invisible community also takes part in our worship and pray for us. It is our responsibility too to pray for the community.

2. Prayer--the life-giving oxygen

In the Church, the body of Christ, prayer is not a means to achieve personal or selfish gains. On the contrary, prayer is the life-giving oxygen to the body. If we do not breathe, we die. Similarly, if we do not pray for each other, the life of the Church slowly declines.

The Church prays not only for the Christian believers, but for the whole world, for the simple reason that Christ died and rose from the dead for the whole creation (Rom.8:18-22).

There is no limit to the love of Christ. Consequently, prayer rooted in this love has also no limit. It is in this sense that St. Paul asserts... "I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depths, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38,39). The living and the dead, the Jew and the Gentile, the Greek and the Barbarian, the Aryan and the Dravidian, all become one body in the love of Christ (Gal.3:26-28).

3. The two dimensions of the Church

We conceive the Church in its widest possible significance. So, it is useful, if we distinguish between the two senses in which we use the two dimensions of the Church.

In the first sense Church means the community of believers which has received baptism and remains a eucharistic community and which is primarily referred to as the Church, the body of Christ. This community includes individuals who publicly acknowledge their faith in Christ and live accordingly.

In the second sense, it may be said that the Church encompasses the whole humanity. This shows the universal, all-comprehensive nature of the Church. One might naturally wonder how the Church includes the whole humanity. According to our faith all people born on this earth bear the 'image and resemblance of God.' It is true that all do not recognise or accept the fact that they bear the stamp of God. But Christ died and rose again from the dead for the salvation of the whole humanity, and hence the Church prays for non-believers and works for their wellbeing also. St. Paul states explicitly (in Timothy 2:1-4) that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth". This belief that the whole humanity has been called upon to partake in the glory of Christ leads the Church forward. Moreover, our hopes in the working of the Holy Spirit enable us to see the whole humanity in the body of the Church.

4. Body as the temple of the Spirit

The glorified body of Christ is the meeting place of all humanity and that of the whole creation. Everyone who heard Christ did not understand that he was not speaking about the temple of Jerusalem when he said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). After his resurrection his disciples understood that he was alluding to the 'temple that was his body'. This spiritual temple is the meeting place of the Church.

5. The Church as the bride of Christ

The Old Testament prophets have described Israel as the bride of Jehovah (Hos.2:19-21). In the context of this description it is easier to understand the New Testament concept of Christ being the bridegroom and the Church the bride. In the

parable of the ten maidens the five wise maidens wait for the bridegroom and receive him with joy when he comes at midnight (Mt.25:1-13). This parable is also interpreted as giving a picture of the Church as the bride of Christ, waiting for the bridegroom. St. Paul expresses this profound idea beautifully in his epistle to the Ephesians "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the Church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy without blemish" (Eph. 5:26-27). "The new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2) is a symbol of the Church.

The sacrament of marriage signifies the entering of two unrelated persons into a deep personal relationship. Christ also brings humanity, which does not deserve the love and mercy of God, into such a deep everlasting fellowship. This picture at once symbolises, the gulf between God and man, and also their deep and abiding relationship. The whole creation is linked to Christ in the bond of love. The exhortation given to creation is to become one with Christ. And it is as a prelude to this union with Christ that the Church—the bride of Christ—enters the bridal chamber with him. This special status of the Church as the bride of Christ symbolizes God's promise of love and salvation of the whole creation.

Exercise

1. Explain why the Church is called the body of Christ.
2. Find out from the New Testament at least three references to the Church other than those describing the Church as the body of Christ and as the bride of Christ.
3. Which portion of the epistles is read out at the sacrament of marriage? Summarise what is said about Christ and the Church in this portion.

LESSON 5

THE ONE CHURCH

- 1 *The one Church.*
- 2 *The model of Trinity.*
- 3 *To the Holy Eucharist in the one faith.*

Four epithets are used to describe the Church in the Nicene creed which we say every day. They are: 'One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic'. The first two have been used in the New Testament and the other two from the second century onwards. Let us examine the meanings of these still relevant words from a Christian perspective.

1. The one Church

The Church of Christ is only one. The words in Christ's prayers: "as you are in me and I in you, that they also may be one in us" (John 17:21), explain the nature of the Christian Church. The schism within the Church is against the will of God. The basis of unity is "one Lord, one faith and one baptism" (Eph.4:5). Since the unity of the Church and of the whole humanity is the will of God, the Orthodox Church prays for unity and works towards this goal. For historical and other reasons there have been splits within the universal Church. Differences of opinion regarding the person of Christ, interpretation of the Bible, development of certain later dogmas, etc. have all been responsible for these splits. Also, there are political and cultural reasons, power struggle and even personal rivalry that have contributed to the divisions within the Church. However, the Holy Spirit is constantly at work imbuing the different factions of the Church with the yearning for unity.

2. The model of the Holy Trinity

The indescribable Unity within the Trinity is the supreme model of unity that the Church has accepted. We understand the nature of the Triune God through the unity of the three persons the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This unity is a relationship of perfection. The relationships among human beings are always subject to setbacks. Though human relationships can express love to a certain extent, they have not yet reached a stage of perfection. The relationship among the three persons of the Holy Trinity is one of deep and abiding love radiated all through eternity. It is to the bond of such perfect love that God has called the Church and humanity as a whole.

Our common faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the basis of the unity of the Church. Participation in the Holy Eucharist provides the daily nourishment to the unity. The result of unity is love, co-operation and fraternity among people. The unity of factions within the Church is not a mere structural one but a dynamic Christian experience with continuous growth and development. It is a continuous march to the endless unity of the Trinity. The unity of the Church cannot be determined and ensured with the help of canons and creeds alone; for it transcends them all.

3. To the Holy Eucharist in the one faith

The Orthodox tradition views the coming together of factions through theological discussions, mutual understanding and dedication to the one faith in the one Lord as the first step towards unity. Unity in the Eucharistic participation becomes the culmination and symbol of this one faith. Many reformed sects have different views. They insist on unity in the Eucharistic sharing first, and unity in creed and dogmas later. The position of the Orthodox sects is in accordance with the view of the ancient Christian tradition. One earns the right to share in the Holy Eucharist only after accepting and joining the community in full faith in Christ. The Orthodox sects teach

that real unity will be possible only if we consider seriously the question of faith and tradition of the undivided Church.

Unity is not achieved merely because some proclaim themselves to be true believers and brand others as heretics. All factions, sects and denominations have to make an earnest effort to realise unity in Christ in the spirit of genuine love. To achieve unity we should accept the life and faith of the undivided Church as our guidelines. It is the Holy Spirit that leads the Church to unity.

The idea of one Church does not mean merely the unity of all individuals living now in history. It goes much beyond that. It includes the whole community of believers in heaven and on earth, those living, and those who departed in faith. Even those who lived and departed before Christ, believing in truth and virtues, will be included in this unity. In the liturgy of St. James we affirm that the incarnate Christ "made those in heaven and those on earth, the chosen people and aliens, body and spirit united in Him" through His death and resurrection.

It is very important to understand that the unity of the different sects within the Church does not mean organisational or cultural uniformity. The Christian tradition teaches that the Church in every region should spread the Gospel and worship God in ways and means available in the respective cultural set-up, language, attire, symbols and traditions. Such regional sects with complete freedom in administrative matters have their own ecclesiastical leadership. Autocephaly is a major feature of all Orthodox communities. Diversity in the forms and symbols of worship and cultural expression does not go against the unity of the Church; on the contrary, it makes the unity richer; it brightens up the God-given creativity and human freedom in such matters.

Diversity among the different sects in cultural and national character is permissible and healthy. The Orthodox sects have always upheld this principle. Even though the communities in

America, Ethiopia and India believe in one and the same Christ, and have the same dogmas, there are bound to be national and cultural differences among them. Such diversity makes it possible for the Church to interpret the Gospel of Christ in keeping with the times as well as the cultures and levels of understanding of the peoples of these countries. The worship in the Indian Christian communities is obviously different from that in the Ethiopian Christian communities. The Japanese clerical robes can be considerably different from those of the American Christians. The Eastern Orthodox tradition maintains that each regional or national community should have its own head and that it should witness the unity of the universal Church through one faith and the one Holy Eucharist.

Those who stand against such a diversity within the universal Church, and those who try to bring about only a semblance of unity through the identity reached in external matters are working against the creativity of the Holy Spirit. Even as the Spirit gives diverse gifts to individuals, it also gives diverse gifts to the communities in different places. St. Paul himself speaks about regional Churches such as the Church in Corinth, the Church in Ephesus and so on. Various Churches of diverse linguistic and cultural background become one in Jesus Christ.

The unity of regional Churches is not a goal in itself. It is a prelude to and a symbol of the unity of all humanity. Therefore, the march of Christian Churches towards unity should be with an open mind and with the awareness of a wide horizon ahead. The Christian meaning of unity should be manifest in the readiness of the Church to live and die for the life of humanity. The purpose of the death and resurrection of Christ was to present the whole world, united in Him as an offering to the Father. The unity of regional Churches assumes a Christian meaning and becomes relevant only when it becomes an offering of love and genuine concern for humanity.

Exercise

1. What is the supreme model of the unity of Christian communities? why is it that the Orthodox Churches see in the Holy Eucharist the perfection of unity rather than a means to unity?
2. What is the difference between unity and uniformity?

LESSON 6

THE HOLY CHURCH

1. *The Church shares the holiness of Christ.*
2. *Communion of saints.*
3. *Gifts of the Holy Spirit.*
4. *Continuous growth.*

The Church is holy, although its members are sinful human beings. St. Paul describes the members of the Church in general as 'saints' (Rom. 1:7, 12:13, 15:26, 1 Cor. 1:2). They are called saints in the sense that they have been "sanctified through Christ", and "called apart for Jesus Christ."

1. The holiness of the Church derived from that of Christ

He who instituted the Church is holy. He has called us all to participate in his holiness through the Church. It is, therefore, quite natural that the Church, the body of Christ, who is the head and source of holiness, is also holy. Our Church Fathers have taught us that we have also been sanctified through Christ, because God assumed human nature in Christ. The Church exhorts us to attain supreme holiness through leading a Christian life rooted in love and goodness. We have

been called upon to liberate ourselves from the darkness of sin and evil, and move on to the light of love, and to reflect the glory of God. The Church, the bride of Christ, becomes sanctified through the continuous presence and activity of the Holy Spirit, which sanctifies and completes all "that have been created and will be created." Jesus Christ, "the bridegroom" gave himself up for the Church, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her with the washing of water with the word, that he might present the Church to himself in splendour without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:26,27). The Holy city, "new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2) is a symbol of the Church.

2. Communion of Saints

The expression, 'communio sanctorum', (Communion of saints) is used as a synonym of the Church. The presence of holy men and women, both living and dead, is an important aspect of the holiness of the Church. There is a prayer in the liturgy of St. Xystus which says: "Lord, remove us not from our communion with our holy fathers who helped us to be children to your mercy and to be brethren to your only begotten son". The presence of saints, both men and women, who pray continuously for the salvation of the world, is an asset and a source of inspiration to all humanity. They pray for us and with us. We pray for them also. Thus we can express our unity and love for one another in Christ through our intercessions. The intercession of the Church, combining with the prayers of the saints, merges with the unique intercession of the great high priest, Jesus Christ. The holiness any member of the Church is endowed with is the common spiritual wealth of the whole Church. Holiness is just like light. It illumines the surroundings. It does not confine itself to a few individuals; it spreads sweetness and light all around.

3. Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Holiness is a gift of the Holy Spirit. We honour persons who have an extraordinary measure of this gift, and call them saints. Their special gift, namely, their holiness, is used for the building-up of the whole Church.

4. Continuous growth

Though the Church existing in this world is holy, the presence of evil in the world is also a fact to be reckoned with. We can attain perfection in holiness only through a constant struggle with the forces of evil. Therefore, holiness is not a static quality which can be attained at a particular stage in one's life, but a continuous and endless growth. It is better to think that God is sanctifying one continuously and not at a specific time in one's life. We have to view holiness as a gift of God; at the same time it requires our constant and a consistent endeavour to attain holiness.

The holiness of the Church does not mean that the Church condemns the world or judges it unholy. Sanctification is a process in which evil is annihilated and the world is transformed in such a way as to make it worthy of reflecting the glory of God, through our deep commitment to Him and participation in His holiness.

Exercise

1. Learn by heart a sentence from the Holy Communion Service (Thaksa) explaining our communion with Saints, and reproduce it.
2. Write a paragraph on the relationship between holiness of Christ and that of Church.
3. Learn by heart Eph. 5:26-27.

stood the Church as a great mystery involving the totality of the whole creation.

3. The worship that is universal (catholic)

The catholic nature or universality of the Church is reflected above all in worship. The Holy Eucharist that is being celebrated in the presence of this Triune God on behalf of the whole creation is the focal point of worship. Therefore, the whole creation is involved in this worship. The Church offers worship as one large community that includes the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth and the sea, as well as the choirs of angels and archangels, the living and the departed and everything that God has created.

In the works of the Fathers of the Eastern Church ecclesiology or the study of the Church is not treated as a separate topic. The main reason for this is the catholic nature of the Church; for it is rather improper to treat a reality, which touches upon everything that exists, as a separate topic or subject. The basic theological insight of the Fathers is derived from the fundamental concept of the Church as "his body the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23). It is impossible for a person or a community that does not look deep into the whole thing to discern this foundation. The biggest drawback of the Western Protestant thought is its inability to understand the catholic nature of the Church. Consequently, a number of distorted concepts regarding sacraments, priesthood etc. have crept into the Western tradition.

4. The Roman tradition

The Chief criterion of unity and catholicity of the Church in the Roman tradition, is allegiance to the Pope, the Bishop of Rome. The Roman Church teaches that the claim of any local Church in a region to be catholic becomes tenable only if the latter owes allegiance to the Pope. Thus, according to the Roman teaching the Church in the whole world should owe its allegiance to the Pope, who is the Patriarch of the Western Church,

Unit 2

LESSON 1

THE CHURCH CATHOLIC

1. *The word, 'catholic.'*
2. *Cyril's definition of 'catholic.'*
3. *Catholic worship.*
4. *The Roman tradition.*
5. *The Orthodox tradition.*

1. The word, 'catholic'.

The adjective 'catholic' can etymologically be traced to the Greek word *Kat 'holos* which means 'universal', 'all inclusive, comprehensive', etc. If the Church is described as catholic, what is meant is not mere geographical universality. The Church does not necessarily become catholic in nature because of the extent of its influence from one end of the earth to the other.

2. St. Cyril's definition

The fourth century Church Father, Saint Cyril, who lived in Jerusalem, gives a comprehensive definition of the word, 'catholic'. He says: The Church is catholic (universal) because it has spread all over the world and because it imparts instruction in its fullness to all people regarding matters visible and invisible, earthly and heavenly. The Church leads all sorts and conditions of people the ruler and the ruled, the learned and the ignorant to the Orthodox faith. It treats and heals the sinful soul and body. It embodies all virtues and deeds. It is endowed with all kinds of spiritual gifts. It may be noted that words such as 'all' and 'entire' are repeatedly used to qualify the Church. The Fathers have under-

for it to be described as a universal or catholic Church. The local Church achieves its fullness in the universal Church. The Roman tradition maintains that local Churches in different regions are imperfect components of the universal Church. When all such Churches come together in communion with the Pope, 'the shepherd of the universal Church' and the vicar of Christ', the catholic nature of the Church becomes manifest. This in brief is the traditional teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

5. The Orthodox tradition

It is not allegiance to any one particular Pope or Patriarch that determines the catholic nature of the Church, according to the Orthodox tradition. This tradition teaches that the fullness of the universal Church is manifest in the local Church, where the Holy Trinity is worshipped in true faith and in the one Holy Eucharist, in communion with the bishop. Many such regional Churches expressing the catholicity and fullness of the Churches may exist. But the only universal shepherd of all these Churches is our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ did not appoint any bishop as his vicar or substitute in any part of the world. All bishops manifest in their persons the sacramental presence of God.

The term 'episcopal synod' refers to the coming together of the bishops, the shepherds of the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in the faith and love, in the communion of the Holy Eucharist. The universal or ecumenical synod is one of the visible expressions of the catholicity of the Church.

All this means that local Churches do express the fullness or universality of the Church in the Orthodox tradition. Subject to the above conditions the fullness of the Church is expressed in the Eucharistic communities coming together in true faith for the Holy Eucharist, along with the episcopos. This position of the Orthodox Churches is now being slowly accepted by the Roman Catholic Church and some of the Churches of the Protestant tradition too.

Exercise

1. Learn by heart St. Cyril's definition of 'catholic'.
2. What is the meaning of the word 'catholic'?
3. State briefly how differently the catholicity of Church is interpreted in the Roman Catholic tradition and the Orthodox tradition.
4. How does the perfection of catholicity become manifest in the Church?

LESSON 2

APOSTOLIC CHURCH

1. *Apostles and the Church.*
2. *Tradition of the authentic faith.*
3. *Missionary Church.*

1. Apostles and the Church

The Church named the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ apostles, because they were sent by Jesus Christ on a special mission to preach the message of salvation. The Church takes for itself the adjective, apostolic because its basis is the apostolic preaching of salvation to the world. "The Church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20). The foundation of the Church even today is the apostolic witness to the risen Christ. An apostolic Church is one which proclaims the good news and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to the world, and which lives and worships in the apostolic tradition. It should be particularly noted that the adjective, 'apostolic' is closely related to the other three adjectives of the Church, viz., one, holy

and catholic. No Christian community which ignores these three attributes of the Church can call itself an apostolic Church.

2. Tradition of the true faith

The continuation in all integrity of the true, authentic faith is one of the major features of the apostolic Church. There is an unbroken tradition of true Christian life and teaching in the Church. The sects which remain outside this stream of tradition and interpret the Bible or celebrate the sacraments in accordance with their own interpretation have no right to be called apostolic. The Holy Spirit has helped the Church to follow the exhortation of St. Paul "to stand firm and hold the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth, or by letter" (2 Thess. 2:15). The tradition of the Church is not just dry, dead rituals. On the contrary, what we call tradition is the experience of life that flows continuously and abundantly through the whole body of the Church as a result of the dwelling of the Holy Spirit. This great stream of the Spirit remains unbroken from the apostolic days all the way down to the present time. Only those who are absorbed in to this stream can realise the nature and calling of the Church.

3. Missionary Church

A very significant characteristic of the apostolic Church is its sense of mission. The word 'missionary' is derived from the Latin translation of 'apostolic'. It should be understood in its wide Christian sense. The aggressive missionary activities of the Western Churches, carried out in a spirit of racial pride and colonial cultural superiority, have only resulted in the reluctance of many to accept the Gospel of love preached by Jesus Christ. The apostolic Church has been called upon to work for the good of all mankind. The Church loses its apostolic character, if it works for narrow communal, racial or political interests and brings about a rift in the human community. The Church that works for righteousness and justice in the world, and brings love and joy to humanity bears witness to its apostolic nature.

There are some Churches, like the Malankara Orthodox Church, which are founded by one or the other of the twelve apostles of Christ and are referred to as apostolic Churches. But it is not necessary for the Church to be founded by an apostle for it to be called an apostolic Church. There are many ancient Churches founded by the disciples of the apostles and their successors; these are also apostolic Churches. What is important to note is that all Churches that remain in the unbroken tradition of the authentic faith and apostolic authority are apostolic Churches.

Exercise

1. Write a paragraph on the relationship between the apostles and the apostolic Church.
2. What is meant by the tradition of the Church?

LESSON 3

THE CHURCH AND THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST

1. *The ordinary meaning of 'authority'.*
2. *The model of authority of the Church.*
3. *Nature of authority.*
4. *Is a definition of 'authority' possible?*
5. *Christ's manner of revealing his authority,*

1. The ordinary meaning of authority

The word 'authority' is not a favourite one with many in our times. This is because of the flaws that are there in our perception and use of the word. If authority is understood as the power to command and make people obey, then we shall have to divide people into two categories—those who command

and those who obey. This division between the ruler and the ruled, between the master and the servant is resented by many today. In communities which support and practise a clear division between the ruler and the ruled, there are unhealthy tendencies such as groupism, rivalry and conflicts. Undoubtedly, distortions in the meaning of authority and the misuse of authority as such lead to rifts and dissensions within the society. The history of the Christian Church is full of instances of authoritarian conduct and the problems that have arisen from it and have adversely affected the Church. Today, there is an earnest attempt to re-examine the nature of authority in different parts of the world. The Church has also its own role to play in this context.

2. The model of authority for the Church

The authority of the Church has been derived from Christ's authority. (Lk. 9:1, 10:19). Hence there is identity between the authority of Christ and the authority of the Church. Basically the same authority as that of Christ should be exercised by the Church also. We believe that the Church is a divine as well as a human reality in the same way as Christ was perfect God and perfect man at the same time. So, these two aspects became manifest in the exercise of authority within the Church. What should be understood is Christ's authority and its nature; for it is Christ's authority that forms the basis of the authority of the Church.

3. Nature of the authority of Christ

Christ himself clarifies what constitutes his authority (Mt.20:28). Some of the Jews thought of Christ as the Messiah who would build a worldly empire. It is not wrong to think of Judas as one of those who subscribed to such an idea. Also, the plea of the mother of Jacob and John, the sons of Zebedee, (Mt. 29:20-28) is noteworthy; for she wanted her sons to be given important positions in Christ's kingdom. Even when Christ asked her "Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?", she and the others who heard him took it literally. It was in the wake of

this incident that Christ revealed the nature of his authority as well as that of his apostles and the Church he was going to establish. Christ made it clear right at the beginning that his authority was different from worldly authority. He said: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave: even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mt. 20:25-28).

4. Is a definition possible?

When the Jewish elders insisted that Christ should clarify the basis and nature of his authority, he was reluctant to define it in words (Mt 21:23-27). Their persistent question was "By what authority do you do this and who gave you this authority?" (Mt. 21:23). Christ did not answer the question, but asked another question in return, "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or of men?" (Mt. 21:25). Realising, this was a trap, the elders pretended ignorance and blurted out a simple answer, "We do not know". Christ answered, "Neither will I tell you, by what authority I do these things."

Why was it that Christ was reluctant here to reveal the nature and source of his authority? Christ knew that it was meaningless to say anything profound to those who had come to him with the avowed intention of disbelieving him and of consciously ignoring the truth that he preached. He revealed his divine mysteries only to the community of people that were mentally prepared to accept him fully in good faith.

The non-believing Jewish leaders had only one question to ask Christ when they saw him healing the sick on several occasions, "By what authority do you do this?" They had known that Christ "was not as the scribes" and that he taught them having had authority (Mt. 7:29). But they did not want to probe deep into the source of this authority; instead, what they did was to try to question it and discard it totally. Therefore, Jesus Christ

remained quiet and did not want to reveal the source of his authority to them. The reluctance shown by Christ to reveal the source of his authority to the Jewish leaders is an example to the Church. This is important because the Church sometimes attaches undue importance to definitions of 'authority'. In a world of sin and disbelief definitions of 'authority' couched in words do not have any meaning. Very often these definitions of Christian authority are given in forms and words that define worldly authority, and therefore cause many problems. The authority of Christ is rooted in his self-emptying, self-denying love. Though this authority may be reflected in the words or teachings of the Church, yet it is not possible to confine it in dry definitions, canons or constitutional provisions.

5. Christ's manner of revealing his authority

Christ revealed his authority not through words but through his deeds. Christ, the good physician revealed his authority in healing the sick. When he healed the man with the unclean spirit in the synagogue, all those present were amazed and said: "With authority he commands unclean spirits and they obey him" (Mk. 1:27). Like a good shepherd Christ showed deep concern for his sheep and laid down his life for them (Jn. 10:11). He girded himself with a towel and washed the feet of his disciples (Jn. 13:4-5). He prayed for the whole creation, like a high priest (Jn. 17). "Christ, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:6-8). This obedience to the will of God is the essence of Christ's authority. We tend to regard 'authority' and 'obedience' as words having opposite meanings but in Christ the two meet in a new meaning.

The Son of God who became man chose the weak on earth. He gave himself upon the cross. He taught us that authority rested on love and self-denial and thus gave us a new definition

of authority. What this definition means to the Church requires further examination.

Exercise

1. Try to follow the different meanings of authority from the following verses: Mt. 7:29; Lk. 7:8; Mk. 11:28; Lk. 4:36; Lk. 9:1; Lk. 22:25; I Tim. 2:2; Tit. 2:15.
2. Why did Christ show unwillingness to reveal to the non-believing Jewish leaders what kind of authority he had?

LESSON 4

THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH

1. *Not to condemn but to save.*
2. *The grain of wheat that dies.*
3. *Self-denial.*
4. *Identity and authority.*

1. Not to condemn but to save

We have seen that the model of authority for the Church is the authority of Christ himself. The purpose of the incarnation of Christ was not to reveal the authority of God to man. If exercise of authority had been God's purpose, there would not have been any necessity for Christ, the second person in the Holy Trinity to be born like an ordinary man and to suffer death on the cross. The word 'philanthropia' is repeatedly used by the Fathers of the Eastern Church to refer to the deep and abiding love of God for human beings. Philanthropia is the cause and basis of God's incarnation; the basis of incarnation is not desire for the expression of God's authority. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son.

Philanthropia or love is the motive force behind the authority of the Church also. The Church has been given the authority to forgive the sins of those who truly repent and to heal the sick in soul. Because the Son of man came to save the world and not to condemn it, the Church also proclaims the gospel of love and salvation. The authority of the Church is seen reflected in words like 'forgiveness', 'redemption', 'healing', 'reconciliation', 'love', 'salvation' and the like. But instead, if the Church thinks of authority in terms of administration, commands, decrees, trials and penalty, it amounts to a distorted understanding of divine authority. In certain stages in the history of the Western Churches, attempts were made to define the authority of the Church mostly on the lines of the latter concept.

2. The grain of wheat that dies....

We have seen that the authority of Christ comes from his self-denial. He suffered humiliation and death for the sake of the world. He did not project himself to the world in order to teach that he was the Son of God. When he gave himself up for suffering and death, and showed the meaning of constant communion with the Father, many began to realise that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah to come. When he said: "...unless a grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn.12:24), he was talking about himself. These words of Christ also constitute his explanation of the meaning of the nature and authority of the Church.

What is said above may appear to be a self-contradiction in terms. For it is those individuals and communities that do not practise self-denial that gain authority in our present-day world; self-assertion, and not self-denial is seen as the first step towards power and authority. But the example Christ set for the Church is one of self-denial and self-emptying.

3. Self-denial

One might reasonably ask if the Church exists eternally with Christ, how then can it deny itself? The answer here too is

exemplified in the life of Christ. A Church that stands for the poor and the oppressed in this world practises self-denial. In doing so it may have to forgo many worldly positions or rights. A Church standing for justice and peace is surely travelling on the way of the cross. If it fights against economic exploitation, preparation for war and man's inhumanity to man, it is sure to be tried in the court of Pontius Pilate. If it searches for and finds its lost sheep and carries them on its back, if it supports the weak and the needy, if it heals the sick or forgives sins, the world might question it. By what authority do you do this? But it is here that we see the authority of the Church at work. There is no dearth of persons or groups that would like to rule over others. But seldom do we come across individuals and communities that can discover for themselves the authority derived from self-denial.

4. Identity and authority

A search for the meaning of authority leads us to the question of the identity of the Church. In this connection we may refer to a well-known letter written in the second century: "A letter to Diognetes". We do not know for certain who wrote this letter; yet, one thing is certain: the author of the letter would have been a Christian leader or thinker of the second century. The views on the identity and character of the Christian Church expressed in the letter are: "The Christians have no city, language or dress of their own. No city or place is particularly foreign to them because they know that the whole earth is the creation of God. But they consider this world itself foreign to them. They love everyone but are hated by all. They do good to all but are persecuted by all. Their presence is inconspicuous. They are not identified by any particular kind of clothes. Even as the Spirit abides in the body and animates it, the Christian Church remains in this world and through its invisible presence enlivens it."

This letter reveals quite clearly the state of the Christian Church and its self-assurance in the second century. The Church

lays no special emphasis on creating an external identity for itself, but instead concentrates on quickening the world through its inner life. This is a pointer to the real authority of the Church.

The Church sees its authority in caring for humanity, in emptying itself for others and in interceding for the whole creation. The authority that the Church has gained from Christ is the one that fosters the welfare of all men, redeems them from sin, and gives them fullness of life.

Exercise

1. How is God's love of man the basis of the authority of the Church?
2. What are the sources of the authority of the Church?
3. What is the substance of "A letter to Diognetes"?

LESSON 5

THE CHURCH AND THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

1. *Splits in the Church.*
2. *The earth and its fullness.*
3. *Inspiration for unity*
4. *Unity in faith*
5. *Unity based on wisdom*

1. Splits in the Church

Whenever schisms arose in the Church, the body of Christ, there were also attempts at bringing about unity. Many factors contributed to these schisms. Those who probe deep into these divisions can find theological, cultural, political economic and even personal factors as having been responsible for them. The first major division in the Church took place in the fifth century at the time of the Ephesus Ecumenical Synod (A. D. 431) over the question of Nestorian faith. As a result of this division, the Eastern Syrian Church in Persia became separated from the other Churches. Again, in A. D. 451 another important division took place after the synod of Chalcedon. The Christological debates centring round the person of Christ were responsible for this division. The question debated upon was how the incarnate Christ combined in himself divine as well as human nature. The consequence was that the three famous Coptic Orthodox Churches in Egypt and the Syrian Church of Antioch lined up against the Roman and the Greek Churches. Later, the Indian, Armenian and Ethiopian Churches accepted the Christological position of the Coptic and Syrian Churches. These five Churches are together known as the Oriental Orthodox Churches. The Eucharist is a common feature of these five Churches. Again in the eleventh

century there was a rift between the Greek Orthodox Church with its Patriarchal seat at Constantinople and the Roman Church over theological issues concerning the Holy Spirit and the Son-Spirit relationship. As a result of the Reformation in the Roman Church in the sixteenth century the Western Church was split into the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed Churches. Further division took place in the Reformed Churches off and on, and the result was the coming into being of a large number of denominations within the world Christian community.

It is not our intention here to go deep into the causes of these divisions. Most of the Christians are now conscious of the lamentable fact that the body of the Church has been cut into several pieces. As a result, efforts to bring about Christian unity have gathered momentum and universality. The present ecumenical movement is the result of these efforts.

2. The earth and its fullness

The Greek word *oikoumene* means "the whole inhabited earth". The word, 'ecumenical', is derived from this term. Though '*oikoumene*' has been used with different shades of political meaning in the Roman and Byzantine empires, the Christian tradition is to use it in the widest possible sense of 'the earth and its fullness' (Ps. 124:1, I Cor. 10.26). The term refers to the whole earth. Although the ecumenical movement is usually seen as a movement for the unity of the Christian Churches, we should be able to understand it in its widest possible meaning as the ultimate unity of the whole creation. As pointed out earlier, the ecumenical movement has a long history because every division in the Church has been accompanied by efforts for unity. The present-day ecumenical movement began in Europe in the first decade of this century. Initially, the leaders of the various Reformed Churches were in the forefront. There was no unity or any type of co-ordination among the Reformed Churches in their missionary activities in Asia and Africa in those days. Many Christian leaders understood ecumenism in these early days as the coming

together of these Reformed Churches that do not have any fundamental theological differences among themselves. There are a few, even today, who limit ecumenism to the unity of the Protestant Churches. Whatever be the concepts associated with ecumenism, attempts to bring about the unity of the Churches culminated in the formation of the World Council of Churches. The Malankara Orthodox Church is a founding member of the W. C. C. established in 1948. The Orthodox Church has been able to provide commendable creative leadership to the WCC right from the beginning through the presence and participation of its outstanding leaders in the activities of the WCC. It may be noted here that the first woman President of the WCC long before women's movements were heard of, was an Orthodox lady from the Indian Orthodox Church. The WCC today is a powerful forum of the ecumenical movement.

Similarly there is a National Council of Churches (NCC) functioning at the national level in India. This Council is not a unit or regional body of the WCC, but an independent organization. The Malankara Orthodox Church is also a member of this Council. The Church has membership in the Kerala Council of Churches working at the provincial level.

Only the various Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Churches are members of the WCC. Although the Roman Catholic Church has no official membership, there are many areas in which that Church works in co-operation with the WCC. For example, the Roman Catholic Church is an official member of the Faith and Order Commission, the theological wing of the WCC.

3. Inspiration for Unity

The High Priest's Prayer of Jesus (John. 17) is the source of inspiration to the ecumenical movement. The purpose of the incarnation of Christ is the unification of the Church and the whole humanity in the ultimate unity of the Holy Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. St. Paul indicates in Eph.

4:5 that the concept of 'one Lord, one faith and one baptism' was prevalent right from the apostolic days.

It was painful to many Christians that the divisions in the Church were a hindrance to real Christian witness. And it was this pain and concern that gave rise to the ecumenical movement. In our present-day world Christian witness should mean witness to unity. It is obvious that such unity will be hastened by the unity of the Churches. Although the immediate goal of the ecumenical movement during its early days was the unity of the Christian Churches, it is now heading towards a much bigger goal, namely, the unity of all humanity. The Church, which is the new Israel and is described as 'a light to the nations' (Isa. 49:6), should live not for itself, but for the whole world. This fundamental understanding of her role has now been realised by many Christian Churches, and this has given added impetus to the ecumenical movement.

As a result of this insight, the ecumenical movement has begun to take an interest in a number of issues such as a just economic order, social equality, freedom from exploitation and poverty, reconciliation among racial and ethnic groups, care for the environment etc. The Christian Churches have turned their attention towards these issues in the firm belief that the core of redemption consists in the liberation of the whole man composed of body, mind and spirit.

4. Unity in faith

The Orthodox tradition maintains that unity in the basic Christian faith is a pre-requisite if the Churches are to become truly united. Reaching a common understanding on the doctrinal issues is as important as working in co-operation with one another for the implementation of social, economic or philanthropic programmes. Recognising this, the WCC has put considerable emphasis on organising studies and consultations on issues connected with faith and order and on evolving a consensus among member Churches on the essentials of their faith. The Reformed

Churches, on the other hand, usually view the Eucharistic communion as a preliminary step in the unifying process, and tend to consider issues concerning doctrines later. The Orthodox position is that the Eucharistic communion is the ultimate symbol of unity. To partake of the same Holy Eucharist implies becoming one and the same body in Christ. Therefore, to enter into the Eucharistic communion without arriving at unity in respect of the doctrinal aspects of faith and without mutual love is not a step in the right direction according to the Orthodox Churches. A balanced approach is what is required.

5. Unity based on wisdom

There are certain Christian denominations that try to win over other Christians to their fold in order to add to their numbers; they do so by the questionable means of persuasion and of spreading misinformation. We should know that such actions stand in the way of the working of the Holy Spirit, and become a stumbling block on the road to unity. It has become increasingly clear to the other Christian Churches that the faith and theological positions of the Orthodox Church have in no way departed from the authentic Christian tradition. The Orthodox tradition has deeply influenced various leading theologians of the Roman Catholic Church as well as those of various Protestant Churches. It is really unfortunate that instead of searching for the fundamentals of the Orthodox tradition, some of the Orthodox people yield to the treacherous and deceitful ways by which some other Churches and groups steal away people using foreign funds and organizational strength. Although the Orthodox Church is creatively involved in the ecumenical movement, yet in view of the problems stated above, it teaches that the members should exercise discretion in dealing with ecumenical matters and be mature in their approach.

Exercise

1. Write five sentences on the meaning of the word 'ecumenical'.
2. Write a paragraph on the role of the Malankara Orthodox Church in the ecumenical movement.
3. What is the main inspiration for unity?

LESSON 6

THE CHURCH AND THE ARK OF NOAH

1. *Noah's Ark—two interpretations.*
2. *Our relationship to non-Christians.*
3. *The Church and its attitude to dialogues with non-Christians.*

We see the Church as a continuation of the saving act of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. St. Paul says that God has put all things under his (Christ's) feet and has made him the head over all things for the Church, which is his body the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23). He further states that if we, as members of the Church, suffer for the sake of others, it is a continuation of the suffering of Christ himself. "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's affliction for the sake of his body, that is, the Church" (Col.1:24). The inseparable relationship between the incarnated Christ and the Church is made clear in this statement. The goal of the Church should be the redemption of the world in the same way as it was Christ's purpose too.

1. Noah's Ark: two interpretations

The Fathers of the early Church have interpreted Noah's Ark, that is described in the Old Testament, (Gen.6:8) as a precursor of the Church. Noah's Ark remained as a symbol of hope and salvation in a flood which destroyed the whole world. Those (human beings or animals) that entered the Ark were saved; others perished. This symbol is interpreted in two ways. They insist that only those who enter the Ark are saved and that the others are condemned. In the light of this interpretation, some believe that only the visible Christian Church will be saved and those belonging to other faiths will perish. This is not a Christian approach; nor is it the right one.

The Eastern tradition views Noah's Ark in a different way. The Ark of the Church symbolises salvation and not condemnation. The Ark stands for the salvation of the whole creation. The Church does not have the right to judge who will or will not finally be saved. The purpose of the Church is not to condemn human beings but to save them. God commands Noah to preserve all living beings in pairs so that "they may keep their kind alive upon the face of all the earth" (Gen.7:3). Animals which are clean and those which are unclean—both enjoy the salvation of God (Gen. 7:2). God, the Creator, desires the salvation of his created beings, and not their condemnation. The Church has the authority to take certain disciplinary actions or punitive measures, having regard to the good of mankind. But the Church does not have the right to exclude anyone from the Kingdom of God. Christ says, "...I did not come to judge the world but to save the world."

(John 12:47)

2. Our relations with non-Christians

There are a few things which we have to pay attention to in our relations with those who are not members of the Christian Church.

- (i) All human beings are the children of God and bear His image and likeness.
- (ii) The Church, the body of Christ, lovingly prays for the whole creation and yearns for the salvation and the good of all mankind. (I Tim.2:1-4).
- (iii) Salvation is the gift of God. It is God who decides how or when his creation should be saved. We have no right or authority to delimit the working of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 10:34—35).
- (iv) Christians are members of the Church Christ has founded as the normal means to salvation. They should remember with humility and gratitude the divine gifts given to them and should pray for all people (Tit.3:4-7).
- (v) The Church is not merely a community of people living here and now. Instead, it is a reality which includes all

faithful departed, all saints and all who waited patiently for the coming of Christ, all who lived their lives with integrity, and the whole company of spiritual beings. It is impossible to see the Church as a narrow minded organisation limited in its function and existing only within history. We have no right to tell our non-Christian brethren that we alone will be saved, and they will be condemned.

3. The Church and its attitude to dialogues with non-Christians

With the advent of the ecumenical movement, the Churches have shown interest in entering into dialogues and discussions with members of other religions and those believing in other ideologies. Our Church is also actively involved in such dialogues. The primary aim of these dialogues is to arrive at an understanding with the non-Christian brethren and to tackle the common problems confronting humanity. It is possible to reveal Christian values and ways of thought to others through such relationships. The Churches currently co-operate with other groups in search of solutions to common issues and problems. Our Christian faith teaches us to acknowledge goodness wherever and in whichever persons it is found, and to work with like-minded people. Christ has taught us to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. The essence of our mission lies in proclaiming the love of God in this world, and at the same time in respecting the freedom, religious and cultural values and traditions of others.

Exercise

1. What are the two interpretations given to Noah's Ark, which is regarded as a symbol of the Church?
2. Briefly state some of the things that we should observe in our attitude towards and relations with non-Christians.

Unit 3

LESSON 1

JESUS CHRIST, THE HIGH PRIEST, AND THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE CHURCH

1. *Continuity with a difference.*
2. *The Order of Melchizedek.*
3. *King and prophet.*
4. *Participation of the Church.*
5. *The whole body of the Church.*

All Orthodox Christian reflections on priesthood originate from two basic ideas:

- (i) Jesus Christ is the only and eternal high priest standing as mediator between God and humanity.
- (ii) The Church, the body of Christ, belongs to the royal priesthood by virtue of it being partaker of the royalty and priesthood of Jesus Christ.

These two fundamental ideas are interrelated. The first is clearly expounded in St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews and the second in the First Letter of Peter and also in the Book of Revelations. It is necessary to understand these two aspects in order to gain an insight into the concept of royal priesthood which originated in the apostolic times and continues uninterrupted to the present day.

1. Continuity with a difference

In the Letter to the Hebrews Jesus Christ is introduced as the eternal high priest. Having been written primarily for those who were Jewish converts to Christianity, the epistle compares and contrasts in detail the Jewish priesthood and Christ's priest-

hood. In a sense, the continuation and culmination of the Old Testament priesthood is found in Jesus Christ. But there is also a fundamental difference. It is in this difference that the author of the Letter to the Hebrews finds the uniqueness of the priesthood of Christ. The equivalent word of 'priest' in the Hebrew Old Testament is *Kohen* and the corresponding Greek word is *Hiereus*. The same words have been used to refer to Jesus Christ, the priest also.

According to the author of the Letter, Levitical priesthood had many inherent defects. Those elected to this priesthood according to the order of Aaron were required to offer sacrifices for their own sins also (Heb. 7:27). They were compelled to seek the remission of sins through yearly sacrifices of animals (Heb. 10:1-4). And at the same time these sacrifices could not cleanse the worshippers and make them perfect (Heb. 10:1). The priesthood of a Levite priest terminated with his death. This priesthood and the sacrifices were incomplete as well as inadequate.

2. The order of Melchizedek

The priesthood of Christ was fundamentally different from Levitical priesthood. The model here is that of the high priest, Melchizedek. Not much is known about this 'mysterious high priest of the Most High God'. In his Epistle St. Paul also introduces the same high priest as Melchizedek who is referred to in the Psalms (110:4) and who remains for ever. St. Paul says: "He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither, beginning of days nor end of life but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest for ever" (Heb. 7:3, 4). And through Abraham who had paid tithes to Melchizedek, the Levitical priesthood came to be inherited by Jesus Christ who became the eternal high priest in accordance with the order of Melchizedek.

But Christ, being the sinless, eternal high priest, need not offer sacrifices for remission of sins, unlike the Jewish priests. Moreover, he opened the door of eternal salvation to us through his unique sacrifice on Calvary. That is to say, Christ's sacrifice is unique and incomparable in every sense.

3. King and prophet

The two other great expectations about the Messiah in the Old Testament were that he would be a king as well as a prophet. The Jesus who found salvation in the Kingdom of Jehovah believed that Israel would have complete liberation when the Messiah became their king. Many Jews viewed this belief in a purely worldly sense. But Christ gave a new meaning to the whole concept. Obviously it was difficult for the Jews to understand a king of Zion who entered Jerusalem sitting on a donkey or a 'king of the Jews' who was crucified like a criminal. All the same this was how he revealed the meaning of his royalty.

The Messiah who is a high priest and king is also a prophet at the same time. Christ revealed his prophetic role while announcing the purpose of his mission reading from the Book of Isaiah, in the Synagogue in Nazareth (Lk. 14-24). In Christ who personally experienced the truth contained in the saying, 'No prophet is honoured in his own place', we see the true prophet. In Christ who interpreted the scriptures, who proclaimed that the Kingdom of God is at hand, and who healed the sick and fed the hungry, the teacher, the prophet, the physician and the shepherd meet and become one. Also, the different aspects of Christ's personality revealed in his roles as king, high priest, teacher, prophet, physician and shepherd become mutually complementary.

4. Participation of the Church

The Church, being the body of Christ, participated in all the above aspects of Christ's personality. It is to this participation that St. Peter refers when he says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). The whole people of God are being built up to become the royal priesthood in order that they may offer a sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ.

The Church partakes of the priesthood of Christ so that it also intercedes for the whole world like Christ. Similarly, it partakes of the character of Christ in the prophetic witness and royalty of his mission. In teaching the world and in shepherding the society, the Church also performs the same functions as those Jesus did for the world. This indeed is a right and a privilege which the Lord Jesus Christ has given to Church. "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever" (Rev. 1:6; cf. 5:10; 20:6).

5. The whole body or the Church

All the above functions are performed by the Church as a whole. Of all these functions the offering of the Holy Eucharist is the most supreme. The Holy Eucharist offered by the Church in heaven and on earth standing in unison with the holy priesthood is not a mere repetition or a service in memory of the sacrifice on Calvary. It is on the other hand full participation in the only and eternal sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is against the background of this priesthood which the Church manifests as a whole that the meaning of the special priesthood within the Church can be properly understood.

Exercise

1. What are the two basic ideas of Christian priesthood?
2. Learn by heart 1. Pet. 2:5.
3. What are the six attributes given to the Messiah in the Bible?

LESSON 2

EVOLUTION OF THE STRUCTURE OF PRIESTHOOD

1. *The three-fold ministry*
2. *Tradition of the early Church*
3. *Ordained ministers and their relationship with the people of God*
4. *Synods*
5. *Ordained ministry and the body of Christ.*

1. The three-fold ministry

We recognize three Orders in the ministry of the Church, namely, a bishop (episcopos), priest (presbyter, kashisho) and deacon. Clear indications regarding the three-tier structure of the clergy are seen in the famous letters of Saint Ignatius (2nd century). In the New Testament there are references to only two ordained positions, i. e. bishop and deacon. We read that St. Paul appointed elders wherever he established Churches. Such elders (or presidents of the congregations) are the episcopoi (bishops). The literal meaning of the Greek word 'episcopos' is supervisor. The English word 'bishop' is also a modified form of the Greek word. In the early days of Christianity the terms 'episcopos' and 'presbyteros' had more or less the same meaning and could be used as synonyms.

The Greek word *presbyteros* and its Syriac equivalent *kashisho* mean 'elder'. It is likely that the apostles might have appointed elderly, mature, knowledgeable persons to supervise the newly formed local Churches. The terms 'episcopo' and 'presbyter' were used interchangeably in the early New Testament days. In the Acts of the Apostles we are told of the manner of selecting deacons and assigning them special responsibilities. The word 'deacon' means one who serves, helps, etc. In the early days

they were appointed to organize the community meals of the Christian brotherhood and to streamline the day-to-day administrative matters of the Church. But later on, deacons also became part of the liturgical-clerical Order. That is how the three clerical Orders, namely episcopos, presbyteros and deacons came into existence by the end of the second century.

The qualities and qualifications necessary for those who aspire to become bishops and deacons are clearly stated in St. Paul's Letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 3:1-13). They should be exemplary persons of genuine Christian faith leading perfectly righteous lives.

2. Tradition of the early Church

The ancient Christian centres such as Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, and Constantinople were all within the Roman empire. The evolution and development of ecclesiastical positions such as Bishop, Metropolitan etc. took place primarily in these centres within the Roman empire. There were ancient Churches in centres such as Persia and India, outside the Roman empire. But owing to various historical forces it was the ecclesiastical structure and organisational set-up evolved in the Roman imperial centres that became commonly accepted.

The early Christian communities first came into being in cities. The first Christian groups in the New Testament were established in towns in Asia Minor and Europe. This was because preachers and those who came to listen to the Gospel had easy access to towns. It was later that Churches were built in rural areas and the Gospel was preached there. There was usually only one Christian community in a town. All members of the community assembled to participate in the Holy Eucharist. There was a presiding member—an elder, or a bishop, in such a congregation. He was the chief celebrant in the Holy Eucharist. So, the early tradition was to have one bishop for the congregation of a place. But the Church grew fast, and depending on the number of believers in a particular region, different

communities (parishes) came into existence there. In such a situation it seemed improper to have more than one bishop in the same region. That is how the special Order of presbyters originated. The episcopos enjoyed the chief shepherd's position and the presbyters (priests), ordained and duly authorised by him, were directly in charge of local parishes. They were the chief celebrants in the Holy Eucharist in local congregations, on behalf of the episcopos, and they were given the responsibility of shepherding the Church at that level. This is how the present hierarchical structure has developed within the Church.

3. Ordained ministers and their relationship with the people of God.

The episcopos in any locality did not function as a mere individual. There was a small community of presbyters and deacons, living with every episcopos in order to assist him and give counsel, when necessary. The head of the Church had a continuous, lively relationship with his people. A small council consisting of a few lay persons, mature and wise, priests and deacons had an advisory role. It also served as a spiritual fellowship. Such a council along with the episcopos played an important role in the administration of the spiritual as well as material concerns of the Church. The present diocesan councils in our Church are in fact an offshoot of this tradition. Normally all important matters pertaining to the spiritual life of the people in a diocese are handled by this council presided over by the bishop. The parish councils presided over by the presbyters are small replicas of the diocesan council. Such councils have the responsibility of assisting the parish priest in running the administration of the parish in matters both spiritual and material. There is a notion that the responsibility of the council is only in regard to the administration of the affairs of the parish; this is wrong.

Important decisions in matters affecting the parish as a whole are taken by the general body of the parish, which again has a spiritual function. The general body is the assembly of all people belonging to the royal priesthood. The general body functions under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, discusses issues, both

secular and spiritual, and arrives at decisions at its meetings. There is also an extended version of a general body known as the Malankara Syrian Christian Association in our Church. The Association comprises two lay persons and one priest from every one of the parishes, all the bishops and the Catholicos. Such assemblies, representing the whole Church, are a continuation of the early Christian tradition. All this shows that the clergy do not stand isolated from the people, but have been called upon in particular by the Holy Spirit to give spiritual leadership to the people.

4. Synods

An episcopal synod is a council of all the bishops of the Churches. As mentioned earlier, such synods are the expression of the unity and catholic nature of the Church. The bishops in important cities received special privileges and positions later under the Roman administration. Thus the bishops of metropolitan cities came to be called Metropolitans. Many bishops functioned under the administrative authority of one Metropolitan or the other. Ecclesiastical positions such as patriarch and Catholicos also came to be evolved in a similar manner in course of time. The bishop of the most important city was usually elected head of the Church in that geographical region. He became the chief spokesman and head of the Church in that area. The person who held such a position within the Roman empire was designated Patriarch whereas one from outside the empire was called Catholicos. Their position is not above that of the Church; nor are they isolated from the people; they are very much within the Church and are with the people of God.

5. Ordained ministry and the body of Christ

What we have said about the structure of the Church so far is to stress the point that clerical positions such as episcopos, priest or deacon become meaningful only within the ambit of the holy Church. All who attain these positions are first of all members of the Church, primarily by virtue of the holy baptism and

the holy anointment (Mooron) they receive. To be a member of the Church, the body of Christ, is in itself a position of importance in the Church. When a person is raised to the position of ordained ministry, his basic qualification is that he is a member of the Church through his baptism and through his being a partaker of the Holy Eucharist. It is this firm foundation that helps him receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, consent from the people of God, and ordination from the episcopos. These gifts are to be received in the name of the Church for the Church and along with the Church.

Exercise

1. Give the meanings of the words, 'episcopos' 'kashisho' and 'deacon'.
2. Write a paragraph on episcopal synod and explain what it is.

LESSON 3

THE PRIEST: VOCATION AND ELECTION

1. *The Church and the individual's vocation.*
2. *The role of the Christian community.*
3. *The call of the Christian community.*
4. *Personal conviction and vocation.*
5. *The laying on of hands.*

We have already referred to the fundamental and inseparable relationship existing between the individual called to priesthood and the people of God, that is, the royal priesthood. Let us consider here the kind of vocation required for persons to become priests and the manner of their election to priesthood.

1. The Church and the individual's vocation

While considering the vocation for priesthood, we may turn our attention to the words spoken by Jesus Christ to his disciples regarding this: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (John 15:16). The Western Reformed Churches follow the tradition of interpreting call to priesthood as a personal desire in one's mind. This interpretation has begun to find favour with our Church also to some extent these days. It is generally believed that those who come for theological studies and ministry take their own decisions. The decision of the individual is certainly important especially when it is inspired by the Holy Spirit. But the ancient Orthodox tradition was for the Church to make the call under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to suitable persons to join the ministry. That is to say, the role of the Christian community in inviting mature members of the Church to take orders was more important than the personal decision of the members concerned. There were instances when persons thus called had declined, out of humility, to become priests or bishops. In most of these instances the Church could successfully persuade them to be ordained. And these persons invariably rendered exemplary service to the Church. There were also cases in which the Church declared persons unworthy of becoming priests or bishops, when they came forward to receive priesthood and resorted to scheming and propaganda for their election. This makes one point clear: the vocation to become a shepherd, priest or prophet, for the good of the community, like Jesus Christ, does not depend on one's personal desire alone. Instead, it comes as a call from the people of God inspired by the Holy Spirit and as acceptance on the part of those who have been called.

2. The role of the Christian community

St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews makes it clear that in the Old Testament days also the call from the community was a pre-condition for persons to accept priesthood. St. Paul says: "And

one does not take the honour upon himself, but he is called by God just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not exact himself to be made a high priest ..." (Heb. 5:4—5). The invitation extended by the Christian community will be based on a well considered assessment of the candidate and on the spiritual needs and requirements of the community. So, the chances of a wrong choice are remote. It is said in the Acts of the Apostles that the election of deacons is not by the apostles alone, but by the whole community (Acts. 6:2—4). Likewise, it was the apostles, the elders and the whole Church that chose the men to go to Antioch and other places to convey the decision of the Jerusalem Synod to the Churches there (Acts 15:23).

3. The call of the Christian community

This apostolic tradition is preserved in the Orthodox Church to a certain extent. The episcopos is elected by the representatives of the whole Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In the Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, the appointment of bishops is made primarily by the Pope himself. Of late some sections of people in the Roman Catholic Church too have begun to express the view that the people's voice should be heard in the selection and appointment of bishops. In the Orthodox tradition, only those elected and proclaimed worthy (axios) by the people are usually ordained bishops. Even in the case of priests, the tradition till recently was for the parishes to choose suitable persons and send them to the bishops for ordination. This practice has declined in the wake of the theological instruction imparted in seminaries. Even then steps have been taken to make sure that only those who are suitable and acceptable in their local parishes and for the whole Church are chosen for training. This rectifies the defect to a certain extent.

4. Personal conviction and vocation

Though the role of the Christian community in choosing individuals to the sacrament of priesthood has been emphasised here, it does not in any way mean that personal desire, conviction

and inner urge do not count. St. Paul in his First Letter to Timothy says: "If anyone aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a noble task" (1 Tim- 3:11). St. Paul embraced Christianity after a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. The risen Christ appeared before him, while he was on his way to Damascus, and called upon him to be his apostle (Acts. 22:6—10). Further reading reveals that St. Paul realised God's call in many ways through the Church. One can receive the message of the Holy Spirit through other persons, through the Church or on the basis of one's own inner spiritual urge. There are no limits to the ways in which the Holy Spirit can call upon one to join the ministry of the Church.

5. The laying on of hands

One's vocation for priesthood reaches formal completion by the laying of hands by the episcopos upon the candidate. The episcopos does this by virtue of the authority vested in him through the apostles by Jesus Christ on behalf of the Church and for the Christian community. St. Paul reminds Timothy "Not to neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance, when the council of elders laid their hands upon you" (1 Tim. 4:14).

In short, three points deserve our attention regarding the vocation and election of candidates to the sacrament of priesthood.

(i) It is the Holy Spirit that guides individuals to special priesthood. St. Paul exhorts the elders of the Church in Ephesus: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the Church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son" (Acts. 20:28).

(ii) The call, consent and acceptance of the Church and the royal priesthood are the basis of elevating individuals to special priesthood in the Church.

(iii) The episcopos stands with the people of God and lays hands upon the candidate specially called upon to accept priesthood, and invoke the special gifts of the Holy Spirit upon him.

The vocation for and election to priesthood remain incomplete without the above three conditions being met.

Exercise

1. Write a paragraph on how the Church calls upon its members to join the ministry.
2. What are the three important conditions governing the vocation and election of candidates to priesthood?

LESSON 4

THE BISHOP, THE PRIEST AND THE DEACON

1. *The bishop (Episcopos).*
2. *The presbyter (Kashisho).*
3. *The deacon.*
4. *The Holy Order.*

1. The bishop

The bishop (episcopos) has a key position within the structural framework of the Church. We look upon the episcopos, as the good shepherd and teacher, as one of the rallying points in our Christian life. Mar Ignatius, an Apostolic Father and Bishop of Antioch, who lived in the early part of the second century emphasises this in his writings. He says: "Where there is a bishop, there is the Church". He also states that those who rebel against the bishops deprive themselves of their fellowship in the Church. The early Church Fathers have depicted the picture of the Eucharistic service in which the Holy Eucharist is the focal point, the episcopos being the chief celebrant surrounded by

concentric circles of priests, deacons and the faithful people worshipping God. In this the Holy Eucharist and the episcopos are the central elements.

The Orthodox tradition maintains that the episcopos is the sacramental presence of Jesus Christ, the high priest and the good shepherd. The episcopos is not a "vicar", as in the Roman Church, substituting Christ in his absence. Instead, Christ himself makes his presence in the Church felt through the bishop standing in the midst of the people of God. An episcopos has been called upon to announce God's forgiveness to his people, to shepherd them on the path of righteousness and to be a mediator on behalf of his people in the presence of God. The name 'priest' given to Christ in the New Testament was later on given to the episcopos also. It is expected that the bishop, being the sacramental presence of Christ, exemplifies the model of Jesus Christ in his own life.

Though the bishop is the chief celebrant in every Eucharistic service, for practical reasons the presbyters have been authorised to be celebrants since the early days of the Church. This has made the presbyters discharge functions and responsibilities earlier discharged only by the episcopos. The presbyters, therefore, can now administer sacraments in a parish, which only the episcopos was supposed to do. But in the case of sacraments such as ordination, consecration of Holy Muron etc. for the Whole Church, the episcopos has to be the chief celebrant, and the tradition is still maintained in the Church. In the case of a parish, for all practical purposes it is the presbyter who bears the sacramental presence of Jesus among the people. The presbyter is called upon to reveal Christ, the priest, the shepherd, the prophet, the king and the teacher, to the community he serves through his life and personality. From the end of the fourth century onwards the episcopos has come to be commonly called the high priest and the presbyter the priest.

3. The deacon

Deacons were first elected for the discharge of worldly duties rather than spiritual duties. There were strifes between the

Hellenists and the Hebrews in the early Christian community in Jerusalem when the disciples were increasing in number (Acts 6:1-6). Seven men were selected as deacons to bring about order and organize the community meals. The day-to-day administration was entrusted to them. The qualifications prescribed for them by the apostles were that they should be of "good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom." In course of time deacons also became part and parcel of the liturgical life of the community of the Church. The social and philanthropic activities of the Church came under the responsibility of deacons. Deacons also came to have the responsibility of assisting the bishop in liturgical and other matters. Now since the Order of deacons is viewed as a mere stepping-stone to priesthood, it is regarded as incomplete. But it is complete in itself. There are many cases of deacons remaining as deacons throughout their lives. One can see the names of many famous deacons such as Saint Stephen and Saint Ephrem in the history of the Church. There was also a practice of appointing elderly and worthy women as deaconesses in the apostolic days. St. Paul specially commends sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the Church of Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1). Revitalising this tradition, which declined some time ago, would definitely be desirable. This would also enable the Church to receive the invaluable gifts, talents and services of women who are also "co-heirs to the grace of life" and full participants in the royal priesthood of the Church.

4. The Holy Order

The Order of the clergy comprising episcopi, presbyters and deacons is sometimes referred to as the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The Roman Catholics and certain other groups interpret this to mean "rule by the clergy". This is, however, a distortion.

The reputed Eastern Christian ascetic and theologian called Dionysius the Areopogits (5th century) describes in one of his books the nine choirs of angels standing around the throne of God engaged in continuous and dynamic worship of God. Each circle of angels has been positioned on the basis of their ability

concentric circles of priests, deacons and the faithful people worshipping God. In this the Holy Eucharist and the episcopos are the central elements.

The Orthodox tradition maintains that the episcopos is the sacramental presence of Jesus Christ, the high priest and the good shepherd. The episcopos is not a "vicar", as in the Roman Church, substituting Christ in his absence. Instead, Christ himself makes his presence in the Church felt through the bishop standing in the midst of the people of God. An episcopos has been called upon to announce God's forgiveness to his people, to shepherd them on the path of righteousness and to be a mediator on behalf of his people in the presence of God. The name 'priest' given to Christ in the New Testament was later on given to the episcopos also. It is expected that the bishop, being the sacramental presence of Christ, exemplifies the model of Jesus Christ in his own life.

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4. The Holy Order

The Order of the clergy comprising episcopi, presbyters and deacons is sometimes referred to as the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The Roman Catholics and certain other groups interpret this to mean "rule by the clergy". This is, however, a distortion.

The reputed Eastern Christian ascetic and theologian called Dionysius the Areopogits (5th century) describes in one of his books the nine choirs of angels standing around the throne of God engaged in continuous and dynamic worship of God. Each circle of angels has been positioned on the basis of their ability

to transmit and radiate the glory of God. This is a complete picture of radiance and eternal motion. Dionysius compares his holy ordering to the ordering of *episcopoi*, presbyters and deacons within the Church, and calls this ordering holy hierarchy. Thus hierarchy, which means "holy ordering" does not mean rule by priests; instead it is the holy ordering within the Church in the model of the ordering of angels standing in encircling choirs around the throne of God receiving and transmitting the glory of God. It is this concept that is accepted in the Orthodox tradition.

Exercise

1. Write a paragraph on the place of the *episcopos* in the Church.
2. What are the duties of deacons?
3. What is meant by holy hierarchy"?

LESSON 5

APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

1. *Apostolic succession*
2. *Apostolic succession and the community*
3. *Gnostics and apostolic tradition*

There have been debates and controversies as to how the authority of Jesus Christ given to his disciples has been transmitted to later generations. The expression, 'apostolic succession, has more often than not been interpreted wrongly.

1. Apostolic succession

Wherever they established new Church, the apostles laid hands upon suitable persons acceptable to the communities and

appointed them *episcopoi*. Those who became *episcopoi* in this manner appointed their successors to lead the congregation after their time. That is to say, the *episcopoi* of the Church are successors to the apostles. But it is incorrect to view the succession in an over-simplified sense of transferring individual authority from one *episcopos* to another.

2. Apostolic succession and the community

Three points regarding apostolic succession demand our special attention. First, apostolic succession is not something which is transferred from one person to another. It is the Christian community which makes this succession possible. In the same way as the tradition of authentic faith remains unbroken in the Church the apostolic authority continues to exist uninterrupted in the Church. Because of the working of the Holy Spirit this authority flows uninterrupted in the Church, the body of Christ. Therefore, it is not in any particular individual but in the whole of the Christian Church that apostolic succession is centred. But when individuals chosen by the community and guided by the Holy Spirit are elevated to episcopal status, they become special witnesses to the apostolic faith. If a bishop ordains an individual and consecrates him bishop without the consent or acceptance of the Christian community, it does not amount to apostolic succession.

In Hippolytus's work "Apostolic Tradition" written in the beginning of the third century, the procedure of raising an individual to episcopacy is clearly laid down. An individual chosen by the whole people and having no blemish should be ordained bishop. When such an individual has been chosen and accepted by all, the people, the presbyters and all the bishops who are available should come together on a Sunday. With the consent of all present the bishops should lay their hands on the head of the candidate. The presbyters should remain silent and all the assembled should pray silently for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Second, the apostles did not hand down authority to their successors in their personal capacity. It was the whole apostolic

community that transferred the authority in this way. That is to say, all episcopoi have obtained the same authority from the apostolic college irrespective of whether St. Thomas consecrated bishops in India or St. Peter in Antioch. It is therefore not correct to say that a particular bishop in a particular place has the sole authority devolved upon him from a particular apostle. Succession comes from the apostolic college to the Christian community which chooses and ordains its bishops.

Third, it is an individual, who has received the Holy Spirit through baptism and anointing with holy Muron, that is later ordained bishop. It is noteworthy that the anointing of a person with holy Muron is not repeated at the time of his consecration as bishop. Now the congregation prays for the candidate that he may receive special gifts from the Holy Spirit, and the bishops present lay their hands on his head. Prior to this the candidate in most cases obviously has received proper Christian training in matters concerning faith from his own family, parish and also from the Christian community. Therefore, it is the candidate's family and the Christian community at large that train him in the true Christian tradition and faith, and not the bishop who is consecrating him, though the bishop retains his position as the teacher of faith. St. Paul writes to Timothy that he is reminded of his sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in his grandmother Lois and in his mother Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5). This also makes clear that apostolic succession is not a linear one passed on from one bishop to another, but is passed on from generation to generation in the Christian community as a whole.

3. Gnostics and apostolic succession

In the early centuries certain groups called "gnostics" came into being within the Church; they posed a problem to the true faith and endangered it to some extent. The gnostics claimed that they received special knowledge (gnosis) directly from Christ; this knowledge was of a secret character and, therefore, was not obtainable to all. The gnostic teachers, on the basis of the knowledge they claimed they had, rejected the lawfully consecrated bishops of

the Church and ignored certain genuine traditions of the Church. They claimed to have obtained apostolic succession through certain cryptic traditions.

It was to oppose such false claims that some Church Fathers prepared a list of the successors of the apostles in different places. Fathers like Saint Irenaeus maintained that bishops of the Church were publicly consecrated as witnesses to the apostolic traditions of the Church and that no secret traditions other than those already known had been handed down by the apostles and that true apostolic tradition therefore had been handed down through these bishops of the Church who had kept and transmitted the true faith.

It is not hard to follow this argument, if we take into account the peculiar circumstances that existed in those days. But the argument, however, became distorted later when the bishop was isolated from the Christian community and projected as heir to a secret tradition open only to the spiritually enlightened.

Exercise

1. Briefly describe the three points that enable one to understand the true meaning of apostolic succession.
2. What were the claims of the gnostics regarding apostolic succession?

LESSON 6

THE HOLY SACRAMENTS

1. *The basis*
2. *The supreme sacrament*
3. *Mysteries of the Church*
4. *How many sacraments are there?*

1. **The basis**

The meaning of the holy sacraments is enshrined in the mystery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. God's unlimited love of man was the force behind the incarnation. God revealed Himself through Christ at a stage when the human person by himself was incapable of knowing God and loving Him. Hence the basis of the mysteries which we call sacraments is God's unbounded love of humanity and the resultant incarnation of Christ.

2. **The supreme sacrament**

We perceive the world around us through the five senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. The Christian Church does not teach a spirituality which denounces the body and its senses. The invisible and inconceivable God was made visible to man in the incarnation of Christ. As St. John says: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life. we proclaim. . . ." (1 Jn. 1:1-3). This is how an apostle bears witness to Christ the Son of God who took upon himself the body and nature of man in all their completeness. As stated in the liturgy of St. James, "Christ combined in himself the spirit, the body, his own people, the aliens, the heaven and the earth".

As a result of this merger of the spirit with the body it is difficult to think of the spirit separately from matter in the Christian

faith. Moreover, because God merged Himself with His creation through His Son, Jesus Christ, physical objects also gained the capacity of bearing God's presence. All sacraments administered in the Church, reflect the glory of God, since the unification of God and humanity began with the incarnation of God in Christ. In the widest sense the supreme sacrament is Christ who became man for the sake of humanity. We participate in the nature of God through the sacraments. Through them we are able to transform the nature of creation and enter into the supreme communion of love.

3. **Mysteries of the Church**

In Syriac the word 'sacrament' means 'sanctification'. But the use of the word, 'sacrament', in the sense of 'mysteries of the Church', dates back to ancient times. It is in this sense that the Greek word 'mysterion' is used. The English word, 'sacrament' is derived from the Latin word, 'sacramentum'. The word 'sacramentum' in the early times referred to a wide range of things, viz. the oath taken by a soldier joining the Roman army, a seal put on the animal for sacrifice, etc. Later on, the word came to be used exclusively to refer to baptism, the Holy Eucharist and so on.

The expression 'mysteries of the Church' is more acceptable in the Eastern tradition. In the New Testament, the Gospel and sometimes Jesus Christ himself are referred to by the use of the word 'mystery'. On certain other occasions the word is used to denote the Church or the inscrutable ways of God (Rom. 16:25-26, 11:25, 1 Cor. 2:6, Col. 1: 26,27; 2:2; Eph. 1:9, 1:4-10; 3:3-12). An analysis of the meaning of the Greek, Aramic and Hebrew words for 'mystery' gives an idea of 'the mysterious council of God.' Therefore, to celebrate sacraments or to participate in sacraments is to become participants in the highest council of God. The sacraments in short enable us to enter the presence of God and to enjoy perfect love and communion with God and the saints.

4. How many sacraments are there?

No one in the early Church attempted to determine the number of sacraments. The notion that there were seven sacraments first came up in the Roman Church in the twelfth century. The special importance attached to number seven was the reason for this. Number three symbolised Trinity, and number four the creation. It was argued that since three added to four indicated the unification of the creator with the creation, number seven was important. Many referred to the importance of the number in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. The Council of Trent of the Roman Catholic Churches in the sixteenth century officially proclaimed the number of sacraments to be seven. The number came to be accepted in some Orthodox Churches also mainly because of the influence of the Western Churches. At the time of the Reformation certain leaders like Martin Luther accepted only two sacraments. Luther argued that Christ instituted only two sacraments, namely, baptism and the Eucharist, and that hence only these two were acceptable.

The sacraments are dealt with, one by one, in the next Unit. Although ordination of deacons, priests and bishops is included in the list of sacraments, it will not be dealt with again since this has already been covered in this Unit.

Exercise

1. What is the basis of sacraments?
2. Which is the supreme sacrament?
3. How did the notion of seven sacraments come about?

Unit 4

LESSON 1

HOLY BAPTISM

1. *Through fire and the Spirit*
2. *The Mother Church*
3. *Water and the Holy Spirit*
4. *The new creation*
5. *Infant baptism*

Holy baptism is the first sacrament through which we are initiated into the Church. In Judaism, as well as in a few other ancient religions there was a tradition of ritual bathing in water as a symbol of one's entering a new community. In the Christian Church baptism was instituted at the command of Jesus Christ (Mt. 28:19, Mk.16:16, Jn. 3:5).

1. Through fire and the Spirit

The Church has always accepted the Lord's command that "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:5). John the Baptist himself said that while he baptized with water, Christ would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Lk. 3:15-16). Though the physical medium of water is used in Christian baptism, the emphasis is on the activity of the Holy Spirit. The first prayer in the Syrian Orthodox liturgy of baptism says: "O, Lord God, make us worthy of this spiritual, priestly ministry which you have entrusted to your holy apostles so that we may baptize with fire and water".

2. The Mother Church

It is the Church that baptizes. The Church also receives

the individual who has been baptized. In the liturgy of baptism there is a request to the Church which reads:

“O, holy Church, receive this little lamb that has been born of the baptismal water by the Holy Spirit”. In answer to this the Church says, “O, new lamb, born of water in the name of the Holy Trinity, child of baptism, come. I welcome you”. Baptism is not a mere personal sacrament. Though baptism is administered individually to members, there is a real participation of the Christian community in this sacrament right from the beginning. An individual receiving holy baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is initiated into the great mysteries of the Holy Trinity and the Church. He becomes the member of a new community which pervades heaven and earth.

3. Water and the Holy Spirit

The use of water as the physical medium for baptism is highly suggestive. We read in the book of Genesis the Spirit of God brooding over water and creating all sorts of living beings. Water symbolises a state of shapelessness and chaos. The Holy Spirit bestowed shape and order on creation lifting it from its shapeless, chaotic state. Such was the act of first creation. This creation became subject to death and decay as a result of sin, and tended to slide back into the former state of chaotic nothingness.

Jesus Christ came in order to renew this creation. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus Christ when he received baptism in the river Jordan. The Spirit acted in the same way as in the beginning of creation. Christ who rose out of the Jordan after the baptism carried in himself the new creation. “Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17).

4. New Creation

The teaching of the early Church was that we would become a new creation through baptism. In baptism we get liberated

from the bondage of sin and evil and become enlightened through the Holy Spirit. The newly baptised were referred to as ‘the enlightened’ in the beginning. The remission of sins is not the only purpose of baptism. The liturgy clearly spells out many other purposes; they are: to receive the seal of life, to belong to the flock of Christ, to reflect the glory of God, to be brothers and sisters of Christ, to become worthy of spiritual rebirth, and to strip off the old man and to wear the glorious robes of immortality.

St. Paul teaches us that baptism is basically our participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. “We were buried there fore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Rom.6:4-5). Immersing in water denotes our participation in the death and burial of Christ. Rising from water symbolises our participation in his resurrection. The assumption is that anyone receiving baptism and becoming a Christian should be like Christ in his life. In this sense the sacrament of baptism is our participation in the redemptive mysteries of the incarnation of Christ.

The priest breathes air on the person who is getting baptized in preparation for his/ her receiving the Holy Spirit. The prayer said on this occasion is: “Give him/her the heavenly breath your only Son breathed on his disciples”. Incidentally, this also points to the breathing of life into Adam’s nostrils in the first act of creation. The Holy Spirit dwells abundantly in the person who has been baptized. The life of a Christian is the life which the Holy Spirit gives him.

5. Infant baptism

Baptizing children is an old tradition of the Church. In the early Church, a large number of people, both adults and children, were brought forward to be baptized. Saint Gregory of Nazians who lived in the fourth century exhorts: “Give your children

the seal of the Holy Trinity through baptism at the earliest opportunity". It is only natural that children born of Christian parents are baptized early in their childhood and made full members of the Church. The Christian community fosters the child in prayer and nurtures it in the Christian faith.

The godparent promises at the time of baptism that the child shall be brought up in the Christian tradition as a true representative of the whole Church. The denial of baptism to children on the plea that they were not mature enough to know what they were going through came as a result of the influence of the rationalist movement in the wake of the Reformation in the West. But the number of people who think on these lines is, however, on the decrease. Christ himself, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed, "I thank thee Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou has hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes. . . ."(Lk. 10:21). This means that children also have a special gift to perceive the holy mysteries. Children do have the same right as anybody else to receive the grace of God and be full members of the Church. Jesus has declared that the Kingdom of God belongs to children too. The Church normally practises infant baptism and accepts adult baptism wherever need arises.

There are also differences in the manner in which baptism is held. In the early days the person who was baptized was fully immersed in water. This is still the practice in certain denominations. The second method is to place the child in the baptismal font and pour water over his/her head. In our Church we follow this method. Some denominations also follow the practice of sprinkling water on the person getting baptized.

Exercise

1. Memorize and write down a song from the Syrian Orthodox liturgy of baptism, or its meaning, which says that the Church receives into its fold the child that has been baptized.
2. What was the term used to describe the newly baptized?
3. How does St. Paul interpret baptism?

LESSON 2

BAPTISM AND CHRISMATION

1. *Preparing the candidate*
2. *Holy baptism*
3. *Holy oil/holy Muron*
4. *Holy seal*
5. *Ordination*

1. Preparing the candidate

Baptizing was a relatively simple act during the apostolic days. But as the Church grew, some established practices came to be associated with baptism. By the fourth century large numbers of people started coming into the Church. Since they lacked any understanding of the Christian faith, it became necessary to impart instruction in catechism for a long time before they were baptized. Thus the training of candidates for baptism (catechuminate) became an institution in the Church. A large number of the works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem are devoted to studies and lectures intended for the benefit of candidates for baptism. The bishop himself gave guidance to catechismal training.

The training was given during the period of the great lent. The names of those aspiring to be baptized in a particular year were written down in the Church register at the beginning of the lent. Even today the names of candidates are written down in the Church registers as a continuation of this early practice. A prayer said on the occasion is: "O Lord, write in the book of life the name of this thy servant who has now been given the sacred call to come out of darkness and wrong ways and to have genuine knowledge of Thee".

In the days that followed the training, evil spirits were exorcised from the candidates. (This practice finds a place in our present

liturgy too. All evil spirits are driven out of the person baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit). A characteristic feature of the catechismal training was the inculcation of the basic doctrines of faith in the candidates and of familiarising them with the life and teachings of Christ. The Nicene Creed was also taught; this was done towards the end.

2. Holy baptism

Candidates were usually baptized on the Saturday before Easter. This was conducted in a pond adjacent to the Church maintained for the purpose. The candidates stretched their arms, turned towards the west (where the sun sets and darkness comes from) and denounced Satan; they then turned towards the east (where the sun rises and light comes from) and accepted Jesus Christ, the eternal sun of truth and justice. As a symbol of stripping off the old man, they removed their clothes and immersed themselves in water. They were then anointed with holy Muron. White clothes, symbolising eternal life were given to the candidates as they came out of the baptismal pool. They wore only white clothes in the following weeks. The newly baptized ones were received with lighted candles and escorted to the Church. They participated in the Easter service bearing lighted candles. A new drink made of honey and milk was given to the new Christians, along with the Holy Eucharist, as a symbol of their entry into the land of promise.

3. Anointing with holy Muron (holy chrismation).

Both baptism and the anointing with holy Muron are understood as one and the same sacrament in the Eastern tradition. It is not proper to separate baptism and anointing and relate the former particularly to Jesus Christ and the latter to the Holy Spirit. These two are considered two separate sacraments in the Western tradition. The ceremony of anointing a baptized child with holy Muron is known as confirmation in the West. Confirmation is usually given by the bishop when the child is about twelve or thirteen years old. The Eucharist is given to children only after

confirmation in the Roman Catholic Church and some of the Reformed Churches. In the Orthodox tradition as soon as a child is baptized, he or she is anointed with holy Muron and is made a participant in the Holy Eucharist. This was also the tradition of the ancient Church. As a result of the present-day ecumenical studies, the Western Churches have slowly begun to appreciate the position of the Orthodox Churches in this regard.

4. Holy Muron

There is an ancient tradition behind the use of oil for anointing just like the use of water in baptism. In the Old Testament we read of Kings, priests and prophets being anointed with oil. In the New Testament the coming down of the Holy Spirit on someone is referred to as anointing (1 Jn. 2:27, 2 Cor. 1:21, Lk. 4:18). The Gospels proclaim that Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit anoints us so that we can partake of Christ who is the priest, king and prophet, all at the same time.

A sweet-smelling oil specially prepared and sanctified is used for anointing. Holy Muron is poured into the baptismal water before baptism. The prayer on this occasion is: We pour Muron into this in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, so that through this water the old man may be renewed and recreated.

5. Holy seal

Anointing the person baptized with Muron on the forehead after baptism is a very ancient tradition. The Church Fathers used the expression 'seal' for the anointing with Muron. Using seals on sheep in a flock for the purpose of identification was a common practice. The Roman soldiers too had special royal seals affixed to their bodies. The giving of the permanent new seal of the Holy Spirit to those who became members of the flock of Christ and of the army of Christ is easily understood against this background. In the prayer in our liturgy said just before the anointing with holy Muron we read: "O Lord, may this servant of thine, who has, through baptism, become a soldier of thine, receive

the holy seal in thy name. May he be filled with all sweet fragrance of goodness and become unyielding to all types of forces of evil. May he hereafter not fear or yield to the forces of darkness; may he walk in thy light, become a son of light, walk with thee always and reach your holy presence."

6. Ordination

We are anointed with the holy oil so that we may be liberated from all fears and all forces of evil, and may spread through our lives the fragrance of Christ's life as well as the blessings of the Holy Spirit. In our liturgy holy Muron is described as the holy fragrance of Christ, the seal and symbol of true faith and the culmination of all spiritual gifts. After putting the seal of Muron on the forehead of the candidate his whole body is anointed with oil. A prayer said on this occasion is: "Just as Aaron was anointed to be sanctified to become the high priest, this lamb who has been baptized is also anointed with this holy oil". After that a crown, symbolic of the kingship of Christ is placed over the head of the Child. He is taken to the altar, made to kiss the altar and the Gospel and taken around the sanctuary. The child receives the Eucharistic communion after this.

The child is initiated into the priesthood of Christ and of the Church through anointing with the holy oil. The Church makes no distinction between male and female children while administering this sacrament. This sacrament is given only once. One who has been anointed likewise does not receive it a second time and even if the child is in later years consecrated bishop, no second anointing is done. In such cases special prayers are said and the sacrament or ordination is completed by the laying on of hands. In the early centuries there was a tradition in many places of laying on of hands along with anointing with Muron. Many Churches follow this practice even today. This shows that admission to the general priesthood of the Church is given equally to all members of the body of Christ, men and women alike. The gifts of special priesthood are given to individuals who are already initiated into the general priesthood of the Church.

The word 'Christ' means 'anointed'. We all bear the name of Christ because we are also anointed. We have all been called upon to be like Christ. The essential truth of anointing with oil is realized in this Christianisation of our lives and in our becoming Christlike with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Exercise

1. What is meant by catechumenate?
2. What is the difference between the Western Churches and the Eastern Churches as regards anointing with holy Muron?
3. What does the holy seal signify?

LESSON 3

THE HOLY EUCHARIST

1. *A redemptive memory*
2. *The holy sacrifice*
3. *Bread and wine*
4. *Bread and wine as symbols of the whole creation*
5. *Offering and receiving*
6. *The beginning of the eternal feast*
7. *The complete worship*
8. *Two Orders*
9. *The experience of the Eucharist*

The Holy Eucharist is the pivotal point in the life of the Christian Church. The meaning of all sacraments is centred in the Holy Eucharist. With the coming of the Holy Spirit after the resurrection of Christ, there have been congregations of believers

coming together to celebrate the Holy Eucharist right up to the present day.

The word 'Qurbana' means offering. The familiar Greek word *Eucharistia* is used to refer to the Holy Qurbana; it means thanksgiving. The English word, Eucharist, originates from this Greek word.

1. A redemptive memory

After instituting the Holy Eucharist, Christ said, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk. 22:19). It is in obedience to this exhortation that the Holy Eucharist on the Sunday of Christ's resurrection is celebrated every year. Remembrance (anamnesis) is thus one of the basic features of the Holy Qurbana. It does not simply mean remembering things of the remote past. This is a redemptive remembrance. The whole mystery of Christ, who became incarnate for us, suffered, was buried, and rose on the third day and who is to come a second time, is remembered and celebrated in the Holy Eucharist. As we sing in the service of the Holy Qurbana, "Lord, we remember thy death, recall and proclaim resurrection and look forward to thy second coming". We participate in all those events of redemption that we remember through our partaking of the Holy Eucharist. We experience moments of the past, the present and the future at the same time in this sacrament. This is not an individualistic remembrance and waiting. It is the remembrance the Christian community has kept for centuries now. The whole character of the Christian Church is manifested through this remembrance, celebration and hopeful waiting.

2. The holy sacrifice

The Holy Eucharist came to mean 'sacrifice' in the second century itself. But this sacrifice is not merely a repetition or remembrance of the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. We participate in that unique and eternal sacrifice in every Eucharistic service. This redemptive sacrifice becomes real to us through our sacramental participation. Participating in the Lord's sacrifice also

means presenting ourselves as sacrifices to God. In the preparatory service (thooyoba) of the Holy Eucharist this aspect is specially mentioned. The priest prays on this occasion that our thoughts, words and deeds may be acceptable as sacrifice and that we may be made worthy of presenting our body, mind and spirit as objects of sacrifice acceptable to God. In our liturgy the Holy Eucharist is described as bloodless sacrifice, spiritual sacrifice and rational sacrifice.

3. Bread and wine

What is it that we offer in the Holy Eucharist? Bread and wine are offered all over the world in the Holy Eucharist. Both are fruits of human toil—products of what the earth so graciously gives us as a result of our labour. Man gives bread and wine as offerings of sacrifice (Qurbana) to God, expressing his gratitude (*Eucharistia*). In many Orthodox Churches there is a tradition of people bringing the bread and wine produced at home, to be offered in the Holy Eucharist. In the new liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church there is a ceremony in which two representatives of the people bring bread and wine to the altar. This makes clear that the substances offered belong to the people and are offered by them.

4. Bread and wine as symbols of the whole creation

A close examination of the initial portion of our liturgy helps us to understand that we offer ourselves as well as the whole creation along with bread and wine. Wheat and grapes, used for making bread and wine, are the produce of the earth. Our body itself is of the earth. God created the whole living and non-living things out of the same earth. Therefore, the whole creation including human beings is of the earth. It is to symbolise the whole creation that the priest "offers the produce of the earth", namely, bread and wine as objects of sacrifice. The bread and wine represent not only the whole creation of the earth but also the sun, the moon, millions of stars and the whole universe. Therefore, the sacrifice we experience in the Holy Eucharist is one

symbolising the whole universe. The celebrant priest prays on this occasion: "Standing before thy flaming throne, I beg thee absolution for thy people and liberation to thy whole creation." The whole creation waiting for the glory of God is offered through the symbols of bread and wine. The affirmation of St. Paul that "the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:19) also falls in line with the inner meaning of the Holy Eucharist.

5. Offering and receiving

The bread and wine we offer come back to us as the body and blood of Christ. We receive them for the remission of our sins and for the transformation of our character. This sort of offering and receiving completes one Eucharistic cycle. This cycle continues in every Eucharist. The Church teaches us that in this process our human nature should get transformed and we should become like Christ. Similarly, creation should also return to the experience of paradise, i. e. the experience of absolute unity, love and reconciliation.

6. Beginning of the eternal feast

In the Holy Eucharist we offer the same ordinary articles of food as used by human beings. Food sustains us in our life in this world. That is to say, along with the articles of food we offer our entire life too to God in one thanksgiving (Eucharist). We are invited to partake of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharistic service. This is symbolic of the eternal feast in the Kingdom of God. We should take part in this feast with love and purity of heart. We should participate in this as a community and rejoice in the Lord. The experience of the early Church is recorded in the Acts as follows: "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people" (Acts 2:46).

7. The complete worship

The Holy Eucharist is the supreme worship of the Church. It is not only the faithful living that participate in it, but also all

the faithful departed and all the saints of the past and present. In a wider sense, in the Holy Eucharist we remember and pray for everyone who has done the will of God since the time of Adam right upto the present. The Church as a whole remembers the Virgin Mary, the apostles and saints on this occasion. They also pray continually for us. They and we become one in Christ. We specially remember those who are poor, sick and suffering; we also pray for widows, orphans and those who genuinely repent of their sins. This loving remembrance and intercession for them are done many times during the preparatory service (Thooyoba) as well as at the time of public celebration.

The public celebration of the Eucharist commences with our remembering the Mother of God and Saint John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ. "Mary who brought thee forth and John who baptized thee supplicate to thee on behalf of us. Have mercy on us." A very important place is given to the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist in the scheme of salvation brought to us through Jesus Christ.

8. Two Orders

The Holy Eucharist has two parts. The first is known as the Order of the Catechumens and the second as the Order of the Faithful. Though this division does not have much relevance now, it was quite meaningful in the early centuries. Only those who received baptism and were full members of the Church had the right to participate in the 'Order of the Faithful' of the Holy Eucharist. During the Order of the Catechumens ('Catechumen' means a person who is being prepared for baptism), those who were already baptized as well as those who were preparing for baptism were permitted to participate. The main events during this part were readings from the scriptures, sermons and instruction in the essentials of Christian faith. After this the catechumens or candidates for baptism were blessed and sent away. The deacons then closed the doors of the Church, so that the baptized and faithful alone participated in the service that followed. This part is known as Anaphero. The meaning of the Greek word is to 'lift up'. This

signifies our holding up our minds, thoughts and hearts and everything we have along with the lifting of the consecrated bread and wine, to the exalted heights of the Triune God, on whose right is seated Jesus Christ.

The Roman tradition used to teach that the most important moment in the Holy Eucharist was when the words commencing with "This is my body....." were uttered. In the Orthodox tradition we do not subscribe to the idea that certain particular moments in the Holy Eucharist are substantially more important than others. All moments are equally important. We do not try to define precisely at which moment the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. Nevertheless, certain occasions, such as those when the words, "This is my body.." are uttered, when invocation to the Holy Spirit (Epiclesis) is made and when the bread is broken, are considered peak moments in the liturgy.

Thubdens are the great intercessory prayers of the Church. In these intercessions—three each for the living and the dead—we remember the leaders of the Church, the sick and the suffering, administrators and rulers, the Holy Virgin Mary, Apostles, martyrs Church Fathers, teachers and the faithful departed, and pray for them.

9. Receiving the Holy Eucharist

The teaching of the Church is that all the faithful who participate in the Eucharistic service should also receive the Holy Communion. Unfortunately very often in many parishes only the celebrant priest receives the holy Qurbana. This is not the ancient Christian tradition. Regular partaking of the Holy Communion is essential, if we are to realise the fullness of the power of the Eucharist. The prayers in the liturgy have all been written on the assumption that all who attend the service also partake of the Communion. The new life we are granted in baptism and our adoption as the children of God are to be continually renewed in the Holy Eucharist. The strength, integrity and renewal of the

community of believers in the Holy Spirit can be attained only through common participation in the Holy Eucharist.

Our participation in the Holy Eucharist is meant also to enable us to commit ourselves to the love and service of humanity. As we make our offering of bread and wine to God in the Eucharist we should also share our daily bread and other material possessions with those who are in need. We should also use our God-given talents for the good of the world. Our participation in the Holy Eucharist should encourage us to strive for a better social order based on truth, justice and peace.

Exercise

1. How does the Holy Eucharist become redemptive memory?
2. Explain how bread and wine represent the whole creation.
3. What are the two important Orders in the Holy Eucharist?
4. What is Anaphero? Give another name for the Holy Qurbana.

LESSON 4

MARRIAGE

1. *Man and woman as one human person*
2. *From God*
3. *The Church and Christ*
4. *Picture of an abiding relationship*
5. *Misunderstandings*
6. *Provisional*
7. *The crown of glory and the crown of thorns*
8. *Participation in the act of procreation*

1. Man and Woman as one human person

"So God created man in his own image: in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). God created human beings as males and females right at the beginning of creation. He gave both man and woman the same human nature and the same resemblance to God. According to another tradition in Genesis itself God created Eve from one of the ribs of Adam, so that she would be a companion to him. Because she was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh, "(Gen.2:24). Genesis proclaims that these two individuals possessing complete equality and resemblance to God are basically not two individuals but one. Therefore, one can hardly say that sex differences in the human race have deep roots.

2. From God

When the Pharisees asked him his views on divorce in order to test him, Jesus answered quoting the two verses cited above from the Old Testament (Mt. 19:5). Christ's answer shows that the apostolic Church had definite views on marriage and divorce, "What therefore God has joined, let not man put asunder"- this was the view of Christ as well as that of the early Church. The Church has striven hard to adhere to this through out in the Christian tradition. The teaching of the Church is that marriage has been instituted by Christ and that marital relationship is the supreme relationship of love and humanity.

3. The Church and Christ

In the Orthodox liturgy for marriage there is one constant theme running throughout the relationship between the bridegroom Jesus and the bride, the Church. St. Paul interprets the relationship between Christ and the Church as a great mystery. The liturgy qualifies Christ as the true bridegroom who chose the Gentile daughter as his Church and cleansed her of all blemish and impurity with his own blood and submitted himself to be

her bridegroom. It is in close association with this mystery that the apostle understands marital relationship also. Readings from the Psalms, Song of Songs, passages from the Old Testament—all point to the strong relationship between Christ and the Church. The Church exhorts couples to build up a perfect relationship based on the unique and inseparable relationship between Christ and the Church. It is also pointed out here that marital relationships with merely superficial love or just worldly goals do not reach perfection. The unity and love of the Holy Trinity are to be reflected through the selfless love of the couple. In this sense, couples entering marital relationship also become partakers of the mystery of the Holy Trinity and of the relationship between Christ and the Church. And it is here that marriage becomes a sacrament.

4. Picture of an abiding relationship

In the Old Testament the metaphor of a bridegroom and bride is used to refer to the relationship between Jehovah and Israel. The Fathers of the Church tell us that God rejected Israel which was unfaithful to him and accepted the new Israel i. e. the Church as the bride. Mystics use the same language as we have in the liturgy of marriage to describe the deep and abiding relationship between God and the human soul. The feast of the Kingdom of God at the end of time is described in the Revelation to John as "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev.19:9).

5. Misunderstandings

There were many like the gnostics and Manichaens in the early centuries who taught that marriage was evil and should be given up. The Church opposed them tooth and nail. What the apostolic Church taught us was: "Let marriage be held in honour among all and let the marriage bed be undefiled" (Heb.13:4). There were many in those days who abstained from marriage in the hope that Christ would come soon. St. Paul who was a celibate wrote: "I wish that all were as myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another" (1 Cor.7:7).

6. Provisional

Some Fathers of the Church like Gregory of Nyssa argued that the differences between man and woman were intended by God for the race to increase and that they were not fundamental ones lasting for ever. This argument was based on what Christ had said to the Sadducees. He had said: "...in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Mt.22:30). It was on the basis of the thought contained in the above verse that celibacy gained value and significance in the monastic movements. For, it is believed that he who does not marry in this world and leads a celibate life experiences the world to come in this world itself.

7. The crown of glory and the crown of thorns

In the first part of marriage service the Church recognises the decision of the two individuals to come together in marriage. Rings are exchanged as a symbol of their engagement. In the second part crowns are blessed and placed over their heads. Crowns generally signify royalty. But a song sung just before the blessing of the crowns says: "The Church shines like the moon, seeing the sun of justice (Jesus) hanging on the cross.". This alludes to a different kind of crown. Likewise the crown of the bridegroom is compared to the crown of thorns of Jesus. In the Greek and Russian Orthodox traditions this crown is compared to the crown of martyrs. All this makes it abundantly clear, that the crown does not denote worldly royalty, material happiness or mere physical bond of love; instead, it is a crown of thorns, symbolising self emptying, suffering, denial of selfish goals and mutual self giving. The crowns of the bridegroom and the bride known as the "crowns of justice and happiness" lead them to a genuine, honest life filled with the happiness of the Holy Spirit.

8. Participation in the act of procreation

Couples are called upon to participate in God's act of creation with discretion and in freedom. They should have the

great desire that the children born out of their love should be the children of the Kingdom of God. In the early centuries it was just natural that a Christian husband or wife was married to a non-Christian partner. But more often than not the non-Christian partner embraced Christian faith, having been impressed by the righteous life of prayer led by the Christian husband or wife. The world needs men and women who lead exemplary family life facing challenges. Each such family is the cornerstone of the Church and the Kingdom of God. It is from the family that one first gets love, sense of security, hope and compassion—qualities human beings are so badly in need of. The Christian marriage is a pointer to these lofty goals of family life.

Exercise

1. What according to Genesis is the basis of marriage?
2. How is the relationship between Christ and the Church the basis of a Christian marriage?
3. What is the significance of the blessing of the crowns?

LESSON 5

SACRAMENTS OF HEALING

1. CONFESSION

1. *A wound in the body of Christ*
2. *Sin is a disease*
3. *The Church absolves sins*
4. *Alienation from the love of God*
5. *The Sacrament of reconciliation*
6. *Counselling and confession*

1. A wound in the body of Christ

The sins committed by the members of the Church damage the healthy life of the Church. The sin committed by an individual is not considered a purely personal affair. Because each person is grafted to the common body of the Church through baptism and the Holy Eucharist, his evil thoughts and deeds affect the whole body of the Church. Therefore, the sin of an individual affects not only his person, but the community also. When our limbs or any other part of the body is injured, the injury is treated as a common need of the body. When the wound worsens, the whole body suffers, so also, when the wound is healed, the whole body is healed. A person falling into sin not only brings about his own personal ruin, but causes pain to the whole Christian community. The Church as a whole rejoices in his repentance. Jesus Christ has said " . . . there will be more joy in heaven over one who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Lk. 15:7).

2. Sin is a disease

The Orthodox tradition views sin as a disease. God treats the human race, that has fallen into sinful ways, with compassion and mercy in the same way as we deal with a sick person. The incarnation of Christ itself is the result of God's infinite love. Although a person falls ill as a result of his own folly or wrongdoing, when he is ill he is not condemned but treated with compassion so that he may recover. Our basic attitude to a sinner is not to look upon him as a criminal and punish him but to heal him and restore him to health. The Church looks at the sin of her children as a disease and strives to heal them. The healing process might sometimes be long and painful. Even as a person suffering from cancer has to undergo surgery for the removal of the cancerous tissues from his body, a sinner has also to subject himself to some kind of spiritual surgery. But the Church carries out the surgery not to destroy life but to save it. This is the reason why Jesus Christ came as the good physician. He was an ideal physician, more inclined to cure the physical and mental

infirmities of the human person and lead him to eternal life than to condemn him. The Church in granting remission of sins continues the same work which Jesus did.

3. The Church absolves sins

It is the Church that hears the confession of the sinner who repents, and that absolves his sins. The priest hears the confession as a representative of the Church. The apostolic authority delegated to the Church in the words, "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mt. 18:18, John 20:22—23), was first and foremost given to the Church. The priests have received this authority through the Church. There was a tradition of publicly confessing one's sins in the early days of the Church. It was later decided to have private confessions because public confessions led to some difficulties. Anyway, it is clear that confession and absolution of sins are processes closely associated with the body of Church. "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another that you may be healed". (Jas 5:16). Not only spiritual but physical ailments too are healed as a result of confession

Modern science has slowly begun to realise that no disease can be isolated from the psycho-somatic reality of the close connection between body and mind. The medical sciences have also recognised that the disease of individuals is not confined to the individual per se, its causes and consequences being intimately related to his environment and society. The Church, right from the beginning, has viewed individual sins and remission of sins, in this light.

4. Alienation from the love of God

Whatever that alienates us from the love of God and the love of our fellow beings is sin. There is only one principle in the Christian faith; that is the principle of love (Jn. 15:12). "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called the children of God" (1 Jn. 3:1). St. John asserts that whoever abides in this love does not commit sins. Christ who narrated the parable of the prodigal son revealed a heavenly Father who shows infinite

patience and love (Lk. 15). There is no fear in love (1Jn.4:18). Therefore, we can go near the throne of God with courage and confidence. "And because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, crying "Abba, Father". So through God you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son then an heir" (Gal. 4:16).

In the early Church the three sins that were regarded as heinous were apostasy, murder and adultery. The sinners were required to confess their sins publicly and also to do public penance. The most severe penance imposed on the sinners was not to permit them to participate in the communion of the Holy Eucharist. When it became clear that the sinners genuinely repented, they were permitted to partake of the Holy Eucharist. The penance was not a punitive measure, but a therapeutic measure; the intention was to heal the sinners and bring them back into the Christian community.

5. The sacrament of reconciliation

People get reconciled to God and their fellow beings as a result of confession. Therefore, this sacrament may well be called the sacrament of reconciliation. We may receive the sacrament whenever we feel the need. We have to go for confession when we are particularly conscious of our sins and the need for repentance. Though the practice of receiving the Holy Eucharist soon after receiving the absolution of sins is commendable, yet the Church does not insist that one should always make a formal confession before the priest every time one receives the Holy communion. But one should always be physically and spiritually prepared for this supreme sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. The Church exhorts us to receive the holy Qurbana regularly on all Sundays and other feast days. Confession is to be made whenever there is a genuine spiritual need for doing so. What is important is not the number of times in a year one should go for the sacrament of confession, though it is advisable to maintain certain regularity depending on one's spiritual needs.

6. Counselling and confession

Counselling given to those who are mentally or psychologically suffering is different from the sacrament of confession. Both can be interrelated and one may be complementary to the other. But the absolution of sins given by the priests to a sinner who genuinely repents is part of the divine authority of the Church. It is, however, desirable that the priest is capable of giving counselling and advice to those having psychological problems. Unfortunately many of the modern methods of psychotherapy taught in universities do not seriously take into consideration the deep relationship between the human person and his/her need for faith in God. Hence those trained in this way do not see clearly the link between sin and disease. It is better to receive counselling from those having a healthy spiritual vision than from one who has only a superficial understanding of the psychic and spiritual dimensions of the human person. When the monastic movements developed, a number of monks were well-known as good father-confessors and counsellors. In the Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches, there is a tradition of accepting such monks with spiritual enlightenment as father-confessors and spiritual gurus. But it should be remembered that every priest in the Church has been given authority to forgive and absolve sins.

Confession is to be understood as a sacrament of healing of the body and the spirit. The Church in heaven and on earth rejoices over the healing and restoration of the physical and spiritual health of an individual, and glorifies the Lord, "the sun of righteousness" that rose "with healing in its wings" (Mal. 4:2).

Exercise

1. How does the sin of the individual affect the body of the Church?
2. Explain the Orthodox tradition that looks upon sin as a disease?
3. What were the sins regarded as public sins in the early Church?

LESSON 6

SACRAMENTS OF HEALING

2. HOLY UNCTION/ANOINTING THE SICK

1. *The Kingdom of God and the ministry of healing.*
2. *Disease and sin.*
3. *Symptoms and causes*
4. *Transformation of nature.*
5. *Apostolic tradition.*
6. *Oil and love of God.*
7. *Not extreme unction.*

1. The Kingdom of God and the ministry of healing

To Jesus Christ healing people was a sign of the beginning of the Kingdom of God. A good part of his work was the healing of the sick and the suffering. "And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people" (Mt. 4:23). There is an intimate relationship between the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and the healing of the sick. When Jesus sent out the twelve apostles to different parts of the world, to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, he also gave them authority to heal the sick. "So they went out and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them" (Mk. 6:12-13).

2. Disease and sin

The relationship between disease and sin has been discussed in the previous lesson. Sin, death and decay overcame humanity which was alienated from the love of God. Sin is a major symptom of our weak human nature. When the strength of our body, mind and spirit fails, we come nearer to death and decay. When

our strength fails as a result of our sins, we are approaching death. The diseased state shows our approaching death, which is the wages of sin. Though this fundamental relationship between sin and disease exists in the case of humanity as a whole, it does not mean that the diseases an individual suffers from are necessarily the result of his own sins. Jesus makes this clear to his disciples when they asked him about the man who was born blind (Jn.9:3). Since diseases continue as one of the consequences of the fall of humanity, even infants who have not committed any sin also suffer from diseases.

3. Symptoms and causes

Jesus Christ became incarnate to restore the human race that was scattered and disintegrated as a result of its sin. Therefore, Christ considered healing the sick an important mission of his. But Jesus, the good physician, also knew that diseases were merely symptoms and that it was the causes that had to be eradicated. It was because of this that Jesus told the paralytic carried to him by four men: "My Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mk. 2:1-5). What Christ did was to free the sinner from his sins and his sense of guilt, the root causes of diseases, and restore him to his original state of harmony with God and humanity.

4. Transformation of nature

The purpose is not merely the healing of the sick, but the transformation of our own nature as well as that of the creation. Our physical appearance gets disfigured as a result of diseases. In the same way nature too gets distorted as a consequence of sin. In the portions from the Gospels read on Sundays during the fifty days' lent, we get the picture of a heavenly physician that transforms us from our disfigured state to our original state of security. He transformed water, that represents inorganic matter, into good wine. He healed those who were diseased in body, mind and spirit. Finally, he raised Lazarus from among the dead. Christ, the physician, transforms matter, the human body, mind and soul that are subject to death and decay. "(He) will

change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Phil. 3:21).

5. Apostolic tradition.

It is against this background that we should understand the sacrament of holy unction. The apostles anointed with oil those that were sick, and healed them (Mk. 6:12-13). This is seen more clearly in the Letter of St. James. "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church and let them pray over him anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins one to another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects" (Jas. 5:14-16).

6. Oil and the love of God

Oil is the symbol of love and compassion. The Malayalam word for love (Sneham) is synonymous with oil. Similarly in the Greek language also the word for oil (elaion) and the one for compassion (eleon) are related. Hence it is the oil symbolising divine mercy and compassion with which the sick are anointed. In the parable of the good Samaritan also we see the Samaritan anointing the wounded person with oil.

7. Not "extreme unction."

The holy unction is a sacrament that can be received at any stage of illness. Many refer to it and wrongly understand it as the last rites, as in the Roman Catholic Church. This is a wrong Western notion. The holy unction is administered with the hope and prayer that the person may be cured of his sickness and restored to normal health. It is not intended as preparation for his final departure.

The sacrament of the absolution of sins, as in the holy confession, is a part of holy unction also. A good number of the prayers are directed to the confession and absolution of sins. The

reason, as already indicated, is the relationship between sin and disease. There is a special order of the holy unction known as *candle service (kantheela)* - a fairly long service with five wicks lighted with oil. The sacrament of holy unction as practised ordinarily and this special service are in fact, the same. When the anointing is done, the first prayer that is said is: "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, may you be purified and sanctified. May all the sins you have committed, knowingly or unknowingly, be forgiven and may all evil thoughts and desires be banished From you". When this prayer is said, oil is applied on the forehead, chest and knees in the shape of a cross. After this, anointing is further done for the sanctification of the external and internal senses; oil is applied to the eyes, lips, ears, hands, legs and the navel. This sacrament of holy unction which has a deep spiritual meaning should be considered one of the important mysteries of the Church. Its meaning should be properly understood and its position among other sacraments restored.

Exercise

1. Explain the relationship between sin and disease.
2. What is the importance of anointing the sick with the oil?
3. How did Christ view the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the act of healing the sick?