



Diocese of South-West America
Sunday School

11th Grade

A World To Be Transfigured



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Recommended Book: **Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy** by Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick

LESSON 1 - PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Objective: To understand how the parable of the Good Samaritan presents a model of the Church as a vehicle to promote healing and to share God's Love

Almost every contemporary biblical commentary interprets the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) as a moral exhortation, but there is a deeper meaning in this parable that applies to how we look at ourselves and how we look at others, including those outside of the Orthodox Church.

Most commentaries read this parable as though the audience is called to identify with the Good Samaritan (who helped the wounded man), not the priest or Levite (who passed by “on the other side”). Jesus’ “Go and do likewise” at the end of the passage fits neatly into this interpretation.

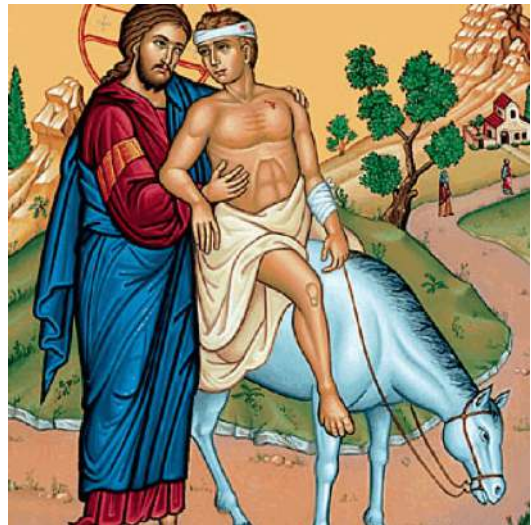


However, the Orthodox Church teaches us to identify with the wounded man, whom Christ (the Good Samaritan) rescues, binding his wounds, pouring on oil and wine,

placing him on His own beast, and taking him to the inn and the innkeeper to be cared for until His return. The bandages, oil and wine are sacramental images of healing for (1) the garment of Baptism, which delivers us from the wounds of sin; (2) the oil of Chrismation, which gives us new life in the Holy Spirit; and (3) the Communion of the Holy Qurbana, which leads to eternal life. His “own animal” indicates Christ bearing our sins in His own body, and the inn reveals the Church in which Christ’s care is received. The words of the Samaritan in verse 35 – “Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you” are the words we remember in the Nicene Creed where Christ will come again in His great glory to judge both the living and the dead. The innkeeper therefore is the Bishop, the priests, the deacons and all of us.

These two interpretations are, of course, not mutually exclusive. After all, those who are in Christ are called to become like Christ, to participate in the Life of Christ. It is little wonder that Christians seek to follow the example of the Good Samaritan. However, participating in the Life of Christ is not a simple matter of morality, but rather it is about mystical union. It is about being in Christ, and it is this being in Christ that leads us into a Christ-like life, a life that to those around us might appear as a “moral” life. Christ was despised and rejected, spit upon and mocked--even as He was pouring out His life-blood to save us. It takes much more than morality to place a wounded man on your own beast (your own flesh) and carry him to the inn.

The Church's reading of this parable teaches us to see ourselves as the wounded one, in need of a Good Samaritan to bind our wounds and lead us to the inn. We are Baptized and become members of the Church. This is not an “I-did-it-once” experience, but a spiritual reality that we grow as One with the Body of Christ. In fact, the life in Christ is a life of continually remembering that I am the poor and needy one, I am the wounded man in need of the Savior, and then a miracle, a mystery – a Sacrament – happens. As I am cared for by the Good Samaritan, I become in some small ways like the Good Samaritan. The One who cares for me allows me to share in His care for others--and in His suffering.



We are then called to be Christ – to bring His healing and love to the world around us, even to those who are not members of the Church. We should not be like the priest and Levite, but like the Good Samaritan. And the doors of the inn – the Church – are always open. As Fr. Thomas Hopko wrote, “We are to bring the Truth and the Love of God, the Gospel, to everybody. We are to be witnesses.” And as St. John Chrysostom exhorted us, “hatred towards those who are without is done away; for no one can feel hatred towards those for whom he prays: and they again are made better by the prayers that are offered for them, and by losing their ferocious disposition towards us. For nothing is so apt to draw men under teaching, as to love, and be loved.”

Adapted from the Orthodox Study Bible, an article by Fr. Michael Gillis

(<http://holynativity.blogspot.com/2010/05/reading-parable-of-good-samaritan.html>), and St. John Chrysostom's Homily 6 on 1 Timothy 2:1-4 (<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/230606.htm>)



LESSON 2 – ORTHODOX APPROACH TO TRADITION

Objective: To understand Tradition not as prescribed practices or beliefs but the original teachings of Christ living in the world today by the Holy Spirit through the Church and us, her members

Orthodox scholars summarize the distinctive characteristic of their Church by pointing to its changelessness, its determination to remain loyal to the past, its sense of living continuity with the Church of ancient times.

"We preserve the Doctrine of the Lord uncorrupted, and firmly adhere to the Faith he delivered to us, and keep it free from blemish and diminution, as a Royal Treasure, and a monument of great price, neither adding anything, nor taking anything from it"

This idea of living continuity is summed up for the Orthodox in the one word "Tradition." "We do not change the everlasting boundaries which our fathers have set," wrote St. John of Damascus, "but we keep the Tradition, just as we received it."

Orthodox Christians are always talking about Tradition. What do they mean by the word? In today's world, 'tradition' sometimes has a negative connotation, but it is important to understand that our Tradition is our teaching given to us. A tradition, says the Oxford Dictionary, is "an opinion, belief, or custom handed down from ancestors to posterity." Christian Tradition, in that case, is the faith which Jesus Christ imparted to the Apostles, and which since the Apostles' time has been handed down from generation to generation in the Church (**1 Corinthians 15:3**). To an Orthodox Christian, Tradition means something even more concrete and specific than this. It means the books of the Bible; it means the Creed; it means the decrees of the Ecumenical Councils and the writings of the Fathers; it means the Canons, the Service Books, and the Holy Icons — in fact, the whole system of doctrine, Church government, worship, and art which the Church has articulated over the ages. The Orthodox Christian of today sees himself as heir and guardian to a great inheritance received from the past, and he believes that it is his duty to transmit this inheritance unimpaired to the future.

Note that the Bible is our Tradition. Some people try to define "Tradition" as "the oral teaching of Christ, not recorded in writing by his immediate disciples"; however, this is not correct. Not only non-Orthodox but many Orthodox writers have adopted this way of speaking, treating Scripture and Tradition as two different things, two distinct sources of the Christian faith, but in reality there is only one source, since Scripture

exists within Tradition. To separate and contrast the two is to impoverish the idea of both alike.

The Orthodox, while reverencing this inheritance from the past, are also well aware that not everything received from the past is of equal value. Among the various elements of Tradition, a unique pre-eminence belongs to the Bible, to the Nicene Creed, to the doctrinal definitions of the Ecumenical Councils: these things the Orthodox accept as something absolute and unchanging, something which cannot be cancelled or revised.

Not everything received from the past is of equal value, nor is everything received from the past necessarily true. As one of the bishops remarked at the Council of Carthage in 257, “The Lord said, ‘I am truth.’ He did not say, ‘I am custom.’” There is a difference between “Tradition” and “traditions:” many traditions which the past has handed down are human and accidental — pious opinions (or worse), but not a true part of the one Tradition, the essential Christian message of the Gospel.

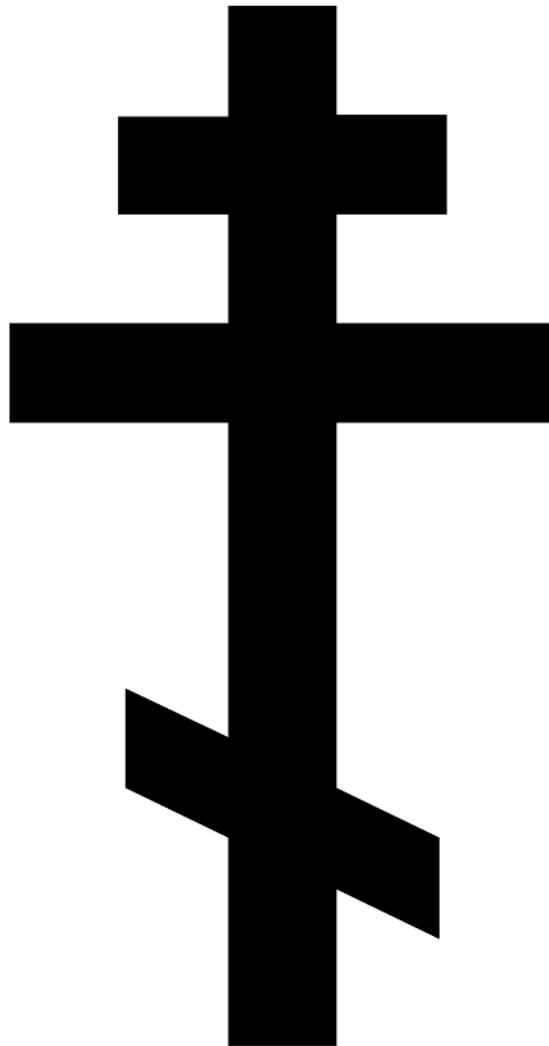
True Orthodox fidelity to the past must always be a creative fidelity; for true Orthodoxy can never rest satisfied with a barren “theology of repetition,” which, parrot-like, repeats accepted formulae without striving to understand what lies behind them. Loyalty to Tradition, properly understood, is not something mechanical, a dull process of handing down what has been received. An Orthodox thinker must see Tradition from within, he must enter into its inner spirit. In order to live within Tradition, it is not enough simply to give intellectual assent to a system of doctrine. Tradition is far more than a set of abstract propositions — it is a life, a personal encounter with Christ in the Holy Spirit. Tradition is not only kept by the Church — it lives in the Church, it is the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church. The Orthodox conception of Tradition is not static but dynamic, not a dead acceptance of the past but a living experience of the Holy Spirit in the present. Tradition, while inwardly changeless (for God does not change), is constantly assuming new forms, which supplement the old without superseding them.

This idea of Tradition as a living thing has been well expressed by Georges Florovsky:

Tradition is the witness of the Spirit; the Spirit’s unceasing revelation and preaching of good tidings . . . To accept and understand Tradition we must live within the Church, we must be conscious of the grace-giving presence of the Lord in it; we must feel the breath of the Holy Ghost in it . . . Tradition is not only a protective, conservative principle; it is, primarily, the principle of growth and regeneration . . . Tradition is the constant abiding of the Spirit and not only the memory of words.

Tradition is the witness of the Spirit: in the words of Christ, "When the Spirit of truth has come, he will guide you into all truth" (**John 16:13**). It is this divine promise that forms the basis of the Orthodox devotion to Tradition.

Adapted from "The Orthodox Church" by Bishop Kallistos Ware



LESSON 3 – ORTHODOXY, HETERODOXY, AND HERESY

Objective: To understand that the Truth is completely and fully revealed in Christ and communicated to us through the One Church; all other systems of belief, whether Christian or not, are incomplete

It is part of the fundamental character of Orthodox theology that we do not theologize outside the Church. That is, although we have very detailed theology of what it means to be an Orthodox Christian, we have absolutely no theology about what it means not to be one. God has never told us the spiritual status of the non-Orthodox, except in only the most general terms that cannot be reliably applied to particular people. You cannot find it in the Scripture, in the writings of the Fathers, or in the Holy Qurbana. All we have been given is the Way.

From this, we can look at a given doctrine or practice and say, “That is not the Way,” but we cannot say, “All of you who have embraced that heresy are therefore forever damned.” We do not know that.

Orthodox Christians believe that the Way is Jesus Christ, the God-man, and that He founded a concrete, historical community, the Church, in which His followers live out the life He gave them through the work of the Apostles. Furthermore, we believe that the Orthodox Church is uniquely that One Church, that Christ did not found denominations or a movement called “Christianity.” It is clear from the point of view of Orthodoxy that not all religions are the same, that not all worship the same “God,” yet, at the same time, we recognize that there can be truth in all religions and philosophies. St. Justin Martyr in the 2nd century called this the *spermatikos logos*, i.e., the *Logos* in seed form. The *Logos*, or Word, is Jesus Christ (John 1), and St. Justin believed that all belief systems had within them the seeds of His revelation. Because all human beings are created according to the image of God (Jesus Christ), they are capable of discovering the Truth of God to some extent. Since all Truth and goodness comes from God, any goodness found in other religions is from God. The fullness of the Truth, however, is in Christ, God’s complete revelation to man.

Because of this, it is better to describe other faiths as “incomplete” rather than “false.” By discussing the similarities between our religions, we have the opportunity to celebrate what is True and show how that leads one to Orthodoxy and a better understanding of God and His relationship with mankind.

“We know where the Church is; it is not for us to judge and say where the Church is not.” From the Orthodox point of view, all Christian and non-Christian bodies that are not Orthodox are fundamentally not the Church. The Church is a concrete, historical community founded by Jesus Christ through His Apostles, which has existed for roughly two millennia. That is why we can say where the Church is.

The question becomes subtler when we are discussing individual persons. For any given person, baptism and formal membership in the Orthodox Church are not the apex of Christian life. On the contrary, the full course of a person’s life demonstrates his relationship with God. In this way, the saints are our evidence of the sanctifying, transforming power of God’s Grace, which is available to all of us. By conforming to the Will of God throughout their lives, by His Grace, the saints were able to enjoy His Presence in this world, undeterred by the temptations of this life. Throughout our lives, we strive towards such models of perfection and holiness, with Christ as the prime example.

A Christian life is not one of anxiety, wondering whether we can ever really “know” whether we are “in” or “out.” It is much more like being married – it is always changing and evolving, but built on a certain foundation. There is always the possibility for greater depth and unity, but also for dissolution and separation. It is a dynamic relationship, not a static status. The deepening of that relationship increases the joy married partners have in each other’s company. On a greater level, if we develop a relationship with God during our lives on this earth, then the presence of God in eternity is heaven, which we begin to experience in this life through the Sacraments and following His Will. On the other hand, like when a marriage relationship is corrupted and the presence of one’s partner brings pain, when a life is lived selfishly and apart from God, being in God’s presence is a great source of pain, like those described in common conceptions of hell. Just as we hope for ourselves, we also hope for the non-Orthodox that they would be able to live a true life in the Orthodox Church during their lifetime; but, if they do not, we hope that when presented with God in the next life, they will have developed the qualities of God innate in them (from being made in God’s image) in this life such that they will find joy in it, rather than pain.

So, while we can say with surety that heretical teachings are dangerous to the spiritual life, it is not up to us to judge any particular person in terms of how that danger affects him. We do not know, because none of us can look into another’s heart. Nevertheless, because an Orthodox person knows that Orthodoxy represents the fullness of the Christian faith, he is called by God to share his faith with others, to invite them to experience that same fullness and be transformed by it.

It is absolutely essential, however, that all these discussions, while standing firm on what is true and right, be conducted in humility. The Orthodox evangelist must not say, “I am right, and you are wrong,” because after all, he refers to himself every time he takes Communion as the “chief of sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). That the Orthodox Christian faith is uniquely true is not to the credit of any Orthodox person. We did not invent it, and we fall short of living it as we should, because we are sinners. Thus the Orthodox Church proclaims her heritage as the original Christian Church founded by Christ not in pride, but in humility as a historical experience.

Definitions

Orthodoxy: Both “true teaching” (literally “straight doctrine”) and “true worship” (literally “straight glory”). Orthodox Christianity is the life in faith given by Jesus Christ to the Apostles and then passed down within the Orthodox Church from generation to generation. It is not possible to be Orthodox outside the historical community of the Orthodox Church.

Heterodoxy: “Other teaching” and “other worship.” Heterodoxy is anything that contradicts Orthodox Christian doctrine and worship. This term may also be used to refer to all non-Orthodox Christian groups.

Heresy: Literally, “choosing.” Heresy is the act of choosing to be separate from Orthodoxy in doctrine and/or worship. The word may also be used to describe any heterodox teaching.

Heretic: One who was a follower of the Orthodox Christian faith and then consciously rejected it. Technically speaking, one who was never Orthodox cannot be a heretic. He may, however, believe in heretical teachings (i.e., heterodoxy).

Apostasy: Literally, “standing apart.” Apostasy is the act of deliberately leaving the Orthodox Church. One who does so is an apostate.

Schism: Literally, “separation.” Schism is a separation of a group from the Church, which often, but not always, includes heresy on the part of the schismatics.

Adapted from Chapter 1 of “Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy” by Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick (published by Conciliar Media Ministries, 2011)

LESSON 4 – THE CHURCH

Objective: To understand that the Church is more than just the house of God. It is the body of Christ that unites us all in Him and brings us to the fullness of Christian life through its teachings and practices

One of the tragedies of today's world is the common belief that it is Christ alone who saves us, not the Church. As Orthodox Christians, we believe that it is indeed Christ who saves – there is no “if”, “and” or “but” to that! However, there is a misunderstanding when it comes to the role of the Church. We believe the Church is His Body, and we who are joined to Him are joined to His Church as well. To say we love Christ, who is the Head of the Church, and at the same time reject His Body is to deny the New Testament teaching (e.g. **Ephesians 4:16** and **Colossians 1:18**). There is one Church, one God, one doctrine, one Baptism.

In the Nicene Creed, we profess that we believe in the “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.” This belief was first expressed in the Creed during the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. and is often referred to as the “four marks” of the Church. It is wrong to think this is a new teaching that was created during the Council of Constantinople, as we see these teachings in the writings of St. Ignatius and other Church Fathers, as well as in the writings of St. Paul. Rather, to protect the teachings of the Faith that were given by Christ to the Apostles, it was formally introduced into the creed in 381 A.D.

It is important for us to understand these marks, as it helps us understand who we are and how we relate to other denominations and religions. For example, the word “Catholic” does not refer to the Roman Catholic Church, but rather it refers to the universality of the Church. A quick explanation of the terms is given below, but you are encouraged to learn more on the topic to grow in the proper understanding.

ONE: In the letter to Ephesians, we read St. Paul teach - "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all"(**Ephesians 4:5-6**). The “One” in the Creed describes the unity of the Church, which is the Body of Christ (**Colossians 1:24**). During Christ's final interaction with his disciples on the night of his arrest, this was the prayer He had for the Church (**John 17:20-23**) i.e., that we all may be “one.” Fr. Thomas Hopko wrote – “this one Church, because its unity depends on God, Christ, and the Spirit, may never be broken. Thus, according to Orthodox doctrine, the Church is indivisible; men may be in it or out of it,

but they may not divide it. According to Orthodox teaching, the unity of the Church is man's free unity in the truth and love of God. Such unity is not brought about or established by any human authority or juridical power, but by God alone. To the extent that men are in the truth and love of God, they are members of His Church.” However as Bishop Kallistos Ware expressed - "We can say where the Church is; we cannot say where she is not." It is not for us to use the Nicene Creed to judge other denominations, but rather it is a proclamation and reminder that the Orthodox Church is the “One Church” that Christ had in His prayer.

HOLY: The word “holy” is a statement that we are set apart for a special purpose by and for God. We hear this very clearly in the words of St. Peter – “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (**1 Peter 2:9**). This is not a statement that we are members of the Orthodox Church are free from sin, nor that the institution of the Church cannot sin. Rather, Christ's Church is holy because it is His (**Matthew 16:18**) and, more so His Body (**Colossians 1:24**). Our Salvation is to continue with all our effort on the path to holiness, to be perfect like our heavenly Father is perfect (**Matthew 5:48**).

CATHOLIC: The Church is the fullness or wholeness of Christ's Body on this earth. During Holy Qurbana, we are reminded that only God is perfect wholeness, but God makes the Church to be catholic by its participation in His full, divine life. According to Fr. Thomas Hopko, “The term ‘catholic’ as originally used to define the Church (as early as the first decades of the second century) was a definition of quality rather than quantity. Calling the Church catholic means to define how it is, namely, full and complete, all-embracing, and with nothing lacking. Even before the Church was spread over the world, it was defined as catholic. The original Jerusalem Church of the apostles, or the early city-churches of Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, or Rome, was catholic. These churches were catholic -- as is each and every Orthodox Church today -- because nothing essential was lacking in them to be the genuine Church of Christ. God Himself is fully revealed and present in each Church through Christ and the Holy Spirit, acting in the local community of believers with its apostolic doctrine, ministry (hierarchy), and sacraments, thus requiring nothing to be added to it in order for it to participate fully in the Kingdom of God. Often the word “catholic” is defined as universal, with the idea that the Christian faith is for all men. Although this is correct and true, and our Great Commission of Christ (**Matthew 28:16-20**) is to bring the Gospel to everyone, it is important to understand that not everyone chooses to believe or accept the teachings of Christ and the Church (due to free-will). Catholicity is a qualitative mark: the quality of

the whole faith handed down from the Apostles. The Church as the Body of Christ is not limited to a time, place, race or culture.

APOSTOLIC: Christ chose His Apostles and in turn sent forth His Apostles and disciples with the command - "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you...receive ye the Holy Spirit" (**John 20:21-23**). Christ taught and revealed to His Apostles, and thereafter this teaching became the foundation of the Christian Church; this is the "Apostles' doctrine" that is referenced in **Acts 2:42**. The understanding of "Apostolic" is that the Church is built upon Christ and the Holy Spirit sent from God the Father and upon those Apostles who were sent by Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit. Secondly, the Church in its earthly members is itself sent by God to bear witness to His Kingdom, to keep His Word and to do His Will and His Works in this world. As explained earlier, no teachings were added to the Faith handed to us, nor was anything taken away. Rather, through the active presence and guidance of God, the Church continues to grow in the fullness of the revelation of Christ.

The Church is that place established by Christ where we each may become what we are created to be, maturing and being perfected. The Church as the Body of Christ carries us beyond our petty and worldly personal concerns, stretching our vision to the eternal and the heavenly as we ascend together to worship the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Adapted from the Teacher's Notes published by the Diocese of South-West America (<http://www.ds-wa.org/sunday-school.html>), and the Study Article titled "The Church" on page 1604 of the Orthodox Study Bible

LESSON 5 – THE APOSTOLIC AGE

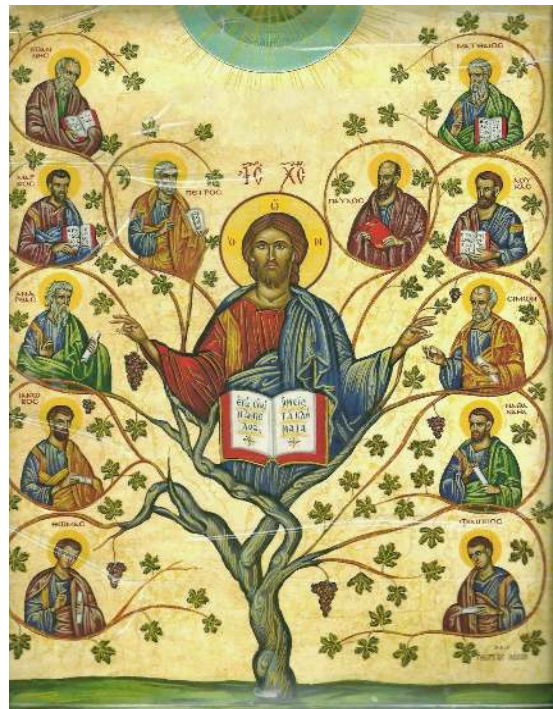
Objective: To learn about the Church in the First Century, its beginnings, and its practices and that the Orthodox Church is that Church, which is never changing, and ever holding fast to the Truth which has been handed down in word and writing

The first century of the Christian era begins with the birth of Jesus Christ from the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem. Christ lived, died, rose again and ascended into heaven in the first century. This century also witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles on the feast of Pentecost (the event which is often called the birthday of the Church), the missionary work of the apostles as well as their martyrdom.

The gospels and epistles and all of the books which comprise the New Testament scriptures were written in this period. The book of the Acts and the Pauline epistles give us a very clear picture of the missionary work that St. Paul carried out. St. Peter established the Church in Antioch and later in Rome. St. Thomas brought the Gospel to India. St. Mark established the Church in Egypt. There are several other traditions regarding the work and the missions of the other apostles. All of them suffered martyrdom with the exception of St. John the apostle, who died in exile on the island of Patmos. Through the book of the Acts, we learn of the stoning of St. Stephen and the execution of St. James, the brother of St. John. Tradition also tells us of the stoning of St. James the Just who was the first bishop of Jerusalem. Countless other Christians died for their faith in this first century under the wave of persecutions that were conducted by the emperors Nero and Trajan.

The Church

Contrary to what is sometimes thought, the Christian Church was first an urban phenomenon which only later spread to the rural areas. Also, it was composed mainly of people from what we would call today the “higher classes” of society. Thus, it is not true that Christianity gained its foothold in the world in uneducated and backward people.



who were looking for heavenly consolation in the face of oppressive and unbearable earthly conditions.

The main event of the Church of the first century was the admittance of Gentiles into the Church who were not obliged to follow the ritual requirements of the Mosaic law (see Acts 15, Galatians, Romans). Although the Christian Church entered Roman imperial society “under the veil” of Judaism, it was quickly understood that the People of God are called from all nations united in Christ the Messiah, who they confessed as the Lord and Savior of all men and the whole world.

The requirements for entry into the Christian Church was faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ, repentance from sin, and baptism in Jesus’ name with the subsequent reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Those who fulfilled these requirements entered the Church which was founded in each place as a local community led by those called bishops or presbyters who received the laying-on-of-hands from the apostles. The apostles themselves were not local bishops of any particular Christian community in any place. Each of the early Christian communities that we know about had its own unique character, and its own unique problems, as we see in the New Testament documents. Generally speaking, however, each church had great concern for the others and were all called to teach the same doctrines and to practice the same virtues, living the same life in Christ and the Holy Spirit.

As we read in **Acts 2:42, 44** - “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teachings, and communion, to the breaking of the bread, and the prayers. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need”

This description of the Church in Jerusalem can generally be applied to all of the early Christian communities. We also get a glimpse into the life of the early Church through the letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch. St. Ignatius (traditionally held as the child that Jesus placed on his lap in Matthew 18:3-4) was the third bishop of Antioch and wrote seven letters as he was imprisoned and taken from Antioch to Rome where he suffered his martyrdom.

“Take care to do all things in harmony with God, with the bishop presiding in the place of God, and with the presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles, and with the deacons” - Letter to the Magnesians

“Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be; as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not lawful to baptize or give communion without the consent of the bishop. On the other hand, whatever has his approval is pleasing to God. Thus, whatever is done will be safe and valid” — Letter to the Smyrnaeans

“Take note of those who hold heterodox opinions on the grace of Jesus Christ which has come to us, and see how contrary their opinions are to the mind of God ... They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, flesh which suffered for our sins and which that Father, in His goodness, raised up again. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes” — Letter to the Smyrnaeans

Through his letters, we see that the Church of the 1st century is very much like the Church we have today. Bishops lead the Church, and the Holy Eucharist was of utmost significance in the Christian life. The Eucharist was not seen as an allegory, or something symbolic of Jesus. It was professed to be **THE** flesh and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In the Thubdens, we remember these Apostles who took the Gospel to the different parts of the world, these Fathers who lead the early Church in sound faith through written and oral traditions, and these martyrs who suffered and died for their faith.

Adapted from Bible and Church History available at

<http://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/bible-history/church-history/first-century>



LESSON 6 - ORIENTAL ORTHODOX

Objective: To learn about the historical origins of the Oriental Orthodox Churches

A major division in the Church took place over the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. The Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern churches including the Greek and Russian Churches accepted the Council of Chalcedon. The churches that did not accept this council are called Oriental (or non-Chalcedonian) Orthodox churches, and include the the Syrian (Antiochian), Coptic (Alexandria), Armenian, Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Malankara (Indian) Orthodox churches.

Both Eastern (Chalcedonian) and Oriental (Non-Chalcedonian) churches regard themselves as orthodox, as “right-believing,” or (more accurately) as “right-worshipping.” But they have differed on their position with regard to the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) and the definition on Christological dogma (i.e., who Christ is) made at that council. Thus their long and often painful division goes back over 1500 years. In recent decades relations have begun to improve, yet developments have been both encouraging and frustrating. Encouraging - because theological dialogue, first informal in the 1960s, then formal in the 1980s and 1990s, has led to the conclusion that the Christological issues that initially prompted the division of these churches have been resolved, so that continued division can no longer be justified on dogmatic grounds. Frustrating - because the division does continue. There has been positive dialogue and unity between the Churches, such as a Joint Commission subcommittees on liturgical and pastoral issues that met in Damascus in February 1998 and agreed - among other things - “that the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches basically maintain the old liturgical traditions in their local liturgical types, which co-existed in the undivided Church”; and they also declared that liturgical issues have to be theologically clarified to indicate that they are in agreement with common Christological Statements. But, opposition to the work of the Joint Commission has slowed down progress towards unity and the arguments against unity are not based on the understanding of the Person of Christ but rather more historical and political reasons.

Armenian Apostolic Church

According to church tradition, Christianity was introduced to Armenia by Saints Thaddeus and Bartholomew, two of the twelve disciples of Christ. The early kings of Armenia were largely hostile to the new religion: the martyrdom of Thaddeus and then Bartholomew in the years 66 and 68 marked the first of several state-sponsored

persecutions. Around the beginning of the fourth century, however, a young nobleman named Gregory succeeded in converting the king, and Armenia became a Christian country--the first Christian state in history. Hagiography records that St. Gregory, henceforth known as “the Illuminator” or “the Enlightener,” was instructed by Christ in a dream to build a great cathedral in the capital city of Vagharshapat, not far from Mount Ararat. In commemoration of this vision, the cathedral and the city both became known as Etchmiadzin, or the place where the “Only-Begotten” (Christ) “descended.” The Holy See of Etchmiadzin remains to this day the spiritual center of the Armenian Church.

Armenia has endured an unsettled and often violent history, with periods of foreign domination at the hands of Persian, Arab, Greek, Turkish, and Soviet invaders. Following Arab and Byzantine invasions in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the traditional kingdom of Armenia was more or less abandoned, and a new Armenian kingdom, known as Cilician Armenia, was established further west, at the eastern edge of Asia Minor. The Catholicosate, or central authority of the church, was likewise transferred from Etchmiadzin to Cilicia. The Cilician kingdom fell about three hundred years later, and the See of Etchmiadzin was restored in 1441; nonetheless, there remain to this day two Catholicosates within the Armenian Church: Etchmiadzin retains a primacy of honor, but the Catholicosate of Cilicia (presently centered in Antelias, Lebanon) is fully independent in administration. There are also two Patriarchates, one in Jerusalem and the other in Constantinople, both of which are under the authority of Etchmiadzin.

The darkest period in the history of the Armenian church and people was that of the Turkish massacres of 1915-1920, sometimes referred to as “the Armenian Genocide.” According to some estimates, around 1.5 million Armenians were killed and many more exiled; the clergy of the Armenian church were not spared, dropping in number from approximately 5,000 in 1915 to around 400 just eight years later (Arten Ashjian 4-5). In 1920 Armenia was invaded by the Soviets and soon after incorporated into the Soviet Union. In 1991 the Republic of Armenia declared its independence from the Soviet Union, and opened the door to a revival of Armenian Orthodoxy in its traditional homeland.

For centuries the Armenian Apostolic Church has had a large diaspora population. Today its faithful are spread throughout the world, including Turkey, the Middle East, Europe, Australia, and America.

The Coptic Orthodox Church

The term “Coptic” is derived from the Greek word *aigyptios*, meaning Egyptian. Today it is used to distinguish the Christian inhabitants of Egypt from the majority Arab Muslim population. The Coptic Church is presently centered in Cairo, though it is traditionally associated with Alexandria, one of the five patriarchal thrones of early Christendom (along with Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, and Constantinople). St. Mark the Apostle, who is believed to have brought the faith to Egypt in the first century, is reckoned as the first bishop of Alexandria; Pope Tawadros II, the current Coptic patriarch, holds the title “118th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark.”

Prior to the legalization of Christianity in 313, the church in Egypt suffered frequent persecutions under the pagan Roman emperors. The most severe was under Diocletian (284-305), who in a series of edicts ordered churches to be destroyed, copies of scripture to be burned, and clergy and laity alike to be imprisoned, tortured, and killed. To this day the Coptic Church follows a special calendar in commemoration of all who died rather than renounce their faith; years are counted not from the birth of Christ but from the beginning of Diocletian’s reign in 284, which corresponds to 1 “Anno Martyrum” (A.M.), or “In the Year of the Martyrs.”

One of the greatest legacies of the Coptic Church is the monastic tradition, described by Coptic scholar Aziz Atiya as “the gift of Egypt to Christendom” (59). As early as the second or third century, Christians desiring to devote themselves entirely to a life of prayer and fasting began to retreat to the solitude of the Egyptian desert. St. Antony the Great is generally regarded as the father of monasticism, though it was his younger contemporary St. Pachomius who first organized a formal, communal style of monastic life. From Egypt, the monastic movement spread throughout the Christian world. Coptic monasticism began to experience a revival in the late twentieth century, and today there are several hundred monks and nuns both in Egypt and abroad.

Many of the early church fathers flourished in Christian Egypt. Notable among them were Clement of Alexandria and his successor Origen, who headed the Catechetical School at Alexandria, one of the most famous institutions of learning in antiquity. Other towering figures were St. Athanasius the Great, a defender of orthodoxy at the First Ecumenical Council (325), and St. Cyril of Alexandria, the most influential voice at the Third Ecumenical Council (431). The works of St. Cyril, who vehemently rejected Nestorius’ separation of Christ’s humanity from His divinity, are often cited by Oriental Orthodox theologians as a foundation for the rejection of the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.).

The supporters of Chalcedon had on their side the Byzantine civil authorities, and as a result the non-Chalcedonians in Egypt faced harsh persecutions. The Coptic patriarch of Alexandria was deposed and exiled, leading to the permanent establishment of a dual patriarchate: one of the Greek Byzantine Church, the other of the Coptic Church. In the two hundred years after Chalcedon, attempts at reunion were made, though without success; these efforts came to an end in the seventh century, when Egypt was cut off from Byzantium by Arab Muslim conquest.

In the centuries-long history of Arab rule in Egypt, the treatment of Coptic Christians has varied widely. At times there were persecutions, especially after the Crusades, which though initiated in Europe nonetheless tended to antagonize Muslim rulers against Christians in general. During other periods, however, the Copts enjoyed a remarkable degree of tolerance and respect. In recent times, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Egypt has heightened tensions between the Christian and Muslim communities, and Copts have faced discrimination and sometimes even attacks at the hands of extremists. Nonetheless, relations between the patriarch and the Egyptian president are reportedly good, and there have been signs that the government is working to improve the situation.

Since the elevation of the saintly Pope Kyrillos VI to the patriarchate in 1959, there began a renaissance in all aspects of church life that continued strongly under Pope Shenouda III and today to Pope Tawadros II. Ancient monasteries have once again begun to flourish, interest in Coptic studies has grown, Sunday School programs are strong, and churches have been established in North America, Europe, and Australia.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

The earliest contacts of Ethiopia with the Christian faith may have been in the first century: the New Testament records that an Ethiopian eunuch returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem met the apostle Philip on the road, receiving baptism at his hands (**Acts 8:26-39**). The eunuch was said to be an official in the court of the queen of Ethiopia, and tradition holds that upon his return he became the first to preach Christianity there. A separate tradition also records that the apostle Matthew himself visited Ethiopia in the course of his missionary travels. The great turning point in Ethiopian religious history, however, was not until the fourth century, when the king of Axum proclaimed Christianity the state religion.

The Axumite Empire was at that time a formidable kingdom stretching across present-day Eritrea, parts of present-day Ethiopia, and additional territories along the

Red Sea (Molnar 2). According to legend, it had been founded in about 1000 B.C. by Menelik I, a son of King Solomon by the Queen of Sheba; indeed, down to the twentieth century emperors of Ethiopia continued to regard themselves as heirs to the throne of Solomon, Haile Selassie (reigned 1930-1974) being accounted 111th in the succession. The semi-historical *Kebra Nagast* (The Glory of the Kings), a medieval work usually cited as the textual source for this tradition, further records the intriguing legend that soon after Menelik's anointing the Ark of the Covenant was brought from Jerusalem to Ethiopia. There are many who believe the Ark is still there to this day, carefully guarded in a sanctuary near the Church of St. Mary of Zion in Axum.

The fourth-century conversion of the Axumite king to Christianity is credited to St. Frumentius, a Phoenician-born bishop ordained by St. Athanasius of Alexandria to minister to the faithful in Axum. Since that time, the Ethiopian Church has been closely tied to the Coptic Church, with the Patriarch of Alexandria overseeing the appointment of bishops until recent times; only in 1959 did the church receive full independence. Occasionally the Christians of Ethiopia are still incorrectly referred to as "Coptic Christians," a label that belies not only the church's autocephaly but also its distinctive heritage.

Together with the Coptic and other Oriental Orthodox Churches, Ethiopia rejected the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.), which proclaimed Christ to have two distinct natures, human and divine. Wishing to stress that Christ has only one, simultaneously human and divine nature, the Orthodox Church of Ethiopia also refers to itself as the *Tewahedo* (also spelled *tewahido*), or "Made One / Unity," Church. Non-Chalcedonian Christianity in Ethiopia was further strengthened in the late fifth century, when a group of exiles fleeing persecution under the Chalcedonian-leaning Byzantine Empire came to Ethiopia. These men, known as the "Nine Saints," translated the Bible and important works of theology into Ge'ez (the language of Ethiopia at the time), established monasteries, and worked to convert the remaining pagans in the land.

In the seventh century Islam began its rapid spread through North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Ethiopia was exempted from jihad, perhaps at the order of the Prophet Muhammad, some of whose companions and relatives are said to have received shelter and religious protection from the king of Axum; but the surrounding conquests left the Christians of Ethiopia relatively isolated. The church continued to be governed by Coptic bishops, though the dangers of the road from Egypt to Axum at times left the see unoccupied (*ibid.* 6). Beginning in the thirteenth century, Ethiopia faced intermittent conflicts with regional Muslim states, culminating with a devastating series of attacks led by the sixteenth-century ruler Ahmad ibn Ibrahim. With Portuguese

assistance, Ethiopia eventually repelled Ahmad's armies, but only after years of violence in which many churches, along with some of Ethiopia's greatest artistic treasures, were destroyed.

The work of Jesuit missionaries during this period led to deep tensions within the church. In the early seventeenth century, Emperor Susneyos of Ethiopia converted to Catholicism, ordering the persecution of those who refused to accept Chalcedonian christology. A bloody rebellion followed, ending with the ascent to power of Susneyos's son Fasiladas, who expelled the Jesuits from the country and proclaimed the restoration of Orthodoxy; for the next two hundred years, further missionary efforts were strictly suppressed.

In the twentieth century, with political support from Haile Selassie, the Ethiopian Church began pushing for greater independence from the Coptic Church. In 1948, the Coptic Church agreed to consecrate an Ethiopian rather than a Copt as the next metropolitan of Ethiopia. The Egyptian-born metropolitan died in 1950, and the Ethiopian-born Archbishop Basilios succeeded him the following year. In 1959, the move was made complete, as Basilios was elevated to the rank of patriarch of the Ethiopian Church. Henceforth, Ethiopia was fully independent from the Coptic Church, although it continued to accord to Alexandria a primacy of honor. In 1993, after the political independence of Eritrea from Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Church was in turn to recognize the autocephaly of the Eritrean Church, which had previously been a province under the jurisdiction of the Ethiopian patriarch.

A Marxist revolution in 1974 led to the overthrow of Haile Selassie and the official separation of church and state. The years following the coup were marked by severe persecution of Christians: church properties were seized by the state, and as many as tens of thousands of Ethiopians were killed during a period known as the "Red Terror." The communist government of Ethiopia fell in 1991, and this in turn led to a schism within the church, with Patriarch Merkorios being accused of collaboration with the communists and forced to resign. In 1992 Patriarch Paulos was consecrated in his place, but Merkorios refused to recognize the election. Merkorios, taking refuge first in Kenya and then the United States, established the Holy Synod of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Exile; as of 2004, the division between the followers of the Patriarchal church in Ethiopia and the Synod in Exile remains unhealed.

The Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church

The history of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church is closely tied to that of its neighbor, the Ethiopian Church. Until the twentieth century, both churches were under

the jurisdiction of the Coptic patriarch in Egypt: the Ethiopian Church received full independence only in 1959, the Eritrean Church in 1993. Relations between the two churches have often been tense, owing to war and subsequent border disputes between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Nonetheless, they remain in full communion with one another, as with the other Oriental Orthodox Churches, and indeed share a common heritage of liturgy and art stretching back at least fifteen hundred years.

In former times Eritrea was part of the Axumite Empire, the rulers of which traced their lineage to the legendary Menelik I, son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Although Christianity may have been introduced in Eritrea in the apostolic age, the earliest undisputed records of its existence date to the fourth century, when the king of Axum proclaimed it The Nine Saints the state religion. The faith was further spread in the late fifth and sixth centuries by the Nine Saints, a group of exiles fleeing theological persecution in the Byzantine Empire. These saints established churches and monasteries throughout Eritrea and Ethiopia, many of which may still be seen today. As a result of their labors, as well as of the traditional connection of Axum with the Coptic patriarchate in Alexandria, Orthodox Christians in Eritrea have always sided with non-Chalcedonian christology, which teaches that Christ has but one, undivided nature, at once human and divine. In celebration of this doctrine, the Eritrean Church also refers to itself as the Tewahdo, or “Unity / Made One,” Church.

Situated along the southwest coast of the Red Sea, Eritrea was home to several important trading ports. With the spread of Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries, however, its ports fell into foreign hands, and as Axum began to decline, the Christians of Eritrea entered a long period of relative isolation. In the sixteenth century the Ottomans seized the port city of Massawa, whence their influence soon spread inland. Eritrea was also ruled by Egypt during the nineteenth century, then by Italy, which in 1890 proclaimed Eritrea a colony; the name “Eritrea” itself comes from an Italian version of the Latin *mare erythraeum*, the old Roman name for the Red Sea.

During World War II, Italy lost power, and Eritrea was claimed by the British. In 1949 Britain agreed to administer the region as a trust territory for the United Nations; three years later, in accordance with a UN decision, Eritrea was declared an autonomous unit within a federated Ethiopia. In 1962 Ethiopia dissolved the federation and annexed Eritrea as a province, sparking a prolonged and violent conflict between Eritrean rebels and Ethiopian forces. The rebels won a decisive victory in 1991, and in a referendum held two years later, Eritreans voted overwhelmingly in favor of independence. Although Ethiopia recognized Eritrea’s independence, fighting broke out again in 1998 as a result of a border dispute. A peace agreement was signed in December 2000, but as

of 2004 the final demarcation of the border is still unsettled, and relations between the two countries remain tense.

Prior to political independence, the church in Eritrea was administered as a diocese within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In 1993, however, the local church, led by Archbishop Philipos of Asmara and supported by the Eritrean government, petitioned the Coptic Church for ecclesiastical independence. The request was granted on 28 September 1993; the following year, “the Ethiopian and Eritrean churches signed an agreement in Addis Ababa that reaffirmed the autocephalous status of both churches, and recognized a primacy of honor of the Coptic Church among the Oriental Orthodox churches in Africa” (Roberson). In 1998, Abuna Philipos was elevated to the rank of patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church. As of 2004, the church is led by Patriarch Antonios, who was elected following the death of Philipos’s successor, Yacob.

The Syriac Orthodox Church

The Syriac Orthodox Church, one of the oldest churches in the world, had its origins in the city of Antioch in the Roman province of Syria; according to the New Testament, it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians (**Acts 11:26**). Church tradition records that St. Peter served as the first bishop of the city, before his journey to Rome; the famous martyr Ignatius of Antioch, also known as St. Ignatius the Illuminator, is said to have been Peter’s second successor. Together with the patriarchates of Jerusalem, Constantinople, Rome, and Alexandria, Antioch became one of the five great centers of early Christendom. The city of Edessa, to the northeast of Antioch, was also an important center for the church, especially in the development of a distinctively Syriac heritage. The Syriac language itself originated as an Edessene dialect of Aramaic.

As Latin was the lingua franca for the Roman Church and Greek for the Byzantine Church, the Syriac language united Christians across a wide geographical region. The patriarchate of Antioch originally included under its jurisdiction all the lands from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf, and at its height extended even as far east as Afghanistan. In English the church was formerly known as the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, but in 2000 the Holy Synod decided to adopt the term “Syriac” instead, to avoid confusion with the modern nation of Syria.

Antioch was an important center of theology, and its students and teachers were deeply involved in the christological debates of the early Ecumenical Councils. The third of these councils, held in Ephesus in 431, led to a schism within the Syriac-speaking community, with followers of the condemned theologian Nestorius eventually

establishing a separate church in Persia, known today as the Assyrian Church of the East. The next major council was held at Chalcedon in 451, and its decision, too, proved divisive. The Syriac Church rejected the proclamation of the council that Christ has two distinct natures, maintaining instead a single nature, at once human and divine. The schism between the opponents and supporters of Chalcedon eventually led to the emergence of separate patriarchates in Antioch, which continue to this day: the Syriac Orthodox patriarchate belongs to the communion of churches known as Oriental Orthodox, while the other patriarchate is a member of the Eastern Orthodox communion.

At the time of the council, Antioch was part of the Byzantine Empire, and the Syriac Orthodox Church was frequently persecuted by Chalcedonian-leaning emperors. Many of its bishops were exiled, and by the mid sixth century the church was in great decline. But revival was soon to follow, through the labors of Jacob Baradaeus, who in around 544 was ordained bishop of Edessa. Jacob, who is commemorated as one of the greatest saints of the church, traveled extensively in an effort to renew the faith, ordaining twenty-seven bishops and hundreds of priests and deacons (Syriac Orthodox Resources). So successful was his undertaking that outsiders sometimes refer to the Syriac Church as “Jacobite,” though the church itself rejects the appellation.

With the Arab conquest of the Near East in the seventh century, the church was delivered from the threat of further Byzantine suppression. Syriac Christians and Muslims generally enjoyed good relations: “The early years of Muslim occupation were characterized by religious tolerance and justice,” writes Chorepiscopus John Meno, “and Syrian Orthodox enjoyed positions of great influence and prestige under the Caliphs”. Relations deteriorated to some degree after the Crusades, which stoked anti-Christian sentiments among many Muslim rulers. Nonetheless, the seventh to thirteenth centuries in general mark a prosperous era for the church, with some of the finest outputs of literature and scholarship.

In the fourteenth century the Mongols entered Syria, destroying countless monasteries and churches. These invasions marked the beginning of a period of oppression and decline from which the church has only in recent times emerged. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the church suffered a particularly fierce persecution under the Turks, and “by the beginning of the 20th century, Syriac Orthodox Christianity was confined mostly to mountainous rural areas, such as Tur Abdin, and various towns in the Ottoman Empire” (Syriac Orthodox Resources). The greatest tragedy befell the church in 1915, remembered as Sayfo (“The Year of the Sword”), when tens of thousands of Syriac Christians were massacred by the Ottomans. Many of the survivors fled to

Turkey, resettling in North America and in the newly emerging nations of the Middle East.

As a result of the difficult and often violent history the church has had to endure, the office of the patriarch has shifted several times over the centuries. The most recent move was to Damascus, where church administration has been centered since 1959. Over the past several decades, the church has enjoyed a period of revival—sometimes referred to as a modern renaissance—much of it taking place in the new diaspora. Today Syriac churches exist throughout the Middle East, as well as in Turkey, North America, Europe, Australia, and especially in India, where the church has long had an important presence.

Adapted from “Beyond Dialogue: The Quest for Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Unity Today”, by Rev John H Erickson © Saint Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, and summaries found at the Harvard Divinity School project <http://pluralism.org/affiliates/student/allen/>

LESSON 7 – ROMAN CATHOLICISM

Objective: To understand that the differences between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church are not merely external but rooted in doctrine, spirituality and faith

In 1009 Pope Sergius of Rome wrote a confession of faith which included the filioque in the creed. At this time his name, and that of the Roman Church were omitted from the diptychs - being the official list of sister churches and bishops officially recognized and liturgically commemorated by a given church - of the church of Constantinople.

By 1052 a great controversy arose between Constantinople and Rome, not only about the filioque, but also about the place of the Roman papacy in the Church, and about divergent liturgical practices in East and West. The immediate cause of the conflict at this time was the Pope's suppression of Greek liturgical practices in South Italy, and the suppression of Latin practices in the East by the patriarch of Constantinople. In 1053 the Pope sent legates to Constantinople in an attempt to restore communion between the churches. Michael Cerularius, the patriarch of Constantinople, refused to give the papal legates a hearing because he thought they were politically motivated.

On July 16, 1054, Cardinal Humbert, the head of the papal delegation, was tired of waiting. He was irritated by the lack of respect shown to the Roman ambassadors, so he placed a document of anathema and excommunication (applying only to the "patriarch Michael Cerularius and those in sympathy with him") on the altar table of the Holy Wisdom (Hagia Sophia) cathedral.

At the same time, the cardinal was very careful to praise Constantinople as a "most orthodox city."

The official reasons for Humbert's anathema and excommunication of Cerularius were the removal of the filioque from the Creed; the practice of married clergy; and liturgical errors. Patriarch Michael Cerularius responded to Humbert's action by excommunicating all responsible for the July 16 incident. He drew up a long list of Latin abuses, mostly of divergent liturgical practices such as the use of unleavened bread for the eucharist, and the practice of baptism by one immersion.

Although Cardinal Humbert acted only against the person of the patriarch and his sympathizers, and although the patriarch reacted only against Humbert himself, the attempt to restore unity between East and West in 1054 resulted in a permanent schism

between the two churches which persists until today. Several gestures of reconciliation, such as the symbolic “lifting of the anathemas of 1054” by Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I in 1966, were made, but to no avail.

The reforming spirit of the Roman papacy reached its height in the eleventh century under Hildebrand who, as Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085), firmly established the papacy as a secular power. In 1089 the East asked Pope Urban II for a confession of faith. He refused to comply since such a compliance would presume that the bishop of Rome could be judged in the Church by another. Thus, although Patriarch Nicholas III of Constantinople (1084-1111) said: “Let the pope confess the orthodox faith and he will be first,” this was never again to happen in history.

By the time of the first crusade in 1095, no one in the East doubted that the Pope of Rome was emperor in the West. It was ultimately the crusades which sealed the schism between the churches. The crusaders took over Jerusalem in 1099, expelled the Muslims, and established a Latin hierarchy in place of the local, existing church order.

Differences in Vision

There are three primary areas in which Roman Catholicism differs from Orthodoxy not specifically in doctrinal terms, but in terms of its overall vision, its theological and spiritual culture. These three areas are the development of doctrine, the relationship between faith and reason, and a different kind of spirituality.

Development of Doctrine

That the Roman Catholic Church accepts development of doctrine means that, as history progresses, new doctrines appear that were absent in previous centuries. In theory, a “good Catholic” from two hundred years ago could be in danger of excommunication were he alive today! For example, papal infallibility (dogma of the Catholic Church that states that, in virtue of the promise of Jesus to Peter, the Pope is preserved from the possibility of error) was denied by many Catholics, including bishops, until the official definition of the dogma in 1870 at the First Vatican Council.

Orthodoxy, however, believes in the development of the expression of the Christian doctrine, but not of its meaning and substance, which is eternal, having been given by God in its wholeness to the Apostles. Further, although it is often the starting point for further theological reflection, Orthodox dogmatic formulation, especially in its conciliar expression, is primarily a pastoral response to heresy, not an opportunity for speculation or imagination in doctrine. Orthodox dogma never claims to expound the whole truth about anything, but only delineates the borders of the mystery.

As Orthodox Christians, we reject the notion that the Church of today has a better understanding of the truth and a higher level of knowledge than the Church of the Apostles. This theological difference is the framework for all the innovations of the Roman Catholic doctrine that differ from Orthodoxy, and includes the doctrine of Immaculate Conception, the Filioque (addition to the Nicene Creed), Purgatory, and Original Sin all of which the Orthodox Church does not believe as it is not per the ancient teachings of the Church.

Faith and Reason

Development of doctrine is possible in part because of the relationship Rome sees between faith and reason, in which reason is placed on a much higher level in Christian life than it is in Orthodoxy. Especially since the time of Thomas Aquinas (13th Century), Rome has defined and redefined much of its doctrine (often new dogmas) in terms of reason. Pope John Paul II puts faith and reason on the same level as means to the truth - "Faith and reason are like two wings in which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth".

For the Orthodox, rational thought is a useful tool to support the only true means of knowing the truth: faith in cooperation with God's grace. Reason, though useful, is not a necessary element in Christian life. Orthodoxy is rational, but not subjected to the demands of human rationality. You can be a true theologian in the Orthodox Church and yet be mentally challenged, because true theology is not defined by the acuity of the rational mind but by the quality of the prayer of the heart.

Spirituality

The overemphasis on reason leads to an imbalanced spirituality (the everyday spiritual life of the Christian), in which the integral oneness of the body, mind, and soul that Orthodox spirituality nurtures becomes fragmented, and the body is too highly emphasized in the spiritual life. Instead of turning the eye of the soul away from this world, we feel Roman Catholic spirituality tends to focus on specifically earthly images and sensations. Examples include introduction of modern musical instruments, complex singing, more realistic paintings, etc.

Roman Catholic spirituality is also characterized by the legalism required by its rationalist theology. For instance, it is held as a sin not to fast whereas Orthodoxy recognizes fasting as simply a tool. One may also find detailed lists of how to obtain indulgences out of purgatory, quantitative penances (e.g., say 10 Our Fathers and 5 Hail Marys), and the annulment of marriages.

LESSON 8 – THE REFORMATION AND BEYOND

Objective: To understand the roots of the Protestant Reformation and the theology that characterizes almost all Protestant Churches

The iconic moment that touched off the 16th century Protestant Reformation was the nailing of the 95-theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, by Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk who had become desperate for the reform of the Roman Catholic Church of the middle ages in Europe. He never had any intention of forming a new denomination, but his insistence on the abolition of indulgences and their sale, as well as his affirmation of the supremacy of the Bible over the church hierarchy, provoked his excommunication by Rome in 1520 A.D..

Historians call the first wave of the Reformation the “Magisterial Reformation”, since it had the backing of the civil authorities (the magistracy), particularly in what is now Germany. These first Reformers had no problem with working together with the secular authorities for the good of their churches. With the help of this magistracy, the solid hold of Rome over the religious unity of Western Europe came to an end.

The denominations produced by the Magisterial Reformation, all of which differ from one another on major points of doctrine and practice, include Lutherans, the Reformed Churches (both Calvinists and Zwinglians, including Presbyterians, Puritans, Congregationalists, and Dutch Reformed), and Anglicans (including Episcopalians). Methodists and Wesleyans, which branched from Anglicans, may be classified with these groups.

The Five Solas

Although the Reformation quickly splintered along doctrinal lines, there were five ‘solas’ (Latin for ‘alone’) that characterized most Reformation theology - *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone), *sola fide* (Faith alone), *sola gratia* (Grace alone), *sola Christus* (Christ alone), and *solī Deo gloria* (To God alone be glory). These five doctrinal positions are the pillars of the Protestant Reformation. In one form or another, they continue to be believed by all the thousands of denominations of the Magisterial Reformation and deeply influence all Protestant churches. In some ways, Orthodoxy agrees with all of these solas, but also differs from them in important ways.

Sola Scriptura

In its basic form, *sola scriptura* means “by Scripture alone.” At the beginning of the Reformation, it did not mean a total abandonment of all Church tradition, but simply attempted to elevate Scripture to the highest and most central point of Christian life. It was not long, however, before the implication that how one interprets the Bible is more important than ancient teachings would leave to various doctrinal revolutions.

Sola scriptura is the most important defining and distinctive doctrine for all of Protestantism. With this principle, any doctrine or practice may be “proven” from Scripture, depending on how one reads it. On this principle all the Protestant denominations were founded. Without it, question of authority comes into play and the believer finds that he has to be obedient to someone else’s interpretation of Scripture.

The Orthodox Church has multiple objections to the doctrine of sola scriptura. The first is that sola scriptura fails its own test, since such an idea is found nowhere in the Bible! It is true that the Bible speaks very highly of the value of Scripture (e.g., **2 Timothy 3:16**), but never does it say that it is exclusively authoritative. Ironically, the Bible describes the Church (not itself) as the “pillar and ground of the Truth” (**1 Timothy 3:15**). St. Paul also notably commands believers in **2 Thessalonians 2:15** to “stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word (of mouth) or epistle”. Readers of the Protestant New International Version (NIV) translation will miss this, because the NIV translates the Greek *paradosis* (tradition) as “teaching” when it is used in a good light but as “tradition” when used in a manner that contradicts Scripture alone as authority.

Another problem making the Bible an exclusively authoritative source is that its very design does not lend itself to such usage. There is no systematic theology or catechism in the Bible. There is no manual on important manners such as how one is to worship God. The Bible is a collection of documents of various genres written for various purposes - history, poetry, pastoral teaching, prophecy, and apocalypse. But nowhere do we find in it an exhaustive manual on Christian life.

Another major problem is that sola scriptura would have been a practical impossibility for the early Church. After the Resurrection of Jesus, it was roughly twenty to forty years before the New Testament began to be written! The last of the New Testament documents, St. John’s Revelation, was probably written in A.D. 95. Christians therefore would have had to wait about 60 years before the Church could function, and we know that this is clearly not the case as the early Church is well documented in the Acts of the Apostles and grew due to the power of the Holy Spirit, the prayers of the Saints and the blood of the martyrs.

For the Orthodox, the Bible - its contents, canonization, and interpretation - have always been a matter for the Church community. Authority was given by Christ to His Church, and so the Church used that authority to write the Bible and to compile and canonize it. The Church still uses that authority to interpret it (e.g., the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is clearly documented in John 6, and the Body and Blood is real and not symbolic).

Sola Fide

The doctrine of sola fide teaches that justification comes by faith alone. In classical Protestant doctrine, justification is being “declared righteous” by God. Sola fide was formulated primarily in response to the Roman Catholic insistence on good works (and the system of merit, satisfaction, purgatory, and indulgence), which was interpreted by Luther as trying to earn one’s way to heaven.

Orthodoxy, by contrast, teaches with the Scripture that it is by grace through faith that we are saved, and not of works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Where Orthodoxy differs from the doctrine of sola fide is in its understanding of faith, works, and justification. Faith for the Orthodox Christian includes good works, not because they earn salvation, but because they are the form of cooperation with divine grace, which does the work of transformation. Justification for the Orthodox is being made really righteous, not simply declared so. In fact, in **James 2:24** we read, “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone”.

Sola Gratia

The teaching of sola gratia (“by grace alone”) is that it is only God’s grace that accomplishes salvation. No act of man contributes to salvation in any way. The most extreme form of this doctrine is held by classical Calvinism, which holds that man has absolutely no role in his salvation, not even assent. God will damn or save you, whether you want it or not. This is called predestination, and directly contradicts with the Orthodox teaching of free-will (which is necessary, as we believe God is love). Orthodoxy believe in synergy, that God and man are co-workers (**2 Corinthians 6:1**), that man must “work out (his) salvation with fear and trembling (**Phil. 2:12**)

Sola Christus

Sola Christus is the teaching that “Christ alone” is the means of salvation, and was formulated in response to the strongly mediatorial understanding of 16th century Roman Catholic clergy. The fear is that a fallible human being would presume to stand between a believer and God. In the sense that the Reformers usually mean that salvation

is possible only in and through Christ is acceptable to Orthodoxy. However, the accompanying rejection of the clerical role, most especially in serving the Sacraments, is not acceptable.

Soli Deo Gloria

Sola Deo gloria is the teaching that to God alone is due glory. This doctrine is a direct rejection of the veneration of saints and other holy objects or persons. It is a reaction to the ostentatious earthly glory of 16th century Roman Catholicism. Orthodoxy agrees with the essence of this doctrine, that God alone is worthy of our worship. However, it is a rejection of His Incarnation and of His work in human beings in history to deny honor to those Saints and holy places. Veneration is given to saints only because of the work of Christ in them. It in no way detracts from the worship due to God alone. We should of course never seek our own glory, but there is nothing wrong with showing respect and veneration to God's saints, who show forth His glory.

Summary

The fruit of the Reformation led to the idea that one could be a true Christian without church membership, and today we see many denominations distance themselves from all elements of the ancient Church that was present in the Acts of the Apostles. Today, we also see the next logical step where there is no need for community - instead of a church, there is a popular uprising defined by enthusiasm, emotion, and personal charisma.

The Evangelical Church and more than 40,000 other denominations all exist and are labeled as "Christianity", but it must be understood that the fullness of the Faith as given to us by Our Lord Jesus Christ only exists in the Orthodox Church.

The Orthodox Church is evangelical, but not Protestant. It is orthodox, but not Jewish. It is catholic, but not Roman. It isn't non-denominational - it is pre-denominational. It has believed, taught, preserved, defended and died for the Faith of the Apostles since the Day of Pentecost 2000 years ago.

LESSON 9 – NON-MAINSTREAM CHRISTIANS

Objective: To learn about sects and denominations that have heretical beliefs but appear to be Christian.

As shown in the earlier lesson, the Orthodox Church shares certain basic beliefs with some Christian denominations from Roman Catholic to the churches of the Reformation. For example, we share the belief in the Holy Trinity and in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. There are significant differences as well, but there is still some basic common ground.

In this lesson, we introduce groups that call themselves “Christian” but are largely regarded as non-Christian by most groups that have been mentioned to date. Mainstream Christians may look upon these groups as cults or heretics. This rejection of the Christian label for these groups is largely based on their rejection of traditional dogmas of the Holy Trinity and the nature of Jesus Christ. This is the reason why a believer of one of these churches will need to be Baptized by the Orthodox Church and received into Orthodoxy with the full conversion process normally reserved for non-Christians.

Unitarian Universalists

Unitarianism is the teaching that God is not a Trinity of divine Persons, but rather that He is absolutely one divine Person. This belief actually had been taught by early heretics of the Church e.g., Sabellius taught that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were simply “modes” of a single Person of God.

Mormons

The Mormon faith was started by Joseph Smith, who had a vision of God and Jesus, who told him that all Christian denominations had fallen away from the true faith and that it would be restored in time. At the age of 17, he claimed to see a vision of an angel named Moroni, who told him where to find a set of golden plates buried in a hillside. Unearthing these plates and a special pair of seeing stones, he reported he had found the Book of Mormon which were ancient texts from a long-forgotten Native American tribe. The religion founded on this discovery came to be called Mormonism, and Smith, along with other Mormon leaders, is believed to be prophets.

Mormons believe in the Holy Trinity, but they regard the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as three separate gods who are united in purpose, which they refer to as the

godhead. Unlike the God of the Orthodox and True Church, these gods are not uncreated. In fact, the Father who created our world was once human but gradually became god over time. The goal of life as a Mormon therefore is to become god. An elevated Mormon will also get to father many children and to create his own world, beginning the cycle of creation over again.

There are many other doctrinal differences, but as we have read the Mormon doctrine concerning the Trinity is radically different from Orthodoxy, because Mormons are polytheists while Orthodoxy is monotheistic. Mormon soteriology (doctrine of salvation) sounds similar to the Orthodox doctrine of theosis, but in Orthodoxy man does not become an almighty God but rather participates in and becomes transformed by the one and only God. The key problem in all Mormon theology in general is the failure to distinguish between the created and the uncreated.

Christian Science

Christian Science is the system of religious belief of the Church of Christ, Scientist. The denomination was founded in 1879 by Mary Baker Eddy, a New Hampshire native raised with Calvinist beliefs. The single most distinctive teaching of Christian Science is the belief in the unreality of the material world. Materiality is an illusion. As a result, if someone is suffering from some sickness, all they need to do to be cured is to realize that their sickness is an illusion. All evil can be destroyed simply by becoming aware of the power and love of God. Seeking medical treatment is the result of a lack of faith.

Christian Scientists have neither ordained clergy nor sacraments. Baptism and Holy Communion are thought of in purely spiritual - that is non-material - terms. The primary focus in Christian Science is on spiritual healing.

From the Orthodox point of view, the dualistic anti-materialism of Christian Science is simply delusion and a denial of God's creation. Creation exists in both visible and invisible elements, both material and immaterial, in an eternal union. Man himself is a union of both body and soul, and the separation that occurs at death is temporary, being healed and renewed at the general resurrection at the end of time.

Jehovah's Witnesses

The origins of the Jehovah's Witnesses lie in the 1870s in the preaching of Charles Taze Russell. The group believes in the end, only 144,000 people from the whole of human history would actually make it to heaven. Russell's followers were expected to spend much of their time warning others about the imminent end of the world, which they keep wrongly predicting.

Like the ancient Arian heretics, the Witnesses identify Jesus as a creation of God through whom the rest of creation was made. Jesus did perform miracles here on earth but does not perform them any more. He suffered and was killed, but was resurrected by God as a “spirit creature”. Jesus is also the same person as the Archangel Michael. The Holy Spirit is not a divine person but rather is merely God’s “active force”.

The Witnesses use and believe in the Bible, though they have their own special translation called the New World Translation which is altered to support their doctrine. Hell does not exist for the Witnesses but is simply a symbol for death. Instead the wicked will be annihilated after Armageddon. Until that happens, all of the dead, both good and evil, are conscious of nothing.

Orthodoxy strongly contrasts with these and other doctrines of the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

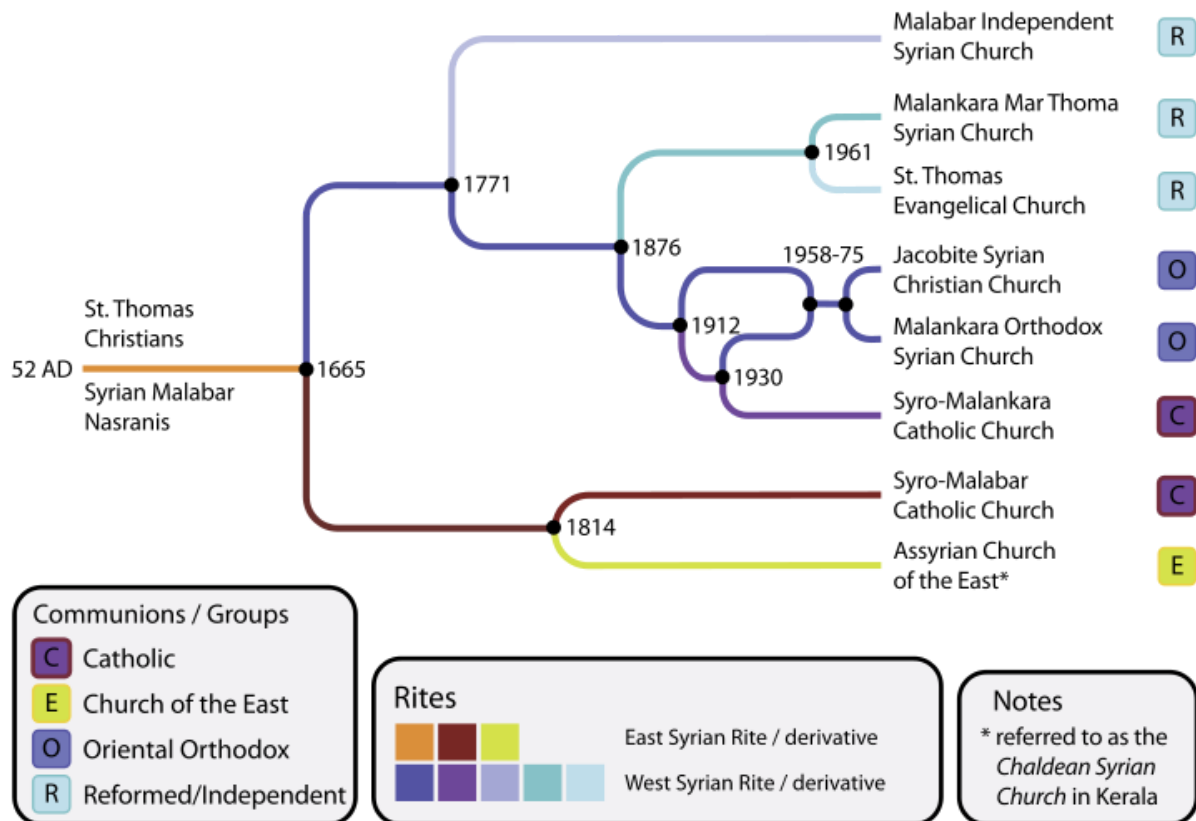
Conclusions

The origins of these various non-mainstream religious bodies yield another demonstration of what happens when the notion takes hold that the individual person is the arbiter of what is true, especially when one accepts that true Christianity has been lost at some point in history. If a Lutheran can stand up and say that Joseph Smith is not to be believed, then one has to wonder why Martin Luther should be believed. While both represent major disjunctions from traditional Christianity, both also claimed to be restoring ancient and true Christianity.

Orthodox Christianity proclaims that through the power of the Holy Spirit, the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church was never “lost” or forgotten. Our approach to Christ is that the Son of God came to earth at a moment in history, was born of the Virgin Mary, lived, died, and rose from the dead, founding His One Church through the Apostles. All departures from this clear Gospel message, as we have seen, lead to quite dangerous spiritual results.

LESSON 10 – MALANKARA CHURCHES

Objective: To learn about the different Churches in India that have Apostolic Origins and their schism from the Orthodox Church



Our Church is formally known as the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, and often referred to as the Indian Orthodox Church.

Christianity in India has a far longer history than most people are aware, with origins stretching back more than a thousand years before the arrival of Catholic and Protestant missionaries. Indeed, when the Portuguese began to colonize the southwest coast of India in the early sixteenth century, they were surprised to find there a Christian community tracing its roots all the way to the apostle Thomas. The Orthodox Church in India, the inheritor of this ancient tradition, is known as the “Malankara” Church, after an old name for the region where the church is centered, roughly equivalent to the modern state of Kerala.



St. Thomas is said to have reached India in 52 A.D., and established several churches in Malankara as well as spending time in what is today the state of Tamil Nadu; a small mount near Chennai (the capital of Tamil Nadu) is venerated as the site of his martyrdom and is a center of pilgrimage for Christians of many denominations in India. Sea trade routes did exist between the Near East and the Malankara coast, and that Syrian and Persian merchants had contact with South India in the early centuries of the Christian era. A group of around 400 Syrians from Edessa is said to have arrived in 345, led by a merchant known as Thomas of Cana and accompanied by Mor Joseph, a Syrian bishop (Kottapparambil). Another wave of Syrian immigrants arrived in Malankara in the ninth century.

Beginning in the fifth century, the Syriac community in the Near East came to be divided between the Assyrian Church of the East, which accepted the doctrines of the theologian Nestorius, and the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch, which regarded Nestorianism as a heresy. Although the influence of Syriac Christianity in India is uncontested, it is difficult to know which tradition was more influential, and at what periods. Many scholars have asserted the jurisdiction of the Assyrian Church of the East in Malankara from an early period; others have argued for a continuous Orthodox tradition until 1490, when it is well documented that the church began receiving Nestorian bishops from Persia. The period of Assyrian bishops continued until 1599, when Roman Catholics took control of churches in the region.

The Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama had reached India in 1498, and the following century marked the beginning of European colonization and missionary work there. Indian and European Christians seem to have enjoyed cordial relations at first, but by the end of the sixteenth century the situation had completely deteriorated: while the Malankara Christians were content to acknowledge separate apostolic traditions, stemming respectively from St. Thomas and St. Peter, Catholic missionaries sought to bring the Indian Church under the administration of Rome. The culmination of their efforts was the Synod of Diamper (1599), which proclaimed the Malankara Church a part of the Roman Catholic Church. Although canonical irregularities meant that Rome

never accepted the synod, its conveners nonetheless enrolled the support of the local government and began enforcing use of a Latinized rite.

On January 3rd, 1653, Malankara Christians finally rebelled: thousands gathered before the Coonan (“leaning”) Cross in Mattancherry, taking an oath no longer to submit to the Roman Church. However, Rome sent groups of Carmelites attempting to reclaim the lost churches. The Carmelites reclaimed eighty-four churches, leaving Archdeacon Mar Thomas I (who lead the Coonan Cross Oath) with thirty-two churches. The eighty-four churches and their congregations were the body from which the Syro Malabar Church has descended. The Syro Malabar Church continues to follow the East Syrian rite in their liturgies. The other thirty-two churches and their congregations represented the nucleus from which the Syriac Orthodox (Jacobites & Orthodox), Thozhiyur, Mar Thoma (Reformed Syrians), Syro Malankara Catholics have originated. The Syriac Patriarch of Antioch helped restore the Church in India and allow the faithful to adhere to Orthodox faith and practice. The restored church thus became an autonomous part of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries gave rise to schisms within the Malankara community. The Malabar Independent Syrian Church of Thozhiyur was founded in around 1774, following the disputed appointment of a local bishop. Another split took place the following century, when Anglican-inspired reformers within the Malankara Church broke away to form the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar; today the Mar Thoma Church has approximately 700,000 members and is in communion with the Church of England.

The most significant schism for the Orthodox community of Malankara took place in the early twentieth century, when a large group of the faithful, pointing to the founding of the church by the apostle Thomas, urged the formation of an independent Indian Orthodox Church. Although the Malankara Church was already an autonomous, or self-governed, part of the Syriac Orthodox Church, the new faction desired autocephaly, or its own head rather than reliance on the patriarch of Antioch. The autocephalous church, established in 1912, became known as the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. Despite repeated efforts at reconciliation, relations between the two groups sadly remain tense.

We must all continue to pray for peace, forgiveness, and unity between the Malankara and Syriac Orthodox Churches. We are of one Faith, and truly brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ, who had sent the Apostles Saint Peter and Saint Thomas to bring our ancestors into the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

LESSON 11 – OUR CHURCH HISTORY

Objective: To learn about the history of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and the efforts of Vattasseril Thirumeni in establishing the Catholicate

Apostolic Origin

St. Thomas the Apostle of Christ arrived in India north of the modern-day city of Cochin (Kerala) in about AD 52. He preached to the Jewish colony and established Christian communities at seven places, namely Maliankara (Kodungallore), Palayur, Paravur(Kottakavu), Gokamangalam (Kokamangalam), Niranam, Chayal (Nilackal) and Kollam(Quilon). There is also what is known as a “half-Church” at Thiruvithancode, which was a Church made on land donated by the local king. In almost all these places, there is a strong presence of St. Thomas Christian communities with ancient traditions.

From Kerala, St.Thomas proceeded to the eastern parts of south India where also he had converts and then preached as far as China. Later returning to India he was martyred at Mylapur (near Madras) in AD 72.

There is historical evidence of the representation of the churches in India at the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea. Records show that a Bishop named John attended the council and represented Persia and India. St. Ephrem attests to the missionary work of St. Thomas to India, and has composed hymns on St. Thomas on his mission in India, martyrdom and removal of bones to Edessa etc, in the 4th century. When the Portuguese reached India in 1498 A.D., they found Christians who were unanimous on the point that the apostle St. Thomas suffered martyrdom and was buried at Mylapur. Many non-Christian residents near Mylapur also witnessed to the Portuguese that St. Thomas had been buried there and that Christian settlements existed in the vicinity. St. Eusebius of Caesaria also wrote about St. Thomas in India.

The general consensus of opinion among scholars about the origin of Christianity in India is that the foundations of it in India were laid by St. Thomas, the apostle. Almost all serious historians do not subscribe to the view that Christianity in India had its origin out of the missionary works of the East Syrian church or of the Roman Catholic Church as neither church made any such unique claim.

The presence of the Jewish settlements in South India even before the Christian era is also proven without doubt, attesting to the presence of an active trade relation between

Jews in Israel and South India. Cranganore, Palur, Paravoor etc where St Thomas established Christian Communities were also Jewish settlements and were great trading centers. The presence of the Jews at these places led Thomas to be invited to those places, where he as the result of his labors established Christianity.

Ultimately, the most conclusive evidence to prove St. Thomas' presence in India is our Church. When asked about the proof of St. Thomas coming to India, a renowned scholar responded - "In the end, we are the evidence. We have a very ancient, unbroken tradition that St. Thomas was the founder of the church in India. Our traditions are unanimous that he came here, and that is something we have held onto, despite persecution, for 1,700 years. Our spirituality is very close to that of the early church and we believe our church is as old as any Apostolic Church in the world. Our songs and traditions are quite clear about this. In the end it is these traditions that we base our belief on: not something on paper or stone which is secondary. It is our fidelity to St Thomas that is most important to us."

South India had trade connections with the Mediterranean and West Asian world since ancient times. This enabled the Church in those areas, particularly Persia, to have a knowledge of the existence of a Christian community in India. Many Christians, when they were persecuted in Persian Empire, fled to the South western coast of India and found there a ready and warm welcome.

There is no documentary evidence referring to the way the Indian Church was governed during early centuries. According to tradition, the successor of St. Thomas corresponded with the leaders of the Christian Churches in the Middle East, and the church of India from time to time was ruled by prelates from that part of the world.

The Persian Connection

The Persian connection of the Indian churches has to be seen in the context of the internal dissensions and state persecution of Christians in Persia from the 5th century. A Synod of the Persian Church (410 AD) affirmed the faith of Nicea and acknowledged the Metropolitan of Selucia-Ctesiphon as the Catholicos of East. Not long after, the christological controversies of Chalcedon, fuelled by the strains between the Persian and Byzantine empires, swayed the Persian church to declare itself Nestorian and its head to assume the title of Patriarch of the East (Babylon). From their base in the then flourishing theological school of Nisibis, Nestorian missionaries began moving to India, Central Asia, China and Ethiopia to teach their doctrines-probably associating the churches in these countries with the work of St. Thomas the Apostle, whom the Persians must have venerated as the founder of their own church.

By the 7th Century, specific references of the Indian church began to appear in Persian records. The Metropolitan of India and the Metropolitan of China are mentioned in the consecration records of Patriarches of the East. At one stage, however, the Indian church was claimed to be in the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan of Fars but this issue was settled by Patriarch Sliba Zoha (714- 728 AD) who recognized the traditional dignity of the autonomous Metropolitan of India.

There were other developments in the Persian Church of potential import to the Indian Church. A renaissance of the pre-Chalcedon faith began led by St. Jacob Baradaeus, emphasizing the West Syrian Christological tradition of the one united nature, influencing the church in Persia as well. Availing the relatively favorable political climate following the Arab conquest of Syria and other parts of West Asia, a maphrianate of the anti-Chalcedonians was established and Mar Marutha, a native Persian, became the first Jacobite Maphriana (Catholicos) of the East. The jurisdiction of this Catholicos at Tigris extended to 18 episcopal dioceses in lower Mesopotamia and further east, but significantly, not to India.

On the growth of the church in India during the first 15 centuries, the balance of historical evidence and the thrust of local tradition point to its basic autonomy sustained by the core of its own faith and culture. It received with the trust and courtesy missionaries, bishops and migrants as they came from whichever eastern Church- Tigris or Babylon, Antioch or Alexandria, but not from the more distant Constantinople or Rome. There were times in this long period when the Christians in India had been without a bishop and were led by an Archdeacon. In such occasions requests were sent, sometimes with success, to one another of the Eastern prelates to help restore the episcopate in India. Meanwhile the church in Persia and much of west declined by internal causes and the impact of Islam, affecting both the "Nestorian" Patriarchate of the East (Babylon) and the Jacobite Catholicate of the East (Tigris). As will be seen from the later history of the Indian Church, the latter, was reestablished in India (Kottayam) in 1912 while the former was transplanted to America 1940.

The Colonial Era

The Church in India maintained its local autonomous character. Following the arrival of Vasco de Gama, the Portuguese General, in Calicut, Kerala, India, in 1498, the Europeans came to South India more frequently and by the 16th Century the Portuguese established themselves. Although they had found a Christian community on arrival, the Portuguese brought with them missionaries to carry on evangelistic work in order to

establish churches in communion with Rome under the Portuguese patronage. These missionaries were eager to bring the Indian Church also under the Pope.

The post-Portuguese story of the church in India from the 16th century- is relatively well documented. In their combined zeal to colonize and proselytize, the Portuguese might not have readily grasped the way of life of the Thomas Christians who seemed to accommodate differing strands of eastern Christian thought and influence, while preserving the core of their original faith. The response of the visitors was to try and bring them under Rome-Syrian prelates, apart from the new converts in the coastal areas under Latin prelates.

They succeeded in their efforts in 1599 with the `Synod of Diamper'. The representatives of various Indian parishes who attended the assembly were forced by Portuguese Authorities to accept the Papal authority.



Following the synod, the Indian Church came to be governed by Portuguese prelates. They were as a whole, unwilling to respect the integrity of the Indian Church, and a majority of people were not happy about the state of affairs. This disaffection led to general revolt in 1653 which is known as the Koonan Kurishu Satyam, or Coonen Cross Pledge on January 3rd 1653. As pictured above, this was a public avowal by members of the Saint Thomas Christian community of Kerala, India that they would not submit to Portuguese dominance in ecclesiastical and secular life. The swearing of the oath was a major event in the history of the Saint Thomas Christian community and marked a major turning point in its relations with the Portuguese colonial forces. The oath resulted in the excommunication of 54 years Roman domination started with the synod of Diamper in CE 1599 by the Portuguese and declaration of the sovereignty Malankara Church in 1665 AD. However, initially with no bishop to guide spiritually, the faithful had to face serious difficulties. Yet it was determined to keep the independence of

Indian Church and accordingly, Archdeacon Thomas was raised to the title of Mar Thoma, the first in the long line up to Mar Thoma IX.

At the request of the Thomas Christians, the "Jacobite" bishop, Mar Gregorios of Jerusalem came to India in 1664, confirmed the episcopal consecration of Mar Thoma I as the head of the Orthodox Church in India. Thus began the formal relationship with the "Jacobite" Syrian Church, as it happened, in explicit support of the traditional autonomy of the Indian Church.

History repeated itself in another form when the British in India encouraged reformation within the Orthodox Church, partly through Anglican domination of the theological seminary in Kottayam, besides attracting members of the church into Anglican congregations since 1836. Finally the reformist group broke away to form what is known today as the Mar Thoma Church. This crisis situation was contained with the help of Patriarch Peter III of Antioch who visited India in 1875-77. The outcome was twofold - a reaffirmation of the distinctive identity of the Orthodox Church under its own Metropolitan and, at some dissonance with this renewal, an enlarged influence of the Patriarch of Antioch in the affairs of the Indian Church. The Patriarch of Antioch used this opportunity to exert his authority in the Church and suppress the authority of the Malankara Metropolitan. The interference of the Antiochian Patriarch resulted in legal fights and the final judgment of the Travancore Royal court in 1889 declared that the Patriarch had spiritual supervisory powers over the Malankara Church. But it also declared that the Patriarch does not have any temporal authority in the Church. The Patriarch was not satisfied with this decision.

During the Malankara Association Meeting held in March, 1908, Vattasseril Thirumeni was chosen as Metropolitan and was sent to the Patriarch in Antioch for consecration. He was consecrated as the Metropolitan by name Geevarghese Mar Dionysius VI on 31st May 1908 but was not given an official "kalapana" to establish his authority. It is customary that every bishop when ordained, a "kalapana" is also given to him. The Patriarch Mar Abdulla expressed that office of the Metropolitan of Malankara was not necessary for the Indian Church and instead sent a Syrian Bishop by name Sleet Mar Osthathios to India to succeed Mar Dionysius V. When Mar Dionysius V passed away on 11th July 1909, Antiochian Patriarch Abdulla was requested to confirm the appointment of Geevarghese Mar Dionysius as his successor, which he had agreed. During his meeting with leaders of Malankara Association, Patriarch made a suggestion in a very diplomatic way that they should write a statement acknowledging the authority of the Patriarch over everything in the Church. Patriarch Abdulla asserted that he had the authority whether the Indian Church admitted it or not. He was claiming both spiritual and temporal authority in the Church of Malabar as a divine right while the Royal Court

decision admitted only the spiritual authority, which Mar Dionysius VI and those who stood with him were willing to admit but opposed to his claim of temporal authority. In fact this was the only difference between the two sides. Spiritual authority here referred to matters related to interpretation of faith, maintenance of the sacramental life, and the observance of ecclesiastical discipline. Authority of temporal matters consisted of the carrying out of the Church's internal administration, management of its finances, Schools, Parishes and other institutions. Court decisions from the 19th Century (1889) had denied to the Patriarch authority in the temporal sphere. All the Bishops consecrated by the Patriarch during the period following 1875, except Mar Dionysius VI, had admitted this illegitimate claim and given the Patriarchs concerned the registered deeds demanded by them. Thus in reality all of them betrayed the cause of preserving the integrity of the Indian Church. But the only exception was Mar Dionysius VI.

Patriarch Abdulla with the advice of his supporters took the decision of sending a letter of excommunication to Metropolitan Mar Dionysius. Mar Dionysius convened the Managing Committee of the Church at the M.D. seminary Chapel. This meeting expressed its solidarity with the Metropolitan, ignoring his excommunication, and resolved to call the Malankara Association to workout the steps to be adopted in handling the situation. Meanwhile, in response to communication from Kerala, the Senior Patriarch Mar Abdul Messiah, the canonical Patriarch informed on 17th August 1911 that the excommunication of Mar Dionysius by Patriarch Abdulla was null and void, and the Church of Malabar should ignore it. The supporters of Mar Dionysius requested the Senior Patriarch Mar Abdul Messaiah to visit India to repair the damage done by Patriarch Abdulla. Accordingly, on 13th June 1912 he arrived in Kerala. His Grace Paulose Mar Ivanios was raised as the first Catholicos of the East in 1912. By the reestablishment of the Catholicate in Kerala, the Malankara Orthodox Church became autocephalous. The Catholicate and the Patriarchate are indeed equal in rank. The Catholicos has the right at supervision over his church, in the same way as the Patriarch has it over that of his.. He has further consecrated two other Bishops, Geevarghese Mar Philoxenos, who became the second Catholicos in 1925, and Euachim Mar Ivanios.

Mar Abdul Messaiah returned to Antioch and passed away on 30th August 1915, before which he issued two Kalpanas dated 17th September 1912 and 24th February 1913 stating that the Catholicos has been installed, and that the Bishops of Malankara Syrian Church have the right to raise a successor to the Catholicos. It is given the authority to fulfill, in consultation with the Malankara Association, all the services needed for the edification of the Church, by the Holy Spirit. He shall thus ordain Metropolitans and Bishops, consecrate the Holy Mooron, and perform the other functions necessary for the Church.

About a year before his death, Mar Dionysius VI got ready his 'Will', handing over all the properties of the Church administered by him to the episcopal Synod of the Church, after his time. The Patriarchal side raised objection to its adoption in Court, soon after his death. But it had no effect, as the court dismissed the case. The 'Will' was then registered and formally executed. He bade farewell to his earthly life on 23rd February 1934 in triumph and glory, after receiving the benefits of all the sacred rites with full participation.

An illustrious leader, Mar Dionysius served the Malankara Syrian Church as its Metropolitan for a period of twenty five years. His unwavering faith, sincere devotion and dauntless courage are commendable. Vattasseril Thirumeni was a man of prayer, determination and dynamism. He was a saint who never stooped before falsehood. Vattasseril Geevarghese Mar Dionysius is popularly known as Malankara Sabha Bhasuran (The Great Luminary of Malankara Orthodox Church) which our Church has bestowed on him in recognition of his rich contribution to Malankara Orthodox Church.

Adapted from "The Malankara Orthodox Church: A Historical Perspective", by H.G. Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorios

LESSON 12 - THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

Objective: To learn that the Orthodox Church was, is and always has been a body of self governing Churches held together through faith and sacramental communion.

As we have learned through our study of Christian history, Orthodoxy is unique – it is not just a kind of Roman Catholicism without the Pope, but something quite distinct from any religious system in the west. Yet, often times when one learns more about Orthodoxy, they will often easily discover much in it which, while different from what they had known, is yet curiously familiar. "But that is what I have always believed!" Such has been the reaction of many, on learning more fully about the Orthodox Church and what it teaches and they are partly right.

As we have seen, the Christian Church was united through the first three Ecumenical Councils – Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus. As such, we can say for almost 500 years after Christ although there were constant struggles, disagreements, and heresy .. at the end, there was only one denomination, one Church. As Orthodox Christians, we lay claim to the fact that we are members of that One Church – the pre-denominational body of worshippers united in Christ.

History, geography, and politics has yielded the situation today where there are many different "Orthodox Churches" – the Indian Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, etc. However, all of these Churches are members of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church that together form the One True Body of Christ.

The Orthodox Church is a family of self-governing Churches. It is held together, not by a centralized organization, not by a single prelate or bishop wielding absolute power over the whole body (i.e., there is no equivalent position to the Pope in the Roman Catholic Church), but by the double bond of unity in the faith and communion in the sacraments. Each Church, while independent, is in full agreement with the rest on all matters of doctrine, and between them all there is sacramental communion. Every Bishop of the Church is in full brotherhood and equal to Bishops of all Orthodox Churches. This decentralized system of independent local Churches has the advantage of being highly flexible, and is easily adapted to changing conditions. Local Churches can be created, suppressed, and then restored again, with very little disturbance to the life of the Church as a whole.

There can be autocephalous and autonomous Orthodox Churches. An “autocephalous” Church is completely self-governing. It elects its own primate and has the right to consecrate its own Holy Chrism, among other prerogatives unique to autocephalous Churches. The term “autocephalous” literally means “self-heading”. An “autonomous” Church is self-governing to a certain degree in its internal matters, but its head is appointed or confirmed by the autocephalous Church which nurtures it. An autonomous Church also receives its Holy Chrism from its “Mother Church.” The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church is an autocephalous Church.

Orthodoxy is universal — not something exotic and oriental, but simple Christianity. Because of human failings and the accidents of history, the Orthodox Church has been largely restricted in the past to certain geographical areas. Yet to the Orthodox themselves their Church is something more than a group of local bodies. The word "Orthodoxy" has the double meaning of "right belief" and "right glory" (or "right worship"). The Orthodox, therefore, make what may seem at first a surprising claim: they regard their Church as the Church which guards and teaches the true belief about God and which glorifies Him with right worship, that is, as nothing less than the Church of Christ on earth.

"Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like the rushing of a violent wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues like flames of fire, divided among them and resting on each one. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:2-4). So the history of the Christian Church begins, with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles at Jerusalem during the feast of Pentecost. On that same day through the preaching of Saint Peter three thousand men and women were baptized, and the first Christian community at Jerusalem was formed.

Before long the members of the Jerusalem Church were scattered by the persecution which followed the stoning of Saint Stephen. "Go forth therefore," Christ had said, "and teach all nations" (Matt. 28:19). Obedient to this command they preached wherever they went, at first to Jews, but before long to Gentiles also. Some stories of these Apostolic journeys are recorded by Saint Luke in the book of Acts; others are preserved in the tradition of the Church such as St. Thomas journey to bring the Word to India. The legends about the Apostles may not always be literally true, but it is at any rate certain that within an astonishingly short time small Christian communities had sprung up in all the main centers of the Roman Empire and in places well beyond the Roman frontiers.

Supper of the Lord, receiving His Body and Blood in the sacrament. But the Eucharist is something that can only happen locally — in each particular community gathered round its bishop; and at every local celebration of the Eucharist it is the whole Christ who is present, not just a part of Him. Therefore each local community, as it celebrates the Eucharist Sunday by Sunday, is the Church in its fullness.

The teaching of Ignatius has a permanent place in Orthodox tradition. Orthodoxy still thinks of the Church as a Eucharistic society, whose outward organization, however necessary, is secondary to its inner, sacramental life; and Orthodoxy still emphasizes the cardinal importance of the local community in the structure of the Church. To those who attend a Divine Liturgy (Holy Qurbana), when the bishop stands at the beginning of the service in the middle of the church, surrounded by his flock, Ignatius of Antioch's idea of the bishop as the center of unity in the local community will occur with particular vividness.

But besides the local community there is also the wider unity of the Church. This second aspect is developed in the writings of another martyr bishop, Saint Cyprian of Carthage (died 258 A.D.). Cyprian saw all bishops as sharing in the one episcopate, yet sharing it in such a way that each possesses not a part but the whole. "The episcopate," he wrote, "is a single whole, in which each bishop enjoys full possession. So is the Church a single whole, though it spreads far and wide into a multitude of churches as its fertility increases" (On the Unity of the Church, 5). There are many churches but only one Church; many episcopi but only one episcopate.

There were many others in the first three centuries of the Church who like Cyprian and Ignatius ended their lives as martyrs. The idea of martyrdom had a central place in the spiritual outlook of the early Christians. They saw their Church as founded upon blood — not only the blood of Christ but also the blood of the martyrs. In later centuries when the Church became "established" and no longer suffered persecution, the idea of martyrdom did not disappear, but it took other forms: the monastic life, for example, is often regarded by Greek writers as an equivalent to martyrdom. It is important to understand that the Greek from which we obtain the word "martyr" is μάρτυς, mártys — which literally means "witness". As members of the Body of Christ, we are all called to be witnesses, martyrs, to the Good News of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Being a witness by giving up our life and dying for Christ is the highest form of martyrdom.

One of the most ancient names for Christianity is simply, "the Way". In **Acts 19:23**, we read "And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way". It is a name

that emphasizes the practical character of the Christian faith. Christianity, as understood by Orthodox Christians, is more than a theory about the universe, more than teachings written down on paper; it is a path along which we journey – in the deepest and richest sense, the way of life. Christ Himself teaches, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (**John 14:6**).

As a Christian of the Orthodox Church, we must understand this need for living experience. To many who are ignorant of the teachings of the Church, Orthodoxy seems rigid because of the rules and traditions. For true Orthodox Christians, however, loyalty to the teachings and traditions of the Church does not mean just acceptance of formulae or customs from past generations, but rather the ever-new, personal and direct experience of the Holy Spirit in the present, here and now.

Adapted from “The Orthodox Church” and “The Orthodox Way”, both written by Bishop Kallistos Ware

LESSON 13 – ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY AND WORSHIP

Objective: To learn what the Orthodox Church teaching is on the relationship between God and man

Orthodox spirituality

The relationship between man and God is the basic concept of every religion. Each religion may have its own views and attitudes about the relationship between God and man. The basic content is the same in Christianity. But the Eastern and Western traditions differ in their approaches. Here we shall examine the differences in the basic principles and approaches.

Man in the image of God



We all agree that man is distinct from, and superior to all other creatures. Man who is created in the image of God, is given power and authority over the whole creation. The Orthodox Church says that this image of God is not just something that distinguishes man from the rest of creation. It is an endowment intended to enable him to grow in the likeness of God. Our free-will, conscience, thinking and imagination, all these are comprised in the 'Image of God.' These are qualities of God. God has given these qualities to man by His over-flowing love towards man. It is because God desires that man should become like Him. To become like God is to conform to the nature of God. The nature of God is perfect goodness. Man has to grow in goodness to become conformed to God's nature. Free-will, reason, intellect and all other qualities of man

are given for the realization of this goal. So, man has to distinguish between good and evil, and choose the good.

Incarnation

It is a pity that man could not realize the image of God in him in the right way. Man due to the fall and by his free-will is prone to choose the evil and disobey God. The punishment of death and corruption fell on man and his divine likeness was defaced. Still, God was kind to man. He decided to offer Himself to enable us to reach our destiny. The second person of the Holy Trinity became man and suffered death and corruption on our behalf. Irenaeus (of Lyons, [115-202 A.D.] in his book, Against

Heresies puts it as follows: "God became what we are so that we might become what He is." In other words, God became man so that man might become divine. It is the same that St. Athanasius of Alexandria, [293 -373 A.D.] says about the salvific mission of our Lord, "The Son of God became the Son of man, so that the sons of men might become the sons of God."

Transformation

Our Lord's aim was to make us the children of God so that we may share His divine nature. His body and blood are the median through which we become united in Him and become 'in Him'. As members of the Church, His Body, we are initiated to the life of the kingdom of God, and so we are to be transformed day by day. We are to be glorified and transfigured through the life in the Church, through fasting, prayer and partaking of the mysteries. We are going to attain our actual humanity in its full measure at His second coming.

But our life on earth is a constant and decisive spiritual battle. In this battle, the image of God should shine more and more and the strongholds of Satan must be pulled down. A Christian's battle is not just defense; it is attacking Satan and advancing in goodness. Temptations, trials and tribulations are for the testing of our mettle and for our progress in goodness.

It is this transfiguration and transformation that our fathers called "deification" or "theosis". Through the Holy Spirit, and the real experience of our freedom, we are becoming deified. St. Paul the apostle exhorts as follows: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (**2 Cor. 3:18**)

Sanctification

Bishop Kallistos Ware in his article "The Transfiguration of the Body" teaches, "The Transfiguration - whether of Christ or His saints, underlines the significance of the human body. When Christ was transfigured on Mount Tabor, His divine glory was manifested in, and through His human body. Through their physical eyes, the disciples saw that in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily' (**Colossians 2:9**). And just as Christ's glory is not only inward but bodily, also, it is with that of the saints; their transfiguration emphasizes that man's sanctification- 'deification' as the Greek Fathers called it-is not something that concerns the soul alone, but also something that involves the body." So it is possible on earth itself to experience that glory of the Transfiguration. Many of our saints have testified to it by their lives. In the Holy Spirit and by the

blessing of the Holy Eucharist, we become immersed and strengthened in the heavenly life.

Orthodox Worship

Worship is the central element in any religion. It expresses the particular religion's vision of God's attitude to man and understanding of the universe. Christian Church, from its very beginning has been a worshipping community. During its long history, there evolved elaborate and complex types of worship. It includes the acts of praise and repentance, the personal and public prayers, the Divine Liturgy and Sacraments. There are vast differences between the liturgical traditions of the East and the West.

Originally the word 'worship' refers to the service to God by man as a servant to his master. Thus the surrender of man's self-will and independence forms the heart of worship.

Nowadays there are people who deny any religion or worship. They charge those who observe these as irrational, unreasonable, or 'uncultured'. But their arguments cannot check the natural thirst of man for worship. The tendency for worship is inherent in man's nature itself. But modern man may not be satisfied with the traditional forms of worship. This is true. He needs new and relevant types of worship. Modern man longs for a worship which gathers up the real life of man today. This worship must involve the non-conscientious layers of mind with the expression through concrete things and actions. This worship also needs the awareness of the transcendent in the experience of the worshipping community.

The full participation of the faithful in the offering of the liturgy was a characteristic of the early Church. This same aspect is retained, and the congregational responses in the Divine Liturgy are highly emphasized in the Eastern worship. In the West this is not so important and the emphasis is upon personal devotion. Often times, worship in the West is reduced to a praise and worship song and a sermon from a pastor, which is more focused on the individual.

It is not normally permitted to an Orthodox priest to celebrate the Eucharistic liturgy by himself. Generally he should have at least the deacon and one person to represent the congregation. The Eucharist is an act of the whole Church and hence needs the entire congregation as participants. In our liturgies the invocation of the Holy Spirit (epiclesis) has a significant part. Invocation refers to the inevitable presence of Holy Spirit in the consecrated elements. But this special calling up of Holy Spirit is ignored in the Western

tradition. Here we have to note that the epiclesis is not the sole occasion of the consecration of elements.

The liturgy as a whole is for the consecration. But here we specially call for the indwelling experience of Holy Spirit. This does not mean further, that before the epiclesis, Holy Spirit was absent in the liturgy.

Iconography

Icons are sacred art that was used in the early Church and occupied a prominent place in Orthodox worship. Luke the Evangelist is believed to have drawn the first icons of



Lord Jesus Christ, St. Mary, the mother of our Lord, and the apostles. The icons are sanctified attempts to manifest the mysterious divine realm. The painters are usually monks, and the discipline of fasting and prayer is required for painting an icon. Icons have to be of scenes of actual events and persons who have actually manifested themselves. For example, an icon of the Trinity can be made only in two forms: either that of the three angels that appeared to Abraham or the scene of baptism of our Lord in the River Jordan (Father testifies Him; the Son receives the testimony; Holy Spirit descends like a dove.).

The icon, like the Word, is a revealing medium of spiritual truth. It is a presence, not a decoration or an illustration. An icon is not a photograph or reproduction of an actual scene, but brings forth the theological teaching - an icon of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ will include St. Paul, although historically at that time St. Paul was still known as Saul and persecuting the Church. However, the Icon of the Ascension is correct in that the Church of Christ is for both Jews and Gentiles, and St. Paul is also known as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Trinitarian

In the Eucharist, we are purified by the Holy Spirit and united in our bodies and souls with Christ, and through Him we confront the Father. The Christian fellowship is rooted in the fellowship among the three persons of the Holy Trinity. Awareness of the total Body of Christ: The Body of Christ comprises of the whole company of saints, and the faithful departed, along with the believers. The liturgy is an occasion to have the fellowship with them. There are a number of prayers in the liturgy to pray for, and

intercede through the saints, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the departed souls. Certain hours in the daily prayer circle are devoted for the saints, and the departed. The preparatory prayers for the Holy Eucharist are full of their remembrance.

Beauty is a mark of worship. The beauty of the worship is preserved through poetry. Many of the Eastern prayers are set in poems, compiled from the Biblical verses, with rhythmic and metrical arrangements.

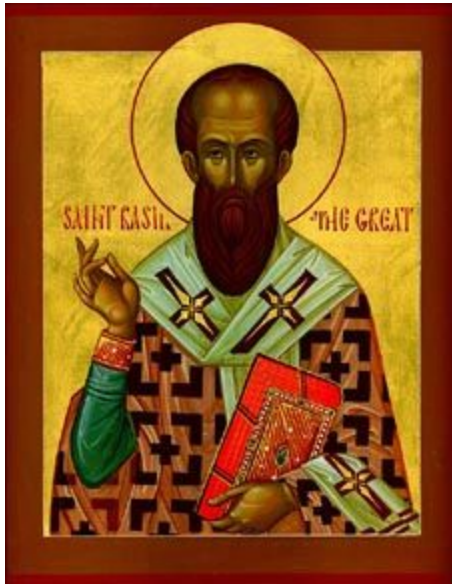
The early Eastern Fathers were endowed with spiritual enlightenment and deep knowledge in all the books of the Bible. They could arrange the liturgical cycle and prayers with apt scriptural passages.

The Eastern liturgies cannot be understood simply by a penetrating study of the texts. Though dramatic in form, they are not plays to be read. They are not even dramas to be seen. Only by full and repeated participation along with a congregation nurtured in the liturgical tradition, one can come to know their spiritual richness. The various liturgical instruments, the vestments, the gestures of the priest and the people, the reverence paid to icons, all of them have special significance and symbolic meanings. In fact, worship is an act.

All Orthodox Churches generally encourage the use of the vernacular. Though the principle of using the language of the people is generally accepted, in practice the emotion of clergy and laity alike often pull in the direction of keeping the ancient liturgical languages. Vernacularization can be generally said to be in line with the spread of modern education.

LESSON 14 – SAINT BASIL

Objective: To learn about the life of a great Father of the Church - St. Basil



The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church holds Saint Basil the Great in such high veneration that the head of our Church, the Catholicos of the East, always includes the name of St. Basil (i.e., Baselios) in the name. The current head of the Church is His Holiness Baselios Mar Thoma Paulose II, who became Catholicos of the East and the Malankara Metropolitan on 1 November 2010.

St. Basil was the Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia. He was born in the year 330 at Caesarea, the administrative center of Cappadocia. He was of illustrious lineage, famed for its eminence and wealth, and zealous for the Christian Faith. The saint's grandfather and grandmother on his father's side had to hide in the forests of Pontus for seven years during the persecution under Diocletian.

St Basil's mother St Emilia was the daughter of a martyr. On the Greek calendar, she is commemorated on May 30. St Basil's father was also named Basil. He was a lawyer and renowned rhetorician, and lived at Caesarea.

Ten children were born to the elder Basil and Emilia: five sons and five daughters. Five of them were later numbered among the saints: Basil the Great; Macrina (July 19) was an exemplar of ascetic life, and exerted strong influence on the life and character of St Basil the Great; Gregory, afterwards Bishop of Nyssa (January 10); Peter, Bishop of Sebaste (January 9); and Theosebia, a deaconess (January 10).

St Basil spent the first years of his life on an estate belonging to his parents at the River Iris, where he was raised under the supervision of his mother Emilia and grandmother Macrina. They were women of great refinement, who remembered an earlier bishop of Cappadocia, St Gregory the Wonderworker (November 17). Basil received his initial education under the supervision of his father, and then he studied under the finest teachers in Caesarea of Cappadocia, and it was here that he made the acquaintance of St

Gregory the Theologian (January 25 and January 30). Later, Basil transferred to a school at Constantinople, where he listened to eminent orators and philosophers. To complete his education, St Basil went to Athens, the center of classical enlightenment. After a four or five year stay at Athens, Basil had mastered all the available disciplines. “He studied everything thoroughly, more than others are wont to study a single subject. He studied each science in its very totality, as though he would study nothing else.” Philosopher, philologist, orator, jurist, naturalist, possessing profound knowledge in astronomy, mathematics and medicine, “he was a ship fully laden with learning, to the extent permitted by human nature.”

At Athens a close friendship developed between Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian (Nazianzus), which continued throughout their life. In fact, they regarded themselves as one soul in two bodies. Later on, in his eulogy for Basil the Great, St Gregory the Theologian speaks with delight about this period: “Various hopes guided us, and indeed inevitably, in learning... Two paths opened up before us: the one to our sacred temples and the teachers therein; the other towards preceptors of disciplines beyond.”

About the year 357, St Basil returned to Caesarea, where for a while he devoted himself to rhetoric. But soon, refusing offers from Caesarea’s citizens who wanted to entrust him with the education of their offspring, St Basil entered upon the path of ascetic life.

After the death of her husband, Basil’s mother, her eldest daughter Macrina, and several female servants withdrew to the family estate at Iris and there began to lead an ascetic life. Basil was baptized by Dianios, the Bishop of Caesarea, and was tonsured a Reader (On the Holy Spirit, 29). He first read the Holy Scriptures to the people, then explained them.

Later on, “wishing to acquire a guide to the knowledge of truth”, the saint undertook a journey into Egypt, Syria and Palestine, to meet the great Christian ascetics dwelling there. On returning to Cappadocia, he decided to do as they did. He distributed his wealth to the needy, then settled on the opposite side of the river not far from his mother Emilia and sister Macrina, gathering around him monks living a cenobitic life.

By his letters, Basil drew his good friend Gregory the Theologian to the monastery. Sts Basil and Gregory labored in strict abstinence in their dwelling place, which had no roof or fireplace, and the food was very humble. They themselves cleared away the stones, planted and watered the trees, and carried heavy loads. Their hands were constantly calloused from the hard work. For clothing Basil had only a tunic and monastic mantle. He wore a hairshirt, but only at night, so that it would not be obvious.

In their solitude, Sts Basil and Gregory occupied themselves in an intense study of Holy Scripture. They were guided by the writings of the Fathers and commentators of the past, especially the good writings of Origen. From all these works they compiled an anthology called Philokalia. Also at this time, at the request of the monks, St Basil wrote down a collection of rules for virtuous life. By his preaching and by his example St Basil assisted in the spiritual perfection of Christians in Cappadocia and Pontus; and many indeed turned to him. Monasteries were organized for men and for women, in which places Basil sought to combine the cenobitic (koine bios, or common) lifestyle with that of the solitary hermit.

During the reign of Constantius (337-361) the heretical teachings of Arius were spreading, and the Church summoned both its saints into service. St Basil returned to Caesarea. In the year 362 he was ordained deacon by Bishop Meletius of Antioch. In 364 he was ordained to the holy priesthood by Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea. "But seeing," as Gregory the Theologian relates, "that everyone exceedingly praised and honored Basil for his wisdom and reverence, Eusebius, through human weakness, succumbed to jealousy of him, and began to show dislike for him." The monks rose up in defense of St Basil. To avoid causing Church discord, Basil withdrew to his own monastery and concerned himself with the organization of monasteries.

With the coming to power of the emperor Valens (364-378), who was a resolute adherent of Arianism, a time of troubles began for Orthodoxy, the onset of a great struggle. St Basil hastily returned to Caesarea at the request of Bishop Eusebius. In the words of Gregory the Theologian, he was for Bishop Eusebius "a good advisor, a righteous representative, an expounder of the Word of God, a staff for the aged, a faithful support in internal matters, and an activist in external matters."

From this time church governance passed over to Basil, though he was subordinate to the hierarchy. He preached daily, and often twice, in the morning and in the evening. During this time St Basil composed his Liturgy. He wrote a work "On the Six Days of Creation" (Hexaemeron) and another on the Prophet Isaiah in sixteen chapters, yet another on the Psalms, and also a second compilation of monastic rules. St Basil wrote also three books "Against Eunomius," an Arian teacher who, with the help of Aristotelian concepts, had presented the Arian dogma in philosophic form, converting Christian teaching into a logical scheme of rational concepts.

St Gregory the Theologian, speaking about the activity of Basil the Great during this period, points to "the caring for the destitute and the taking in of strangers, the supervision of virgins, written and unwritten monastic rules for monks, the

arrangement of prayers [Liturgy], the felicitous arrangement of altars and other things.” Upon the death of Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea, St Basil was chosen to succeed him in the year 370. As Bishop of Caesarea, St Basil the Great was the newest of fifty bishops in eleven provinces. St Athanasius the Great (May 2), with joy and with thanks to God welcomed the appointment to Cappadocia of such a bishop as Basil, famed for his reverence, deep knowledge of Holy Scripture, great learning, and his efforts for the welfare of Church peace and unity.

Under Valens, the external government belonged to the Arians, who held various opinions regarding the divinity of the Son of God, and were divided into several factions. These dogmatic disputes were concerned with questions about the Holy Spirit. In his books *Against Eunomios*, St Basil the Great taught the divinity of the Holy Spirit and His equality with the Father and the Son. Subsequently, in order to provide a full explanation of Orthodox teaching on this question, St Basil wrote his book *On the Holy Spirit* at the request of St Amphilochius, the Bishop of Iconium.

St Basil’s difficulties were made worse by various circumstances: Cappadocia was divided in two under the rearrangement of provincial districts. Then at Antioch a schism occurred, occasioned by the consecration of a second bishop. There was the negative and haughty attitude of Western bishops to the attempts to draw them into the struggle with the Arians. And there was also the departure of Eustathius of Sebaste over to the Arian side. Basil had been connected to him by ties of close friendship. Amidst the constant perils, St Basil gave encouragement to the Orthodox, confirmed them in the Faith, summoning them to bravery and endurance. The holy bishop wrote numerous letters to the churches, to bishops, to clergy and to individuals. Overcoming the heretics “by the weapon of his mouth, and by the arrows of his letters,” as an untiring champion of Orthodoxy, St Basil challenged the hostility and intrigues of the Arian heretics all his life. He has been compared to a bee, stinging the Church’s enemies, yet nourishing his flock with the sweet honey of his teaching.

The emperor Valens, mercilessly sending into exile any bishop who displeased him, and having implanted Arianism into other Asia Minor provinces, suddenly appeared in Cappadocia for this same purpose. He sent the prefect Modestus to St Basil. He began to threaten the saint with the confiscation of his property, banishment, beatings, and even death.

St Basil said, “If you take away my possessions, you will not enrich yourself, nor will you make me a pauper. You have no need of my old worn-out clothing, nor of my few books, of which the entirety of my wealth is comprised. Exile means nothing to me, since I am

bound to no particular place. This place in which I now dwell is not mine, and any place you send me shall be mine. Better to say: every place is God's. Where would I be neither a stranger and sojourner (Ps. 38/39:13)? Who can torture me? I am so weak, that the very first blow would render me insensible. Death would be a kindness to me, for it will bring me all the sooner to God, for Whom I live and labor, and to Whom I hasten."

The official was stunned by his answer. "No one has ever spoken so audaciously to me," he said.

"Perhaps," the saint remarked, " that is because you've never spoken to a bishop before. In all else we are meek, the most humble of all. But when it concerns God, and people rise up against Him, then we, counting everything else as naught, look to Him alone. Then fire, sword, wild beasts and iron rods that rend the body, serve to fill us with joy, rather than fear."



Reporting to Valens that St Basil was not to be intimidated, Modestus said, “Emperor, we stand defeated by a leader of the Church.” Basil the Great again showed firmness before the emperor and his retinue and made such a strong impression on Valens that the emperor dared not give in to the Arians demanding Basil’s exile. “On the day of Theophany, amidst an innumerable multitude of the people, Valens entered the church and mixed in with the throng, in order to give the appearance of being in unity with the Church. When the singing of Psalms began in the church, it was like thunder to his hearing. The emperor beheld a sea of people, and in the altar and all around was splendor; in front of all was Basil, who acknowledged either by gesture or by glance, everything going on in church.” Everything was focused only on God and the altar-table, and the clergy serving there in awe and reverence.

St Basil celebrated the church services almost every day. He was particularly concerned about the strict fulfilling of the Canons of the Church, and took care that only worthy individuals should enter into the clergy. He incessantly made the rounds of his own church, lest anywhere there be an infraction of Church discipline, and setting aright any unseemliness. At Caesarea, St Basil built two monasteries, a men’s and a women’s, with a church in honor of the Forty Martyrs (March 9) whose relics were buried there. Following the example of monks, the saint’s clergy, even deacons and priests, lived in remarkable poverty, to toil and lead chaste and virtuous lives. For his clergy St Basil obtained an exemption from taxation. He used all his personal wealth and the income from his church for the benefit of the destitute; in every center of his diocese he built a poor-house; and at Caesarea, a home for wanderers and the homeless.

Sickly since youth, the toil of teaching, his life of abstinence, and the concerns and sorrows of pastoral service took their toll on him. St Basil died on January 1, 379 A.D. at the age 49. St. Basil, together with St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Gregory of Nazianzus are remembered as the Cappadocian Fathers.

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LESSON 15 – ALMS-GIVING

Objective: To understand the practise of alms-giving in the Orthodox Church

In Christ's teaching, alms-giving goes together with fasting and prayer. We have seen that this is also the teaching of Isaiah and of the Old Testament generally. When one prays and fasts, one must show love through active generosity to others.

“Beware of practicing your piety before men, in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do...that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (**Matthew 6:1-4**)

As with fasting and prayer, the gifts of help to the poor must be done strictly in secret, so much so that one should, as it were, even hide from himself what he is giving to others, not letting one hand know what the other is doing. Every effort must be made, if the gift will be pleasing to God, to avoid all ostentation and boastfulness in its giving.

As we have already seen, there is no real love if one does not share what he has with the poor - “...if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?” (**I John 3:17**). Such was the command of the law of Moses as well.”If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, in any of your towns within your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. Take heed lest there be a base thought in your heart, and you say, ‘The seventh year, the year of release is near,’ and your eye be hostile to your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the Lord against you, and it be sin in you. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him; because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, you shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land.” (**Deuteronomy 15:7-11**)

Such also was the teaching of Wisdom - “The poor is disliked even by his neighbor, but the rich has many friends. He who despises his neighbor is a sinner, but happy is he who is kind to the poor. He who mocks the poor, insults his Maker, he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.” (**Proverbs 14:20-21, 17:5**)

According to St. John Chrysostom, no one can be saved without giving alms and without caring for the poor. And St. Basil the Great, who always urged generosity in almsgiving viewing it as sowing seeds of charity that leads to integrity and eternal happiness, called men who have two coats or two pair of shoes, when his neighbor has none, a thief. All earthly things are the possessions of God. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell in it.” (**Psalms 24:1**) Men are but stewards of what belongs to the Lord and should share the gifts of His creation with one another as much as they can. To store up earthly possessions, according to Christ, is the epitome of foolishness, and a rich man shall hardly be saved. (**Luke 12:15-21**)

“How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the Kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” But he said, “What is impossible with men is possible with God.” (**Luke 15:24-27, Matthew 19: 23-26, Mark 10:23-27**)

“Woe unto you that are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full now, for you shall hunger.” (**Luke 6:24-25**)

“For He who is mighty...has filled the hungry with good things, but the rich He sent away empty.” (**Luke 1:53**)

The reason why a rich man can hardly be saved, according to Jesus, is because when one has possessions, he wants to keep them, and gather still more. For the “delight in riches chokes the word of God, and so it proves unfruitful” in man’s heart. (**Matthew 13:22, Mark 4:19, Luke 8:14**)

According to the apostle Paul, the “love of money” - not money itself - is the “root of all evils.”

There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and

destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs. (**1 Timothy 6:6-10**, cf **Hebrews 13:5-6**)

The apostle himself collected money for the poor and greatly praised those who were generous in giving.

The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, but he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide...so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work. As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." (**Psalms 112:9**)

You will be enriched in every way for great generosity which...will produce thanksgiving to God... (**2 Corinthians 9:6-12**)

The spiritual person must share what he has with the poor. He must do so cheerfully and not reluctantly, secretly and not for the praise of men. He also must do so, as the poor widow in the gospel, not out of his abundance, but out of his need.

And Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny. And He called His disciples to Him, and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living." (**Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:2**)

Giving alms, therefore, must be a sacrificial act if it has any spiritual worth. One cannot give merely what is left over when all his own needs are satisfied. One must take from oneself and give to others. In the spiritual tradition of the Church it is the teaching that what one saves through fasting and abstinence, for example during the special lenten seasons, should not be kept for other times but should be given away to the poor.

In recent times the teaching has developed that the spiritual man should work within the processes and possibilities of the free societies in order to make a social structure in which the poor will not merely be the object of the charity of the rich, but will themselves have the chance to work and to share in the commonwealth of man. In this way the poor will have dignity and self-respect through assuming their just place as members of society. "We do not want handouts," say the poor, "we want to be able to

learn and to work for ourselves.” The spiritual person is the one who works to make this happen; and it is right and praiseworthy to do so. The only temptations here would be to have this attitude and to undertake this action without personal sacrifice, and to think that when such a “just society” will exist - if it ever will - all of men’s problems will be solved. The spiritual decadence of many wealthy persons demonstrates that this is not the case.

Thus the words of Christ remain forever valid and true: “...the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me...if you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, and follow me.” (**Matthew 19:21, Mark 14:5-7, Luke 18:22, John 12:8**)

The one who is truly perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect is the one who gives all for the sake of others, in the name of Christ, with Him, and for His sake. Such a person is most truly living the spiritual life.

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<https://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/spirituality/prayer-fasting-and-alms-giving/>*

LESSON 16 – SIN, SUFFERING, AND DEATH

Objective: To understand suffering as a means to salvation. Unless one struggles, one cannot grow spiritually.

Why does suffering exist? This perplexing question came to mind recently as I stood in a hospital corridor and overheard a young man and a young lady talking about a friend who was quite ill in the room nearby. "Why does he have to suffer so much? Is he being punished by God?" The second person followed with: "What I can't understand is why God lets this happen to a person as kind as Bill?"

We are all aware of the fact that no one can escape personal suffering which does not distinguish between individuals. The paramount question is how will we handle the suffering? As we consider this most misunderstood subject, we must learn to accept the fact that suffering touches all and that we must develop deeper insights into all of life. Throughout the world and in every age the questions about suffering continue to be asked. Why does it exist? Does God want us to suffer? Is it God's will? Medical science has made great strides in recent years; however, suffering still exists with the accompanying fear and depression that follow. With the experience of suffering we can either grow spiritually, or become hardened and isolated, from God.

Suffering ends for us only in the Kingdom of Heaven which is described in the Orthodox Funeral Service prayers as a place: "... where pain, suffering and sorrow do not exist." Suffering as a result of illness makes us aware of the contrast between good health and bad. Some illnesses are due to careless health habits and abuse on our part. The dilemma of suffering often brings about depression and dejection, feelings of hopelessness and anger.

There are basically three major causes of suffering: Those who are suffering in body and soul as a result of persecution by others, suffering from sickness and disease, or suffering in spirit because of our own and the world's sins. We deal with suffering in one of two ways: We accept it with humility and convert it into a means for our salvation or we capitulate to it rebelliously and blame God.

As Orthodox Christians we believe that if we wish to live a good life in Jesus Christ, we will be persecuted and suffer. The Book of Acts (5:41) tells us "... they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name." Those who suffer and keep Christ close in

praise receive His Grace and their sufferings are directed to God's glory. The first epistle of Peter tells us:

"Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of time in the flesh no longer by human passions, but by the will of God." (**1 Peter 4:1-2**)

St. Paul teaches, "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." (**2 Cor. 4:17-18**).

The Orthodox Christian who repents through the Sacrament of Confession transforms suffering into spiritual growth and is made "perfect through suffering." (Heb. 2:10). St. John Chrysostom tells us in his 28th Homily on the Letter to Hebrews that affliction can alleviate sins, and make us strong. The most difficult suffering is not in the flesh but the spirit. This suffering torments the soul and causes us to feel futile. Orthodox Christians through their suffering identify with and participate spiritually in our Lord's agony on the Cross. Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ suffered as a result of His compassionate love to the ultimate degree. During our suffering we must keep our mind and heart on Him asking to be close to Him, showered by His Grace. "Come to me," He says, "all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (**Matthew 11:28**).

We know from the Book of Genesis that the nature of man and woman was defiled by our forefather Adam in his disobedience to God and thereby became subject to suffering, illness, and death. "Sin came into the world through one man ... (and) spread to all men," (Rom. 5:12). When one suffers, whether bodily or mentally, he or she is a victim of the devil and the "sin of the world." (**John 1:29**). This does not mean that we are necessarily being personally punished with our suffering. The world is full of sin and therefore, sickness and suffering run rampant.

The world is in bondage to the devil which St. Paul calls "groaning in travail" (Rom. 8:22), until the Savior returns. Until that day, God allows suffering as an aid for our salvation. God is not the cause of suffering. Since it does exist due to the devil's deceit and mankind's general weakness, wickedness and sin, He offers us the chance to use it so that we might be healed and saved in the forgiveness of sins. He does not send us suffering. He permits us to use it for our own good. When Orthodox Christians become ill or are persecuted, they recognize that this suffering is caused by sin, their own and the sins of the world. They do not blame God, because He did not cause it and does not wish it upon His children. They further know that through God's Will, they can be

healed in this life and suffering ended in order to have more time to serve God and their fellow brothers and sisters here on earth, and accomplish the remainder of His plan for us. They further know that this suffering can be a means for serving God and they accept it as such, offering it in love and faith for their own salvation and that of others.

The greatest evidence of faith in Jesus Christ is shown when we endure suffering with faith, love and joy. This is the greatest possible witness to God's salvation. Praising God at such a time is the greatest offering we can make. How many times have we heard one of our immigrant seniors, while in excruciating pain say: (Glory to You, O God)!

All the saints of the Church suffered. Even when they healed others with prayer, they did not ask for deliverance for themselves. St. Paul, the great Apostle of the Lord also suffered. He tells us, "... a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness,' that the power of Christ may rest upon me ... for when I am weak, then I am strong." (**2 Cor. 12:7-10**).

Elder Macarius of Optina, in his work - Man's affliction and God's love writes thus - *"Thou, who by Thy unspeakable goodness has created us, why did thou fill our life with grief? Does not Thy mercy make Thee pity our sufferings? Why dost Thou grant me being and later take it away through a painful death? "*

"I do not enjoy", says God, "your illnesses, O man. But out of the seeds of your grief and sorrow, I want to bring forth for you fruits of eternal and majestic joy. I printed the law of death and destruction not only in your body but also in every object of this visible world. I commanded the whole world together with your body to cry out to you that this life is not the true and real life. That there is nothing here to which your heart must become attached through justifiable love. When you do not hearken unto the threatening voice of the entire universe, my paternal mercy which always wishes you unlimited good, compels me to lift the scepter of chastisement. When I torment you with temptations, wear you out with illness and pangs of remorse, it is so that you might abandon your folly, become wise, cease seeking after shadows, and return to the path of salvation."

"My unutterable mercy and unlimited love for human beings compelled me to take your flesh on myself. Through my abasement, I have revealed the greatness of God to the human race. By suffering on the cross for the salvation of men, whom I desire to draw to myself, I first afflict them with grief, and with these arrows of affliction, I

deaden their hearts to temporary pleasures. The scepter of punishment is an emblem of My love for mankind"

Glory be for all things to the most merciful God who pours out His most ineffable blessings upon us in every circumstance. For the fount of goodness can produce no other waves, but waves of goodness. Man, often not recognizing this, murmurs against Thee, O Gracious One.

How will we then handle our suffering? If we wish to be spiritual, then we must follow the example of our Lord, Who said to His Father in Heaven, "Thy Will be Done."

We can also follow the example of His saints who handled their suffering by saying to Him: "Thy Will Be Done" and their weaknesses were transformed by God's grace into the means of salvation for themselves and others. A single word spoken by the Publican touched the mercy of God. A single word full of faith saved the Good Thief. The words: "Thy Will Be Done" said with deep faith and conviction will do no less.

At a time of suffering try the Orthodox prayer written by Metropolitan Philaret many years ago:

"O Lord, I do not know what to ask of You. You alone know my true needs. You love me more than I myself know how to love. Help me to see my real needs which are concealed from me. I do not ask either a cross or consolation. I can only wait on You. My heart is open to You. Visit and help me, for Your great mercy's sake. Strike me and heal me, cast me down and raise me up. I worship in silence Your Holy Will and Your Inscrutable Ways. I offer myself as a sacrifice for You. I put all my trust in You. I have no other desire than to fulfill Your Will. Teach me how to pray. Pray yourself in me. Amen."

From the article "On Suffering: Thy Will Be Done" by Rev. Dr. Dean P. Talagan