



# Holy Fathers<sub>and</sub> You

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A

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**ORTHODOX CHURCH  
CATHOLICATE OF THE EAST**

DIOCESE OF DELHI



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**Foreword**

I would like to congratulate two of our young Priests, Fr Saji Abraham and Fr P. A. Philip, for being so concerned about the future of our Church. While Saji Achen rightly identified the need for a manual on Orthodox faith, Philip Achen answered around 90 questions, as if in one sitting, making a lasting contribution to Orthodox Christian literature. The book is well balanced, spiritually and intellectually, taking into account the heavenly realm and the earthly one where we are strangers and pilgrims. The profundity and depth of the Apostolic faith has been convincingly communicated; and the meaning of prayer, the heartbeat of Christian life, endearingly explained. Many under the influence of western philosophy and western theology come to regard tradition as a bundle of superstitions to be got rid of. The author traces its roots to the Apostolic teachings and Our Lord's commands, demonstrating its efficacy against error and heresy.

In the times we live, knowledge explosion takes place at a breath-taking pace; and at the click of a mouse, we have all the information that we need, and in fact more information than we can cope with. But along with knowledge comes corrupting websites that destroy the spiritual life of our youth. It is a tragedy that many young lives are decaying in the bud and the temptations of the secular world are too much for them to resist. The edification of the next generation should be the concern of not only Priests but also parents and elders. It is a fact of life that with both parents working, children tend to get neglected. The grand ministry of the grandmothers, as one of the anecdotes in this book explains, is totally missing in our urban life. In its place comes peer pressure or influence of friends, good and bad. Often in affluent societies, vices spread faster than virtues and these children are secretly influenced by friends who have most of the vices. Unless strong faith is imparted to our children by parents, Sunday School teachers and Priests, the chances of our next generation following the faith of their fathers is bleak. This book is a beginning in that Endeavour. We need to have many more edifying books and spiritual conclaves to bring back those who are staying away from the Church and to build up those who attend the service regularly.

May God bless this book with many more reprints and many turning good Orthodox Christians.

**JOB MAR PHILOXENOS**  
(METROPOLITAN)



## **PREFACE**

With the unprecedented mushrooming of charismatic groups, Pentecostal churches and the influx of Western culture, the Orthodox faith and practices have been misinterpreted at some quarters, or least understood by our own members. We live at a time when Christian faith has been challenged as never before – novels and films and documentaries which are sacrilegious or blasphemous are paraded as “scientific truth”. The media hype and the hoopla that Dan Brown’s Da Vinci Code created is just one example.

There is a genuine complaint among our members that they are not adequately taught the faith and practices of the church. Books on Orthodox faith and Biblical expositions from the Orthodox perspective are scanty few. Therefore, the glory and uniqueness of the Orthodox faith remains a mystery for many: even the elders of our church and Sunday school teachers are blissfully ignorant of several aspects of our faith.

As I write these words, I wish to reiterate that Christianity is not a bundle of doctrines but a way of life. I hope this book will be, more than intellectual nourishment, one that takes us closer to Christ through the Apostolic and Orthodox faith.

It was during a Sunday School Conference that St. Thomas Orthodox Church, Ghaziabad, hosted that Rev. Fr. Saji Abraham suggested bringing out a book answering the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). In this book, I have tried to present the topic as simply and vividly as possible – though some of the concepts may seem unpalatable in the first reading. May God bless the young readers to be illumined to become witness of the Lord Jesus Christ, living for His glory.

My heartfelt thanks to His Grace Job Mar Philoxenos, the Diocesan Metropolitan, and Rev. Fr. Saji Abraham, Director, Sunday School Association, for their constant encouragement and support. No less important is the editorial assistance work rendered by my office Staff Mr. Shiju Daniel and Mrs. Uma Devi. May God bless them! dedicate this book for the Glory of His Name and Kingdom.

Ghaziabad  
Fr. P.A. Philip  
15.08.07





## INTRODUCTION

Questions and more questions, yet no answers! This was the predicament of the teenage believers of the Orthodox Christian Diaspora. Considering the danger of wrong answers to the right questions leading young minds astray, our Church think-tanks decided to adopt a pro-active strategy, the result of which is in your hands – HOLY FATHERS AND YOU.

OSSAE- Delhi Diocese plans to bridge the gap between the need-to-know-to-believe and the supply of faith material, initially in printed form and later in digital form. The teaching and edification ministry is as important as any other ministry of the Church. This book is a compilation of the frequently asked questions (FAQ) at the last few Orthodox Christian Conferences and the thoughtful and studied answers by the author.

Let me acknowledge the dynamic vision and fatherly guidance of our beloved Thirumeni, His Grace Job Mar Philoxenos, whose concern for the Diaspora is behind the formation of OSSAE and her maiden book, HOLY FATHERS AND YOU. May the Lord grant His Grace longevity and good health. Rev. Fr. P.A Philip has done a monumental work, which will be read, quoted and remembered for the best part of the 21st century. I am indeed indebted to Rev Fr. (Dr) Reji Mathews and Rev. Fr. M.C Paulose, who have been the source of inspiration in publishing this book.

More than anything else, it is the prayers and the sacrifices of some of our dedicated members, Sunday School Inspectors and Headmasters that shaped this project. I am grateful to Mr. Sunny Thomas; a name well-known in the National media, is the brain behind the editing and other technical content of this book. I do sincerely appreciate his painstaking effort and I expect that, in future too, he will sustain and continue this venture and produce substantial works for the benefit of our youngsters.

Mr. Deji Paulose, Mr. P C Mathai and Kochummen Thomas who made this book happen. I am indebted to the sponsors who would like to be anonymous. May God bless them and their families.

I submit this book in the name of the Triune God, with the intercession of St. Mary, Mother of God, and of all our Patron Saints.

Feast of the Assumption of St.Mary  
August 15, 2007

Fr. Saji Abraham  
(Director; OSSAE Delhi Diocese)





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OSSAE Delhi Diocese has a vision and a mission. The vision is a Spirit-filled Church, walking in the path of the Apostles and Church Fathers who set an example for us to follow. Our mission is to empower the Diaspora, create young men and women of great faith and great accomplishments - like Daniel, David, Moses, Joseph and Hannah, Esther, Ruth and St. Mary.

Great lives begin with great faith, and faith comes by hearing (reading) the word of God (Romans 10: 17).

Faith grows in the family, and through Holy Communion. Our mission is to bring out a series of books and videos to edify our young people so that they grow in wisdom and stature.





## **PART - I**

### **FAITH AND PRACTICES OF THE CHURCH**

#### **(1) What is the Church?**

The Church is a community of disciples living in obedience to the teachings of the Lord, a community envisioned, enlightened and empowered by the Lord. The Church is the Body of Christ, denoting an organic relationship between each believer and the Lord - an organizational relationship, one can sever at will. Metaphorically, the Church is the Bride of Christ, denoting loyalty and purity.

#### **(2) Why should the Church meddle in the life of the Christian?**

The Son of God came into this world for the salvation of mankind through the transformation of the individual. Born into a society, man grows into his fullness through interactions with people. The Church is a society of transformed individuals - or at least it ought to be. And it has a dual role to play: work for the transformation of the individual and work for the transformation of the society itself. Therefore, the Church is the spring of transformation where the individual lives and grows. To call it meddling is a terminological inexactitude.

#### **(3) Is the individual significant in the Church?**

Every human soul is precious in the sight of his Maker. Every great movement in history is started by an individual. Martyrs, missionaries, scholars, musicians and artists who have enriched





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the life of the community are individuals striving for excellence. Individuals are the “living stones” in the edifice of the spiritual temple (1 Peter 2:5).

#### **(4) What is faith?**

In that glorious chapter on faith, the writer of Hebrews says, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). Two aspects emerge from this: it is an attitude and a statement. It is an attitude of trusting God fully, like a little child trusting his/her mother without a question (Mathew 18:3, 19:14, Mark 10:15, and Luke 13:17). Faith is a statement as well - like the Creed - to dispel any shadow of doubt.

#### **(5) Why do we need faith?**

Born at a certain time-frame in history, man lives a transient life in this world and fades out. Man is not the master of his destiny and longs for guidance which he seeks and gets from God. And when he departs from this world, he hopes to be with God who alone is eternal. Thus faith gives man a foundation in this world and in the world to come.

#### **(6) Is ‘faith in God’ the same as ‘faith of the Church’?**

‘Faith in God’ is the nucleus of the ‘faith of the Church’ which embraces matters other than God. It regulates life and worship of the Church, individually and collectively, for the glory of God. ‘Faith in God’ could be Christian or secular, depending on where you find it - within and without the Church.





**(7) Are we saved by faith or works? Does James contradict Paul doctrinally?**

The seeming contradiction arises from a verbal fallacy. James and Paul use 'faith' and 'justification' but with different meanings.

- 4 'Faith' for James means an intellectual belief in the existence of God (2: 14, 17 & 19). That kind of faith even the demons have! James was the leader of the Messianic church in Jerusalem and uses terms in the same way the non-Messianic Jews in Jerusalem would do. The Pharisees and rabbis in Jerusalem spoke of the assertion of monotheism and the mere intellectual assent to orthodox teaching as "having faith." Does this kind of faith save people? NO! Intellectual faith does NOT save anyone.

The kind of 'faith' Paul talks about is 'absolute trust and total dependence' on God; "...and being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised" (Romans 4: 21). This is more than just intellectual faith! The difference is one of believing that a parachute could save you, and actually jumping out of a plane and pulling the ripcord.

- 4 'Justified' is the other word both have used to convey different perspectives. Paul uses it as being justified in God's sight (Romans 5:1), while James uses it as being justified before men (James 2:18). "Don't tell me that you have faith, show me!" James demands.





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James takes the example of Abraham's offering of Isaac (Genesis 22) and says Abraham's action was proof before men, of his righteousness: "Was not Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?" (James 2:21). But James is quick to add that Abraham was made righteous before God some 30 years before this event: "Abraham believed God and his faith was credited to him as righteousness" (James 2:23 & Genesis 15:6).

The contradiction disappears when one realises that Paul is talking about justification before God while James is talking about justification before men.

#### **(8) What is the Trinitarian doctrine?**

We begin our worship and prayers thus: "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit", ascribing the right glory to the Holy Trinity. This shows we call on God as the eternal Father and with Him the eternal Son and the eternal Spirit.

#### **(9) How do we confess God as the Holy Trinity?**

We confess that God is Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

#### **(10) Since God is one, does it mean the one God has three names?**

No, we mean that the one God is eternally Father, who has with Him eternally the Son and the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Father is the eternally perfect God, who has with him the





Son who is eternally born of Him, and the Holy Spirit who comes forth eternally from Him. Each of them is indeed perfect God, and the reality by which He is God, namely Godhead, is the same. Therefore, God is one, and the same is also three.

**(11) If they are three persons, are they not also three Gods?**

The question is legitimate when we follow human logic. For us three persons are three separate individuals. But perceiving God through logic is impossible. God is the reason and ground of all existence and existents; He is not one of the existents that constitute the universe. So for talking of God, our language and logic should be different. Accordingly, we affirm that God, the ground of all existence, is one, and that the same God is also three. He is at once Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**(12) What other inference can we draw from the affirmation that God is triune?**

The three eternal persons have the same Godhead, the same authority, the same will, the same operation, and the same nature. In other words, the divine authority of the Son and the Holy Spirit is the same as that of the Father. They will and act in the same divine energy.

**(13) What is the Orthodox Church?**

Coined in the 4th century, Orthodox is a compound of two Greek words, Ortho (right) and Doxa (glory) meaning giving the 'Right Glory' to God. Orthos doxadzein was a Greek expression for rightly glorifying through the right doxologia, "Glory be to the





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Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit". The Arian heretics had changed this doxology to suit their heresy - i.e., only the Father is God, and the Son and the Holy Spirit are merely creatures. The Arians thus changed the Doxology into "Glory be to the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit".

The Orthodox denotes 'Right Worship', and originated as a term to describe the Apostolic and Universal Church, which had nothing to do with heretical sects like Arianism and Montanism. The cornerstone of the Orthodox Church is Lord Jesus Christ, incarnate as a human being and testified by the Apostolic witnesses. The Orthodox Churches deny authority of one national Church over other national Churches. And the Orthodox Churches unanimous reject the claim of the Pope that Rome has authority over other Churches except those in West Europe which were historically under it.

#### **(14) What is so special about the Orthodox Church?**

The Orthodox worship is unique, heavenly and beautiful. It employs captivating icons or holy pictures, melodious singing, sweet-smelling incense, and majestic services to move the faithful to worship and adore God, fully aware that man is a union matter and soul. If the visible beauty is dazzling, her unseen beauty is even more dazzling; for the Church is the Bride of Christ.

#### **In Spirit and Truth**

The Orthodox worship knits together praise and teaching. Pay close attention to the liturgies and prayers, and you can learn







the cardinal teachings and experience the richness of her spirituality.

The worship service traces its origins back to the Old Testament times when the Hebrews had a treasury of scripture readings, prayers and hymns, which were later enriched by canons by saints down the ages.

Easter, the Feast of Feasts, is the pinnacle of events in the Orthodox calendar. The Church shines in the radiant glory of the risen Christ during this season. Clouds of fragrant incense accompany prayers heavenward; choirs and bells declare the triumph of Life over death, while the faithful greet one another with the holy kiss of peace amid the greeting, "Christ is risen!" The altar doors are left open all the days of that week to show that the gates of Paradise are opened by Christ for us sinners to enter.

### **Sacred Tradition**

In an unbroken stream, the grace of the Holy Spirit which descended on the Apostles at Pentecost comes down to us through His anointed, the High Priests and Priests. Thus the sacred tradition carries the spiritual life of the Church since the Apostolic times. It includes the unwritten acts and teachings of the Lord as well as His disciples. (John 21:25, II Thessalonians 2:15, 3:6). Through them, we are in touch with the spiritual life of all the preceding generations.





## **Orthodox Faith and Sacraments**

**We worship God in Trinity**, glorifying the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit alike. We believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, begotten before all ages, and is of essence the same as the Father. We believe Christ incarnate is truly man - and the only one who knew no sin. We worship the Holy Spirit as Lord and Life-giver who proceeds from the Father.

**We honour and venerate the Saints** and ask of their intercession before God. Of the saints, Mother Mary holds a special place, "more honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious than the Seraphim".

**Baptism and Chrismation** are the two sacraments leading to the saving grace of the Church. Baptism by triple immersion washes away our sins and restores the original image of Adam. With Chrismation, we receive the Holy Spirit, becoming partakers of the fullness of Christ.

**Sacraments of Confession and the Holy Eucharist** enable us to partake of the true Body and Blood of Christ in the form of bread and wine, for the remission of sins, the healing of body and soul, and for Life eternal. Confession is the fourth in the order of sacraments. In confession, Christ gives us - through our confession father - forgiveness of sins, provided our repentance is genuine.

Ordination, Marriage, and Holy Unction complete the sacramental mysteries of the Church. By the laying-on of hands, a High Priest transmits divine grace to the one being ordained, linking him to the grace that descended on the Apostles at





Pentecost. Divine grace sanctifies the union of the bride and the groom in matrimony. (Orthodox Priests are usually married but High Priests come from the monastic tradition). The sacrament of Holy Unction heals infirmities of the body and soul.

### Church Symbols

Almost everything you see in an Orthodox church symbolises some aspect of the Divinity.

**An Open Church:** Traditionally, the Orthodox churches have no pews or chairs. We stand and worship in reverence and humility before God. The absence of rigid pews gives us freedom to move about in the church and feel at home. We are free to venerate icons and lighted candles, as well as to bow at certain times during the worship.

**Candles:** Candles burn on the altar, signifying the light of Truth given by the Lord - the light that illumines all life and spread radiance across the world. Candles also symbolise our soul's burning love of God and the spiritual joy and triumph of the Church. Burning symbolises sacrifice. It burns and becomes less and less. The principle of self-emptying is also seen in the candles.

**The Sanctuary:** Raised above the nave - where people stand - the sanctuary is the Holy of Holies where the Holy Eucharist is celebrated. The altar at the centre of the sanctuary is known as the Holy Throne, because the Lord God Himself is present on it.





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**Icons:** Holy pictures draw instant attention and open the beholder's eyes to certain spiritual truths. They are the silent preachers on the wall, inspiring the seekers of Truth to a higher level of awareness. The icons are an integral part of the Orthodox worship. Derived from the Greek word 'eikon', which means likeness or image, icons of Christ and His saints and martyrs have profoundly influenced the life and worship of the community.

Because the Word became flesh, it is possible to portray the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ. At first glance, the icons may seem austere and strange because they reflect not the natural beauty of the material world but the spiritual beauty of the Kingdom. Icons are venerated, not worshipped. Free from the carnal and sentimental style of the Western religious art, a true icon is painted after much fasting and prayer and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Icons remain an ageless window into the spiritual realm; and as you keep gazing, you begin to realise the true beauty and order of all things, visible and invisible.

#### **(15) How did different Churches originate?**

The Church was founded by Jesus Christ himself, as a divine institution (St. Matthew 16:18). Simon Peter's confession that Jesus is the Son of God is the cornerstone of faith upon which the Church is built. Even in Apostolic times, heresies began to appear, so much so that St. Paul had to warn the churches in such terse terms: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel that is different from the one we preached to you, may he be condemned to hell" (Galatians 1:





8). The Orthodox Churches accepted the Apostolic teachings and preserved them for posterity.

From the very beginning, local churches were independent. The first three ecumenical synods codified the faith and practices of the Church refuting the teachings of the heretics. A controversy sprang up at the council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) on how the divine nature and human nature of Jesus Christ were united. Among the Churches that accepted the decisions of the Chalcedon council were the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches like the Greek Orthodox Church and Churches of the Byzantine tradition.

The Churches that did not agree with the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon are known as the Oriental Orthodox Churches. They are:

1. The Antiochian or Syrian Orthodox Church
2. The Armenian Orthodox Church
3. The Coptic or Egyptian Orthodox Church
4. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church
5. The Malankara Orthodox Church

With the expansion of the Roman Empire, the Catholic Church claimed authority over other Churches, which they rejected. In A.D. 1054, as a result of the disagreement over the authority of the Roman Bishop, the Church split into two: Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. The Roman Catholic Church eventually added certain new doctrines and practices in the Church.





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The Reformation of the 16th century questioned the practices of the Roman Catholic Church and new churches began to come up in different countries, known as the Protestant churches. Later, splinter groups like Pentecostals emerged, based on individual interpretation of the Bible. All of them reject the Apostolic faith.

#### **(16) What are the main differences between the Churches?**

The Malankara Orthodox Church is in communion with other Oriental Orthodox Churches - the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Armenian Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. We have close relationship with the Eastern Orthodox Churches of the Byzantine tradition - like the Greek Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Rumanian Orthodox Church. Theologians have come to a consensus regarding the Christological controversies between these Churches. So the faith of the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches is the same.

The Orthodox Church and the Protestant churches differ mainly on the concept of the 'Church'. To the Protestants and sectarian groups, the Church is the fellowship of the living people only, but to the Orthodox Church, the Church is the communion of believers, both the living and the departed. In these days of ecumenism, we have better relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. But the areas of disagreement continue.

#### **(17) What are the differences between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches?**

a. Regarding the place of St. Peter





According to the Catholic Church, St. Peter is the foundation stone of the Church. Therefore, Peter has authority over the whole Church.

The Orthodox Churches believe the authority is given to all Apostles who are called by Jesus - not to just one Apostle (Ephesians 2:20). The teaching of the Orthodox Churches regarding the foundation stone (Matthew 16:18) and the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:19) are synoptically given below:

a) The Foundation Stone:

1. Christ is the real Rock: "...the Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4).
2. Peter declared the faith of the Apostles; and the rock is their faith, upon which the Church is built.
3. Peter believed and confessed his faith, signifying the Church is built up of true believers, who are the rock.

b) The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven:

The Keys represent the authority to bind and loose or to forgive sins (Matthew 16:19). Jesus gave the authority 'to bind and loose' to all disciples (Matthew 18:18; John 20:23)

**b. Regarding the position of the Bishop of Rome**

The Catholic Church teaches that the Bishop of Rome is the ambassador of Christ, the head of the whole visible church of





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Peter, and is the symbol of unity of the Church. It teaches not only that the Pope has the supreme authority but also that he is infallible.

The Orthodox Churches teach that all Priests are ambassadors of Christ, and that Peter does not have any special authority over the Church. Because all Apostles are equal as far as priestly rights are concerned, there is no need for a visible head for the whole church except Christ, and that the Holy Synods are the symbol of unity of the visible Church. They affirm that the supreme authority of Peter and the infallibility of the Pope are not in line with Christian principles.

#### **c. Divine and human natures in Christ**

In accordance with the Chalcedon Council, the Catholic Church gives emphasis to the separate divine and human natures in Jesus Christ. The Oriental Orthodox Churches, rejecting the decision of the Chalcedon Council, teach the unity of the divine-human nature in Jesus Christ.

#### **d. Number of Universal Synods**

The Roman Catholic Church recognises 21 Universal Synods while the Oriental Orthodox Churches recognise only the first three synods of Nicea, Constantinople and Ephesus.

#### **e. Addition of Filioque clause**

The Catholic Church altered the Nicene Creed regarding the Holy Spirit (Filioque) by adding proceeding "from the Son also", which the Orthodox Churches reject.







**f. Immaculate conception of St. Mary**

The Catholic Church teaches that Virgin Mary was born sinless. The Orthodox Churches believe that Christ died for humanity, including St. Mary. And she was made holy for the incarnation of the Son of God, with the annunciation of Gabriel.

**g. Transubstantiation**

The Catholic Church teaches the dogma of Transubstantiation, which means the Bread and Wine in the Holy Eucharist undergoes a change of substance literally into the Body and Blood of Christ, without change of appearance. The Orthodox Churches believe in the real presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, without change of substance. The Orthodox dogma is called Consubstantiation.

**(18) What are the main differences between the Orthodox and Protestant Churches?**

1. The Protestant churches believe that the Bible with its 66 books is the basis of Christian faith leading to salvation. The Orthodox Churches believe the Bible (New Testament) is born within the Church and its rich tradition.
2. Most of the Protestant groups oppose child baptism while the Orthodox Churches had been practising it since Apostolic times.
3. The Reformed groups do not accept the Holy Eucharist, prayer for the departed, intercession of saints,





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confession before Priests, all of which are integral to the Orthodox faith.

4. The Orthodox Churches are governed by the Episcopal Synod, whereas the Reformed groups are administered in their own way.
5. While the Orthodox Churches call Virgin Mary 'the Mother of God' to denote that Child Jesus is God Incarnate, the Protestant groups avoid the term.
6. For the Protestants, the Church is a fellowship of the living; but for the Orthodox Christians, the Church comprises the living and the departed in Christ.

**(19) Why is our Church called the Malankara Orthodox Church? And why some people call us Jacobites?**

On coming to India, St. Thomas the Apostle built the first church in Malankara, which is now synonymous with Kerala. Hence the ancient Church in India came to be known as the Malankara Orthodox Church.

At a time of religious persecution, Jacob Bardeaus (died in 578 A.D) took upon himself the task of ordaining Priests and Deacons to strengthen the Eastern Church in the Non-Chalcedonian faith. So the Roman Catholic Church nick-named the Eastern Church as the Jacobite Church, implying it was a new Church started by Jacob Bardeaus. The name somehow got stuck and the Orthodox Christians were at one time called the Jacobites.





**(20) What is the Indian (Malankara) Orthodox Church?**

The Indian (Malankara) Orthodox Church is part of the historic St. Thomas Church, which seeks to maintain the Eastern Orthodox identity within the Indian context.

**(21) What is the fundamental character of Eastern Christianity?**

Eastern Christianity strives to maintain the tradition it inherited from the East Mediterranean world through its contacts with Churches of Persia and Syria.

**(22) How does the Eastern Christian character impact the Church administration?**

Eastern Christianity does not promote the idea of an administrative unity for world Churches. But it does maintain the unity of faith within different cultural and geographical areas. Administratively, Eastern Churches are autocephalous and some autonomous as well.

**(23) What do the words 'autocephalous' and 'autonomous' mean?**

An autocephalous Church is a self-governing Church under the leadership of its ecclesiastical head, say the Patriarch or the Catholicos, or even the Archbishop or the Metropolitan. Derived from Greek, 'autocephalous' means having its own head, while 'autonomous' means having its own laws or individuality and selfhood. An autonomous Church is therefore both self-governing and independent in worship and traditions.





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During the early centuries, the Church spread in the Mediterranean and West Asian region. And the Christian communities evolved its own form of worship and practices in tune with the cultural and social setting of the region. In this way, there emerged differing traditions in Egypt, Syria, Rome, Persia, Greece, Armenia, Ethiopia, and so on. The Churches in these areas thus evolved into autonomous Christian communities.

**(24) Were all autonomous Churches autocephalous and vice-versa?**

Not all autonomous Churches were autocephalous; and not all autocephalous Churches, autonomous. The Church of Ethiopia was autonomous from its early history; it had its own form of worship and practices, but it became autocephalous by having its own Patriarch only in the last century. On the other hand, there are the Churches of Russia, Rumania, Bulgaria and Greece that are autocephalous with its own ecclesiastical head. But they are not autonomous, because they adopted lock, stock and barrel the Byzantine form of worship and practices.

**(25) What is the status of our Church - autonomous, autocephalous or both?**

With an Apostolic foundation, our Church should have been autonomous as well as autocephalous. But the vicissitudes of our history made us dependent on Apostolic Churches abroad. But with the establishment of the Catholicate in 1912, our Church became autocephalous. But we are not yet an autonomous Church since we follow the Antiochene Syrian form of worship and practices.





**(26) Should we strive to be autonomous, changing the pattern of worship?**

This is an issue that the Episcopal Synod and the Malankara Orthodox Church at large should address. But we need to understand that the worship we have adopted from the Syrian Church was created before the 13th century in a culture and society very different from ours. If we apply our mind, we will be able to produce our own worship relevant to the Indian context and in Indian languages.

**(27) How come the teaching concerning Jesus Christ led to divisions in the Church?**

Understanding and explaining who Jesus Christ is, was the most formidable task of the early Church. The fact that Christ was God the Son who became incarnate was settled more or less in an acceptable way during the 4th century. The councils of Nicea in 325 and Constantinople in 381 took landmark decisions in this regard. Then in the 5th century, the question how the incarnation was to be affirmed came up for discussion at the councils of Ephesus in 431 and Chalcedon in 451. By then the Church had developed three distinct traditions - of Alexandria, of Antioch and of Rome. The three could not agree, which led to two divisions and three ecclesiastical groupings.

**(28) What are these groupings?**

The groupings are: (i) The Church tradition that respects the teaching of the Antiochene Theological School represented by Nestorius; (ii) The teaching of Church fathers who belong to the Alexandrine Theological School opposing the council of





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Chalcedon; and (iii) The tradition built up on the doctrine of the Council of Chalcedon.

**(29) How do these ecclesiastical groupings define their doctrine?**

The first group insists that in Jesus Christ God the Son and Jesus the man remain united; though one person, the duality between God the Son and Jesus the man is preserved in a way that the title 'Mother of God' with reference to Mary is not affirmed. The Second group emphasizes the unity of Christ; composed of the two natures of Godhead and manhood, there is no confusion or division. Mary is indeed 'the Mother of God'. The third group maintains that Jesus Christ is one person made known in the two natures of Godhead and manhood. The expression 'the Mother of God' with reference to Mary is accepted.

**(30) Why should I pray?**

Here are some reasons for prayer:

- ▶ Because God, our Creator and King, commands us to pray (Romans 12:12, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:17).
- ▶ Because Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship; relationship requires communication, just as the son talks to the father (Exodus 33:11, Matthew 6:9, Hebrews 4:15-16).
- ▶ Because we are weak and helpless (Psalm 54, Matthew 7:7-12, Philippians 4:6, James 5:13).





- ▶ Because we are sinners and need a changed heart (Psalm 51:10, Luke 18:9-14, James 5:16, Jude 20).
- ▶ Because other people need God, and we pray for them (Job 42:7-9, Luke 6:27-28, Colossians 1:9-12, 4:3).

(31) The Orthodox prayers seem never ending. Are we not contradicting what Jesus taught: "But when praying, do not say the same thing over and over again"? (Matthew. 6:7 - 6:15)

In The Art of Prayer St. Theophan the Recluse - a Bishop in the 19th century Russia - reiterates the teaching of early Church fathers about three kinds of prayer: (1) Lips Prayer, (2) Mind Prayer, and (3) Heart's Prayer.

(1) Lips Prayer is simply repeating the words of prayer, and is empty in itself. Prayer of this nature is likely to damage the soul because he who prays this way thinks he is praying and hence deceives himself.

(2) Mind Prayer is the second stage, and the Church fathers call it 'Attention Prayer'. When we say the prayer mentally, the mind is wholly involved. Prayer of this kind gives understanding and meaning, and is beneficial but not yet perfect.

(3) The heart, according to the Church fathers, is the seat of the soul and of all emotions. We are created with a dual nature - body and soul. The mind is the "lowest" part of the soul and the spirit (heart), the highest part. The perfect prayer must involve our whole being - the body, mind and spirit (heart). The true purpose of prayer is transformation of the soul, which





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is a gift of God. The Heart's Prayer aims at becoming Christ-like, our soul recast in the image and likeness of God.

#### **(32) Why do we pray facing the East?**

It is a strong tradition since the Apostolic times and it has biblical foundation: "For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (St. Matthew 24:27).

In its prayers, the Church awaits the Second Coming from the east. During the birth of Jesus, signs were seen in the east (St. Matthew 2:2). "...the Sun of justice shall arise from the east" (Malachi 4:2). The glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east (Ezekiel 43:4). The gate facing the east shall be opened during worship (Ezekiel. 46:12).

There are references in the Apostolic Constitution, Martyrdom of Polycarp and other patristic writings about the Church in the early days praying facing the east.

#### **(33) What is the principle underlying our prayer?**

We begin our prayer with the kauma. It is offered in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The praises and prayers of the kauma that follow immediately are addressed to Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son. They end with barekmor, which in Syriac means 'Lord bless', but it is also the cue for the Chief Celebrant to begin the Lord's Prayer, which is addressed to the Father.







Thus we begin by ascribing true glory to the triune God, and praise the incarnate Son who disclosed God's love on the cross, and then sum it up with the Lord's Prayer.

**(34) What about 'Hail Mary' which follows the Lord's Prayer?**

'Hail Mary' was not part of the kauma even in the 13th century when Gregory Bar Hebraeus lived and wrote. He includes the kauma in no less than three of his books. 'Hail Mary' is not included anywhere. Obviously, this prayer was added in later centuries.

Mary in fact represents the human reality. While worshipping the triune God, Mary is remembered as a member of the human family, whom God the Son chose to be his vehicle for the incarnation. While seeking her intercessory prayers, we express our solidarity with her in the human family.

**(35) Are we expected to say 'Hail Mary' whenever we pray the kauma?**

The practice in the Antiochene Syrian Church, from which we have adopted our worship and prayers, is to say 'Hail Mary' only once, at the close of the prayer.

**(36) What is the significance of offering incense during worship?**

The incense is the symbol of heavenly worship. "And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne; and the smoke





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of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God" (Revelation. 8: 3 & 4).

The incense was used in the Old Testament worship as well. "...at every place incense is offered to my name" (Malachi 1:11).

"And Moses said to Aaron, Take your censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and lay incense on it, and carry it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them" (Numbers 16: 46-50). Here the incense is offered to get rid off the plague. The incense also removes the foul smell of sin.

"Let my prayer be counted as incense" (Psalm. 141: 2).

"...having the golden altar of incense" (Hebrews 9: 4).

"...golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints" (Revelation 5: 8).

".. they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh (Matthew 2: 11).

"..spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense... this altar of incense" (Exodus 35: 8 & 28).

"..the frankincense is to be put..." (Nehemiah 13: 5 & 9).

"..oil and perfume make the heart glad" (Proverbs 27: 9).

"..put burnt fragrant incense upon it (Exodus 40: 26 & 27).

".. dedicate it to him for the burning of incense" (II Chronicle 2: 4).

".. Solomon offered the incense in the temple of God" (I Kings 9: 25).

"..it is the place to burn incense before God" (II Chronicle 2: 6).





**(37) Is the Bible sufficient by itself? How do you explain the doctrine sola scriptura?**

To answer this question, I would like to introduce you to Saint Vincent of Lerins, who lived in the fifth century. Listen to his counsel on how to determine the true doctrine:

“I have often earnestly approached learned and holy men who knew Christian doctrine, asking how I can distinguish the truth of the catholic (universal) faith from the falsehood of heresy. In almost every instance, they have told me that if I, or anyone else, want to detect heresy, avoid the traps set by heretics, and maintain the true faith, I must with the help of the Lord reinforce my own belief in two things:

- 1) The authority of the Holy Scriptures, and
- 2) The tradition of the Church.

At this point, you might wish to ask, “Since the canon of Scripture is complete and more than sufficient, what need is there to join the authority of the Church’s interpretation to it?” Good question. Because of the depth of the Scriptures, they are interpreted differently by different people. Sometimes it may seem there are as many interpretations as there are interpreters! Because of the intricacies of the heresies and flawed doctrines, we must formulate our understanding of the Apostles and the Prophets in harmony with the standard ecclesiastical and orthodox interpretation (The Commentaries, Chapter 2, paraphrased by Fr. Jack N. Sparks).





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Saint Vincent's work assumes significance because it perfectly summarizes the need for tradition in times prior to his own. It was because of the countless heresies seeking to pervert the Scriptures that the Holy Tradition became so important!

#### **Early Scriptural Heresies**

Even from the first century when Apostolic witnesses were alive, heresies began to appear in the Church. And to understand these heresies is to understand the need for the Holy Tradition.

In the first century, the Cerinthians taught that the world was formed out of pre-existent matter, possibly by angels. Jesus began His life as a mere man; the divine power descended upon Him at His baptism, and left Him before the crucifixion.

Also in the first century, the Ebionites taught that Jesus was only the son of Joseph and Mary. The Holy Spirit came upon Him at, but not prior to, His baptism.

In the second century, the Gnostics came into prominence. They taught a wide array of philosophical and pseudo-Christian doctrines, saying, among other things, that there was a distinction between the God who created matter, and the supreme and unknowable Divine Being. The world was therefore imperfect and unspiritual. True knowledge of God could only be obtained through mystical 'gnosis' or knowledge.

Also in the second century, the Marcionites taught that the God of the Old Testament was different from the God of the New Testament. Jesus, who did not really have a physical human body, came to over-throw this cruel god of law and violence.





In the third century, the Novatians taught that the human soul was pre-existent, and that Jesus' soul was united to Jesus the Word some time before His incarnation.

Also in the third century, Sabellius taught that the Godhead did not consist of three distinct Persons but there was only a succession of modes or operations of one Person.

In the fourth century, the infamous Arius taught that the Son was not equal to or of the same substance as the Father.

What a mess! And what we saw is only a small portion of the early heresies. Then there are groups who chose what books belonged to their Bible - from the Old Testament and the New Testament. They all have one thing in common. Just like the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses of our time, they claim that their teachings are truly scriptural!

### **Setting the Record Straight**

None of the Church Fathers who fought heresies believed the Bible needed additions. But the heretics were sugar-coating their poison with the word of God that might deceive the immature Christian. In the words of Saint Vincent, the heretics sprinkle the perfume of heavenly language upon their doctrines, because they are "quite aware that the evil smell of their doctrines will never be accepted if their nasty vapors are released undisguised". There had to be some way to distinguish the truth from error in those formative years of the Church. The one thing that would not work is to let everyone interpret the Bible one's own way!





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The standard yard-stick of the early Church was the baptismal creed taught to catechumens. It was crafted in simple, concise words for instant understanding, like the Apostle's Creed whose roots go back to the second century. That way the Church protected young believers who had come to the knowledge of the salvation of Christ. Baptismal creed contains the essentials of the Apostolic teaching and hence it promoted the right understanding of the Scriptures.

Church Fathers like Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hilary of Poitiers, Athanasius, and Basil the Great have enlightened us on scriptural interpretation. For someone born after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, whose only experience of biblical interpretation is the din and uproar of conflicting opinions, these studies have come as a sweet oasis in the midst of a parched desert. It is a great joy to find that godly men agree on the essentials of interpretation.

These men were heroes of faith but never thought the Bible should be interpreted in isolation and apart from the faith of the Church. But that is what the heretics do. The early Christians understood the Bible in the context of the Church and the community of believers - both the living and the departed, who believed, taught, and worshiped in accordance with what the Apostles had taught as received from the Lord Himself. For early Christians, faith interpreted Scripture.

#### **(38) What are traditions and why are they important?**

Traditions are the faith and practices handed down through generations verbally and in writing. In the following passages we find how traditions were followed in the early Church.





“So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thessalonians. 2: 15).

“...you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the traditions that you received from us” (2 Thessalonians 3: 6).

We are bound to hold fast the traditions transferred to us through the Church by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostles, the Church Father and the Councils of the Church.

Now let us see the importance of traditions in the formation of the faith of the Church.

The Church came first and then the oral and written traditions. The Bible is part of the written tradition.

The Church is the pillar and foundation of Truth, as St Paul says: “But if I am delayed, this letter will let you know how we should conduct ourselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Timothy. 3: 15).

St. Paul does not say scripture is the only pillar of Truth. The Church considers the Bible as the touch-stone of Christian faith. The books of the New Testament were written during 55-125 A.D., but even before that the messages of the New Testament became part of the oral tradition.





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Christ neither wrote a book, nor commanded the Apostles to write one. The Lord himself and the Apostles used Moses and the Prophets, as the Old Testament was referred to. Then came the written traditions, emerging from the memory notes of the Apostles, and the faith of the Christian community, explaining the scriptures, forms of worship and solutions to problems in the Church. The traditions were both oral and written. And unique among the traditions was the New Testament, as St. John illustrates: “. . . that which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us” (1 John 1: 3).

#### **(39) Why Scripture alone cannot be the basis of Christian faith?**

1. The Bible contains things vital for salvation but is not complete in itself, as St. John points out: “But there are also many other things which Jesus did: were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John. 21: 25).

“I have got many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” (John. 16: 12 & 13).

2. Everything the Lord said was not written. Therefore, we are obliged to obey the teachings of the Apostles







and their disciples, and pay heed to the traditions built around them.

3. St. Paul says, "About the other things I will give directions when I come" (1 Corinthians 11: 34). These directions are the unwritten tradition.
4. "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4: 9). So not only what is written but also what is heard and seen assumes significance.
5. The 'heard' things gravitate into life models.

"...And what you have heard from me before many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (II Timothy. 2: 2).

"Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (II Timothy. 1: 13).

"Therefore we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it" (Hebrews. 2: 1).

6. "I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink; I hope to see you (Gaus) soon, and we will talk together face to face" (III John. 1: 13). Such talks are not recorded in the Bible, but can be seen in the Church in which Gaus practised the same.





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7. "And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea" (Colossians 4: 16). But this letter to Laodicea is believed to be lost. So the Church has the authority to interpret the Bible, in the light of the traditions.

**(40) What is the relevance of the Old Testament? Should a Christian follow it?**

- (1) Jesus came not to abolish the Law and Prophets, but to fulfil, as the Lord expressly says, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matthew. 5: 17).
- (2) Both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, the same God as well as a chosen people are mentioned. "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation..." (1 Peter 2: 9).
- (3) "...and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation..." (Exodus 19: 6).
- (4) Jesus learned the Old Testament as we see in the gospel: "...And it came to pass, and after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions" (Luke. 2: 46).
- (5) Jesus taught the Old Testament: "...he began to say unto them. This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth..." (Luke. 4: 16-22).





The Law of Moses was fulfilled in Jesus: “ and he said unto them, these are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me” (Luke.24: 44).

- (7) Jesus quoted from the Old Testament: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Psalm 22: 1). This was the prayer on the cross (Mark 15: 34).
- (8) The sacred book of the early Church was the Old Testament.
- (9) The Psalms and other Old Testament books were used for worship as well as for spiritual nourishment.
- (10) The Old Testament carries seeds of the New Testament ideas: New Israel, Second Adam, Messiah, New Commandment.
- (11) God speaks in the Old Testament: “God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets ...” (Hebrews 1: 1).

**(41) If God is Omnipresent, why should I go to the Church?**

God commanded Moses to make a Tabernacle to worship Him: “And have them make a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them. In accordance with all that I show you concerning this pattern of the Tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it” (Exodus 25: 8 & 9).

Solomon built the Temple of Jerusalem on the same model as the Tabernacle (I Kings 6). “...I have consecrated this house which you have built. Put My name there forever,





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and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually" (I Kings 9:3).

The presence of God can be experienced in four different ways:

1. **Universal Presence:** The presence of God is in the whole universe, both visible and invisible.
2. **Promised Presence:** "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matthew 18: 20).
3. **Dedicatory Presence:** The dedicatory presence of God is seen on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19), in the Tabernacle (Exodus 35), and in the Temple of Jerusalem (I Kings 8). The Church obtains this dedicatory presence through the anointing of the Holy Mooron during the consecration of the Church, which has the Old Testament precedent of Jacob anointing the pillar in Bethel.
4. **Eucharistic presence:** The Church obtains the redemptive presence of God through the Holy Qurbana where God transforms the Bread and Wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

These four types of presence cannot be experienced at home or in a prayer hall. It is something unique to the Church. Therefore, attending the worship service on a Sunday is mandatory.

(42) If God is Omniscient (all knowing), He knows all my needs even before I ask Him. Then is not pray redundant? Does prayer change God's will in anyway? And can prayer change my future?





The Bible assures us that "...your Father knows what you need before you ask Him (St. Matthew 6: 8) But God wants us to know what is good for others and for us - and shun evil. God wants us to desire and yearn deeply what is good for others and for us. Prayer is therefore the training of will to desire the good of all - and turning our will to the spring of all goodness, namely God.

By prayer we become God-like, because communion with God transforms us.

Prayer is not about changing the will of God or the mind of God. In fact, prayer is submitting ourselves to the will of God. The change occurs in our will and mind; that is why a man of prayer is never disappointed. Through prayer, he conditions his mind to accept the will of God. Our heavenly Father, ever loving and merciful, always wills for us what is good, which at times may be difficult to understand.

Prayer is not a monologue or a one-way traffic. It is, in fact, a dynamic dialogue; when you speak, God listens, and God speaks to your heart. Listening to what God has to say is important in prayer. And the perfect model of prayer is the one at Gethsemane. Even under unspeakable agony, Jesus submits to the will of his Father: "Not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26: 39).

In prayer, God should come first, others second, and us third. The Lord's Prayer is the perfect model: His name, His kingdom, His will first. We pray that God's purposes may be established in the lives of all the people; that evil may be banished from





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the earth; that all men may live in peace with justice. Then we ask for our daily bread, for forgiveness, and for protection from evil. The first person singular (I, me) is missing in the Lord's Prayer. We ask all things for 'us' - for all men.

**(43) Does God change His mind? We read so in the Book of Jonah.**

"And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of [or changed his mind concerning] the evil, that He had said He would do unto them; and He did it not" (Jonah 3:10). We get a similar impression from other passages (Genesis 6:7, Exodus 32:14, I Samuel 15:11, Psalm 106:45, Hosea 11:8, Joel 2:13).

Some critics parade this as Scriptural contradiction, reading with statements like, "I am the Lord, I change not" (Malachi 3: 6) or other passages like James 1: 17 or 1 Samuel 15: 29. This contradiction is not real, only apparent. In logic this is called a fallacy of equivocation, i.e. using a word which has two different meanings.

God's character never changes, but His dealing with people does change. In the Book of Jonah, God's character has not changed (Jonah 3:10); He is still the same holy and righteous God that He was before Jonah's preaching. But when the Ninevites changed, God's dealing with them must change; He decided not to punish them. What changed was the people's attitude, not God's standards or His nature.





When a man bicycling against the wind suddenly turns around, it may seem that the wind has changed its direction, although it is blowing just the same way.

**(44) Why should a loving God make man knowing that he would reject God and invite eternal damnation?**

God is sovereign and unquestionable. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55: 8 & 9). God is unique and cannot be compared to anyone, and hence He tells Moses 'I am who I am' (Exodus 3: 14). God is infinite wisdom, infinite love, infinite mercy, and we mortals cannot fathom His wisdom. But the problem with New Agers and pagans is that they try to create a god that is manageable, predictable, controllable, and intellectually graspable.

**When Paul was asked this question, he replied:**

"But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, 'Why have you made me like this?' Does not the potter have power over the clay from the same lump to make one vessel for honour and another for dishonour?"

"What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?" (Romans 9: 20-24).





**Paul gives three answers to this question:**

1. God is the Creator, who can do what He wants with His creations, just as the potter does with his creations.
2. Those who are not chosen for salvation serve a purpose, i.e. to demonstrate God's wrath and make His power known (v. 22). It probably may not sit well with humanists who see themselves as central to the universe.
3. And those who are not chosen were created to make the riches of God's glory known to those to whom He is merciful, i.e. those of us who are being saved by His mercy. Mercy is illustrated by contrast.

**(45) What is sin?**

The Greek word for sin (Hamartia) means 'to miss the mark'. The Syriac word (hthoho) for sin means 'to err'. Together they convey the two dimensions of sin. Since we fail to reflect the glory of God - because we fail to do His will - we miss the mark. Since our thoughts, our words and our deeds defy the character of God and violate the well-being of our fellow beings, we err. In both ways, we sin.

**(46) Why do we fall into sin at all?**

The root of all sin is pride, manifested in self-centredness, selfishness and self-assertion. Every creature is endowed with the basic instinct for self-preservation. This leads to man's search for sufficiency - in wealth, status, pleasure and so on. In itself, this is not sinful. But man tries to gain his end by ignoring the divine dimension and neglecting his fellow beings. In total disregard of God and His plans, and whether others







obtain a due share of the good things of life, man seeks everything for himself and his family. This selfishness gives birth to sin.

**(47) Is not violation of commandments sin?**

Commandments are given to man to inculcate the love of God and the love of fellow human beings (Matthew 22: 35-40). Commandments are not the ends (goal) but the means (way) to developing a Christian character that expresses itself spontaneously in loving God and loving fellow human beings.

**(48) What is God's attitude to man's sin?**

Sin is violation of God's plan of life for man. God hates sin but loves the sinner. In His supreme love, God seeks to liberate man from the evil that causes him to sin.

**(49) What is evil?**

The story of Adam and Eve has the clue. The allurements to sin, which led to evil, suffering and death, results from the misdirected use of the divinely given faculties in us - in the realm of thought, word and deed.

**(50) How is it that created by God, we express ourselves in misdirected ways?**

As created beings, we have two distinct characteristics. On the one hand, we are ever dependent on the Creator and on our fellow beings for our existence and growth. On the other





hand, we tend to assert the gift of our autonomy to the neglect of our fellow beings and the Creator himself.

**(51) Does this mean creature-hood implies evil?**

God created everything good as we see in the opening chapter of Genesis. But man alone has such high rational powers that it leads him to either recognising his dependence on God or to assert himself even against the Creator. But the pride of man tends to seek his own independence in total disregard of God or his fellow beings.

**(52) Is this not tantamount to saying God has failed in the creation of man?**

God has great plans for humanity which He will unfold in the fullness of time. God will always accomplish what He sets out to accomplish because He is God. "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55: 11). Delay because of man's failure will not halt God's great plans.

**(53) When Did Satan Fall from Heaven?**

It happened before the fatal temptation of Adam and Eve. The Bible calls Satan the first sinner (I John 3:8), because of his "moral fall". Satan tempted Adam and Eve and turned them against God as he himself had fallen.

Satan still had access to God's throne in heaven and appearances with the other angels (Job 1: 6-12, 2: 1-7). It is clear that





Satan has no authority in heaven, but he can accuse the brethren (Revelation 12: 10). Satan, of course, has authority on the earth (Matthew 4: 8 & 9, Ephesians 2: 2, 6: 12, I John 5: 19).

The fall of Satan is not geographical; 'Falling from heaven' is a Near Eastern phrase to convey someone suffered a defeat. In non-Biblical literature, it is used to describe the fall of gods from power, or 'falling from grace'.

All the four passages that mention the fall of Satan are symbolic, and cannot be taken literally. The four passages are:

- ▶ Revelation 12:7-13
- ▶ Luke 10:17-24
- ▶ Isaiah 14:12-17
- ▶ Ezekiel 28:11-19

Let us examine these passages one by one.

#### **Revelation:**

The woman spoken of is assumed to be St. Mary, who gave birth to the Messiah, the one who is to "rule the nations with a rod of iron" (Psalm 2:9, Revelation 2:27, 19:15).

If John intended this prophecy chronologically, then the war in heaven (vv. 7-8) occurs sometime between the birth and ascension of Christ (vv. 5-6) and before the Second Coming (v. 12). Either the war in heaven occurs because of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ; or it occurs sometime between AD 30 and now; or it will occur sometime between now and the Second Coming.





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Taking any prophecy chronologically is always iffy, unless the prophecy clearly says so. George Ladd in his commentary on Revelation observes:

*Here John employs apocalyptic mythological language to describe a spiritual fact. We misunderstand the character of John's thought if we try to place this heavenly battle somewhere in the stream of time. John is only concerned with the fact that Satan is defeated.... The reference to Satan being 'hurled down' is only meant to describe Satan's actions against God's people losing their force. We are not to think of any actual change of domicile.*

#### **Luke**

Luke records Jesus' words: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). Commentators have often tried to decide when in Jesus' thought this fall occurred. In this passage, the fall of Satan is connected to the return of his disciples from a short-term mission journey. The disciples were able to cast out demons. This sounds similar to the verse in Revelation: "They overcame Satan by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony" (Revelation 12:11). The shed blood of Christ (The death of Jesus on the cross) and his resurrection are the means of victory over Satan. The secondary means of course is the actions of his disciples. This passage, too, does not refer to any particular change of residence for Satan, but is symbolic to show the enemy is humbled and defeated by the actions of the Apostles. This fits in neatly with the Old Testament language regarding the fall of nations and kings.





## Isaiah

Some people believe Isaiah is giving a graphic description of the fall of Satan (Isaiah 14:12-15). But the passage clearly applies to the king of Babylon. I really don't see any legitimate reason to see Satan in the passage. It is the king of Babylon who suffers defeat and humiliation.

## Ezekiel

This is a prophecy concerning the king of Tyre (Ezekiel 28: 2 & 12). But the prophecy seems to go beyond the king of Tyre, because of the symbolic language. Ezekiel calls the king "a guardian cherub" and refers to Eden. What does this mean? Is this a veiled reference to Satan behind the king of Tyre?

The imagery keeps shifting. Some of it could refer to Satan, but some could also refer to Adam in Eden, "clothed only with precious stones around you, blameless until wickedness was found in you"). And there are also symbols that seem to refer to the high priest of Israel (9 stones that are mentioned are among the 12 worn by the Jewish high priest, ordained to guard God's holy mountain, Jerusalem).

Whoever is being referred to was "driven from the mount of God (Jerusalem), expelled from among the fiery stones, and thrown to the earth." Is the language just meant symbolically of the king of Tyre or is it a reference to some fall of Satan behind the king of Tyre?





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Honestly, the passage is not clear. We can see Satan behind the king of Tyre, but all of the imagery do not fit Satan (“...through your widespread trade, you sinned”: v. 16). Furthermore, you are still left with the question, when did this fall happen? Is this a third fall of Satan? If it is a fall of Satan, when was he driven from Jerusalem? (v. 16)

**Therefore, we conclude:**

The passages in Isaiah and Ezekiel have nothing to do with Satan.

- ▶ The reference to Satan’s fall is symbolic, describing some terrible humiliation and defeat.
- ▶ Based on that there have been a number of “falls” for Satan: the moral fall before Eve’s temptation, Jesus’ disciples on their mission journey, the death of Christ on the cross, the testimony of martyred saints.

**Now for certainties (not just my opinion):**

- ▶ Jesus defeated Satan and all spiritual forces of evil on the cross (Colossians 2:14-15).
- ▶ The testimony and work of Christians is helping to defeat Satan (Revelation 12:11).
- ▶ Satan’s ability to accuse us before God has been (or will be) limited (Revelation 12:10).
- ▶ Satan will finally be defeated and his destiny is in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10, Matthew 25:41).





#### (54) Why do we observe Sunday as the Lord's Day?

From early first century, the first day of the week was observed as the day for 'breaking the bread' and for collection of freewill offerings (Acts 20: 7 and 1 Corinthians 16: 2). In the Book of Revelation, St. John calls the first day of the week, the 'Lord's Day' (1:10). In the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr describes how on Sunday all town and country Christians assembled for instructions in holy writings, for prayer, distribution of bread and wine, and the collection of alms. Tertullian declared that the Christians "made Sunday a day of joy, but for other reasons that to adore the sun which was not part of their religion. Emperor Constantine (d. 337), a convert to Christianity, introduced the first civil legislation concerning Sunday in 321, when he decreed that all work should cease on Sunday, except that farmers could work if necessary. This law, aimed at providing time for worship, was followed later in the same century and in subsequent centuries by further restrictions on Sunday activities.

AD 90-120, THE DIDACHE: "But on the Lord's own [day] assemble and break bread, and give thanks, first confessing your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one that is at variance with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned" (Didache, also called The Teaching of the Apostles, 14).

- ▶ AD 74-132, EPISTLE OF BARNABAS: "Moreover God says to the Jews, 'Your new moons and Sabbaths cannot endure.' You see how he says, 'The present Sabbaths are not acceptable to me, but the Sabbath which I have made in which, when I have rested from all things, I





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will make the beginning of the eighth day which is the beginning of another world.' Wherefore we Christians keep the eighth day for joy, on which also Jesus arose from the dead and when he appeared ascended into heaven" (The Letter of Barnabas, 15:6-8).

- ▶ AD 150, EPISTLE OF THE APOSTLES: "I [Christ] have come into being on the eighth day which is the Day of the Lord" (Epistle of the Apostles, 18).
- ▶ AD 150, JUSTIN MARTYR: "And on the day called Sunday, there is a gathering together in the same place of all who live in a city or a rural district. (There follows an account of a Christian worship service, which is quoted in VII.2.) We all make our assembly in common on the day of the Sun, since it is the first day, on which God changed the darkness and matter and made the world, and Jesus Christ our Savior arose from the dead on the same day" (First Apology of Justin, 1, 67:1-3, 7).
- ▶ AD 150, JUSTIN MARTYR: "But Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly, because it is the first day of the week and Jesus our savior on the same day rose from the dead" (First Apology of Justin, Ch 68).
- ▶ AD 200, TERTULLIAN: "We solemnise the day after Saturday in contradistinction to those who call this day their Sabbath" (Tertullian's Apology, Ch 16).
- ▶ AD 220, ORIGEN: "On Sunday none of the actions of the world should be done. If then, you abstain from all the works of this world and keep yourselves free for spiritual things, go to church, listen to the readings and divine homilies, meditate on heavenly things" (Homil. 23 in Numeros 4, PG 12:749).







- ▶ AD 225, THE DIDASCALIA: “The Apostles further appointed: On the first day of the week let there be service, and the reading of the Holy Scriptures, and the oblation, because on the first day of the week our Lord rose from the place of the dead, and on the first day of the week he arose upon the world, and on the first day of the week he ascended up to heaven, and on the first day of the week he will appear at last with the angels of heaven” (Didascalía 2).
- ▶ AD 250, CYPRIAN: “The eighth day that is the first day after the Sabbath, and the Lord’s Day” (Epistle 58, Sec 4).
- ▶ AD 345, ATHANASIUS: “The Sabbath was the end of the first Creation, the Lord’s Day was the beginning of the second, in which he renewed and restored the old in the same way as he prescribed that they should formerly observe the Sabbath as a memorial of the end of the first things, so we honor the Lord’s Day as being the memorial of the new Creation” (On Sabbath and Circumcision 3).
- ▶ AD 350, CYRIL OF JERUSALEM: “Fall not away either into the sect of the Samaritans or into Judaism, for Jesus Christ has henceforth ransomed you. Stand aloof from all observance of Sabbaths and from calling any indifferent meats common or unclean” (Catechetical Lectures 4:37).
- ▶ AD 400, THE APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS: “And since He was crucified on the day of the Preparation, and rose again at break of day on the Lord’s Day, the scripture was fulfilled which saith, ‘Arise, O God; judge the earth: for Thou shalt have an inheritance in all the nations’ ” (Apostolic Constitutions, Book 5, Chapter 19) .





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- ▶ “Every Lord’s Day, hold your solemn assemblies, and rejoice: for he will be guilty of sin who fasts on the Lord’s Day, being the day of the resurrection...” (Apostolic Constitutions, Book 5, Chapter 20)

**(55) Are the days in Genesis Chapter 1 literally 24-hour days?**

The Hebrew word for day (yom ) is used the same way we use it in English to mean a time span of 24 hours. But then it is also used in the figurative sense as in the days of Pontius Pilate or in the days of the Nazis, to indicate a time period. The Bible uses the word in this sense in the “day of the Lord,” or “King Solomon’s day”.

**The arguments for a literal day are:**

1. It is the most natural and common meaning of the word.
2. The repetition of the phrase, “So the evening and the morning were the first day ...the second day... the third day...the sixth day” (1: 5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31), certainly shows a literal day is intended (The Jewish day begins with the dusk).
3. The age of Adam is given in Genesis 5:3 & 5. But if the sixth day (when he was created) and the seventh day (when God rested) were geological ages, all calculations of his age will go awry.
4. In Exodus 20:8-11, God interprets the days of the Creation Week as being normal 24-hour days.
5. The genre of the Genesis passage is historic narrative, not poetry. And Jesus’ reference to Genesis 1 & 2 shows he viewed it as historic (Matthew 19:4-5 and Mark 10:6-8).





But there are some who take it as geological age. St. Augustine believed it was a period rather than a 24-hour day. Many conservative scholars hold on to this view. (I suspect this is an attempt to harmonise science and the Bible).

**(56) Where does the New Testament say that offerings should go to the local church?**

In Malachi 3:10, God says that He wants the tithe brought to the 'storehouse'. The nearest equivalent to the 'storehouse' would be the local church.

The Scriptural reference in the New Testament comes in Acts 4:34-37 and I Corinthians 16:1-4. The passage in Acts tells us that offerings were brought and "placed at the Apostles' feet" and then distributed by the Church as a body. The passage in Corinthians tells us about a collection being gathered for believers in Jerusalem. The Corinthians were told to bring their offerings on each Sunday to their meeting place, so that when Paul arrived he would not have to wait for everyone's collection. The New Testament pattern seems consistent with the Old Testament one, where offerings were brought to a central location and then decisions made collectively or by the ecclesiastical authority on how to distribute them.

**(57) Is the celebration of Christmas a pagan ritual?**

There is no command in the Bible to celebrate Jesus' birthday. And there is nothing in the Bible even to slightly suggest that Jesus was born on December 25.





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But it just happened that in the Roman Empire December 25 was a pagan holiday linked to mystery religions. While the pagans celebrated their festival, the Christians did not want to participate in that. So they said, *“While everybody else is celebrating this pagan thing, we’re going to have our own celebration. We’re going to celebrate the thing that’s most important in our lives, the incarnation of God, the birth of Jesus Christ. So this is going to be a time of joyous festivities, of celebration and worship of our God and King”* (Opinion of Theologian R.C. Sproul)

I can’t think of anything more pleasing to Christ than the Church celebrating his birthday every year. Keep in mind that the principle of annual festivals and celebrations is deeply rooted in ancient Jewish tradition. In the Old Testament, for example, there were times when God commanded the people to remember certain events with annual celebrations. While the New Testament does not require that we celebrate Christmas every year, I certainly see nothing wrong with the Church’s entering into this joyous time of celebrating the Incarnation, which is the dividing point of human history. Originally, the celebration of Christmas by the Christians was intended to honor - not Mithras or any other cults but - the birth of our King.

#### **(58) What is Salvation?**

In one of the celebrated books of the Bible, the Romans, St. Paul explains the concept of Salvation. “...while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son”. The word ‘reconciliation’ becomes almost synonymous with Salvation. When we were estranged from the holiness of God





because of our sin, the death of Christ has effected a reconciliation. Christ accepted rejection by the human race, and proclaimed on the cross God's forgiveness. To be reconciled to God is Salvation, which enables us to realise peace with God and with our fellow beings.

Salvation is redemption from sin, and growth to perfection in the image of God. According to the Bible, Salvation involves the past, the present and the future.

As a Christian, my answer is: "I am saved, I am being saved and I will be saved." The following verses will illustrate the point:

1. Past: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).
2. Present: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God" (I Corinthians 1:18). Also Acts. 2:47
3. Future: "So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him, He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Hebrews 9:28). Also see Mark. 13:13.

#### **(59) Is Jesus your personal Savior?**

We come across people who say, "I was taught to think of Jesus as my personal savior". The Protestants believe salvation is a personal ('me alone') experience, and the Church is the collection of individuals who are saved. But the Orthodox Church teaches that Salvation is not individual but corporate - the





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whole Church is saved together and apart from the Church there is no salvation. The conversion experience as a 'saving act' is not part of the Orthodox faith; rather this conversion experience through baptism is only the door into the saving ark of the Church. Jesus by His death and resurrection defeated sin, death and the devil, and unlocked the door to Paradise, closed to fallen man and guarded by cherubim with a flaming sword. Salvation is all about following Christ into Paradise.

The emphasis on individuality in Western culture, especially American, is the anti-thesis of Christianity, and stems from a blurred view of the Church. The Reformation theologians were compelled out of the exigencies of time to justify Salvation apart from the Church. The Church is the Bride of Christ, and if we are part of the Church following Christ, then we are saved. But if we are straying out, we have jumped out of the ark.

#### **(60) What does it mean to ask in Jesus' name?**

Jesus says, "Ask whatever you desire in my name and I will give it to you". The phrase 'in my name' is vastly misunderstood. The Protestants end their prayer 'in Jesus' name' while the Orthodox Christians conclude by ascribing glory and honour to the Holy Trinity.

"In Jesus' name" is ambassador language. It implies that (1) I have a relationship with Jesus; (2) I am acting as His representative on His behalf, and (3) that what I am asking for is truly Jesus' desire (1 John 5:14). If these things are true, then God will grant the request. That's a promise.





We make many requests to God in prayer, which are legitimate, and God grants them. But some of our requests do not meet the three criteria, and therefore are not requests made 'in Jesus' name'.

**(61) Where did Jesus go between His death and resurrection?**

Jesus told the penitent thief, "Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). So the question is, "Where is Paradise?"

**(62) Where is Paradise?**

The Jewish idea of Paradise is speculative. Some say it is located in the distant East; some believe it is on the perimeter of the earth; others identify it with the third heaven. Some rabbis see it as a compartment of Hades, where all the dead go; yet others consider it the happy side of Sheol, where the righteous tarry. A few look upon it as a VVIP lounge for Enoch and Elijah and the like.

**Key Passages**

Biblical passages throwing light on the subject are:

- ▶ Concerning Old Testament saints: 1 Samuel 28:3, 13-15; Luke 16:19-31.
- ▶ Concerning Jesus' activities: Luke 23:43, 46; Acts 2:24; John 20:17; I Peter 3:18-19.
- ▶ Scripture equates Paradise with Third Heaven: II Corinthians 12:2,4; Revelation 2:7.





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- ▶ Scripture taken out of context: Ephesians 4:8-10, 1 Peter 4:6.

**Two Acceptable Views:**

1. Paradise is Third Heaven, where God's throne is. When Jesus committed His spirit to the Father (Luke 23:46), His spirit ascended to His Father. On Easter Sunday, Jesus' spirit was reunited with His body in resurrection - just as ours will be.

I Peter 3:18-19 should be interpreted as the spirit of Jesus preaching to the wicked people of Noah's generation before the flood, who in Peter's day were in Hades ('prison').

2. Paradise was a compartment in Hades where all the dead went before the resurrection of Christ. The wicked went to a place of torment (Luke 16:22 & 23). The righteous went to 'Paradise', also called 'Abraham's Bosom' (Luke 16:22), where they were conscious and were "comforted" (Luke 16:25). According to this view, when Jesus died His spirit went to the place where the righteous were in Hades.

Why did Jesus visit Hades? To proclaim His victory to disobedient "spirits in prison," human or demonic (I Peter 3:18-22). He did this, staying in the precincts of Paradise. At some point - either at the death of Jesus (Matthew 27:50-53), or the resurrection of Jesus, or the ascension of Jesus - Abraham's Bosom was emptied







and all the Old Testament saints were led into Heaven. Heaven is now the new location of Paradise (II Corinthians 12: 2 & 4; Revelation 2: 7). After taking away the righteous into Heaven, there is only one area of Hades left, the place of torment. The unrighteous dead await final judgment in Hades, when Hades will be cast into the 'lake of fire' or hell (Revelation 20: 14).

According to this view, the meaning of the phrase "He descended into hell" is that while His body was still in a tomb, His spirit literally descended into Hades.

Both views agree that Heaven and Paradise are now the same place and this is where the souls of dying believers enter to be with Christ (II Corinthians 5: 6-8, Philippians 1: 23-24).

### **(63) Why do we pray for the dead?**

The Body of Christ consists of the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant, the former comprising the living and the latter, the departed - both alive in Christ. The Church Militant is the fighting Church, battling Satan and his fallen angels right on earth. The Church Triumphant has finished the race as its members have entered their eternal rest.

We have the assurance that "those who depart from this life in faith will remain with Christ" (Philippians 1:23). We pray for them the same way we pray for the living. Resurrection has demolished the barriers between the living and the dead. And we pray the same prayer for the living and the dead: "Lord,





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have mercy!" The departed need forgiveness of sin and a 'place of rest' in the bosom of Christ; so we make petitions to God for these.

The Protestants teach that judgment immediately follows death, determining the eternal state of the soul. The Orthodox Church believes this judgment only determines the state and 'residence' of the soul in the spiritual world. This is a judgment based on your spiritual propensities - whether you enjoy the company of saints or sinners, whether you look to angels or demons, whether you act like Christ or Satan, or whether you belong to the kingdom of God or outside?

Do not confuse this judgment with the Last Judgment when souls are reunited with the body and God will judge every human being. Those who have the spark of grace will be brought into the Kingdom and others thrown into the outer darkness eternally. So when we pray for the departed - pending the final judgment, we simply lift them up to God calling out for His mercy.

#### **(64) What is the sacrament of Confession?**

Confession is the sacrament of penitence. At Baptism, we - our godfather or godmother on our behalf - have taken a vow to abandon Satan and his works and to accept Christ and his ways. This means we are called upon to lead a life of faith, keeping to the ideals of honesty, dependability, purity and nobility - in thought, word and deed. Through such a life, we will be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. However, the fact remains that this goal is seldom reached, tempted as we are to





seek our own private good to the neglect of the good of others, or to lead a life of unhealthy pleasure to the neglect of fulfilling our duties. In the face of this reality, the Church provides for the sacrament of penitence to help us in our moral and spiritual growth.

**(65) How shall we benefit from confession?**

This is not a difficult task to perform. First of all, we must have a sense of responsibility regarding ourselves. Holding to it, we should examine ourselves periodically and see whether we do really fulfil it. Whenever we realise that we fall short of the mark, we should ask for divine help to better ourselves. Repenting of our sins in thought, word and deed, we confess and receive absolution from God, through the Priest.

**(66) Do we need a Priest for confession?**

Our Lord gave the Apostles the authority to forgive sins, and the Apostles to the High Priests and Priests. "Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:18).

"And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit, if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven, if you retain the sins of any they are retained' " (John. 20:22 & 23).

To receive forgiveness of sin, we must confess. Confession is a process of repentance and admission of sins committed, with a





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pledge not to commit them again. The confession is a sacrament of giving absolution by a Priest. Confession is always a prayer before God in the presence of a human witness as illustrated in the Bible. For example, Achan was asked to confess his sins before God not hiding it from Joshua (Joshua 7: 19).

King David confessed his sins to Prophet Nathan, the servant of Jehovah, and Nathan conveyed to King David the absolution of his sins by God. "And David said unto Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord'. And Nathan said unto David, 'The Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shall not die' " (II Samuel 12:13).

**The salient features of Confession are:**

- ▶ It is a process of turning away from evil ways to God.

"Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?' " (Ezekiel 33: 11).

- ▶ It is the experience of a penitent admitting with a contrite heart to God that he or she sinned against God.

"Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest" (Psalm 51: 4).

Achan confessed his sins to Prophet Joshua.





“ And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him, and tell me now what thou hast done, hide it not from me” (Joshua 7: 19). It is also an opportunity to get counsel from the Priest. The Bible says one should consult the Priest to learn from him.

“For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts” (Malachi 2: 7). Through confession, the Priest is enabled to pray for the penitent more meaningfully.

- ▶ The Priest has by Apostolic succession the authority to absolve sins.

“Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained” (John 20: 23).

- ▶ Priests are the ambassadors of God making people reconcile to God.

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (II Corinthians 5: 20).

Christ had asked the lepers whom he cured to show themselves to the Priests. Christ had respected the Priests.





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“And when he saw them, he said unto them, go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed” (Luke 17: 14).

- ▶ Confession is also a promise that the penitent undertakes to strive to keep off sin.

Priests are under oath not to disclose confessions. Priests can be the best of counselors, being men of God and a sacramental presence in the society.

**(67) Can't we obtain absolution directly from God?**

The Church does not deny that. What it does is to provide a sacrament as a concrete means, whereby its members may receive the consolation which they need. If we use this provision, we shall find it to be spiritually and psychologically edifying, getting rid of the guilt feeling in the most efficient manner.

**(68) Is Confession a pre-requisite for receiving the Holy Communion?**

There is a lot of misunderstanding on this point. The truth of the matter is that Confession is not thought of as a pre-requisite to partaking in the Holy Communion. What is important is that we should examine ourselves - sanctify our inner tabernacle - before receiving the Holy Communion.





**(69) Should confession be loud?**

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1: 9).

The question is, ‘Are we to speak aloud our confession?’

The Greek word for confession (Homologia) suggests a public admission of truth. “Unless you confess the Son of man, neither will He confess you before the Father and His angels” (Matthew 10: 32) and (Romans 10: 9). In secular literature, the word was used to confess to a crime, or admit guilt in a court of law. Vine’s Expository Dictionary defines it as “to speak...” and “to declare openly...”

Perhaps even more important is the Old Testament pattern of Sin Offering (Leviticus 4: 1-13; 6: 24-30; 8: 14-17; 16: 3-22) and Trespass Offering (Leviticus 5:14 - 6:7; 7: 1-6) which were used to atone for specific transgressions. A bull, goat or ram was brought to the Priest. The worshipper laid his two hands on the head of the animal (signifying that his sin was transferred to the animal) and then confessed his sin to the Priest. The confession would be something like this one found in the Mishnah: “O Lord, I have committed iniquity, transgressed, and sinned before you, I and my house. O Lord, forgive the iniquities, transgressions, and sins, which I have done by committing iniquity, transgression, and sin before you, I and my house. As it is written in the Torah of Moses, ‘For on this day shall atonement be made for you to clean you. From all your sins shall you be clean before the Lord (Leviticus. 16: 30).’ Following this public confession, the Priest then sacrificed the animal.





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This idea of verbal confession continues in the New Testament where we are told to “confess our sins to one another” (James 5: 16).

I think the pattern is pretty clear that confessions ought to be made to someone. This creates a humble, confessing community living in the grace of God.

**(70) Should there be a special priesthood in the Church when all believers are priests?**

Priesthood is of two kinds: general priesthood and special priesthood. “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” (I Peter 2: 9). The verse talks of general priesthood. But, to act as the representative of Jesus Christ, special commission from the Lord is necessary. The authority to celebrate the Holy Eucharist was given only to the selected 12, who by Apostolic succession passed it on to the High Priests and Priests.

The Apostles are given special grace to forgive sins (John 20: 23). We find that special gifts are given for special ministry. “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing...?” (1 Corinthians. 12: 29 & 30).

The Church expects the relationship between Jesus Christ and his disciples replicated between the Priests and other members of the congregation.







**(71) Does the Bible forbid calling Priests and High Priests fathers?**

“And do not call anyone on earth father, for you have one Father, and He is in heaven” (Matthew 23: 9). Of course, the Lord said this but in the light of the cravings of Pharisees and Sadducees for glory forgetting the Father in heaven. It is a comment on their hypocrisy rather than a blanket ban on the use of the word.

St. Paul understood it rightly when he wrote, “For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers” (I Corinthians 4: 15). We see that Paul himself claims to be their spiritual father. Also Paul speaks of Timothy as his “true child in faith” (I Timothy 1:2).

Hence it is right to call Priests and High Priests ‘fathers’, especially because this term reminds them of their fatherly duties.

**(72) Why do Priests wear black?**

Over the centuries, Church clerics were required to wear distinctive garb to identify them as ordained clergy. In the early Church, no distinctive garb seems to have been worn, except of course liturgical vestments, which in some cases were also worn outside the celebration of sacraments. For instance, sometimes Bishops and Priests wore the chasuble like regular clothing, as did the Deacons with the dalmatic.





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For over four centuries, Priests wore the same clothes as ordinary people. The tunics were normal clothes. When it was fashionable to wear shorter robes, some priests kept tunics, and thus they stood out from other people. The Synod of Braga, A.D. 572, ordered Priests to wear different clothes when they went out. The tradition of wearing cassocks was established over a very long period. In those times, men used to wear robes, especially the gentry liked wearing long dresses: the zupan (a long coat lined with cloth of gold) and the kontusz (an overcoat with split sleeves) and belts. The clerical clothing was established in the 17th and the 18th centuries. The colour of the cassock was connected with the hierarchy of clergy, which has remained up till now: the Pope wears a white cassock, cardinals wear red (scarlet) ones, bishops wear amaranth red ones and Priests wear black ones.

The Council of Braga in Portugal (572) was one of the first such synods to mandate that clergy wear a tunic reaching to the feet. Responding to reports of laxity in Britain, Pope John VIII (c. 875) admonished the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to ensure that their clergy wore proper attire, particularly long tunics.

In the middle Ages, the dress of clergy began to be regulated by canon law with other specific regulations passed by local synods. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) decreed that clerics must wear garments closed in front and free from extravagance.

At the turn of the 15th and the 16th centuries, there was a custom of wearing robes called 'rvrend' (the word derives from Romance languages). Around this time, the cassock became





the distinct garb of the clergy alone. It was given the French name soutane (derived from Medieval Latin/Early Italian sottana, which means beneath, referring to the fur linings). The English-speaking people adopted the word cassock, derived from early French casaque.

The color black indicates poverty. Moreover, black is a color of mourning and death for the Priest, the symbolism is dying to oneself to rise and serve the Lord as well as giving witness of the Kingdom yet to come. Black is associated with sorrow but in the case of priestly robe this colour has another symbolic meaning. A black cassock is to remind a Priest that he 'dies to the world' every day and immerses in eternity. Blackness also symbolises giving up bright colours and thus giving up what the world brings, its glittering, honours and entertainment.

Further, the colour black is the symbol of authority. A judge sitting on the judgment chamber wears black. An advocate who pleads in the court wears black robe. In the same manner, wearing the black robes during the services is a mark of the spiritual authority of Priests.

In our very secular world, the wearing of clerical garb continues to be a visible sign of belief and of the consecration of one's life to the service of the Lord and His Church.

### **(73) Why do our Priests wear caps (Thoppi)?**

The Orthodox Priests wear caps which sometimes is a distinguishing mark for the Priests. In fact, there is no clear spiritual meaning or theology for caps. During the Holy Qurbana,





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when the Priests put on various parts of the vestments, there are prayers associated with each. There are special prayers when the Priest puts on the ceremonial sandals but no prayer is said when the cap is put on.

Further, during the Holy Ordination service of the Priests, there is no specific prayer or spiritual direction when the cap is given to the Priests. All these suggest that the cap is not a part of the holy vestments of Orthodox Priests. In pre-Diamber era (before 1599) we do not find any evidence of the Priests wearing caps. The minutes of the synod of Diamber suggest that instead of caps, the Priests had "Kudummi" (locks of hair) like the Brahmin Priest. In the post-Diamber era also there is no clear instruction regarding the Thoppi. The Priests in Malankara were instructed to wear the Thoppi only after the process of Syrianisation began here. As the cap is part of the apparel of a Syrian Priest, the Syrians introduced it in our Church too. In many of the Orthodox Churches, Priests have no caps. There is more tradition than theology in the matter of wearing Thoppi. As it was part of the dress of the Syrian Priest, we also adopted it.

#### **(74) Why do we worship the Cross? Is it not idol worship?**

We never worship the Cross, we venerate it. Veneration is not idol worship because we do not worship the object. When we venerate the Cross, we actually venerate the sacrifice of our Lord on the Cross by which we are redeemed. Christ used the Cross as a weapon for our salvation. Those who love Christ will love the Cross.





**The Bible holds the Cross in high esteem.**

- 1) Jesus Christ signifies the Cross as his emblem. "He who does not take the cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10: 38).  
"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23).
- 2) St. Paul exalts the Cross: "Our glory is on the cross of the Lord (Galatians 6:14)  
The cross of Christ is God's power for us. (1 Corinthians 1: 17)  
The end of the enemies of the cross is decay (Phil 3:18).
- 3) We read the indirect reference of Cross in the Old Testament. Ephraem and Manasse were blessed by hands put as Cross (Genesis 48: 13 &14).

The Cross is used as a banner of Peace, Victory and Reconciliation. The word 'sleebo' (syriac for Cross) means "the crucified one". So when we venerate the sleebo, we venerate the one who died on the Cross.



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## PART - II

### SOCIAL ISSUES AND THE CHURCH

#### (1) Why not women priests and women high priests?

The Orthodox Churches do not ordain women as priests or high priests. But some modern theologians who seek to sound trendy and intellectual raise this issue at every ecclesiastical form. Certain Western materialistic churches averted a vertical split by ordaining women as priests. The Orthodox community does not get distracted by faddisms of this kind because it runs counter to Holy Tradition.

A story in the background of the Russian Revolution is so revealing. The communists were determined to wipe out religion, the 'opium of the masses', from the face of the earth. So the clergy were forbidden to evangelise or teach children religion and were ordered to confine themselves to the four walls of the church. The Patriarch of Moscow was summoned by the communist bass and asked, "What will the Church do after the last grandmother dies?" The Patriarch confidently replied, "There will be another generation of grandmothers to take their place". That was a bold reply indeed but has turned prophetic. The grandmothers of Russia today were either children or not even born when these words were spoken!

Great was the ministry of the grandmothers who extended the priestly ministry of handing over the faith to the younger generations. St. Paul speaks of the diverse ministries of the Church. While the ordained priesthood is essential, other





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ministries are equally important in extending the priestly ministry of Our Lord.

To be a Priest of the Orthodox Church is neither a 'right' nor a 'privilege'. Orthodox Priests do not belong to a privileged upper class or an upper caste. And not even a degree from a reputed theological seminary guarantees ordination. We believe it is God who chooses His Priests. Jesus called men to be Apostles to face the rough and tumble of the world and even to pay the price of martyrdom, while women were part of His extended ministry.

The clergy do not stand above the people of God but they stand in their midst, just as Christ stands in the midst of His people. Those who carry out essential ministries without being ordained also stand in the midst of God's people, for the ministries they pursue in the name of Our Lord also share in His work. The image of the Church is one in which the entire people of God work and worship together, "with one mind" and in harmony - building up one another and striving to achieve unity rather than planting divisions.

It is interesting to note that this controversy is a recent one with roots outside the Orthodox Church. While it surely warrants a thorough study and discussion and dialogue, especially on the role of deaconesses in the early Church, we need not go overboard. The question why the issue failed to surface all these 1,950 years after Christ should silence the harebrained theologians who make much ado about nothing.







**(2) What is the problem with inter-caste and interfaith marriages?**

While the secular marriage is a contract between the bride and the groom, the Orthodox marriage is a sacrament. It is the great mystery of two becoming one in Christ; and a sacrament is meant for the Church members only. St. Peter reminds Christians about their unique calling thus: says "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous Light" (I Peter 2:9).

It is incompatible for a Christian boy - a member of a chosen race and special people - to seek a non-Christian girl or vice-versa. A Christian marriage is possible only between two believers, as St Paul reminds us, "Do not be equally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?" (II Corinthians. 6:14).

There is another reason: a family in the Christian perspective is a miniature of heaven on earth. The unity in family is to a large measure depends on the faith and practices of the partners. There is so much truth in the adage that 'A family that prays together stays together'. Praying together is a near impossibility in a mixed marriage. At a time when marriages of identical cultures of boys and girls are on the rocks, the chances of couples of diverse faith and practices living in peace and harmony are bleak. In case a marriage of such kind is to be





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solemnised in the Church, the non-Christian partner has to first believe in Christ and be baptized.

**(3) What is wrong with live-in relationship?**

Living together as man and woman is, as a matter of fact, a family. It is in the family that children are born, brought up, taught value systems, and turned into respectable citizens of the country and, above all, members of the family of God. In man and woman is vested this great responsibility by God. And matrimony is the means that the Church sanctions for people to work out this divine plan.

In the Orthodox marriage rite, the wedding ring is blessed and given to the bride and the groom by the Church. There is no exchange of rings since marriage is not a contract but a sacrament. Together the bride and the groom makes a covenant with God, and the Church enthrones them as King and Queen to live a holy and happily life in a family. This is expressed in all its spiritual beauty in the 'Crowning' service. Since live-in relationship breaks the God-given sanctity of marriage, it is unethical, immoral and hence not acceptable.

**(4) Is it sin to date? How far should I go in dating? How far is too far?**

Dating is aping the West, which is the graveyard of all value systems. It is a dangerous trend that jeopardises the institution of marriage and weakens the concept of family. Immature teenagers' dating culminates in tasting the 'forbidden apple'.





Promiscuity in an unbridled ambience leads to violation of Commandments.

Many students ask: How far should I go on a date? My first response is that the very concept of dating is incompatible with the Indian culture and Christian traditions. If at all you date, here are some principles to go by:

1. Flee from sexual immorality. Don't get trapped in situations that invite sin.
2. Remember bad company corrupts good character. When you accept a date, you are in essence saying, 'My values are the same as yours'. Keep away from 'friends' who have a perverted mind.
3. Shun alcohol and drugs. They are sin-inducing poison.
4. Do not send the wrong message by your body language to guys/girls who will lead you astray.
5. Sin is first committed in the heart. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminds us: "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed with her in his heart". Keep your heart pure.
6. Do not go to murky places for a date. Your intentions may be good but the flesh is weak.
7. Rein in your impulses. They are unbridled horses that can ride you to disaster. Petting, necking, nestling, caressing, kissing, kneading are all downhill stations to the kingdom of darkness.

Finally, how can a teenage boy or a teenage girl stay pure? The Bible answers: "By living according to your word" (Psalm 119:9)





**(5) Do we need speed-breakers in relationship?**

The best Christian boy-girl relationship grows out of spiritual bond. The love of God and worship and prayer bring them closer. From the spiritual bond, a social dimension develops as they are involved in Good Samaritan activities. Human beings comprise the body, mind and spirit, in the reverse order of importance. Any relationship that starts at the spiritual level, and comes down to the psychic and bodily levels is likely to be more stable than a relationship in the reverse order. Examples of failed relationships are legion where it all started with sex. Sexual spell has a life cycle of 22 months, after which comes the anti-climax. So relationships based solely on sex are bound to flounder.

Jesus teaches the principle of successful living in his Sermon on the Mount: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). When you seek God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind, God will provide all that you need, including a life partner.

Our youthful emotions are most likely to mislead us. The best speed-breaker in our relationship is the word of God that cautions us against enticing and entangling affairs. Marriage gives warmth, security and liberty for the sexual relationship to develop richly.

**(6) What is wrong with sex before marriage?**

Sex is God's beautiful gift to man and woman to bind them spiritually, intellectually and emotionally in the holy wedlock. Sex outside the wedlock is sin and the Bible forbids it. But sex





comes with a lot of complications that even adults find it difficult to handle.

Scientific studies show that relationships that start with sex last at best for 2-3 years, and marriages usually run into trouble in 3-5 years. If a couple had sex before marriage, the charm would fade away just when the marriage troubles start.

Sex before marriage changes your life in so many ways! Sexual gratification is sought for selfish reasons rather than for sacrificial reasons. For a marriage to succeed, the spirit of sacrifice is quintessential. But people who indulge in premarital sex are the impulsive lot who lack the spirit of sacrifice. Hence it is very unlikely that people who had premarital sex will find true love and happiness in married life. And there is no guarantee that people who had premarital sex will not have extramarital affairs rocking the wedlock. At best, these people can find sham happiness, but the volcano erupts!

Premarital sex destroys your virginity and creates a guilty conscience that is difficult to get rid of, if you marry someone else in the end. Then you enter the holy matrimony by cheating your spouse. Moreover, sex outside marriage exposes you to sexually transmitted diseases (STD) which is the scourge of our time.

**(7) Where in the Bible does it spell out that premarital sex is sin?**

Virginity was highly prized by the Jews, so much so that there was a ritual on the wedding night to prove the bride's purity by producing a blood-stained cloth or garment (Deuteronomy 22: 15, 17 & 20).





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n the New Testament, the word 'virgin' appears as a synonym of sexual morals (1 Corinthians 7: 28, 34, 36-38; II Corinthians 11: 2).

**(8) Is it wrong for a girl to wear jeans?**

There is nothing in the Bible - as far as I can see - that categorically states girls wearing jeans or pants is immoral. The Book of Deuteronomy (22: 5) forbids women wearing men's clothing. Some Pentecostal churches interpret this as a ban on women wearing jeans or pants. But in our modern culture, jeans and pants are not exclusively male clothing.

St. Paul's objection to women wearing braided hair, gold, and pearls (I Timothy 2: 9-11) must be understood in the historical context. In Roman times, these represented costly and time-consuming extravagance. Pearls were fabulously priced and were way beyond the average church member's reach. A display of gold ornaments meant "I'm rich. Look at me and envy." Braids were fastened by jewelled tortoise-shell combs, pins of ivory or silver. The pin heads were often jewells with carved miniature images of an animal, a human hand, an idol, a female figure). The braiding of hair would take several hours.

This passage is probably an example of using an absolute statement when a relative statement is meant - which is a Hebrew style. [Other examples: Genesis 45: 8; Exodus 16: 9; Psalm 51: 4; Psalm 51: 16; Jeremiah 7: 22-23; I Corinthians 1: 17; Philippians 2: 4; 1 John 3: 18.]

The best translation of the verse reads, "I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not merely with





braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds." Absolute statements like this are used when the speaker wishes to emphasize the latter part of the statement: "Women should dress with good deeds." Therefore the whole statement is to emphasise the principle that "women should dress with good deeds" .

So how should women dress? God says women should learn how to dress modestly and decently. Women should resist the temptation to show off, wearing flashy apparel so as to make others jealous or to attract men. Revealing the curves and curls of human body is indecent. Vanity is a sin and the pursuit of the cult of beauty is a waste of time, money, and energy, all God-given for the extension of His kingdom.

Nevertheless women need not balk at fashion, and Christian women need not look old-fashioned or awkward. This, too, is a way of drawing attention: "Look, how holy I am!" A proud heart wearing the mask of modesty is indeed sin. 'Do not be the first to start a fashion trend, or the last to lay it aside' sound a good dictum. At any rate, girls should avoid wearing tight jeans and tops to the Church.

#### **(9) Is Divorce permitted in the Church?**

'Divorce' is a legal word meaning full and final separation so that each one is free to remarry or live alone at will. Ray E Baber defines the term as, "Divorce is merely a process of un-marrying people who have been married. It is an official recognition that their marriage is a failure and therefore has more cause for terminating than for continuing. Divorce





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indicates the failure of a given marriage. .” (Marriage and Family, page 443).

While the world population increased fourfold between 1867 and 1950, divorces increased thirty-nine-fold that is ten times faster than the population growth. Baber cites nine major causes: (1) adultery, (2) desertion, (3) cruelty, (4) conviction for crime, (5) alcoholism, (6) impotence, (7) nonsupport, (8) insanity, and (9) living apart, for divorce.

Drug addiction, ante-nuptial un-chastity by wife, joining cults that disbelieve in cohabitation of spouses, vagrancy of husband, crime against nature, violent temper, leprosy, venereal disease, public defamation of spouse, gross misbehavior and wickedness are some of the thirty-nine minor reasons for which divorces were granted as of 1950. Despite the crumbling relations, chaotic social situation and frightfully escalating divorce rate, people still attach great importance to the institution of marriage at least in principle.

There can be no greater tragedy for individuals and society than divorce. Relationships are shattered, children stranded, finance crumbled, violence induced and hopes and aspirations devastated. The anxiety, fear, hate and feeling of insecurity which it creates carry for the rest of the life and pass it on a bad legacy to next generation. No one can ever replenish the void created. It is a dereliction from the basic duties as an individual and an affront to moral standards and God. Divorce itself is no sin but the result of sin.

Children are the most hapless victims. Children need the love and care of mother and father both, grandparents and close







relatives to develop positive attitude about life, toward family and society. Children living with parents who constantly argue and fight, or with single parent, or foster parent, are more susceptible to all sorts of wild feelings than those who live in lovable family atmosphere. Children who are isolated from the love of parents live in seclusion and suffer low esteem. Wantonness induces abuses, addiction to drug, alcohol and sex which in turn incites violence, psychological disorders and ultimately become threat to themselves and society.

Words fail to express the havoc that divorce brings into the lives of spouses and children but the staggering question is; who cares? I am yet to come across one single opinion supporting divorce, addiction and violence and yet there is no end in sight; rather addiction, violence and divorce increase unabated. We can point fingers and write volumes on the many reasons and aspects that lead to divorce and all the chaos that it creates. All of them could be condensed in one sentence and that is: humanity driven by outlandish ego first divorced God from life, thus lost the standard point of reference on what is right and wrong, or good and evil. In this case Satan is the victor.

Both Matthew and Mark devote space to divorce but there is an essential difference. In Matthew (19: 3-9) you find a clause "except for sexual immorality" that is not there in Mark (10: 1-12). Interestingly, this is not found in the oldest manuscripts, and scholars believe this is a later addition. Liberal thinkers like Baber and Jay Adams believe Jesus justified divorce. This interpretation serves a guide to 'tidal increase in divorce.'

We need to analytically examine both the passages. Mark's presentation is more of a natural dialogue than that of Mathew.





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Most scholars, Orthodox and Catholic, agree that Mark is the first evangelist who wrote a Gospel of our Lord. Mark as the faithful disciple of St Peter wrote his Gospel as per St. Peter's advice and it is undoubtedly the Gospel of Peter. Both Mathew and Luke considered the Gospel of Mark as their base. Gospel of Mark is thus more accurate in rendering events. Luke deserves distinction, though he skips the lengthy discussion. "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery" (Luke 16: 18). This is a précis statement banning all kinds of divorce. Surely, Jesus did not conceive a conditional divorce in opposition to the original intent of the Creator who from the beginning of creation made them male and female and willed that the two shall become one flesh, and that what He has joined let no man separate.

The Roman Catholic Church considers marriage a sacrament. But there is no uniform approach among the Protestants, most of whom considers it a civil union. The Orthodox Church considers marriage not only a sacrament but also a mystery (Roso). God in His unfathomable love made the impossible possible in the union of the male and the female, replicating the union of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

With the shrewd eyes of the tax collector, Matthew recaptures the drama of the Pharisees walking up to him with the question of divorce that defied a consensus. The question was the leading controversy of the time and the Pharisees intended to draw Jesus into it, and if possible to ensnare him.

Three rabbinical schools were prominent in those days, but each opposed to the other: (1) Shammai taught that it was legal to divorce one's wife for reason of infidelity; (2) Hillel





taught any reason, as silly as a spoiled dish, would be sufficient reason to divorce; and (3) Rabbi Akiba took an extremely liberal view that 'if you see a prettier woman, divorce the first wife.' They all claimed their teaching was based on Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 24: 1-4).

The Pharisees failed to trap him as Jesus went to the root of the problem, and expounded the original intent of creation, asserting that humanity has drifted too far from the original purpose. In the beginning God created them male and female (in Syriac: Dkar v nekbo bro enoon). The Hebrew word for male is tsakar, which means prick or pierce. This conveys masculine sense of that which is powerful, sturdy, upright. The word for female is neqbah, which means perforation or tunnel, conveying the feminine sense of the soft and delicate. Scholars suggest evidence of sexual union in 'become one (sarx) flesh'. St. Paul conveys the same meaning when he wrote, "He who is joined to a harlot is one body with her" (I Corinthians 6: 16).

God is the one who designed sex and procreation through sexual union. This happened before the Fall and therefore not incidental to the Fall. What the Fall brought upon the humanity is loss of control, desire and misuse of sex through perverted desires. Sex is the gift of God and not an evil in itself. Proper use of sex is exercising the Will of God and a function that fulfills God's purpose. Biological scientists now think reproduction is possible without sex and man can conceive!

So we conclude that the Church cannot permit anything that Jesus does not approve.





### **(10) Is abortion sin? Where does Scripture say it?**

Abortion is taking the life of a baby before it is born, which is a heinous type of modern murder. The murder takes place in the protected zone of a mother's womb! "...You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb," says the Psalmist (139:13).

From the Christian perspective, children are a gift of God and are precious, whether born or unborn. Abortion has two alternatives: contraceptive or adoption. Parents are free to choose. Sometimes, the Christian is caught in a mother-or-child dilemma in difficult pregnancy. But a decision must be made recognizing that two lives are at stake.

In his Canon II, St. Basil the Great excludes any consideration of abortion at an early period of pregnancy. "She who purposely destroys the foetus shall suffer the punishment of murder, and we pay no attention to the distinction whether the foetus was formed or unformed."

The penitential discipline of the early Church required that "murderers" be admitted to a reconciliation with the Church and to Holy Communion only at their deathbed or at that time they repented. However, the council of Ancyra allows some exceptions for those involved in abortion: "Concerning women who commit fornication and destroy those which they have conceived or who are employed in making drugs for abortion, a former decree excluded them until the hour of death and to this some have assented. Nevertheless, being desirous to use somewhat greater leniency, we have ordained that they fulfil ten years (of penance)...." (Canon XXI).





In order to fully understand the position of the Orthodox Church on the issue, one can refer to the solemn celebration of such feasts as the Conception of St. John the Baptist (September 24), the Conception of the Theotokos (December 8) and indeed the Feast of the Annunciation (March 25) when Christ Himself was conceived in the womb of the Virgin. The celebration of these Feasts implies that human life - and, in those cases, the life of John, of the Theotokos, and of Jesus, as Man - begins at conception and not later when the foetus becomes 'viable'.

The Biblical perspective is unequivocal that abortion is an interruption of human life. It can be justified in no way by arguments usually accepted in our permissive and secular society: the physical or psychological discomfort of the mother, over-population, financial hardships and social insecurity. These are evils which indeed need to be cured, but the cure cannot be killing of innocent victims who possess a full potential for a normal human life. If abortion is accepted as a normal procedure in facing the ills of society, there is strictly no reason why killing could not be accepted as a "solution". Then Hitler's "final solution" of the Jewish problem too stands justified! Now extend it to the chronically ill or the ailing senior citizens. What an inhuman society we could be then!

Christians considered killing even in wars a deadly sin. St. Basil the Great requires that soldiers who have been directly involved in killing in war do penance for three years (Canon XIII). However, by not condoning total pacifism (though admitting it sometimes), the Church recognised that killing at war is not fully identical to murder since it occurs (at least, in principle) to save other lives. Instances like killing to defend innocent life cannot be seen as murder. However, the attitude of St.





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Basil towards the soldiers indicates that even in these cases, killing is evil, possibly a lesser evil than a passive acceptance of violence by others. By analogy, one may consider that in the extreme (and very rare) case when the interruption of the life of the foetus is the only means of saving the life of the mother, it may be considered a "lesser evil." However, in those cases, the horrible responsibility for the decision is to be taken with full awareness of the fact that killing remains killing.

So the Orthodox Church does have guidelines on this fateful issue, and on personal and family responsibilities involved. The Church will certainly oppose legislation legalising abortion, which is a sign of dehumanisation and cynicism of society. At the same time, we will remember that the moral stand against abortion implies responsibilities for caring the millions of miserable, hungry, uneducated and unwanted children that come into the world without assurance of a decent life.

#### **(11) What does the Bible say about tattoos? Or men getting piercing?**

The only Scripture specifically mentioning 'tattoos' is found in the Old Testament: "Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19: 28). Tattoos were used extensively by other nations for pagan worship, decoration, and marking a slave. Tattoos are still forbidden among all sects of Jews - the Orthodox, Conservative and Reformed. There is even one rabbinic text prohibiting the burial of bodies with tattoos, the prohibition rarely enforced though.





The only Scripture that speaks about decorative 'piercing', as against piercing by a sword or nail, is in Exodus (21: 6). This is a passage on piercing the ear lobe of a person to mark him as a slave. In the Jewish nation, slaves and pagans were the only ones with pierced ears. When Jacob's family wanted to set themselves apart to the Lord, earrings are specifically mentioned as items that they put off (Genesis 35: 4). Apparently, any disfigurement or cutting of the body was not allowed for His 'holy people' (Leviticus 21:5, Deuteronomy 14: 1 & 2, I Kings 18: 28). The only exception to this was circumcision (Genesis 17: 11-13). In modern-day Judaism, it has become permissible for women in the West to pierce their ears because it is common among the majority non-Jewish population. Jewish men are, however, not to pierce their ears.

The Jewish writings on the subject refer to two concepts: (1) We are "made in the image of God." Even though God is Spirit, somehow our bodies reflect God's glory. (2) Our bodies are a gift from God, complete as is. As one Jewish rabbi put it, "No matter how well considered, a tattoo is the result of a short-term decision to decorate the body forever. What hubris to imagine that any of us, as individuals, can improve artistically on the original design of the Lord!"

So if you were a Jew either living in the Old Testament times or in modern times, the law forbids tattoos and piercing. However, Christians do not follow all the Old Testament laws, especially the ceremonial ones. In fact, some of them are set aside by Jesus and his Apostles. Are tattoos and piercing still forbidden for Christians?





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If an Old Testament law corresponds to any basic New Testament principle, it is valid even today. The New Testament teaches that our bodies are not our own (I Corinthians 6: 12-20).

- ▶ “The body is meant for the Lord” (I Corinthians 6: 13).
- ▶ “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit” (I Corinthians 6: 19).
- ▶ “You are not your own; you were bought at a price” (I Corinthians 6: 19).
- ▶ “Honor God with your body” (I Corinthians 6: 20).

The key principle here is that our bodies belong to God, and that we are to use them in ways that honor and reflect God’s glory. So we arrive at the conclusion using deductive reasoning that we should not inflict marks and cuts on our bodies since we are made in the image of God.

**(12) Is drinking sin? What about smoking?**

“Do not look on the wine when it is red,

When it sparkles in the cup,

When it swirls around smoothly;

At the last it bites like a serpent,

And stings like a viper” (Proverbs 23: 31 & 32)

“Envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries...those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5: 21).







These verses have uttered the last word on the question. The Orthodox Christian parents have to set an example to their children on how to glorify God in their body, so that they can live a fuller and meaningful life.

Those who smoke or drink are more likely to engage in pre-marital sex, struggle in school and have difficult relation with their parents.

The writings of the holy fathers strongly denounce the vice that leads to many other ruinous sins. Very often drinking causes the disintegration of family, bringing enormous suffering to both the victim and his family, especially his children.

St. Basil the Great writes:

*Drinking is animosity against God... Drinking is a voluntarily courted devil... Drinking drives the Holy Spirit away.*

St. John Chrysostom warns:

*Drinking is the root of all evils... The drunkard is a living corpse... Drinking in itself can serve as punishment, filling as it is the soul with confusion, filling the mind with darkness, making a drunk prisoner, subjecting one to innumerable diseases, internal and external... Drinking is a many-sided and many-headed beast... Here it gives rise to fornication, there to anger, here to the dullness of the mind and the heart, there to impure love... Nobody obeys the ill will of the devil as faithfully as a drunkard does.*





St. Tikhon Zadonsky testifies:

*A drunken man is capable of every evil and prone to every temptation... Drinking renders its adherent incapable of any task.*

Even more destructive is the ever increasing drug-addiction — the passion that enslaves a person to the forces of darkness. With every passing year, this terrible infirmity engulfs more and more young people. Vested interests promote the drug culture among youth as something fashionable and intellectual. And the vulnerable youth falls neatly into the trap.

Spiritual emptiness, loss of the meaning of life and blurred moral vision drive the youth to narcotic escapism. This is the fruit of consumerism and the cult of prosperity. The Church today offers the hapless victims spiritual and moral support to overcome the vice. Without denying the need for medical aid at critical stages, the Church pays special attention to the prevention and rehabilitation, which are the most effective when the victims participate consciously in the Holy Eucharistic and prayers.

### **(13) Is there a Commandment against Homosexuality?**

Homosexuality is nothing new, and the Old Testament deals with it sternly. But what is new in contemporary American society is the publicity and promotion of this perverse lifestyle and its protection by laws. Much of what was said about sex outside marriage applies to homosexuality.





The arguments that homosexuals may be genetically predisposed and that children become homosexual in reaction to unhealthy adult relationships are specious, because human beings are accountable and ought to have control over their passions.

The theory that homosexuals are naturally attracted to people of the same sex is akin to the claim that heterosexuals are attracted to the opposite sex and therefore should be allowed to express their feelings freely. The genetic predisposition argument takes us to the logical conclusion that dacoits and murderers, too, should be genetically examined and classified!

While condemning homosexuality, we must take care to nurture and correct the homosexual. Despite their moral turpitude, they must be treated with understanding and even respect so that they can overcome their erroneous propensities.

In his book *Contemporary Moral Issues*, Harakas outlines the teaching of the Church on homosexuality:

Regarding homosexual acts, the traditional and exclusive teaching of the Church is condemnatory, seeing such acts as morally wrong. In the face of homosexual acts as well as all other expressions of wrongful sexual expression (fornication, adultery, prostitution, incest, bestiality, masturbation) the Church teaches that the only proper place for the exercise of the sexual function is in marriage. The evidence from the sources of the faith,





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without exception, considers homosexual acts as morally wrong. In the Old Testament, we read, "If there is a man who lies with a male as those be with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act. (Leviticus 20:13. Also, 18:22). Grave punishment was visited on the city of Sodom by God for this sin (Genesis 19:1-29) and as a result Sodomy is another name by which homosexual behavior is described. In speaking of this sinful act, the New Testament uses it to illustrate the "depraved passions" of fallen humanity: "their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way the men abandoned the natural function of women and burned in their desire towards one another, men with men, committing indecent acts . . . " (Romans 1:24-28). Elsewhere, this evil is related with several others and severe punishment is threatened:

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals (arsenokoi tai – literally, "men go to bed with men for sexual acts"), nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God" (I Corinthians 6:9-10. Also, I Timothy 1:8-10).

The patristic tradition is no less unanimous and clear-cut in its judgment. From the 2nd century Didache of the Twelve Apostles, through the





writings of the Fathers of the Golden Age of the Church such as St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, St. Gregory of Nyssa (4th and 5th centuries), through the sixth century Code of Justinian, the Canons of St. John the Faster (early 7th century) to the decisions of the 21st (1972), and 23rd (1976) Clergy-Laity statement on Homosexuality by the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas, released in March of 1978, the teaching is consistent and unvarying: homosexual acts are immoral and wrong.<sup>1</sup> W x

Paul D. O'Callaghan writes in the Journal of Christian Bioethics: Consideration of the divine design and purpose of sex immediately reveals why homosex, adultery, fornication, prostitution, masturbation, and all other forms of sex outside of marriage are morally deviant. In none of these acts can the true realization of oneness in communion occur, because they are outside the God-established marital union, violations of it, or fundamentally disordered. All of these are true of homosexuality. Since the unitive drive for the experience of union is realized in the conjunctio oppositorum, the desire of man and woman to recreate their original oneness in Adam, it is clear that the desire for union with the same sex is a disordered passion. Something is very wrong when a male seeks to complete himself by





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union with another male. This is why the Apostle Paul argues that homosexuality is “against nature” (Rom. 1: 26-27). It is not just that the particular genital acts are ill fitted, unusual, and abhorrent. It is the fact that the very nature of the homosexual drive is at odds with how God created us as human beings, in His image, as male and female.<sup>2</sup>

**(14) How should I behave in the Church?**

*“I was glad when they said to me, Let us go into the house of the Lord” (Psalm 122:1). I will enter Thy house by Thy grace, O Lord, teach me Thy truth and straighten my path before Thee, for my enemies’ sake that I may glorify without obstruction the One God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.*

The Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church - as it was known in the early Christian centuries - gathers all her children around Jesus Christ, Our Lord, by the liturgical unity. It is here and only here that all are deemed equal - the rich and the poor, the scholar and the plebian, man and woman, young and old. And here we stand as one soul, united by faith and prayer.

Brothers and sisters, let us learn honorable examples of Church behavior and give thanks to the Lord who strengthens our soul by His presence, and who by His exceeding mercy forgives our sins.

- a) Man is an icon of God, therefore let our relationships towards one another be loving and kind. Let us hate sin





but love sinners, for sin comes from the devil but man is the work of God. Sin is not only doing evil, but also the absence of good deeds, as St. Paul reminds us: "Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good" (Romans 12: 9).

- b) Remove your shoes or sandals before entering the Church. When we enter the Church, we must leave all worldly thoughts behind us. Crossing ourselves with piety, let us go forth with this prayer: "In reverence, will I come to Thy House and offer my vows to Thee".
- c) Men should stand on the north side of the Church and women on the south. Leave space in the middle of the Church to honour the departed.
- d) Hold fast the rules set by St. Paul (I Corinthians 11: 4-15) that Christian men pray with their heads uncovered thus expressing their piety, while Christian women should be decently clad with no make up on, giving an example of meekness and purity in serving God. No one should enter the Church wearing shorts or sleeveless blouses or shirts.
- e) We should make sure to be always on time for the holy liturgy, so as not to disturb the prayerful peace and quiet. Greeting friends and handshaking in the Church is a sign of disrespect for God, besides disturbing others in their prayer.
- f) It is unseemly to reverence the relics, if any, while the service is on. Beware of talking and laughing in the Church, for this shows disrespect to God and it disturbs others. Chewing gum, eating or drinking in the Church before, during or after the service is blasphemous. If our thoughts stray, we should bring them back.





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Participate in the liturgy piously, singing without artificial or emotional trills, each according to his/her best. "Let us stand well, let us stand in awe, let us be attentive to offer the holy oblation in peace..." Do not turn around and watch others pray, for it is not for us to judge, lest we be judged, as the Pharisee was; but repeat to yourself, as the repenting Publican, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

- g) Follow the exhortation by the Deacon from time to time. E.g. "Let us stand well, Let us bow our heads before the merciful Lord," etc.
- h) While we receive the Holy mysteries, we piously bow our heads to the Holy Sacrament, and after receiving we slowly and carefully step to the side and wait for the prayer of thanksgiving and the end of the holy liturgy.
- i) No one should leave the Church before the end of the service. The highlights of the liturgy are the Little and Great Entrance, the reading from the Epistle and the Gospel, the Cherubim hymn, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, and the holiest of all, the consecration of the Bread and Wine transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. Brothers and sisters, let us prepare for the Holy Communion in a worthy manner through fasting, prayer and confession. Let us purify our hearts and minds, asking forgiveness of all and for all. Let us partake of the Body and Blood of Christ worthily to receive the bountiful blessing of Our Lord and immortality.







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Paul the Blessed, Saint, the Lord's Apostle, said:

If one come to preach to you  
other doctrine than we knew,  
Be he man or angel bright, Curs'd  
be he in Church's sight; Doctrines  
all diverse arise, shooting up with  
many lies;

Blest is he who first and last Trusts  
God's truth and holds it fast.

