



MAR THOMA

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## FOCUS 2001

FEBRUARY 7-10, 2001

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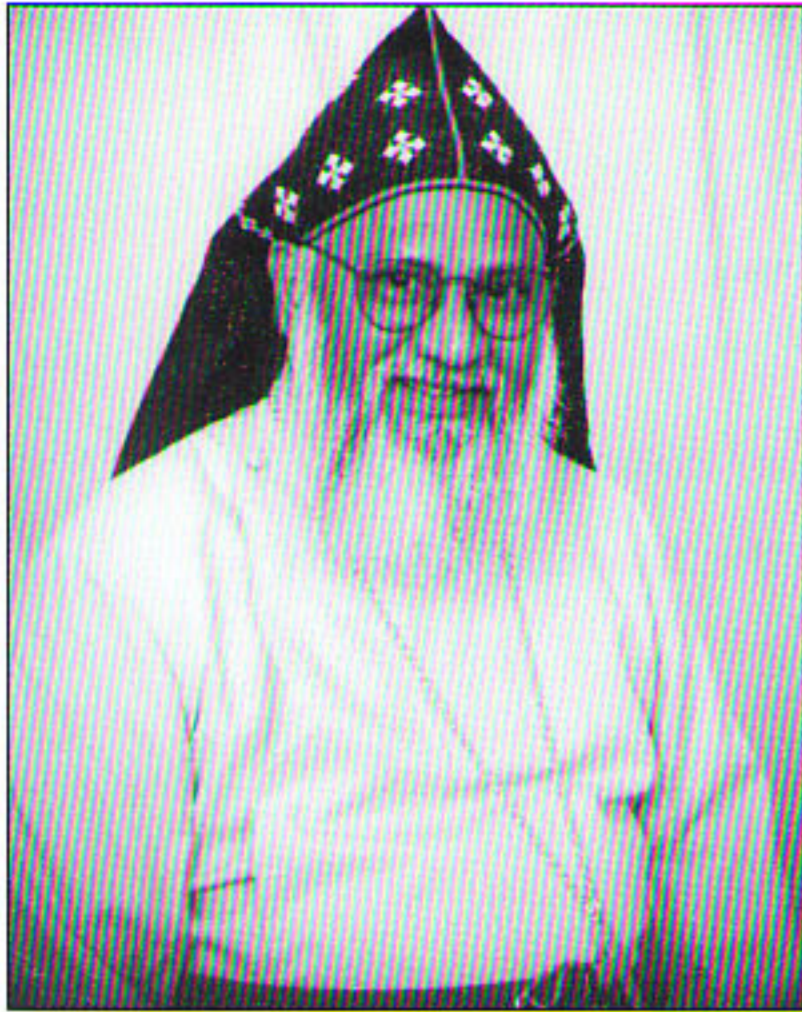
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# Message from the Diocesan Bishop



Dearly beloved in Christ,

The Maramon Convention was a great blessing to many this year also. The speakers at the convention challenged the audience for repentance and renewal, to adopt a new life style—a life in Christ. Special sessions for children, youth, women, evangelists, families and general public touched the hearts and minds of everyone present. Many had dedicated and rededicated their lives for the service of the master. It's my hope and prayer that the church and the society would be changed towards a kingdom community in the coming days and months.

The Central Committee of the WCC met at Potsdam near Berlin, Germany during the first week of March and declared the years 2001-2010 as the "Decade to overcome violence." The churches are challenged to hold hands with all on this earth to work for peace and harmony. It's natural and easy to get violent. Non-violence, on the other hand, requires strength and moral courage. There was intense debate on the question of "Violence as a last resort." It is not the question of violence and non-violence. It is the issue of life in peace and justice for all on earth. Peace with justice is the burning issue of the modern time.

The biennial meeting of the FOCUS Group met at Santhigiri during the first week of February. Nearly 40 delegates from USA, UK, Gulf countries, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and India gathered for three days and pondered on the theme "From the corridors of power to the expanses of divine grace." It's heartening to note that our Diaspora community is taking great pains to find meaning of and give content and mission to their lives. Their vision of establishing a Diaspora Center and Diaspora Foundation is commendable and will have far reaching consequences.

This is the Lent season and we are meditating upon the life, work, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When we identify with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, we would be able to share the glorification of Christ too. Nowadays all we want to look at is at the throne and crown and hate to see the manger and the cross. We tend to forget "there is no crown without the cross." Our challenge is to shoulder the pain of humanity and pathos of God that the world may be different and God's purpose fulfilled.

Our diocesan assembly is meeting immediately after Easter in Long Island. Over one hundred delegates from the length and breadth of this diocese will get involved in serious deliberations regarding the present and future life and work of this diocese. The proposal to move forward with Zonal Assemblies and Councils are worth trying as it may enhance regional growth and fellowship. Retreat and camp centers in different regions also need to be built up soon. The unfinished basement at the Sinai Center is now beautifully completed with added facilities like a council chamber, dining hall, guest room, library, office cabins, office for literature society etc. Thank God we could clear all outstanding personal loans also. I must thank all our members who helped us with loans during our financial needs.

This year nearly twenty of our clergy are being transferred to India after completing their ministry here. We owe much to their contributions. Let's be thankful to them and pray for their continued ministry. The incoming of a large number of new priests is going to affect the very nature and texture of this diocese. To add to that there would be changes in the diocesan secretary and the diocesan bishop. This calls forth a radical change at all levels. New vision, new mission, new blood, new life, new persons. Change and newness are to be welcomed. Let's be grateful to the old and hopeful about the new.

Jacob Achen, Molly Kochamma, Dhanya and Divya deserve special thanks. Their smiling faces, overflowing hospitality and warm reception made the entry into the Sinai Center a very refreshing and enchanting one. They may take away a good chunk of "life" from Sinai. Surely they are leaving some sweet memories for us. Let "Kaithakuzhy" be blessed. Let's thank achen and family for what they were to us. May God bless you all.

With blessings

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus

# The Metropolitan's Call to the Diaspora Church

Jesudas M. Athyal, Chennai, India

Excerpts from the Keynote Address delivered by The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Metropolitan at the Second FOCUS Seminar held at Santhigiri Ashram, from February 7-10, 2001. The observations made by the Metropolitan at the discussions there too have been included here.

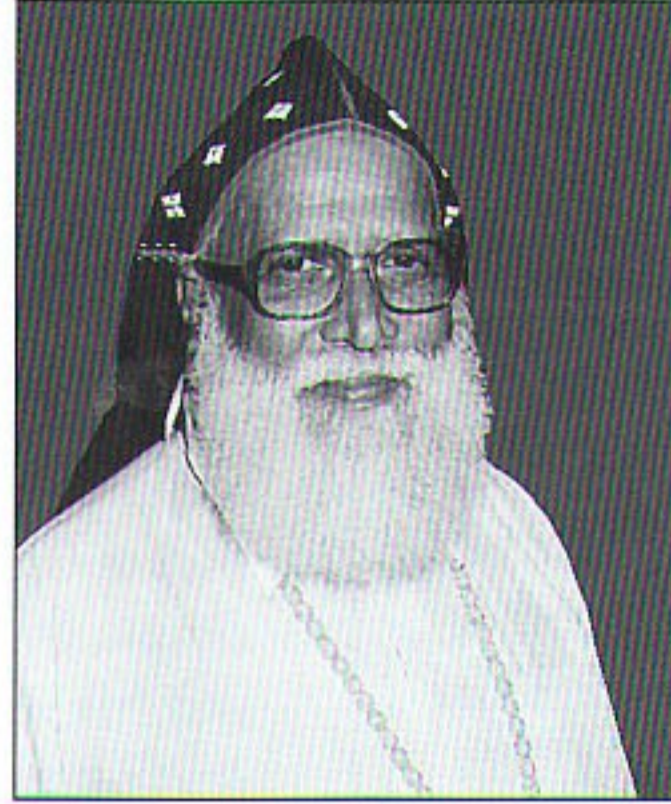
## Power and Grace

What is Diaspora? The Greek meaning of the term 'diaspora' refers to 'the dispersed people' (the scattered people). In this sense, the whole church theologically is a diaspora community, the people of God scattered over the face of the earth, to witness to the great deeds of God. It is often adverse circumstances that prompt people to move away from their home land, to strange lands. The Israelites who went to Egypt due to famine was a diaspora community. For them that was a liberation journey, but it resulted in enslavement. Dispersion is for liberation, but there is no good without the possibility of evil. Dispersion is liberation, but it is also a challenge. This truth is relevant for our present diaspora communities too.

Secondly, all of us, the members of the diaspora church and others, should collectively reflect the relation between the ultimate and the particular. S. Radhakrishnan used to say: 'You should discover *Swadharma* in the context of *Vishwadharma*. The ultimate, to be divine, needs be reflected in the particular. The Kingdom of God is both 'now' and 'beyond'. The infinite should enter into history; or should become FINITE. In Jesus, the infinite came to history.

We need to reflect collectively on the general theme of this seminar: *'From the corridors of power to the expanses of divine grace.'* Power is neutral. What is important is, who wields power. A leader is not one who is always at the forefront, but one who make others leaders. We should not be the victims of circumstances, but the creators of circumstances. **Authority is not in bringing others to submission, it is in developing people. Do not dictate or discover for the people; help them to discover for themselves.** What is needed is trans-formation, not re-formation. The basis of trans-formation is disobedience; responsible disobedience. The task of the church is to build up people who will critically participate in this task.

Grace is getting something we do not deserve. It is only through grace that power can be exercised properly. Those who have taken the world seriously will take the grace of God seriously. Grace is what you get when you have nothing to give in return. The corridor therefore is between the powerful and the powerless, linking Christians to human beings.



## Para Parishes

Several people ask the priests to define the role of the laity. What does the priest know of your situation? It is you who are out in the world, from Monday to Saturday. The priests could help you to understand the concept of God, but it is for you to interpret it in the situation in which you are placed. In changing circumstances, new questions spring up for which the traditional answers are irrelevant.

Take a place like London. There are so many churches there and many are not being used today. Why? Everybody thinks that it is because the people are indifferent to religious faith. No. London is no longer a dormitory town; it is now offices, shops and other similar places. So people have gone off. They live in far off places today. They have to start early morning to reach their places of work, and by the time they return home, it is late. So their present geographical parish is only a sleeping parish. And consequently, the whole parish is sleeping!

The traditional understanding that the parish is within a specific geographical area, is now increasingly being discarded in the diaspora, as for instance, in Bombay where the Syrian Catholics have formed a diocese separate from the local Catholic community. Their understanding is that parish is a *worshipping* community, not a geographical entity. We however have to move further. We need to move from parishes to para parishes: parishes for office workers, laborers and working women; parishes in the work place and parishes in the market. Also, parishes for different types of people. We should get people not on geographical basis, but from real life situations. These should be our concern.

These are the realities today. You people live in the secular world and are in tune with them. The life and witness of the dispersed community is integrally related to the life of the larger community. You should tell us what should be the agenda for the church today. Do not expect to get directions from Tiruvalla; instead give Tiruvalla directions. Though we often see what is happening around us, we do not always observe. We should be able to discern critically what is happening around us and interpret them in the light of the Word of God.

## Teaching magisterium

Do any of our parishes arrange a teaching mission? We don't teach, we only preach. We are interested in everything else but teaching. This is an important area when we consider our youth. In the college, they have teaching sessions, but in the church we make it a preaching session. They have a lot of questions, and they should be helped to find their own answers. Today we are eager to thrust our answers on others, but we have no time or patience to understand their questions. We need to take study seriously. Study the history and liturgy of the church too. You are even free to write new liturgies, but no one is interested in these issues. Once I attended a service conducted by the youth at the St. Thomas Church in Bombay. During the service, at the time of confession, they came forward with a flower in their hands and said: 'this was a beautiful flower on the stem of the plant and everybody enjoyed it, but we wanted to possess it for ourselves, disregarding all the other people. We made it ours; now it is faded and useless. This is the sin that we are involved in.' To me that was a very meaningful confession. That is real confession. After the confession, they presented a skit where they together said: 'Now Lord, we have understood our mistake, we are going to plant another plant which in due course of time will bloom and bring out more flowers which will be enjoyed by all around us.' I asked the vicar of that church afterwards if he wrote that play. He had not; he let the youth write it. Why don't we make people write their own liturgies? The Church has not yet given an official translation of the matins, though there are several official translations of the liturgy; we have deliberately not done so, wanting you to exercise your freedom and write your own liturgies, and use it with the approval of your vicar and diocesan bishop.

What is Christian priesthood? Is it celebrating at the altar alone? Is priesthood confined to the church? Is it that the priests celebrate or the congregation celebrates? In the Mar Thoma Church, a priest by himself cannot celebrate the Holy Communion. There should be people first, to receive the Holy Communion. So if you want to be a priest, you can be one only in relation to the laity. Putting on a cassock does not make you a priest. In England, putting on the cassock makes you a priest. There, I once saw several ordinary people putting on the dress of the bishop. I asked them why they are doing so. They said: 'These people are all rogues; let them understand that they are no better than any of us.'

The lack of understanding about priesthood among our people is partly because little teaching is done. According to the Bible, all of us belong to the royal priesthood. The priestly ministry is related to the royal priesthood. In baptism we are ordained to the priesthood of the church. There is today the criticism that the church is unable to keep pace with the changes outside. The world is changing so rapidly; the old cultural, patriarchal barriers are crumbling. But we in

the church have created walls, the non-Syrian Christians are excluded, non-Malayalees are excluded, even our own women cannot go up to the altar. This is our situation; our reluctance to change. So goes the criticism.

There is a great deal of truth in these criticisms, and I agree with most of them. But there is also another side to it. That is that in our efforts to change the present situation, we need to be sensitive to the values and understanding of *all* sections in the church, not just 20% of them. In a parish, perhaps 80% of the parish may not have had the privilege of college education, but they are also part of the parish, not just the small section of highly educated people. Again, our problem boils down to teaching magisterium. Study, and help others to study. There are several good books, and several translations of the Bible too. But here too, we need to be sensitive to the *local* context. Bishop Stephen Neill of England who was a good friend of the Indian Church, after retirement, took up the job of writing simple books for the third world. Once I asked him what was his next task. He said that he has three manuscripts, sent by people from America and England. Now, I have to put them into English, he said. The words that we use should be understood even by a person who has studied only up to the primary school. Language is very important, if language is for communication.

## Diaspora and identity

The churches in the diaspora are taking steps to preserve their cultural heritage and liturgy, and want to pass them on to the coming generations. Now, a Sunday has been set apart as Diaspora Sunday, for remembrance and thanksgiving. The diaspora wanting to preserve their identity is understandable; historical events are important. Remembrance of them can be occasions for thanksgiving. The diaspora community today is a privileged one; this is something to be thankful for. But let us also remember the less privileged ones. The people of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, for instance, who do not have the freedom even to worship together.

All the same, we should not reduce our identity to certain historical periods alone, when we moved from one geographical location to another. We should also remember that we are the makers of history *today*. The church is not a static community, but a pilgrim community. We have not yet arrived, and we should resist the temptation to stay put. This reality should be reflected in the diaspora church too, especially with regard to our youth. Wherever they are, and whichever idiom they use to express their faith and culture, we should remember that they are adding to our heritage.

Identity does not necessarily mean separation. In marriage, two people are brought together, but they do not become one physical entity. The point is *oneness*, as you visualize in the Bible. Again, the problem is that Trinity is not taught properly in our parishes: that while Jesus was in

the womb of his mother, he was in heaven. The Christian understanding of identity is *oneness*; it is not giving up your specialty. Diversity is necessary in the church. If the church is to be Catholic, there should be diversity. I don't believe in complete uniformity. Identity therefore does not mean that you should be separate. What is church? What we need to stress in the church is the corporate aspect of worship, not what is being done by the Achen alone. Laity are the representatives of priesthood. In our worship, lay people are the sign and symbol of the church. So also the bishop and the clergy.

One last question. The efforts of the diaspora community to retain an organic link with the land of their origin and the problems they face in their efforts to pass on these values to the younger generation have been discussed a lot. But the identity of the dispersed people in relation to their new homes too is important. Will the diaspora community ever become the local community?

### **Exclusion—Inclusion**

The preamble of the Constitution of the Mar Thoma Church states that the church is *part of the* whole Catholic and Apostolic Church. It is *part* of the one universal Church. So it is not being an exclusive church, but is essentially inclusive. What however is the place of tradition in inclusion? Can we overnight become unrelated to history? Again, is inclusion the complete de-culturalisation of us from our culture? Not only the tradition of our church, but even the tradition of our community are important. Community is important. We usually say that the church is the fellowship of the believers. It sounds good, but is it true? For one, it is not believers alone who are part of the church. Not all people in the church are perfect, not even the clergy or bishops. The church is not for the church; the church is for the world. Together we should try to be what we ought to be. Together we become the people of God. 'The people of God,' is the term used both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. We cannot live as a church without reference to the larger community.

Questions of exclusion-inclusion are frequently raised these days, but are our families inclusive? You want to retain your cultural identity in alien settings. Is it inclusive?

### **Younger generation**

You talk about the need for inclusive communities. How genuine is your concern? In the diaspora churches, several of you are reluctant to change the language of the worship service from Malayalam to accommodate the youth. Do you know what your children say about you? They told me: **"All of them know English, but we cannot read Malayalam. We tolerate them on two Sundays; but they cannot tolerate us for two Sundays."** **What is the use of their going to the church for worship? It is these attitudes that are driving the youth away from our church today.** It is not the Kerala church, but your homes

that are driving them away. How many of you have family prayers at home, even though you grew up in an atmosphere where there were morning and evening prayers at home? Now you don't have it at your homes. You were raised in the tradition of the family altar, now in the new situation, you have lost everything. Think of your children. In *Alice in Wonderland* it is said: 'You have to run very fast if you have to be where you are.' It is a fast changing world; if you want your children to remain firm give them deep roots. That is the importance of teaching. Teaching is not a one-hour business. You should be able to analyze the current trends, and interpret them.

### **The task today**

What I want to tell you now is that you should go back to your parishes, sit with your Achen and Committee and discuss all these matters. Teaching is most important. That is how Communism grew in Kerala — through study classes. The workers will gather regularly in the tea shops where one of them will read the current affairs in the newspaper and take a study class on the socio-political implications of it. They are the '*Achens*' (Fathers); we are 'priests.' This should happen in your parishes too. You must have classes for older people too, to let them say what the church should be. All other related aspects too should be discussed.

### **Call to the Diaspora Community**

So what I want to tell you again and again is to go back and share these concerns with your parish. You have to carry the people with you. You know Jesus. He accepted many of the prevalent customs. Devil, for instance. You cannot overnight eradicate the people's notion about devil. **What has to be done is a slow but steady process of educating the people. What is the difference between change and revolution? When the change is too fast, and too radical, it becomes revolution. When the people involved in the change adjust themselves to the changing condition, you call it revolution. The point here is about changes in the church or parish. In some cases, even revolutions are necessary.**

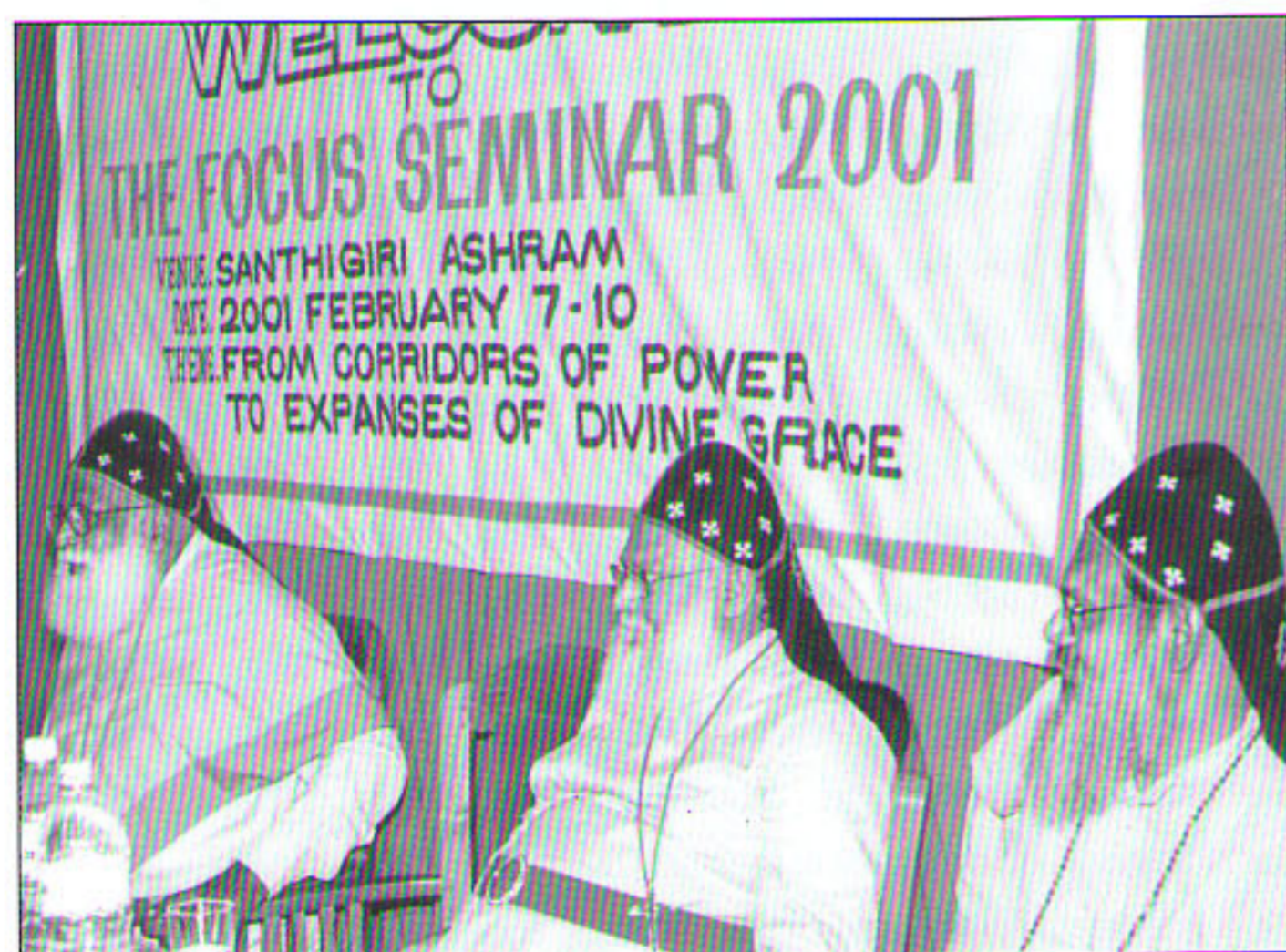
What makes a church the church? Every member of the Church should become a member in the Kingdom of God. Two things are implied in this. Firstly, that being in the Church does not necessarily mean that you are a member in the Kingdom of God. Secondly, we are in the process of arriving. Nobody should say that I have arrived. So the Kingdom of God should be understood in its totality. What we do now is to teach about the church. But we often forget that the church can be understood only in the background of the Kingdom of God. What is ultimate is God's Kingdom, not the Church. What we are involved in is a pilgrimage. We have not yet arrived; so don't stay put. ■

# FOCUS 2001 Seminar



*The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Metropolitan inaugurating the FOCUS Group Seminar on February 8, 2001 at Santhigiri.*

“From the corridors of power to expanses of divine grace” was the general theme of a seminar held at the Santhigiri Ashram, Alwaye from February 7-10, 2001. The seminar was the second of a series organized by an independent lay movement, FOR CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING AND SOLIDARITY—FOCUS—of the Mar Thoma Diaspora communities around the world. Forty participants from seven countries came together with the bishops and other leaders of the Mar Thoma Church. Opening night’s discussion was held under the leadership of The Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius started the seminar with a Holy Communion Service.

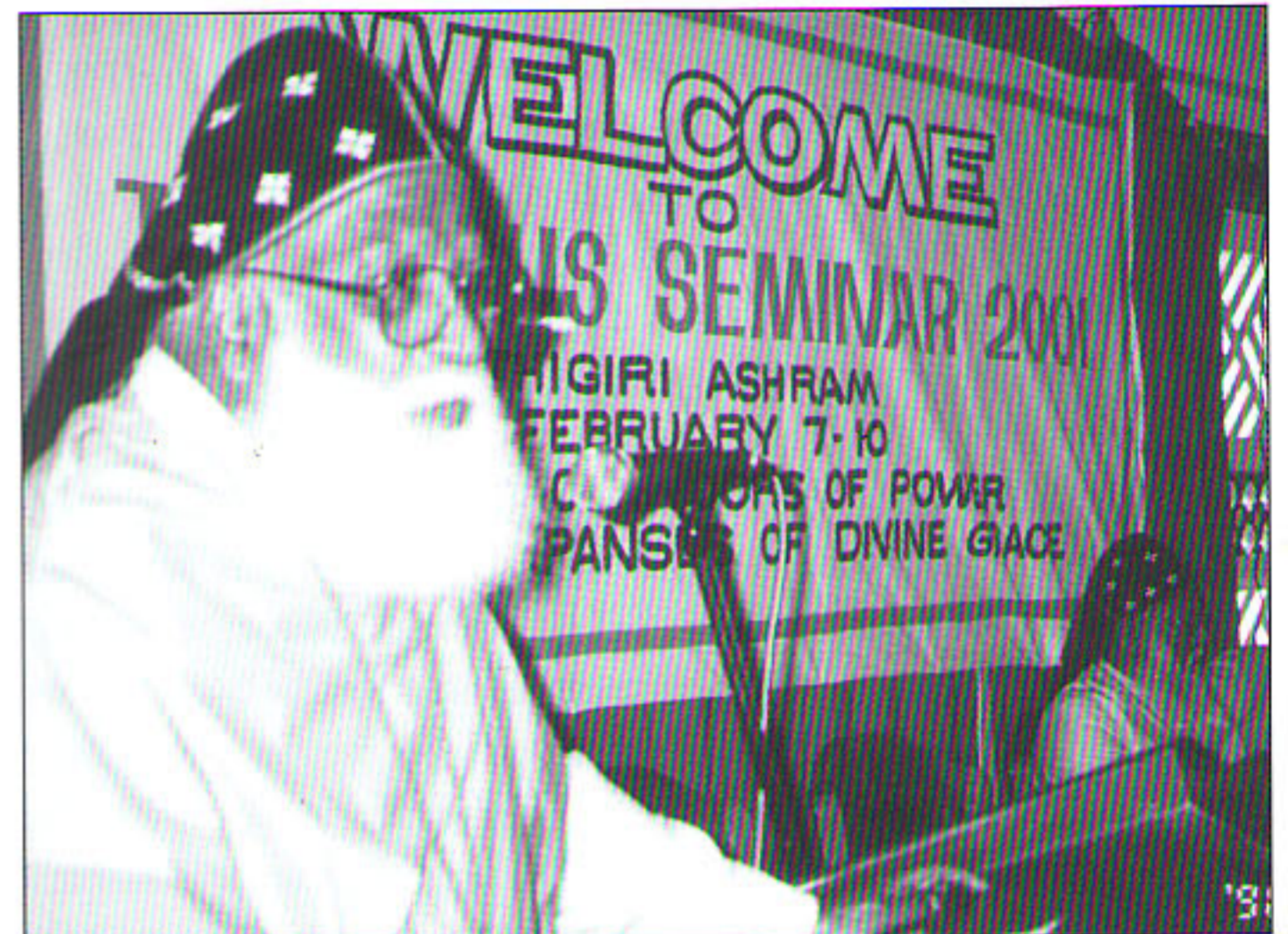


*Listening to the proceedings.*

The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Metropolitan, while delivering the inaugural address, congratulated the FOCUS movement of the Mar

Thoma Diaspora for organizing the seminar and for such good participation. Thirumeni made an elegant and eloquent surgical analysis on the general theme of the seminar in his characteristic style laced with humour, in depth understanding and intellectual brilliance. The Metropolitan, together with Theodosius and Zacharias Thirumenis then interacted with the participants in a three hour dialogue on a wide range of issues.

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Irenaeus, Suffragan Metropolitan described the human tragedy unfolded after the Gujarat earthquake. Thirumeni had a real and very sensitive understanding of the socio-economic, political and religious realities unfolding as a serious after effect of the earthquake. He warned that it was not the time to make glib remarks but rather it was time to help the victims in a



*Valiya Thirumeni addressing the delegates.*

most generous way with love and compassion. He then explained about some of the coordinated help generated through various Christian organizations.

We had a workshop on issues relating to the Mar Thoma Diaspora communities and this was discussed under the following sub-categories: issues at local and diocesan level, global issues, relationship with the Mother Church and the need for a lay-centered and youth-centered Church. We are very grateful for the following leaders for giving good leadership at this workshop: Mr. Mathew Kallumpram, Dr. Thomas Abraham, Mr. Abraham Mattackal, Dr. Roy Joseph, Dr. Kuruvilla Mathew, Dr. M. V. Mathew and Dr. Elizabeth Mathew. Both Zacharias Thirumeni and Theodosius Thirumeni gave guidance during the workshop.





*The Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Irenaeus Suffragan Metropolitan speaking to the delegates.*



*The delegates with the Bishops.*

The second workshop was about the general understanding of the theme of the seminar. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Rev. Dr. K. U. Abraham, Dr. A. K. Tharian and Mr. Jesudas Athyal gave leadership for this. Papers submitted by Dr. George Zachariah Mr. George Poikail, Rev. Dr. M. J. Joseph and The Rt. Rev. Geevarghese Mar Athanasius were helpful in unraveling the complexities of the theme.

It was not a men only seminar, there was a good representation of women. Dr. Mariamma Thomas spoke on the importance of Christian leaders exercising authority in a most effective way. She compared the Roman Catholic model of hierarchical authority and the Mar Thoma model dispersed authority through parish structures, diocese, mandalam, council, deacons, pastors and Bishops. Mrs. Elzi Zac Varghese in a light-hearted manner expressed her understanding of the general theme of the seminar in a simple and humorous way by comparing the 'corridors' to the comings and goings of a 'kitchen cabinet' and 'expanses' to the openness, the freshness, the calmness, the beauty and vitality of an outdoor garden. We are afraid to turn to God, turn to Holy Spirit; the power lay there totally unused for solving the problems confronting us. Instead, we turn to human agencies for getting things done in most inadequate ways.

Finally, a word of thanks to the participants who took time and efforts in attending the seminar and contributing so richly to the deliberations. Not only had we a good seminar and fellowship but the careful husbandry of the available funds helped us in providing some much needed help to a local Mar Thoma parish at Thiruvankulam and some help towards building a house for a poor family at Cochin. Our thanks and appreciation go to all our bishops, clergy and other leaders who participated in the seminar and also to the voluntary helpers and members of the local

organizing committee under the leadership of Mr. Philip Mathew and Rev. & Mrs. K. G. Joseph. We are also grateful to the trustees of the Santhigiri Ashram for making available the facilities for the seminar.

In the business meeting, the FOCUS Group elected an International Committee consisting of Dr. Kuruvilla Mathew, Mr. Philip Mathew, Dr. Thomas Varughese, Mr. A. Luke, Mr. Abraham Mattackal, Dr. Elizabeth Mathew



*The Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa and Rev. K. G. Joseph conducting Holy Communion Service on February 8, 2001.*

and Mr. Mathew A. Kallumpram to represent members of the participating countries. Dr. Samuel A. Chacko, Dr. Roy Joseph and Dr. Zac Varghese were elected as Convenors. The meeting also resolved to request the Santhigiri Trust to set up a Diaspora Centre at Santhigiri and the general body authorized the International Committee of the FOCUS Group to take appropriate steps in this regard.

**Dr. Zac Varghese, London, U.K.**

# How Do Power and Grace Feature in Our Daily Living?

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius

**W**hat is daily Christian living? St. Paul in his letter to Philippians says (Phil. 2:5-11). Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus V. 6. Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7. But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross: 9. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name, which is above every name: 10. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth: 11. And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. (King James Version)

In this exhortation of St. Paul he portrays how power and grace are featured in Christ's life style. St. Paul gives this as the pattern for our daily Christian living.

## 1. Expression of Christian life

The four Gospels in our Holy Bible narrate the public ministry of Jesus Christ. It clearly says that Jesus lived a different style than the people of His time. Mt. 7:29 says "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." Jesus was different. The followers of Christ are called not to mimic him but to put on Christ (Gal. 3:27); What is required in Christian life is not some sort of adjustment to go along with the life of others. But to have a total change of perception because Christ lives in him/her.

The history of the Christian Church gives us adequate evidence to say that the mind of Christ was lacking in many historical occasions. Distorted ideas made the Church a silent spectator of the violations of the Human Rights like slave trade and extermination of the natives of the land. The protest of Martin Luther, formation of the Protestant churches and the formation of the Anglican Church are clear indications of how the Church craved for Power. The present Pope John Paul II has already recognized that the Church has gone wrong. We all know that the Pope has publicly asked pardon for the violations of human rights by the Church in the past.

Permit me to give you the example of Kiran Bedi I. G. of India. Her predecessors as Inspector Generals of Thihar



Jail in Delhi believed that they can prevent criminals from committing further crimes by harsh and cruel treatment in the Jail. Kiran Bedi was different. She treated the Prisoners with respect and genuine concern. She said: "no reform is possible unless and until a sensitivity to the human condition is developed. In whatever condition and in whatever place we may discover a human being, his or her rights ensuing from this fact must be recognized and appreciated...any system not permeated with humanness will

not and cannot work." Kiran Bedi succeeded in transforming Tihar Jail within a period of six months. It is the mind (vision) that motivated her. St. Paul correctly says: Let the mind of Jesus be in you.

## 2. Position and Authority

With wrong ideas of authority people in position may work really hard. They can only produce the wrong results faster. With a wrong map of Cochin in hand one may walk faster to reach the destination. The person will only reach the wrong place faster.

I am told that 'a parish priest said to the person who came with an application for membership that he should also deposit Rs. 16, 000/ for family Vault to reserve space in the Parish Cemetery. This appeared strange for the person who was a returnee from ABU-DHABI. He decided to take membership in another parish.' What is more important: person or money?

When Jesus took before Pilate he said "Know thou not that I have power to crucify thee and have power to release thee. Jesus answered you would have no authority over me if it were not given to you from above" (John 19:10-11). All authority is from God.

The purpose of every authority is for service. Once the disciples of Jesus, James and John, asked for positions on the right and left of Jesus when he comes into glory. This disturbed the whole group of disciples. Knowing their displeasure Jesus said (Mark 10:42-45) "Ye know that they, which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise Lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the Chiefest shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered

unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Any authority is a means to serve and for the Christian it is a life to witness the Gospel. Any person in authority who believes that his or her duty is to govern and not to serve; to be the first and not the last, may achieve many things but will prove to be a counter witness to the Gospel. Such persons will ignore or crush individuals for the sake of institutions or personal sense of achievement.

In a democratic country like India the position and power are given by the people. Those who are in the Legislative Assembly, Parliament, Rajyasabha or in positions like that of the Prime Minister and the President are all elected by the people. The persons in various positions and authority exercise their power because they are sanctioned by the people of the Country. We believe that God is working through the people and therefore all authority is divinely ordained. Those who are in power are therefore accountable to God and to the people. As mentioned earlier the power is given to them not for personal achievement but for service.

In the Mar Thoma Church there is a harmonious relationship in the Church administration and management between a hierarchical order and a democratic set up. In all administrative matters the Pradhinithi Mandalam is the highest and Supreme body. And in the Spiritual realm the Metropolitan is the highest person, subject to God. The Metropolitan presides over the Pradhinithi Mandalam and Episcopal Synod. So he is the Metropolitan in Synod and Mandalam. He is the Spiritual Father of the Church. Let us bear in mind that in the Church it is not possible to separate the spiritual body and the administrative body. All authority is God given and those who are in power is accountable to God and to the people. What is expected of a person in power is a graceful action.

### 3. Power and Grace

Power and Grace go hand in hand in the daily living of any Christian. Grace is one of the Key words of the New Testament and an attribute of Christ. St. Paul in his second Epistle to Corinthians says (8:6-9) "Accordingly we have urged Titus that as he had already made a beginning he should also complete among you this gracious work. 7. Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in utterance in knowledge, in all earnestness and in your love for us—see that you excel in these gracious works also. 8. I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. 9. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich". Paul writes this in the context of a collection for the members of the Church in Jerusalem from the

members of the Church in Corinth. He says that the giving is a gracious giving. This is possible only with an interest in other people. For, without an interest in others the finest piety may become a stagnant pool. John declares that (1 John 3:14) love of the brethren is the test by which we know that we have Christian life. St. Paul is not trying to exercise his power here. He says that in Verse 8. More than the money St. Paul sought the development of the Church in the Grace of Christian Character. The growth of personality is from within and can be produced only in freedom. It is in this context that Paul cites the example of Jesus Christ.

Grace cannot be understood apart from the human needs in which God comes to our help. The Holy Bible tells us that people should become persons in Christ and they should do the will of God of their own free choice, knowing fully well that what they do is according to the will of God. God was not winning human love by coercion. Instead the human mind is awakened by the revelation of perfect goodness and righteousness as we see in Christ Jesus. Verses 5-8 tells us that Christ laid aside the power, prestige, dignity and privilege and came down to associate with the Creation. He took the form of a servant sharing the ordinary labor of humankind and enduring without exception the ills and injustices of the world in which he lived. He became poor in money, in position, in power, in reputation, poor in all the things that people generally aspire. This God in Christ did it in order to be one with human kind and to win them by love and goodness. This act of love is the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is love, which will not let us go, and yet will not overwhelm our will or destroy our freedom.

The Grace of Christ operates to produce faith, love and peace not by infusing them into our hearts but by reconciling us to God and allowing us to exercise our freedom. So for a graceful living Christ should live in us. This living in Christ enables us to see other people with their needs in a new light. They are our brothers and sisters for whom also Christ died. So in the light of the cross we see others with a new value. The cross changes our whole perspective to see the whole created order as Christ sees.

The experience of the Grace of God awakens us also to an act of gratitude. We are conscious of a debt to Christ which must be paid (expression of our love in response to God's love), and can be paid only to those whom Christ paid. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me"—said Christ (Mt. 25:40). Francis of Assisi, for example, took all men to his heart because he saw in them the Christ to whom he owed his life.

Grace is completely free and entirely undeserved. No one can earn grace. It can only be humbly and gratefully received. The fundamental idea of grace is gift, given out of the sheer generosity of the giver's heart, a gift which the receiver could never have earned and could never have

deserved by any efforts of his own. To St. Paul the essential idea of all religion is Grace, and grace means that no man can ever acquire anything in the sight of God; that all that man can do is to accept with wonder that which God freely and generously gives. Jesus Christ is the incarnate grace of God. It is by grace and grace alone that men are saved and this salvation is for good works (Eph. 2:8-10). Paul insists that we are not only saved by grace but also called by grace (Gal. 1:6, 15).

Grace is the power of God, which clothes a man with day today fortitude and strength. Grace is a man's day to day defense and inspiration. Grace is not only the glory of the mountaintop; it is the source of strength for the ordinary road of every day.

#### 4. Christian Living

If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. Christian living is becoming a new person, totally and entirely new from what is old. Gospel is a complete paradigm shift. In speaking about the fruits of the Spirit, Paul says it is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, etc. He contrasts this with the works of the flesh. A Christian is called to walk in the spirit and not in the lust of the flesh. So Paul exhorts "If we live in the spirit let us also walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:19-26). It will be interesting to study the Sermon on the Mount in this context.

Christian life is qualitatively different when it is clothed with humility. Paul wrote about his disability by reminding himself that God's strength was perfected in man's weakness. So he insisted that the only ground for glory was the cross of the Jesus Christ and the Grace of God which enabled him.

The spirit of Christ becomes the source of virtue, which operates through the body. They are of three kinds. (1) Relating to God; (2) Relation to ones' fellow person; and (3) Relating to one's self. This is possible only by a life in Christ. This dynamic presence of Christ is a power for daily cleansing and constant renewal. This power is a growing power. "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (II Cor. 3:17). It is the Spirit of the Lord that leaves a person in control of himself/herself and in organic relationship with the fellow person and God, the source of moral activity and freedom.

God offers Grace to human kind with the special purpose of accomplishing good things, which he/she cannot achieve for himself/herself. It is not for a reward for good conduct but it is rather a means of liberating a person from his/her own deep failure and helplessness. Therefore Grace of God is an active and effective power from God. "My Grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (II Cor. 12:9).

#### 5. Christian Action

Action is an expression of life. Every moment one is doing something or the other and there is no value free action. Every action is preceded by a thought or a desire. Proverbs 23:7 says, "for as a man thinketh in his heart so is he". Every thought and every desire shape us. It means that every good thought we have, makes us more Christ like and capable of witnessing the Gospel. The goal of religious life is therefore to give witness to the Gospel. Referring to Christian attitude Paul exhorts (Rom. 12:1-2) the Christians: "... be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God".

In a conference of the Directors of various companies they were once asked to meditate on the question: what would you like to inscribe on your epitaph when you die? No one wanted to mention that he was the Director of this and that company. The goal of Christian life is to give witness to the Gospel.

St. Paul goes on to say, 'to every one that is among you, I say through the grace given unto me not to think of oneself more highly than he or she ought to think; but think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every one the measure of faith'. Here Paul makes it clear that we, being many, are One body in Christ, and everyone members one of another. Paul gives emphasis to community living. At the same time each member, to hold on to what is noble and good in the sight of God. He clearly says vengeance is not expected from a child of God. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirsts, give him drink; ...overcome evil with good".

A tree is known by its fruit. When Christ called the disciples, he called them to abide in him as a branch abides in the vine. John 15:5 says; he that abideth in me and I in him the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing...(Ver. 8). Here in is my father glorified that ye bear much fruit so shall ye be my disciples.

The emphasis here is for a graceful Christian living. In this modern techno-centric world emphasis is given more to fruit bearing than Christian living. This is to give more importance to outward action than to inner life. Today in the Church and in religious life the concern is mainly on getting the work done rather than rendering Christian nurture to the people. This is like squeezing the goose to get all the golden eggs. You simply cannot violate the laws of human nature. Isn't it true that we, as members of the Church give more importance to public worship than to Christian nurture through Sunday School, Adult Bible Class and the like? It is a common thing now that people flock together for the Service of Holy Qurbana and abstain themselves from attending neighborhood prayer meetings and Bible classes. It is a fact that people give money for evangelistic work and abstain from partaking in the mission

in our Mission fields. After all, being holy is basically a question of being human—human as Christ was human.

## 6. Humility and Service in Christian life

He taught them with authority, says the Gospel. What is this authority? This is an expression of the total annihilation of self and the manifestation of God's authority.

This in other words is the humility to become instruments in the mighty hands of God. It is the question of stooping to conquer. This is what incarnation is all about. We have an interesting passage in John 13. This is regarding Jesus' ministry of washing the feet of his disciples. When he finished washing their feet he said to them (Vs. 12-15). "Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me master and Lord: and ye say well; for so..." What Jesus did was to set an example so that the disciples would continue to do it.

Authority is for service. It is to be carried out in humility, obeying the Heavenly Father and in loving others as oneself. This attitude is not weakness but a way of the Cross—which ultimately brings victory. This is the Grace of God for our graceful living.

## 7. The Victorious Cross

And they crucified him '... is the title of a Chapter in the book 'Cross of Christ'. The Roman Emperors, the religious leaders and the people, all exercised their authority in crucifying Christ. Was that a success or failure? Undoubtedly Jesus died on the cross. His body was brought down and it was buried in a tomb. The door of the tomb

was sealed with the authority. Soldiers were posted to guard the place. This is a supreme example of the exercise of power without grace. Ultimately this exercise of power was proved to be futile.

The book Cross of Christ goes on to say that Jesus died on the Cross instead of being crucified. This, as in incarnation is an expression of divine self-emptying. The death on the cross is an expression of God's Grace. This was to redeem the created order from sin and to grant redemption. Therefore self-emptying is a supreme manifestation of God's love. The cross was not a mark of utter failure of the ministry of Jesus. Instead, he was reigning from the cross as the victorious Lord.

We as Christians know the ministry of caring and sharing. Cross of Christ bids us to the dimension of self-emptying—even unto death. It is here that we can understand the meaning of the words of Jesus regarding the grain of wheat that should fall down to die for abundance in fruit bearing (John 12:24-26).

## Conclusion

How do power and grace feature in our daily living? Both power and grace are from God. Both are essential in our daily living. These two feature in our living as the two sides of the same coin according to our mind set—a turning to God and rejoicing in Hope. Therefore St. Paul exhorts "Have the mind of Christ." ■

A paper presented at the FOCUS Seminar.

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# Service at any Cost, Not Power at any Price

The Rt. Rev. Geevarghese Mar Athanasius Episcopa

In his book *Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer speaks of “cheap grace” and “costly grace”. For discipleship, one has to pay its cost. The cost is to be paid not in terms of money, but in terms of life. All the precious things in the world are not bought, but caught! The glory of love is the price we pay to make life precious. The object of love, as Woodrow Wilson puts it “is to serve, not to win”. In multi-faith and multi-cultural situations, the Diaspora Community meets with several opportunities to manifest the power of love.

This is to make others know that “service is the rent we pay for the space we occupy”. Service is the language of kindness and compassion. It is the text of all religions. As we participate in the reconciling ministry of Christ as co-workers with God, this challenge becomes the text of human existence for all. It is here that we make a common platform. Let us praise God for this unitive vision in Christ for the created order.

The world has its own standards of judgment. It measures life in terms of what one has. In the parable of the Rich Fool, Jesus sets right the priority in life. As Christian faith is a life of relationship, life is to be measured “not in the abundance of things”. What we are before God “is the basic question we should ask ourselves.” In the request of James and John “to sit at the right and at the left of Jesus in glory” (Mk.10:35-45) takes us to the heart of the question. Jesus makes his mind clear to them when he pronounces the standard of the Kingdom: “whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. This leads us to the universal axiom for life, “not to be served unto but to serve” (Mk.10:45). We need to pray continually, as Michel Quoist prayed, “Lord, deliver me from myself”....I’m suffering dreadfully. Locked in myself, Prisoner of myself, I hear nothing but my voice, I see nothing but myself....I knock against my own walls, my own boundaries”. It is precisely at this point that the theme of this get-together, **“From Corridors of power to expanses of divine grace”** becomes relevant for our life in the global village of today.

The two Greek words, “*diakonos*” and “*doulos*” correctly reveal the mission of Christ to the world. He designated himself as a “*diakonos*” in Jn.13:12ff. It means that he is a servant—a waiter—who is always sensitive to the call of the world. It should be the pattern for the being of the Church by being “eyes to the blind and feet to the lame”. The great



temptation is to draw nigh to the domes of power in the corridors of life and to remain there without paying the cost. “To launch out into the deep” is indeed a call to move “outside the gate” and to a wide and open area with a view to creating space for all to live. **Affirmation of life** for all is the basic core of mission today. There are several corridors of power in the world where people exercise their influence, overlooking accepted norms. This should not happen in the community of the faithful. In his Republic Day speech, President

K. R. Narayanan had sounded a note of caution. The basic question before the Parliament is **not stability** but fulfilling its **responsibility**. It is commitment that should determine all our priorities. There is a paradoxical commitment in the life of a Christian. Martin Luther has succinctly put it as, “A christian man is a free Lord of all subject to none; A christian man is a servant of all subject to everyone.” It is the power of love that makes a nation free. Freedom of the heart is that which helps one develop right attitude to life. One’s attitude can make either *kosmos* or *chaios*. To serve others means to become relevant and to be available at the bleeding point. As Mother Teresa puts it, “work of faith” is indeed “work of love..” None can create history without paying its price. Price is usually paid in terms of radiating the power of love either by “being a candle or by being a mirror that reflects it”.

## **Divine solidarity as mandate for service**

The vulnerability of God in the incarnation of Jesus speaks of divine solidarity with the weak and the marginalized. God in Christ has given us the meaning of kenotic-life style for healing the brokenness of the world. The Kingdom values—communion with God, compassion for the poor and passion for justice—alone make Christian ministry relevant in the world today. Therefore we need to think of a paradigm shift in mission as authentic to Christian life-style. A movement from *diakonia* (service) to *dikaiosune* (righteousness) is the need of the hour. There was a time when people had access to the domes of power through short cuts. That is what is found generally in the political arena. James and John in the Marckan passage were carried away by it. The challenge today is to build all structures of power with a human face. The big missiological question is how do we translate proclamation into social commitment? How do we transcend barriers of various types through

*diakonia*? There are three types of *diakonia*. They are charitable *diakonia*, social *diakonia* and revolutionary *diakonia*. The Church is used to the first type of *diakonia* for years. There is no conflictive situation in its area of operation. The revelation of the righteousness of God in Christ demands us to look for all the options today. In the parable of the good Samaritan, there was no moral question before us in the past to search for the hideouts of the robbers. As the conscience of the world, the time has come for the Church to raise moral questions. By being a moral community, we must continue to pay its price for common good. This is costly. Several people have paid its price by laying down their lives. This is the ministry of John the Baptist. The authenticity of this ministry depends upon the integrity of the Church.

### **Wear out in seva than rust!**

In the service of the Church to humanity wherever we are placed, we need to break walls of pessimism, narcissism, fatalism and cynicism. All these philosophies make people prisoners and keep them in perpetual bondage. The dignity of service is to be shown by manifesting the power of the Towel as Jesus did. The towel has no power in itself. It is the touch of the hand and the bowing of the head to others' feet

that generate power for liberation. This is to be communicated to the future generation as legacy of the Mar Thoma Church. The enlargement of love, the employment of love and the engagement of love, as St. Paul puts it in Philippians 1:3-11, make life sublime. In a diasporic situation, life is to be rooted in the local context. The words of Mahatma Gandhi is worth recalling, "I must not serve distant neighbors at the expense of the nearest". The resources of the diaspora community should also find a local bearing in each situation. It is the context that determines the nature of the response.

The oft quoted prayer of Ignatius of Lyaola sums up what we ought to carry with us.

*"Teach us, good Lord, to serve Thee as Thou deservest,  
To give and not to count the cost  
To fight and not to heed the wounds  
To toil and not to seek for rest  
To labor and not to ask for any reward  
Save the joy of knowing that  
We do Thy will for the  
sake of Jesus Christ."*

A paper presented at the FOCUS Seminar.

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SHIRAZ STUDIOS



# Where Have all the Mentors Gone?

Dr. Zac Varghese, London, UK

**M**entorship is a fashionable word for an ancient and classical system of learning from and living through the experiences of one's parents, teachers and peers. The term 'mentor' means guide or teacher and is best illustrated by Homer in *Odyssey*: Odysseus asks Mentor to supervise the development of his son, Telemachus, when Odysseus decides to depart on his voyage. This ancient idea of a 'Guru' and 'Sishyan' was the corner stone in the ministry of Jesus and His disciples.

Mentors are those whom we trust to instill in us the confidence and encouragement we require to move forward in any situation; faced with a new situation, we often look for guidance from someone with maturity who has already had the experience. Mentoring may be described as a self-help process and, as such, may have both advantages and disadvantages. On the beneficial score, mentoring may help to overcome the sense of being alone. The knowledge that others have survived an experience and they are available to discuss this in strictest confidence, offer guidance for coping may be helpful and reassuring. On the other hand, mentoring is a skill, which may be developed with humility, but does not come easily to everyone. Good intentions may not help when skills of communication and understanding are needed in order to convey information in a supportive manner. Information must be handled carefully and confidentially in many situations, the ability to do this is a skill, which may be developed with prayer, training and practice.

Mentoring has been employed as a successful tool in many different areas of secular life such as education, social service, community health promotion, and promotion of leadership skills. In general, its purpose is to add formal education and training processes by giving people the opportunity to discuss a new experience with someone who has already had the experience and coped with it successfully. A measure of identification or common beginnings between the mentor and the 'mentee', the person being mentored, creates a comfort zone, which may facilitate the process. Sadly, this level of mentoring is now lacking in our church life, but it was part and parcel of the pastoral care at one time. The writer himself has benefited enormously from such mentoring at every stage in his life from very kind and generous religious and secular leaders.

What case can be made for considering a mentoring program in our parishes? The answer appears to be two folds: the lack of sensitivity to understand the need, and secondly, in our inability to provide the emotional and intellectual investment required for sustaining pastoral care at every level. Communication is the heartbeat of a parish

and community life, a community without communication is a dead community. I was able to appreciate this in a meaningful way when I attended a church service with the former director general of police of Kerala, Dr. P. J. Alexander, in a very poor village in Zimbabwe. At the end of the service, people stood up and said that such and such people could not come for the service on that day because of illness or other social reasons. This I thought was involvement and caring at a very high level; they were all concerned about their neighbors and parishioners. This is the level of involvement and understanding required in our parish life. Despite the proliferation of theological education, pastoral care remains a low priority for many clergy. A very large proportion of the clergy in the Mar Thoma Church has graduate and postgraduate qualification in theology, yet they have very little understanding about everyday theology of life and very little practical experience in mentoring.

During the last quarter of a century, our Church had lost two vital group of mentors. Firstly, we lost a very valuable group very venerable 'Valiya Achens' who had enormous secular and religious clout. They were very helpful in maintaining discipline amongst clergy and lay people. They preserved the dignity of the Church at every level, they knew how to respect and maintain the authority of the Episcopacy. They had a stature and an extraordinary dignity of their own. They were giants and were very important role models. It is difficult to create such an order again in our Church, but consideration should be given in creating a layer of senior 'Achens' with extraordinary abilities. The Church of England has Canons and Archdeacons to function as mentors; some consideration should be given to create such an order. What a difference it would make to our Church to see some 'Malpans' with real insight into the ethos of the Mar Thoma Church.

Secondly, we lost a very valuable group of lay leaders who were totally loyal to the Church. These people were the gatekeepers of our tradition who helped to maintain the dignity and the sacredness of the Episcopacy. They gained their respect not through the ballot box, but through their unselfish service to the Church. "Service at any cost, not power at any price" was their motto. Now some people try to buy their leadership with their checkbooks and other means. Sadly, we are developing a culture of controllers; our people are experts in writing lengthy projects for collecting other people's money and controlling it. These people are enormously generous with others' contributions. Their motto is that charity begins at another man's checkbook. Instead of investing in the Church, these control-freaks take

'investments' from the Church. They become self-styled guardians of other's morality and a 'not in my backyard mentality-nimby.' This is a sure way to moral, ethical and spiritual bankruptcy. This new breed of 'ballot box-leaders' beginning to think that they have the God-given right to control the activities of every member of the Church. For instance, the Mandalam report of 1997-98 suggested a claim of the Church on the personal wealth and intellectual abilities of its members. This is a dangerous trend of controlling the individual freedoms of the members of the Church. People with good intentions and liberal views are on the periphery and are marginalised. We need to find a way to bringing these people back into the centre of our parish and Church life. We need mentors now to help these people and in turn they themselves would become mentors for planting the next crop of good leaders for the Church. In such a scenario, the ballot box will become a blessing instead of a curse. The real question is this: where have all the mentors gone?

Each parishioner presents unique physical, psychological and social issues for clergy. Anxiety over marital relationship, health, education of children, and economic stability are all issues needing help from parish priests. In the absence of pastoral care with respect to the above and other issues, parishioners have little to draw on as a basis of knowledge or experience in preparing to cope with emergencies in life situations. Lay people, provided they are given training in lay ministry, may address this lack of expertise. One to one communications with another lay person offers an individualized, highly personal involvement, which other interventions do not provide. As such, a lay ministry may furnish an important adjunct to pastoral ministry and support programs, although it cannot be a total substitute. Think of the possibilities: a basket ball in my hands is worth nothing, but in the hands of Michael Jordan worth millions of dollars; a pound in my purse worth very little, but in the hands of Mother Teresa brought happiness to many; a joke in my tongue has very little

benefit to others, but in Metropolitan Chrysostom's tongue it brings the house down; two fish and five loaves were just enough for a little shepherd boy, but in Jesus' hand it was enough for five thousand and more. A good Mentor will be able to bring untold benefit for many.

How can we go on from here? Think about what had happened when Christians were attacked and churches were burned in India recently. Christians from every corner of India poured out support, solidarity and prayer. In fact, whenever an attack comes from outside the church, Christians pray more, give more, trust God more and trust each other more than ever before. But when attacks come from inside the church, the exact opposite happens. We pray less, give less, serve less, and serve each other less. This is devastation at a deepest level, a wasting sickness of the soul and fibre of our own spirituality. We cannot afford to have this damage continue unchecked. Not only are the lives and hearts of individuals at stake; much bigger issues hang in balance. But misuse of authority by leaders is not the only way Christians get hurt in the church. We often hear from people who face neglect in times of great crisis in their lives. Or they feel persecuted because of isolation and neglect. These marginalised people often ask, "How can I get involved in church again? I don't want to be hurt again or used any more, but I want the fellowship with other Christians." Something inside these people continues to ask that question because the church, for all its weaknesses and failing, is a place of promise and hope.

Mentorship programs may help us to understand the enormity of grace, mercy and help God wants to pour out to us through His Church. Through our mentors we will be realizing what it means to be a member of a loving and caring church—with all its responsibilities and privileges that gives us as we relate to each other. An understanding of mentorship can be best approached with a quote from Pual Saltman: "One can be no better a teacher than one is a learner at any point in one's life." But the question remains: where have all the mentors gone? ■

### **FOCUS Satellite Meeting**

A satellite meeting of the FOCUS will be held on Thursday July 5, 2001 from 2 to 4 p.m. at the Radisson Hotel, Philadelphia (Family Conference venue). The primary objective of the meeting is to get as many Mar Thoma Diaspora members as possible involved with the FOCUS movement so that decisions of far reaching consequences affecting our children and grandchildren could be taken collectively. We request all those who plan to participate in the Family Conference to arrive at the hotel latest by 1 p.m. so that after the Family Conference registration, they could attend the satellite meeting of the FOCUS. It will not cost you any extra time or money. There is no registration fee for the satellite meeting, but it would be of great help if your name is registered in advance by sending an e-mail to [Abamat@aol.com](mailto:Abamat@aol.com) or by faxing your name and telephone number to **562-420-6528**.

**Dr.Samuel K. Chacko Phone: 610-459-3715 Abraham Mattackal Phone: 562-420-8817**



# When Was Jesus Born?

Prof. M.M.Ninan

## When was Jesus Born?

Prof. M.M.Ninan

[Second Part of the Two Part Series]

*An analysis of the various hypotheses and establishes that both the historical and scriptural evidence is for a date of 25th of December as the real Christmas Day*

However there are many who believe that sixth month is actually the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy and therefore need not necessarily be the month of Elul. I have therefore calculated the possible birthdates of Jesus starting from all possible service periods of Zechariah.

### Calendar Service of the Priests following David's Order

1. Nissan (Aviv) (30 days)	2. Iyar (Zif) (29 days)	3. Sivan (30 days)
Pesach (14th) Week 1: 1-7 course 1 Week 2: 8-14 course 2 Week 3: 15-21 (Pesach) all serve Week 4: 22-28 course 3 Week 5: 29-30 course 4	Week 5 Upto 5th course 4 Week 6: 5-12 course 5 Week 7: 13-20 course 6 Week 8: 21-28 course 7 Week 9: 29 Pentecost all serves	Week 9: 1-6 Pentecost all serve Week 10: 7-13 course 8 Week 11: 13-19 course 9 Week 12: 14-20 course 10 Week 13: 21-27 course 11 Week 14: 28-30
4. Tammuz (29 days)	5. Av (30 days)	6. Elul (29 days)
Week 14 upto 4: course 12 Week 15: 5-11 course 13 Week 16: 12-18 course 14 Week 17: 19-25 course 15 Week 18: 26-	Week 18: -3 course 16 Week 19: 4-10 course 17 Week 20: 11-17 course 18 Week 21: 18-24 course 19 Week 22: 25-	Week 22: -1 course 20 Week 23: 2-8 course 21 Week 24: 9-15 course 22 Week 25: 16-22 course 23 Week 26: 23-29 course 24 <b>Cycle ends</b>
7. Tishri (Ethanim) (30 days)	8. Cheshvan (Bul) (29 days)	9. Kislev (30 days)
Week 27: 1-7 course 1 Week 28: 8-14 course 2 Week 29: 15-21 Succoth (15th) all serve Succoth (22nd - Feast of Conclusion) Week 30: 22-28 course 3 Week 31: 29 course 4	Week 31: 1-6 course 4 Week 32: 7-13 course 5 Week 33: 14-18 course 6 Week 34: 19-25 course 7 Week 35: 27-29 course 8	Week 36: 1-4 course 8 Week 37: 5-11
10. Tevet (29 days)	11. Shevat (30 days)	12. Adar (29 days)

When the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., the priestly course of Jehoiarib was serving. If the priestly service was

unbroken from the time of Zachariah to the destruction of the temple, this calculation will lead to the course of Abijah occurring in the first week of October which is again in Tishri.

### Possible Date of Birth of Jesus (Approximate)

Possible Date of Zachariah's Service	Possible Date when Elizabeth conceived John	Annunciation of Mary	Birth of John	Birth of Jesus
Nissan 15-21 (Pesach) 7 Apr 6	Nissan 30 18 April 6 BC	3 Tishri 3756 15 Sept 6	14 Shevat 3756 23 Jan 5	16 Tammuz 21 June 5
Iyyar 29-Sivan 6 (Pentecost) 3 June 7  The service actually continues over the next week also.	Sivan 16 3755 2 June 6 BC  Not a possible case as Zachariah had continued to serve the next week.	18 Heshvan 3756 28 Oct 6 BC	29 Adar 1 3755 8 Mar 5 BC	2 Elul 3756 2 Aug 5 BC
Sivan 7-13 17 May 5 BC	Sivan 23 3755 7 Jun 6 BC	25 Heshvan 3756 4 Nov 6 BC	7 Nissan 3756 15 Mar 5 BC	9 Elul 3756 10 Aug 5 BC
Tishri 15-21 (Succoth) 3755 Day of Atonement 21 Tishri 3755 14 Oct 7 BC	30 Tishri 3755 21 Oct 7 BC	3 Nissan 3755 20 Mar 6 BC	15 Av 3755 28 July 6	16 Tevet 3756 25 Dec 6 BC
Bul 27-Chislev 4 3755 23 Nov 7 BC	Chislev 14 3755 3 Dec 7 BC	17 Iyyar 3755 22 April 6 BC	18 Elul 3755 30 Aug 6 BC	20 Shevat 3756 27 Jan 5 BC

That leaves us only four cases. However Luke 1:21 indicates that while Zachariah was inside the temple, people were anxiously waiting outside.

*Luke 1:21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zachariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple.*

If the vision was in the assembly hall—in the Holy Place and people were in the Court of the Gentiles, they could have gone in to see what was happening. Evidently this could not have been possible for some good reason. This is possible only if Zachariah was inside the veil—in the Holy of Holies—where only the High Priest could go and that with the blood of the sacrifice and carrying the incense as a cover. No one else could go in. So they all waited outside anxiously until Zachariah came out.

The problem here is that in all the Old Testament descriptions of the tabernacle, the incense table is placed right in front of the opening of the veil on its left side.

*Ex. 30:6 Put the altar in front of the curtain that is before the ark of the Testimony—before the atonement cover that is over the Testimony—where I will meet with you.*

*7 “Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar every morning when he tends the lamps.”*

Here “in front of the curtain” do not define the place exactly. Most descriptions give the impression that it was outside the veil inside the assembly area along with the shew table and the candlebra.

Now look at the description of the tabernacle in Heb. 9

*Heb 9:1 Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary.*

*2 A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place.*

*3 Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place,*

*4 which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron’s staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant.*

*5 Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.*

*6 When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry.*

*7 But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.*

In this description the table of incense is found not in the Assembly—the Holies, but inside the veil within the Most Holy Place. Does this contradict with the Old Testament arrangements where we find the incense table outside the veil. Notice again that the author of Hebrew makes specific mention of “When everything had been arranged like this”.

Under normal circumstances the incense table is just outside the veil where the High Priest daily ministered. But on the Day of Atonement it is moved in by lifting the veil without opening it. The golden altar of incense has been moved by the High Priest into the Most Holy Place, into the Presence of God. The process is now described. Having moved the incense table inside (Some suggest that there was a smaller incense table inside and a larger one outside. But I see no evidence for it in the Bible)

*Lev. 16:12 He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the LORD and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain.*

*13 He is to put the incense on the fire before the LORD, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the Testimony, so that he will not die.*

Having covered the Ark of Testament with the cloud of incense, then the High Priest may enter inside the veil with confidence carrying with him the blood.

*Heb 9:14 He is to take some of the bull’s blood and with his finger sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover; then he shall sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times before the atonement cover.*

*15 “He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull’s blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it.”*

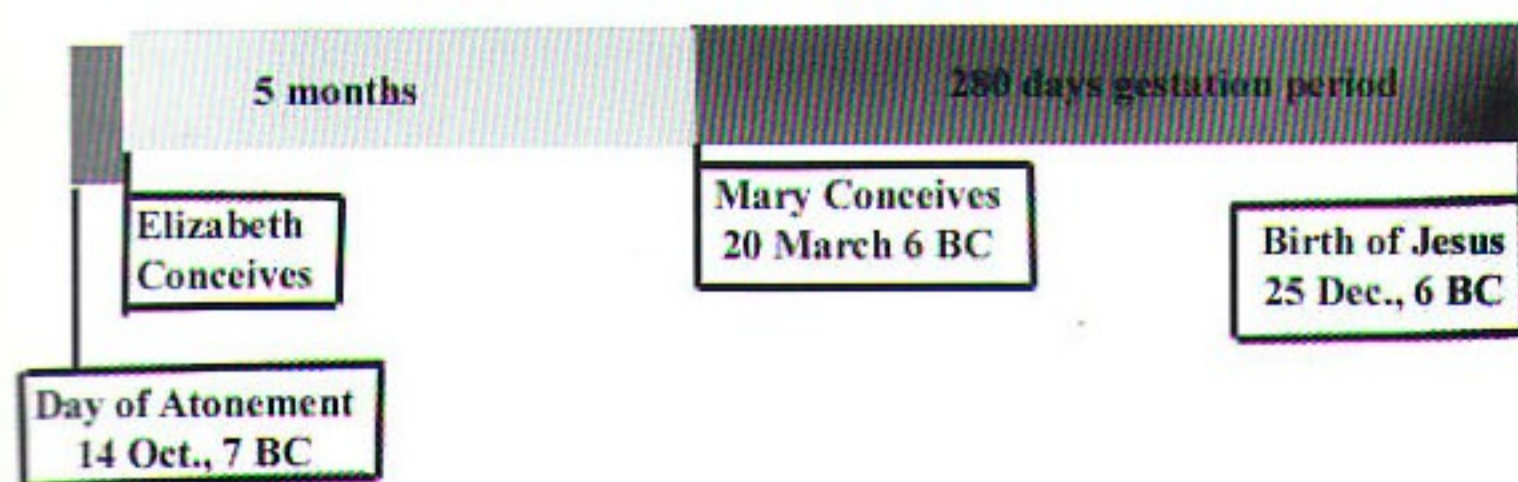
*16 In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness.*

Thus we are told that the event took place at the time of the final ceremony of the Atonement on the Day of Atonement. Zechariah’s vision was dated 21st of Tishri and thus whatever be the year of birth, Jesus was born in the month of Tevet i.e. in December/ January.

The problem of the Sixth month does not arise because the sixth month of the Civil Year is the same as the sixth month of pregnancy of Elizabeth.

Actually it was near the feast of Hanukkah when the Jewish nation celebrated the freedom through Maccabee revolution. It is a festival of Lights. Maccabee revolution was the typical messianic expectation, which failed to last. Jesus was asserting that true freedom is not political freedom but spiritual freedom. All through His ministry Jesus combated against this misplaced messianic notion and it was this that brought Him to the cross. But such typological explanations are not valid reasons for the establishment of an objective reality. The fact is that we could find a typological explanation for any of the dates.

## The Christmas date



## The Shepherds?



One argument raised against the December date is that there were shepherds keeping watch at night at that time in the field (Luke 2:8). December is pretty cold and normally shepherds would not be out there. In fact, early Jewish sources suggest that the sheep around Bethlehem were outside year-round. In the normal traffic of shepherds they move around and come near Bethlehem from November to March of the year. But then these were a special class of shepherds who were Levites who kept the sacrificial lambs. They do not move around because they supply the lambs for daily sacrifice from whom people bought their approved lambs, which are blemishless. The fact that the Angels announced the arrival of the perfect sacrificial lamb to these shepherds indicates this.

From objective analysis Zechariah's date of vision can only be placed on 21st of Tishri whatever typological meanings we may want to attach to the birth of John and birth of Jesus. These arguments are based solely on the written word without recourse to too much interpretations and assumptions.

## The Tradition

The tradition for December 25th is actually quite ancient. Hippolytus, in the second century AD, argued that this was Christ's birthday. In the fourth century, John Chrysostom argued that December 25th was the correct date. John Chrysostom (347-407) taught that Zechariah received the message about John's birth on the Day of Atonement and John the Baptist was born sometime in June or July, and the birth of Jesus took place six months later, in late December or early January. The first recorded mention of December

25 is in the Calendar of Philocalus (354 A.D.) which assumed Jesus' birth to be Friday, December 25, 1 A.D. December 25th was officially proclaimed by the church fathers in 440 A.D. Two dates December and January 6 are used by Western and Eastern Churches respectively. This difference is due essentially to difference in calendar that were followed. Luke 2:1-7 mentions a tax census ordered by Augustus Caesar. The census records were eventually taken to Rome. Cyril of Jerusalem (348-386) requested that the true date of Jesus' birth be taken from the census documents. He reported that the date he was given from these documents was December 25. Unfortunately, these records are no longer available. (Joseph Tkach <http://www.wcg.org/>)

Fifth, of eight books. Sec. III.—on feast days and fast days, a catalogue of the feasts of the lord which are to be kept, and when each of them ought to be observed. Presently, scholars date Constitutions from the late second or third century.

“XIII. Brethren, observe the festival days; and first of all the birthday which you are to celebrate on the **twenty-fifth of the ninth month**; after which let the Epiphany (January 6th) be to you the most honored, in which the Lord made to you a display of His own Godhead, and let it take place on the sixth of the tenth month; after which the fast of Lent is to be observed by you as containing a memorial of our Lord's mode of life and legislation. But let this solemnity be observed before the fast of the Passover, beginning from the second day of the week, and ending at the day of the preparation. After which solemnities, breaking off your fast, begin the holy week of the Passover, fasting in the same all of you with fear and trembling, praying in them for those that are about to perish.”

*“The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles”*

There was never a question about the period of Jesus' birth either in the East or in the West. Only in the recent years this date was challenged. However Christmas was not celebrated with the pomp and splendor of these days in the past, because normally birthdays were never celebrated by Christians. In the Malankara tradition birthdays are never celebrated. The Sixtieth year (Shadhiabtha purthi) was sometimes celebrated but that was not on the birthday. No wonder why there is scant documentations over this matter. That is why even the gospels are silent about it. ■

# The Art of Giving —A Thought for the Easter

Daniel Thomas, St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, New York

The “gift of giving” is the basic link that joins “Christmas” to “Easter”. The gift of love of our God the Father enabled to send His only Son to the world for our sake and He has fulfilled the gift of giving of His own life on the Calvary for our sins. The season of Christmas begins with the message of hope, peace and happiness. Even though the Christmas season has been especially exploited by the Western world for commercial means, the underlying idea of exchanging and giving gifts at Christmas brings out the “joy of giving.” In other words, the season of Christmas is synonymous with happiness. At the same time, Easter is superficially viewed as a time of sorrow because of the awful and shameful suffering and death of Christ on the Cross. This shows us that happiness may lead us to sadness because without pain and suffering, we cannot reach to the next cycle of event, that is the happiness (Second Coming). As the old saying goes, for every peak, there is a valley.

What does this tell us of our “giving”? There is a fallacy that whatever we possess, wealth, position, power, knowledge, etc., are our own, and for our own use and happiness. For a true follower of Christ, this is not the case. We do not own anything, or we are not the real owners of things. As Psalm 24:1 proclaims, “the earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.”

A USA Today poll asked its readers to finish the line, “I’d give more, but ....”. The result explained why people don’t give more money and their time:

- 84% said they doubted their donation would be put to good use
- 80% said that job demands left them with no time to participate
- 79% said they had no excess income to give
- 70% said family commitments consumed their extra time

Many of us have similar thoughts. But suppose, if no one gives? There would be no blood banks to supply blood to hospitals and not enough hospitals for the sick. There would be no Salvation Army or other similar charitable organizations to help the needy and no shelters to escape from the cold and biting chill of the winter. Without money, none would be built and without workers, none would function. There would be no missionaries to carry the gospel. Without volunteers, who would go, and who would send them? People would die without knowing Jesus. But the real question is, what does God want? What does His Word teach us about giving?

The Bible teaches us several fundamental truths about **giving**:

## God’s Goodness and Love

The foundation of all giving is **love** and **goodness**. One special emphasis of the New Testament concept of love is

that it is not primarily self-fulfilling, rather it is oriented toward giving oneself for the good of others. God’s goodness is His inherent moral perfection and His wonderful generosity to all His creation. God is good, and does good to all (Psalm 119:68). Therefore, He expects us to do likewise. As we read in John 13:15, “I have set you an example, that you should do as I have done for you.” In order for us to carry out our mandated task, we need to experience a fundamental transformation in our lives and that will empower us to reverse impulse from “taking” to “giving”, from self-centered to selfless service and sacrifice. The transforming effect will drive us to love others. As cited above, God is the ultimate owner of everything—our resources, careers, talents, time, and under his ownership, goodness prevails.

## The Commission of Stewardship

God created man and woman to serve as stewards of His creation and not as owners. He also gave us the responsibility to manage our possessions in ways that will honor Him and accomplish His will on earth. That means, we have a moral responsibility to use/manage our resources for the benefit of those who are in need of them.

How can we give when the culture in which we live today says “take”? The culture shock has hit us. Our wealth gets tied up in culture driven “wants” beyond our basic needs. The culture preaches self-indulgence and consumption. But God speaks of “self-sacrifice” and “cheerful generosity.” He honors sacrificial service and stewardship, not unwanted and wasteful consumption of resources.

Instead of stewardship, many of us have assumed the role of ownership. That means, we have relieved God from His role as the ultimate owner, and took over His responsibility and began to act like the person in the parable of the “Rich Fool” (Luke 12:16-21). This is a perfect example of self-centered living instead of sacrificial life. The instantaneous feeling of pleasure in accumulating material wealth has blinded the spiritual way of life of this so called rich man. When your thoughts and actions are driven by greed, you bring your own down fall. The value of one’s life is not determined by the abundance of material wealth, rather his way of life that is filled with the love and character of God.

It is shocking to see that today we live in a society where 15% of the world’s population controls 90% of its material wealth. Who has time and patience to hear the cries of the other 85% of the population in their busy and self-centered life style? There is nothing wrong in living and working in a capitalistic society, as long as the capital does not control us.

## Effective and Fruitful Living

Stewardship is a sort of life style. Just giving money to the needy is not enough if we are to be good and faithful stewards. We are to use all our resources—our time, talents, positions and power, as well as our money for the benefit of others. Our lives should present a contrast to the prevailing culture, so that others might notice why we live differently from the rest in our social circle. Rather than running around to satisfy our unwanted appetite for affluence, we can spend money wisely in ways that will attract others in eternal life and that is what God requires of us. It is a fact that today's Christians are essentially no different from non-believers; "anything goes" kind of a life style.

Should God be concerned about entrusting you with the reins of wealth, power, education, and leadership position? Can He trust you to handle effectively the talents and time you have as Christ's ambassadors? Is your life a living sacrifice, one that is filled with the love and character of God?

As stewards, we must look past generous financial help for others and set ourselves to live effectively with all we have been given. Then, having been entrusted with much,

we can receive our master's commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness" (Mat. 25:21).

As we prepare ourselves to enter into the Easter spirit, we should be mindful of the greatest gift given freely to each one of us through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The fact that God willingly spared His only son, and His total obedience in fulfilling the mission, in spite of the unspeakable suffering and death on Calvary, show how great was God's amazing grace and love for you and me. We have to look beyond the temporary grief over the betrayal, torture, and gruesome carnage that occurred the week leading to Calvary, so as to celebrate the new beginning that Easter brings. Only when we understand the depth of our depravity, can we fully grasp the true happiness in Christ's victory over Satan on our behalf. In order to meet the risen Christ and realize the joy of His resurrection, we have to remove the darkness of sin and come into the light. Let us continue His course to fulfill His mission of saving the lost ones. He gave us even the very last drop of his blood and, therefore, let us give whatever He has entrusted with us for those in need. ■

## Lent—What It Means to Me?

Mary Varghese, Chicago

In our faith, the glory of Christmas precedes the rejoicing at Easter. The story of Christmas in all its splendor and glory awakens even the most cynical person and binds them with the magic of the Eastern Star.

January brings in its wake the aftermath of Christmas—bills to be paid, the 'back to work' drudgery and the tendency to be generally surly. The biting cold temperatures in the Mid Western states of North America only add to this vexatious mood. Gone is the beauty of the snow covered landscape. The same landscape now holds no more charm and the advent of spring is eagerly awaited. The thought of spring brings to mind the observance of lent and its significance. Lent is the period during which our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was in the wilderness, being tempted by Satan. There was no food or water in the wilderness, but angels watched over the Son of God.

During the season of lent, traditionally, we give up fish, meat, eggs and maybe even milk for a period of 50 days. Part of the reasoning behind this is to reserve the money saved for charitable work. Being an ardent believer of this tradition, even though, honestly, I do not give up milk and eggs, many times I have been questioned as to the validity of this observance.

Typically, I would be asked 'So only during these 50 days do you plan to be a good Christian?'

Or "This belief has no basis — you are such a hypocrite!" And many comments to the like. As our Achens have indicated that only those who can, need to observe lent.

From listening to many sermons, and my past experience, I would like to state why I observe lent. To me lent signifies "A new beginning." Just as in spring, new buds arrive and Mother Nature renews her breathtaking beauty, lent is precedent to the rejoicing at Easter.

Being just an ordinary mother and wife and every other role that I try to fulfill, I am prone to making my mistakes, and pick myself up and go on. During the period of lent, every time there is fish or meat at the table that I do not eat, it reminds me of why I am doing this.

It reminds me that I have a goal to accomplish in the next 50 days—a goal to be a better person than I was last year and try very hard to incorporate that in my life, not just for the 50 days but for the rest of my life.

### Small steps to being a better person:

My sacrifice, small as it is, reminds me of the Resurrection. The amazing grace that "...For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son..." John 3:16. I try not to say any harsh or unkind words, to never fail to praise His name every day.

Each year I set a new goal for myself. Each year, after Easter, I try to continue to live up to the standards that I have set for myself.

When Good Friday dawns, the sadness at the cross reminds me of how unworthy I am of this great love.

The rejoicing at Easter tells me that I have been given a chance to repent and be forgiven. ...And suddenly the whole world is glorious again!

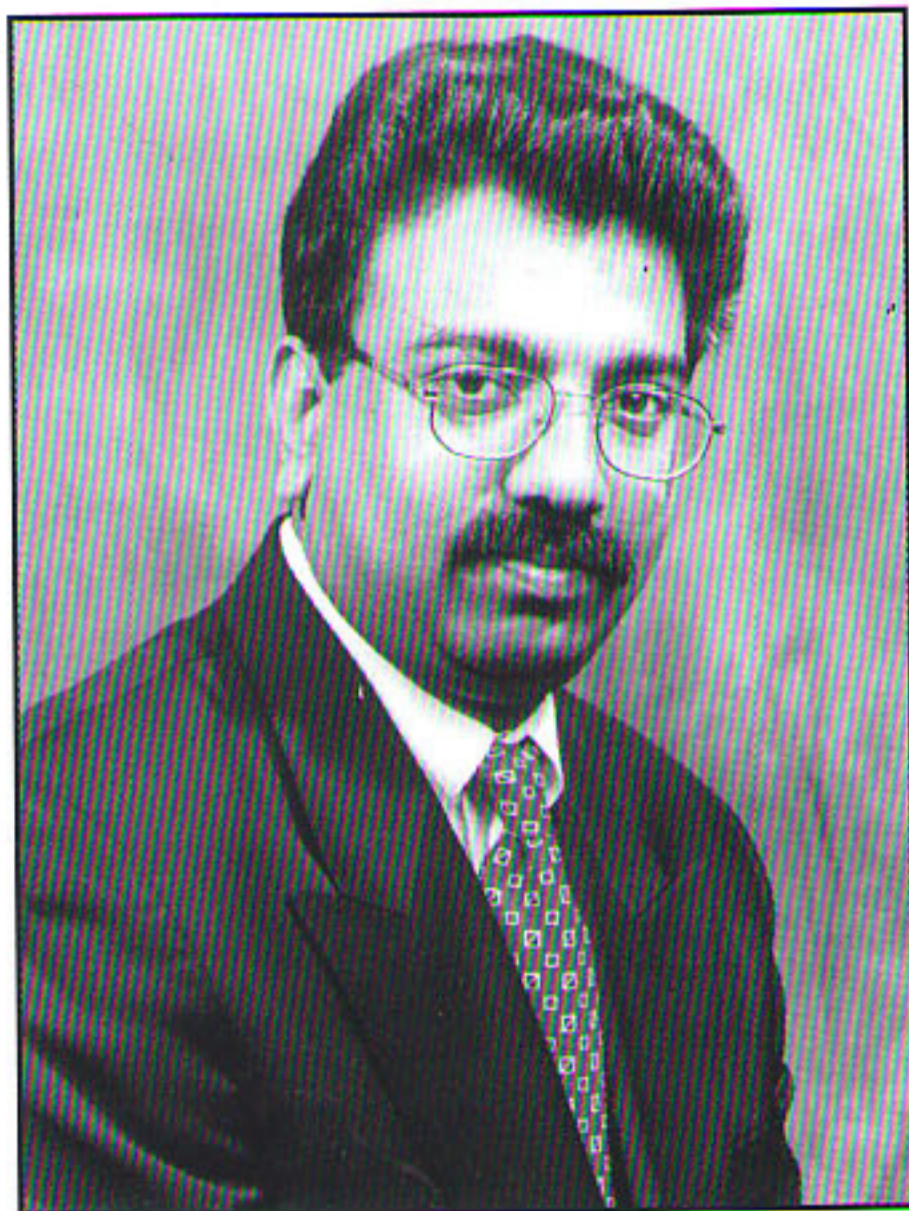
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# Origin and Significance of the Maramon Convention

Rev. A. T. Philip

**Background:** In 1853 the Slavery Abolition Act had been passed by the government of Travancore. Following the conversion of Daivathan (his Christian name is Abel) a Pulaya, and member of his family at Kaipatta, Mallappally in 1854, the weaker sections were taken in good numbers into the communion of the CMS which had parted company with the Syrians in 1838. In the Syrian Church internal/dissensions and litigations on the one hand and exodus of spiritual enthusiasts on the other caused great confusion and a great many of the believers were in a hopeless situation. During this time some dedicated persons of the reformed Church made isolated attempts to reach out to the Pulaya, Paraya and Kurava communities of the weaker sections in central Travancore. Quite a few persons of these communities expressed their willingness to receive baptism. However, there were less chances to incorporate these new Christians into the fellowship and structure of the Mar Thoma Church. The final separation of the Mar Thoma and Jacobite Churches was still to be made and there were false pretensions of an ethnic community still prevalent even within the Mar Thoma Church. Hence the converts at Mannar, Ranni, Mangalam, Myladumpara and Ayroor were handed over to the CMS. At Venmony the new converts were given to the Salvation Army. In 1886 two CMS preachers from England, Baringgold and Carney, made extensive preaching tours and campaigns at Kottayam, Tiruvalla, Kodukulanji and Mavelikara. A few of the Mar Thoma Christians who attended some of these meetings got inspired to form the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association, first of its kind from among the Indian Churches. On September 5, 1888, the day of Thiruvonam, important festival of Kerala, twelve persons-eleven laymen and an ordained minister-gathered together for prayer and self-examination in a bath house on the bank of the river Pampa at Kallissery near Chengannur. These persons were moved by the Holy Spirit to form the Association, object of which is defined as follows: (i) to conduct revival meetings among Christians and non-Christians and (ii) to secure sufficient amount of money for that purpose. The work began at Othera with the co-operation of a convert Thomas from the Vettuvan community. In the beginning the work was of a threefold nature, namely, elementary school education, bible class and worship service. A school building built and managed by the Metropolitan was used for the purpose. In 1889 on the day of Ascension eighty-five persons of the Pulaya community were baptized. The Metropolitan named the Association as the Malabar Syrian Christian Evangelistic Association. Second place of activity at Eraviperoor was centered around the Parayas. Poikayil Yohannan, a convert from the place later became an evangelist of the church. In his old age Yohannan gave shape to the Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha. (The PRDS is drawn from the diverse groups of the socially weaker sections



who are termed as the Adi Dravidians Paraya, Pulaya, Kurava, Vettuva, Ainava and other backward classes. It was understood as a movement starting from Christianity and ending up in Hinduism, though the leaders and adherents of the movement emphatically deny that they are Hindus. Instead they regard themselves as of a new religion). By 1895, the year of commencement of the Maramon Convention, the association intensified its activities among the poor and despised sections at many places such as Anaprampal, Vengazha, Vettiyakonam, Perisery and Niranam. Revival gatherings arranged by inspired individuals of the

traditional Christian community attracted new converts also. In the feasts all sat together and ate. They also used to take communion in Church services conducted in traditional parish-churches. Nevertheless, momentary enthusiasm died out instantly and there were instances of hatred and separation which impeded meaningful interaction and integration. Socially and economically well placed persons absorbed into their labor force the new converts and they were given special care and provisions. Though the master-servant distinction was kept between them the new-comers felt at home in the fellowship and company of their new bosses. Women of traditional Christian families accepted women converts into their kitchen and there was no taboo in relation to cooking and preparation of meals. Here we see a gradual move for social integration. Leaders of the Church encouraged their congregations to provide new clothes for the converts on the occasion of their baptism. The following statement by the Secretary of the Association as given in the report of 1900-1901 is of paramount importance: In order to improve the social standards of newly converted Christians from the weaker sections such as Pulaya and Paraya communities Christian individuals and agencies must come forward to increase their daily wages and in that context if others do not agree to employ them for work paying the increased wages we must undertake to train them in masonry, carpentry, metal-works, laundry-work, barber-craft etc. The Association may buy cultivable land and encourage members of the new Christian communities to bring forth by their labor coconut and pepper groves and a portion of the income thus generated be given for their benefit.

In the nineteenth century Kerala Church there were Persian, Roman, Antioche and Anglican interests consolidating themselves. Besides, revival spirituality also had its astounding influence. Under the circumstance reconstruction of the autonomous and indigenous Mar Thoma Church on the Kingdom values of the Gospel was the primary need. Lakshmana Rao, Maratha Brahmin who was converted to Christianity and extensive preaching campaigns in the Mar Thoma parishes in 1888-89. Rev. C. P. Philipose, Secretary of the Association

accompanied the preacher and translated his message into Malayalam. This enterprise had its impact on the believers. The general secretary had given a call for financial support for the work. The extract is reproduced in the *Suvisesha Doothan* (Mal.) of the year. Glancing through the annual report of the Association for the last one hundred and odd years one could easily ascertain the role of ordinary members of the Church in providing means for the support of the work. Every annual report contains individual contribution of money collected parish-wise. Year by year it showed a steady increase.

**Inception and growth of the Convention:** The managing committee of the Association met on 16th Vrichikom 1070 M.E. (1895) and decided to invite V. D. David, a Tamil Christian to preach in the Mar Thoma parishes. David and his associate L. M. Wordsworth came accordingly. They had first visited the senior Malpan Geevarghese Philipose Achen who was on his death-bed (On the occasion of the burial of Philipose Malpan, his sons made a public announcement that there would not be the after-death feast (*adiyanthiram*) for the Malpan. Mar Thoma Christians of central Travancore put a stop to this practice ever since), and had their preaching at the Ayroor Church. Subsequently they had extensive preaching tours in many parishes. Rev. C. P. Philipose translated the messages. David and Wordsworth came to Kerala as invited by the CMS *Padri* Archdeacon Oommen Mammen. After three months of widespread revival activities it was felt that there has to be a large gathering for all those who wish to come together. Accordingly it was decided to have a pandal erected on the sand-bed at Maramon adjacent to the Maramon parish which was then the head-quarters of the Mar Thoma Church, just on the northern side of the ancient Hindu temple of Aranmula. Later on the location of the convention is changed towards further north. The convention is arranged in the lean months of February-March, when we have very little water in the river and there is a large area of sand-bed available for the meeting. The first meeting of the convention was scheduled for ten days with a view to end the session on the first Sunday of Meenam 1070 (M.E.). The meeting is named as Pentecost Convention. The gatherings composed of Christians and irrespective of denominational affiliation. David was the main speaker. Principal emphasis of the speaker was sanctification by shunning sins away. In Kerala the reformed Christians of the Mar Thoma Church were the pioneers to organize people in large numbers to listen to public speeches and Maramon convention has its central place. In olden times people were scattered in small principalities and they had no chance to make a general assembly even if they wanted to. A large gathering of this magnitude as we have at Maramon every year is a new phenomenon. Mara-mon meets are vibrant with evangelistic fervor and they attract world attention. Religious, social, political, cultural and ecumenical undercurrents are visible here.

In early periods converted Christians seldom had regular worship places and they were not allowed to worship with other Christians in traditional parishes. Under such circumstances the pandel at Maramon provided a common meeting place. Very Rev. K. E. Oommen recalls the early days of the Maramon Convention: "It was amazing to see the people who were once kept aloof as untouchables and unapproachables sit together with the Syrians in a pandel". Messages given at the convention were

aimed at Christian edification and nurture. Issues centered around adult and infant baptisms, eucharist etc. were discussed at length.

The Rev. Thomas Walker, a CMS missionary from Tirunelveli was a regular speaker at the convention for many years w.e.f M.E. 1074 (1899). He was good at settling disputes and the convention had a strong foundation and clear aim during this time, though it was not initially intended to be held systematically every year. He emphasized the need for rebirth (Jn.3:3ff.) After the spiritual revival of 1070 M.E. the year of commencement of the convention a section of the Christians of Central Travancore were forced to believe that their continuance in an episcopal church would hamper progress in Christian life and that infant baptism is opposed to the Scripture. A speaker by name Gregsen had misled the people as such. A minister and some believers of the Mar Thoma Church who were attracted by Gregsen's teaching left the Church. Following this incident conservatives and progressives clashed in the Church on the question of future reform measures to be adopted in line with those initiated by Abraham Malpan, the reformer. Very Rev. Ipe Thoma Kathanar, Vicar General being the leader of the conservatives and Rev. C. P. Philipose leader of the liberals. Though the Metropolitan was able to control both sides, there was a degree of pessimism on the future state of affairs. Thomas Walker was a good counselor and guide at this dead-lock (T. C. Chacko, *Malankara Mar Thoma Sabha Charithra Sangraham* (Mal.), Vol. 2, Tiruvalla, TAM Press, 1937 pp. 91-92).

Bishop Larson, Bishop Gor, Kagawa, Bishop P. Walsh, Bishop Stephen Neill etc. were the speakers in subsequent years. Among the speakers, Rev. C. P. Philipose, and Rev. M. C. George (*father of the late Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan Alexander Mar Thoma*) had their unique positions. From the early thirties of this century for a period of over thirty years Dr. Stanley Jones was the main speaker. His messages centered around the unchanging saviour Jesus Christ and the unshakable kingdom of God had a tremendous influence on the hearers. Over the years the organizers try their best to arrange the best speakers from India and overseas.

The convention provided a common platform for ecumenical thinkers to address the people at large. Apart from the leaders of the World Council of Churches Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch, Ignatius Zakka I, Canterbury Archbishop George Carey, bishops of the Orthodox, Jacobite, Roman Catholic, CSI, Chaldean and Thozhiyoor churches attend and address the gatherings on certain special occasions. The Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association organizes the meet every year. It is estimated that in recent years twenty lakhs (two million) people gather together every year to listen to the messages. There is a satisfactory coverage of the proceedings by the local dailies. The Radio and Television net-works also give much importance to the event. People's representatives irrespective of party affiliation and Central and Kerala ministers attend the meetings now and then. Competent translators give on the spot translation of the messages delivered in English. The government of Kerala has taken interest to arrange all possible amenities and infra-structure for the convention every year.

**Maramon Convention and Ayroor Hindu Matha Mahamandalam:** In the first meet of the

Maramon convention 1895 one of the afternoons was set apart for a special meeting for Hindus. This meeting was held at 4 p.m. Among those present two Hindu leaders Kavada Govindan Vadhyar and Kurupintayyathu Kesava Pillai got up for discussion at the close of the meeting. David, the speaker, answered the questions impressively. Govindan Vadhyar informed David that it was written in the Christian Scriptures that one should give him who asks and if that is so, will you give your coat to me. David answered in the affirmative and came forward with his coat and helped the Vadhyar (teacher) to wear it.

Thottavallil Narayanan Aasan, a Hindu leader of Ayroor (birth place of Rev. C. P. Philipose) regularly used to attend the Maramon Convention, for many years. The Aasan (guru) had provided quality timber for construction of a portion of the convention pandel. Centenary Supplement of the Maramon convention issued by the Malayala Manorama contains Narayanan Aasan's picture. Rev. C. P. Philipose and other leaders of the Mar Thoma Church had discussions with Hindu leaders on the question of social and cultural emancipation. There were joint efforts engineered by leaders of the Church and Hindu community to tackle social issues and fight social evils. Though the upper cast Hindu sections of central Travancore were not converted to Christianity they were inspired by Christians to renew themselves religiously and socially. In due course Ayroor became the centre of Hindu renaissance. Sadananda Swamikal, spokesman of Hindu renaissance, had advised the Hindu leadership to give up old type of temple festivals and resort to mature religious discourses. Following an untoward incident in M.E. 1028 Christians of the locality withdrew from futile practices of Hindu temple festivals at Ayroor (Revati festival of M.E. 1028 was on Sunday. The Christians did not go to remove the effigy of the horse contrary to the usual practice. Therefore, the Nairs had to carry the same without the anticipated support of the Christians. They were determined to take revenge and as they left the burden at the temple site, came back as a group to hunt the Christians out. Whosoever came to know this escaped from the scene. Women hid themselves in cellars or hideouts in houses. With uncontrolled anger the Nairs caught hold of all those could be found...A.T. Philip, *The Mar Thoma Church and Kerala Society*, Trivandrum: 1991, pp. 42-43. It is recorded that some Christian leaders of Ayroor had gone to Sucheendram Temple in South Travancore over two hundred and fifty years ago to copy the design of chariot at the temple in order to make the seven storied big chariot at Ayroor. See Ayroor Pakalomattom Thazhamon Kudumba Charithram (Mal.) 2nd edn. Ayroor: The Cherukara Press, 1982, p.50). The big chariot used for the purpose had been dismantled and the wooden beams were used to construct the Hindu Karayogamandiram in 1087 M.E. (1912). A couple of years before the formation of the Nair Service Society, the socio-cultural organization of the Nairs. Sadananda Swamikal himself had dedicated the building. For some years annual meetings were held in the Mandiram and later they were permanently arranged on the sand-bed of river Pampa at Ayroor. Venue of the meet is named as Vidhyadhiraja Nagar after Chatampi Swamikal, reformer of the Nair community. This Hindu Matha Mandalam had attracted religious and other leaders from all over the country through out these years. It is the largest

Hindu religious convention in South India (Malayala Manorama Daily (Mal.) Kottayam: February 20, 1994 p.1.) Influence of the Mar Thoma Church on the renewal of the Hindu community in central Travancore is an established fact. T. N. Upendra Natha Kurup, President of the Hindu Matha Mahamandalam and former President of the Travancore Devaswom Board says that the Mahamandalam had received inspiration from the Maramon Convention. Upendra Natha Kurup and his brother Prabhakara Kurup recall that they used to walk eight kilometers to reach Maramon in order to listen to Dr. Stanely Jones. The two brothers are descendants of Narayanan Aasan. Upendra Natha Kurup recalls the past leadership given jointly by Rev. C. P. Philipose and Narayanan Aasan to solve social and ethical problems of the people of Ayroor. They were able to amicably settle disputes that arose among the people. They never allowed toddy and other liquor shops to function in that locality. And there were no toddy tapping or liquor shops in that area until recently. (Malayala Manorama Convention Supplement February 12, 1995, p. 7. Even now at times people (men, women and children) organize themselves irrespective of religious distinctions to remove liquor shops. Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan reports such an incident happened recently at Thadiyoor, a ward of the Ayroor Panchayat. See Malankara Sabha Tharaka, August 1995, p. 3).

Later Aasan had started a primary school for the education of the Harijans and the school is named as Devi Vilasom Harijana Primary School. The Hindu Matha Convention celebrated its 83rd anniversary in 1995 (February 20-27). There was a drop in the forties and fifties which affected the progress of the convention. However in 1955 representatives of Hindus from Ranni toward the east to Mundankav toward the west assembled together and gave shape to the Sanathana Dharma Mela of South India (Malayala Manorama op. cit., February 20, 1994 p. 1). It is a common meeting place for all irrespective of caste and religion. As in the case of the Maramon convention a separate pandel is erected every year to accommodate women who come with small children. Every year the Hindu Matha Maha Mandalam begins on the closing day of the Maramon convention. Now the date is fixed as the third Sunday of the month of February.

**Maramon Convention and Socio-Political Developments:** The Maramon Convention has contributed a lot to instill democratic values. State Congress leaders like Pattom Thanupillai, and T. M. Varghese had yearly arranged political meetings on the sand-bed of Keezhukara at a short distance from the Convention pandel at the intervals of the convention meetings. And the famous Kozhencherry speech of C. Kesavan on 13th May 1935 against the Dewan and the excesses of his rule at a meeting of the combined political organization of the Christian-Ezhava-Muslim combination had the influence of the Maramon Convention. Venue of the Kozhencherry meet on the opposite bank of Maramon was named Mathews Nagar, after Mathews Mar Athanasius who worked for the social emancipation of the Christians. T. M. Varghese and K. T. Thomas (both members of the Mar Thoma Church) were respectively the leader and secretary of the combined political organization. Varghese's faith had an appeal on his personality. E. M. Koor writes: Varghese was born in a family of the Mar Thoma denomination of the Syrian Christian Community which had an extensive history and tradition in

Kerala relating itself to St. Thomas, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. Though the Mar Thoma Church is only in the third position because of its meagre following and lack of material wealth, it has taken many adventurous steps in matters connected with the proclamation of the Christian gospel and in the realm of spiritual life. The ideology and tradition of the Church is to set out for great things firmly believing in Jesus Christ. Birth and growth in such a Church atmosphere must have definitely contributed to the formation of Varghese's character (The Mar Thoma Church and Kerala Society, op. cit., p. 103). T. M. Varghese was the first home minister of Travancore. He was the first person in any of the Indian provinces who demanded a representative and democratic government. Challenge levelled by the Christian Ezhava-Muslim combination was instrumental in securing the Temple Entry Proclamation of Travancore on 12th November 1936.

C. V. Kunjiraman was the first among the people of other faiths to deliver a speech at the Maramon Convention and that was on the afternoon of Saturday the 9th of March 1936. After him K. L. Kunjukrishnan and Paul Paramu also had spoken on the same day. Kunjiraman and Kunjukrishnan were Ezhava leaders. Paul Paramu was a convert from the Ezhava community. The three speeches were very powerful and a gathering of over thirty thousand assembled at the meeting listened to them carefully. Kunjiraman emphatically expressed his view that the Ezhavas had no alternative but to accept Christianity as their new religion. He had also stated that he would accept Christianity forthwith. On the next day (i.e. the last day of the convention) the Mar Thoma Metropolitan exhorted that since Ezhavas, the professional toddy tappers are determined to stop tapping Christians must stop consuming it forthwith (Malayala Manorama, 1936. See the reproduction of the report in Malayala Manorama 1995 February 12).

Citizen Right Forum organized in 1919 was the initiator of the Nivarthana Prasthanam, combined political organization, and this Nivarthana Prasthanam later developed into the State Congress. From 1920 on the Citizen Right Forum and the SNDP (Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalanam) submitted many a memoranda to the government for the right of temple entry. In 1924-25, the famous Vaikom Satyagraha was initiated by the Citizen Right Forum with the support of the Indian National Congress and the blessings of Gandhiji. This move was to secure freedom for the avarnas to walk on public paths in the vicinity of the temple. This was a time when the Ezhavas began to think in terms of conversion to Christianity. On the first of November 1931 Guruvayoor Satyagraha began and the demand was right of entry for all Hindus in all the Hindu temples. Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee was the architect of this move and Kelappan was the leader. It seems that the Satyagraha was not the real issue confronted by the government of Travancore to make the temple entry proclamation. In Kochi and Malabar the temples were opened for the avarnas only in 1947. How then it happened in Travancore much earlier in 1936? The speedy act of the Travancore government was mainly in view of the Christian-Ezhava-Muslim unity and the Ezhava threat to convert themselves en-masse to Christianity, and most probably to the Mar Thoma Church. K. K. Kuruvilla, Principal of the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary and an eminent leader of the Mar

Thoma Church was a frontliner of the Indian National Congress in Kerala during this time. Gandhiji expressed his affection for Kuruvilla in a public meeting at Kottayam. One day the Father of the nation had visited him at his residence in the Mar Thoma Seminary.

In 1936, the year of the proclamation, during the Assembly meetings, rules for reservations to be given to the weaker sections were approved by the government of Travancore and hence the Samyukta Rashtree-ya Sabha (combined political organization) had been dissolved. While the temple entry proclamation could quench the fire spread in the Hindu society and sustain the avarnas within the Hindu fold it was not a permanent solution to the sociopolitical problems. When the newness of the situation connected with the temple entry died out Ezhavas rejoined the Christians and Muslims to fight for their other interests. Their enmasse conversion to Christianity never happened. The proposed conversion of C. V. Kunjiraman also never happened. However, the Mar Thoma Church played a part knowingly or unknowingly in securing the right for Ezhavas and other weaker sections to have access to the temples and the Maramon convention has a central place in the development. It was also because of the contribution of the church to provide wise political leadership through K. K. Kuruvilla, T. M. Varghese, K. T. Thomas and others.

**An Evaluation:** The Maramon Convention has a place in the history of social change in Kerala. It is a good sign that the people could unite beyond religious and social differences to tackle common issues and fight social evils. In this age of religious hatred and communal tensions the Maramon Convention and Ayroor Hindu Matha Mahamandalam raises very important challenges to form an integrated and inter-religious community. Religious and social groups must take a serious note of it.

It is gratifying to note that the democratic forces developed a combined organizational position at Kozhencherry in the vicinity of the spot where the Maramon Convention is held annually. The stance taken by the combined organization of the Christian-Ezhava-Muslim populations had far reaching consequence in the formation of a democratic government in Travancore quite early, at least one decade ahead of the independence of India, and also to influence the act of proclamation of temple entry for the weaker sections of the Hindu fold at an early date.

Christian church denominations in Kerala and elsewhere must imbibe from the convention messages insights and values of the Gospel to work beyond the limitations of closed communities, ethnic, social and religious. The Mar Thoma Church as it organizes the convention meetings every year has to make a self-examination as to how far the Church grow mature imbibing the values of the kingdom of God in the realm of socio-political, inter-religious and ecumenical witness. The meritorious events in history must repeat themselves locally and universally. The Church as a whole has to sincerely invoke the Spirit of the risen Lord to brood over us and our situations. ■

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# 106TH MARAMON CONVENTION — 2001

## *Opening day of the Maramon Convention*

*From Left to Right:*

*Dr. Cleophus J. Laru,  
Dr. Samuel T. Kamalesan,  
The Rt. Rev. Geevarghese  
Mar Athanasius and  
The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose  
Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma  
Metropolitan*



*The opening day of the Maramon Convention.*



*The last ones to leave after the inaugural meeting.*

# ദൈവശബ്ദം ശ്രവിക്കുക, രൂപാന്തരപ്പെടുക

## മാർത്തോമ്മാ മെത്രാപ്പോലീത്താ

(ഉദ്ഘാടനപ്രസംഗം)

ആദ്ധ്യാത്മിക ചൈതന്യത്തിന്റെ ഭക്തിഭാവങ്ങൾ, സർഗ്ഗീയ സോപാനങ്ങൾ കയറുന്ന, പരിപാവനമായ പമ്പാസരസ് തടത്തിൽ, ദൈവസ്നേഹത്തിന്റെയും, മാനവമൈത്രിയുടെയും ശക്തി ദൈവിക തയിലൂടെ വെളിപ്പെടുത്തുന്ന ചരിത്രപ്രസിദ്ധമായ മാരാമൺ കൺവൻഷന്റെ 106-ാമതു യോഗങ്ങൾക്ക് ആരംഭം കുറിച്ചു. കൺവൻഷനുവേണ്ടി വഴിമാറി ഒഴുകുന്ന പമ്പാനദിയുടെ വിരിമാറിൽ മനോഹരമായി വിരിച്ചൊരുക്കിയ വിശാലമായ പന്തലിൽ ഉച്ചവെയിലിനെ വകവെക്കാതെ 12 മണിക്കുമുന്യതന്നെ വന്നുതുടങ്ങിയ വിശ്വാസസമൂഹം പുതുസമർപ്പണത്തിന്റെ അനുഭവത്തിൽ “വരിക സുരാധിപ പരമ പരാ”..... എന്ന ഗാനം റവ. സ്കറിയാ ഏബ്രഹാമിന്റെ നേതൃത്വത്തിലുള്ള 51 അംഗ ഗായകസംഘത്തോട് ചേർന്ന് പാടിയപ്പോൾ ജനഹൃദയങ്ങളോടൊപ്പം പമ്പാ മണൽപ്പുറവും, പമ്പയിലെ കുഞ്ഞോളങ്ങളും ആദ്ധ്യാത്മിക ചൈതന്യവേദിയായി മാറി.

മലങ്കര മാർത്തോമ്മാ സുറിയാനി സഭയുടെ പരമാദ്ധ്യക്ഷൻ നിദാന്തവന്ദ്യദിവ്യ മഹിമശ്രീ. ഡോ. ഫിലിപ്പോസ് മാർ ക്രിസോസ്റ്റം മാർത്തോമ്മാ മെത്രാപ്പോലീത്താ 106-ാമതു മാരാമൺ കൺവൻഷൻ ഉദ്ഘാടനം ചെയ്തു.

വിശുദ്ധ മത്തായിയുടെ സുവിശേഷം 11-ാം അദ്ധ്യായം 15-ാം വാക്യം വായിച്ചുകൊണ്ടാണ് സന്ദേശം ആരംഭിച്ചത്. “കേൾപ്പാൻ ചെവിയുള്ളവൻ കേൾക്കട്ടെ. ദൈവശബ്ദം കേൾക്കുവാൻ കഴിയണം. ചെവിയുള്ളതുകൊണ്ട് എല്ലാം കേൾക്കാൻ കഴിയില്ല. മാരാമൺ കൺവൻഷൻ ദൈവശബ്ദം ശരിയായി ഗ്രഹിക്കുന്നതിനും പ്രായോഗികമാക്കുന്നതിനുമുള്ള വേദിയാകണം. ദൈവശബ്ദം തിരുവചനത്തിലൂടെ, അതിന്റെ വ്യാഖ്യാനങ്ങളിലും ധ്യാനത്തിലും കൂടെ തിരിച്ചറിയാൻ കഴിയും.

മനുഷ്യശബ്ദത്തിലൂടെ ദൈവശബ്ദം തിരിച്ചറിയാൻ കഴിയും. മാത്രമല്ല ചരിത്രസംഭവങ്ങളിലൂടെ ദൈവശബ്ദം തിരിച്ചറിയണം. സമീപകാലത്തുണ്ടായ രണ്ടു സംഭവങ്ങളിലൂടെയുള്ള ദൈവശബ്ദം തിരിച്ചറിയുന്നതിനു നമുക്കു ശ്രമിക്കാം. ഗുജറാത്തിലുണ്ടായ ഭുകമ്പം ചരിത്രത്തിൽ പുതിയതല്ല. അനേകരുടെ മരണത്തിനിടയാക്കിയ സംഭവം. എന്താണതിന്റെ അർത്ഥം? ദൈവം ദിനംതോറും പഴയതിനെ പുതുതാക്കിക്കൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്നു. ലോകത്തിലെ ദോഷസാധ്യതകളെ തിരിച്ചറിഞ്ഞ് നന്മയുടെ സാധ്യകളെ തിരിച്ചറിഞ്ഞ് പിന്തുടരുവാനാണ് ദൈവം മനുഷ്യനെ ലോകത്തിൽ ആക്കിയിരിക്കുന്നത്. എവിടെയെല്ലാം ലോകത്തെ നശിപ്പിക്കുന്ന ശക്തികൾ ഉണ്ടോ അവയെ വിട്ട് നല്ലതിനോട് ചേർന്ന് പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്നതിനുള്ള പ്രതിഷ്ഠയായി ഈ വർഷത്തെ കൺവൻഷൻ തീരണം. സമ്പത്തിനും ഭൗതികസുഖസൗകര്യങ്ങൾക്കും പ്രാധാന്യം കൊടുത്ത് അനീതിയ്ക്കും അഴിമതിക്കും കൂട്ടുനിൽക്കുന്നവർക്കുള്ള സന്ദേശമായി ദൂരന്തങ്ങളെ കാണേണ്ടതുണ്ട്. ലോകം അന്തമല്ലെന്നും, നിത്യമല്ലെന്നും ദൈവം മാത്രമാണ് നിത്യമായതെന്നും ചരിത്രം നമ്മെ പഠിപ്പിക്കുന്നു.

എന്നാൽ വേദനപ്പെടുന്നവരെ പറ്റി തകർന്ന ഒരു ഹൃദയം ഉണ്ടാകണം. ദൂരന്തത്തിനിരയായവർ നമ്മുടെ ആളുകളാണ്. അവരുമായി ഐക്യദാർഢ്യം ഉണ്ടാകണം. നിന്റെ അയൽക്കാരൻ നിന്റെ ആവശ്യം എന്നതാണ് കർത്താവ് പഠിപ്പിച്ചത്.

സമീപകാലത്തുണ്ടായ മദ്യദുരന്തം അനേകരുടെ ജീവനൊടുക്കി. മദ്യത്തിനെതിരെ ശബ്ദിക്കുവാൻ നാം ശക്തരോ? മദ്യം വിറ്റ് അനേകർ സമ്പത്ത് വർദ്ധിപ്പിക്കുന്നു. അതിലൂടെ അനേകർ നശിക്കുന്നു. ഈ സംഭവത്തിൽ കൂടെയും ദൈവശബ്ദം യോനായിലൂടെ ശ്രവിച്ചു നിന്നവയിലെ ജനം ദൈവത്തിങ്കലേക്കു തിരിഞ്ഞതുപോലെ

ദൈവശബ്ദം ശ്രവിച്ച്, രൂപാന്തരപ്പെട്ട് ദൈവത്തിങ്കലേക്ക് തിരിയുന്നതിന് ഇടയാക്കട്ടെ എന്നു പ്രാർത്ഥിച്ചുകൊണ്ട് ത്രിയേക ദൈവത്തിന്റെ നാമത്തിൽ കൺവൻഷൻ ഉദ്ഘാടനം ചെയ്തു.

മാർത്തോമ്മാ സുവിശേഷപ്രസംഗസംഘം പ്രസിഡന്റ് അഭിവന്ദ്യ ഗീവർഗീസ് മാർ അത്താനാസ്യോസ് എപ്പിസ്കോപ്പാ അദ്ധ്യക്ഷം വഹിച്ച യോഗത്തിൽ അഭിവന്ദ്യ ഡോ. ജോസഫ് മാർ ഐറേനിയോസ് സഫ്രഗൻ മെത്രാപ്പോലീത്താ, സഭയിലെ എപ്പിസ്കോപ്പാമാരായ ഡോ. സഖറിയാസ് മാർ തെയോഫിലോസ്, ഡോ. ഗീവർഗീസ് മാർ തിയഡോഷ്യസ്, ഡോ. യുയാക്കീം മാർ കുറിലോസ്, ജോസഫ് മാർ ബർന്നബാസ്, തോമസ് മാർ തിമൊഥെയോസ്, ഡോ. ഐസക് മാർ പീലിക്സിനോട് എന്നിവരും സംബന്ധിച്ചു.

സുവിശേഷപ്രസംഗസംഘം ജനറൽ സെക്രട്ടറി റവ. റ്റി.എ. കോശി പ്രാരംഭപ്രസ്താവനയും സ്വാഗതവും നടത്തി. ഇവാഞ്ചിലിസ്റ്റ് കെ.ജെ. മത്തായി വേദഭാഗം വായിച്ചു. കൺവൻഷന്റെ മുഖ്യപ്രസംഗകൻ ഡോ. സാമുവേൽ റ്റി. കമലേശൻ വചനശുശ്രൂഷ നടത്തി. റവ. എ.റ്റി. സഖറിയ ഭാഷാന്തരം ചെയ്തു. അഭിവന്ദ്യ ഡോ. ജോസഫ് മാർ ഐറേനിയസ് സഫ്രഗൻ മെത്രാപ്പോലീത്താ സമാപന പ്രാർത്ഥനയ്ക്ക് നേതൃത്വം നൽകി.

അർത്ഥവത്തായ തിരുവചനശ്രവണത്തിലൂടെ ദൈവരാജ്യപൂർത്തീകരണത്തിനായുള്ള യാത്രയിൽ, പൂർവ്വികർ കൊളുത്തിയ ത്യാഗത്തിന്റെയും ആത്മശക്തിയുടെയും പൊൻതിരി അണയാതെ കാത്തു സൂക്ഷിക്കുവാനുള്ള സമർപ്പണത്തോടെ അടുത്ത ദിനങ്ങൾക്കായി കാതോർത്ത് വിശ്വാസസമൂഹം ഭവനങ്ങളിലേക്ക് മടങ്ങി.



# ഞാൻ എന്തുചെയ്യണം?

വേദഭാഗം മീഖാ 6:8

പ്രസംഗം : റവ. ഡോ. സാമുവൽ റ്റി. കമലേശൻ

പരിഭാഷ : റവ. എ.റ്റി. സഖറിയ

ഒരു ദേശീയ ദുരന്തം അനുഭവിച്ചുകൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്ന സന്ദർഭത്തിലാണ് നാം കൂടിയിരിക്കുന്നത്. നാം പ്രവേശിച്ചിരിക്കുന്ന വർഷം എപ്രകാരം ജീവിക്കണം എന്ന ദിശാബോധം കണ്ടെത്തുന്നതിന് ഈ വർഷത്തെ കൺവൻഷൻ സഹായിക്കണം. ഒരർത്ഥത്തിൽ പുതിയ സഹസ്രാബ്ദത്തിന്റെ തുടക്കം ഇപ്പോഴാണ്. രൂപാന്തരത്തിനാണ് നമ്മുടെ പൂർവ്വികർ ഈ മണൽപ്പുറത്ത് വന്നത്. നിലവിലെ മാത്രമല്ല ഈ മണൽപ്പുറത്തും രൂപാന്തരം നടന്നിട്ടുണ്ട്. നമ്മുടെ പൂർവ്വികരുടെ രൂപാന്തരത്തിന്റെ ചരിത്രം മുഴുവനും സാക്ഷ്യം വഹിക്കുന്ന പമ്പാനദിയുടെ മടിത്തട്ടിലാണ് നാം കൂടിയിരിക്കുന്നത്.

മീഖായുടെ പുസ്തകം ആറാം അദ്ധ്യായം ഒരു സംഭാഷണമാണ്. ഒരു ആരാധനാഗീതം കൂടിയാണിത്. ദൈവം മനുഷ്യനോടും, തിരിച്ചു മുളയ്ക്കുന്ന സംഭാഷണം. വാ:1-5 ദൈവം ചോദിക്കുന്ന ചോദ്യങ്ങളാണ്. വാ: 6,7 നാം എന്തു ചെയ്യണം എന്നത് പ്രതിപാദിക്കുന്നു. ഹോമയാഗങ്ങളോ? അതല്ല. ആദ്യജാതനെ കൊടുക്കണമോ? വേദപുസ്തകം ശിശുബലിയെ അംഗീകരിക്കുന്നില്ല. ദൈവം എന്താണ് മനുഷ്യനിൽനിന്ന് ആഗ്രഹിക്കുന്നത്. നമ്മുടെ വസ്തുവകകളല്ല. ദൈവം നമ്മെതന്നെ ആവശ്യപ്പെടുന്നു. നമ്മിലൂടെ ചരിത്രത്തെ രൂപാന്തരപ്പെടുത്തുവാൻ ദൈവം ആഗ്രഹിക്കുന്നു. ദൈവം തന്നെ നമ്മെ നമുക്കുവേണ്ടി നൽകിയെങ്കിൽ നമ്മെത്തന്നെ ദൈവത്തിനായി നൽകുവാൻ സാധിക്കുമോ? ദൈവം കാട്ടിത്തന്നതല്ലാതെ ഒന്നും നമ്മിൽനിന്നും ആഗ്രഹിക്കുന്നില്ല, ആവശ്യപ്പെടുന്നില്ല.

ഈ ഭാഗത്ത് (വാക്യം 8) മൂന്ന് കാര്യങ്ങൾ നമ്മോട് ആവശ്യപ്പെടുന്നു.

**1. ന്യായം പ്രവർത്തിക്കുക**

സാധാരണക്കാരായവർക്ക് എങ്ങനെ സമൂഹത്തിൽ ന്യായം സ്ഥാപിക്കാനാവും, നീതി സ്ഥാപിക്കാൻ കഴിയും. നേതാക്കന്മാരും ഉന്നതരും അല്ലെ അതു ചെയ്യേണ്ടത്. വേദപുസ്തകം പഠിപ്പിക്കുന്നത് വ്യത്യസ്തമാണ്. സാധാരണക്കാരായ ആളുകൾ അസാധാരണരായി തീർന്ന് നീതി പ്രവർത്തിക്കണം. മീഖാ പ്രവാചകന്റെ കാലത്ത് അധികാരമുള്ളവൻ ഇല്ലാത്തവരെ പീഡിപ്പിച്ചിരുന്നു. മുതലാളിമാർ തൊഴിലാളികളെ ചൂഷണം ചെയ്തു. നീതിന്യായ സ്ഥാപനങ്ങൾ അന്യായത്തിന് കൂട്ടുനിന്നു. ഈ വ്യവസ്ഥിതി ഇന്നും നമ്മുടെ സമൂഹത്തിൽ ഒരു പരിധിവരെ നിലനിൽക്കുന്നു. മീഖാ പ്രവാചകൻ നമ്മുടെ സാഹചര്യത്തോട് സംസാരിക്കുന്നു, ആവശ്യപ്പെടുന്നു; ന്യായം പ്രവർത്തിക്കുക. സാധാരണക്കാരായവർക്ക് ഇതെങ്ങനെ സാധ്യമാകും? മർക്കോസ് 1:14,20 വരെയുള്ള ഭാഗത്ത് സാധാരണക്കാരായ നാലു മക്കുവൻമാരെ യേശു വിളിക്കുന്നു. സാധാരണക്കാരിലൂടെ

യേശു ഭൂമുഖത്തെ മാറ്റിമറിച്ചു. നീതിയുടെ ഒരു പുതിയ തത്വശാസ്ത്രം യേശു രൂപീകരിച്ചു. ശിമോൻ, അന്ത്രയോസ്, യാക്കോബ്, യോഹന്നാൻ എന്നീ സാധാരണക്കാരോട് യേശു പറയുന്നു. “എന്നെ അനുഗമിക്കുക, ഞാൻ നിങ്ങളെ.... ആക്കും”. ഈ തത്വം ഇന്നും നിലനിൽക്കുന്നു. യേശു നമ്മെ വിളിക്കുന്നു. അവൻ നമ്മുടെ ചരിത്രം തിരുത്തിക്കുറിക്കുന്നവനാണ്. സഭയിലെ ഓരോ അംഗവും വിളിക്കപ്പെട്ടവരാണ്. ഓരോരുത്തർക്കും ഓരോ ചുമതലയുണ്ട്. എന്നെയല്ല വിളിച്ചത് എന്ന് ആരെങ്കിലും കരുതിയാൽ അതു തികച്ചും പരിതാപകരമാണ്. എല്ലാവരും ശ്രേഷ്ഠതയുള്ളവരോ അധികാരമുള്ളവരോ ആയി എന്നല്ല. അധികാരത്തിന്റെ കേന്ദ്രം മാറി എന്ന് ലോകം അറിയണം. (1 കൊരി:1:26) ദൈവവചനം നമ്മുടെ ജീവിതത്തെ സ്വാധീനിക്കണം. നമ്മുടെ ജീവിതത്തിന് ഒരു സ്വാധീനവലയം ഉണ്ട്. ദൈവം വിളിക്കുമ്പോൾ, ഈ സ്വാധീനവലയം ദൈവത്തിന്റേതായി തീർക്കുവാൻ ദൈവം ആഗ്രഹിക്കുന്നു. നമ്മുടെ സ്വാധീനവലയം അപ്പോൾ ദൈവം വിശാലമാക്കും. സ്വാധീനവലയത്തിനു പുറത്തുള്ളതിനെ അകത്താക്കുന്നവനാണ് ദൈവം. നീതി പ്രവർത്തിക്കുവാൻ ദൈവം നമ്മെ വിളിക്കുന്നു. അതു നമ്മുടെ സ്വാധീനവലയത്തിന്റെ ഉള്ളിൽ ആരംഭിക്കണം.

നീതി പ്രവർത്തിക്കേണ്ട മറ്റൊരു മേഖല ദൈവം നമുക്കു നൽകിയ കഴിവുകളെ വിതരണം ചെയ്യുന്നതാണ്. വിദ്യാഭ്യാസവുമായവർ വളരെയധികമുള്ള മേഖലയാണിത്. നാം വളരെ അധികാരമുള്ളവരാണ്. നമ്മുടെ കഴിവുകളെ മറ്റുള്ളവർക്കായി നൽകുവാൻ കഴിയുമോ? അരുണ റോയി എന്ന ഐ.എ.എസ്. വനിത, ഗ്രാമങ്ങളിലെ ജനങ്ങളെ പീഡിപ്പിക്കുന്ന സഹ ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥരുടെ സമീപനങ്ങളിൽ നൊന്ത് പദവികൾ വിട്ടൊഴിഞ്ഞ് ജനങ്ങളിലേക്ക് ഇറങ്ങി ചെന്ന വനിതയാണ്. തന്നെത്തന്നെ സാധാരണക്കാരായ ജനങ്ങൾക്കു നൽകുവാൻ കഴിഞ്ഞതിൽ താൻ സന്തുഷ്ടയാണെന്ന് അരുണ റോയി പറയുന്നു. കർത്താവ് പറഞ്ഞത് ഇതുതന്നെയാണ്. യുവാക്കളേ, ദൈവം നമുക്ക് നൽകിയ കഴിവുകൾ മറ്റുള്ളവർക്കായി നൽകുവാൻ കഴിയുമോ? നീതി എന്നത് ഈ പ്രവർത്തിയാണെന്ന് നാം കരുതാത്തതിടത്തോളം നമ്മുടെ സമൂഹം നന്മയിലെത്തുകയില്ല.

നീതി പ്രവർത്തിക്കുമ്പോൾ അധികാരത്തെ പുനർവ്യാഖ്യാനം ചെയ്യേണം. അധികാരത്തെ പൈശാചികമായി കാണുന്ന ഒരു സമൂഹമാണിത്. ദൈവരാജ്യത്തെപ്പോലും വിലകൊടുത്ത് വാങ്ങാം എന്നു കരുതുന്നവർ അനേകം. കൊലോ. 2:15 ൽ അധികാരത്തെപ്പറ്റി തികച്ചും വ്യത്യസ്തമായ ഒരു വ്യാഖ്യാനം കാണാം. എന്തുചെയ്യേണം എന്ന് കർത്താവ് കാണിച്ചു വേദം, അതു നാം ചെയ്യേണം. സഭയോട് ഇത് ഇന്നാവശ്യപ്പെടുന്നു.

എന്റെ രാജ്യം എന്നതിനെപ്പറ്റി കർത്താവ് തന്റെ വ്യാഖ്യാനം വെളിപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു. അത് പീലാത്തോസിന്റെ രാജ്യസങ്കല്പമല്ല. കർത്താവിന്റെ രാജ്യത്തിന്റെ ഉടമകൾക്ക് വ്യക്തിപരമായ ഉദ്ദേശങ്ങൾ നടപ്പിലാക്കാൻ കഴിയാതെ വരും. ഇന്നുകാണുന്ന അധികാരഘടനയെ നാം പുനർവ്യാഖ്യാനം ചെയ്യണം. അനീതിപരമായവ ചെയ്യാതിരിക്കുവാനുള്ള തയ്യാറെടുപ്പുണ്ടാകണം.

**2. ദയാതല്പരനായിരിക്കുക**

കൃഷ്ണരോഗി യേശുവിനെകണ്ടു എന്ന സൗഖ്യമാക്കുവാൻ മനസ്സുണ്ടോയെന്നു ചോദിച്ചപ്പോൾ യേശു അവനെ തൊട്ട് സൗഖ്യമാക്കി. മനസ്സലിഞ്ഞ ദൈവം മാറിനിൽക്കുകയില്ല. ഇന്നും സഭയ്ക്ക് ഇപ്രകാരം പിൻമാറി നിൽക്കാനാവില്ല. മനസ്സലിപ്പ് ശക്തമായ ഒന്നാണ്. ഹൃദയത്തിന്റെ പ്രവർത്തനമാണ്. അത് ഉള്ളിൽനിന്നും ആണ് ഉണ്ടാകേണ്ടത്. യേശുവിന്റെ ജനനസമയത്ത് സെൻസസ് നടന്നു. അധികാരത്തിന്റെ ഘടനകൾ തല എണ്ണി കൂടുതൽ പണം സമ്പാദിക്കുവാൻ ശ്രമിക്കുമ്പോൾ ദൈവം തന്റെ സ്വപുത്രനെ അയച്ച് ദയകാണിച്ചുതന്നു. മനസ്സലിവിന്റെ തത്വശാസ്ത്രം മേധാവിത്വത്തിന്റെ ശക്തിയെ അഴിച്ചുമാറ്റുന്നതാണ്.

**3. താഴ്മയോടെ നടക്കണം**

നടക്കുക എന്നത് ക്രിയാപദമാണ്. പുതിയ നിയമത്തിന്റെ ഭാഷ പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്ന ഭാഷയാണ്.

താഴ്മയോടെ നടക്കുക എന്നാൽ ശ്രദ്ധാപൂർവ്വം നടക്കുക എന്നാണ്. പരിജ്ഞാനപൂർവ്വമായ നടപ്പ്. ന്യായം പറഞ്ഞിട്ട് പ്രവർത്തിക്കാതിരിക്കുന്നത് ചതിവാണ്. ദൈവത്തിനുവേണ്ടി വൻകാര്യം ചെയ്യുന്നതാണ് യഥാർത്ഥ വിനയം. സാദോവികമായി ലഭിച്ചതെല്ലാം ദൈവത്തിന് സമർപ്പിക്കുക. വിനയത്തിന് പല മുഖങ്ങളുണ്ട്. കൊൽക്കത്തയിൽ വിനയത്തിന്റെ പേര് മദർതൈരേസ എന്നായിരുന്നു. മറ്റൊരു മുഖം തമിഴ്നാട്ടിൽ പ്രവർത്തിച്ച പോൾ ബ്രാന്റിന്റെയാണ്. ഇങ്ങനെ യുള്ളവർ സമൂഹത്തിൽ ചലനം സൃഷ്ടിക്കും.

ഇന്നും നാം എന്തു പ്രവർത്തിക്കണം എന്ന് നാം ചിന്തിച്ചു. ആധുനിക സമൂഹത്തിന്റെ പ്രശ്നം അറിവില്ല എന്നതല്ല അറിയുന്നത് ഗൗനിക്കുന്നില്ല എന്നതാണ്. നാം ഇന്ന് ഇവയെ പരിഗണിക്കുമോ? നാം എന്തുചെയ്യേണം എന്നു ദൈവം ആഗ്രഹിക്കുന്നു.

ന്യായം പാലിക്കുക  
ദയാതല്പരനായിരിക്കുക  
താഴ്മയോടെ നടക്കുക.



# The Empty Egg An Easter Story

Stan Abraham, London

Jeremy was born with a twisted body and a slow mind. At the age of 12 he was still in second grade, seemingly unable to learn. His teacher, Doris Miller, often became exasperated with him. He would squirm in his seat, drool, and make grunting noises. At other times, he spoke clearly and distinctly, as if a spot of light had penetrated the darkness of his brain. Most of the time, however, Jeremy just irritated his teacher.

One day she called his parents and asked them to come in for a consultation. As they entered the empty classroom, Doris said to them, "Jeremy really belongs in a special school. It isn't fair to him to be with younger children who don't have learning problems. Why, there is a five year gap between his age and that of the other students." Mrs. Forrester cried softly into a tissue, while her husband spoke. "Miss Miller," he said, "there is no school of that kind nearby. It would be a terrible shock for Jeremy if we had to take him out of this school. We know he really likes it here."

Doris sat for a long time after they had left, staring at the snow outside the window. Its coldness seemed to seep into her soul. She wanted to sympathize with the Forresters. After all, their only child had a terminal illness. But it wasn't fair to keep him in her class. She had 18 other youngsters to teach, and Jeremy was a distraction. Furthermore, he would never learn to read and write. Why waste any more time trying?

As she pondered the situation, guilt washed over her. Here I am complaining when my problems are nothing compared to that poor family, she thought. Lord, please help me to be more patient with Jeremy. From that day on, she tried hard to ignore Jeremy's noises and his blank stares. Then one day, he limped to her desk, dragging his bad leg behind him. "I love you, Miss Miller," he exclaimed, loud enough for the whole class to hear. The other students snickered, and Doris' face turned red. She stammered, "Wh-why that's very nice, Jeremy. Now, please take your seat."

Spring came, and the children talked excitedly about the coming of Easter. Doris told them the story of Jesus, and then to emphasize the idea of new life springing forth, she gave each of the children a large plastic egg. "Now," she said to them, "I want you to take this home and bring it back tomorrow with something inside that shows new life. Do you understand?" "Yes, Miss Miller," the children responded enthusiastically—all except for

Jeremy. He listened intently; his eyes never left her face. He did not even make his usual noises. Had he understood what she had said about Jesus' death and resurrection? Did he understand the assignment? Perhaps she should call his parents and explain the project to them.

That evening, Doris' kitchen sink stopped up. She called the landlord and waited an hour for him to come by and unclog it. After that, she still had to shop for groceries, iron a blouse, and prepare a vocabulary test for the next day. She completely forgot about phoning Jeremy's parents. The next morning, 19 children came to school, laughing and talking as they placed their eggs in the large wicker basket on Miss Miller's desk. After they completed their math lesson, it was time to open the eggs. In the first egg, Doris found a flower. "Oh yes, a flower is certainly a sign of new life," she said. "When plants peek through the ground, we know that spring is here." A small girl in the first row waved her arm. "That's my egg, Miss Miller," she called out. The next egg contained a plastic butterfly, which looked very real. Doris held it up. "We all know that a caterpillar changes and grows into a beautiful butterfly. Yes, that's new life, too." Little Judy smiled proudly and said, "Miss Miller, that one is mine." Next, Doris found a rock with moss on it. She explained that moss, too, showed life. Billy spoke up from the back of the classroom, "My daddy helped me," he beamed. Then Doris opened the fourth egg. She gasped. The egg was empty. Surely it must be Jeremy's she thought, and of course, he did not understand her instructions. If only she had not forgotten to phone his parents. Because she did not want to embarrass him, she quietly set the egg aside and reached for another. Suddenly, Jeremy spoke up. "Miss Miller, aren't you going to talk about my egg?" Flustered, Doris replied, "But Jeremy, your egg is empty." He looked into her eyes and said softly, "Yes, but Jesus' tomb was empty, too." Time stopped. When she could speak again, Doris asked him, "Do you know why the tomb was empty?" "Oh, yes," Jeremy said, "Jesus was killed and put in there. Then His Father raised Him up." The recess bell rang. While the children excitedly ran out to the school yard, Doris cried. The cold inside her melted completely away.

Three months later, Jeremy died. Those who paid their respects at the mortuary were surprised to see 19 eggs on top of his casket, all of them empty. ■



# Who is Jesus for Me?

Reuben K. Jacob

**T**he subject 'Who is Jesus for Me?' is a personal question. Therefore, I would like to share couple of thoughts from the Bible in light of my life experience with Jesus. First of all, it is important to know that this is the most relevant question that one should address when you come to know Jesus. Also, it is a question that gives a dynamic answer, as our relation with Jesus is growing along with our faith. In other words, the answer to this question will not be same the day you accepted Jesus and 10 or 20 years after that, because our knowledge of God changes and God reveals Himself to us as we grow in faith.

Jesus Himself asked this question to His disciples in a very special way. In Mathew 16: 13-16, when Jesus came to Cecaeria Phillipi, He asked His disciples, "who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say Elijah, some John the Baptist and others say Jeramiah or other prophets." Then Jesus asked them, "Who do you say I am?" Then Simon Peter said, "You are Christ, the Son of the Living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah, for this is not revealed to you by man, but my father in Heaven and on this rock I will build my church."

From this passage there is only one point that I want to elaborate on: which is, why did Jesus ask this question, "who do **people** say I am?" Being almighty God, Jesus knew very well what others are thinking about Him. So, He didn't ask this to know how popular He is. But He wanted to know whether His disciples, His very close friends, has a conviction that He is Lord. In fact, this is the reason why

Jesus raised the second question, "Who do you think I am." Remember! the first question was "Who do **people** say I am."

When He asked this personnel question, He expected a specific answer from them. And Peter gave the most powerful statement in the Bible saying, "**You are the Christ, the son of Living God.**" It doesn't matter what others say about Jesus. The most important factor is 'Who is Jesus for You and me.'

Then Jesus replied to Peter saying, "the church is built on Peter." Here what Jesus really meant was that the basic foundation of the church is our rock-like conviction that Jesus is the Christ. So, the church is built and growing on our unquestionable and self revealed acceptance of Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior. Remember here that the church never grow if you merely accept Jesus because someone else compelled you to do so. It is our choice.

Before concluding, I think it is important to tell you that Jesus is the Christ for me for the past six years. He is with me in all my needs and He is my best friend whom I can talk to anytime I want. So let me ask you, my friends, Who is Jesus for you? Is He just a miracle man lived long time ago in Israel? Or is he your own Christ, the Savior of your body, mind and soul. ■

First place winner of the Elocution Competition for ages 10-12 held at the Sixth Southwest Region Sunday School Junior/Senior Conference at Dallas on March 10, 2001, is a member of the Trinity Mar Thoma Church, Houston.

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## Faith in the Midst of Crisis

Shane Ninan

**C**risis...faith...how can these two words work together? The word crisis implies an emergency or a situation in which we don't know what the outcome will be. Faith means that we believe that the outcome of a situation will be a positive one or one that will enable us to grow in character. But because we live in such a depressing world, how can we have faith in the midst of a crisis?

A crisis often occurs when we least expect it, such as an earthquake, car accident, or even the death of a loved one. We are left wondering, why has this happened to me and how am I supposed to get through this? Has God forsaken me? Is he trying to punish me? However, as all of these questions run through our minds we must also remember that sometimes God allows us to face a crisis so that He may test our faith, or get our attention, or even minister to

another person. But no matter what the cause, a crisis always gives God the opportunity to show His power through us. For it is during a crisis that we are at our weakest point.

When looking at the word faith, we find that the apostle Paul defines it in his letter to the Hebrews when he states, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." When we say that we believe in a God and His existence, we are also saying that we are not alone. We are believing that there will be someone by our side to rejoice with us during our times of happiness as well as help us during our times of trial. It is because of faith in such a God that we are able to stand up in the midst of our crisis and to rebuke any fear that may stand in our way. In essence, faith gives us the power we need to depend on God alone.

Now that we understand these two concepts of crisis and faith, we can now analyze how the two work together. In the book of Exodus we find the story of the Israelites and their escape from Egypt. As they approached the Red Sea, they saw that the Egyptians were following them and ready to attack. The Israelites feared for their lives and blamed Moses for bringing them out into the desert to die. But Moses chose to see beyond this crisis and to declare his faith in God by saying, "Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Lord will fight for you. You need only to be still." The Lord did fight for them and enabled the children of Israel to cross the sea unharmed by the Egyptians. It was because of the faith that Moses chose to place in God that God was able to deliver him and the Israelites from their crisis.

My dear friends, just as Moses chose to believe that the Lord would fight for him in the midst of his crisis, we too must believe that the Lord will fight for us in the midst of our crisis. We should remember the words of James when he says, "Consider it pure joy my brothers when you face

trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be complete and mature, not lacking anything." A crisis must not be feared or cause us to doubt the existence of God. Instead we should rejoice and rest in the fact that we serve a God who has the power and ability to save us from our crisis and to make us stronger believers in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

By remembering that faith means to believe that the outcome of a situation will be a positive one or one that will help us to grow in character, we must now examine our own lives to see if our beliefs match this definition of faith. If you were to look at your own life, would you consider yourself strong like Moses or would you be like an Israelite—one who doubts the power of God? ■

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First place winner of the Elocution Competition for ages 16-18 held at the Sixth Southwest Region Sunday School Junior/Senior Conference at Dallas on March 10, 2001, is a member of the Trinity Mar Thoma Church, Houston.

## The Dance

*Gini George, Philadelphia*

*Held captive by the lure  
I step into the darkness  
Swallowed by the night  
Consumed by its' desire... I dance*

*I dance with death all around me  
Enticed by its' lure of desire  
I dance knowing that death awaits  
"This road leads only one way", someone shouts*

*My inside scream "more", but my heart...  
My heart screams "traitor" and I scream...  
I scream, my world screams "sinner"... but He  
He... my being, whispers "come back"*

*Sin no longer, sin no longer  
I hear the words, they echo thru myself  
I try to run...to hide...but where?  
Your spirit whispers, "come back"*

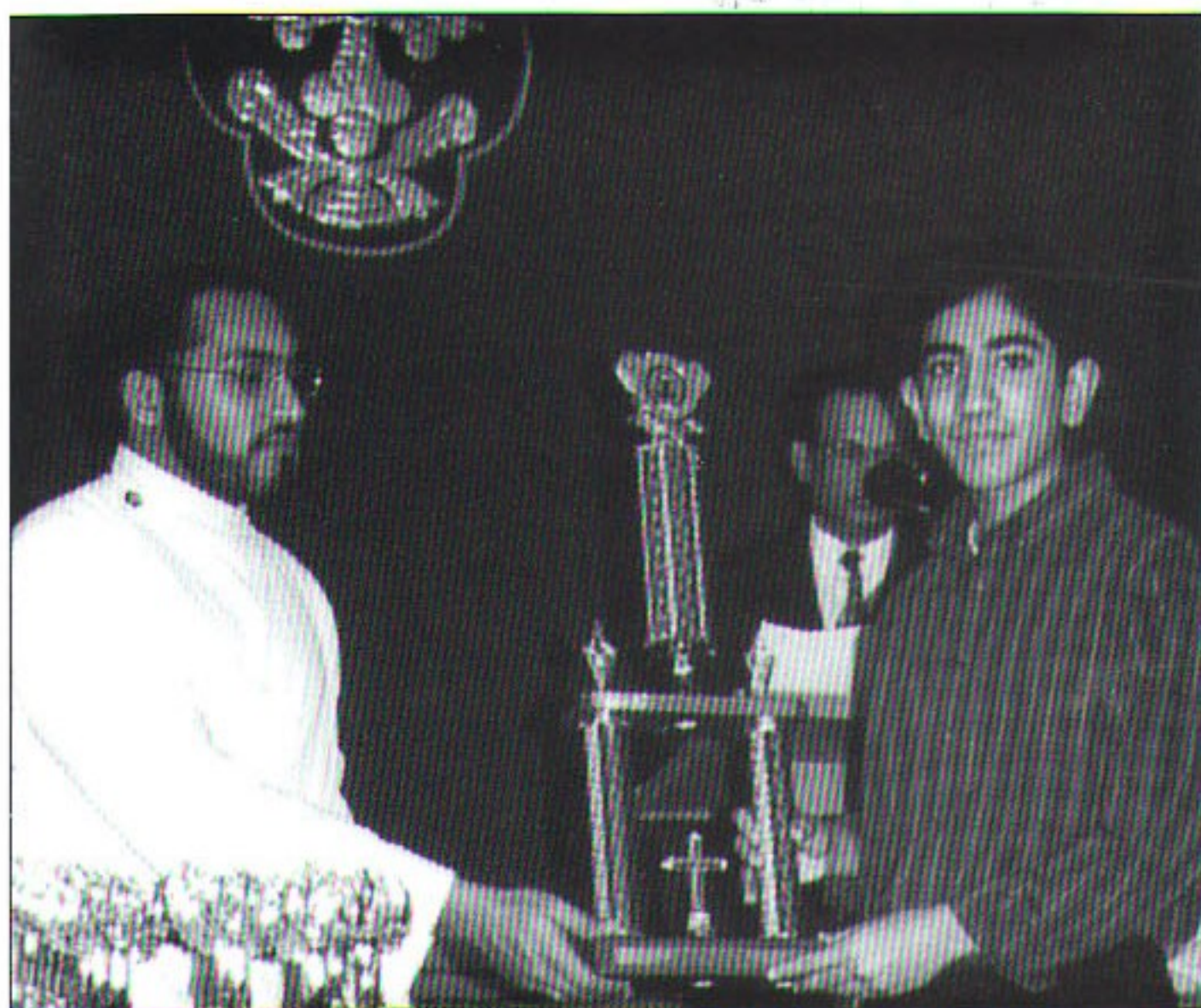
*Held captive by its lure  
I step into the darkness and He...  
He leaves his majesty and enters my world  
"No!" I scream, darkness melts... Light enters*

*I scream "I'm sorry ... again"  
He, my life, whispers... "my grace is for you"  
He whispers... "my grace is sufficient"  
He whispers... "come just as you are"  
He whispers... I paid it all, it is finished*

*Held captive by his love, I step into the light*

# Christian Self Giving

Kelvin Varghese, Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch



*Kelvin Varghese receiving First Prize from Roy Achen.*

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." The greatness of God's love for us is demonstrated by His priceless gift to us. In Ephesians 5:25 we read "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her." Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20, "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." This is what God's self giving for the world.

Just as God's loving and giving are inseparable, so too our giving is an expression of our love. This goes much deeper than just putting something in the offering plate on Sunday. It begins with giving ourselves to the Lord each day of the week. In 2 Corinthians 8:14, Paul commended the churches in Macedonia for their generous giving. Their giving was the result of their dedication to Christ, for Paul said in verse 5 that, "they first gave themselves to the Lord."

Mother Teresa in her book "Heart of Joy" wrote: "Never

be afraid of giving, but do not give your surplus. Give to a point that it is difficult for you. There is a deep joy in giving, since what we receive is much more than what we given. To the question what is Christianity? A Hindu gentleman answered: Christianity is giving. Christ gave Himself at the cross. Such is God's love. He is asking you and me to show His love to others by giving ourselves until it hurts.

Stanford Kelly, a missionary to Haiti, was taking an offering in the little congregation he was serving. He found in the offering plate a gift of \$13, which was equivalent of one-month salary in Haiti. The gift surprised him, and prompted him to search out the giver. Kelly found the giver to be a farmer. He asked the farmer about this sacrificial gift, and found that he sold his only horse, which provided him his livelihood. Kelly asked, "why didn't you come to church to give the gift yourself? The farmer replied, "because I had no shirt to wear to the Church." This is the true meaning of self-giving.

Sometimes it is hard for us to smile at one another. It is often difficult for the husband to smile at the wife, or for the wife to smile at her husband. While speaking to a small group of people, one man asked Mother Teresa "Are you married"? Mother Teresa answered "Yes I am married to Jesus, but sometimes it is difficult for me to smile at Christ, because he is too demanding." It is true, Jesus is asking too much of you, in the form of self-giving.

Let us give ourselves like Christ gave Himself to us: as truth, which must be spoken; as life, which must be lived; as light, which must shine out; as love, which must be loved; as a way which must be trodden; as joy, which must be communicated; as peace, which must be radiated; and as sacrifice, which must be offered to others. Thank you. ■

Sermon which won the first prize in the Regional Sunday Schools competition for the age groups 12-15 held at the Regional Sunday School Conference in Dallas March 2001.

## ESSAY COMPETITION

The Mar Thoma Messenger will hold its Second Annual Essay Competition for our students upto 15 years (Juniors) and 15 to 20 years (Seniors) as of June 1, 2001. Typewritten essays of not more than 1500 words may be sent to the above address no later than May 25, 2001 along with a signed declaration of the author to the effect that he or she has received no help from anyone else in the preparation of the essay.

### Subjects

Juniors:

**"What does it mean to me to be an American (Canadian/European) Marthomite"**

Seniors:

**"The Mar Thoma Church, as I see it, twenty five years from now"**

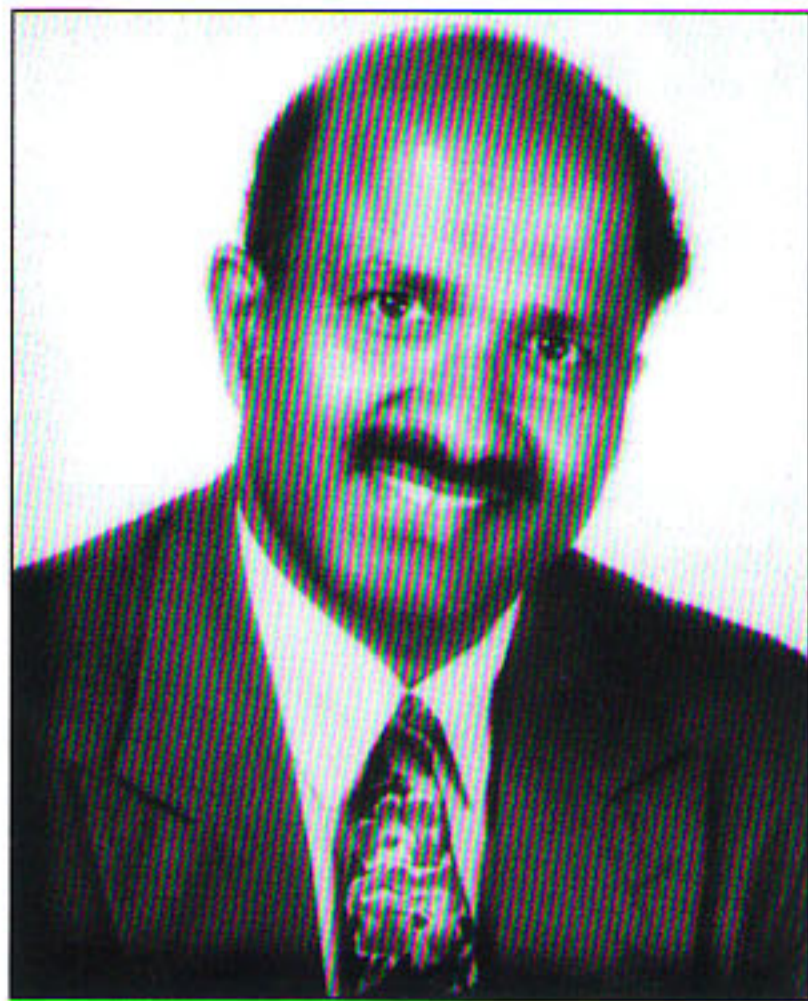
Awards will be given to the First and Second Place winners during the forthcoming Family Conference in Philadelphia.

### Declaration

I, \_\_\_\_\_ declare that I have received no help, whatsoever, from anyone in the preparation of the essay that I am sending herewith.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



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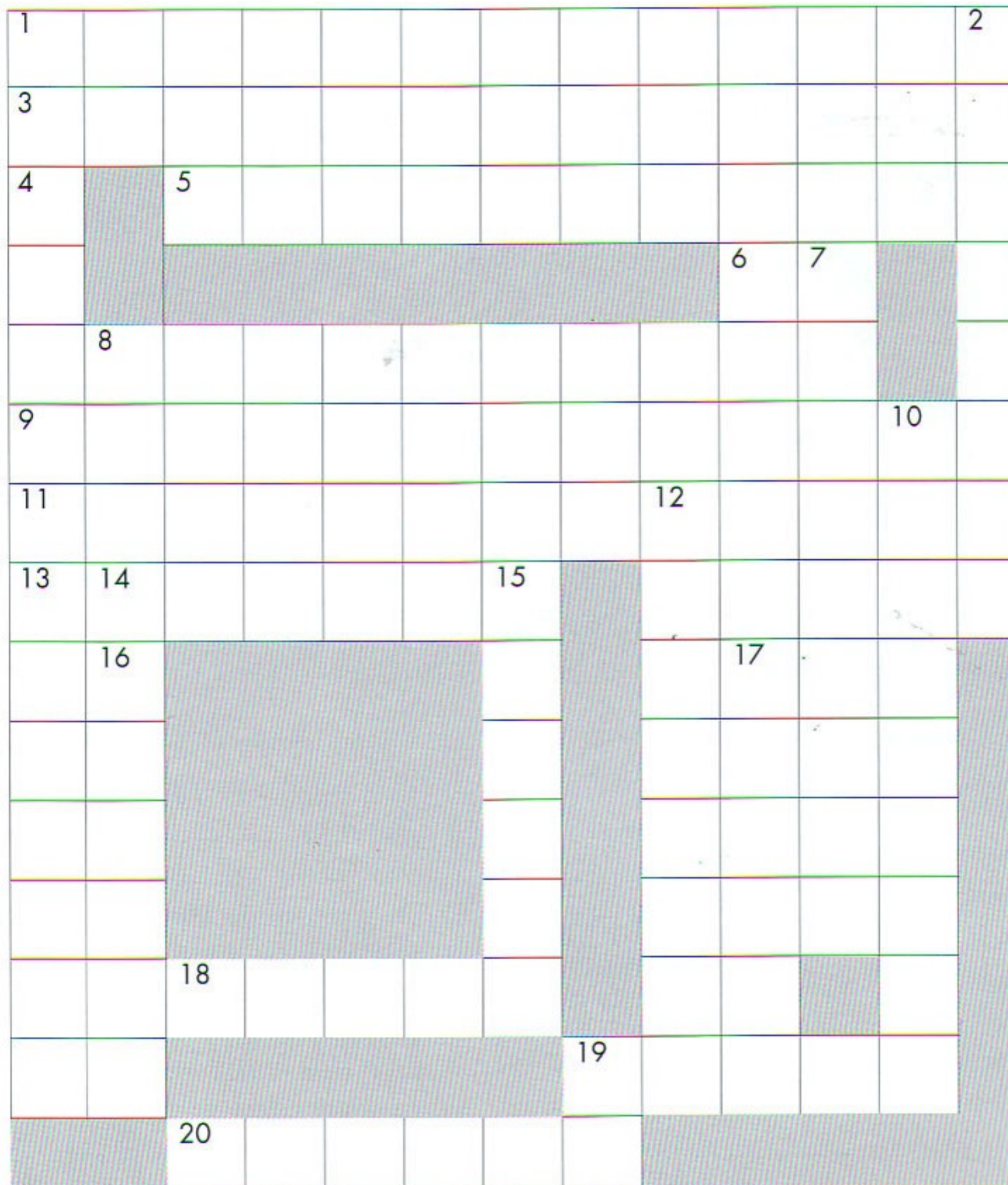
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# BIBLE CROSS WORD PUZZLE

AS IN THE NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION  
(based on 1 Kings Chapters 1-11)

Mrs. Jessy Kurien (New York)



## Across

1. Who came to King Solomon to test him with hard questions?
3. How many concubines King Solomon had?
5. King Solomon had asked the Lord for a \_\_\_\_\_ heart to govern the people and to distinguish between right and wrong.
8. Solomon and all people of Israel observed the festival before the Lord for \_\_\_\_\_ days in all.
9. Who was the mother of Solomon?
11. In the inner sanctuary, Solomon made a pair of \_\_\_\_\_ of olive wood.
14. Lord raised up against Solomon an adversary \_\_\_\_\_ the Edomite.
18. King Solomon had spent \_\_\_\_\_ years building the temple of the Lord.
19. There was nothing in the ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at \_\_\_\_\_.
20. God gave Solomon \_\_\_\_\_ and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore.

## Down

2. Who succeeded Solomon as King?
4. King Solomon began to build the temple of the Lord in the month of \_\_\_\_\_.
6. When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the \_\_\_\_\_ filled the temple of the Lord.
7. Which was the goddess of the Sidonians?
10. Adonijah sacrificed sheep, cattle and fattened calves at the stone of \_\_\_\_\_ near En Rogel.
12. Who was the mother of Adonijah?
13. Adonijah was born next after \_\_\_\_\_.
15. Solomon was anointed as king at \_\_\_\_\_.
16. King Solomon went to \_\_\_\_\_ to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place.
17. King \_\_\_\_\_ supplied Solomon with all the Cedar and Pine logs to build the temple.

# BIBLE WORD SEARCH

AS IN THE NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION  
(based on 1 Kings Chapters 12-22)

Mrs. Jessy Kurien (New York)

S	T	H	I	R	T	Y	F	I	V	E	A	B
E	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	A	J	K	L	M
V	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	B	U	H	V	W
E	X	A	S	A	D	O	N	I	R	A	M	Y
N	Z	H	A	B	J	J	C	R	D	Z	T	E
T	F	S	G	H	I	U	J	A	K	R	A	R
E	Z	I	M	R	I	D	L	M	M	I	B	A
E	N	L	O	P	Q	A	R	D	S	T	E	V
N	K	E	R	I	T	H	R	A	V	I	N	E
A	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	N	A	B	C	N
B	Z	A	R	E	P	H	A	T	H	D	E	S
O	B	A	D	I	A	H	F	G	H	I	J	K
T	W	E	L	V	E	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R
H	A	M	A	A	N	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y
Z	A	B	C	D	E	J	E	Z	E	B	E	L

1. Only the tribe of \_\_\_\_\_ remained loyal to the house of David.
2. Jeroboam made two golden calves, one at Bethel and the other in \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Who was King Rehoboam's mother?
4. Who succeeded Abijah as King?
5. King Baasha was buried in \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The King of Israel who reigned only for seven days.
7. King Ahab's wife.
8. Lord asked Elijah to hide in the \_\_\_\_\_, east of the Jordan.
9. Who brought bread and meat to Elijah?
10. Elijah lived in the house of a widow at \_\_\_\_\_.
11. Who was in charge of Ahab's palace?
12. Elijah made the altar of the Lord with \_\_\_\_\_ stones.
13. Elijah fled to \_\_\_\_\_, the mountain of God.
14. Elijah went up to \_\_\_\_\_ and threw his cloak around him
15. The person who got killed for a vineyard.
16. Jehoshaphat was \_\_\_\_\_ years old when he became King.
17. Who was Jeroboam's father?
18. Rehoboam sent out \_\_\_\_\_, who was in charge of forced labor, but all Israel stoned him to death.
19. Rehoboam reigned \_\_\_\_\_ years in Jerusalem.
20. Ahab's first born son.

### Bible Word Search Finders (January 2001)

1. Juley George
2. Christopher George Chacko
3. Anika Sara Chacko
4. Mariamma Zachariah
5. Thankamma George
6. Denny Simon
7. Binsi Koshy
8. Ansu Koshy
9. Asha John
10. Vinod John
11. Ansu Andrews
12. Kunjamma Thomas

### Bible Cross-Word Puzzle Winners (January 2001)

1. Juley George
2. Sneha Mary Abraham
3. Christopher George Chacko
4. Anika Sara Chacko
5. Mariamma Zachariah
6. Asha John
7. Vinod John
8. Jay Mathew
9. Kunjamma Thomas

### ATTENTION ALL CONTESTANTS!!!

Please mail your answers to:  
Mrs. Jessy Kurien, 260-27 74th Avenue,  
Glen Oaks, NY 11004

**DEADLINE FOR ANSWERS June 15, 2001**

# DIOCESAN/PARISH NEWS

## WELCOME TO OUR NEW BISHOP AND ACHENS!!

The Mar Thoma Messenger and its readers proudly welcome our new Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos who is expected to assume his responsibilities beginning October 2001 and our new achenes most of whom will take up their new assignments beginning May 2001. While a large number of adult members in our diocese know Coorilos Thirumeni personally, as he had earlier served in our Staten Island, Bethel (Philadelphia), Washington DC, Baltimore and Florida parishes, we publish below a few relevant personal details particularly for the benefit of our children and young adults.

Coorilos thirumeni (formerly Rev. Euyakim I. Cheeran) was born on November 25, 1951 in Kunnamkulam, of his parents Sri Ittymani Ittyachen Kunju and Smt. Saramma. After his early education in C.M.S.L.P. School and Govt. High School in Erumapetty, he joined Sacred Heart College, Thevara for P.D.C. and then Christ College, Iringalakuda for Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees.

After obtaining B.D. from Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam, Euyakim I. Cheeran was ordained as deacon on April 29, 1978 and as



Kassissa on May 16, 1978. Rev. Cheeran served as parish priest in Jalahali, Kottayam, Jerusalem, Thiruvapur, Palarivattom, Bombay (now Mumbai)-Kolaba, Staten Island, Washington DC, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Florida.

Rev. Cheeran was elevated as Ramban on April 11, 1989 and was consecrated as Bishop of the Mar Thoma Church on September 12, 1989. Coorilos Thirumeni was in charge of the Adoor-Mavelikkara Diocese from January 1990 to August

1997 and Ranny Nilackal diocese from August 1997 on. Coorilos Thirumeni also served as the President of the Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakyam; Manager, Chengannur Christian College; and Chairman, Kattanam Mission Hospital. Thirumeni is currently serving as the President of the Mar Thoma Suvishesha Sevika Sanghom; Manager, St. Thomas College, Kozhencherry; Mar Thoma Teachers Training College, Edakkulam and Mar Thoma ITC, Cherukole.

## OUR NEW ACHENS

It's for the first time in the history of our diocese that a number as large as 20 new achen are coming to this diocese in one year. We have requested each one of them to send us their family photograph and bio-data but we have so far not heard from all of them.



*Rev. C. A. Varghese and Family*

**REV. GEORGE JOSE** whose home parish is St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Mulakuzha, was ordained as Kasseessa on June 15, 1985. From 1985 to 1988 he served as a missionary at Mungod-Sirsi Mission while also serving as a vicar of Koppa, Salem, Sirsi and Hoobly parishes. Later he served Chandanakkavu, Ezhamkulam, Ayilara parishes. From 1992-1995, Jose achen served Kumpalathanam and Vellayil parishes. From 1995 to 1998, Jose achen was the Asst. Vicar of the St. Thomas MT Church, Santacruz, Bombay and Vicar St. Stephen's MTC, Marol, Bombay. He is currently serving as the Senior Principal and Manager of Mar Thoma School, Indore, Assistant Director of KSK, Kshipra and Vicar of MTC, Dewas. After obtaining B.Sc. Degree and Master of Arts Degree (Sociology), Rev. Jose obtained Bachelor of Divinity from MT Theological Seminary, Kottayam and Diploma in Developmental Studies from Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, U.K. in 1995. Kochamma, Litty, hails from Pandalam. They have two daughters—Navya 12 years and Remya 6 years.

*Place of assignment: Immanuel MTC, Houston*

**REV. C. A. VARGHESE** (Cheppanalil Abraham Varghese) achen is from Venmoney. He has Master Degrees both in Arts and Education and also Bachelor of Divinity. He was ordained in 1977 and he served in many places and capacities some of which are as under: Kozhikode and Karunagapalli parishes (1977-78), Principal St. Thomas School, Ranchi (1978-83), Director, Krist Seva Kendra, Kshipra, Indore, Principal Christu Kula Mission Field, Satna (1983-89), Satna MTC (1989-93), St. Thomas MTC, Kattanam (1993-94), Missionary South Travancore Mission Field, Kattakada (1994-98). C. A. Varghese achen is currently serving as the Vicar of St. Thomas MTC, Karolbagh, New Delhi. He is also the Director of Mar Thoma Social Action Project, New Delhi, Manager, St. John's School, New Delhi, Chief Editor Darshan, New Delhi, Co-ordinator Gram Jyoti Schools, New Delhi and Member, Mar Thoma Sabha Council. Kochamma, Suma, is a teacher by profession and worked in various private schools at different places. They have three sons—Anupam (21 years) is a final year student at Engineering College, Jhalundar, Arun (15 years) and Arpan (12 years).

*Place of assignment: Epiphany MTC, New York*



*Rev. George Jose and Family*



**REV. JOHN P. OOMMEN** is the Vicar of Jerusalem Mar Thoma Church, Nanthoncodu, Trivandrum. His home parish is St. Thomas MTC, Pallickal. He had his B.A. and B.Ed. Degrees from Kerala University and B.D. from M.T. Theological Seminary, Kottayam. Achen was ordained in April of 1971 Prior to this, he was the Vicar of St. Thomas MTC, Punalur. Achen's wife, Valsa, is from Melpadom and they have three children—Renjith (21 years), Rebu (17 years) and daughter Reiya (11 years).

*Place of assignment: St. Stephen's MTC, New Jersey*



*Rev. Joseph Mathew and Family*



*Rev. John P. Oommen and Family*

**REV. JOSEPH MATHEW** is the Vicar of Ebenezer MTC, Dombivli East, Bombay. He is a native of Vijayapuram and his home parish is St. Peter's MTC, Manganam. He was ordained as a priest of the MTC on July 8, 1989 and served parishes in Anchal, Pazhayeroor, Vilakkupura, Allahabad, Varanasi, Chavara, Sarthathi Mission, Melembhaagham and Elanthoor. Joseph Mathew achen's wife, Reji, is from Pullad. They have two children—a son Asish (7 1/2 years) and a daughter Arpith (4 years).

*Place of assignment: Florida*

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**REV. K. V. CHERIAN** has been serving as the Administrator of Girideepti Tribal Hostel, Cochin from 1996 on. His home parish is Bethel MTC, Idukki. He had his M.A. Degree from Raipur Ravisankar University and B.D. from Serampore University. Cherian achen was ordained as a Kasseessa in 1991 and served parishes in DelliRayara, Madhya Pradesh, Kothamangalam and Thengode. Achen's wife, Susan, is from Kottayam and they have two children Nissy (8 years) and Nidhin (3 years).

*Place of assignment: St. James, London, UK*



*Rev. K. V. Cherian and Family*



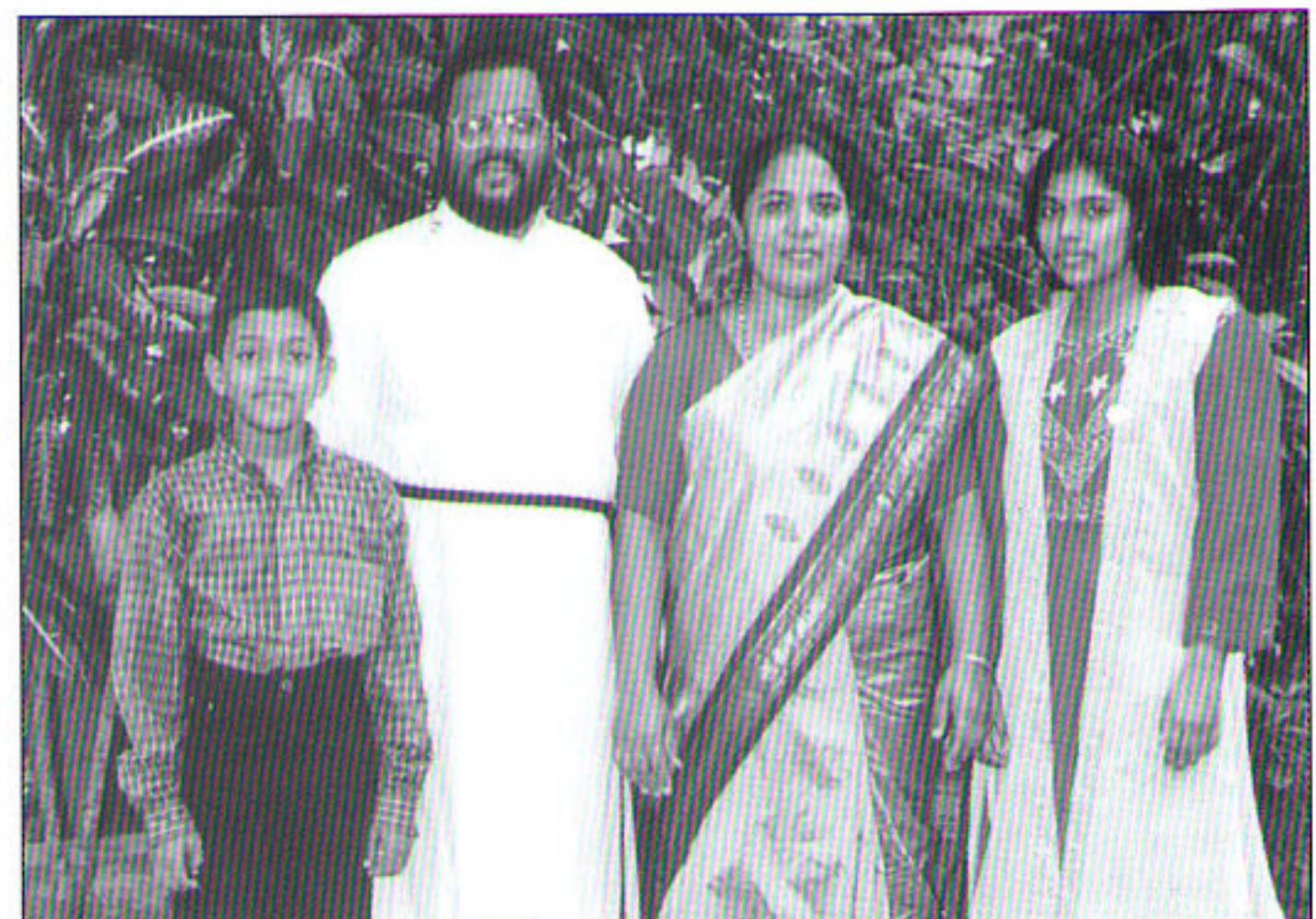
*Rev. Mathew Philip and Family*

**REV. SIMON BEHANAN** is the present Vicar of the St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Niranam Central. He was born on July 6, 1957 of parents T. B. & Aleyamma Behanan. His home parish is Salem Mar Thoma Church, Chennithala. After obtaining Bachelor of Science Degree in 1977 from Mar Thoma College, Thiruvalla, he Joined Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam, from which he obtained B.D. Degree in 1981. Behanan achen served as parish priest in Kolencherry, Mamala, Vengola, Pampakkuda and North Valakom from 1981 to 1985 and from 1985 to 1988 he served parishes in Cheppad and Ramapuram. From 1988 to 1992, Behanan achen served various parishes in Malaysia. From 1992 to 1996, he served in Ernakulam and from 1996 through 2000 in Annanagar and North Madras. Besides serving as the Zonal Council member of Malaysia-Singapore Diocese, Behanan achen served as Council Member of our various dioceses and also as President of the Cochin Counselling Center, Ernakulam and Shalom Counselling Center, Madras. Anu Kochamma, Sherly Simon Behanan, hails from Valiyakavu, Ranny. They have two children—Ansu (15 years) and Abel (11 years).

*Place of assignment: Atlanta MTC, Atlanta*

**REV. MATHEW PHILIP** is a teacher of Christian Ministry subjects at the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam for the last six years. Prior to this, he served parishes in Kunnankulam, Bangalore, Alwaye, Jabalpur, Visakhapatnam and Patna. He had his B.D. & M.Th studies in the United Theological College, Bangalore on completion of which he was awarded the degrees by Serampore University. He was ordained as a Kasseessa on July 17, 1979. Achen's wife, Annamma, has a Diploma in Christian Services from UTC, Bangalore besides B.Sc. and B.Ed. degrees. They have three children—Daughter Susan (17 years), Sons Samuel (15 years) and John (12 years).

*Place of assignment: Dallas MTC, Farmers Branch*



*Rev. Simon Behanan and Family*

**REV. P. K. ZACHARIAH** (Puthenpeedikayil Kunjukunj Zachariah) is currently serving as the Vicar of Nazareth M.T.C. Ettichuvadu, Ranny. Zachariah achen is from Kallissery, Chengannur. He has M.A. and B.Ed. Degrees from the University of Kerala and B.D. from Serampore University. After being ordained as Kasseessa in 1986, Rev. Zachariah served parishes in Patna, Mysore, Prungalloor, Neyyattinkara Mission field churches and Vadasserikara. He also served as the Principal of St. Thomas School, Patna, Manager of St. Thomas School, Mysore and Missionary in Neyyattinkara mission field. Achen's wife, Nirmala, is from Nedungadappally and they have three children—a daughter Susan Smitha (12 years), another daughter Ann Soumya (9 years) and a son named Abin Snehith (2 years).

*Place of assignment: Bethel MTC, Philadelphia*



*Rev. Prasad Mathew and Family*

**REV. OOMMEN SAMUEL** had his B.D. studies at Bishops College, Calcutta and Degree from Serampore University. He was ordained as a Kasseessa in 1976 and he served parishes in Elappara, Vandiperiyar, Kattappana, Cheenthalar, Kallada, Kundra, Gramam, Peringilipuram, West Kallada, Patharam,,Perayam, Kallimel, Thevelakkara, Mepral, Kuruthicad and Vathikulam. Oommen Samuel achen is at present serving as the vicar of MTC in Pallikkal. He is a native of Karthikapally. Achen's wife, Annamma, is from Cherukole and they have two children—Sam (22 years) and Pretty (19 years).

*Place of assignment: St. Peter's MTC, Teaneck, NJ*



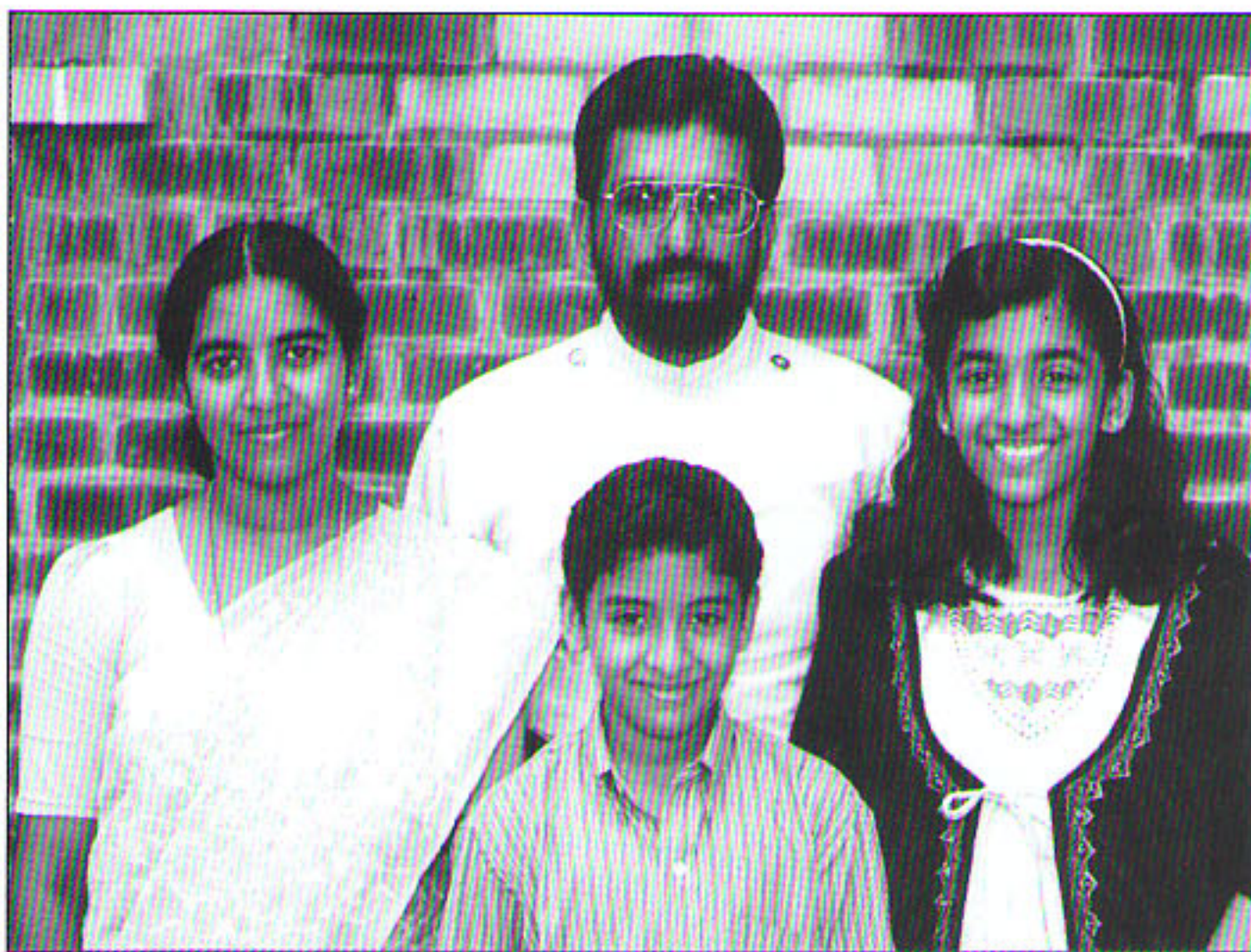
*Rev. P. K. Zachariah and Family*

**REV. PRASAD MATHEW** is from Channapetta, Anchal and is currently serving as the Vicar of Mallappally M.T. Church in Keezhuvaipur. He had his B.D. and M.Th. degrees from Serampore University, and Master of Arts Degree from Calicut University. He was ordained as Kasseessa on June 25, 1987 after which he served as Vicar of Arabi Aarohanam, Kolihattu Hermon, Kannoor, Thalassery, Chetput (Madras) Anna Nagar, North Madras, Kalppakam, Piravanthoor, Elikkattoor, Puthuparambu, Kanam, Ullayam and Koothrappally parishes. Achen and Kochamma (Suja) have two sons—Aasish (6 years) and Anugrah (5 years).

*Place of assignment: St. John's MTC, London, UK*



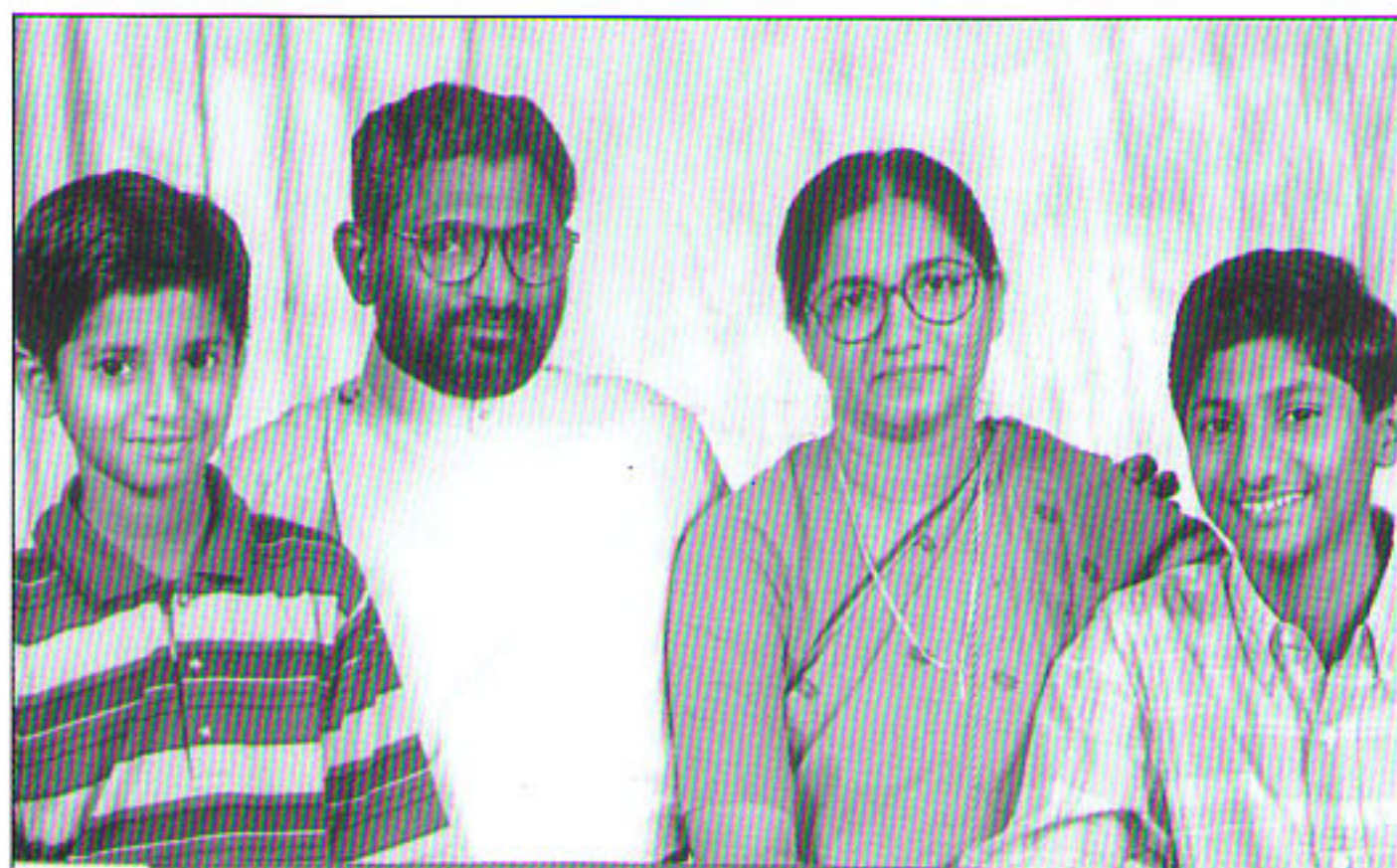
*Rev. Oommen Samuel and Family*



*Rev. Sonny Thomas and Family*

**REV. SUNNY GEORGE** is the Director (Research), T.M.A.M. Research & Orientation Center, Kottayam. His home parish is Jersalem MTC, Niranam while that of his wife, Anitha, is Hoskot Mission Parish. Kochamma is an attorney by profession. Sonny George achen obtained his B.D. Degree in 1983 and M.Th. in 1992 from Serampore University. Rev. Sonny George' earlier assignments include serving as Secretary to the then Safragan Metropolitan Rt. Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom, South Travancore Missionary, Program Director TMAM Orientation Center, and Vicar Horeb MTC, Puthupally.

*Place of assignment: Philadelphia MTC, Philadelphia*



*Rev. T. V. George and Family*

**REV. SONNY THOMAS** is presently the Vicar of Mar Thoma Church, Uthimoodu (Dist. Pathanamthitta) Achen's home parish is Jubilee Memorial MTC, Kanjeettukavu, Ayroor. After his ordination on May 31, 1983, Sunny achen served the following parishes: Thalavoor & Pattazhi – 1983-1986; Baroda & Anand – 1986-1990; Chathannor & Kalluvathukal – 1990-1994; Kumplampoika – 1994-1998; Uthimoodu – 1998-2001. Sunny achen and Kochamma (Omana) have two children—a daughter Christina studying in 7th grade and a son Christo studying in 3rd grade.

*Place of assignment: Detroit MTC, Detroit*



*Rev. Sunny George and Anitha Kochamma*

**REV. T. V. GEORGE** (Thadathil Varghese George) was ordained as Kasseessa on April 1, 1982 and is currently serving as vicar of the Salem Mar Thoma Church, Colaba, Bombay and St. Thomas English Medium School, Surat. He also served the following parishes: Thulappally & Muttappally–1982-1985; Adoor & Thuruthikara–1985-1988; Secunderabad–1988-1992; Goa–1992-1995; Surat & Ankleshwar–1995-2000. T. V. George Achen is from Cherukulanji, Ranny. Achen & Kochamma (Jessy) have two sons—Ajit 16 years and Ashish 12 years.

*Place of assignment: Trinity MTC, Houston*

**REV. ALEXANDER THOMAS** has been serving as a Teacher and the Principal of St. Thomas High School, Honavar for the last thirteen years. He also serves as Assistant Vicar in Honavar and conducts Holy Communion service once a month in Ankola and Mangalore. Alexander Thomas achen had his theology studies at M.T. Theological Seminary, Kottayam and he was ordained as a Kasseessa on June 4, 1986. He served the following parishes from 1986 on—Kallar, Nedumkandam, Kattappana, Anakara, Kochara, Vandenmedu, Honavar, Kumta, Malpe and Manipal. He also worked as a missionary in Honavar mission field for six years and also as the Manager for four primary and one High School of the Church in Honavar District. Rev. Alexander Thomas' native place is Mathra, a suburb of Punalur while Kochamma, Lissy, is a native of Enathu. They have a son Anoop (13 years).

*Place of assignment: Ascension MTC, Philadelphia*

**REV. K. M. MATHEW** (Koikamannil Mathai Mathew) has been working at our Mar Thoma Mission, Mongrapali, Orissa for the last three years. He is a native of Seethathode (Pathanamthitta Dist.) Achen's wife Selin, is from Pallickal (Allepey Dist.). They have a daughter, Megha Rosheen of about 1 1/2 years. After his ordination as Kasseessa in the year 1990, he served Chennamkary, Alleppey, Raipur, Hyderabad and Vijaywada parishes.

*Place of assignment: Trinity MTC, Edmonton, Canada*

**REV. SAJI P. JOSEPH** is currently serving as Director/Secretary of the Navjeevan Centre, Bombay. He was born in Kalyan, Bombay of parents Mariamma & V. S. Joseph from Punnacadu. He had his B.D. Degree from Serampore University. He was ordained as a Kasseessa in 1991 after which he served in parishes Edayaranmula, Kuruchimuttom, Gwalior and Jhansi. Saji Joseph achen and Kochamma (Jéssy) have a daughter Smrithi Mary (8 years) and a son Navin (2 1/2 years).

*Place of assignment: Student in Princeton*

**REV. C. A. ABRAHAM** (Cherukattu A. Abraham) is the Vicar of MTC, Puthencavu (Chengannur). After taking Master of Art Degree from the Catholicate College, Pathanamthitta, he took B.D. and then M.Th from Seramore University. He is also a registered Medical Practitioner in Alternative Medicines. After he was ordained in March 1982, Rev. C. A. Abraham served our parishes in Annaprampal, Niranom, Cheenamkary, Parakkathanam, Venghazha, Vayalathala, Puthencavumala, Perinadu, Ashtamudi, Velloorkonam, Puthukulangara, Karupuzha, Vithura, Ranny-Vaikom, Valiyakavu and Mannarathara. Rev. C. A. Abraham also served as missionary in South Travancore-Nedumangadu Region besides being the Diocesan Secretary, Ranni Nilackal Diocese, Bishop's Secretary to Rt. Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom, Director, Mukti Counseling Center, Lecturer (Religions), M. T. Seminary, Kottayam. Both Achen and Kochamma (Betcey) have extensive training in Counseling and Kochamma has been working for the last seven years as a Counselor at Mochana, the De-addiction Center, Kottayam. They have a son, Bruben (16 years old).

*Place of assignment: Dallas MTC, Grand Prairie*

**REV. SAMUEL M. SAMUEL** had obtained his Master of Arts degree from Mahatma Gandhi University and B.D. Degree from Serampore University in 1991. He was ordained as a Kasseessa in 1991 and thereafter he served parishes in Gudalur, Pullenchery and Goa. Samuel achen is the Vicar of MT Church in Karimba from 1998 on. His home parish is St. Thomas MTC, Kozhenchery. Kochamma, Marykutty, is also from Kozhenchery and they have two children—son Chris (6 years) and daughter Christina (3 years).

*Place of assignment: The MTC Staten Island, NY*

**REV. T. S. THOMAS** (Thazhayil Samuel Thomas) is at present serving as the Vicar of St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Kallimel, Mavelikara. He is a native of Uthimoodu (Dist. Pathanamthitta). Achen and Kochamma (Leelamma) have two children—Lyte Thankam and Doria Susan. After his ordination as Kasseessa in 1980, Rev. T. S. Thomas served our parishes in Mundakkayam, Chittar, Panaveli, Trichur, New Delhi.

*Place of assignment: Canadian MTC, Toronto*

(Readers may please keep in mind that all our achen on the above list have yet to collect their visas and there is always the possibility of visa being denied to an achen. Also the place of assignment could be changed later. If any mistake has crept in while transmitting the details of the bio-data, our apologies in advance are due to our achen and readers – The Chief Editor)

## BON VOYAGE TO OUR RETURNING ACHENS!!

After three or more years of productive service in our diocese, the following achen are leaving us to take up their new assignments in India. The parishes they served and the members they were associated with have been immensely benefited by their selfless service and dedication. There is no doubt, at the same time, that the experience they gained and the good times and bad times they faced, would only enhance their ability and will power to face life's unending trials and tribulations. We may not have been the best of the lot at times, but we are greatly indebted to you for your love and concern for all of us. We will miss you but please rest assured that our good wishes and prayers will, always, be with you and that God will strengthen you and keep you all under His protective wings:

Rev. K. Y. Jacob, Diocesan Secretary  
Rev. Joseph Chacko, Philadelphia MTC, PA  
Rev. Joseph Cherian, Trinity MTC, Houston

Rev. Varghese M. Easow, Bethel MTC, Philadelphia  
Rev. John T. George, London  
Rev. Kurien George, Youth Chaplain, Northeast Region  
Rev. Philip George, St. Peter's, Teaneck, NJ  
Rev. T. C. George, Florida  
Rev. P. T. Chacko, Ascension MTC, Philadelphia  
Rev. Thomas K. Jacob, Long Island MTC, NY  
Rev. Dr. K. T. Joy, Detroit MTC, Detroit, MI  
Rev. George Mathew, Canada  
Rev. Jiji Mathews, MTC of Dallas GP Branch, TX  
Rev. Sajan P. Mathew, MTC of Dallas Farmers Branch, TX  
Rev. A. T. Philip, Immanuel MTC, Houston  
Rev. M. Samuel, NJ MTC/Atlanta MTC, Randolph, NJ  
Rev. John Thomas, The MTC Staten Island, NY  
Rev. Varghese Thomas, London  
Rev. L. Varghese, Edmonton, Canada

## A SPECIAL WORD OF THANKS TO REV. K. Y. JACOB

After serving for a period of close to three years as the Vicar of Chicago Mar Thoma Church, K. Y. Jacob Achen was asked to serve as the Diocesan Secretary from 1999 on. It's probably one of the toughest jobs in our Diocese as he is the Telephone Operator, Public Relations Officer, Special Assistant, Confidential Secretary, Driver and the list goes on. We have seen him in good times and bad times, but he always maintains his calm and collected attitude. To the members of the Messenger Family, he has been a source of inspiration, guidance and help. He worked long hours often sacrificing even family time. The experience and knowledge he gained will immensely enrich the parishes, organizations and people that he will be asked to serve in the years to come.

We will certainly miss you Jacob Achen, Molly Kochamma and your loving children Dhanya and Divya. And we thank you from the bottom of our hearts for all that you rendered to us. May God be with you and keep you all in His tender care!!!



## Matrimonial

**Bridegroom Wanted:** Syrian Christian parents from Central Kerala, settled in Bangalore but presently working in Dubai, invite alliance from parents of well qualified boys with a minimum of postgraduate studies, excellent moral values and broad outlook for their beautiful 23 year old daughter, currently doing her Ph.D. in sociology at Duke University, North Carolina. She had her early schooling in Bishops Cotton, Bangalore and her undergraduate studies (double major in Math and Economics) at Ohio Wesleyan University, Ohio. She is hardworking and ambitious with an excellent moral character. Parents will be in US May 10th till July 1st week and can be contacted via e-mail: babuji51@hotmail.com or mgeorge@emirates.net.ae

## MILLENNIUM MISSION PROJECT — WALK-A-THON — 2000

We are pleased to inform you that the Walk-A-Thon — 2000, the Millennium Mission Project organized by the Diocesan Sunday School was a success. Seventeen Sunday Schools in our Diocese participated in it, and we thank all the Aichens, Superintendents, Teachers, Students, and Parents for their support and cooperation. By God's grace, we were able to raise \$14,645.00 last year. We will continue the project this year also, and encourage all the Sunday School Superintendents to take a special interest, and support this mission project. We like to recognize the following Sunday Schools for their dedication and support:

1. Bethel MT Sunday School, Philadelphia	\$545.00
2. Detroit Mar Thoma Sunday School	200.00
3. Ebenezer Mar Thoma Sunday School	100.00
4. Epiphany MT Sunday School, New York	532.75
5. Immanuel MT Sunday School, Houston	1,165.00
6. MTC of Dallas Farmers Branch Sunday School	1,839.00
7. MTC of Dallas GP Branch Sunday School	1,780.00
8. Mar Thoma Sunday School, Chicago	268.00

9. MT Sunday School, Greater Washington	215.00
10. MTC of Los Angeles Sunday School	211.00
11. Mar Thoma Sunday School, New Jersey	250.00
12. Mar Thoma Sunday School, Oklahoma	352.00
13. St. John's MT Sunday School, New York	505.00
14. St. Paul's MTC Sunday School, Dallas	1,270.00
15. St. Thomas MT Sunday School, New York	710.25
16. Staten Island MT Sunday School, New York	159.00
17. Trinity MT Sunday School, Houston	4,543.00

We request all the Sunday Schools which were not able to conduct the Walk-A-Thon last year to participate this year and the date is Saturday, August 4, 2001. This is for a worthy cause and we need your support. Together we can make a difference in the life of those children with your valuable donations.

**“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”**

**T. A. Mathew**  
Secretary, Diocesan Sunday School

## Diocesan Sunday School — Calendar of Events

Diocesan Sunday School Examination	— Sunday, May 13, 2001
Walk-A-Thon — Children Walk for Children	— Saturday, August 4, 2001
Vacation Bible School	— During the Summer Vacation — June and July

**Southwest Region Sunday School, Edavaka Mission and Sevika Sanghom members bid farewell to Rev. K. Y. Jacob, Rev. A. T. Philip, Rev. C. Joseph, Rev. Jiji Mathews and Rev. Sajjan P. Mathew on March 10, 2001.**



## MAR THOMA NORTH EAST REGION COUPLES CONFERENCE

North East and South East Regional Sevika Sanghom conducted a couples meeting on March 24, 2001 at Long Island Mar Thoma Church, Merrick, New York. North East Regional President Rev. Monsi K. Philip presided over the meeting. Rev. Dr. C. P. Mathew conducted the Bible study based on Genesis 2:24 & Eph. 5:23. He spoke that God created us in his image, and gave us his soul and mind. He gave us freedom and goodness. So in our family life we should retain goodness and love and share with people around us. Our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus was the Main Speaker. Thirumeni's message was very inspirational and it provided great insight in all aspects of Christian life. Thirumeni spoke of the basis and concept of the Christian family. Thirumeni told us to show love and concern for the oppressed and the suffering in the communities and teach our children the values of Christian family through our actions. Rev. Fr. Chacko Thadathil of Philadelphia gave a motivational speech. He said that the family consists of God, man and woman. If anyone tries to avoid any one of them, their family will be in trouble. The Theme of the conference was **Christian Family in the modern contest**. Song and worship conducted by the Long Island Sevika Sanghom. Mrs. Annamma Alex conducted intercessory prayer. The Vicar of the Long Island Mar Thoma Church Rev. Thomas K. Jacob gave the welcome speech and Regional Secretary Mrs. Lilly Simon expressed the vote of thanks. About 500 people from both regions attended the meeting.

### Farewell Meeting

A Farewell meeting was conducted for our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Thirumeni, Diocesan Secretary Rev. K. Y. Jacob, Rev. John Thomas, Rev. Thomas K Jacob, Rev. Joseph Chacko, Rev. Varghese M. Easow, Rev. P. T. Jacob Rev. M. Samuel, and Rev. Philip P. George who are transferring from this region to



*North East Region Sevika Sanghom Members with Zacharias Thirumeni and the transferred achens.*

India. Rev. Monsi K Philip presided over the meeting. Mrs. Lilly Simon and Mrs. Daisy Daniel expressed thanks for their valuable services to this Region and the Diocese. Diocesan Bishop Zacharias Thirumeni, Rev. K. Y. Jacob and Rev. Philip P. George, gave the reply speech.

**Mrs. Lilly Simon, Regional Secretary**

## MR. VARGHESE SIMON APPOINTED TO BUSINESS ADVISORY COUNCIL



Washington, D.C. – Rep. Tom DeLay, R-TX, announced that Mr. Varghese Simon has been appointed to serve on the Business Advisory Council in recognition of valuable contributions and dedication to the community and to the Republican Party. The Business Advisory Council is a part of the National Republican Congressional Committee, and is dedicated to making sure that small business has a voice in Washington.

Washington, D.C. – Rep. Tom DeLay, R-TX, announced that Mr. Varghese Simon has been appointed to serve on the Business Advisory Council in recognition of valuable contributions and dedication to the community and to the Republican Party. The Business Advisory Council

House Majority Whip Congressman Tom DeLay will be the Chairman of the Council, and Mr. Simon will represent the state of New York and is expected to play a crucial role in the Party's efforts to involve top business people in the process of government reform. "Mr. Simon, who has long supported Republican ideals, particularly in debt reduction and tax reform, will be a key member of the Council," said DeLay.

Simonkuty served as the last treasurer of the Mar Thoma Zonal Council of the Mar Thoma Church in North America and the first treasurer of the Diocese of North America & Europe. He is the partner of the Taj Travels & Tours in New York and is a member of St. John's Mar Thoma Church, New York.



*You are cordially invited to  
attend the*

**XIX MAR THOMA  
FAMILY CONFERENCE 2001**  
**Diocese of North America & Europe**

**Hosted by:**  
**The Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia**

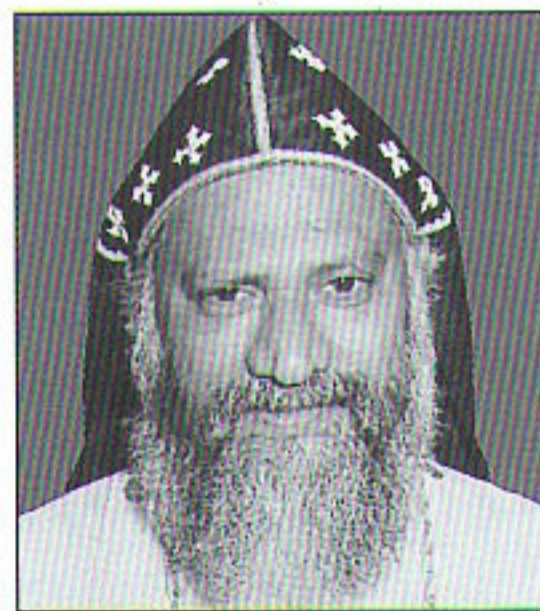
**Venue:**  
**Radisson Hotel  
Historic Valley Forge Convention Center**

**Date:**  
**July 5-8, 2001**

**Theme:**

**CALL THE WIND**

**"Son of Man, Can These Bones Live Again? (Ezekiel 37:3)**



**Speakers:**

The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Metropolitan  
The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa, Diocesan Bishop  
Rev. Dr. Samuel T. Kamaleson • Rev. Dr. T. J. Thomas • Mr. Shane Claiborne  
and leaders from the Child Evangelism Fellowship

*President*  
Rev. Joseph Chacko  
**215-677-7979**

*Vice President*  
Dr. Samuel K. Chacko  
**610-459-3715**

*Secretary*  
Mr. John Philip  
**610-430-8576**

**INFORMATION:**

[www.marthomachurch.com/conference](http://www.marthomachurch.com/conference)

**SUGGESTIONS:**

[philaconference@marthomachurch.com](mailto:philaconference@marthomachurch.com)

The second International FOCUS (For Christian Understanding and Solidarity) Seminar was held at Santhigiri Ashram from February 7-10, 2001. The fact that forty delegates from seven countries joined together to understand and discuss some of the possibilities and common challenges faced by the Mar Thoma Diaspora in different continents is, indeed, an accomplishment in itself. Most of the discussions and deliberations centered around finding ways and means to keep our grandchildren and great grandchildren fully aware of their roots and the rich culture and heritage of their great grandparents. Many a movement with far reaching consequential effects, in the history of mankind, was started by an individual or a handful of individuals. This is true in the case of the history of our Church too. The Metropolitan, while inaugurating the Seminar, called upon the Diaspora community to be sensitive to the needs of the under privileged and to become a local community 'while trying to retain an organic link with the land of their origin.' Realizing that every movement, in order to achieve its goals and ambitions, needs to have the popular support, the Metropolitan exhorted the delegates to go back to their parishes and make our people aware of the goals and ideals of the FOCUS movement. It's with this idea that a satellite meeting of the FOCUS is scheduled for July 5, 2001 from 2 to 4 p.m. at the Family Conference venue. This meeting is crucial as we would be discussing and taking decisions about, amongst other things, establishing a Diaspora Center and a Diaspora Foundation not only for the benefit of our future generations but also for the benefit of the underprivileged and the downtrodden.

During the month of April we celebrate the most significant event in human history, the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Because Christ arose from the dead, we have hope, not only in this life, but also in the life to come. The lessons of the commemoration of the Lent are meant to last us throughout the conduct of our lives. But we often give way to pride; we are ready to bend and break others in the pursuit of our own goals; we permit ourselves to be blinded by the dazzle of wealth. Lent reminds us, essentially, of the ultimate purpose of our life; the attainment of unity with God. As we search our souls, we take stock of our actions, uncover our shortcomings, yet also discover ways of overcoming them. While enjoying the great prosperity and blessing, we must not be oblivious to the reality that all our earthly possessions will one day perish and that the true riches await those that have faithfully served the Lord.

It's for the first time in the history of our diocese that twenty new achenes are coming to this diocese at one time. We are getting a new Bishop too. We need to uphold them in our daily prayers so that God's abundant mercies prevail upon them in their preparations of travel and throughout their stay and ministry in our diocese. We are at a crucial stage of our existence as a worshipping community in this part of the world. Our diocese has come a long way both in its growth and its activities. But we face many challenges too. In the not-too-distant future, our second generation Marthomites have to take up more and more leadership roles in our diocese. More youngsters have to come forward willingly to undergo theological studies so that after completion of their studies they can serve as achenes in our diocese. Our parishes should be encouraged to get involved in more outreach activities. We have a large pool of well qualified doctors and other medical personnel in our diocese. They should be encouraged to set up medical camps in the remote areas of India or any other developing country on a regular basis so that a few at least will have the benefit of their expertise and talents. As our emphasis will slowly shift towards our involvement in more and more charity oriented outreach activities, solely with the purpose of alleviating the sufferings of the poor and needy, we ourselves would be transformed from a worshipping community to a witnessing community. From the mountain top of our successes and achievements, we hear a call from the valley. We must answer the call!

**Abraham Mattackal**

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