
UNIT 21 CHRISTIANITY

Structure

- 21.0 Objectives
- 21.1 Introduction
- 21.2 Sources and Beliefs
 - 21.2.1 The Founder of Christianity
 - 21.2.2 The Biblical Concept of God
 - 21.2.3 The Biblical Concept of Body, Soul and Salvation
 - 21.2.4 Organisation and Communion
- 21.3 Teachings of Christianity
 - 21.3.1 Purity of a Person and the Moral Deeds
 - 21.3.2 Forgiving Sins and Evils
 - 21.3.3 Evangelisation and Baptism
- 21.4 Christian Social Order
 - 21.4.1 Universal Brotherhood
 - 21.4.2 Egalitarian Outlook
 - 21.4.3 Service of Underprivileged
- 21.5 The Church and the Wider World
 - 21.5.1 Adaptation to the World
 - 21.5.2 Civil Authority
 - 21.5.3 Society's Impact on Church
 - 21.5.4 Sects and Sub-divisions
- 21.6 Christianity, Modern Society and Social Evolution
- 21.7 Christianity in India
 - 21.7.1 Advent of Europeans
 - 21.7.2 Christian Population
 - 21.7.3 Denominations and Sects
 - 21.7.4 Missionaries and Welfare Activities
- 21.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 21.9 Key Words
- 21.10 Further Readings
- 21.11 Answers to Check Your Progress

21.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this unit are to acquaint you with the religious belief system and social order of Christianity. After reading this unit you should be able to

- discuss the chief sources and beliefs in Christianity
- examine the teaching of Jesus Christ
- explain the Christian social order
- describe Christian view on the Church and the world
- discuss various aspects of Christianity in India.

21.1 INTRODUCTION

As indicated, India is a plural society. One of the significant elements of this plurality is that of the religious belief systems and religious practices. Religion is an important dimension of group formation. The world view and the behavioural patterns of a social group are largely shaped by their religious practices and beliefs. Christianity is an important world religion. A sizeable section of the Indian population follows Christianity. It will be sociologically significant to analyse and know the basic tenets of Christianity and social organisation of its followers.

In Unit 17 of ESO-02 we discussed the Christian social organisation with special reference to India. In this unit we shall introduce you to the basic tenets of Christian religious belief. We also will introduce you briefly to the socio-religious aspects of Christianity in India. After reading this unit, you should be able to know the Christians belief system and about their life on earth and hereafter. The Christian way of life and the ideal Christian society are also discussed in this unit. How the faith of Christians is nourished and how they derive spiritual inspiration about the consequences of the adaptation of the Christian community to the world, and some broad ideas about Christians in India are discussed at length in this unit.

Though the Christians are heavily concentrated in the countries of the European and American continents, the followers of Christianity are found in almost all the countries of the world. They are subdivided into a large number of churches and denominations based on organisational and doctrinal differences. These subdivisions can be subsumed under the three broader categories of (1) the Roman Catholic Church, (2) the Eastern Orthodox Church and (3) the Protestant denominations. The first two categories date from the early period of Christianity and the third category of churches sprung during the last few centuries owing their origin to dissident groups from the parent bodies. The basic elements of Christianity described in this lesson are, however, common to all the above categories of churches. Besides these Christian churches, there are certain cults such as *Christian Science*, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, *Mormonism* or "*Latter-day Saints*", *the Unification Church* or "*Moonies*" and so on, which though akin to Christianity, differ from the Biblical Christianity in important respects.

In describing Christianity from the sociological perspective, in this lesson, some of the functions which a religion is expected to perform will be kept in view. These functions include the assistance which religion provides the individual in gaining added power and satisfaction, the explanation of the problem of evil, the offer of the hope of better life in the future, the formulation of a plan for salvation, the improvement of the quality of the present life and an outline of an ideal society.

21.2 SOURCES AND BELIEFS

Christianity is the religion founded by Jesus Christ, but it has its roots in the Judaic tradition. It is counted among the revealed or divinely inspired religions. The divinely inspired religious precepts are contained in the holy book of the Christians known as the Bible. The Bible is divided into two books: the Old Testament and the New Testament. Most of the books of the Bible are written mostly by different authors at different points of time starting from the ancient times. The books of the *Old Testament* dealing with the period before the birth of Jesus Christ were originally written in Hebrew and partly in Aramaic, and the books of the *New Testament* dealing with the life and teachings of Jesus and the Acts of his Apostles which depict the formative period of Christianity, were originally written mostly in Greek or partly in Aramaic. The first four New Testament books telling of the life, death and resurrection of Christ are known as the *Gospels*.

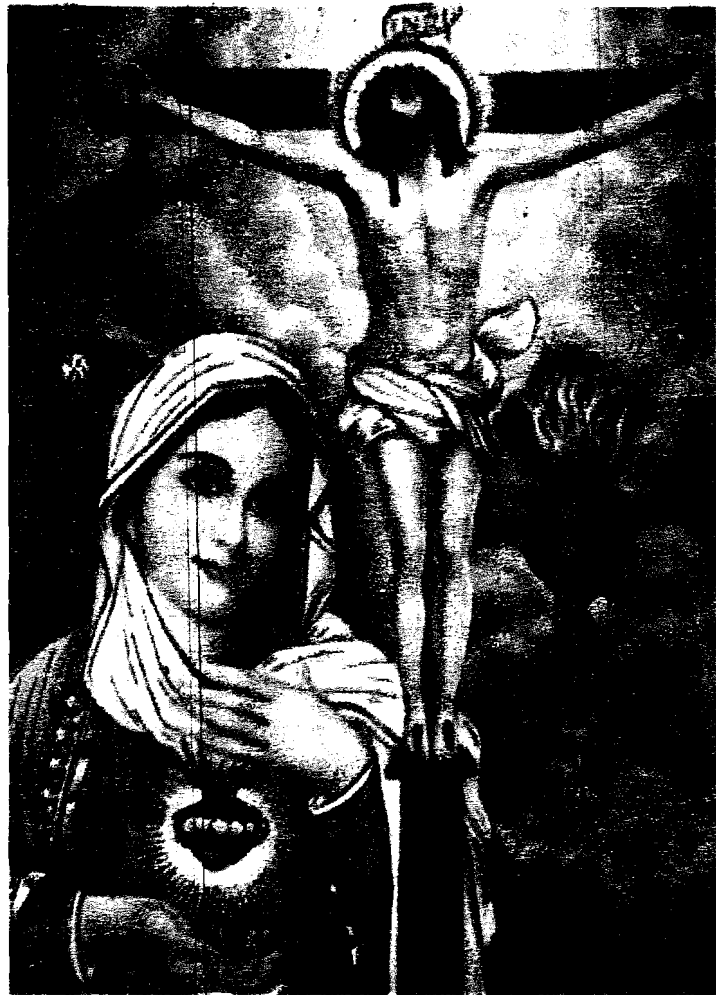
21.2.1 The Founder of Christianity

Central to the Christian faith is the identity of its founder, Jesus Christ. Christ was a historical figure born about 2,000 years ago. He lived a short span of 33 years and his public life covered only the last three years during which he healed people, performed miracles, even raising people from the dead, and taught his disciples how to live lives that would be pleasing to God. But the most remarkable feature of Jesus' life, according to Christian belief, is that after he was crucified, dead and buried, he rose again on the third day and appeared to his Apostles and disciples before ascending into heaven. Jesus claimed that he was son of God and behaved

as such by forgiving sinners on his own authority, which was a sore point with the Jewish religious leaders. But his disciples believed that he was God. Therefore, one of the basic tenets of the Christian faith is the belief that Jesus Christ is true Man and true God.

During his life Jesus made many disciples and followers. They, however, did not form themselves into a separate community or church. It was obvious that until his death and resurrection Jesus did not complete his religious mission. As a matter of fact, the arrest of Jesus by his enemies and his ignominious death on the cross came as an apparent anticlimax to the work of propagating his faith. On the day before his death, when Jesus was arrested, his Apostles who were his constant companions, panicked and deserted him. Even his favourite Apostle, Simon Peter who was following him from a distance, denied having known Jesus when questioned by others on three occasions. The Apostles who believed in Christ as the Son of God were disenchanted when he seemed powerless at the hands of his enemies. At his death they hid themselves for fear of being apprehended.

After the third day Jesus rose from the dead. From then on until the fortieth day when, according to the Bible, Jesus ascended into heaven, he appeared to his Apostles and other disciples several times. It is during that time, having accomplished his mission, Jesus commissioned his Apostles to spread his faith to all nations saying: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mathew 28: 18-20).



Jesus on the cross, with his mother Mary in the foreground.

21.2.2 The Biblical Concept of God

In this context it may be pointed out that the Biblical concept of God is rather complex. God is one but has revealed Himself in the Bible as three persons — *the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit*. Such a conception of God is described as the mystery of the *Unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity*. According to the Bible Jesus is God, the Son, born of the Virgin Mary who conceived by the Holy Spirit. The incarnation of Jesus as man, according to the Bible, is a part of the divine plan for the atonement of the sins of mankind.

In order to understand why it was necessary for God to become man so as to save mankind, one needs to know that the Bible teaches about the origin of *sin* and *evil* in this world. According to the Bible, God created heaven and earth and he made Adam and Eve the first ancestors of mankind in his own image. But Adam and Eve were disobedient to their creator thereby bringing sin and evil into this world. As a result all mankind became heir to the original sin and lost the privilege to be regarded as children of God. It was only the suffering and death of a sinless man, Jesus, which could atone for the sins of mankind. And God so loved mankind that he sent his only beloved son to save mankind from eternal damnation. Jesus is therefore called the Saviour of mankind. The Bible states that whoever believes in him will be saved (John 3:16).

21.2.3 The Biblical Concept of Body, Soul and Salvation

The Bible teaches that man has body and soul; whereas the body perishes with death, the soul survives eternally. Salvation in Christianity means the survival of the soul or the individual personality in a happy existence in heaven after death. Contrary to the belief in the transmigration of souls, Christianity teaches that human beings live only once on the earth and so have only one chance to make sure of a happy after-life. Although the original sin-condemned man to eternal damnation, Christ's suffering has redeemed mankind. But any individual can attain salvation only if, he or she were to accept Jesus as Saviour. The Bible is clear on this point in quoting Christ's own words: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John, 14:6). This and other references in this lesson are in the Books of the New Testament in the Bible.

Box 1

The unfolding of the scheme of salvation in Christianity also establishes the link between the Old and the New Testament of the Bible. The Old Testament is an essential part of the Jewish tradition. Jesus Christ was a Jew who followed the Jewish tradition which provides the point of reference for his teaching. The basic link between the Old and the New Testament lies in the fact that the Old Testament is always looking forward to One who was to come about, whom there are several promises, prophecies are descriptions which are fulfilled in Jesus. So from the point of view of Christians, the New Testament bears witness to the unique event foreseen in the Old Testament. Moreover, the Old Testament is a constant reminder that God punishes the evil and rewards the good and that he never forsakes those who believe in Him. Together, the Old and the new Testaments constitute the progressive self-revelation of God.

21.2.4 Organisation and Communion

The organisation of the early churches was based on the belief in Jesus as the 'Risen Lord'. In the beginning the Christians gathered daily for their worship, but in due course, one day in a week called the 'Lord's day' (Sunday) was set aside

for the worship service. This practice is generally followed in the Christian churches even today. The core of the worship service consists of religious instruction, preaching, prayer and the breaking of bread. The breaking of bread or the 'Lord's Supper' has a special significance in Christian worship. This practice follows from what Jesus did at his last supper with his Apostles on the night before his death. He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his Apostles saying, "This is my body given for you; this is remembrance of me". In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you". (Luke 22 : 19, 20). This incident symbolises Christ's suffering and death on the cross which is the central act of salvation, freeing mankind from sin.

The replication of the 'Lord's Supper' at the worship is believed to realise once again, Christ's presence (called the living presence). In the eating of the bread and drinking of the wine a direct and intimate union with Christ is achieved. This part of the worship service is also known as Communion or Eucharistic rite.

In general, the religious services of Christians are mainly aimed at Worshipping God in spirit and truth (John 4:24), that is, worshipping the Father through Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Indicate the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible in about eight lines.

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- ii) Narrate the concept of body and soul as depicted in Christianity in about five lines.

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- iii) Jesus rose from the dead after the
 - a) fifth day
 - b) fourth day
 - c) third day
 - d) second day

21.3 TEACHINGS OF CHRISTIANITY

Although Jesus did not reduplicate the Judaic tradition, he abrogated some of the Jewish conventions, gave a radical twist to the old ethical principles and spelt out the fundamental principles of the ideal social order.

21.3.1 Purity of a Person and the Moral Deeds

Among the archaic Jewish practices which Jesus brushed aside, reference may be made to the rituals to ward off pollution. When the Jews complained that his disciples did not adhere to their traditional custom of ritual "cleaning" of hands before meals, Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' (Mark 7 : 14,15). Jesus thus teaches the important truth that it is not outside rituals or ceremonies or eating of special foods that make a person clean before God. It is the purity of a person's heart and mind that makes one clean in God's sight.

According to his instructions the norms of proper conduct are not to be anchored on the morality of this world but rather on the other-worldly criteria of fulfilling the will of God and of pleasing Him. 'Therefore, a Christian is not supposed to expect reciprocity or popularity from his good deeds; his rewards come from wheat pleases God to bestow upon him both in this and the outer world.

In doing moral deeds or giving charity, a person should not draw attention to oneself so as to be honoured by others; God rewards such deeds done in secret (Mathew 6 : 1-4).

21.3.2 Forgiving Sins and Evils

Jesus impresses upon his followers that let alone murder, even the expression of anger against others amounts to sin and that God does not accept prayers and gifts unless we first reconcile ourselves with each other (Mathew 5 : 21-23). So also God forgives the sins of persons who forgive others who sin against them (Mathew 6 : 14, 15).

It is the way of the world to pay back the aggressor in his own coin. But Jesus tells his followers, "Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Mathew 5 : 38, 39). So also, consider what Jesus has to say, "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Mathew 5 : 43-45).

These precepts of Jesus seem to be so unreasonable and impractical. But his own conduct during the most trying time of his life is a telling demonstration of his preaching. When Jesus was falsely charged and sentenced to death, he neither resisted his captors nor defended himself before the court. What is more, when he was crucified during his dying moments, he uttered from the cross these stunning words of mercy to his enemies: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23 : 24). Thus Jesus not only taught his followers a new way of life but also in his exemplary life showed how it could be accomplished.

21.3.3 Evangelisation and Baptism

Christ's mandate to his disciples to spread his message of love and forgiveness throughout the world is considered to be an obligation on the part of all Christians to do likewise. The act of spreading the gospel of Christ is termed evangelisation.

However, the decision of accepting the message or of becoming a convert to Christianity, should be left to the persons who receive the message, which is regarded as the work of the Holy Spirit.

The acceptance of the Christian faith by renouncing their old religious beliefs and practices meant for the converts a rupture from their old communities as well. So the new Christians formed themselves into communities or churches of their own. The churches drew people from different religious and ethnic groups, who were welded into a new Christian identity. The new recruits to the faith were admitted with a simple ceremony called Baptism.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) According to Christian thought the norms of proper conduct are to be anchored
 - a) on the moality of this world
 - b) on the other wordily criteria without fulfilling the will of God
 - c) on the other wordly criteria of fulfilling the will of God
 - d) on self-interest.

- 2) The act of spreading the gospel of Christ is termed
 - a) Universalisation
 - b) Christianisation
 - c) Evangelisation
 - d) Spiritualisation

- 3) What is the significance of Lord’s Supper in Christianity? Answer in about five lines.

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21.4 CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ORDER

Social order of every religious group is organised based on certain principles. These principles provide the base of togetherness and commonness of ideas and coexistence. It would be interesting to see how the Christian social order is organised. From the teachings of Jesus it is possible to identify some of the basic principles of the Christian social order.

21.4.1 Universal Brotherhood

The fundamental principle of the ideal society according to Jesus is the idea of universal brotherhood. But just as the justification and motive for the ideal conduct stem from the desire to please and fulfil the will of God, the basis of universal brotherhood is also the love of God. The idea that the love of man flows from the love of God was made clear by Jesus when he was answering a question by a Jewish jurist. In replying to the question, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law”? Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”. This is the first and the greatest commandment.

And the second is like it. 'Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments' (Mathew 22 : 35-40). The term neighbour used in this context, as Jesus explained (Luke 10 : 28-37) transcends the traditional connotation of spatial proximity, but embraces the broader meaning of fellowmen/women irrespective of the spatial or social connections. The love of fellowmen is not ordinarily ingrained in social structures which always made a 'distinction between 'we' and 'they'. It is the love of God which makes the Christian ideal of loving one's fellowmen/women, attainable.

21.4.2 Egalitarian Outlook

A second important principle of the Christian social order is the egalitarian outlook. The Christian church brought together people from different races, cultures and classes and forged a new spirit of coherence, unity and equality among them. Paul, the most prominent among the organisers of the early church emphasised, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3 : 28). The early Christians who were liberated from the fetters of their former communities, addressed one another brothers and sisters, shared their provisions or contributed their income generously for common use and formed themselves into an egalitarian community.

The egalitarian ideal is further supported in the new kind of leadership and authority enjoined upon his followers by Jesus. Ordinarily, a leader tries to wield his power and authority to command compliance by persons whom he leads, and people seek the office of leadership for the privileges which accrue from it. But Jesus taught that all power and authority comes from God and the function of the leader is to serve the people under his charge.

21.4.3 Service of the Underprivileged

Yet another major principle of the ideal society according to Christ's teaching is the concern and commitment for the service of the underprivileged. During his lifetime as man, Jesus showed great compassion for people in distress. Exhorting his followers to do likewise, he pointed out that the heavenly king namely God, would apply reward those who took care of the poor, the strangers and the oppressed. Acts of kindness done to such people were equivalent to showing kindness to God Himself.

The ideal society in Christianity, which stands for universal fellowship, equality of members, a service oriented leadership and a special solidarity with the disadvantaged sections, is ultimately based on the belief in and love of God. Such a society is termed the reign of God or the kingdom of heaven.

Activity 1

Based on your observation and experience of the Christian society write a note of about two pages on the 'Christian Social Order in our Society'. Exchange your note, if possible with your colearners at the Study Centre.

21.5 THE CHURCH AND THE WIDER WORLD

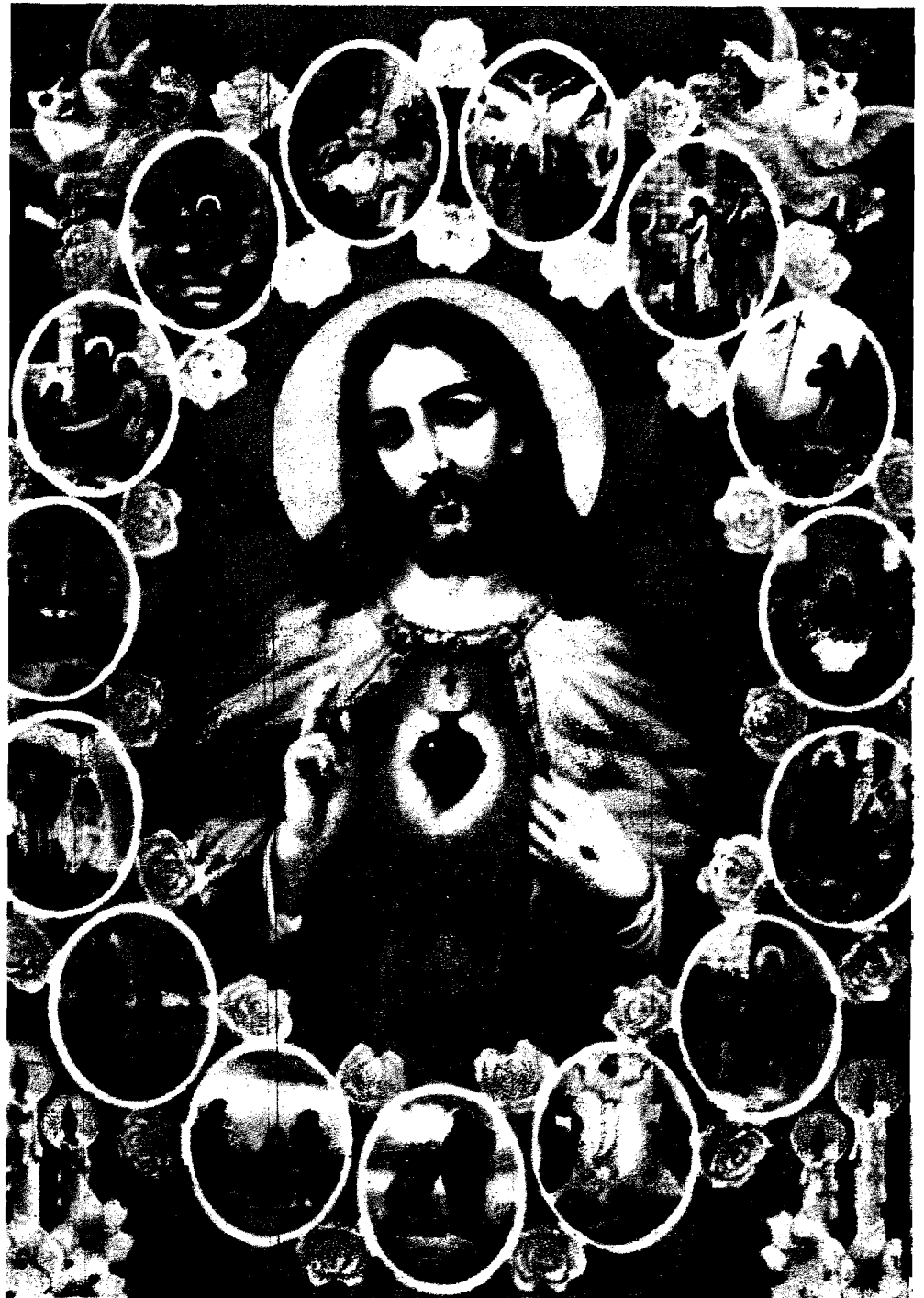
The church plays a key role in the Christian society. It determines largely the Christian world view. It is of great sociological significance to see how the church encounters itself with the wider society and the world. The church is the actualisation of the ideal society according to the teachings of Jesus. At the same time, it has to function within the wider society whose values and patterns of social relations are inconsistent with the Christian social order. Right from the beginning, the Christians were painfully aware of this contradiction and had to suffer on account of it. While

regarding the ideal Christian society as the heavenly kingdom, they referred to the existing social order as the worldly society or the 'world'.

The disjunction between the church and the 'world' (wider society) raises several questions; how does the church adapt itself to the 'world'? What impact has the church made upon the world? What impact the world has made upon the church? Indeed, these are the sociological issues of adaptation and assimilation.

21.5.1 Adaptation to the World

In its adaptation to the 'world', there is no question of the church's accepting the world totally in spirit and in fact, for that would amount to a negation of the



Jesus in the centre of the photo, with vignettes from his life and teachings depicted all around him.

Christian ideal. It was also not possible to reject the world totally as that would involve in a head-on collision with the powerful political and religious authorities leading to a bloody revolution which is against the spirit of Christianity. The early church actually took course in between the two extremes. It rejected the world in spirit but accepted it in fact. In a sense this approach agreed with what Jesus did; he did not try to destroy the old order but attempted to transform it. It was, however, implied that the Christian way of life was superior to the worldly life and should there be serious conflict between God's commandments and the civil law, a Christian is obliged to obey God rather than man (Acts 5 : 29).

21.5.2 Civil Authority

In the compromise that was struck between the church and the 'world', it was recognized that the political powers and civil authorities were ordained of God and hence merited obedience (Romans 13:1), and the Christians carried out their civil obligations including the payment of taxes faithfully. Similarly, although everyone is considered equal in Jesus Christ, as a seeming accommodation to the prevailing patriarchal and feudal practices, the wife was enjoined to obey the husband and the slave to obey the master, although the persons in authority, were also required to treat their subordinates with love and consideration (Ephesians 5:2-25, 6:5-9).

With the spread and gaining influence of the church, Christian values and ideals began to percolate into the larger society. The humanitarian ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity which gained acceptance in the Western civilisation, owe their origin to the teachings of Jesus.

21.5.3 Society's Impact on Church

If the Church has influenced the wider society, sometimes the latter also has had its impact upon the former. This happened in Europe especially during the Middle Ages when the entire European society became Christian and the Church acquired considerable political and economic power. In that process the church became infected with worldly values.

21.5.4 Sects and Sub-divisions

The complex form in which the Christian church finds itself at present with its many subdivisions can be attributed to the rise of pressure groups when the parent bodies deviate too much from the biblical path. Such dissident pressure groups which are called sects are either (1) integrated into the parent body or (2) they secede or are expelled from the main church, when the dissident groups establish churches of their own.

- i) The first type of phenomenon is represented by the monastic movements of the 4th, 5th and the 6th centuries, which were attempts on the part of some of the members to live in line with the teachings of Jesus when the parent bodies (the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches) were more inclined to the worldly life. The monastic movements were ultimately integrated into the parent bodies which underwent a renewal as a result.
- ii) The second type of phenomenon can be illustrated with the 16th century Reformation movement in Europe, when several dissident groups left the Roman Catholic Church and underwent a renewal as a result of that challenge. The Protestant churches recognize the authority of the Bible alone, whereas the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches also recognized their church traditions as authoritative, besides the Bible.

Box 2

Thus the compromise between the church and the 'world' also leads to the ever present processes of dissidence, renewal or secession. However, in all these changes the Bible serves as the steadying force. Besides lending stability to the churches, the Bible is also responsible for bringing about a basic unity in beliefs and values among the different churches. There are however, differences among the churches in the interpretation of the Bible. As a student of sociology, you should be interested to know the dynamics of group formation. This section must have given you some insights on the group formation in Christianity. You may also be interested to know the institutional network through which the Christian society operates. You may also be interested in the aspects of festivals and ritual of that society. To know, all these aspects you may like to see Unit 17 of ESO-02.

21.6 CHRISTIANITY, MODERN SOCIETY AND SOCIAL EVOLUTION

Christian movement delineated a condition for the selection of human beings and also for the creation of a society for peaceful survival of human being based on new values. Christianity has been one of the important factors of modernisation and economic development through the societal values it has legitimised. However, at every stage of the social evolution and modernisation as such, the Christian religious system and its values stood in complex relations of interdependence with other factors viz., economic and political institutions, the social institutions like family and kinship, the system of stratification etc.

i) Institutionalisation

In this context it is essential to have an idea on the forms of Christian institutionalisation. The *first* pattern of the institutionalisation assumed that the existence of the religious association of the Christian is essentially a separate entity without established relations to the rest of the society. The example can be that of the Pietistic sects.

The second type of institutionalisation is that of the Catholic Church. "This is interpreted in the sense of an established church, which is the state religion of a politically organised society". The church and the state are the distinct organisations. Hence the church achieved a transcendental orientation and became to be concerned eventually with its particular version of monasticism and to give the orders a kind of primacy, over the secular priesthood. This in a sense gave by default a special position to the secular political authority, since there was no papal monarchy to match the secular.

The third type of institutionalisation is that of the emergence of the Protestant sects. Here the break is fundamentally with the sacramental system, making the "true" Church invisible and salvation dependent, from the human side, on faith above... The shift to the Protestantism essentially meant the *abandonment of this tutelage with its special kind of religious paternalism*. The main branch of Protestantism, i.e. the Calvinists, laid great emphasis on the worldly activism for the creation of the kingdom of God on the earth.

The Protestant reform movement opened the door for modernisation and economic development through its general trend of social and cultural change. The Protestant followed science, trained in law. The reform movement of the Protestant became intimately related to the development of nationalism — vernacular translations of

the Bible multiplied and some protestant areas achieved distinction very rapidly in economic development — (Weber, W. 1972 : 246).

ii) Protestantism and Economic Development

Max Weber locates a casual link between the Protestant ethic and the development of capitalism in Europe. In his famous treatise on *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism* Weber points out that the Puritan sects of the Protestantism rationalised their religious beliefs and values towards “this worldly asceticism”. This rationalisation was possible through the concept of calling — (task set by God) which was a product of Reformation movement. To Weber the major callings for the Protestants of Puritan sects are:

- a) There exists an absolute transcendent God who created the world and rules it, but he is incomprehensible and inaccessible to the finite mind of man,
- b) This all powerful and mysterious God had predestined each of us to salvation or damnation, so that we cannot by our works after a divine which was made before we were born,
- c) God created the world for his own glory,
- d) Whether he is saved or damned, a man is obliged to work for the glory of God and to create the kingdom of God on earth,
- e) Earthly things, human nature, and flesh belong to the order of sin and death and salvation can come to man only through divine grace (Aron, 1967 : 221-222).

These callings helped the Calvinist Protestants to be self-disciplined, dedicated to work, honest and follow the path of “this worldly asceticism”. For them work is worship and there is no space for idleness or laziness. This specific character of Calvinistic belief accounted for the relation between Calvinist doctrine and the spirit of capitalism which was characterised by a unique devotion to the earning of wealth through legitimate economic activity. This is rooted in a belief in the value of efficient performance in the chosen vocation as a duty and a virtue. The affinity between the two and the emergence of capitalist economic regime as defined by Weber existed only in the West. However, such an affinity is particular only to the Protestant ethics. It is not found in the Catholicism; not in any other religion like Hinduism, Islam, Confucianism, Judaism and Buddhism of which Weber made a comparative analysis. For further detail you may see again Unit 15, Block 4 of ESO-03.

21.7 CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

In Unit 17 of ESO-02, we discussed in detail the Christian social organisation in India. You are advised to go through that unit to know about the institutions like family, marriage and inheritance in the Christian society in India.

Christianity was introduced into India almost from its inception by Thomas, one of the Apostles of Christ. According to tradition Thomas landed on the coast of Kerala in 52 A.D. and set up seven churches in different areas. Then he travelled to Madras where he was martyred at *Mylapore* in 72 A.D. The descendants of the early Christians of Kerala were known as St. Thomas Christians. They are also called Syrian Christians, not because they came from Syria; but because they follow the Syrian liturgy as distinguished from the Latin liturgy, in their worship. The Syrian Christians formed part of the society in Kerala as a prosperous community and were ranked among the higher castes. They did not seem to have made much effort in spreading their faith in other parts of the country.

21.7.1 Advent of Europeans

The spread of Christianity in India came with the advent of the Europeans from the early 16th century. The Portuguese missionaries were followed by the Dutch, the French and the British along with other European and American missionaries. The Indian Christians belong to different churches and denominations after the religious background of the missionaries who converted them. On the other hand, since the missionaries from different countries worked in different areas of India where their respective country had political influence, the Indian Christians of different religious denominations were also spread in different parts of the country.

Although the Britishers among the European nations wielded the greatest political influence in India, they were initially circumspect in permitting missionary activity. The missionaries, during their regime worked mainly in the tribal areas and among the former untouchables. The Portuguese missionaries had the biggest success in converting Indians to the Roman Catholic faith especially in the west and east coasts of South India, so much so, at present about two-thirds of the Christians in India are to be found in the southern states and that the Roman Catholics outnumber all the other denominations of Christians put together.

21.7.2 Christian Population

According to the 1981 Census the Christians in India numbered 16.77 million or 2.43 per cent of the total population. They are found in every state and almost in every district of the country, but most of them are concentrated in a few pockets or regions. Their major concentrations are found in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Goa and most of the states of the North Eastern Hill areas comprising Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Manipur, Tripura etc.

21.7.3 Denominations and Sects

The multiplicity of divisions in the world body of Christians is also reflected among Christians in India. Most of the Protestant denominations are divided into two main churches termed the Church of North India and Church of South India. Other Indian Christians include the Roman Catholics, the Anglicans and Syrian Christians who have maintained separate identities. The Roman Catholics who comprise the largest group are further divided into those who follow the Latin rite and those who adhere to the Syrian rite.

These different churches have their pockets of concentration in different areas which are often mutually exclusive, reflecting the history and circumstances of their conversion.

21.7.4 Missionaries and Welfare Activities

Consistent with the social philosophy of their religion, the Christians in India are well represented in the social welfare activities in the country with particular concern for the service of the underprivileged. Their work in the fields of health and education is well recognized. The fact that Kerala is the most literate state having the best health-care delivery system in the country is no less due to the pioneering efforts of the Christian churches than to the impetus given by the enlightened rulers of the region.

Activity 2

Write a note of about one page on social activities of the Missionaries based on your observations and experience. Exchange your note with other students of the Study Centre, if possible.

As a student of sociology you would be interested to know how Christianity has been influenced by the plurality of India civilisation and culture. In unit 17 of ESO-02 you should be able to get some glimpses of these aspects.

Check Your Progress 3

i) Mention the three fundamental principles of ideal society as propagated by Christianity.

- a)
- b)
- c)

ii) Describe the consequences of the adaptation of the Church to the World in five lines.

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iii) Indicate major denominations of Christianity in India.

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)

21.8 LET US SUM UP

This unit began with a discussion on the life and message of Jesus Christ. Christianity is the religion founded by Jesus Christ who is believed to be the son of God but became man, suffered, died and rose alive, in order to atone for the sin of mankind. The divinely inspired teachings or the Word of God as accepted by Christians, are contained in the Bible, the holy book of the Christians.

We explained in this unit the teachings of Christianity. The life and teachings of Jesus are central to Christianity. Jesus taught and lived a way of life which was contrary to the common practice. The ethical conduct and social life that he preached and practised was founded on the love of God and the love of fellowmen flowing from it. After Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, a remarkable transformation took place among his disciples, which is attributed to the descent upon them of the Holy Spirit. Ever since, the Holy Spirit is believed to provide spiritual strength and inspiration to Christians who live according to the teachings of Jesus. The religious services of the Christians are mainly aimed at worshipping God, the Father through Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christian social order and the role of Church in the Christian society are also discussed in this unit. The community of Christians, the church, is modelled after the teachings of Jesus. However, the fact that the church has to adapt itself to the larger world with its contradictory norms of behaviour, poses peculiar problems to the Christians.

Lastly we discussed some aspects of Christianity in India. Christianity was introduced into India at its inception in the first century A.D., and a Christian community

flourished in Kerala. But its spread in different parts of the country took place with the advent of the European missionaries from 16th century onwards. Although the Christians in India form only 2.4 per cent of the population according to the 1991 census, they are found concentrated in a few regions of India in considerable proportions. They have made a mark in the country in social service activities.

21.9 KEY WORDS

Apostles	: Jesus Christ's twelve original disciples and Paul.
Baptism	: A ritual by which a person is admitted to the Christian community.
Gospels	: The first four New Testament books telling of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
Holy Spirit	: The active presence of God in human life constituting the third person of the Trinity.
Incarnation	: The union of divinity with humanity in Jesus Christ.
Liturgy	: Body of rites prescribed for public worship.
Prophet	: One who utters divinely inspired revelations.
Resurrection	: The rising of Jesus Christ from the dead.
Trinity	: The unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three persons in one God, according to Christian dogma.

21.10 FURTHER READINGS

Clemen, C. 1988. *Religions of the World*, Reprint (English Translation) Manas Publications: Delhi.

Barton, A.G. 1990. *The Religion of the World*, Olympia Publications: New Delhi.

Macquarrice, J. 1966. *Principles of Christian Theology*, S.C.M. Press: London.

21.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) The unfoldment of the scheme of salvation which is the integral part of the Christian religion, stretches over both the Old and the New Testaments. The Old Testament contains promises, descriptions and prophecies about the coming Saviour, which were fulfilled in Jesus whose life and teachings are dealt with in the New Testament. In this sense the New Testament bears witness to the Old Testament. Jesus was a Jew and his teachings which are found in the New Testament, often refer to the teachings in the Old Testament.
- ii) As mentioned in the Bible, man has body and soul. The body perishes with death but the soul survives eternally. Salvation means the survival of the soul in heaven after death. According to Christianity, human beings live only once on the earth and there is no re-birth.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) c.
- ii) c.
- iii) The breaking of bread of 'Lord's Supper' has special significance in Christian Worship. The replication of the 'Lord's Supper' at the Worship service is believed to realise once again his presence (called the living presence) and intimate Union with Christ. This part of the Worship service is known as Communion.

Check Your Progress 3

- i)
 - a) Universal brotherhood,
 - b) Egalitarian outlook,
 - c) Service of the underprivileged.
- ii) In the Christian belief there is neither the total adaptation to the world nor total reflection. There is a balanced approach. The early church reflected the world in spirit but accepted it in fact.
- iii)
 - a) Roman Catholic
 - b) Eastern Orthodox Churches
 - c) Syrian Christians

UNIT 22 ISLAM

Structure

- 22.0 Objectives
- 22.1 Introduction
- 22.2 The Advent of Islam
- 22.3 Tenets of Islam
 - 22.3.1 Islamic Concept of God
 - 22.3.2 The Angels of God
 - 22.3.3 The Book of God
 - 22.3.4 The Messengers of God
 - 22.3.5 The Day of Judgement or Resurrection
 - 22.3.6 The Duty of a Muslim
- 22.4 Major Schools of Thoughts, Movements and Sects
 - 22.4.1 Major Schools of Islamic Thoughts and Movements
 - 22.4.2 Sects in Islamic Society
- 22.5 Social Institutions as Viewed by Islam
 - 22.5.1 The Family
 - 22.5.2 Marriage and Divorce
 - 22.5.3 Institutions Governing Inheritance
- 22.6 Islam and Indian Muslims
 - 22.6.1 Elements of Castes
 - 22.6.2 Asharaf and Arzal
- 22.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 22.8 Key Words
- 22.9 Further Readings
- 22.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

22.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to

- explain the pre-Islamic conditions prevailing in Arabia and the advent of Islam
- discuss the meaning of Islam and its sources and tenets
- describe major schools of Islamic thought and sects
- explain the social organisation
- describe the Islamic society in India.

22.1 INTRODUCTION

In the plurality of Indian culture and civilisation Islam played a crucial role. The life style of the Islamic society is shaped by the tenets of Islam. As a student of sociology you should be interested to know the belief of that society. You would also be interested to know the movements and the conditions leading to the emergence of various sects in that society. We should also know the organisational arrangements of that society through which the belief system operates in daily life. Towards this effort in this unit, we shall discuss the tenets of Islam, the movements schools of thought and sects in the Islamic society in a socio-historical perspectives. We shall also touch upon the social organisations of that society briefly (for details see the course ESO-02, Unit 16 on, Muslim Social Organisation provided above Islam). We shall begin our analysis with an introductory note on the pre-Islamic conditions prevailing in Arab society to know the historical context of emergence of Islam. We shall also describe the meaning of Islam, its sources and tenets. Apart from this, we shall highlight the major schools in Islamic thought and its various sects. Various

social institutions like marriage, divorce, institution governing inheritance in communities following Islam will also be discussed in this unit. An attempt will be made in this unit to analyse the influence of Islamic teachings on social structure. Lastly, we will describe briefly the Islamic society in India.

22.2 THE ADVENT OF ISLAM

Before the advent of Islam, the Arab Society was confronted with many social problems. It was a tribal society. It was centred around a tribe or a kindred. It was a patriarchal society in which all rights were available to the male members and female members were not entitled to any right and were treated like a commodity. They were exchanged and even offered to the guest for sexual pleasure. Over all, the Arab society was confronted with many such evils and the society reached to the point of degeneration. Social reformers and people of wisdom started thinking of bringing reform in the Arabian society. Prophet Mohammad was also perturbed by the decadence in the religious life of the Arabs. He sought an opportunity of chastening their morals by placing before them new values of life. He tried to bind people on the bases of faith rather than on the old bond of blood. This new community was the community of Islam which was based on the brotherhood. The word Islam literally means "Absolute submission to God's will", but this does not imply any idea of fatalism. In its ethical sense, it signifies striving after the ideal of righteousness. The word Islam is also derived from a root word which means "peace". Thus, the true Muslim submits to God's will and obeys His Commandments, and lives at peace with his fellow men.

22.3 TENETS OF ISLAM

Islam does not profess to be a new religion formulated by the Prophet Mohammad but is the continuation of all former religious principles decreed by God through His revelations to all prophets including Moses and Jesus. Islam demands faith in:

- God
- The Angels of God
- The Book of God
- The Apostles of God.
- The Day of Judgement or Resurrection

22.3.1 Islamic Concept of God

Every Muslim believes in God's oneness, that He is one and has no partner, that He is omnipotent, all-owerful, eternal and is every-qualified with the attributes of supreme greatness. All are humble unto Him. All should seek exaltation through Him and humility unto Him, for they all are mere subordinate creatures seeking His favour and most favoured by Him are the pious ones who obey His commandments.

22.3.2 The Angles of God

God has created the Angles. All Muslims must have faith in their existence but they are not to be worshipped. They are created and are free from carnal desires.

22.3.3 The Book of God

It is the belief of Muslims that God has sent Books in different ages in which God revealed. Muslims believe in *Holy Quran* which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.

22.3.4 The Messengers of God

As Muslims believe in the Books revealed by God, they also believe in the messengers sent by God in different ages to reclaim mankind from infidelity, idolatry and superstition. The Holy Quran makes no distinction between the Prophets sent by God but according to them Prophet Muhammad is the last Prophet of God.

22.3.5 The Day of Judgement or Resurrection

The Muslims also have belief in the Day of Judgement. The dead shall rise from their graves, and every individual shall give an account of his or her own actions. Muslims also have belief in Heaven and Hell.

22.3.6 The Duty of a Muslim

Apart from these beliefs, a Muslim should do the following duties.

- i) Recital of the creed
- ii) Prayer to God five times a day — at dawn, midday, mid-afternoon, directly after sunset, and an hour-and-a-half later. A special midday congregational prayer with sermon is binding on Fridays.
- iii) Paying the *Zakat* or legal alms which is a form of charitable tax.
- iv) Fasting during the month of “Ramzan”, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar.
- v) *Haj* i.e. Pilgrimage to the ‘Holy Kaba’ in Mecca once in a life time by those who can afford it.

Through these practices of devotion, a Muslim becomes the master over his passions and desires and attains, through worship and observance of Islamic rules, the apex of dignity, human conduct and elevation of mind.



Mohammedan mother teaching a child to read the Holy Quran, the main scripture of Islam.

Thus according to Islam, a Muslim must have faith in the above mentioned beliefs and must practise the above mentioned practices in order to surrender before the “Will” of God and hence attain a place in the Heaven after his death.

Activity 1

Prepare a two hundred word note on the duty of a Muslim performed by your Muslim friends/colleagues/persons known to you. Exchange your note with other students in the Study Centre, if possible.

22.4 MAJOR SCHOOLS OF THOUGHTS, MOVEMENTS AND SECTS

No religious beliefs and practices operate in isolation. It has to encounter the world around. In this process it influences others and also get influenced. Let us know how Islam encountered the world. Even though the Quran being a guiding principle for the Muslims to carry out their life according to its teachings but as it migrated to other parts of the world its institutions were affected by conditions in different regions during the centuries of their existence. There is a *principle of movement in Islam*, and Muslim institutions and the Muslim way of life have changed in terms of space and time. Let us try to understand the nature and scope of this principle of movement in Islam.

In the absence of a clear and categorical answer from the Holy Book (Quran), the absolute word of God, the prophets’ decisions — His percepts, His acts and practices’ negative as well as positive — were regarded as decisive. An inherent conservatism canonised the *Sunna* — Custom, usage of the ancients; any stepping aside from it was a *‘biddat’* innovation and had to win its way by its merits, in the teeth of strong prejudice. Islam did exchange this practice and replaced it by the traditions of Prophet Muhammad. After the death of Prophet Muhammad, *four* schools came into being to interpret and provide guidance in dispensing justice. As a matter of fact the use of judicial opinion was seriously questioned and its scope precisely defined in the ninth century A.D. Under the *Abbasids* the sources of Muslims law were discussed, and the four schools founded in this period defined the scope of legal friction and equity in the development of Muslim law. These four schools are discussed below briefly.

22.4.1 Major Schools in Islamic Thoughts and Movements

i) Abu Hanifa (AD 699-766)

He founded a School of Islamic jurisprudence and opined that when *Quran* and *Sunna* are silent about a problem, this school emphasized the role of *‘Qiyas’*, reasoning by analogy, to guide the people to carry out the activities.

ii) Malik Ibn Anas (AD 713-95)

Another School of Islamic law was founded by Malik Ibn Anas. According to this school *Quran*, *Suna* and *Ujma* (all religious scriptures) should become the basis of the interpretation of new situation.

iii) Ash-Shafi (AD 767-820)

This School was founded with the intention that the traditions of Prophet Mohammad should become the main source of the interpretation instead of individual opinion, *istihsam*, as well as *istislah*. He fell back on the principle of agreement, *ijma*.