



**THE ENGLISH VERSION OF THE
PAADAPEEDATHINKAL (പാദപീഠത്തിങ്കൽ)**

At The Master's Feet

**A study of the faith and practices of the
MAR THOMA SYRIAN CHURCH**

At the Master's Feet (English)

(പ്രാഥമികത്തിലേക്ക്)

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PREFACE

"PAADHAPEEDATHINKAL"

Christian education/ nurturing begins at home. The church also plays a vital role in this process. The church and the word of God helps us in Christian growth. We need spiritual food to grow up to the stature of Christ. The knowledge of God has been revealed to us through the mysteries of the creation. The whole creation looks eagerly for the glorious appearance of Christ. The faith that has been passed on to us has a collective dimension. God, the Holy Spirit enables us to follow the faith of many who had led victorious lives and gifts us wisdom and discernment to explore new dimensions of meaning and to be strengthened in faith. Only when God reveals Himself can we be able to see, know and comprehend Him. Faith is also a gift from God. We can never claim that we ourselves have discovered or gained faith. God is ever a great mystery. Only when we bow before Him in humble adoration, devotion and awe, then He reveals Himself to us. To learn from Jesus, sitting at his feet (*Padhapedathinkal*) is a great experience. The meaning of the word '*upanishad*' is to 'sit beside' 'sit under'.

This is a revised English translation of the book '*Paadhapedathinkal*' published by Episcopal Jubilee Institute, Thiruvalla in 1994. This book is published by Dharma Jyoti Vidya Peeth, Delhi with the permission of the Governing Board of E.J. Institute. The sincere efforts of Mr. Kurian Yousif (Karolbagh) and Mr. A.J. Philip (Editor in chief of Telegraph, Chandigarh) in translation and Rev. Dr. V. S. Varghese (Principal), Rev. Sunny E. Mathew (faculty member) and Rev. Sam T. Koshy (Governing Board Member), of Dharma Jyoti Vidya Peeth in editing and Sabina

Printing Press in printing are acknowledged.

May this book be a means for those who could not follow Malayalam, especially for our youth to grow in faith and practice of the church and its rich traditions. Let this book be a channel to mould a self esteemed Mar Thoma community.

Joseph Mar Barnabas Episcopa

Chairman, Dharma Jyoti Vidya Peeth

INTRODUCTION

Study and meditation plays a vital role in spiritual life. Keeping this in mind the Dharma Jyoti Vidya Peeth has ventured in such direction. In this endeavor, the encouragement received from the faithful is appreciative.

We thank God almighty for enabling to publish a book on the faith and practices of the Mar Thoma Church. This work is the revised English translation of the Malayalam book *Paadapeedathinkal*. This book comprise of questions and their answers on the Bible, Doctrines, Worship, Sacraments, Church History, Ecumenism, Spirituality, People of other faith and so on.

Christian faith is a personal as well as community oriented experience. But, it must be communicative, understandable and intellectual. Such a faith community will be founded on the firm foundation. It will be responsible and witness oriented. This book will surely help every Marthomite to raise to such standards.

This book is prepared in such a way that, it may suit persons of every age. It will be very valuable to those who cannot read Malayalam. There are many doubts and confusions relating to faith. Hope this book will help to clarify it to a certain extend. But, it is not complete in itself in relation with the subjects. Only prayer is that it may help to deepen our faith which in turn, helps to build the church, strengthen the relationship with God and with the society.

THE HOLY BIBLE



The Bible is the record of the experiences of the people of faith. It is a book of faith and a book in faith. It is a collection of 66 books, as officially recognised by the reformed churches. The word 'Bible' is derived from the Greek word '*Biblos*' which means 'the Book'. More than a book, the Bible is a collection of books. There are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. Though there were many faith-related compositions, the books in the Bible were the ones selected by the holy teachers of the church.

Bible has the sanction of God. God inspired the Bible. Since the Holy Spirit guided the authors of the Bible in their work, it is divinely inspired. That is why we describe the Bible as the word of God. However, this does not mean that God dictated every word in the Bible. Before the Old Testament, there were the chosen people of Israel. Similarly, before the New Testament, there was the chosen church. Thus, it was from the chosen community of believers that the Bible had its origin. Before there was an inspired book there were an inspired people.

According to the exhortation of the Vatican Council, "God chose some to write the Holy Bible. They used their own talents in their writing. Therefore, they are authors in their own right. However, it was God who worked in and through them". Those who composed the word of God were inspired by God and were totally influenced by the Holy Spirit. Since different people wrote the Bible, different styles and expressions are discernible in the book. But what qualifies it to be called the word of God is that God inspired it and there is clarity about God's plan for deliverance from sin.

The central tenet of the Christian faith is Christ and the salvation through Him. This is proclaimed through the Old and New Testaments.

The Scriptures testify Christ. And it is from the Christ that the Scriptures derive their sanctity. As the first testimony of God's action through Christ is the Scripture, its authority is unique and supreme. We read and study the Bible to interact with Christ and to hear God's voice.

There may be other sacred books, which contain sublime thoughts. But the importance of the Bible is neither the greatness of the thoughts contained in it nor the fact that it contains explanations acceptable to the human mind. The uniqueness of the Bible and its special attribute – the word of God – are because it helps in deepening one's faith and in surrendering oneself to God. It does not matter to the believer whether it corresponds to his/her own intellectual formulations and ideologies. Centuries before Christ and throughout the period of the church, the Word was the basis of Christian faith and teachings. The Bible occupies a central position in the church and it is the basis of the church's mission. The church's duty is to understand the changing linguistic context and lifestyles of the people and interpret the word accordingly and in an appropriate manner.

Q. Did Moses write the Pentateuch?

- A. The first five books from Genesis to Deuteronomy are known as the Pentateuch (five-volume book). The Hebrew and Christian traditions have it that Moses is the author/compiler of these books. But on a close examination of the Pentateuch, there can be doubts about Moses' authorship. For instance, the differences in the descriptions of the same incidents (Genesis 12: 10-20, 20: 1-18, 26: 6-11), in the nomenclatures of God (Jehovah), and the varying descriptions of Moses' death (Deut 34: 5) are pointed out as primary evidences that the author of these books is not Moses.

When we study these books exhaustively, we can find that there is an intimate relation between the traditions that existed in Israel and the theological thoughts of those periods. A single person did not author the five volumes; rather they are an anthology of various documents. These documents belonged to various periods. There are mainly four documents; Yahvist (J, BC 950), Elohist (E, BC 800), Deuteronomy

(D, 700 BCG) and Priestly (P, BC 550). These documents had been edited at various times and integrated to form the Pentateuch. These volumes deal mostly with the life and times of Moses. That is what we should understand when they are called the Book of Moses. That Moses could have authored some portions of these books cannot be ruled out.

Q. Why are the genealogies given in the Bible?

- A. The Israelites had the practice of preserving their written genealogies. These genealogies contain the names of their forefathers and mothers. Along with that, they also contained whatever they knew about the origins of other people in a condensed form. The aim of these genealogies is to link the coming generations with their ancestors and to make them realize that they are all part of God's salvation plan. By recording the lineages of other people, it gives the insight that Jehovah is working through the ages. Besides, it helps to strengthen the belief that the Israelites are God's chosen people and that the Messiah will take his birth as one of them. It also helps to identify the plurality of origins of our people as belonging to various clans, cultures, traditions and practices. The word 'history' is not mentioned in the Old Testament. Instead, the word 'lineage' is used. This is the equivalent of history according to the Hebrews. The genealogy is a part of their history. (St. Mathew 1: 1-17, St. Luke 3:23-38).

Q. Why is the book 'Song of Songs' included in the Bible?

- A. The Song of Songs is a book of exceptional poetic beauty. A specialty of the book is the rich imagination and the exquisite non-dogmatic language used in it. It is all about the conversation between a love-struck young man and a young woman. Conservative Jews had hesitation in including these erotic poems in the Bible. Later it was included in the Biblical canon in the belief that sexual feelings are a God-given gift and hence they cannot be considered sinful. That is why there was delay in including it in the Canon. It was finally included in AD 90. It is also known as a matrimonial song and a love song.

There are various interpretations of the Song of Songs. While the Jews see it as figurative of God's relations with His chosen Israel, the church sees it as a description of the relations between Christ and the bridal church. It gives the insight that married life is mandated by God. It also underlines the need to preserve the sanctity of marriage by ensuring mutual love and mutual commitment. In this light it is possible to see the Song of Songs as a love song. Because it raises human life and relations to the level of God, its inclusion in the Bible is quite appropriate.

Q. Is there any reference to Christ in the Old Testament?

- A. There are references to the Messiah's arrival and the establishment of the Kingdom of God throughout the Old Testament. The prophets had prophesied that the Messiah would reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever (Isaiah 9:6, 11:1, 33:14, Micah 4:1, 5:2). During the Old Testament period, the people had three concepts of the Messiah – the king, the prophet and the priest. We believe that all these concepts were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Gold, frankincense and myrrh offered, (Matthew 2:11) represent the king, the prophet and the priest.

Christ's mission conformed to the expectations about the Messiah. It is clear from Jesus' teachings and life that the concept of the Messianic kingdom was fulfilled through Him and He was indeed God's messiah. Jesus incorporated into his ministry and death the concept of the suffering servant. Though the coming of Jesus conformed to the Jews' imaginations about the Messiah, His mission was contrary to their expectations about the Messiah. The prophecies pertaining to the Messiah, the Kingdom of God and the mission of the Messiah have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Q. Why did God choose one community?

- A. The Israelites felt that they were the chosen people. They believed that they are a people holy to the Lord and that they had been chosen out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession (Genesis 12:1, 17:4-8, Exodus 19:5, Deuteronomy 7:6). Later, their belief underwent changes.

They no longer considered themselves as a medium of God's mission. This was rather functional, never racial. Instead, they considered themselves as a special people, separated from others. However, God chose them not because God loved them more. It is because of God's love for all God's creations and God's concern over what was to befall them that God chose the Israelites as a medium in God's salvation plan. "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for other communities, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). Thus, their selection was for a mission. By selecting them, God was entrusting them with a responsibility. Seen in this context, their selection did not mean that others were rejected. While the Bible teaches us that Israel is God's special property and its people God's chosen ones, it also teaches us that God the Lord of all the people in the world (Psalms 24, 67: 4, 98:4,9). In Amos 9:7, this is made clear: "Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?" declares the Lord. "Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?" That is why the Persian King Cyrus is portrayed as God's messiah (Isaiah 45:1).

Q. Who are the prophets?

- A. Prophecy is central to the Hebrew writings. It is not proper to see the prophets as simply those who prophesied Jesus Christ and other future developments. Such an interpretation will not do justice to the phenomenon. Prophecies as mentioned in the Old Testament should be evaluated from the point of view of the relevance of the prophets in the history of Israel and how they influenced their political system and their theological beliefs.

The prophetic tradition is not peculiar only for Christians. Such a tradition was part of all cultures, particularly the ancient West Asian culture. However, prophecies that figure in the Old Testament should not be seen as a manifestation of the traditions that existed in other cultures. Prophecies in Israel had a certain uniqueness and relevance.

Philosopher (*Roe, Hose*), godman (*Ish, Elohi*), prophet (*Nabi*) are the words used in the Bible to describe the prophets.

The word prophet means a person who is chosen by God to say things that God himself wants to say to people, for example, to tell them what they should do and what they should not do.

The prophets had a clear understanding that they were called out by God. They also knew what God expected of them. Each prophecy should be seen in the political, social and religious contexts in which it was made. The prophets talked about God's designs for humankind.

The sum and substance of the prophecies they made is that though the people of Israel were God's chosen people, they were bound to invite the wrath of God as they had not kept their word with God. Those who atone for their lapses and return to their relationship with God will be saved from eternal condemnation. Maintenance of justice and peace and protection of human rights in the world are what God wants. The prophets taught that religious traditions and worship styles should be the outward manifestations of the divine order. That is why they criticized those worship systems which were not related to the people's lives.

It is impossible to understand the prophetic message except in its relations with the world and historical events. The prophetic mission is not possible by keeping itself aloof from the realities of life and human experiences. The prophet is one who is active in the world and who understand God's objectives in historical events and informs the world about God's intentions. Thus, the prophetic ministry is an interpretation of the events of the period in which they live. In short, the prophets are those who saw the world through the eyes of God. The prophecy is a gift of God to the Church. We should be aware and beware of the wrong prophecies. False prophets are the ones who are not concerned about justice, righteousness and are concerned only about selfish and parochial motives.

Q. What is "justice" in Biblical perspective?

- A. Justice is one of the fundamentals of the Bible. This is the yardstick for human's relations to God, fellow human beings, all other creations and nature. When the word is used in the context of human's relations with God, it denotes God's nature. A just God does justice in a justifiable manner. Doing justice is the righteous

obligation. In all His judgements and commandments, God's justice is revealed. Fairness is something which should be evident in all our dealings. This is what God expects from the people. To do injustice is to break human's contract with God.

Q. What is the Biblical view on peace?

- A. The Biblical view of peace is the view of fullness. The Hebrew word used for peace is "*shalom*". It means "fullness" or the state of being complete. It does not mean the absence of conflict, strikes, protests or fights. Or even mental peace. Rather, "*shalom*" is the result of human justice-based contractual relationship with God. The following factors are inherent in the "fullness" that we describe here: 1) An environmental state in which all the creations of God, even those which are mutually antagonistic, enter into a peace accord that ensures their security and welfare; 2) A social state in which all the inequities in human and economic relations disappear so that everyone is entitled to a just share of all goods and power so that justice and equality are possible; 3) An attitude to life in which people are ready to sacrifice their selfish motives in order to love and respect others and take care of their needs. It was because he saw fullness of his life in Jesus that St. Paul said, "He is our shalom". Again Says, "God's Kingdom is neither food nor drink. It is justice, peace and happiness in holy spirit." This is what the Bible teaches about peace (Isaiah 9). It is the harmony, dialogical existence, democratic sharing of all capitals.

Q. What is pre-destination?

- A. God has a purpose for every one and for everything. This does not mean that he is destined to become something. When St. Paul evaluates his life in the light of the experiences he underwent, he says, all his experiences were planned by God. It is his subjective experience. God has not destined anybody to become anything. Yet, He has expectations about everybody. Of course, He is able to know what a person would become because he has that divine power. It is not pre-destined. It is at best pre-knowledge. Esau's decision to sell his eldership was his personal decision. He had the freedom not to sell his right. But God knew what he would do.

The same thing happened in the case of Judas Iscariot.

Because God is omniscient, He knows everything. But it is not predestined that some should be saved and some others destroyed. The belief in fate destroys one's sense of responsibility and one's ability to co operate with the Holy Spirit and strive for a better life.

Q. What does the Bible teach about God's second coming?

- A. Christ's second coming is integrally related to the fulfillment of God's Kingdom. The New Testament teaches us that God's Kingdom which began with the coming of Jesus will reach its fullness with His re-coming (Mark 9:1, 14:25, I Corinthians 15:24-28;) "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Jesus in his earthly life prophesied about the judgement day (John 12:48) about coming again in his Father's glory and rewarding each person according to what he has done (Matthew 16:27) and the son of man meting out justice (Matthew 25: 32-46).

Christ's second coming was one of the fundamental tenets of the ancient church (I Thessalonians 4:13-18, Colossians 3:4, II Peter 3:8-13, I Corinthians 5:5, 15:24-26). When the Nicene Creed was codified, this was declared as one of the church's cardinal faiths. It is proclaimed as part of the worship service every day. Christ's second coming is also called the Day of the Lord (I Thessalonians 5:2, I Corinthians 5:5). Christ's second coming is to redeem his promise (John 14:3), to raise those who have fallen asleep in Him (I Thessalonians 4:13-16), to lift up the living to meet the Lord in the air (I Thessalonians 4:17), to destroy death forever (I Corinthians 15:25,26), to enforce divine justice (Matthew 25:31-46), to reward each person according to what he has done (Matthew 16:27) and to accommodate the faithful in His own glory (Colossians 3:4). To be with the Lord forever is the ultimate aim (I Thessalonians 4:17).

We do not know the exact time when Jesus will come again (Matthew 24:36) but his second coming is a certainty. The faith in his second coming will make our life vigorous. It will also make us conscious about our future and more responsible in our life. That

He will come again to judge the dead and the living is one of the basic Christian faiths. Our responsibility is to prepare ourselves for his second coming (Matthew 24:42-51; I Corinthians 1:7).

During the Holy Qurbana the priest says, "O Lord, we remember your death, burial and resurrection, your ascension in to heaven and your presence now with God the father in glory and in power. We await your coming again to judge the world in righteousness and truth.

Q. What is Kingdom of God?

- A. Kingdom of God is the central theme of the Bible. It is the goal of the future and the experience of the church today. The coming of Jesus marked the advent of His Kingdom. God's promise that He would send his beloved son to the world to save humankind from sin and establish His Kingdom on earth was fulfilled through Jesus Christ. Mark the words of Jesus when He speaks about God's Kingdom: "The time has come, the Kingdom of God is near" (Mark 1:15). Salvation in Christ has began the kingdom experience. In the New Testament this period is called *Eschaton* time . Humankind has entered the crucial and ultimate period through Jesus Christ. The human condition which is evil-controlled, prone to diseases and death will be set free and made lively. This is the task of the Kingdom of God which will be implemented through Jesus Christ. The acts of Jesus like controlling satan, curing the ill and raising the dead indicate that God's Kingdom has arrived. Jesus himself had said, "If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God has come to you" (Matthew 12:28, Luke 11:20).

For the first time in history, the Kingdom of God made an advent with Jesus Christ. But the Kingdom will not come into fruition in this world which has many limitations. During the second coming of Jesus, the Kingdom of God will be in its full glory. Today we can access only a fraction of the unlimited scope that the Kingdom of God promises in the future. We who have stepped into the Kingdom of God are growing with fullness in view. That is why Jesus, who said "the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21) also taught us to pray "May your Kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2). It

was to preach the message "the Kingdom of heaven is near" that Jesus sent out his disciples (Matthew 10:7). The very purpose of the church is to preach, practice and envision this message.

The church, as the body of Christ, is the visible expression of the Kingdom of God.

The Great Feast Of The Kingdom Of God

In order to reveal the various aspects of the Kingdom of God, Jesus uses a lot of similes. The most notable among them is the one on feast. The friendliness, camaraderie and happiness of the Kingdom are reflected in this simile. Prosperity and happiness are the hallmarks of the Kingdom (Isaiah 25:6-9). God invites everyone to take part in the feast. "Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find", Jesus asks his disciples (Matthew 22:9, Luke 14:21). The only condition God insists on for partaking of in the feast is that the person concerned should be in the wedding dress (Matthew 22:11-12). According to the Book of Revelation, "fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints". The feast is to celebrate the coming together of the bridegroom that is Jesus and the bride that is the church (Revelation 19:7-9).

Holy Communion is the feast of the Kingdom of God. By taking part in Holy Communion, we experience the goodness of the Kingdom of God in this world itself. In doing so, we wait for the everlasting feast and renew our hope for it.

THE BASIC CHRISTIAN BELIEVES



Q. Who is Jesus Christ?

A. By taking birth as son of man, God revealed himself. Son of God, Son of Man, Messiah, the Lord, the Word – this is how the New Testament attempts a description of Jesus Christ. But none of these words are sufficient enough to capture the essence of Him. Since incompleteness is antithetical to God, there is complete God-ness and humanness in the God who revealed Himself through Jesus Christ.

The greatness and completeness of humaneness can be found in Jesus Christ, who descended to the level of human so that the latter can identify him/herself with the son of God. In the words of Rt Rev Michael Ramsey, who was the Archbishop of Canterbury, "God is like Jesus Christ. There is nothing un-Christ like in God".

Q. What is the meaning of the cross of Jesus?

A. Here the cross does not stand for an instrument that was used to execute people. What it signifies is God's limitless love and realisation of his salvation bid. We know God revealed His nature through Jesus. It is doubtful whether God could have revealed his selfless love except through Jesus' sufferings on the cross for you and me.

The expression of divine love through death is on the cross. Thus it is a new dawn of creation. It is the icon of the Christian love and incarnation. For the church it is a signifier to Jesus Christ. It is redemptive, liberative, healing, affirmative, hope giving and morale icon for us.

Q. What is the teaching of Holy Spirit?

A. God's presence and reality are experienced in the church that is the body of Christ through the Holy Spirit. In the same way as God's presence and his salvation attempt were revealed through

Jesus, so are they through the Holy Spirit these days. So the Holy Spirit should not be seen as a third entity of God but another aspect of Godself. As St. John emphasizes in his gospel, Jesus promises yet another counselor to be with us forever (John 14:16). It is this counselor or comforter who continues Jesus' work in this world. That phenomenon is called the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit is not an alien entity which we bring into the church through our prayers. Rather, the Holy Spirit is that which gives life to the church, which is nothing but the body of Christ. In difference to this truth is discernible in many of the activities of the church. This is because the church does not comprehend the presence and reality of the Holy Spirit. By invoking the Holy Spirit, we try to wake up the church from its spiritual slumber.

In the 'sedra' of the '*pentecusty perunnal*' (The feast of the Pentecost.) "The holy spirit was active in the creation. Holy spirit enabled the prophets to communicate the word of God. The incarnation is in and through the spirit."

Q. What is meant by "speaking in other tongues"?

- A. The ability to utter incomprehensible words was considered a great spiritual gift during the New Testament period. No doubt, it is a gift to speak in alien languages. St. Paul had this ability (II Corinthians 12). Yet, he considers "my power is made perfect in weakness". He goes on to assert, "for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (II Corinthians 12:9-10). The Corinthians considered the gift of the tongue as the greatest gift. It is to them that St. Paul says, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal" (I Corinthians 12:31; 13:1). The Greek believed that the tongue of the angels consisted of unnatural and incomprehensible words. He explains in detail in Chapter 13, that love is a greater gift than this supernatural gift of tongue.

The question is not whether it is possible to use words which no one else understands. The real question is how God's love as revealed in Jesus Christ can be shared with others. What happened

on the day of the Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13) also substantiates this viewpoint. The emphasis is not on the miracle of speaking in strange tongues, but in the miracle of communication to the people of different language background.

There is a mistaken belief among Christians that the ability to speak strange tongues is a measure of the blessing of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul had this gift. Yet, he considered the love of Jesus that he witnessed as more important than this gift. As mentioned earlier, he considered his weaknesses as his strength. What's more, he even says, "I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue" (I Corinthians 14:19).

Q. What is the Holy Trinity?

- A. Church affirms the faith in God as trinity. Every worship and sacraments begins and ends in the glorification of trinity. We can see references to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the Bible. The early church believed that it was the same God who created the world that revealed Himself in Jesus Christ and who continues to reveal himself through the Holy Spirit. It was the God who created the world talked to Abraham, Moses and prophets in the fullness of time revealed himself in Jesus Christ and revealed through the holy spirit. Though they did not define the word Trinity, the concept was clear to them. "They were sure of an experiential understanding of the Trinity, rather than a conceptual one." Later when attempts were made to define the term, there arose controversies and conflicts in the church. In any case, the experiential understanding of the Trinity is better than a theoretical understanding of the term. It is difficult to define.

Q. What is the Image of God?

- A. Entire creation is an expression of being of God. It has been recorded that human being was created in the image of God. But we should see this idea in the context of Jesus Christ through whom God revealed Himself. For us, the ideal humanism is the one we find in Jesus. God expects us to follow this model. This idea

is contained in the verse, "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (Ephesians 4:15).

Image of God is our identity. Image is not in the sense of substance, form or essence. It is the potential, possibility and purpose of the creation. Culmination of image of God can be seen in Jesus Christ.

Q. What is the salvation through Jesus Christ?

- A. Alienation of human from God is sin (II Corinthians 5:19). Deviating from God's plan for human and keeping aloof spiritual way of living and disciplines are considered signs of sin. There is a tendency to portray sin as simply moral turpitude and personal misconduct. But salvation in the New Testament perspective means, the whole creation has alienated from God and the attempt is to reconcile through Him all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross (II Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 1:20; Ephesians 1:10; 2:14). Belief in this reconciliation process and attempts to involve in it are signs of experiencing salvation. The evangelistic effort of both the church and the individual is to stand witness to this great experience.

When we say "renewed in Christ" it includes the whole world and humankind. Belief in salvation and working towards it are what is expected from all believers. When someone asks whether a person is "saved", it should include these fundamental and essential features of being saved. It is impossible to compare individuals with one another and then say that somebody is holier and more spiritual than the other. Salvation is a gift of God in Christ and it is a possibility of the believers to personalize and practice it.

WORSHIP



Worship is the communication and the communion with God.

It enables human to remain in contact with its creator.

Worship is the visible form of our faith in our creator. It is impossible to understand the essence of worship through definitions and explanations. Except in the light of our faith in God and love for Him, it is difficult to make sense out of worship. Worship is meaningless for a person who does not have anything to worship. When we take part in worship, every aspect of our personality takes part in it. It is when our thoughts rise up to God, that real worship takes place. The condition of our body, the state of our body parts are all aimed at worshipping Him. The worship is the community celebration of every aspect of life.

During worship, God faces us through the word. Thereby sacraments become means of grace. Through the word, God speaks to us individually. Through His salvation bid, He comes closer to us. Through church's worship service, we show our respect and thanks to our creator and redeemer.

Q. What is the meaning and significance of written liturgy?

- A. An arranged order of worship is known as liturgy. In the ancient church, worship was conducted in an orderly manner. Indications of are available in I Corinthians 11-14. Many portions of the New Testament are parts of the oral liturgy followed by the ancient church. It was through liturgy that faith was proclaimed and propagated (John 3:5; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:2; Ephesians 2:2-3, 21; Colossians 1:12-20; Titus 3:5-7; Hebrew 6:4; I Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:4, 22:20, 5:8;). These portions teach us many things about Jesus Christ and His salvation bid. As the church grew, orderly worship service also grew. Written prayers came into being in the context of

wrong teachings that found a way into the church. Bishop of Lyons, Irenaeus had said: "Our doctrine is in conformity with the eucharist and the eucharist confirms it". It helps in keeping the church united, in maintaining the beliefs and in spreading them. Worship becomes meaningful only when we assimilate the essence of the written liturgy while following it. Then there is no question of repetition. Repetition shows the depth and make faith stronger. The liturgies were all written by divinely inspired people.

Extempore prayer has its own importance in worship service. Therefore, written and orderly liturgies are better for the conduct of worship services and to assimilate the spiritual truths. If carefully examined, it would be revealed that extempore prayers have a repetitive tendency.

The written prayers are condensed prayers of the sages of the church. They are continuously modified and translated. In this sense liturgies are dynamic part of our worship.

Q. What is the importance of corporate worship?

- A. Jesus took part in the corporate worship in the synagogue (Luke 4:15). Jesus says, "where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them" (Matthew 18:20). We read about "people meeting together in the temple courts" (Acts 2:46). The church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19), the church in Nympha's house (Colossians 4:15) and the church in Philemon's house (Philemon 2) all refer to the group of people who assembled there for worshipping God.

Worship is always a public and corporate action. Church is known as a group of the faithful. Worship becomes a reality through the relationship human maintains with one another, creation and with God. It is not possible to lead a Christian life by keeping aloof from the faithful. So corporate worship is unavoidable for a Christian.

Q. What is the importance of symbols and signs in worship?

- A. Symbolism is an integral part of the Eastern worship tradition. The entire worship order is a mix of symbols and signs. There is a vivid explanation of the basic principles of Christian worship in

the Book of Revelations. There is constant worship in heaven. As Isaiah and John visioned, angels worship God before the heavenly throne (Isaiah 6:4; Revelation 4:8). The Book of Revelation says that 24 elders, including the 12 elders of Old Israel and the 12 apostles of Jesus take part in the heavenly worship along with the angels (Revelation 4:8-11). Jesus, who is described as a lamb which had been slain, stands in the centre of the throne circled by the elders and angels (Revelation 5:6). "And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (Revelation 5:8). Those who have partaken of Holy Communion, which is the symbol of the living God, are entitled to take part in the heavenly worship (Revelation: 7). They wear white robes and hold palm branches while standing before the throne and the Lamb and take part in the worship (Revelation 7: 9-17).

It is the picture of Christian worship as practiced in Asia Minor in the first century that St. John portrays in the Book of Revelations. Christian worship centres on Holy Communion which is all about the slain Lamb. Holy Communion is modeled after the ever-lasting worship that takes place in heaven. The symbols are helpful in representing some of the unseen features of the heavenly worship. It is in the light of this Eastern tradition that an attempt should be made to understand the significance of the symbols.

There are limitations in expressing the meaning of the symbols through words. Yet, it can be said that they are visible, worldly symbols of the unseen reality. The symbol can either be an object or an act. When a person shakes hand with another or exchanges a flower, it reflects their love and respect for each other. Both the giver and the receiver are happy. Here the handshake and the flower are symbols. The symbols have no importance except as part of the worship. They, therefore, acquire an inner meaning.

Symbols evolve from culture. As culture varies, the symbols too change. In Oriental and Occidental cultures, the symbols too are different. Since the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and Syrian Orthodox churches belong to Oriental traditions, they use symbols in their worship services which are quite different from the ones

used in Occidental churches like the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Church of South India and the Church of North India.

We can see that our worship service is influenced by the Eastern traditions. The reason why we abandoned some of the practices is because our worship had degenerated into ritualism. When we take part in the worship service understanding the significance of the symbols and signs used, worship becomes a meaningful exercise.

Q. What are the different gestures and symbols in worship service? What is their meaning?

A. Symbols and signs are distinct and are, therefore, classified accordingly.

a) Gestures-Liturgical actions

The following are the gestures that we use in worship:

Bowing of head during worship

Bowing of head symbolizes penitence, submission, respect and humility. It also denotes acceptance of heavenly blessings. Covering head is also meant the same.

Praying with hands raised

This is the oldest style of prayer of the Jews. The Psalmist describes it in these words, "May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice" (Psalms: 141:2). We read about Moses holding up his hands and seeking God's help (Exodus 17:11). St. Paul says "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing" (I Timothy 2:8). It also symbolizes intercession and praying on behalf of others. That is why our priests raise their hands in the Communion services.

Standing and sitting

The eastern churches have the tradition of standing up and prostrating while taking part in worship service. Adoration (Kauma) style prayer is well known to us. The Syriac word 'Kauma' means 'standing up'. Adoration is a prayer done in a standing position.

When we stand up, it means we are standing in front of God.

The realizations about God's glory make us more humble and conscious of our sinfulness. When the realization of God's presence and our sense of inadequacy meet together, we prostrate before God and pray (Revelation 5:8).

We sit only when lessons are read and sermons are delivered. In the Eastern, Jewish tradition, there is the practice of sitting at the feet of Rabbi and listening to his teachings (Luke 10:39). This has influenced the Christian worship tradition. During passon week the church prostrate before the Lord to acknowledge His Lordship.

Kiss of peace

The kiss of peace is given to express our love, respect and equality. It denotes that in Jesus everybody is equal (I Peter 5:14). The idea that while worshipping God, the worshipper should have reconciled to God and to co-believers as contained in Matthew 5:21-25 is noteworthy. The kiss of peace is an outwardly expression of unity and reconciliation among individuals and receiving God's love and peace. It is through coupled hands that we receive and share the kiss of peace.

Reading the Gospel.

Through the reading of the gospel, Jesus speaks to the people. When the gospel is read from the centre of the madbaha, it means the Word which took the form of man has come to the centre of the congregation. Through the reading of the gospel, God proceeds in a solemn way. It is to announce His arrival that the celebrant says, "Brothers and sisters, let us stand in silence and reverence and listen to the proclamation of the living Word of God from the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ". The congregation stands up to hear the gospel. This denotes their readiness to receive God who has arrived in their midst. Usually, only the priests read the gospel during the worship service. We are hearing the words and deeds of Jesus.

Washing of Hands

In the Jewish tradition, there is the system of the host washing the feet of the guest (Genesis 18:4; Luke 7:44). The Jews took bath

before eating food. Before the last supper when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, Peter asks him to wash not just his feet "but my hands and my head as well" (John 13:8-10). This highlights the need for purity and cleanliness. After washing his hands, this is how the priest prays in silence: "O Lord God, wash away all my impurity and sin. Cleanse me with the sprinkling of your life that I may be fit to enter your holy presence in purity and holiness and, identifying myself with your supreme sacrifice, to offer to you this holy and divine service with a pure conscience as is pleasing to you. Amen".

PARTICIPANTS OF THE WORSHIP

a) **Worshipping community.**

They symbolise humankind and all other creations of God. It is when they all join hands that worship is completed. (Acts 2.47)

b) **Celebrant:-**

Celebrant is the representative of the faithful who prays on their behalf. It is the church as a whole that offers worship. The priest is the voice of the faithful. He addresses the church in the name of God.

c) **Deacon**

In the Book of Revelation, it is mentioned that there are layers of messengers like the Seraphim and Cherubim taking part in the worship before the heavenly throne (Revelation 4). Deacons are the ones who worship before the altar beside the celebrant. From the days of the apostles, there have been deacons assisting the celebrant in the worship service. In Acts 6. We read about the appointment of Stephen and six others to this post. They were chosen for the post of deacons. Even if the deacon is appointed to a higher post like priest or bishop, it should only improve his responsibility and not change his attitude to ministry.

d) **Choir**

Right from the beginning, choir has been a part of the church.

Jehova's festival days were celebrated with songs and dances (I Chronicle 25:6-7). The choir represents the angels who take part in the worship in heaven. It is pertinent to remember that at the time of Jesus' birth, "suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests'" (Luke 2:13-15).

They symbolise humankind and all other creations of God. It is when they all join hands that worship is completed.

OBJECTS

1. **CHURCH BUILDINGS**

Church is a place earmarked for community worship. When worship takes place here, the temporal, spiritual, the eternity and the present come together. Church is a place where the faithful experience the presence of God. Church is holy because it is meant to worship Holy God. The term "Holy" should be understood as specially earmarked.

Christian churches are modelled after the Jewish temples. Church consists of Haikala (sanctuary) and Madbaha.

a) **Madbaha**

The word "*madbaha*" means a place for sacrifice (bali). The Madbaha represents heaven. It is, therefore, sacred. The heaven God created on earth – Eden – was in the east (Genesis 2:8). The Madbaha is at the eastern side of the church. This is because of the belief that human church who was banished from Eden wants to return to the paradise and he, therefore, turns to the celestial light, which is located in the east. That is why people turn to the east when they pray. Besides, it is also believed that the second coming will be from the east – "For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (Matthew 24:27). The cross, as a symbol of the risen

Christ, is kept in the Madbaha.

b) Thronos

The Greek word "*thronos*" means the throne. It symbolises the throne – high and exalted – that Isaiah saw in a vision (Isaiah 6:1). In his vision, the throne is at the centre of the heavenly worship. In the revelation of John, the heavenly worship takes place before the throne and in front the lamb (Revelation 4:5; 7:9-11). In the same way, thronos occupies an important place in the celebration of Holy Qurbana. It links Holy Communion with heavenly worship.

Thronos is also called a holy table or altar. It reminds us of Jesus' sacrificial offering.

2. TABALAITHA

It is a rectangle wooden tablet kept on the thronos, it is of the size 15 inches length 8 inch width, ½ inch breadth. It is on this tablet that the paten and the chalice are kept. From the fourth century onwards this has been used for the celebration of Qurbana. When a church is consecrated, the Metropolitan consecrates the Tableetha also. Without the tablet, no Holy Communion is allowed. This is the table which reminds us about the Last Supper and Jesus' crucifixion on the wooden cross. Tabaleetha can be used as a portable altar where the consecrated churches are not available. Tablaithaa symbolises the relationship between the Metropolitan and the parish concerned, the integrity of Holy Communion and the unity of the church. By using the tablet consecrated by the Metropolitan, it tells that Holy Communion service held in all the parishes is with his approval and under his guidance.

3. VIRIKUTTAM

It is the covering of the Tableetha with 3 pices of clothes in 3 colours; Red, Green, and White. The blood of Jesus Christ redeemed the universe. The holy church which carry the body and blood of Jesus Christ symbolises with white.

4. KASA, PEELASA

Paten and chalise are the holy vessels which carry the Bread and Wine.

5. THIRASSELA (VEIL)

Churches that follow the Eastern rites consider worship as a symbolic of the heavenly worship. Here the earthly worship and the heavenly worship join together. The entrance to the Madbaha is hemispherical. Madbaha symbolises heaven, sanctuary the earth and the curtain the sky. The curtain signifies the holiness of Madbaha, the invisibility of God's presence and the mystic nature of Holy Communion. The curtain pulled from the right side to the left. The worship reveals the mystery of God. The curtain is not meant to keep certain things secret from God. Nor it is meant to keep God and man separate. The curtain is used only in the churches that follow the eastern tradition. It has nothing to do with the curtain at the Jerusalem temple.

6. KABELANA

It is two pieces of decorated cloths which the paten and the chalice are covered. The word '*Kabelana*' means cover. It symbolizes "the cloud that filled the temple of the Lord" (1 Kings 8: 10-11).

7. SOSAPPA

It is a white piece of intricately embroidered cloth which is used to cover the paten and the chalice during Holy Communion. This is also interpreted as a symbol of God's presence and holiness. This idea is contained in the prayer the priest utters while laying the table for the sacred offering: "The skies are filled with the glory of the great. His glory fills all his creations."

After the Kiss of Peace, during Holy Communion, the priest raises the Sosappa and says this prayer: "You, O Lord, are the rock whence water flowed for the children of Israel. You are the precious stone which the builders rejected." According to this prayer, the act of removing the Sosappa symbolises the rolling back of the stone from the Lord's grave (Matthew 28:2). Like the water that gushed out of the rock so that the Israelites did not die in the deserts (Numbers

20:2-11), like the living water that flowed through the Lord (John 7:37-39), humankind got deliverance from death. During the ordination ceremony when the gospel is read, Sosappa is placed on the candidate's head as a symbol of dwelling of divine glory (Exodus 24:15-18; Psalms 72:19; Isaiah 6:1-3).

8. INCENSE

Incense is an integral part of the eastern rite. It has its origins in the practice in vogue in Jewish temples. The Jews believe that it was introduced in their worship as commanded by God. We read in Exodus 30:1-10 that there was an altar of acacia wood for burning incense. God commanded Moses to burn incense every morning and evening (Exodus 30:7-8). The main job of the priest was censuring. (1 Samuel 2:28; Numbers 16:7). Censing in the morning and in the evening was a symbol of the prayers of all the Israelites. It means Israel's prayer lifts up like incense to God's presence (Psalms 141:2). St. John says, the prayer of the church is like the incense that the saints carry when they take part in the heavenly worship (Revelation 5:8). This points to the fact that censing was a part of the worship practiced in Asia Minor (Revelation 8:3, 5). When St. Paul says the help that the Christians of Philippines rendered to him was incense offering to God, it should be understood in this context.

The significance of censing can be understood as

1. Incense symbolises the presence of the invisible God. Old Israel saw God's presence in the cluster of clouds. Incense is the symbol of God's presence in the present-day church worship.
2. Censing denotes the worship which church offers to God in the consciousness of His presence in its midst. "In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations" says the Lord" (Malachi 1:11).
3. Through worship, the place gets purified. Incense represents the good traits. Everybody likes the presence of a good person. In the presence of incense, other things also acquire its smell. The source of all goodness and fragrance is God.

The contact with Him will make the church also fragrant. And through the church, the world should also become fragrant. The fragrance the church obtained from the contact with God flows into the world of worship. Jesus himself is the fragrance.

4. Similarly, God expects purification of the believer's life through prayers. The incense acceptable to God is holy life. That is why the church uses incense in its worship service. Every believer is a temple where God dwells (1 Corinthians 3:17; 6:19). Like incense that fills up the church, so should the believer's life be filled with God's love and virtue. This internal fragrance is what makes censing meaningful. "The prayers of the saints lift up into God's presence like incense" (Revelation 5:8). The church's prayer also joins it.
5. Incense is also a symbol of respect for a person. When the celebrant swings the censor and bows to the congregation, it is because the latter is sanctified by God. When he does that, the congregation should in return bow to him. The liturgical bowing of the deacon with incense is the symbolic affirmation of priesthood of all believers.
6. Incense is the living substance of a tree. When it is burnt in fire, it amounts to a sacrifice. (The idea is someone dies in place of me.) Coal represents the sin-filled world. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that helps burnings and converts it into fragrance.

9. BREAD AND WINE

a) Bread

In the New Testament the bread used in the Eucharist is described in three gospels as unleavened (*pathira*) and as leavened (*amira*) in the gospel according to John. In the churches that follow the Eastern rites (Antioch worship tradition), it is leavened bread that is used in Holy Communion. This is the tradition that we follow in our church. 'Amira' has life in itself. Bread is made with fine flour of wheat.

The bread is round-shaped. Its upper surface is divided into four parts in the shape of a cross. Each part is further

divided into three parts. All the 12 parts bear the symbol of the cross. These 12 crosses represent the 12 apostles who united themselves in the only Son of God.

b) Wine

Juice obtained from grapes is used as wine for Holy Communion. It should be red, slightly sweet and sour. Red wine symbolises blood. In the Old Testament red wine is called "the blood of grapes" (Genesis 49:11, Deuteronomy 32:14). Wine cheers those who are mourning or are in torment (Jeremiah 16:7; Proverbs 31:6). The coming of Jesus is compared to the pleasure of sipping wine (Joel 2:19, 24). The cup also symbolises torment (Matthew 26:39). It represents the transformation through suffering. After all, wine is obtained through treading the wine-press (Isaiah 63:2; Jeremiah 25:30).

From the beginning, the tradition has been to mix wine and water. The Gospel, according to John, says, "One of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water" (John 19:34). This is the verse the church points out to explain the practice of mixing wine with water. While preparing for the Holy Communion service, (*Thooyaba*, second part,) the priest says the following prayer after mixing water and wine in the chalice: "For the atonement of man's sin, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ shed blood and water on the cross". The mixing of wine and water symbolises the joining of the two natures in Christ, human and divine.

These objects are the central objects of Holy Communion. By offering these objects obtained from the soil through our toil, we express our thanks to God for his abundant mercy. They represent the relationship between man and God and also man's indebtedness to God. Agricultural yields are a symbol of entire humankind and God's creation. It is not just the offering of the people who have assembled in the church but of the whole nature, which includes every bird

and animal and even those which we consider inanimate. The Eucharist is meant to take part in the Lord's last supper. If that indeed is the case, the last meal was meant to keep everybody and everything united in God's presence. Outwardly, only the believers take part in Holy Communion. But Holy Communion is not something the believers offer for the sake of fellow believers. The real Eucharist is one that in all faith the believers offer to God for everything that God has created. In the liturgy of our church, there is a prayer in the section entitled *Sedra*, "Lord Jesus, make us to rejoice with all the children of your kingdom and to partake in your glory with all who have served you." First of all, it is an offering of thanks (eucharist) for giving life to the world. It was for that purpose that Jesus died and resurrected. So we offer thanks and praise to God for his life-giving sacrifice. And the symbol of that a small piece of bread and a little measure of wine. This wine and bread are served to the believers as the body and blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

10. CANDLES

Light symbolises God's presence. Israel knew God's presence through the pillar of fire. In the Old Testament period, there was the tradition of lighting a lamp before the curtain in the temple (Leviticus 24:1-4). The church moves in the light of God. This is implied by the use of candles in worship. There is a reference to this in the Book of Revelation: "There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 22:5). "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12), says Jesus. Lighted candles represent the light of life. In the New Testament period, lamps were used for worship (Acts 20:8; Revelation 4:5). The lighted candles remind us that we are the light of the world. In the first centuries, Christians were persecuted by the Romans and the Jews. They, therefore, used to meet in caves and catacombs at night for worshipping God. They had to use light in these dark places. The candles also remind us of the hardship they underwent to worship God.

There is a custom of lighting six candles each on both sides of the *Thronos*. The 12 candles symbolise the 12 apostles. Like the candles that emit light by emptying- themselves, we are expected to sacrifice ourselves for the betterment of the world. Kingdom life style is to loose the identity.

11. CROSS

Cross has a central place in Christian worship. It symbolizes the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In our church the custom is to place atleast a simple, wooden cross on the *Thronos*. This is because our centre of hope is not the Christ who suffers on the cross but the Christ who overcomes death and resurrects Himself. Cross is a symbol of suffering and victory. Cross without an image represents the resurrected Christ.

The acronym 'INRI' inscribed on the cross stands for "*Jesus Nazarene Rex leudaorum*". It is a Latin expression which reminds us about "Jesus, the King of Jews" that was inscribed on the cross on which Jesus died. 'IHS' stands for "*Jesus Homonis Salvator*". It stands for "Jesus Man's Saviour".

When we make a sign of cross, it means we are conscious of the presence of Jesus who took life as man and died on the cross. It also means that we remember Jesus' ministry for the salvation of humankind. It also symbolizes the advent on earth of God who brings us to the right place from the wrong place we had chosen ourselves.

12. BELL

Bell is used to summon the faithful to worship. The tone, tune and timing communicates the nature of the worship.

Q. What is the meaning of priestly vestments ?

- A. The kind of dress used in worship these days first came into vogue in the 4th century. During the time of St. John Chrysostom (347-407AD), there were special dresses for bishops, priests and deacons in Antioch. The dress worn by the priests during the Old Testament period also played a part in the origin of the Christian worship dresses (Exodus 28:1-43). During the Old Testament days, sacred dresses were given to the priests to give them dignity

and honour (Exodus 28:2). The celebrant wears special dress as a symbol of Jehovah's glory and the sacredness of the priestly duty. The description of the priestly dress as given in Ephesians 6:11-17 also influenced the choice of the celebrant's dress.

The various items of the priest's dress in our church are the white kassock, *ooraara*, the tie around the waist, *kayyura* and *kappa*. As each is worn, a prayer is said. These prayers explain the significance of these items.

White Kassock

From the 2nd century onwards white cassock is used as worship dress. When Cyprian attained martyrdom (250 AD), he was wearing a white kassock. The colour white symbolises the holiness obtained through baptism. It is said in the Book of Revelation that those who overcome struggles should be dressed in white (Revelation: 3:5; 7:9). This is said about those who receive baptism. In his vision, St. John sees the church adorned in fine linen, bright and clean. To him, fine linen represented the righteous acts of the saints (Revelation 19:7-8). There are some who believe that before his fall, Adam had a cloak of light. The eastern tradition teaches, that the light man lost, when he fell, is regained through baptism. The church worship God in the holiness of the baptismal ceremony. That is why the priest wears the white dress. It would be meaningful if all those who take part in the worship service also wear white. When Jesus comes again, everybody will get the ever-lasting cloak of light through the intervention of the Holy Spirit. It is this dress that those who participate in the daily worship in heaven will wear. The white cassock symbolizes this phenomenon. White dress also symbolizes the purity of heart as one takes part in the worship of God. Only those who are attired in wedding dress are entitled to take part in the heavenly feast (Matthew 22:11-13).

Kammeees

Kammeees was our Priest's usual dress till the advent of anglican tradition. The dress as a whole resembles the Cross. A priest - a Cross bearer.

Vestments for Holy orders

Priests wear black Kassock during lentern and Funeral times. The colour black denotes the deep and strong Faith with truth and philosophy.

Ooraara

The word 'ooraara' means 'to pray'. When the priest wears it, he says a prayer derived from Psalms 18:39-40: "Arm me with strength for battle. Make my adversaries bow at my feet. Make my enemies turn their backs in fight. Enable me to destroy my foes". It can be considered as a shield against the forces of evil. Priests wear it on their chest through the neck. Deacons wear it on their shoulders.

Sash (Sunoro)

In the Old Testament, to tie the waist meant to get ready. It was compulsory to wear the belt in the Lord's Passover (Exodus 12:11). St. Paul mentions about the need to stand firm with the belt of truth buckled around one's waist (Ephesians 6:16). Before washing the feet of His disciples, Jesus took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel around His waist (John 13:4). Here it is a symbol of one's readiness to serve. The priest says a prayer when he ties a knot around his waist. It incorporates the thought that "in readiness to fight evil, I have taken the sword of God". The Psalmist says, "Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one; clothe yourself with splendour and majesty" (Psalms 45:3).

Hand wear (Sendo)

Along with the kassock used only for Holy Communion service, the priest wears a special hand dress. It is a long piece of cloth which covers the hand from the wrist to the elbow. It symbolizes the offering of one's hands for divine service. It is with the thought that "I am ready for divine service" that the priest wears them. As he does each of them, he says a special prayer or recites from these verses: "He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great" (Psalms 18: 34-35). This is also a symbol of readiness and the fight against evil.

Kaappa (Faino)

The word "*Kaappa*" means the outer coat. The present type of *Kaappa* began to be used from the 4th century onwards. The purple robe that Jesus wore before He died on the cross (John 19:5), the bleeding woman who touched the Lord's cloak (Matthew 9:20,21) and the cloak that had fallen from Elijah (II Kings 2:13) are some of the Biblical references used to explain the significance of *Kaappa*. When the priest wears *Kaappa*, he recites, "May your priests be clothed with righteousness; may your saints sing for joy" (Psalms 132:9). Going by this prayer, it symbolises the holiness that comes the way of the priest who worships God.

Episcopal vestments.

Masnapso

This word means 'headgear' or 'turban'. The head dress that bishops wear is called *Masnapso*. The turban of the Jewish priest was known as *Misnefeth* in Hebrew (Exodus 28:4, 36-40). The word *Masnapso* originated from this Hebrew word. It has reached the Christian tradition from the Sanyasins, who wear a turban. It is a part of monk dress.

Masnapso is a piece of cloth the celibates in the eastern tradition wear on their head. It symbolizes the crown of thorns that Jesus wore. It also stands for the everlasting crown that the believers receive. In the olden days, the Sanyasins used to cover their face also with their turban. Since the world was bad, it was better not to see the world at all. This was the reason why they wore the turban like this. Later on when realisation dawned on them that the Christian duty was to face the world, they did away with this practice. Our bishops are chosen only from the celibates. That is why they wear this dress. On this turban, we can see 12 small crosses and a big cross which tells that the church is entrusted with the teaching of Jesus Christ and his apostle. And the Church is the custodian of these teaching. The 12 small crosses stand for the 12 disciples and the big cross represents Jesus Christ. In Matthew 27:29 there is a reference to the setting on Jesus' head a crown of thorns. This implies that the one who wears it is also ready to represent Christ's mind and action.

Pastoral Staff

It is the sceptre of God's power out of zion.

Staff is a symbol of shepherds. The staff is also used to join to the herd those which strayed from it. Jesus is the good shepherd. The believers see His presence in the bishop. The staff is, therefore, a symbol of the power, responsibility and care he has over his flock. Like Moses who led his people to Canan, the bishop with his staff leads his people to the heavenly Canan. The staff of the oriental Bishops has the shape of both cross and snake. It represents Moses' staff that turned into a snake (Exodus 4:2-4).

Sleebea.

Staff, mightier, sleebea are the pastoral of bishop armour. The sleebea tied with the piece red cloth means victorious cross. A symbol of victory over the evil one.

Q. When the bishop faces the congregation during Holy Communion, he uses a Seelamudi. But when he turns to the east, he removes it. Why does he do so?

A. When Moses descended from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of testimony in his hands, the Israelites were scared of looking at him because his face had become radiant as he had talked to God. Therefore, he wore a veil (Exodus 34:29-35; II Corinthians 3:12-18). It is on this model that the bishops cover their head with Seelamudi when they turn west. They take it off when they turn east. There is no need for any veil when you face God.

Q. Why do the bishops wear red cloaks?

A. Red is the royal colour to monk. Jesus was forced to wear a red cloak during the passion (Mathew 27:28). Bishops symbolises Christlikeness. This was the dress of martyrs.

Q. What is the meaning of the kiss of hand?(Kai Muthu)

A. The believers kiss the hands of those who remain in their relationship with Jesus. Episcopa means one who is appointed from above. The Syrian Christians have this tradition of kissing the cross as a token of their love for Jesus. The kiss of hand

symbolises the acceptance of the leadership of the bishops and the love and respect for them. This is the tradition of the easterners. But there is no Kaimuthu during Passion week.

Q. What is church year or church calendar? (almanac)

A. The church calendar is meant to help the believers in leading a proper Christian life throughout the year. In doing so, they will always remember all the experiences Jesus had during his earthly life. The calendar helps them in this task. (See the article 'Church Calendar: A Study' by Rt. Rev Joseph Mar Barnabas in "Thirunivasam Ethra Manoharam" published by Episcopal Jubilee Institute). Christian Calander starts on 30th October if it is on a Sunday, otherwise on 1st Sunday in November with *Hoodos-Etho* (Renewal of the Church).

Q. There is no consistency about the Passion Week days. They change every year while Christmas Day remains constant. How are these dates arranged?

A. It is the Gregorian calendar (attributed to Pope Gregory XIII who lived in 16th Century AD) that most churches follow while fixing the religious festivals. Easter is decided by following the lunar calendar. Accordingly, the first Sunday after the first full moon after March 21 when sun comes in the straight line, is Easter. Therefore, this date changes. However, Christmas has been fixed as December 25. Hence this date never changes. Earlier, eastern churches used to celebrate Christmas on January 6 by following the Julian calendar. Western churches celebrate that day as (visit of wise men) Epiphany while the eastern churches celebrate it as Danaha (baptism of Christ).

Q. What are the church festivals?

A. Festivals provide the believers an opportunity to remember Jesus' redemptive mission on earth. It is also an occasion for them to praise the Lord and dedicate themselves in furtherance of His mission. All the days earmarked to remember the redemptive work Jesus undertook from his birth to the day of the Pentecost are known as '*Moranaya*' (festivals related to our Lord) festivals.

Besides, there are festivals to remember the saints, the apostles and the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for their faith in their master.

Q. How our church is administered?

A. The administration is a spiritual affair for the Eastern churches. So we cannot separate administration from spirituality. The supreme authority of the church is the Metropolitan. Metropolitan works through the synod (council of the Episcopas).

In the early periods church of Malankara was administered by Archdeacons (arkadiacon). It was based on customary practices, rituals, teachings of early teachers of faith and interpretation of biblical principles. These all comprise the church canon, in syriac language. The Archdeacons administered the church by the canons through the kootams (the councils for consultations). In 1857, the Malankara Metropolitan Mathews Mar Athanasious (the 13th Mar Thoma) compiled and published the Malankara canon, in Malayalam. A distorted canon was produced against us in the seminary case (Exhibit .No.18). This caused the failure in the historic seminary case. After the failure in the court our church general body has been named as the alochana sabha. Later this turned as the prathinidhi mandalam. The mandalam consists of two constituencies: clergy and laity. The ratio of the constituency is 35 : 65. 20% is reserved for women. There is a council to advise the metropolitan in administration. Our church is a unique blend of episcopacy and democracy.

SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH



Sacrament is known by different names in different church traditions. Yet, they either complement each other or have the same meaning. In Greek it is called "*mysterion*", in Latin "*sacramentum*", in Malayalam "*rahasyam*" or "*marmam*", in English "*mystery*" and in Syriac "*roso*". A short explanation of these words will help in understanding the historical background of sacraments.

The Syriac word "*koodasa*" is derived from the word "*kadesh*" which means "make something holy or sacred or pure". The word also means "set apart" in the sense that one joins in the holiness of God. The Syriac word "*roso*" can be translated as "sacred" or "main point". In mystery religions, sacraments are expected to be performed in secret and they are, therefore, called "mystery". The belief in these religions is that through the "mystery", one attains salvation. As sacraments are a means to salvation, they are known as "secret", "mystery" and "main point". Since it is difficult for man to explain, the eastern rite churches call sacraments a "mystery".

But sacraments are revealed secrets of God. They don't remain covered. It is in this context that St. Paul refers to the salvation plan of God as the mystery revealed through Jesus Christ (Ephesian 1:9; 1 Corinthians 2:7; Colossians 2:2).

The Latin word "*sacramentum*" means the "way of sinlessness". Sacrament or "*koodasa*" is an act of purification. When the soldiers were inducted into service in the Roman Empire, they had to take an oath of allegiance to the nation. The oath was called "*sacramentum*". In the early church, baptismal candidates had to say, "I leave Satan and I believe in the messiah". This was an oath of allegiance to Jesus. Since sacraments amounted to swearing allegiance to Jesus, they were called "*sacramentum*".

Sacraments are rituals associated with the church's worship and

purification. The ultimate sacrament of God is Jesus who took birth as man and sacrificed himself for us (Hebrews 1:1-3). We can see God's love and mercy in Jesus. Through sacraments God's mercy and grace percolate down to every level of human life. Thereby, man's situation is raised to the level of God. Sacraments are, therefore, mediums of God's grace that Jesus had instituted and have been passed on to the believers through church traditions. In order to obtain spiritual blessings, the church organises special worships using certain matter. These worships are called sacraments. St. Augustine describes "sacrament" as the "visible form of the invisible grace". What churches of the eastern rite generally say about sacraments is that they are an unexplainable "secret". Sacraments can be generally called "means of grace". In certain orthodox traditions, sacraments are not clearly defined. Nor do they have any limitations. Life itself is considered a sacrament. God's plan is that we should become instruments for others to obtain God's grace.

There are seven sacraments generally recognised by the Christian churches. They are baptism, anointing of the sick, confession, Holy Communion, marriage, priesthood and prayer for the sick (anointing them with special oil). Marriage and priesthood are optional. Marriage and priesthood are for those specially called out.

For every sacrament, there are four unavoidable elements. They are (a) celebrant, (b) matter (liturgy) (c) form (for example, a person who becomes a deacon or priest) and (d) intention. The intention of the sacrament should be clear to both the celebrant and the one who receives it.

Sacraments help us to strengthen our belief in Jesus. They are clear witnesses to God's grace and symbols of God's mercy.

Baptism

Christian baptism should be understood in the context of God's salvation plan. God aims at saving His creation from sin and leading him to the right end. The call to ancient Israel was to join in this effort of God. The New Testament church has also the same call. Setting apart the church and entering into a covenantal relationship with it are all acts of His grace. The Old Testament church and New Testament church

are communities bound by covenants (Genesis 15:5-6, 17-18; Exodus 19:5-6, 17-19; Matthew 26:27-28; Mark 14:24). These covenants are acts of grace. God expects man to respond to it in faith.

In the Old Testament church, circumcision was an act of initiation (Genesis 17:10-17). It was a sign of the covenant between man and God. "For the generations to come, every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised... any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people" (Verses 10-14). It is through circumcision that one enters into the covenant with God. Baptism in the New Testament is equivalent to circumcision in the Old Testament. "In Him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ" (Colossians 2:11).

It is through baptism that one gets an entry into the church. By taking baptism, one unites with the church that is the body of Christ (Romans 6:3-5). We take baptism to unite with Jesus. We receive baptism because we want to be baptised into Christ. Baptised into Christ means getting baptised into his death. We are, therefore, buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of his father, we too may live a new life (Romans 6:2-4). Baptism symbolizes sin-related death and resurrection in Jesus. We expect all those who are baptised to be dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11). This is what happens in baptism.

Q. Can children experience this phenomenon?

- A. Certainly. As mentioned earlier, baptism is the experience of uniting with Jesus. Therefore, the Word teaches us that it is possible to experience it irrespective of a person's age. So it is wrong to reach the conclusion that only an adult can take baptism. If uniting with Christ is the objective of baptism, then children too can experience it.

There is an integral relationship between faith and baptism. In the case of a child, when the church's representative – a godfather or godmother – reiterates that faith, it is the church as a whole that proclaims the faith.

Q. Is redemption of sin possible in baptism?

- A. Redemption of sin is not something that is magically obtained

through the sacrament of baptism. It is through crucifixion and resurrection that Jesus makes possible the redemption of the world from sin. Baptism enables one to participate in this process. This means,

through baptism God lifts up man to experience the redemption of sin. So everybody is entitled to redemption from sin. It is through devotion that man should receive the redemption that God gives.

Q. Does rebirth take place through baptism?

- A. It is the Holy Spirit that enables rebirth through baptism (John 3:5-8). Through baptism, one joins the church, which is the body of Christ. Everyone who unites with Christ's body reaches His soul. Having renewed once in Jesus, it is wrong to doubt it and take baptism again. This is what the church teaches. By the first birth, one gets an entry into the world. By the rebirth obtained through baptism, one gets an entry into God's Kingdom. Both are made possible by God. Both births denote just the beginning. At both ends, growth is necessary. Even the adult who takes baptism merely enters a state of blessedness. This means that the age at the time of baptism is inconsequential. Through baptism, God leads the incomplete man to His grace. It is in anticipation of the scope for growth in God's grace that one takes baptism. At the time of the birth for the Kingdom of God, nobody knows everything about its mystery. Growth in Christian life makes available that knowledge. It is a process whereby the born again person grows to the level of Jesus. That becomes possible through creative participation in church life. (For a detailed study, refer to *Vishudha Snavum Vishudha Kurbanayum – Oru Padanam* (Holy Baptism and Holy Qurbana – A Study) published by the Marthoma Sabha Council in 1995).

Q. Can a person take baptism more than once?

- A. No. Baptism should not be repeated. In the Nicene Creed, we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. When we understand the historical background of this statement, its meaning will become clearer. Some of those who came into the church had to leave it because of threat and persecution. At that time, an argument arose that those who return to the church feeling sorry for leaving it should be baptised again. But after discussing the

subject elaborately, the Synod at Nicea decided that there was no need for another baptism. It is that decision which is contained in the line taken from the Nicene Creed. This means baptism should never be repeated (Eph. 4:5).

The Biblical explanation for this is as follows: Baptism is the experience of entering the church, which is the body of Christ, and uniting in his death on the cross (Romans 6:1-11; Colossians 2:11). The crucifixion of Jesus in history happened only once and it can never be repeated. Similarly, baptism which symbolizes joining the personhood of Jesus and uniting in His death and resurrection is unique and cannot be repeated. If it is repeated, it loses its meaning and character. By repeating baptism, one questions the relevance of God's grace that worked in the first baptism.

Q. What are the symbols used in baptism? What do they mean?

- A. The water used in baptismal service represents purification and the *Syth* (holy oil) health. The priest, using his thumb, makes the sign of the cross three times on the forehead of the child. This is the seal (*mudra*) of his/her membership in the church. The seal also declares that the person now belongs to God. The god parent is the representative of the church. On behalf of the child, he takes the vow: "Lord, whatever has been received as law by your prophets, apostles, fathers, I will receive and believe". He also recites the Creed before receiving the child on behalf of the church. The exhortation that follows baptism explains this idea in clearer terms. The baptistery (baptismal font) is the spiritual womb where the believers take birth. It reminds us about the act of saving through the crucifixion of Jesus. Baptism is done in front of the sanctuary. The membership in the community of the called out is through baptism.

Q. Can a non-Marthomite be a godparent when the baptismal ceremony is conducted in the Mar Thoma Church?

- A. Baptism is not a denominational activity. Through his/her intercession, the godparent gives a commitment to the church that s/he will bring up the child in the faith of the church. So, it is desirable that only those who fully subscribe to the faith and

traditions of the Mar Thoma Church or those who belong to churches which have similar faith become godparent.

Q. Will those who join our church from other churches be baptised again?

- A. If the person had received baptism in the name of the Trinity, then his/her baptism is valid. But if s/he has not been anointed with the holy oil (Muron), will be anointed with it.

Q. What is the role of water in baptism?

- A. In baptismal service, water is the matter. Various churches use it variously in their baptismal services. Is immersion the right way? Or is it sprinkling? The dispute is pointless. The word "baptism" originated from the Greek word "*baptizo*". The word means, sprinkle, immerse, pour, make wet, wash, clean, etc. So it is not proper to argue that it means only immersion. In any case, the significance of the sacrament does not lie in the manner in which water is used. It is clear that since the ceremony is conducted at all times in the church, there is no restriction on the quantity of water that can be used depending on the situation and the climate. Baptism symbolises deliverance from sin. For convenience, the practice followed in many churches is to sprinkle water on the candidate. This sprinkling covers him. It symbolizes the burial of sin.

Right from the beginning, water is used in baptismal ceremony.

ANointing WITH MURON (HOLY OIL)

Q: What is muron

- A: The word "*muron*" means "fragrant oil". It is the anointing oil (Exodus 3:22-27). It is made of olive oil and many fragrant substances. Special prayers are held by the Metropolitan and the bishops when it is prepared. The anointing oil is used to purify baptismal water and to anoint the candidate after baptism. It is also used in the consecration of churches and "*tablaitha*", a plank on which the paten and the chalice are kept in the sanctuary. Muron is used only once on a person.

Q : What is anointing with muron?

- A : In the eastern churches, the anointing for the Holy Spirit is the muron anointing is for the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The sacrament was established in the church in the belief that only if the Holy Spirit finds an abode in a person can he remain firm in beliefs and thereby an ideal Christian. It is called muron anointing because the candidate is anointed with the specially prepared muron.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is portrayed as anointing (II Corinthians 1:21; Ephesians 4:30; I John 2: 20-27;). Anointing was done along with baptism. There are many references in the Book of Acts about the apostles or those sent by the apostles personally blessing the baptised, who thereby receives the Holy Spirit. Subsequently, in place of the apostolic blessing, muron anointing was done. After the apostolic period, instead of the bishops personally touching the baptismal candidates and praying for the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in them, the practice of anointing the candidates with specially sanctified muron was introduced. It is this practice which exists in the eastern rite churches. In the western churches, the old system of the bishops personally blessing and praying for the baptismal candidates continues. It is called confirmation.

Muron anointing is the seal of the Holy Spirit. When the priest of the Mar Thoma Church anoints a person with muron this is what he says: "I anoint you with muron which is a symbol of the gift of the Holy Spirit that is given to the Christians. This is done in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit".

The gift of the Holy Spirit is mediated to the person through the anointing. The Holy Spirit strengthens a person to become a witness of Jesus and his co-worker. It is this strength that enables the believers, who are inspired by Christ's love to love one another. So confirmation in holy spirit goes along with the baptism in our church.

THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION

Q : What is the meaning and importance of confession?

A : For the believer on her/his spiritual journey, confession should be a recurring experience. Confession helps the spiritually dead to realise that the redemption of sin is possible and thereby get strength and comfort. It also renews contact with God. The fellowship with creator and with creation. As during the Holy Communion service, it is possible for individuals to confess in privacy and obtain forgiveness for the sins committed. In the Declaration of Absolution, the priest says: "God has in his mercy pardoned each one of you who has confessed his sins truly". Through this declaration, the believer unites with God's divinity and *son-hood*. It is a sacrament that helps the believer to obtain forgiveness for his sins and with the grace of the Holy Spirit lead a life in constant touch with Christ and society. It is a medicine for healing of body, mind and spirit confession helps to lift the blockade to receive a person God's grace and peace.

HOLY QURBANA

Q : What is the meaning of Holy Communion?

A : We can read about the institution of Holy Communion and its significance in Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-27; Luke 22:7-20; John 6:31-58; 13:1-2; I Corinthians 11:23-30. In his last days on earth, Jesus had a special supper with his disciples. According to the first three gospels, the supper was against the backdrop of the feast of the unleavened bread. The Gospel, according to John, says the last supper took place before the Passover festival (John 12:1; 13:1; 18:28; 19:14). The Passover festival in the Jewish tradition commemorates the liberation of the Israelites from slavery. The Last Supper was a sign of Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross to deliver the world from the slavery of sin. Through the Last Supper Jesus provides his disciples a new Passover. In this Passover, He sacrifices himself so that the world is free of the burden of sin. His death on the cross makes him the church's Passover Lamb (I Corinthians 5:7). The Passover of the Christian church is the feast of the believers and the covenant. Jesus told his disciples, "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you

proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (I Corinthians 11:26). By partaking of this sacramental food that is modeled after the Last Supper, His followers remember Him, face Him and proclaim His death. In every Holy Communion, the church faithfully follows Jesus' command. It is in Holy Communion that the believers have the utmost experience of the Risen Lord. Partaking of this food deepens their faith and strengthens them in their mission.

Q: What is the order of Qurbana that we follow in our church?

A: It is the order of St. James (Mar Yakob) that we follow in our Holy Communion service. Structurally, the service has two stages.

1. Thooyaba or preparatory worship (in two parts)
2. Holy Qurbana service (two parts)

Sacrament of the word.

Sacrament of the liturgy.

Thooyaba is a preparatory worship. Through this both the celebrant and the deacons get ready for Holy Communion service. The first part of Thooyaba can be performed by the priest himself in the sanctuary. Or he can say Thooyaba along with the congregation by keeping the curtain off. It helps in creating a sense of penitence and bringing one on a par with God. In the second part of the Thooyaba service, the priest wears the special dress of the celebrant and readies the paten and the chalice. There are special prayers to say on this occasion. The first part is the order of malchizedek and second part is known as the order of aron.

Like the Thooyaba service, there are two stages in the Qurbana service. The first part is known as pre-anaphora. It begins with the prayer, "O Lord Jesus Christ, born of Mary, baptised by John, have mercy upon us" and ends with the sermon. The emphasis in this part is on reading the scripture, proclamation and listening. Therefore, it is known as the liturgy of the word. The important features of this part are the prayer of St. Savarios, reading of lessons, epistle, reading of the Gospel, Promeon, Sedra, Nicene Creed and the sermon, and confession.

The second part begins with the prayer for peace and ends with the blessing. This part is known as anaphora. The main features of this part are the kiss of peace, anamnesis, the epiclesis,

invocation of the Holy Spirit, the great intercession, meditation during fraction, silent prayer or special prayers, blessing of the bread and the wine, partaking of the sacramental food, first, second, third blessings, benediction and exhortation.

There are three things which were clear to Anaphora of Yakob. From the first and second Roosma (signs) it is the passion of Jesus and his death on the cross that is remembered. In between the second and third Roosma, the breaking of the bread. In the third and fourth Roosma, . This is the Anaphora structure. (For a detailed study, read the article on the subject by Rev Dr Abraham Kuruvila in the book '*Thirunivasam Ethra Manoharam*' brought out by E.J. Institute.)

Q : What is the need for Holy Communion?

A : The Holy Communion helps each believer to grow in Christ Jesus. The communion calls each one to dine with Jesus. It is foretaste of the kingdom experience and the culmination will be in the second coming of Jesus. Yet, the church continues this and its members experience it because of Jesus' command to "continue this in remembrance of me till I come again". So the question whether the Holy Qurbana is necessary has no relevance. The participation in the communion is the privilege and responsibility of each believer, so no one can keep aloof from this.

Q : Is there any insistence that the Holy Qurbana can be said only in the church?

A : Usually we celebrate communion in the churches. At special occasions priests are having the special communion at home. Apart from the church, the Holy Qurbana can be said at any consecrated place. If necessary, the priests can say it at any house or hospital or even near the bed of a patient in accordance with the special liturgy to be used on such an occasion. The priests have the permission to do so.

Q : When should one take part in Holy Communion?

A : Since Holy Communion is the most sublime experience of our contact with Jesus that one can get in this world, all the opportunities for Holy Communion are priceless and helpful in

one's spiritual growth.

Irrespective of gender, one can take part in Holy Communion at all stages of one's life and at all opportunities. Nobody has been barred from taking part in it, other than the undergone disciplinary actions.

HOLY MATRIMONY

Q : What is the Christian view of marriage?

A : God created man and woman in His own image. God desired that man should not remain alone and should become one with woman. He made them so. God teaches us, "What God has joined together, let man not separate" (Genesis 1:27; 2:18; Matthew 19:4-6). The institution of marriage was devised by God Himself to make man's life complete.

Man and woman, who are created and united by God, form a family for Him where the divine rule prevails. Each such family is a small church. It is through the sacrament of marriage that the foundation for such a family is laid (Genesis 1:27; Malachi 2:15; Ephesians 3:14-15). The relationship of man and woman in marriage symbolises the relationship between the church and Christ. The relationship ends only with death. Marriage is not just a contract between man and woman. It is a solemn affirmation before God and an opportunity to receive His grace for a family life. In marriage, man and woman share the joy and pain of life. "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the saviour" teaches St. Paul (Ephesians 5:22-25).

Q : What is the order followed in the sacrament of marriage?

A : Our marriage service is divided into two – the blessing of the ring and the blessing of the crown. The blessing of the ring symbolises the decision to join in marriage. Earlier, this used to be held at home. Blessing of the crown is the marriage service. It is the occasion when God makes the bride and the bridegroom the queen and the king in the kingdom of family. They become one

in God's love. Even now, in the churches that follow the Greek tradition one can see marriage service where actual crowns are used. heavenly constituted.

Q : What are the symbols used in marriage service? What do they mean?

A : Wearing the ring: Here, man and woman do not exchange rings. It is the priest who blesses the rings and puts them on the fingers of the bride and the groom. It was by giving His flesh and blood as a ring that the heavenly groom that Jesus is demonstrated his love to his bride that the church is. It is in that love that the two should get united and live.

Holding hands: It means that in the word of God, they have become united. It is while reading the Gospel that the groom and the bride hold their hands.

Blessing the crown: It was mentioned earlier that during the blessing of the crown the groom and the bride become the king and the queen in the kingdom of family and that they become one in Jesus' love. It also symbolizes the glory of the ever-lasting crown that awaits them. Since the bride is crowned during the marriage service, the practice of our brides coming to the church with a fake crown is to be discouraged. The crowing is only one time to a person.

Tying of Minnu (tali): It is a symbol of fertility in the Indian culture. It is worn as a symbol of a married person. In the "minnu" (necklace), the sign of cross is also engraved. It denotes a blessing for a productive family life. It is that cross which is engraved on the "minnu".

The thronos is visible when the bride and the groom enter the church: The sanctuary and the cross are symbols of God's love and the victory and salvation through Jesus. It is by seeing the thronos that they enter the church. That is why at that time of their entrance the madbaha is open. In our tradition, the bride enters the church and waits for the bridegroom.

Q : What is the church's position on divorce?

A : God's view on marriage has already been explained. The Biblical teaching of the permanency and sacredness of marriage are taken seriously by the church. That is why it has not visualised divorce. The church sees marriage as a life-long relationship. But in very rare situations when no good would come out of the marriage, the church permits divorce after a careful study of the case. But such isolated incidents should not be reasons for minimising the sacredness and sanctity of marriage.

Q : Is celibacy greater than married life?

A : The New Testament considers the experience of marriage as a God's call. Similarly, celibacy should also be seen as God's call. Christian marriage is based on the belief that the marriage was instituted by God who created human in His own image. That is how the church sees marriage. Besides, by taking birth as man, Jesus has made motherhood and reproduction more sacred. There is no need to consider one as inferior to the other. What is important is for what one has been called out (Matt. 19 : 12).

HOLY PRIESTHOOD

Q : What is the relationship between priesthood of Jesus and the priesthood in the Christian church?

A : Priesthood of Jesus is an honour given to the church. Since the royal priesthood has been given to the whole church, all the believers are part of the ordained community. (1 Peter 2:9). "It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to the pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). The people who have the call for full-time ministry and who have been entrusted with the task by the church conduct priestly service for the church (Heb. 7.26-8.1-4).

Q : Are the posts like bishop, priest and deacon based on the powers they wield?

A : Those who have been specially appointed to lead worship services in the church are the deacons. In its origin, the word "*episcopa*" means "one who supervises". From among the priests, one used

to be given higher responsibility while continuing as a priest (Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2; Titus 1:5). Because of it, he used to be called a bishop. In the New Testament days and till the end of the 1st century, priests and bishops were considered equals. Only their responsibilities were different. During the 2nd century, at the time of St. Ignatius (AD 115), the need for the Episcopa functioning as the head of the church arose. Later, the Episcopa became the first in the hierarchy of the priests. From the 2nd century onwards, Bishop, Priest and Deacon became three distinct entities. All of them are chosen to serve. Their fundamental responsibility is to bring up the believers in Jesus Christ.

Q : What is the order of ordination?

A : Before the ordination, the celebrant reads out the church's advice called "amologia" to the candidate. As a mark of acceptance, he makes a sign of the cross on the register. As a symbol of his submission, he bows his head before the celebrant. From the four corners of his head, the hair is being cut in the shape of the cross. Usually, the candidate stays with the celebrant in the church the previous night. During this time, a portion of the hair in the shape of a circle is cut out from his head. It is from the four sides of this circle that hair in the shape of a cross is cut out during the ordination service. It is a symbol of the candidate's complete submission. *Promeon, sedra*, lessons, epistle and Gospel reading are part of the service. Special prayers are said for the dwelling of the Holy Spirit. After that, the Bishop declares that the candidate has become a priest. Then the thanks giving prayer is offered. The celebrant raises the candidate by his right hand and give Bible to him. His official dress is blessed and given to him. The new priest, attired in his official dress, and with cense he bows to the congregation. The first priestly action is the offering of the incense. The candidate bows the altar celebrant and the people. Then the Holy communion service follows.

Q : What are the important symbols used in the ordination service

and what do they signify?

A : **Cutting of hair in the shape of a cross:** When the celebrant cuts the hair in the shape of a cross from the head of the candidate, it symbolises an end to the past and his total submission for the priestly position.

Putting the Sosappa on the candidate's head: In the Old Testament, clouds, lightning, smoke, etc, were considered symbols of divine presence. In this sense, Sosappa symbolises God's presence. It is when prayers are made for the dwelling of the Holy Spirit and when the Gospels read the Sosappa is placed on the candidate's head. Then the celebrant breathes on the candidate. . in the shape of a Cross (St. John 20.21).

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

Q : What is the purpose of the sacrament of oil anointing? When is it done?

A : We read about Jesus curing the sick in the Gospels. God empowered his disciples to cure the sick (Mark 16:18). He cured many by anointing them with oil (Mark 6:13). In the early centuries, the priests anointed the sick with oil in the name of the Lord and cured them (James 5:14-15).

Through anointing, the church prays for the cure. It is not the physical well-being alone that God promises. He also assures mental and spiritual well-being. Anointing is a comfort-giving sacrament.

For the anointing of the sick, service has two parts. There are special prayers for them. The second part is for those who are seriously ill and about to die. This gives comfort and spiritual strength to such persons. By placing the hands of God, the priest prays for the redemption of his sins. This service, which is rooted in the Bible and the traditions of the church, should be given its due importance and carried on.

Q : When can anointing be done?

A : This can be done when a person is sick. It ensures the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the person.

THE BURIAL

Q : Is burial a sacrament?

A : Though burial is not among the main sacraments, it is with great care that the church conducts this service. In emergency situations, the laity can also with due authorisation perform this service.

Q : What are the main symbols used in the burial service?
What does it mean?

- a) **Keeping the body in the east direction:** The belief that Jesus will come again in all His glory from the east .
- b) **Covering the face:** The believers are members of the church, which is the bride that awaits the arrival of her divine groom. The covering of the face with a veil denotes that the person's next vision "will be the face of God. It is done with the hope of resurrection on is poured on him/her off.
- c) **Keeping the cross, candles:** By keeping a cross near the body, we proclaim our faith in risen Jesus . The lighted candles represent life. They also symbolise God's presence.
- d) **Pouring sand on the body:** It symbolises the realisation of God's promise that wo/man is dust and s/he will return to earth and the hope that s/he will regain eternal life. by the priest, saying, "O God, who has said of our race, 'you are dust and to dust' you shall return, we commend the body of this your servant to the earth, with the hope that you will raise it up for eternal life in the last day.

CHURCH HISTORY, ECUMENISM



Q : When did the church begin? What is the church?

A : Church or "ecclesia" means called out people. In the Old Testament, the church begins when God calls Abraham. God elected Abraham to

be the father of all people so that he and his descendents lead everyone to God's presence. That is why God chose the Old Testament Israel as the church. The people called out through Abraham are a covenant community. The New Testament church begins when Jesus calls his 12 disciples. They resembled the elders of 12 tribes (Matthew 10:1; Ephesians 2: 20-22). "The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the corner stone. In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Ephesians 2: 19-22). This church is also described as Christ's body (Ephesians 1:23), God's house, a community of saints – those who have been baptised and thereby separated – and as Christ's bride (Ephesians 5:27). It is a community bound by a covenant (Matthew 26:26). That is the New Israel.

Q : What are the reasons for the persecution of the church and its consequences?

A : The church had to face persecution during the first few centuries. The merciless persecution that the church experienced in its infancy resulted in its growth and development. It also stabilised the faith of the believers. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church", said Tertullian, one of the first century Christian theologians.

It was during the period 29-313 AD that the church underwent an ordeal. First, the Jews persecuted the Christians (29-64). The

opposition the church faced from the Jews is recorded in the Book of Acts (4:1-31; 5:17-42; 6: 60; 8:1). When the Jews realised that the Christian way is different from that of the Jewish religion, the Jews officially began to persecute the Christians. The Jews could not comprehend the Christian claim that Jesus whom they crucified was the messiah.

Then it was the turn of the Roman Empire to persecute the church. The persecution that began at the time of Emperor Nero in AD 64 ended only in AD 313 when Emperor Constantine issued the famous Milan Proclamation. Though the church had to undergo several acts of persecution during the period AD 64-313, church historians record 10 major incidents from among them. Under the Milan Proclamation, Christianity became legitimate in the Roman Empire. It became equal to other religions and could set up worshipping centres and acquire property.

Lack of faith in the Roman Empire and the Emperor, disinclination to worship the Emperor, disinterestedness in joining the military and boycott of public functions were some of the charges against the Christians. They were also considered characterless and were branded as cannibals. (In the ancient church, there was the practice of Christians secretly assembling for Holy Communion. This was because they were afraid of the Jews. Since they used to meet secretly, they were considered bad. The non-Christians who heard that they ate the flesh and drank the blood of Jesus called them cannibals.) The Roman Empire blamed the Christians for natural calamities. The empire also did not like their dislike for traditional forms of worship, the spirit with which they declared Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, the belief that the present rule would end to give way to the Kingdom of God and the efforts to liberate women and slaves from subjugation. The Christians were, therefore, branded as anti-social elements, revolutionaries and enemies of man and persecuted.

During the days of persecution, some people left the faith. But many of the believers faced persecution with grace. Some of them became martyrs. Among them are St. Peter, St. Paul, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin, Cyprian and Origen. In our Liturgy there is a

special prayer in which we remember the martyrs and those who proclaimed their faith.

Because of the persecution that lasted 300 years, an unknown small community in the Roman Empire became well known in the world. Their growing strength, the simplicity and sacredness of their teachings and beliefs and the courageous witness of their martyrs were such that even the Roman Empire was wonderstruck by them. Eventually, Christianity became a great movement. Another benefit of the persecution was that the church was enriched by several books discussing Christian life and faith written during this period.

Q : Is it the traditional belief that Christianity was established in India by St. Thomas in AD 52 ?

A : Historically and traditionally, it is believed that Apostle Thomas reached Kerala in AD 52 and spread the Gospel. The contributions of historian Dr J.N. Farquihar, who carefully studied the traditions followed by the St. Thomas Christians of Kerala and the historical records, are quite significant in this regard.

The book, "Acta Thomae" (the Acts of Thomas), is considered by students of history as having been written in the 2nd century. The book was written in Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus Christ. The book details the apostle's acts in Parthia ruled by Gunthaphores. In the book it is mentioned that after completing the work in that country, the apostle left for another country where he was speared to death. This book was available in all the ancient Christian centres. Those who started writing the history of the church like Eusebius of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Tours and Origen have mentioned that the church in India was founded by St. Thomas. All the churches outside of the Roman Empire, including the Persian church, consider St. Thomas their common apostle. During the initial periods, it was the Alexandrian and Persian churches which could keep abreast of developments in the whole church. There are enough evidences to suggest that these churches had close contacts with the church in India.

Like during the Old Testament period, the name India stood for a vast geographical area situated south-east of Ethiopia during

the first centuries after Christ. There were many known and unknown groups of people living in this area. There were trade relations between

Indian states and Persian countries. Chaldean Syrian Mar Aprem who lived in the 4th century wrote poems about taking the mortal remains of the apostle from India to the Persian town of Edesa. Dr Faquihar opines that it was around AD 165 that the mortal remains of St. Thomas were taken to Persia.

From the archaeological finds, it is estimated that the kingdom of Gunthaphores was situated between Punjab and Afghanistan, and he lived around AD 50. The researches conducted by the British miner Masson in 1834 and the coins recovered from the area confirm the historicity of Gunthaphores. It is generally believed that the apostle who started out from Parthia around AD 50 took about two years to reach the Malabar shores in India. The inscriptions in "Karoshti" script, which is a mix of Aramaic and Sanskrit scripts, found from Taxila substantiates this belief. There is also the clinching evidence of Judo-Christian influences in areas like Patala. All this should be seen in the context of the evangelistic effort of St. Thomas in the land of Gunthaphores.

The traditions of St. Thomas Christians have it that St. Thomas reached Kodungalloor on the banks of the Periyar by ship in AD 52. He spread the word of God at seven places — Kodungalloor, Palayur, Paravoor, Korkkumangalam, Niranam, Kollam and Nilackal (Chayal). This tradition also holds that the entire Tamil region, including Malabar and the Chera kingdom, was part of his apostolate and he was killed with spear at Mailapoor in Chennai in AD 72. It was in recognition of this tradition and belief that the Government of India released a postal stamp to commemorate the 1900th death anniversary of the apostle. Initially, his missionary work centred around Jewish and Judo-Christian traders. Later, by including others, he gave greater depth and reach to the Indian church. Irrespective of caste and creed, people recognise the historicity of the missionary work of St. Thomas in India.

Q : How did the Serampore mission begin?

A : The reformation of the European church and the French and industrial revolutions had a profound influence on the Europeans. The 18th and 19th centuries were periods when the Europeans felt the need to promote Christian faith. It is during this time that the Protestant missionary activities began.

As a result of his study of the Bible and the mission, the Englishman William Carey published a book entitled "An inquiry into the strategy to be adopted by Christians to convert non-Christians" in 1792. Carey's 'inquiry' marked a turning point in Christianity. English historians call William Carey (1761-1834) the father of the missionary movement. Carey reached Kolkata in 1793. Of course, the Protestant mission was started on a small scale in India in 1706. But it is with the arrival of Carey that the English-speaking world took up missionary work on a large scale. In 1799, William Ward, the printer, and Joshua Marshman, the school teacher, reached the Dutch colony of Serampore, situated 16 miles away from Kolkata. Along with them Carey also reached there. Thus began the Serampore Mission. The Serampore missionaries laid emphasis on spreading the word of God, learning the indigenous languages, inquiring into the cultural characteristics of the region and school education.

Q : What is the historical context of the reformation in the Malankara church?

A : It is believed that the Malankara church was set up by St. Thomas in AD 52. We know very little about the history of the church during the first centuries. The arrival of Pantinus in Kerala in AD 189 (It is believed that Pantinus was sent by Demetrius of Alexandria at the request of the Kerala Christians) and Thomas of Cana in the 4th century are incidents that throw light on the infancy period of the Malankara church. History bears witness to the fact that in AD 825, a group from Persia led by Marwan Sabriso, a trader, and bishops Mar Sapro and Mar Prod arrived in Malankara. The Persian cross still kept in the Valiapalli (Big Church) at Kottayam commemorates this period. We get an idea of the Malankara church during the centuries from the 12th to the 15th from the

writings of travellers like Marco Polo. The Malankara church was in contact with foreign churches, particularly the Nestorian church in Persia, from the 1st to the 15th centuries. The Patriarch of the Nestorian church at Babylon used to send bishops to Kerala to help the local church. There were no efforts to interfere in the internal affairs of the church. The Malankara church remained an independent church. The Chaldean church at Thrisoor bears testimony to such independence.

In 1498, Vasco da Gama discovered the sea route to India. With this, the Portuguese and thereby the Roman Catholic Church got a foothold in India. Since Portugal was a Catholic country, its dominance was helpful to the growth of the local Catholic church. There were organised efforts to bring the St. Thomas Christians under the control of the Pope.

UDEYEMPEROOR (DIAMPER) SYNOD – 1599

The Udeyemperoor Synod was organised by the Archbishop of Goa, Alexio Diminensis, with the plan to bring the Marthoma Christians under the control of the Pope. With this, teachings and practices which were not prevalent in the church and which were not in accordance with the Bible began to take roots in the church. Among the canons introduced in the church after the Synod were the prayers to Mother Mary, prayer to the saints, celibacy of the priests, prayer for the dead, intercessional priesthood and secret confession. The Archbishop cleverly brought under his influence Geevarghese Archadioke, who headed the Marthoma Christians at that time. All the links the church had with the eastern rite churches were snapped. For more than half a century after 1600 AD the Malankara church remained under the Roman rule.

THE KOONEN KURISU OATH – 1653

The Marthoma Christians were not happy under the dominion of the Roman Church. They continued their attempts to bring any bishop belonging to the eastern rite tradition to regain the lost independence

and unblemished nature of their faith and practices. The Patriarch of Babylon sent Ahatullah, a bishop, as his representative to India. But before he could reach Kochi, the Portuguese took him from the ship and sent him to Goa. It is not known what happened to the Eastern prelate. Conflicting news that he was buried alive in the sea or was mercilessly murdered in Goa spread. The agitated Christians assembled at the Mattancherry church in 1653. It was decided that they and their descendants would thereafter have no relationship with the Roman church. They decided to take an oath by touching the cross. Since it was not possible for thousands to touch the cross at the same time, they tied a long rope to the cross and each touched the rope (indirectly the cross) swearing to break free from the Portuguese ecclesiastical oppression. But when the rope was tied to the cross and straightened, the cross slanted to one side. That is why it is called "koonen kurisu" (the slanted cross). As Geevarghese Archadiakon had by then passed away, his successor Thomas Archadiakon was installed by 12 priests as Marthoma I to give leadership to the church. (It is worth remembering that our Metropolitan Chrysostom is the 20th Marthoma.) Thus the internal freedom and the sacredness of the teachings and practices it had lost were regained. Since they remained under the Roman control for more than five decades, a section of the Marthoma Christians remained in the Roman church. Those who revolted against the Portuguese came to be known as the Puthencoor (the new group) and those who stayed with the Roman church were called Pazhayacoor (the old group).

Relation with Antioch

In order to ensure that his episcopacy is also apostolic in origin, Marthoma I wanted himself to be consecrated by a bishop. Mar Gregorios, who was sent to Kerala by the Patriarch of Antioch, consecrated him as a bishop in 1665. Thus relations were established between Antioch, Yakoba church. But because of oppression from the Roman Church and the controversy about the apostolic succession, the church had to pay a heavy price. During this time, administration of the church was not efficient. The insistence that the priests should be from the same family prevented ordination of able people. The compulsory celibacy lowered the moral standards of the priests.

Sacraments became an opportunity for the priests to make money. For the bishops it was profitable to ordain even children as young as eight or 10 years old as priests. Both the priests and the laity had very little knowledge about the Bible. Worship in Syriac and the Syriac Bible were both incomprehensible to the laity. The lack of witness and the Biblical illiteracy led to the spiritual and moral decline of the church.

MISSION OF HELP

By the 19th century, the condition of the Malankara Church had become pathetic. The church had become lifeless and listless. Superstitions and wrong customs reigned supreme. The church had begun losing its ability to witness. In order to reawaken the church, the Anglican Church in English set up a missionary group known as the CMS Mission of Help. For the renewal of the church, these missionaries gave several suggestions to the church leadership. Some of them are as follows:

1. Set up a seminary so that the priests have a good knowledge of the Bible.
2. Worship should be in the mother tongue.
3. There should be sermons during the worship service.
4. There should be a concrete plan to give a fixed salary to the priests.

The missionaries translated the Bible into Malayalam and published it. Schools were started close to the churches.

The activities of the missionaries resulted in a renewal in the church. Many people became conscious about the wrong practices in the church and teachings which were not Bible-based. They believed that it was their responsibility to stay within the church and reform it. Two priests who actively collaborated with the missionaries were Palakkunnathu Abraham Malpan and Puthupally Kaithail Geevarghese Malpan, who were both seminary teachers. They gave leadership to the reforming process in the church. Under their leadership, 12 priests of the church gave a memorandum to the British Resident. They wanted the church to be reformed of all the non-Biblical practices which were not prevalent in the olden days. The memorandum submitted in 1836 is a watermark in the attempt to reform the church. But the memorandum

did not receive due attention. Thereafter they decided to make their own attempts to bring about reforms in liturgy and other practices of the church. With a suitably amended liturgy, Abraham Malpan celebrated Holy Communion in Malayalam in his own church at Maramon. He removed an idol of Muthappa, which was kept in the church. He gave importance to the study of the Bible.

FEATURES OF THE REFORMATION IN THE MALANKARA CHURCH

By reformation, what the Malankara Church implies is to go back to the teachings and practices as when the church was set up by St. Thomas. So reformation is meant to amend the teachings imposed on the church by the Romans in the middle ages and later by the Jacobites. The idea was to go back to the system whereby there was no outside control and the worship was in the Episcopal order derived from the Apostles. It was also aimed at making suitable changes in the liturgy on the basis of the bible. The attempt was also to bring back ancient and eastern traditions which are not in contrary with the Bible but are otherwise beneficial.

It was with the first Malayalam St. James liturgy that Kalthayil Geevarghese malpan and Abraham Malpan celebrated Holy Qurbana at the Puthupally and Maramon churches in 1836. Later in 1920 the Alochana sabha of the church coordinated the views of Malpans as follows:

1. The only intermediary between God and man is Christ.
2. Holy Qurbana is an offering of sacrifice through praise and eulogy.

From the history narrated above, one thing is clear. Our church is the continuation of the church that existed in Malankara from the 1st century onwards. The 19th century Reformation, i.e., in 1836, was aimed at removing the wrong practices and un-Biblical teachings which had entered into the church because of the contact with foreign churches and to restore it to its pristine condition. Neither Abraham Malpan nor his successors set up a new church. Rather, our church is the continuation of the church founded by St. Thomas, the Apostle.

Q : What do the terms "Malankara Nazrane", "Syrian Christian" and "Mappila" mean?

A : Malankara or Malabar does not mean the present Malabar. The land of Malayalam was also known as the land of "mala" (hills) i.e., Malabar. The Malankara Church means the church in Kerala.

Christians in Kerala were always known by the name Nazranes. In our records and agreements, this is the term which is used. There was a period when the followers of Nazrane (the man from Nazareth) were branded as Nazranes and ridiculed. But the

believers saw it as an honour. It was only when the church was established at Antioch and other places that they were called followers of Christ or Christians. That the church in Kerala was established at a time when Christians were called "Nazranes" in the Middle East is proof that the Kerala church traces its origin to that period.

We became Syrian Christians not because we came from Syria. We are the sons of the Indian soil. Of course, we do not forget the immigration of Thoma of Kana and others. But they are a small minority. But even today, they keep their identity separate while remaining in our midst. They do not marry from outside their clan. They are known as 'Kanaya'. But everybody used Syriac as the language of the liturgy. But today it is their mother tongue that the Syrian Christians use as the language of the worship. Even so, the Syriac style is followed. By retaining Aramaic, Greek, Syriac and Latin words in the liturgy, we retain our links with various languages, cultures and people. The liturgy we use has been developed over the centuries. In short, it is no surprise that the Christians who used Syriac for their worship were called Syrian Christians. The name has no anthropological, scientific or geographical basis. It is purely religious.

The Christians of Kerala enjoyed certain special benefits and positions from the local rulers. The upper castes called them Mappila from the term "Maha Pillai". Historian T.K. Joseph claims that Cheraman Perumal, a local ruler, gave the name "Mappila"

to the Nazranes to mean "son-in-law". Since the Muslims are also called "Mappila", we would have adopted the term "Nazrani Mappila" to distinguish ourselves. Another explanation is that there was the practice of using the Buddhist term "margam" (path) to refer to the Christians. When St. Thomas reached Kerala, most of the people were Buddhists. Most of those who adopted the new path were believed to have been from the Buddhists. "Mappila" is a corrupt form of "Marga Pilla". Later the word came to mean those who profess foreign religions. That is, perhaps, why the Muslims were also called by the same name.

Q: What is ecumenism?

A: The English word "ecumenism" is derived from the Greek word "*Oikoumene*". The word originated from "*Oikos*" which means house, home, shelter, etc. The word "*Oikoumene*" means the land where one can settle. Now the word is explained by including all possibilities in God's creation. Words like Economy and Ecology are also included in the meaning of the word "*Oikos*". In short, economics, environmental science and salvation are all interrelated.

The word "*Oikoumene*" was used in history with seven meanings as listed by Wisert Hupht. They are:

1. Related to all land where settlement is possible.
2. Representing the Roman Empire (Luke 2:1; Acts 17:6).
3. Related to the whole church.
4. The possibility of a universal church.
5. Related to the worldwide missionary efforts.
6. Unity between two or more Christian churches.
7. That which denotes the consciousness about the need and desire for unity among churches.

Nowadays, the unity of churches, the unity of mankind, the integrity of creation are considered the highlights of Ecumenism. Studies to unravel the unity in the diversity of God's creation and thoughts about a grand ecumenical vision have all given the word a deeper meaning.

Q : How did the modern ecumenical movement begin?

A : With the advent of the 20th century, those who led the missionary

movement felt the need for close coordination among various denominations and missionary groups without compromising their distinct identities. They desired a world conference of missionary groups for which they made joint efforts. As a result, the World Missionary Conference was organised at Edinburgh in Scotland in 1910. Thus began the modern ecumenical movement. Following the Edinburgh meeting, conferences on the same pattern were held at different places in the world. Many movements came into being to lead such ecumenical efforts. The idea of a common council to link these movements has been germinating since the thirties. As a result, the World Council of Churches came into being in 1948.

Q : What is the communion of Churches in India (C.C.I.)

A : The unity of the Church of North India, the Church of South India and the Mar Thoma Church is exemplified through a Joint Council. While retaining their independent administrative systems and traditions, they formed the CNI-CSI-Mar Thoma Joint Council in 1978 to coordinate their joint programmes. At present it is known as C.C.I. The presidium of the Council consists of the Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church and the moderators of the CNI and CSI churches. The three churches have equal membership in the Council. For closer relations among the churches, the Joint Council has made arrangements like Festival of Unity (2nd Sunday in November) and Regional Councils.

Now C.C.I. have a common lectionary and a common liturgy as a Symbol of unity.

THE CREED



Q : How was the Creed formed?

A : The word "Creed" is derived from the Latin word "*credo*" which means "I believe". Creed was an essential feature of the worship in the synagogue. It was referred to as "saying the *sema*". The Hebrew word "*sema*" means "to hear". The three portions in the Books of

Moses beginning with the word "Hear" are used as the Creed (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11; Numbers 15:37-41). The Creed was said collectively by the people. The Creed is one of the features borrowed from the Jewish tradition. What separated the early Christians from the Jews is the declaration about the Lordship and divinity of Jesus Christ.

In the ancient church, there were two types of Creeds. One is called the baptismal Creed, which was pronounced by the baptismal candidates. It was very brief (for example "Jesus is Lord" as in 1 Corinthians 12:3 and "I believe Jesus is the Son of God". In the changed historical context, the need to expand the Creed arose. That is how the Apostle's Creed came into being. Since it was devised for the use of baptismal candidates, the acceptance of the Creed is in one sentence: "I believe". The Apostle's Creed was not drafted by the Apostles of Christ. It is considered apostolic as it contains the teachings that was passed on to us from the Apostles. It was in 390 AD that the Apostle's Creed came to usage. It is said that its shortened form was used from the second half of the 2nd century in the Roman town. This Creed highlights the belief in the Trinity, the virginal birth of Jesus, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, second coming, redemption of sin, resurrection of human body and eternity. The Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church use this Creed.

The second type of Creed is called conciliar Creed. When

wrong teachings surfaced in the church, a synod was organised to define the correct faith. The Creed so evolved is called the conciliar Creed. The Nicene Creed that we use in our church is an example of this Creed. Since it is collectively said, the term used is: "We believe".

This study related to the formation of the Creed, leads us to a study of the Christian Synods that evolved these Creeds and the circumstances in which the Synods were organized.

Teachings of Arius

Arius was a native of Libya and a priest in Alexandria (AD 250-AD 336). He spread heresy about the Trinity. His heresy can be summarized as follows:

1. God alone is without beginning and end.
2. Before God created everything, He created the word. The word created the world. Word is not the person-hood of God. It is just His ability.
3. There was a time when the word or son was non-existent.
4. The word that is Christ is not full God but full creation.
5. Christ had human body but he had no human soul.
6. Word created the Holy Spirit.

According to the teachings of Arius:

1. The Father and the Son are not of the same substance.
2. The Holy Trinity is non-existent.
3. Jesus Christ is not only full God but also full man.
4. Jesus Christ was half-God, half-man.
5. To worship Jesus is to worship creation.
6. Salvation never took place.
7. The Holy Spirit was created by the creator.

Among the prominent theologians who opposed Arius' heresy were Alexander (death 328 AD), who was a Bishop in Alexandria, and his secretary and deacon Athanasius (about 296-373 AD). Using the Greek word "*Homoiousios*" which means "equal in essence", Arius argued about the Father-Son relationship. Alexander and his disciple, who opposed him, used the Greek term "*Homoiousios*" to argue that

the Father and the Son were essentially equal. Since Arius refused to give up his position, the Synod that met at Alexandria in 321 AD excommunicated Arius. In this Synod, bishops from Egypt and Libya, among other place, attended.

The excommunicated Arius left Alexandria. He tried to assemble bishops and priests on his side. Emperor Constantine who felt that the growing schism in the church would endanger the integrity and strength of the Roman Empire tried to bring about a rapprochement between Arius and Alexander. The Emperor sent the Bishop of Cordova Hosius with a letter to Arius and Alexander indicating that they should put an end to the controversy. He urged both sides to be sparing of words and to exhibit an equal degree of forbearance and receive the advice which their fellow-servant righteously gave. But it had no effect. With a view to ending this controversy, the Emperor called a Synod at Nicea in 325 AD. It was the first public Synod of the undivided church.

Synod at Nicea (AD 325)

The historically important first public Synod took place at Nicea, a major city in Asia Minor. The traditional belief is that 318 bishops from all over the Roman Empire participated in the Synod at the invitation of the Constantine the Great. The Synod was presided over by Bishop Hosius. Though the Emperor had not yet been baptised, he delivered the introductory speech. Arius and Eusebius were on one side, Alexander and Athanasius and those who followed them were on the other side.

At the beginning of the Synod, Eusebius from Nicodemia presented a Creed incorporating the teachings of Arius. It was immediately rejected by the Council. Then the Bishop of Caesarea, Eusebius, presented a Creed which was used in his church at the time of baptism. A translation of it from Malayalam is as follows:

"We believe in the one God, who is the creator of everything, seen and unseen, and the Lord of all, the word of God, God from God, light from light, life from life, the only begotten son, the first among all creations, born of God before all the world, the one who created everything, the one who became man for our salvation, stayed with man, crucified and resurrected on the third day and ascended to Father, and who will come again in all his glory to judge the living and the dead".

It also mentions belief in the Holy Spirit. Although the Creed was considered flawless, it was not considered for two reasons: One, the subject of the controversy was not referred to in it. Two, there was the fear that some of the terminology used in it might be interpreted in support of Arius' teachings. Therefore, some necessary changes were made in the Creed. Instead of the word "word", the word "son" was used. In the definition of the word "son", the word "*Homoiousios*" which means "father and son are in essence equal". Thereby, the Greek word "*Homoiousios*" which means "in essence the son is equal to the father" and which was accepted by Arius was rejected. Thus the Greek word "*Homoiousios*" which means "father and son are equal in essence" became a part of the Creed. This is known as the Nicene Creed. It is as follows:

"We believe in the one true God, the Father Almighty; maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds. Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man. He was crucified also for us in the days of Pontius Pilate, suffered and died and was buried. The third day he rose again by his holy will, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead and of his Kingdom there will be no end.

"We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets and apostles.

"We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for remission of sins and look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the new life of the world to come. Amen".

Though some portions of the Creed were created by the Synods that followed, it is still known by the name Nicene Creed, because most of its important portions traces their origin to the Synod at Nicea. The beliefs that the Creed proclaims can be summarized as follows:

1. The faith in God who created everything. The faith in Jesus Christ. The faith in the Holy Spirit. That is the faith in the Holy Trinity.
2. The complete God-ness and human-ness of Jesus Christ.
3. Christ is the saviour of mankind.
4. The Second Coming of Jesus for judgement.

These are the Catholic beliefs of the undivided church. At the end of the Nicene Creed, there was a line cursing those who did not believe in it. Over a period of time, this curse was removed from the Creed.

After the Synod at Nicea

Those who did not accept the Nicene Creed like Arius were banished. In AD 328, the church recalled Eusebius of Nicodina and other bishops. Around this time, Athanasius became the bishop of Alexandria. Those supporting Arius tried vigorously to convince the church members against the Nicene Creed. It is not wrong to conclude that it was Athanasius who argued with the supporters of Arius who valiantly fought for their case and brought about a situation whereby they had no place in the church. When Constantine found that it was pointless to pursue peace, he left both sides to fend for themselves. Historians believe that the Emperor never understood the intricacies of the controversy and he was interested only in maintaining peace in the church so that the interest of the Empire was not sabotaged. The moment someone convinced the Emperor that it was the obstinacy of Athanasius, who was the bishop of Alexandria, that was responsible for the schism, he banished him forthwith (335 AD) and recalled Arius, who died in 336 AD. When the Emperor died in 337 AD, the western part of the Roman Empire was under the control of Constantine II. The eastern part and the central part of the Empire were under the control of Constantine and Constans. Among them, Constantine was in favour of the teachings of Arius. Constantine II recalled Athanasius in 337 AD. Holding aloft the Nicene Creed, he tried hard to regain control of the church from the supporters of Arius. Because of his fight for his faith, he was banished five times (335, 339, 355, 361, 365 AD). He died in 373 AD. In the drafting and saving of the Creed, the one person whom God used the most was Athanasius.

The controversy continued even after the death of Arius and

Athanasius. After Athanasius, Bishop Basil (330-379 AD), St. Gregory (329-about 389 AD) and another Bishop St. Gregory (about 330-395 AD) were able to establish firmly the Nicene Creed and fight the supporters of Arius. Since the three of them were from Cappadocia, they were known as Cappadocian Fathers. Through their teachings, they tried to counter Arius. At the Synod at Constantinople, the Arius side suffered its ultimate defeat. The three Cappadocian believers were mainly responsible for its defeat (For a detailed study see "Christian Church – History and Witness in the First Centuries" by Rev Dr. T.P. Abraham).

Constantinople Synod (AD 381)

It is the second Synod in the undivided church. Constantinople was the new Capital of the Roman Empire Constantine the Great had built it in 330 AD. The new capital was situated at the ancient Greek city of Byzantium on the Bosphorus. It was Theodosius I the Great (379-395 AD), who ruled the Eastern Roman Empire, who called the Synod at Constantinople in 381 AD. The aim was not only to strengthen the Nicene Creed but also to eradicate the teachings of Arius and their two offshoots. The religious groups were named after Machadonia and Apollinaris. Their heresy can be summarised in the following manner:

Machadonia sect

A bishop of Constantinople and a member of the Arius' group was Machadonia. This sect is known by his name. He gave a new teaching about the Holy Spirit. He argued that the Holy Spirit was equal to the angels and was not equal to the Father. The Son is God in all respects. In substance the Son is equal to the Father. But in the Trinity, there is no place for the Holy Spirit. Like the angels, the Holy Spirit can be called a servant or a worshipper. If the Holy Spirit is not real God, it is just a creation. Through such teachings, they questioned the holiness of the Holy Spirit. They were, therefore, called "opponents of the Holy Spirit". Those who accepted their teachings were called Machadonians.

At a Synod held under the chairmanship of Athanasius at Alexandria in 362 AD, the Machadonian and Arius sects were declared as antithetical to the Biblical teaching, cursed and expelled. It was necessary to oppose heresy and inform the believers about the true nature of the Holy Spirit. It was from this need that the Epiphanius Creed came into being in 374 AD. A native of Palestine, he was the bishop of

Salamese in Kupros. The references to the Holy Spirit in Epiphanius Creed are as follows:

1. **Personhood:** The Holy Spirit is equal to the Father and the Son. In essence, all the three in the Trinity are equal. Like the Son, the Holy Spirit is also the Lord. The Holy Spirit begins from the Father. Along with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is also worshipped and praised.
2. **Eternity:** The Holy Spirit has no beginning and no end.
3. **Godhood:** The Holy Spirit is equal to the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit dwells with the Father.
4. **Acts:** The acts of the Holy Spirit can be interpreted as the origin of all real life. It is responsible for prophecies. It can also be considered the force behind the descent as Son and the genesis of grace.
5. **Beginning:** The Holy Spirit begins from the Father.

Such teachings helped to substantiate the Godhood of the Holy Spirit. The books of the Cappadocian Fathers and Saint Athanasius helped to strengthen the teachings about the Holy Spirit. By the time the Constantinople Synod was held, there was clear understanding in the church about the Godhood of the Holy Spirit.

Appollinarianism

This heresy began with Apollinaris, who was the bishop of Laodicea in Syria from 361 AD. By denying the manhood of Jesus, he tried to stress His total God-ness and sinless-ness. There are three elements in human body – flesh, life and soul. But in Jesus, there is no soul. Instead, there is "logos" (the word), which is the second in the Trinity. Since the Word is not subject to changes, Christ has no humanly desires. He is not susceptible to sin. He has only one feature. That is His divine feature. The danger in this interpretation is that Jesus is not a full man. That is why the Christian religion objects to Appollinarianism. The Synod held at Alexandria in 362 AD and a conference held at Rome in 377/378 AD rejected this teaching as un-Biblical.

It was to take a strong decision on these wrong teachings that Emperor Theodosius I called a Synod at Constantinople in 381 AD. Altogether 15 bishops, considered proponents of the Creed, and 36 bishops supporting the heretical teachings attended the Synod which

was presided over by the Bishop of Antioch, Melithias. This Synod once again recognised the Creed adopted at Niceae and welcomed the word "*Homoiousios*" which means "equality in essence". The supporters of Arius, Machadonia and Appollinaris were declared as heretics and expelled from the church. The manhood of Christ and the equality of the Holy Spirit, the Father and the Son were reiterated. It was this Creed which was accepted at the Synod held in 381 AD and is now known as the Nicene Creed. Its English version is given below:

"I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

"And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

"Who, for us w~~o~~men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

"And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

"And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen."

It is this Creed that our church has adopted for our belief and practice.

The Synod held at Ephesus in 431 AD also adopted the Nicene Creed. This was the third common Synod in the undivided church. It would be worth remembering that the Synods held at Calcedonia in 451 AD declared the Synods at Nicea in 325 AD, Constantinople in 381 AD and Ephesus in 431 AD as the church's common synods and adopted the Nicene Creed as the unalterable Creed of the church. At

a time when the church life was disturbed by false teachings, the great leaders of the church were able to make clear what the beliefs of the church were and thus give purposive leadership to the church.

Q : What is the essence of the Nicene Creed?

A: Every word of the Nicene Creed is full of theological thoughts. A brief explanation about its contents is given below:

The Father God

"I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible".

God, the Father Almighty

It denotes the strongest and most meaningful relationship between man and God. In Jewish thought, God is conceptualised as Father. It only meant that God is the father of the Jewish community. In the Jewish faith, it did not mean that God's love and concern for man was like the father's love and concern for his children. It was Jesus Christ who uplifted every person to the status of the son of God and revealed God as the Father Almighty. The teaching that everyone is the child of God enables us to maintain familial relationship with everyone and help us lead a life dependent on one another.

God, the Father is Almighty. If God is omnipotent, why do many people die in natural calamities and accidents? If God looks after the world like a father, why do miseries happen? Such questions are quite natural. It is difficult to give complete answers to such questions. Yet, we should understand certain truths.

1. We cannot hold God responsible for the miseries caused by the misuse of the freedom given to man.
2. We live in a world which is governed by natural laws. When we go against the natural laws, miseries and mishaps are bound to happen. When God created world, which is governed by the natural laws, and the man who has been given freedom, He circumscribed His own power. Nowadays we do not feel the Father-like love and omnipotence of God.

The Creator of Heaven and Earth

Marcion, who lived in Asia Minor, repudiated the Old Testament and taught that the Jehova referred to in it was the creator of the world where injustice and misery prevailed. He also taught that the Father-like God revealed by Jesus is not the creator of the world. In order to prevent such an idea from gaining ground, the church leaders felt it was necessary to mention in the Creed that the loving God revealed by Jesus is also the creator of the sky and the earth. Later words that denote that the Father Almighty is also the creator of the world were added. It is difficult to believe that the incidents of strife, hunger and the horror stories that we read in newspapers happen in a world created and preserved lovingly by the Holy Father. But that is what we affirm. Without this belief, it is difficult to have faith and hope in a life beyond. It is terrific to believe in a God who loves and live in a world which was not created and preserved by Him. That is not the life and faith of a Christian, as we proclaim in our Creed.

Maker of all things visible and invisible

The Creed was written at a time when people worshipped celestial bodies like the Sun and the Moon and imaginary creatures. The celestial bodies were created and they did not create. If there are any creatures or objects which are invisible, they too are the creations of God. Thus all things visible and invisible are under God's control. Hence, we need not fear them. The Creed mentions God as one entity. For a Christian, the most important thing is the belief in an all-controlling God. This belief liberates us from dependence and makes us humble. It gives us courage and peace. We live in a world of troubles. When we remember that it is a world created by God, the Father, we feel confident.

In the first Creed, the belief in Jesus Christ was restricted to affirmation (Please refer to the portion that deals with baptism). This was sufficient for baptizing the Jews. But when non-Jews began to be baptized, it was not sufficient to affirm the faith in Jesus. Since they believed in many Gods and powers, it was necessary to have their faith in one God affirmed. That is why this definitive and elaborate reference to God was included in the Creed.

The manhood of Jesus

"And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made".

The above quotation from the Creed explains the manhood of Jesus. It also proclaims the complete Godhood of Jesus. That Jesus pre-existed every creation has Biblical basis (John 17:5, 24; Colossian 1:15). Since the circumstances in which the Synod was held at Nicea and the controversy about the Greek word "*Homoiousios*" which means "equal in essence" are dealt with in an earlier chapter, no attempt is made here to explain them.

The work of Jesus

Who, for us wo/men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father".

This portion gives a description of what Jesus did for humankind. This makes it clear that Jesus is the saviour of mankind. It also makes it clear that His birth, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension are historical facts. The kind of work that Jesus did will become comprehensible only if we accept his manhood and Godhood. That is why it is included in the Creed. That God took birth as man is one of the cardinal beliefs of the church as underscored by this passage, "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Philippines 2:6,7). Arius had taught that Jesus was not a complete man. Rationalists had also argued that God who was Holy could not become a man, born of sin. Hence his manhood was just a belief. It was under these circumstances that these words that clearly bring out the manhood of Jesus were incorporated in the Creed. He became a man in flesh and blood. He even reached a stage where his desires and thoughts could even be tested. Except for the fact that

he was devoid of sin, he was like us. He suffered physical pain, hunger and thirst. Our belief is that God's only begotten son became a man for the redemption of our sins.

Second coming of Jesus

"He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end".

One of Jesus' teachings was about the last days. We can read what He said about the second coming in Chapter 24 of the Gospel of Matthew. The passages that refer to Jesus' second coming are Matthew 24:36,42; Matthew 25:3, 26:64, Acts 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17; 1Thessalonians 3:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 1 Peter 1:8,9; Revelation 1:7. To the Apostles who witnessed His ascension, Jesus said: "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven".

What does He remind us when He proclaims that Jesus will come again? The God who comforts us, the God who strengthens us, the God who leads us and the God whose presence we experience will become the God who judges us on the last day. This belief helps us to have a vision about our future and make us responsible.

Faith in the Holy Spirit "And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified".

When debates arose in the church over whether the Holy Spirit was just a power or it had a personhood, it was found necessary to include this reference in the Creed.

One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church: This is the affirmation of the nature of the Church. Church stands on four pillars.

- a) **One:** St. Paul in his teaching emphasis that all believers are part of one body and the head is Christ. By the grace of God, all are incorporated to the body of Christ through Baptism. So there is only one body and one Church (Ephesians 4:4) (1Corinthians 12: 12-27)
- b) **Holy:** Here the word Holy means set apart. Church is been set apart by God for His mission. It is just like a fish in a salty water.
"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people that you may declare the wonderful deeds of

him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (Peter 2:9).

- c) **Catholic:** Catholic means universal and the church is universal. Baptism is not a initiation to a particular church. Each individual wherever s/he is baptized will become a part of universal church. All Marthomites are the part of the universal church, so they are catholic, not protestant.
- d) **Apostolic:** The literal meaning of Apostolic is sent out. Church is the assembly of believers, who are to send out for a particular Mission. Who is an Apostol? St. Peter, who presided over the presiding to elect an apostle in the place of Judea Iscariot says "So one of the man who have accompanied us during all the time that Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us-one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." (Acts 1:21,22). So the apostle is the one who know who Jesus is and one who saw and realize the death and resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ. So a church which experience Jesus Christ and ready to prepare its children to be a witness to the resurrection is entitled as apostolic church.

Apostolic means apostolic succession, which we received through centuries. God has immensely blessed us with a patron Saint Thomas to be our apostle. So we traditionally believed that St. Thomas is the founder of our Church and our Metropolitan is the successor of his throne.

OTHER RELIGIONS



Q : Which are the important religions that originated in India?

A : Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism are the four religions which took birth in India.

Q : Which are the authoritative books in Hinduism?

A : The main texts in Hinduism are the Rig Veda, the Sama Veda, the Yajur Veda and the Atharva Veda. They are known as "Shruti". They were not written by man. They are the truths revealed to the ancient rishis. These truths are eternal. They are proclaimed as infallible. They are considered the source of all knowledge. The Vedas include mantras and Upanishads. Hindu religious texts other than the Vedas are called "*Smriti*". The Puranas and the Epics belong to this category. They wield authority only in so far as they are in conformity with the Vedas. It is essential to have faith in the Vedas. Those who deny the Vedas have no place in Hinduism.

Q : What does "Om" mean?

A : It is a representation and symbol of Brahma i.e., Eshwar. The sound "Om" is considered the essence of all sounds and thoughts. It is a combination of the sounds – "a" as in "ahimsa", "u" as in "Uttar" and "am" as in "Ambika". It also symbolises the creative, preserving and destructive features of God.

Q : What is "karma" and rebirth?

A : The theory of "karma" and rebirth is one of the basic teachings of Hinduism. The other religions that took birth in India – Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism – also accept this theory. "Karma" is one of the basic doctrines of Hinduism. The word "karma" means "action". "Karma" is what man does. Every act has its consequence. Good acts lead to good results and bad acts lead to bad results. Nobody

can escape the consequences of his acts. Nor can anyone take responsibility for another person's acts. A person may not suffer the consequences of his act in his own life. When he dies, his soul which never dies will suffer the consequences of his acts. Depending upon his acts, he will take rebirth. The cycle of "karma" and rebirth continue endlessly. This phenomenon is called the cycle of birth and death.

Q : What is "moksha"?

A : The liberation from the cycle of birth and death in this world is called "moksha". Man's soul is endless. It is deathless. Only the body dies. Soul chooses the shape of body depending upon the person's acts in the previous birth. When the soul joins Parabrahm (Eshwar) without taking rebirth, it is called "moksha". There are two kinds of beliefs about "moksha". According to the advaita philosophy, the soul of the person who attains "moksha" joins the universal soul. He thereby loses his personhood. There are others who believe that human soul never joins the universal soul. They hold that the person who attains "moksha" reaches the presence of God and while retaining his personhood enjoys the holy happiness of God. Since it is "karma" which links a man with the cycle of birth and death and which leads to rebirth, "moksha" is possible only if "karma" is incapacitated.

Q : How can "moksha" be attained?

A : Hinduism teaches that there are three ways through which "moksha" can be attained. They are 1) karma 2) knowledge and 3) faith. Those who take the path of karma believe that one can attain "moksha" through yagyas and other rites sanctified by the Vedas. However, the advaita philosophy denies this. It sees karma as the link that connects a person with the cycle of birth and death. Good deeds and bad deeds produce results. In order to reap that benefit, one has to take rebirth. Therefore, karma never leads to "moksha". Only by incapacitating karma can "moksha" be attained. Advaita holds that soul and universal soul are inseparable. It is only the unlettered who think that they are separate entities. Lack of knowledge leads a person to believe that he is distinct from his

soul. Knowledge is the realization of the fact that one is Brahma itself (Aham Brahmasmi). That realization is "moksha".

Only those who surrender totally to God and worship Him will get abiding peace and godly position through the grace of God. Piety is love for God and faith and dependence on Him. The devotee seeks unconditional shelter in God. Pleased with his devotion, God gives him "moksha". Thus, "moksha" is a grace of God. Irrespective of sex or colour or creed, one can take refuge in God and with His grace can obtain "moksha".

Q : What is the theory of "trimurti" in Hinduism?

A : The theory of "trimurti" was evolved over centuries. The Rig Veda mentions 33 gods and goddesses in the first part of the Veda period. It also refers to the concept of one God. During the Upanishad period, teachings that the highest God was the formless, featureless Parabrahm and Parameshwar (God) is the embodiment of all the good traits that came into being. It was in the epics and the puranas that the theory of "trimurti" took shape. According to this theory, God is one. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are not three different gods. Rather, they are the three different forms of the same God.

God appears as the creator in Brahman, as the protector in Vishnu and as the destroyer in Shiva. That is all. They are all equal. The "trimurti" theory could have been propounded mainly to settle disputes among various religious traditions about who God is. It is a synthesis of the Upanishad teachings and belief systems in various religious traditions.

Q : What is the meaning of idol worship?

A : In Hinduism, there are two visions of God. One is the formless, featureless God called "Parabrahm". And the other is the one with a distinct shape and is the embodiment of all good qualities. In the former vision, there is no place for idols, temples and worship. In the latter vision, there is place for idols, temples and worship. When the idol is worshipped, it is not the object that is worshipped but God who descends on to the idol. Idol is an object that helps the devotee to concentrate on God while he worships Him. Idol is not an end in itself. It is a means that leads the worshipper to

God. Though various Hindu traditions worship different idols, they are all symbols of the same one God. The worshipper sees God in the idol. While worshipping the idol, he establishes a personal relationship with God. Seeing the idol, worshipping it and receiving oblations all symbolize man-God relationship and the blessings obtained through it.

Q : What is the theory of incarnation?

A : An important characteristic of the Vaishnav system of Hinduism is the theory of incarnation. The word "incarnation" means "descend". In order to save the people from evil, Vishnu takes birth from time to time. Therefore, incarnations are many. It is generally said that Vishnu took birth 10 times. The fish (matsya), the tortoise (kurma), the boar (varaha), the man-lion (Narasimha), the dwarf (Vamana), Parasurama (Rama with the axe), Rama, Balarama and Krishna are some of His incarnations. Lately, Buddha has also been included among them by replacing Balarama. Nine incarnations have already taken place. The 10th – Kalki – is yet to take place. The Bhagavat Purana gives a list of 24 incarnations. The Hindus have no difficulty in recognizing the founders and saints of other religions as incarnations of God. That is, perhaps, the reason for the inclusion of Lord Buddha among the various incarnations. In this perspective, it is not difficult for them to see Jesus also as an incarnation of Vishnu. The theory of incarnation helps in reconciling different traditions of faith and worship. The incarnations of the fish, the tortoise, the boar and the man-lion suggests the inclusion of animal worship also in Hinduism. Significantly enough, the historical context of the incarnations do not have any value or significance.

Q : What is the meaning of the word "Islam"?

A : The word means "complete dependence". The whole universe is dependent on God's will. So the eternal law of the universe is "Islam". So man's life should also be "Islamic".

Q : Who is a Muslim?

A : A Muslim is one who has surrendered completely to God's will.

Q : Who founded Islam?

A : Prophet Mohammed (570-632) who lived in Arabia founded Islam.

Q : Which is the basic text of Islam?

A : Koran. The Muslims believe the book is infallible as it contains nothing but God's word, as revealed to Prophet Mohammed.

Q : What are the basic beliefs of Islam?

A : The oneness of Allah (God) and the Prophethood of Mohammed. In the short Creed, "ilaha illallah Mohammed ur-rasoolullah" (There is no God other than Allah and Mohammed is his apostle), the Muslims repeatedly reaffirm their faith.

Q : What are the other beliefs of Muslims?

A : They believe in angels, prophets, sacred books, resurrection, and the Judgement Day.

Q : What is the speciality about the faith in prophets?

A : God has sent prophets to all peoples. From Adam to Mohammed, many prophets came into this world. But Mohammed is the last prophet. He is also the crown of prophets.

Q : Is Koran the only sacred text?

A : No. Many sacred texts came into being through the prophets. Since they were either interpolated or were taken back to heaven, they are no longer available now. Moreover, since the Koran was revealed as the last, all the previous books lost their relevance. So the Koran is the only acceptable book. The Koran is God's word. It is complete truth. It is the source of all knowledge. It is totally infallible. This is the Muslim faith.

Q : What is Islam's attitude to the Christian concept of the Trinity?

A : Muslims do not accept the concept of Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. In their view, it negates the concept of one God and is, therefore, totally unacceptable.

Q : What is the Muslim belief about Jesus (Isah)?

A : Muslims respect Jesus as a prophet. They also believe in His immaculate birth and miracles. But they do not believe that he was crucified. They believe that though the Jews tried to crucify him, God took Jesus back to heaven. Before the Judgement Day, Jesus will come back to earth and proclaim the gospel of Islam.

They consider it a sin to hold Jesus as the Son of God. In that case, God has a wife. That is tantamount to belief in polytheism. Jesus was a prophet but he was only a man.

Q : What is the relationship between man and God?

A : God is the creator and man is the creation. Nobody can do anything against the will of God. Man should surrender totally to God.

Q : What are the religious rites of Muslims?

A : Five rites are compulsory for the Muslims. 1) The repetition of the short Creed that there is no God other than Allah and Mohammed is Allah's Apostle; 2) Pray five times a day (At the time of prayer, a whistle will be blown from the mosque inviting the faithful to prayer. The midday prayer on Friday is very important.); 3) Fast, particularly during the month of Ramzan; 4) Donating a portion of one's income to take care of the poor; and 5) Haj pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in life for those who can afford it.

MISSION OF THE CHURCH



Q : Define the word "mission"?

A : The English word "mission" is derived from the Latin noun "*Missio*". It is a secular word. The simple meaning of "*Missio*" is "sending".

Dictionary defines "mission" as a job or duty that a person or group of people is given to do, especially when they are sent out. The church has been given the divine authority to perform a special duty in the world. To establish the Kingdom of God that began with Jesus Christ in this world, the church has to work along with Jesus. This is the mission of the church.

Q : Explain the diversity of the mission?

A : The word "mission" is understood and explained differently by different people. Some consider "mission" and "evangelism" as one and the same thing, others consider them as separate entities. For some, the mission is to do social work. For some others, the mission is to raise voice against injustice, exploitation and to fight for the rights of the exploited, the oppressed, Dalits and the like. The traditional view of "mission" is spreading the word of God. Accordingly, until the mid-sixties "mission" was considered synonymous with "evangelism". Since the fourth General Assembly meeting of the World Council of Churches held at Uppsala in Sweden in 1968, the ecumenical thought that "mission" has many features was generally accepted. Humanization, development, dialogue, liberation, justice, peace, ecology are some of the aspects of the church's "mission".

"Mission" is a word that pertains to the whole world. Today "mission" has a deeper meaning. It is now understood as a mission to all realms of life like family, culture, work, arts, science, economy, law, statecraft, diplomacy.

Q : Does all the activities of the church comes under "mission"?

A : The church has to work within and without the church. Prima facie, the church's mission may appear to be the sum total of its activities. Many thinkers believe that the church's mission is the work it does for those who remain outside the church.

According to Dr. John R. Stott, the church's mission is to complete all the assignments for which it has been called out, that is to be the salt and light of the world. After the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church issued 16 documents. One of it was entitled "*Ad gentes divinitus*" (The missionary work of the church). It says what the church does for those who remain outside the church is "mission". The Congress on World Evangelization which met at Losan in Switzerland in 1974 also took this stand. If we go by this explanation, the activities of the church within its realm like sacraments, fellowship meetings, worship and construction activities cannot be considered as part of "mission". These activities enable the church to perform its "missionary" role. As such, they are closely related to the church's "mission".

Q : Explain the origin of "mission"?

A : The origin and inspiration for the church's "mission" is Jesus Christ. God sent his only son as a missionary to the world. The Gospel, according to John, explains God's mission (John 3:16; 20:21). In the same way as God sent his only son to the world for his mission, the Son entrusted his disciples and thereby the church with his mission (John 20:21).

According to Reni Padilla, there is no difference between the mission Jesus was entrusted with by His Father and the mission of the church. The mission of the church is an extension of the mission of Jesus Christ. In other words, the mission of the church is a continuation of the mission God launched in Jesus Christ.

Q : What do you mean by mission in the style of Jesus Christ?

A : Jesus demonstrated an incomparable mission style. Service-mindedness, self-sacrifice, the readiness to stand and die for humankind and love are some of the aspects of His mission. The

church's mission should be founded and modeled on Christ's mission. God has not permitted anyone to deviate from the style of mission followed by Jesus Christ.

Q : What is missionary work?

A : Jesus Christ is the God and protector of the whole world. Wherever the people are and whatever be the time, they should all accept Jesus Christ as God and Saviour. With this end in view and with the help of the Holy Spirit, the church stands witness to Jesus Christ through word and work. This is called "missionary work".

Q : Why does the church do missionary work?

A : There are two reasons for the church to take part in missionary work. One is the great commission entrustment. Spreading the word of God is among the God-given commandments. By preaching the gospel, the church obeys His last command. The Gospels and Acts contain references to the great entrustment (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-47; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). Some of His commands are temporary in nature. The command to witness Jesus is valid till His second coming. Therefore, missionary work will have to be continued till that unforeseen date.

Second, it is the need of the world. The man who is not in touch with God is restless, helpless, self-centred, lone, spiritually cut-off and who cannot appreciate interpersonal and social relationships. He needs peace and tranquillity, a vision of life and a new self. When man is in trouble, Jesus is ready to help him (Matthew 11:28). The church is committed to proclaim the availability of Jesus Christ in the world's need. Therefore, the church engages itself in missionary work.

Q : What is the core of the Gospel?

A : The core of the Gospel is Jesus. The Gospel, according to John, says those who saw Jesus with their inner eye, they did not see him the son of a carpenter or a Jewish rabbi. Rather, they saw the Lord of the Universe (John 1:18; 10:30; 14:9). Jesus who was branded just a sinful man and crucified was resurrected and exalted to the right hand of God. Since the Ascension, the church

has been trying to preach that Jesus is the saviour of the whole mankind (Acts 2:32-36; 3:14-16; 4:33; 5:30-32, 42; 9:22; 10:39-42). "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel" (II Timothy 2:8) says St. Paul. Therefore, Jesus is the subject of witness.

Q : Is there any relationship between missionary work and social work?

A : Missionary work and social work have a lot in common. They are related to each other also. Yet, they are independent of each other. They stand together on their own legs. They complement each other. Concentrating only on preaching totally ignoring one's social responsibilities and emphasizing only on social work without any interest in witnessing Christ in word are not scriptural. Social work and preaching are not rivals who walk on opposite path. They are co-travelers moving on the same path to the same destination.

Q : What is life-style evangelism?

A : The best advertisement of Christian faith is the life of a transformed Christian. A person's witness will be more effective if he leads his life in accordance with his witness. It is through his exemplary life that a believer strengthens his witness. For the one who preaches the Gospel, his good conduct and life are a reflection of the transformation his faith in Jesus has brought about. When the precepts and practices are reconciled, the effectiveness of evangelism is strengthened.

Q : Should not evangelism be left to specially selected people?

A : The mission of the church is the responsibility of the believers. All those who have experienced His love have a moral obligation to witness Jesus. This idea is contained in the saying, "Every Christian is a missionary". The whole church and every church member should do evangelism. Nobody is permitted to keep off evangelism. Just because priests and missionaries, ashramites and preachers are engaged in full-time evangelism, it does not minimize the evangelical responsibility of the believers.

Q : Is it proper to continue evangelical work in the context of multiplicity of religions?

A : Religious multiplicity is centuries old. Since the world in which we live has shrunk into a global village, we feel more strongly than ever the phenomenon of religious multiplicity. Missionary work was always carried out among other religious believers. The multiplicity of religions should not slowdown evangelism. Rather, it should be continued in right earnest by respecting the followers of other religions and by accepting our weaknesses. It is not proper to prejudge other believers. Nor should we look down upon them. It is improper to consider them as enemies or try to challenge and defeat their religious beliefs and visions. It is in the spirit of love and brotherhood that we should tell everyone about the Gospel. This is the right Christian approach to the multiplicity of religions.