



MAR THOMA
MESSENGER

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Message from the Diocesan Bishop



Dearly beloved in Christ,

Another New Year, the first one of the real new millennium, has dawned with new opportunities and possibilities. Every new year opens up new vistas of unseen and unknown corridors in our journey of life. There is a challenge in overcoming the fear of the unknown while entering into the unseen and unexplored marinas of life. Unless we take life as a challenge, we would achieve very little in life. Are we prepared to take up the year 2001 a big challenge as individuals, families and communities?

Much of our life depends upon how we shape our life. God has entrusted life into our hands and the whole world into the hands of humanity. We are given the privilege to mold the world. How do we mold it? We are a people with much limitations. If we try ourselves, we will be shaping a limited imperfect world. But if we accept the wisdom and vision of God and work with Him, we would be able to give shape to the ultimate vision of God. The New Year is calling us to join hands with God and work with Him, we would be able to give shape to the ultimate vision of God. The New Year is calling us to join hands with God in shaping the events of the future. Are we prepared to do it alone or work with God? This is a question we have to ponder over.

God is rebuilding this world and the human community. God wants us to be His co-workers. We should not create a world of ourselves. When we work together with God, we will rebuild this world according to a divine pattern for which God sent His only son to be in our midst to gather all of us around Him and with Him to involve in that great task. With Christ in the nation building, in the Church building and in the family building, it makes a lot of difference as, with Him, we are building the divine version of this world. Often we ourselves strive to make our own world which would be like the bubbles in the sea.

I'm glad that our Diocesan Sevika Sanghom joined hands with God in rebuilding the lives of nearly 40 couples of different religious faiths and denominations by supporting them financially to enter into family life. Our Sevika Sanghom members raised about 20 lakhs of Rupees and shared it with 40 couples in a mass marriage at Santhigiri Ashram, near Alwaye on December 16, 2000 in the presence of MPs, MLAs and local dignitaries. The Diocesan Sevika Sanghom Secretary, the Treasurer and some of our other members were present on the occasion. Our members deserve appreciation for undertaking that great humanitarian task. Rev. Jiji Mathew of Dallas and Rev. K. G. Joseph of Santhigiri Ashram deserve special mention for their leadership and dedication. There should not be any without the blessedness of family life, joy of home and the privilege of a job. The dream of 12 other couples still remain unfulfilled because of lack of funds. Perhaps in the not-too-distant future they too could be helped to lead a blessed married life with our financial support. Providing houses, jobs and financial support for families struggling hard to make both ends meet are some of the current missionary tasks of the modern Church. Much more is needed and I hope our community will respond generously and continue the present task on an annual basis.

Christmas is a time when we gather around our siblings, parents, relatives and friends to celebrate the occasion. There is a longing in every human being to be with the dearest and nearest ones. This longing is fulfilled in Christmas at the incarnation where God's longing for humanity and man's yearning for divinity have met with. But there are many who have never known the joy of being together. We need to give others the joy of being with them and we need to receive the joy of others being with us. This is a missionary task in every family, every church and every society. Racism, religious fanaticism, denominational discrimination etc. are cutting the roots of oneness of humanity. We need to struggle hard to foster unity in families, churches and communities in the coming year.

We are going to have a new President for the United States of America. Hope the new President will bring unity, respect for diversity, justice and prosperity to the people who are denied of them. Let's wish and pray God's blessings upon the new President. New changes are awaiting this diocese in the transfer of numerous achenes and perhaps the Diocesan Bishop as well. Let's hope and pray the changes will be for the better both for the diocese and for the Church as a whole. Let the New Year be a year of prayer, meditation and witness. Let's move ahead with the moving God.

My good wishes and prayers go with you all.

Zacharias Thirumeni



When Was Jesus Born?

Prof. M.M.Ninan

When was Jesus Born?

Prof. M.M.Ninan

[Two Part Series – January and April Issues]

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

Year of Birth of Jesus

Bible puts the birth of Jesus:

(1) Before the death of King Herod [Luke 1.5]; Josephus records that Herod died in April of 4 BC. [However Chuck Missler quotes another source which gives the death of King Herod as January 14, 1 BC (Magillath Ta'anith, an ancient Jewish scroll contemporary with Jesus.)] The magi came to Herod and told him when they had seen the star of Christ in the East. Herod wanting to protect his royal line had all males in Bethlehem under two-years old killed. (Matthew 2.1) The Joseph family fled in time and took refuge in Egypt. They returned after the death of Herod from Egypt. Assuming the death of Herod as 4 BC the birth of Christ could be placed between 6 and 5 BC.

(2) Since the reason for Joseph and Mary to make the trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem was the Roman Census, (Luke 2:3-7) if we could identify the time when this was done in Palestine we could pinpoint the birth of Jesus. Luke 2:1-2 identifies a census taken throughout the Roman Empire during the reign of Caesar Augustus, by Cyrenius (also Quirinius) when he was governor of Syria. However there is no historical record of this particular census in the annals of Rome. Since the Roman Empire was very vast, census was spread over several years and this particular census must have been any of the earlier orders. The first century historian Josephus records that Cyrenius did conduct a census in BC 6/7. During the Roman census of Judea in 6 BC [Luke 2:2]; Quirinius was the governor of Judea which was during the period 6-9 BC. We also know that he performed a taxation census in 6 BC.

(3) Luke 3:23 states that 'At the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius as emperor of Rome, Jesus was about thirty years'

old. This would place the birth of Jesus at about 2 BC. Tiberius became emperor in 14 AD. The statement "about thirty" does not allow us much accuracy. We cannot actually pinpoint the year. Jesus could well have been 33 or 34. The only condition for holding any priestly office was that one should be over thirty. This is what Luke was referring to.

Chuck Missler (<http://www.joshuanet.org/articles/born.htm>), on the other hand, places the year of birth as 2 BC on the following grounds:

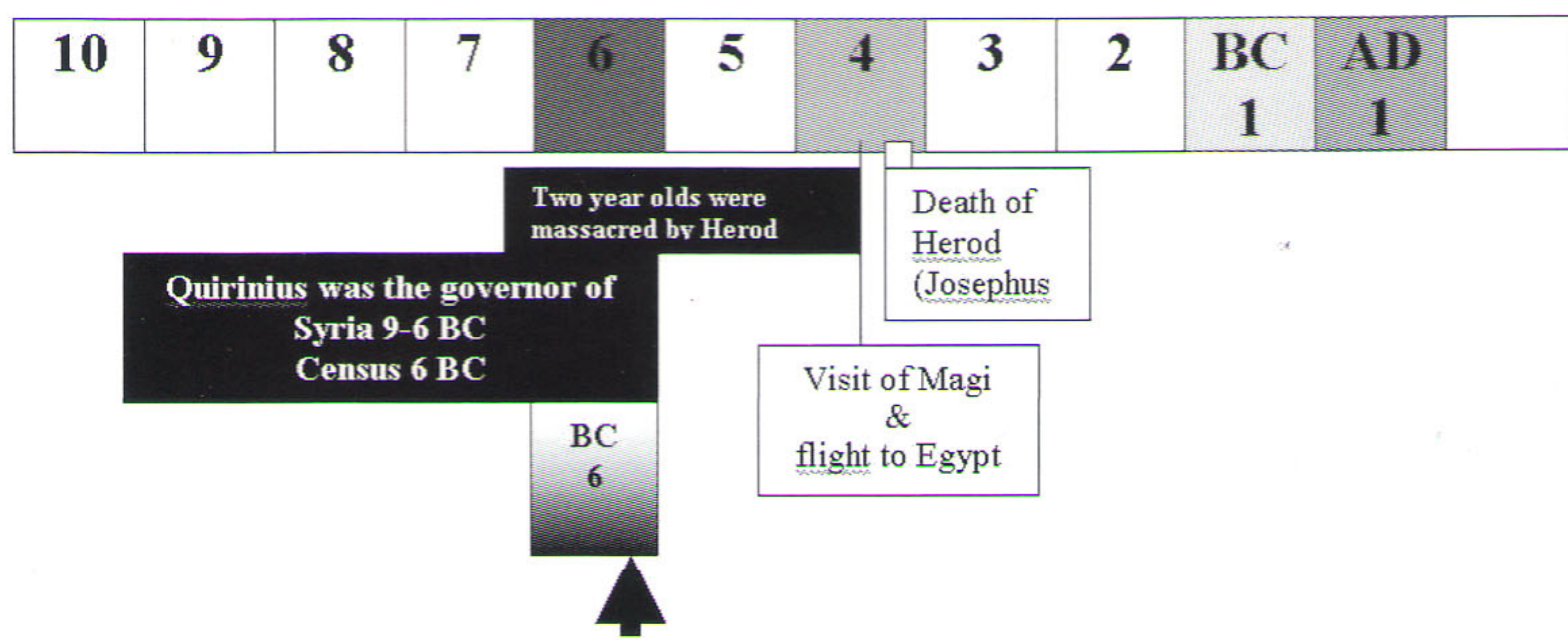
(5) Tertullian, (born about 160 A.D.) stated that Augustus began to rule 41 years before the birth of Jesus and died 15 years after that event. Augustus' died on August 19, 14 A.D., placing Jesus' birth before 2 BC. Tertullian also notes that Jesus was born 28 years after the death of Cleopatra in 30 B.C., which gives a date of 2 B.C.

(6) Irenaeus, born about a century after Jesus, also notes that the Lord was born in the 41st year of the reign of Augustus. Since Augustus began his reign in the autumn of 43 BC., this also appears to substantiate the birth in 2 BC.

(7) Eusebius (264-340 AD), the "Father of Church History," ascribes it to the 42nd year of the reign of Augustus and the 28th from the subjection of Egypt on the death of Anthony and Cleopatra. The 42nd year of Augustus ran from the autumn of 2 BC to the autumn of 1 BC. The subjugation of Egypt into the Roman Empire occurred in the autumn of 30 B.C. The 28th year extended from the autumn of 3 B.C. to the autumn of 2 BC the only date that would meet both of these constraints would be the autumn of 2 BC.

Massive evidence therefore points to somewhere near 6 BC and I have used this as the model year in the following calculations.

Year of Birth



Various methods of arriving at the dates of birth have been employed throughout Christian History with lot of mud slinging from sponsors.

Four of these are explained below:

1. Analysis based on astrological studies
2. Analysis based on the Lord's festivals and implications of what they mean
3. Analysis based on the temple service of Zechariah
4. Early church Documents

1. The Arguments Based on Revelation 12:1-5

By a very intricate astronomical argument following a statement from the book of Revelations, Ernest proposes that Jesus was actually born on *Rosh Ha-Shanah* on September 11 in 3 BC between 6:15 and 7:45 p.m. The Argument runs as follows:

Revelation 12:1-5

“And there was a great wonder [sign] in heaven a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: and she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven: and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his head. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron.”

This could hardly be a description of the Virgin Mary. This “Woman” had the heavens associated with her—the Sun, Moon and the Twelve Stars. John said that this particular display was a wonder (a sign) and that it was “in heaven.”

The Bible speaks of three “heavens.”

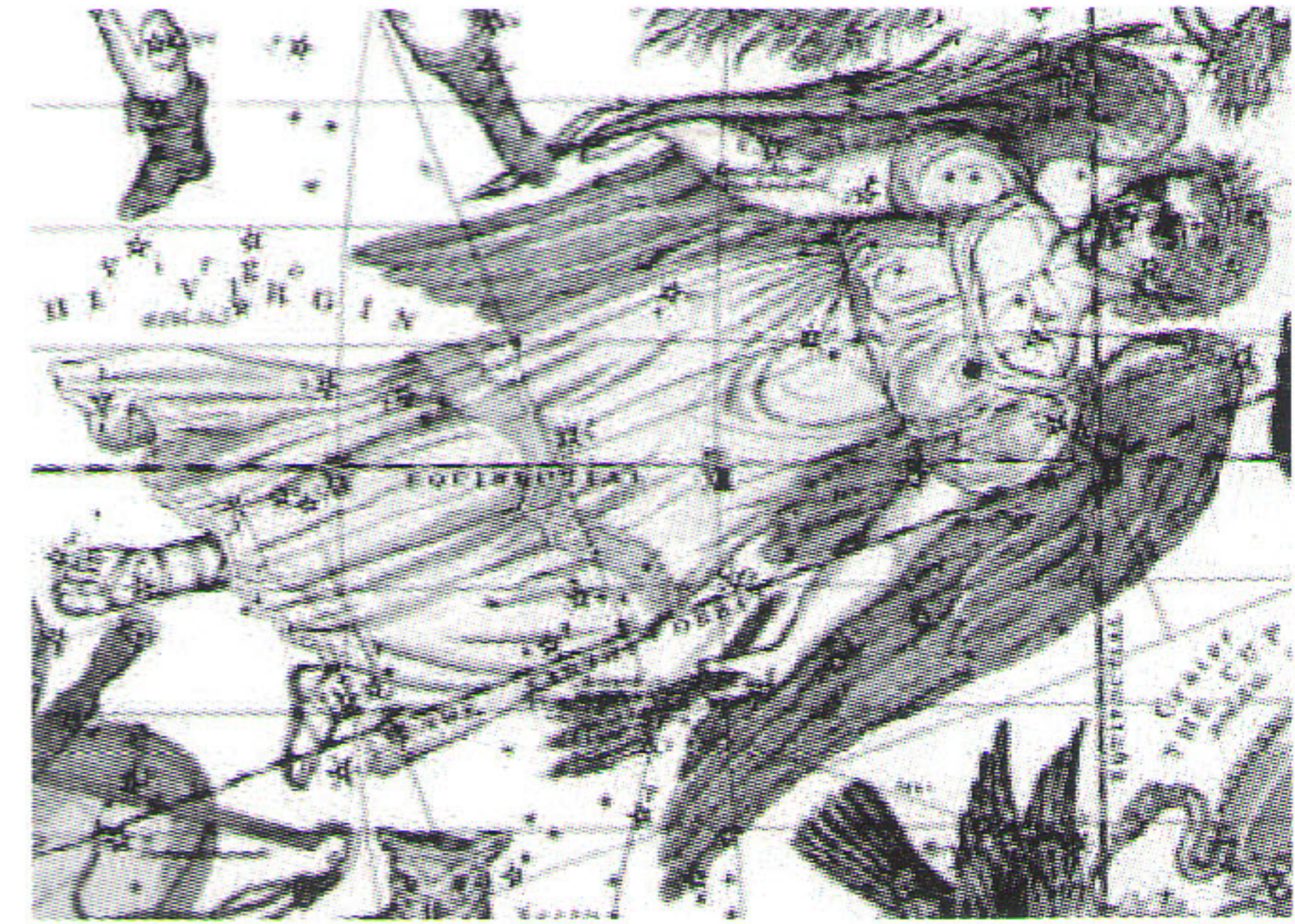
The first is that in which the birds fly and all weather phenomena occur (Jeremiah 4:25; I Kings 18:45).

The second is that of the Sun, Moon, planets and stars (Genesis 1:17).

The third heaven is that where God lives (II Corinthians 12:2).

The Woman in the first three verses is featured as being in heaven with both the Sun and the Moon. So this woman is in the second heaven and is not on earth.

Constellation Virgo



So the Woman represent a constellation—which fits the constellation Virgo the Virgin. Virgo is often represented as a lady with the sheafs in hand—the first fruits of wheat. In the period of Jesus’ birth, the Sun entered into the head position of the Virgo around August 13, and exited from her feet about October 2. The Sun was “clothing” or “adorning” the Woman so that the Sun in the vision was in a mid-bodied to the Woman. The only time in the year that the Sun could be in a position to “clothe” the celestial Woman called Virgo (that is, to be mid-bodied to her, in the region where a pregnant woman carries a child) is when the Sun is located between about 150 and 170 degrees along the ecliptic. This “clothing” of the Woman by the Sun occurs for a 20-day period each year. This 20-degree spread indicates the general time when Jesus was born. In 3 BC, the Sun would have entered this celestial region about August 27 and exited from it about September 15. Jesus the Man-Child would have to be born within that 20-day period. From the point of view of the Magi who were astrologers, this would have been the only logical sign under which the Jewish Messiah might be born.

Virgo is actually located within the last ten degrees of Leo. Thus, the story of Jesus and his mission on earth, as related by these heavenly symbols, should logically begin with his birth from a virgin and conclude with him being crowned king in the final sign of Leo the Lion (with its chief star being Regulus—the King Star).

Prof. Thorley has shown that there are exactly twelve stars surrounding the head of Virgo as we see them from earth. They are (according to astronomical terminology): (1) Pi, (2) Nu, (3) Beta (near the ecliptic), (4) Sigma, (5) Chi, (6) Iota—these six stars form the southern hemisphere around the head of Virgo. Then there are (7) Theta, (8) Star 60, (9) Delta,

(10) Star 93, (11) Beta (the second magnitude star) and (12) Omicron—these last six form the northern hemisphere around the head of Virgo. All these stars are visible ones that could have been witnessed by observers on earth. (See the map above)

Thus, the description of the apostle John in Revelation Twelve describes a perfectly normal heavenly scene that could be recognized by all people on the inhabitable areas of the earth. Here was Virgo with twelve stars around her head, while the Sun was in uterine position and the Moon under her feet. And again, the only time this could have occurred in 3 BC was on the Day of Trumpets (or *Rosh Ha-Shanah*).

The position of the Moon in John's vision actually pinpoints the nativity to within a period of an hour and a half (within 90 minutes) on that day. This may appear an outlandish assessment to make, but it is quite possible. In short, the Book of Revelation shows the precise hour and a half of Jesus' birth!

The key is the Moon. The apostle said it was located "under her feet gives about 6:15 p.m. (sunset), and lasted until around 7:45 p.m. (moonset)"

So Jesus was actually born on Rosh Ha-Shanah on September 11 in 3 BC between 6:15 and 7:45 p.m.

The problem in this treatment is the validity of the assumption that this passage refers to the birth of Jesus. In the beginning of the book we are specifically told that:

Revelation 1:1

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John...

So the whole book of Revelation is concerning the period after the Patmos revelation and does not refer to the birth of Jesus or to the past history. The portion cannot be a bible code for the date of birth of Jesus. The remaining portion of Rev. 12 does not show any reasonable connection with the assumption. In other words this is a typical example of a text taken out of context. Revelation being a book which permits varying interpretations, this is not surprising.

2. Analysis based on the Lord's Festivals and Implications of what they mean

Argument Based on Jewish expectation of arrival of Elijah

Four Passover Cups

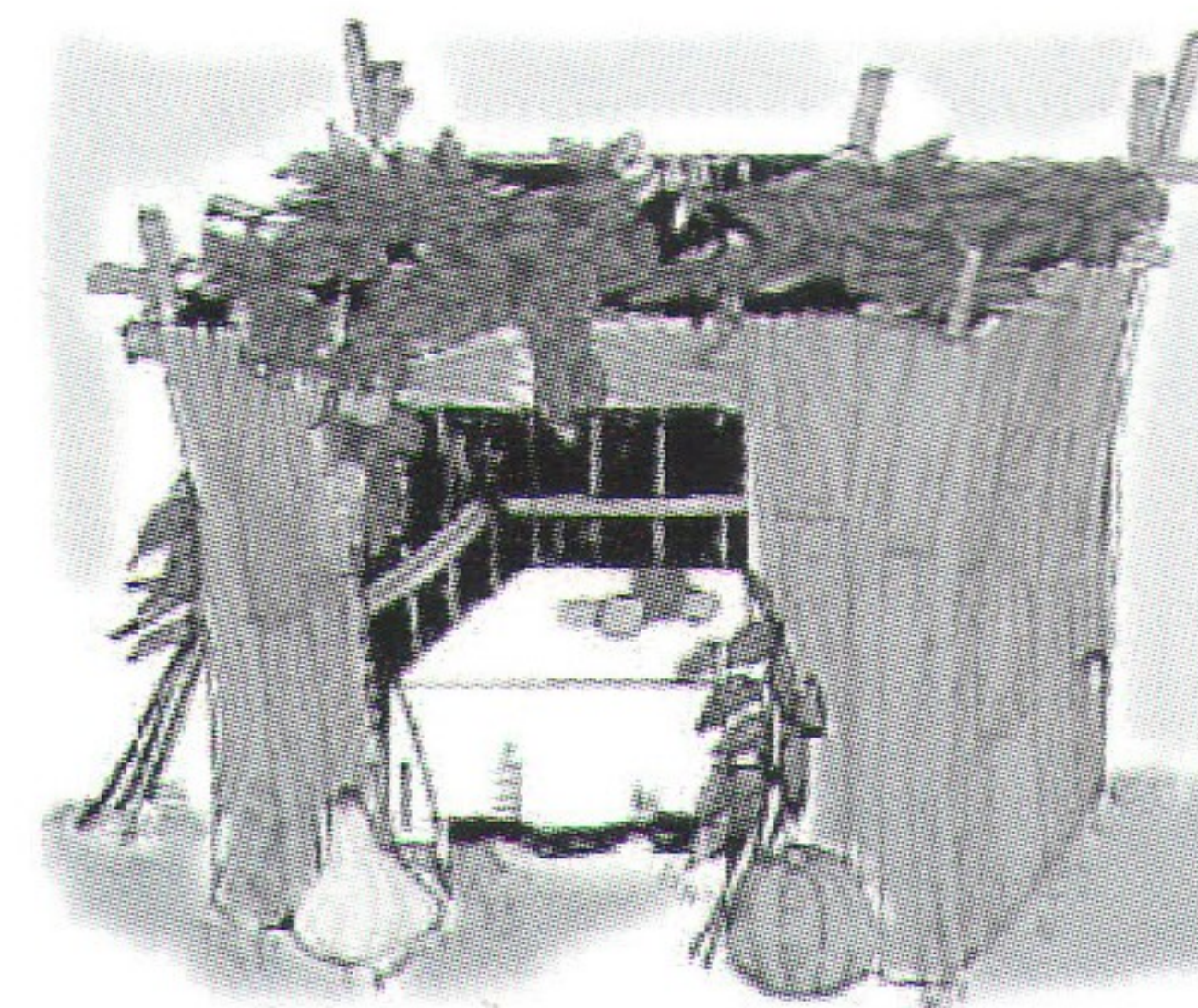


The Jews always put an extra empty chair at the table and an extra cup of wine on the table during the Pesach meal. They also left the front door open during the passover seder in the hope that Elijah will come and join the meal heralding the coming of mesia. Jesus identified John the Baptist as Elijah who was to come. Hence it can be assumed that he was born on Pesach.

"If John the Baptist was born at Pesach, Jesus must have been born during the High Holy Days or at Succoth (40 weeks later). In Luke 1:26 and 36 we are told that Jesus was six months younger than John."

Argument Based on Emmanuel

Succoth Booth



"We are given a possible clue about the time of the birth by the angel who appeared to the shepherds. He said, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10). There are actually two clues here. Succoth is a festival of joy, and it is also known as the "Festival of the Nations". The angel was actually giving them a greeting for the Festival of Succoth. This is the only festival where the nations are positively encouraged to participate (Zechariah 14:16-19)."

"The birth of Yeshua at Succoth fulfils another prophecy: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel—which means, "God with us". (Matt. 1:23, a quotation from Isaiah 7:14)."

John in his gospel mentions the idea of the Word coming to earth in a fleshly tabernacle.

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and Tabernacle among us.

"If the day of his birth were the first day of Succoth, the day of his circumcision would be the eighth day of Succoth, which, like the first day, is a day of sacred assembly. (Leviticus 23:39). On this day, or traditionally the day after, the Jews complete their annual cycle of Torah readings and start again from Bereshit (Genesis). It is called Simchat Torah (Rejoicing of the Law), and is considered to be a time of "fulfillment" of the Torah. The circumcision of Jesus at this time indicates how he had come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 5:17-18)."

"Starting from Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, and his first period of duty in the Temple, and doing a few simple

calculations, we arrive at a result that gives a new and profound meaning to many passages of Scripture.”—Excerpts from article, “Birth of Yeshua, by Mike Gascoigne.”

For that reason, Yeshua is very likely to have been born at Succoth.

Lightfoot (*Horae Hebr, et Talm.*, II, 32), argues for a relation between Passover and Pentecost to Easter and Whitsuntide, connecting the Nativity with the feast of Tabernacles. He argues from Old Testament prophecy, e.g. Zacharias 14:16 sqq; combining, too, the fact of Christ’s death in Nisan with Daniel’s prophecy of a three and one-half years’ ministry (9:27), he puts the birth in Tisri, i.e. September. The Catholic Encyclopedia

All arguments based on typology can at most justify a valid conclusion arrived otherwise. But it will be a mistake to build a conclusion on the basis of typological arguments alone.

Chuck Misler argues vehemently on the Tishri date based on the typology. (Chuck Misler <http://www.ldolphin.org/xmas.html>)

“However, there are many Messianic Believers who, from a Jewish perspective, are convinced that the time of year when Yeshua was really born was at the Succoth (the Feast of Tabernacles). Taking into account certain Jewish customs and traditions, and applying them to the biblical birth narrative, it’s not difficult to calculate and arrive at this season, known as “the season of our Joy.”

After entering the Succah, and reciting certain prayers, the ceremony of Ushpizin bids us to partake in the privilege of inviting and welcoming the “Sh’kinah”) G-d’s Presence) and the seven “faithful shepherds” who enter the succah with us as exalted guests. These guests come to observe how their descendants FULFILL the mitzvah (commandment) of the Succah, in which they dwell under G-d’s protection, in accordance with what G-d had promised in the Torah. These seven faithful shepherds of Israel are: Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya’acov, Yosef, Moshe, Aharon, and Melech (King) David. Back in the Luke narrative, though the text does not specify “seven” shepherds who went to visit Meriam, there seems to be a hint, when one reads between the lines. Moreover, the purpose of their visit is recorded to be very similar with that of the Ushpizin, in which the text states that it was to “see this thing that had happened, which the Lord has told us about.” (Luke 2:15).

Likewise, during Succoth, Jewish families today in Israel construct a flimsy shelter called a “Succah”, made of loosely assembled walls and a leafy overhead covering. In the Succah, we eat or sleep. This is a reminder to us that we were completely dependent on G-d as we wandered for forty years in the desert after departing from Egypt and were led by “a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night.” Because of this experience, we recall that “G-d is with us” (Emmanu-El).

In this same narrative in Luke 2 regarding the Shepherds to whom an angel of the Lord appears, note that the text says that they were “watching over their flocks, AT NIGHT.” The angel brings them a message that their Messiah was born in the town of David, during that day which had just passed to night. This message was accompanied by the appearance of a great heavenly host, praising G-d. When we consider the seasons in Israel, and the weather patterns, one might ask “What is the latest time of year in which shepherds would still be outside with their flocks in the Judean hills, AT NIGHT?” November through February are far too cold in Israel to be doing this kind of activity. The answer of course points to the end of October, at the latest, for temperature reasons alone. Depending of the Hebrew calendar in any given year, as mentioned above, Succoth always falls in the September-October time frame, when the weather is still warm and pleasant outside, especially AT NIGHT. For these reasons, and many others not documented here, we think Yeshua is very likely to have been born at Succoth.

And so, the birth of Yeshua at Succoth fulfils another prophecy: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanu-El—which means, ‘G-d is with us’. (Matt. 1:23, quoting from Yishaiyahu (Isaiah) 7:14).

He was born in a type of Succah where servants of a household slept, or where they kept sheep and cattle. Luke uses the Greek word for “manger” but because Yeshua was Jewish, and it was most likely the festival of Succoth, the text probably describes a Succah.

Yochanan, in his Gospel narrative of Yeshua’s birth, confirms this truth when he indicates that G-d had come to earth to dwell with (and serve) humanity. We read in Yochanan (John) 1:14 about how “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling (Tabernacled) among us,” which is a clear and obvious reference to Succoth.

Yeshua’s birth was the first day of Succoth, then the day of his circumcision would be the eighth day after Succoth which, in accordance with Torah is also day of sacred assembly. (ViYikrah [Leviticus] 23:39). On this day, called “Shemini Atzeret,” or “the Eighth day of Solemn Assembly” and later called “Simchat Torah” or “Rejoicing in Torah,” we complete our annual cycle of Torah readings and start again from Bereshit (Genesis). It is considered to be a time of “fulfillment” of the Torah and also a new beginning for it, in our lives, since Torah is never abandoned. This indeed would seem to be a fitting holiday for Yeshua’s circumcision and dedication before G-d, since He came to set the Torah on a firm foundation by correctly interpreting it and fulfilling it (i.e., becoming the goal to which the Law and the Prophets pointed), thereby making a way to renew the Torah in our lives. (Matt. 5:17-19).”

Another method calculates backward from the date of Crucifixion

Luke 3:23

Now Yeshua himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli,

This Scripture indicates that Yeshua started his ministry when he became 30 years of age. Bible scholars indicate He continued this ministry for a period of 3 1/2 years. Since we know the exact date of his death, Passover, we only have to go back 1/2 year (6 months) to discover his birthday. Using the calendar provided above, we can see that if Yeshua died in the month of Nisan, then 6 months prior to that would be the month of Tishri.

Conclusion #1:

Yeshua was born during the month Tishri.

From Internet article: "The Messiah's date of birth", Hilke Dokter

The problem here is that nowhere in the Bible the exact period of ministry is stated as 3 and half years. We are not sure of this at all.

Arguments for other dates

There are found in ancient documents many dates given for the birth of Christ, some are more probable than others.

For instance: The Catholic Encyclopedia states:

"Others reached the date of 24 or 25 Pharmuthi (19 or 20 April). With Clement's evidence may be mentioned the "De paschae computus", written in 243 AD and falsely ascribed to Cyprian (P.L., IV, 963 sqq.), which places Christ's birth on 28 March, because on that day the material sun was created. But Lupi has shown that there is no month in the year to which respectable authorities have not assigned Christ's birth (Zaccaria, Dissertazioni ecc. del p. A.M. Lupi, Faenza, 1785, p. 219). Clement, however, also tells us that the Basilidians celebrated the Epiphany, and with it, probably, the Nativity, on 15 or 11 Tybi (10 or 6 January). At any rate this double commemoration became popular, partly because the apparition to the shepherds was considered as one manifestation of Christ's glory, and was added to the greater manifestations celebrated on 6 January."

3. Analysis based on the temple service of Zachariah

This calculation is based on the temple service of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. According to Luke 1:5 he was a priest of the order of Abijah. He was performing his duties, burning incense in the Temple, when an angel told him that his wife Elizabeth will conceive a child who should be called

John. Considering this as 0, Elizabeth conceived John after the termination of Zechariah's duty anytime during the next seven days. Here we have an error of +/- 7 days. Mary was told that she would conceive Jesus on the sixth month. This is usually taken to mean that sixth month after Elizabeth conceived John. Though the text itself could mean as the sixth month of the year, Greek grammar may permit this interpretation and is considered as such by many.

Thus if we can identify the end of the service of Zechariah's temple service we could identify the following with almost certainty:

Annunciation of Mary took place after 150 days

John's Birth took place after 280 days

Jesus' birth took place after 430 days

With a possible error of a week or two allowing for Zechariah to travel back to his village home and for Elizabeth to conceive. This method is indeed totally scriptural without much of the usual extrapolation and conjecture.

1. Zechariah belonged to the levitical division of Abijah

Luke 1:5 In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron

2. We can try to locate the time when Zechariah served as High Priest in the temple from this

David divided the levites into 24 divisions to serve at the temple. They served in order and in cycles,

I Chronicles 24:1—tells us that the family of Abhijah was allotted the eighth course

3. There were 24 courses in all..

Deuteronomy 16:16 Three times a year all your men must appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles

Thus three times a year during the festival all the adult were to assemble in Jerusalem before either temple, all these 24 priestly families were to work together.

4. We know that the period of service of each courses was from the Sabbath to Sabbath with a duty of seven days. During end of Sabbath (Friday evening) they have to take charge and continue until the end of next Sabbath (Saturday evening). Though only one person could enter the Holy of Holies all brothers in the family served. This person was taken by lots.

I Chronicles 9:25 Their brothers in their villages had to come from time to time and share their duties for seven-day periods.

II Chronicles 23:1-8—those who were going on duty on the Sabbath and those who were going off duty

So, the week of service began and ended on the Sabbath.

5. According to the Mishnah (also note I Chronicles 27:3), the cycle begins on the first Sabbat (Sabbath) of Nisan,

The eighth course would therefore serve the first time during the tenth week having allowed for the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Weeks, which both occur during the first weeks of the year. Otherwise Zechariah must have served on the (24 first complete cycle +3 festivals+8 =) 35th week of the year.

6. So here are the possible dates on which Zechariah must have served before the altar.

1. Week 3 Feast of the Unleavened
2. Week 9 Pentecost (15+50=65 days after Nisan 14)
3. Week 10 (2 festivals+8 courses)
4. Week 29 Tishri festival of booths
5. Week 35 (24 courses + 3 feasts + 8 courses)

7. However we are told that:

Luke 1:8 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God,

9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

This indicates that people could not see him. People gathered together into the Holies for. This was possible only if he had gone behind the curtain, into the Holy of Holies.

Lev. 16:34 "This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites."

Heb. 9:7 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

If this is so this must have been on the Day of Atonement Yom Kippur—Tishri 15. This is the first month in the civil year also.

8. Elizabeth conceived John the Baptist AFTER Zechariah had finished his Temple service:

Luke 1:23 When his time of service was completed, he returned home. After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion.

His service ended on 22nd of Tishri on the Eighth day a Sunday.

9. Mary conceived on the sixth month.

Luke 1:26-33

On the sixth month God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, To a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.

On the sixth month would then well be "on the sixth month i.e. in the month of Elul" which is also the "sixth month of pregnancy of Elizabeth."

10. Thus from 23rd Tishri adding 280 days of gestation period we arrive at

(7+30+29+30+29+30+29+30+29+30+3) Tammmuz 3

Adding 6 more months we arrive at Teveth 3 which is exactly December 25th.

Thus the date which we celebrate is indeed the Birthday of Jesus.

(To be continued in the next Issue)

FOCUS GROUP SEMINAR

The Second FOCUS (For Christian Understanding and Solidarity) International Seminar will be held at Santhigiri Ashram (near Alwaye, India) from February 7-10, 2001. Marthomites from U.S.A., U.K, Gulf Countries, Singapore, Malaysia and Australia will be attending this Seminar. All Mar Thoma Bishops including Valiya Thirumeni will be present at the Seminar to lead various sessions. Clergies include Rev. Dr. M. J. Joseph, Rev. Dr. K. U. Abraham, Rev. K. T. Alexander and Rev. K. G. Joseph. The theme of the Seminar is "From Corridors of Power to Expanses of Divine Grace."

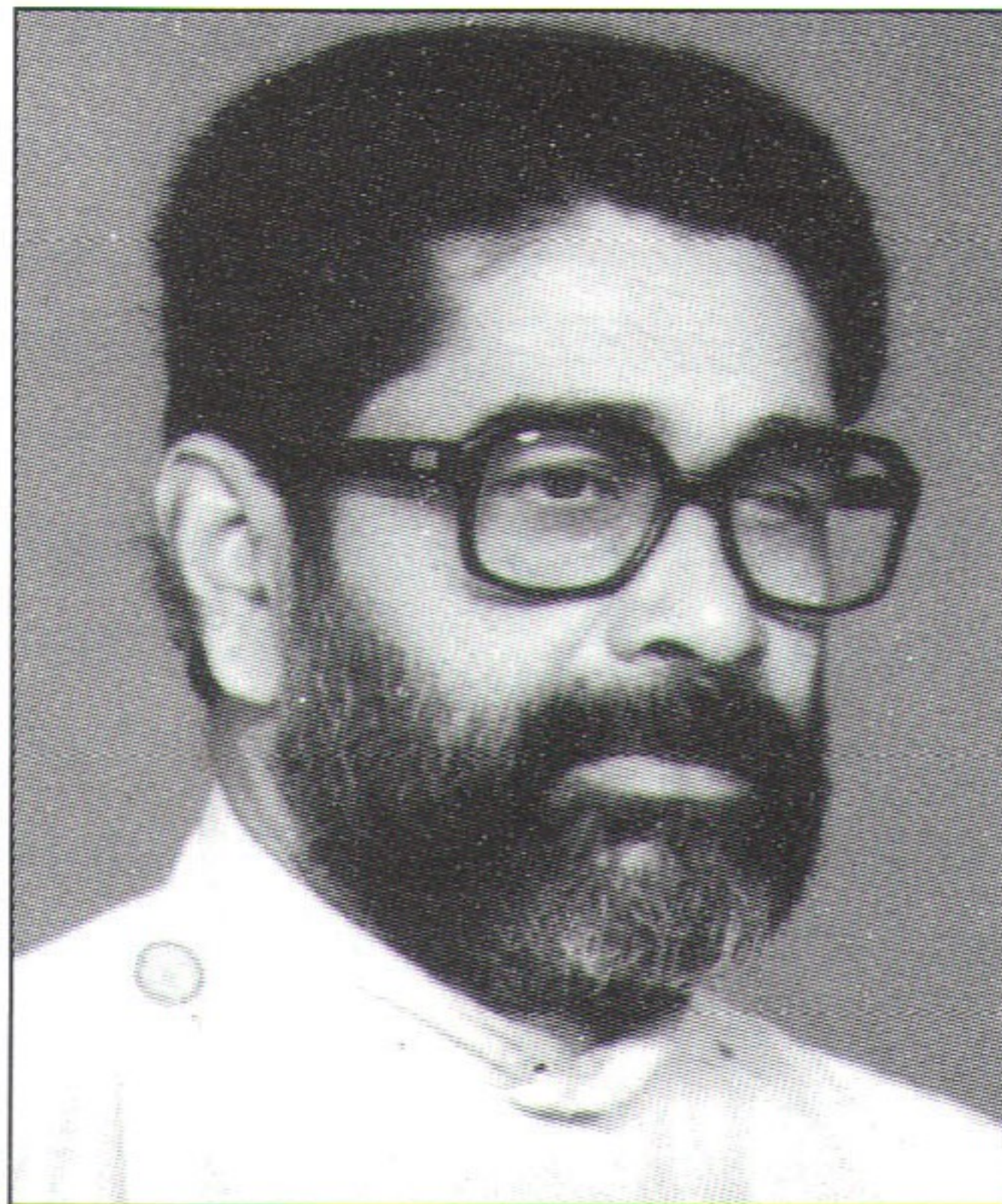
A satellite meeting of the FOCUS GROUP will be held from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Thursday July 5, 2001 in Philadelphia just before the start of the Family Conference at the hotel. Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom and Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus will be present at this satellite meeting. Those who wish to participate in this meeting may register their name in advance through e-mail Abramat@aol.com or fax your name and telephone number to 562-420-6528.

Abraham Mattackal, Long Beach, CA

Liturgical Imperatives of the Mar Thoma Church

An Apologetic View

Rev. A. T. Philip



Liturgical apprehension of the Mar Thoma Church is not static in so far as the Church had a taste of many liturgies including the Latin one at least for a short period between 1599 and 1653. A historical study of the issues underlying the incident at Connen Cross would reveal that the revolt has been organized by this Church against liturgical circumvention by the Romans. Before the take over by Portuguese-Romans this Church had a liturgy known as Malankara Thaksa and this Thaksa is the liturgy of St. Addai and St. Mari in its Malabar variation while its original form is in Syriac, and Roman Catholics of Kerala Syro-Malabar rite now use it in a contaminated form incorporating Papal safeguards. Other liturgies geographically of Syrian origin — The Liturgy of the Apostolic Constitution, The Liturgy of St. James and the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom are Greek, rather than Syrian in character. The Liturgy of St. Addai and St. Mari was evidently transported to Edessa beyond the bounds of the Roman Empire before it became hellenized. One remarkable feature of the liturgy is that the prayer appears to be addressed to Christ though this has been obscured by the addition of an address to the Trinity at the beginning. Addai and Mari are regarded as the founders of the Church of the East (99 AD). Here one must remember that the Persian Church identified as the Church of the East and later as the Nestorian Church had the right of ecclesial supervision over the Kerala Church in the medieval period and it claims a common apostolate of Thomas together with the Kerala Church. The Persian Church cherishes the memory of moving the relics of the apostle from the South-East coast of India to Edessa. In the Malabar Liturgy we never had the trisagia, three hymns of the opening (Kouma). We had the simple prayer: 'O Lord! Do have mercy on us'. The Trisagia were in use only in Antioch. 'O the one (Messiah) who was crucified for us' came into use in order to exclude Aryanism in the 4th and 5th centuries and the Malabar Church never incorporated it into its liturgy until the arrival of the Jacobites.

In the periods before and after the event of Connen Cross, the liturgical life of the Kerala Church was completely disturbed owing to the Roman and Antiochene encounters. Though the clergy who did not submit to the Roman Yoke wanted to adhere to the Malabar Thaksa newly arrived Jacobite Prelates wanted them to forsake the same which allegedly had wrong connotations and

Nestorian bias. There were confusions and revolts in the parish-churches when the Jacobite celebrants officiated the communion service using the St. James Liturgy. The people were ignorant of what was going on. Western Syriac, into which the Greek liturgy of St. James was translated, though was the language of the celebrants happened to be an alien language in Kerala. Gradually the overwhelming hatred towards the Roman faction pacified the group and they have started to reconcile with the St. James Liturgy advocated by the Jacobites. In the new situation the priests began to learn by heart the new Syrian liturgy, occasionally having Greek terms and they used it as a 'mantra' over the people who gathered together for worship. Independent lot of the Malabar Christians accepted the St. James Liturgy in the seventeenth century as a lesser evil at the verge of a great calamity and transition. However, the Jacobite authority over the Kerala Church was not (altogether) unchallenged. It is recorded that Cheppat Mar Dionysius (1825-52) refused to have a laying on of hand by the Jacobite Antiochene bishop Abdh-Msih. Though the vision of the apostolic authority and independence of the Malabar Church was stronger in Abraham Malpan he had received second ordination from the above bishop. It seems to me that the Malpan's move had a different orientation as he wanted to ensure the support of the Antiochene authority in order to overthrow the local authority of the mechanical leadership centered around the cult of liturgy practiced by the illiterate clergy. Winning the support of the patriarch of Antioch he has moved the coins in such a way that the ecclesial authority in due course came into the hands of those who supported the reforms and cause of apostolic independence. Political and missionary presence of the British was an indispensable factor in the whole episode and the demands of the word of God were given utmost importance. Translation and revision of the liturgy in the light of the newly available word of God and its application at the parish Churches of Maramon and other places vindicate this truth. Abraham Malpan had a great regard for and critical solidarity to the liturgy of St. James and that was why he has reformed it and reintroduced the application of the same in order to counter the onslaughts of the Romans, Jacobites and Anglicans over the independent Kerala Church. It must also be pointed out that after the sixteenth century the Persian Church with which the Kerala Church had close connections subsided owing to Islamic conquest and efforts to revive the relations became futile.

The revision primarily aims at the focusing of the word of God in the life of the people through the communion service. Gradually reading from the Bible and biblical sermons were added to the order while Christ event in its full magnitude is displayed colorfully and meaningfully through the person, dress (vestments), gestures and words of the celebrant. St. James Liturgy as in the case of all other ancient liturgies has already imbibed the evils and excesses of the dark age including Mariolatry and mediation of the saints and prayers for the dead. And we find it in the liturgy in its pre-reformed condition. Statement of mediation by Mary, who gave birth to Jesus and John who baptized Him, as found at the opening of the communion service has been altered to affirm the reality of the birth and baptism of Jesus in a striking manner. We have seen earlier that the Prayers addressed to Christ was a special phenomenon of the liturgy of St. Addai and St. Mari. In the revised liturgy of St. James we see the opening prayer as a clear cut address to Christ. At this point the reformer(s) took care to have a unique re-orientation. However, the reformed liturgy amply shows the conceptual framework of the dark age at many places. Nevertheless, the reformed Church is always cautious to educate its members and others that the mediation by dead saints and Mary the mother of Jesus cannot be taken as valid from the point of view of biblical faith. Such vices are employed in a demoralized society where living Christ is not encountered afresh by the faithful in life situations. The Church with which Mohammed came into contact in the seventh century had almost lost sight of the true Christian spirit and charity in hairsplitting controversies about the person of Christ, and the popular adoration of Virgin Mary and other saints almost obscured the truth that God is one. Under such circumstances Islam had an edge over Christianity in the East. We have the same phenomenon in the Indian Church at the close of this century despite all the positive points of the reformation. As the apostles in certain situations blocked the people to have direct access to Jesus during his Galilean ministry, the cults of saints and good men have been employed by the descendants of the apostles with ulterior motives. Yet already in antiquity there were also individuals who rejected the veneration of the saints (e.g. Valentinus). In the 8th century the cult was attacked by the Iconoclasts and again in the 16th century by the Western Reformers. Abraham Malpan and his associates come in the line of these men of faith and vision.

While reiterating the apostolic authority of Thomas as sent by the Holy Spirit from the apostolic community of Jerusalem, the liturgy of the Apostolic Church as originated in Jerusalem also had been accepted by the Mar Thoma Church at a crucial turning point of course with newly available biblical insights. St. James Liturgy at its inception can neither be Greek nor Jacobite. However, the extended form of the liturgy was available only in Greek. And the Jacobites are in history only in the 6th century A.D. The liturgy of St. James has its origin in the Apostolic Church of Jerusalem. Its hellenized version came into force within the geographic zone of Syria, as we have seen early. Dr. K. M. George argues that traditionally the liturgy of St. James is traced back to the first bishop of Jerusalem, St. James who was also the brother of our Lord. We have to differ on this. The communion liturgy of the Mar Thoma Church provided a bold caption at the beginning of the first anaphora that it is attributed to Mar Yakob Sleeha. Obviously it is named after James the apostle who was martyred in Jerusalem (Acts 12:2). Of course in due course James, the brother of Jesus became the elder of the Church and he had presided over the first Council (Acts 15, Gal. 1:18-19). Subsequently James must have become the bishop of Jerusalem and presided over the thanksgiving service in house-churches of Jerusalem. It is likely that Churches in other places also had a senior presbyter who always presided if he were present, though he would delegate his duties to another presbyter if he were not present. In the common Eucharist the presbyter bishop celebrates while the deacon assists. However, during the second and third centuries there must have been many occasions when the deacons actually celebrated the Eucharist. This practice was frowned upon and at the Council of Arles (314) and Nicaea (325) explicitly forbidden. By then it was usual for rural congregations to be served by a resident presbyter. The role played by James brother of Jesus had its parallel in the case of Ignatius of Antioch. The elevation of the episcopate into an order standing above the presbyterate, while also remaining on a level with it, was taking place in the period when apostolic authority was going or gone. The process may have been helped by the examples of the Churches at Jerusalem and Antioch. Christianity as a living faith transcending the Judeo-Christian framework and reaching out to the Graeco-Roman world had its early wrestles between the interests of Jerusalem and Antioch. Liturgy of St. James witnesses this reality. In the apostolic and subapostolic period other centers of Christianity including Rome had minor significance in all matters of prime interest.

Many scholars and liturgiologists think that among all liturgies the St. James' one is the best. In the Syrian Church there are so many liturgies. Dr. K. M. George says that they exceed sixty-five. They include the anaphoras anaphora is the particular name for the text of liturgy of all twelve apostles, known as the apostles' liturgy. However, all other anaphoras including those of the apostles in the Syrian tradition are based on the liturgy of St. James, the basic liturgical text. This liturgy has a universal appeal in as much

as the Byzantine Church uses it on special occasions while they have liturgies of St. Basil and St. Chrysostom in ordinary eucharistic services. This liturgy along with others has been translated into many languages of the Byzantine Church. And from the fifth century a hymn known as 'Let all mortal flesh keep silence' has been in use even in the West. This Hymn expresses the great sense of awe at the eucharistic presence characteristic of the eastern liturgies.

Here we must remember that the Eastern tradition of Christianity has never clearly distinguished between mysticism and theology, between a personal experience of the divine mysteries and dogmas declared by the Church. In the East it was usual to have only one celebration of the Eucharist under the bishop on a Sunday. The early second century texts (Didache, Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr) agree that regular Sunday Worship of the Christians was first and foremost 'Thanksgiving,' (a Greek term, eucharista) which gradually replaced the more primitive term 'breaking of bread'. And in Rome as well until the end of 4th century the liturgical celebrations were in Greek (and not in Latin).

After the introduction of the St. James Liturgy (revised) in Malayalam the Kerala Church (though belatedly) has been introduced to the Greek pattern of thinking. This Church till the 16th century was a secluded lot just like the Persian Church with which it was connected.

Liturgical revision aims at the identity of the Church and fulfillment of its mission. Liturgical renewal is intrinsically connected with spiritual revival and social emancipation. Enactment of the reformed liturgy had been followed by the overthrow of the image of the deity called Muttappan worshiped in the Church circles. This image, I would argue, was identical to the sustenance of the Jacobite Metran Cult from abroad. Abraham Malpan was careful to dissociate the revised liturgy from any cultic influence. Further, he has taken initiative to make a submission to the British resident against the twenty-four unscriptural practices which had no sanction in the canons (ethics) of the Mar Thoma Church. The books Abraham Malpante Naveekaranam Oru Vyakhyanam (Mal.) by M. M. Thomas and the Mar Thoma Church and Kerala Society by the author of this paper shed light on this.

Bishops who took leading part in liturgical celebrations in the early Church were stubborn, persecuted Christians. The bishops who attended the Council at Nicaea were mostly tortured and mutilated beings. In the corporate worship centered around the Eucharist they bear the burdens of the slave communities of Christians who were charged with atheism, (as they refused to worship Caesar and show incense at his statue) cannibalism and incest. They were custodians of the people who were tortured and oppressed for their faith in Christ Jesus. They were also the conscience keepers of Christ and his Church. When the words of Kuriel Elaison were uttered they were genuinely beseeching the Mercy of God Almighty amidst threats and uncertainties, looking for a New World Order. As the congregation pay heed to the blessings: Peace be with you, they were actually getting consoled within themselves.

Symbol of Ichthus (Fish) came into use to convey the faith in Jesus Christ, Son of God, the Savior, first in Christian slave circles. Leaders of Christian Slave Groups as they were gathered by Roman soldiers from different parts of the empire, drew the outline of a fish on the ground with the main finger of their right leg, secretly, and awaited response from the other group as they were escaping the attention of the soldiers. In most cases the response came positively as the leaders of those groups responded with the same outline. In all probability their language would not be the same. For them Christianity was the common bond in suffering and Jesus carrying a lamb on his shoulder, anchor etc. were exhibited at the worship site. We get proof for it from the Roman catacombs. The word liturgy comes from leitourgia meaning 'service of the people'. It has two roots, laos and ergon. The word could be interpreted as the people at work. Etymologically liturgical enactments come as a part of daily Christian life and witness.

After the establishment of the Eastern Roman Empire leaders of the Greek Church became powerful and they were nicknamed Melchites, Kings men. The Greek Church had confrontation with the Semitic Christians as they were opposed to icons and images in the Greek and Latin Churches. There were other reasons also for the rivalry. Bishops of the Greek and Latin Churches became powerful and they have built gorgeous cathedral Churches and began to appear in colorful vestments and elevated hierarchical orders. At this point liturgy lost its inherent virtues and became symbol of prestige and pomp. Elaborate forms and colorful stagings of the liturgy flourished in monastic circles. In due course monasteries and church organizations became powerful. In later periods the Church and Ancient Liturgies never regained their original simplicity.

Eucharist, the most sacred act of Christian Liturgy commemorates the Last Supper which Jesus Christ shared with his disciples on the night of His betrayal by Judas. The evening meal which preceded the culminating events of Christ's mission was not an ordinary supper, but a ritualistic feast (according to many) in which the Jews remember their miraculous deliverance from bondage in Egypt. The Eucharist therefore links His blessing of the bread and wine with the mighty deeds of God who led his people into the promised land. All Eastern liturgies faithfully adhere to this two fold character of the service although differing considerably in details. Most scholars distinguish four main types of Eastern liturgy namely:

- i. The West Syrian or Jacobite
- ii. The East Syrian or Chaldean
- iii. The Coptic and Ethiopian and
- iv. The Byzantine and Armenian

The laity play a vital part in the services which are always vocal. The Holy Spirit is invoked on the holy gifts and congregation during a prayer called Epeclasis (invocation). The lay people are communicated in both kinds (by intinction or otherwise). The central part of the service is Anaphora (offering, sacrifice) and it is also similar throughout the East. It begins with a prologue in which

God is thanked for the creation of human. Then comes the Sanctus (angelic praise to the Lord and Master of the universe) which is followed by the Anamnesis or commemoration of the work of Christ, His Cross, His tomb, His resurrection and ascension. The Anamnesis is completed by the Epiclesis, after which comes the Intercession or Great prayer for all, living and dead, summed up in the 'Our Father.' The Anaphora ends with the elevation of the Host, the fraction of the elements and communion. The prayer of intercession is the least stabilized part of the Eastern Eucharistic canon.

Mere revision or formulation of liturgies would not equip the Church to solve the problems of the World. The Church has to broaden its outlook dwelling on biblical vision and reality of redemption brought about by Jesus Christ. The age of dogmas, religious rivalries and political and ideological differences has gone. The Kingdom of God has to make its manifestation overthrowing the personal interests of the powerful. The Church of Christ has to assert itself burying the interests of mundane counter churches in order to give fellowship to humankind at large to overcome all the problems they face in the realm of existence. ■

Letter to the Editor:

This is regarding the erroneous publication of an article in the July 2000 edition of the Mar Thoma Messenger about the dedication of the newly constructed Detroit Mar Thoma Church. For your easy reference, I attach a copy of the same article that appeared in the Mar Thoma Sabha Tharaka, an official monthly of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar.

My concern is in particular reference to the donation of one lakh rupees for construction of a church in any mission field in India as a token of gratitude by the members of Detroit Mar Thoma Church. Before I write this to you, I gathered information from our publicity coordinator Mr. C. V. Samuel, that he sent the same article to both "Tharaka and the Messenger."

I am a subscriber to both, Tharaka and the Messenger. To my great surprise, I noticed that in the Tharaka it is published as a task already accomplished, i.e. PRESENTED A CHECK FOR ONE LAKH RUPEES TO THIRUMENI, whereas, in the Messenger it is published as a "COMMITMENT YET TO BE ACCOMPLISHED, i.e. a "PROMISE."

As you know, these two words, "PRESENTED" and "PROMISED TO PRESENT," mean a lot of difference in the English Language. If any one has contacted you with different information than that which was officially conveyed to you by our elected publicity coordinator, it is irrelevant and unauthorized. Incidentally, it happened to be myself who presented the check to Thirumeni. I, therefore, request for necessary corrections in the Messenger to conform to the same meaning that appeared in the Tharaka.

P. M. John, Detroit, MI

We received two reports about the dedication of the Detroit Mar Thoma Church — one from Mr. C. V. Samuel and the other from the vicar Rev. Dr. K. T. Joy. We published the one sent by the Vicar.

— Chief Editor

Matrimonial

Bride Wanted: We are seeking brilliant, beautiful committed Christian girl, professional masters degree holder, who has excellent moral and spiritual values, with Syrian Christian family background. We are an ancient Syrian Christian, Marthomite, God fearing family hailing from central Kerala. We are permanently settled in USA for the last twenty three years. Our proposed son is working as an Assistant Director, local government computer job. He is 29 years old, 5' 8" in height, lean and handsome, born in North India, raised and educated (up to Masters of Engineering) in USA, and is a US Citizen. He is a non-smoker, non-drinker, has excellent moral and spiritual values, very good character in all respects, and active in Church, spiritual family oriented. If you are interested based on the above information, please send a detailed bio-data and a recent photograph of the girl, at earliest your convenience to: Thomas M. Thomas, 70 Citation Drive, Henrietta, NY 14467-9768, Phone: 716-334-8329.

Bridegroom Wanted: Marthomite parents invite proposals for their daughter, 25 years, tall medium complexion, graduate of National Law School, currently employed as corporate Lawyer in a reputable company and planning to come to US for higher education, from parents of professionally qualified boys of Marthomite, CSI or Jacobite denomination. Please contact with details and returnable photograph to: Box 8333 BG, Marthoma Messenger, Sinai Marthoma Center, 2320 S. Merrick Ave. Merrick, NY 11566 or E-Mail:chackoxi@yahoo.com

Worship, Sacrifice, Offering (Gen. 4:1-7)

Rev. Dr. K. V. Simon, St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Anicad

In every religion, worship, sacrifice, and offering are the three aspects, which represent a devotee's allegiance to the Deity. The extent of the devotion is expressed in worship. God created man to worship Him. God always dwells on the praises of His people. Worship is the response of the creature and the acknowledgement of the transcendence of God. Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in them says that praise and honor and glory and power are due to the Lamb of God. In the modern world there is perversion in everything — even in worship, sacrifice, and offering.



Worship becomes "Wry"ship

If you worship your body, you sacrifice time and energy in jogging, weight lifting, and aerobic dancing. If you worship your car, you invest time and energy and money changing oil, washing, waxing and polishing and otherwise maintaining it. If you worship your family, you serve those loved ones with time and talent and money. So to worship, we have to offer and spend. Our heart and mind and the whole body needs to be involved in worship. We are asked to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—which is our spiritual act of worship (Rom. 12:1). The six-winged Seraphim worshiped the Almighty God—with two wings they covered their face, with two wings they covered their feet and with two wings they were flying. Their whole body was involved in the act of worship. We have to worship God in His way, not in our way. It is the exaltation of God's "worthiness." Always there is competition in worship. We have all the paraphernalia of worship, but reject the real meaning and beauty of it. One denomination wants to supercede the other, one sect wants to supercede the other. Cain and Abel came to worship in the presence of God. God was not pleased with Cain. We do not know the reason. When we place ourselves at the top of worship, we will diminish the transcendence of God. The Samaritan woman asked Jesus — "our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place we worship is in Jerusalem. Jesus answered—God is spirit, and His worshippers must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:19, 24). If God is not pleased with our worship, it becomes "wry"ship. We come with a distorted, twisted face wearing a masque of insincerity and double-mindedness. We keep jealousy and hatred against our brother and worship God. Our prayer is never answered.

David says, "if I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (Ps. 66:18). We have to worship God from the bottom of our heart, God is not pleased with our lip service.

Sacrifice becomes sacrilege

God is pleased with the sacrifice of an upright heart. Cain's sacrifice was an abomination, a vain oblation in the presence of God. "When you stand in the holy place, the abomination that causes desolation, spoken through the Prophet Daniel" (Matt. 24:15).

God says in His wrath,

"I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings which are ever before me

I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens

Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High" (Ps. 50:8, 9, 14)

Abel is described as a righteous person in the presence of God (Matt. 23:35). "We have come to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (Heb. 12:24). God's acceptance is the main thing in the sacrifice. God looks at our character and attitude. Abel offered a sacrifice of atonement. There is God's provision and God's way. Cain's wrathfulness, sullen, churlish countenance displeased God. His indignation against God spoiled his eternity. His worship and sacrifice did not bring any good to himself or others. He is not willing to accept his brother. Jesus said, "if you are offering your gift, at the altar, and then remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar, first go and be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:23-24). Envy is a sin, which creates discontent in our hearts, it takes away the grace from us. There is no reason for us to be angry with God. Our sin breaks God's heart and robs us of God's Kingdom and life everlasting. The word Cain means keeper. By asking the question "am I my brother's keeper?," he avoids the God-given responsibility. We are given a name "God's child" and we are supposed to do the will of God. To be responsible before God is to be responsible for our brethren. Cain was condemned as a fugitive and a vagabond. Sin and its punishment are at the door, it is following all the way of our life. He is destined to a perpetual disquietude and horror. His own guilty conscience haunts him. There is not a more restless fugitive upon the earth than Cain who is continually pursued by his own guilt. Sacrifice is for the peace of mind. If it destroys peace, it becomes sacrilege.

Offering becomes offense

Whether our offering is big or small, it is the attitude that matters. God looks at the heart of the giver. Our pride cannot purchase God. The woman offered the most expensive alabaster oil on the feet of Jesus. To the onlookers it was a mere waste of money and energy. The poor widow offered her mite. Sometimes, we offer our gift to manipulate God or to win God's favor. God's favor is a gift given to those whom He pleases. It was given to the Virgin Mary. The gift of life comes from God and it cannot be hoarded. Life is fragile and its end is unpredictable. In this world, most of us do not have enough or overabundance of possessions. Offering on the altar with the blood, God pleases, because life is involved in the blood of every creature. So we have to offer the whole life, the whole personality before God. The blood makes atonement with God. The Son of Man came to offer his blood as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). He did not enter by means of blood of goats and calves, but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12). What God requires of us is the fragrant offering of our own lives and all its potentials and possibilities. If our offering has nothing to do with our lives it becomes an offense against God.

Cain offered on his own altar of jealousy. King Uzziah offered on his own altar of pride. King Saul offered on his own altar of self-esteem and self justification. All these offerings turned out to be an offense against God and they were all punished by the wrath of God.

Offer our lives with all its limitations and frailties. God will accept it. God can work miracles in us and bring about

immense possibilities out of our lives. A person has written the following lines:

“Cripple him and you have a Sir Walter Scott
Put him in prison and you have a John Bunyan
Bury him in snow at Valley Forge and you have a
George Washington
Have him born in abject poverty and you have an
Abraham Lincoln
Goad him with bitter racial prejudice and
you have a Disraeli
Afflict him with asthma as a boy and you have a
Theodore Roosevelt
Stab him with rheumatic pain until he cannot sleep
without an opiate and you have a Charles Steinmatz
Make him black of slave parents and sell him for the
price of a fair to average horse and you have a
George Washington Carver.”

How is our worship? Is it from the bottom of our heart? How is our sacrifice? Is it pleasing to God? How is our offering? Does it involve the whole of our being? A full life is one in which you do everything you and God intends for you to do in the time allotted to you. Get rid of your resentments. Forgive everybody you have been nursing a grudge against. Trust God with your future. We cannot worship God and hate our brother at the same time. God demands our tithes and offerings, and accepts no counterfeits. He wants all of us. He wants Him to be at the center of our attention.

Worship the God of our fathers in spirit and truth. Present our bodies as a living sacrifice on the altar of God's holiness. Offer our whole being as an aroma before God. ■

THE MAR THOMA CHURCH – ORDER OF WORSHIP, PRAYERS AND HYMNS BOOK

The Mar Thoma Sunday Schools of the Diocese of North America and Europe are very pleased to inform you that the Worship and Hymns Book is ready for our use.

The communion service is in a three column format with English, Malayalam, and Transliteration, meant to enhance meaningful participation by our youngsters. All our members should have a copy of this book in their homes, and the Churches must buy a copy for their use. The price is \$11.00 per copy and you can order the books by calling Mr. P. T. Mathew at 972-492-0144 or Mr. T. A. Mathew at 713-455-7469. We thank you for your support.

MAR THOMA LITERATURE SOCIETY

Mar Thoma Literature Society is the official distributor of Bibles, Christian Books, Casette Tapes, CDs, Videos, Sunday School and VBS Curriculum Materials for our Diocese. During the Millennium celebrations in Houston, Zacharias Thirumeni inaugurated the book stall for the Mar Thoma Literature Society at Trinity Mar Thoma Church in Houston.

The contact person for the Houston area is Mr. T. A. Mathew.

Identity and Mission

Mar Thoma Church Outside Kerala

Jesudas M. Athyal, Chennai

In any group or fora, there is a direct correlation between identity and mission. While identity denotes the cultural and sociological self-understanding, mission pertains to the normative realm. The content of mission is determined by whether and to what extent the identity is inclusive or exclusive. Speaking in the present context, what has most strongly marked the last half a century is the rise of cultural exclusivism ('isolationism') — especially in religious fora. This has profoundly influenced the content of religions too. A reference to identity therefore becomes essential in a discussion on relevant patterns of Christian mission within the framework of the Mar Thoma Church.

The Mar Thoma Church, which, till the early part of the twentieth century, existed largely within the geographical boundaries of Kerala ('From Chathanoor to Challissery') has, over the last half a century, grown spectacularly. Three factors have contributed enormously to this growth. These can be put in a nutshell as, evangelical fervor, ecumenical openness and the diasporic community. While discussing the question of identity and mission of our church today, we will briefly review these three factors.

Evangelical Fervor

The first and foremost among the developments in the church during the first half of the twentieth century is the evangelical fervor, a natural corollary of the reformation in the church. The exposure to the reformed ideas of the missionaries and the availability of the Bible in the people's language were the main factors that led at a paradigm shift in the self-understanding of the ancient Kerala church. The zeal of reformation coupled with the material insecurity of that period, made the church look outward - towards the task of Christian witness in the world outside. The founding of the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association and the Maramon Convention were major steps in this direction. Thus, from the Syrian church which had for centuries functioned as an exclusive caste group, a section emerged, recognizing 'outreach' as its primary mission. The commitment to mission and evangelism took the church not only outside the Central Travancore area; within the region too, the scope of the church was widened to include the socially downtrodden sections, especially the dalits. The mission of the church was understood and affirmed as cross-cultural, universal and liberative.

Ecumenical movement

The last half a century that saw the evangelical fervor in the church also witnessed our exposure to the ecumenical movement. There are many within the church who today treat

the two as separate and even, antagonistic. However, the evangelical awakening and the ecumenical openness were understood by our church fathers as corollary to each other, both combining to prod the church forward to the larger dimensions of Christian witness in the pluralistic context of the outside world. The church's association with the World Council of Churches since the latter's inception and the other ecumenical fora, exposed the church to the wider Christian world. Within the country too, discussions with other churches, especially the CSI and CNI, opened us to the possibility of Christian unity in India.

It would however be erroneous to identify the spirit of reformation in terms of evangelical fervor and church unity alone. There was also the recognition that social justice is integral to the mission of the church. As noted earlier, the reformed theological insights on 'the universality of the Christian message' challenged the foundations of the exclusive caste consciousness of the Syrian Christians. This has enormous relevance in the context of the participation of the dalits in the fellowship of the church. While caste consciousness has not diminished within the church in any significant way since reformation, the role played by the missionaries in the awakening and liberation of the dalits, and the assimilation of these values by the leaders of the reformation in the Syrian church, led to an increased awareness on these problems within the church, in the process opening up a space for the deprived sections to participate at least marginally in the life of the church and society.

Diasporic community

The last fifty years also witnessed large scale migration, for higher study as well as employment, of the Mar Thoma Christians outside Kerala. Though the migration was scattered and isolated in the initial stages, soon sizable numbers settled down in cities like Madras, Bombay and Delhi. There was also considerable flow outside the country — to Malaysia, Singapore, the Middle East and the West. For Christian fellowship, though a few among the educated migrants aligned themselves with the English speaking Protestant congregations in the new settings, the large number of Kerala Christians preferred the Syrian form of worship — the spiritual and cultural framework which they are familiar with. Accordingly, the Mar Thoma Christians began organizing themselves outside Kerala. The Madras Mar Thoma Church is reputed to be the first full-fledged parish outside Kerala.

The Context Today

Roughly fifty years later, today, a sizable section of the Mar Thoma Christians exist outside Kerala. A second (and in certain cases, third) generation of immigrants, are growing up outside the state. This is especially true in the urban centers of India, Malaysia–Singapore and in the United States of America. This is a generation which has little first hand knowledge of the cultural or social ethos of Kerala. The question of 'identity and mission' of the church becomes most crucial for this section. Today, in the midst of pluralistic cultural and linguistic contexts, numerically our parishes and dioceses are flourishing. But how do the practices and traditions of the church become meaningful to the growing generation in such a context? To what extent has efforts been made to contextualise our cultural ethos, liturgy, church structures and patterns of evangelism? These are the most pertinent questions before the church today.

Today we stand at the crossroads. While remaining firmly rooted in the spiritual and theological heritage of the past, we need to be more open to new and relevant forms of cultural and linguistic forms, for our Christian witness as a church in the pluralistic context. The focus and priorities of the church outside Kerala cannot be different from that within. Yet, the wider context and its highly pluralistic society call for a review of our patterns of worship, witness and structures. It needs to be noted that a church which finds its primary identity as a social or cultural institution alone (*samudayam*) need not necessarily lead to 'an identity crisis, even in pluralistic contexts. There are, existing and flourishing all around us, caste, ethnic, linguistic and even church groups that maintain intact their exclusive and isolationist identity in alien and even hostile settings. Our point however is that the heritage of the Mar Thoma Church as a 'mission church' necessitates a constant process of self-examination on how her identity is in tune with the mission of Christ which transcends (and transforms) all cultural, linguistic and ethnic barriers. It is in the tension between identity and mission that the church realizes its role and relevance today. The three factors that shaped the identity and mission of the church during the last few decades, evangelical fervor, ecumenical vision and the diasporic context, blend into one as we discuss the role of the church tomorrow.

The Laity

Two points can be mentioned in this context. They are, the increased participation of the laity and the focus on local congregation, both for diasporic community as well as 'mission' communities. The demystification of the liturgy and the availability of the Bible in the people's language, the chief elements of reformation, had a profound impact on the participation of the laity in the worship and witness of the church. Along with the clergy, the laity too began to reflect on the implications of Christian witness in the world outside. In the founding of the Evangelistic Association and for several decades at the Maramon Convention, the laity played a crucial

role. Several lay people combined business and professional life with evangelistic work. The laity also played a crucial role in leading the church towards an ecumenical vision. For several decades the laity blazed the path of ecumenical vision in the church. Special mention must also be made of the pioneering role of women, through the *Sevika Sanghom* and in the ecumenical movement, towards the overall renewal of the church. Even today, far removed from the ecclesiastical and hierarchical structures of the church, lay men and women, firmly rooted in their own church and the community, contribute richly to the social witness of the gospel. This is our heritage. The present tendency to limit the role of the laity to the management of financial and administrative matters of the church alone therefore needs to be understood as a deviation from both the theological understanding of the role of the laity as well as the heritage of our church. What is needed today is an effort to re-capture the leadership of the laity in the evangelistic and theological direction of the church.

Local Congregation

The church as a worshipping community, in the form of local congregations, too is important. Translation and the availability of the liturgy and the Bible played a key role in the Reformation in the church. This affirmation should be an ongoing process in the church. How can the liturgy and Bible be relevant in the highly pluralistic and urbanized regions outside Kerala? To what extent should 'regional flavor' enrich the liturgy? The focus on local congregation and the renewal of the liturgy becomes relevant in the context of our missionary work too. To what extent does the cultural plurality of the mission context enrich the life of the church, not only at the level of the local congregation, but at the wider levels such as the diocese and the church as a whole? In this process, can the local congregations be the focal point for a new and relevant ecclesiology?

Conclusion

The mission of Christ is a double edged sword. The gospel that we preach to the outside world should also challenge us to review our own cultural prejudices, church structures and liturgy. Mission cannot be a one way process; rather it is an experience of mutual conversion. The gospel that transforms the alien cultures in 'far away' places need necessarily to transform the 'evangelist' too. While bearing witness to the redemptive act of God through Christ in history, both the evangelist and the evangelized need be open to the God who transcends cultures — in the process, transforming them from within. The tension between our openness (vulnerability) in a pluralistic situation and our commitment to evangelism and ecumenism needs to be central to our discussions today. The tension is between our recognition and affirmation of God's presence and work among people of all faiths and our own commitment to bear witness to the salvation through the lordship of Jesus of Nazareth. ■

Theology of Crimes

The JMM Lecture 2000

Hon. Justice K. T. Thomas, New Delhi

I deem it a blessing to have the privilege of delivering this year's "Dr. Juhanon Marthoma Memorial" lecture. I have only very pleasant memories of that great and noble personage, particularly regarding the occasions when I had personal interactions with him. Though a quarter of a century has elapsed since his mortal end took place from this world he continues to live in the minds of all those who knew him. He was a Gandhian by living, a socialist by outlook and a secularist by approach. Shri Krishan Kant, the Vice President of India had enquired about certain aspect of his life, when I had a conversation with him. He asked me whether Dr. Juhanon had declined to occupy a new bishop's house built for him until another house was built for a homeless poor man. I confirmed the authenticity of the story and added that Dr. Juhanon insisted that the poor homeless man should be a non-Christian. This episode alone is sufficient testimony of the three facets which I have described about him — a Gandhian, a socialist and a secularist.

I have two subjects and the choice was given to me "Theology of Crimes" was one subject and the other was "Doctrine of the other cheek." I was really fascinated by the latter subject particularly because of its catching appellation which is framed on the basis of one of the most famous gospel pronouncements. But I had second thoughts on the advisability of a sitting judge dealing with that subject which has the potentiality to transgress outside the frontiers permitted to judges by virtue of our own self imposed code of conduct. So I sought permission not to deal with any such volcanic topic.

The subject "Theology of Crimes" should not cause any eyebrows to frown. Theology is divine. I know that in popular concept crime is the merriment of evil forces. So theology of crimes is an oxymoron, just like boiling ice cream. But I do venture to speak on such apparently contradictory subjects conjuncted together, as we may have to see the human side of the offenders also.

Has any crime got a theological profile? Indian Penal Code is a catalogue of crimes and their punishments. Certain acts committed by Jesus Christ inside the temple of Jerusalem could be described as crimes. He did such acts by up-turning the tables of the hawkers and extensive damage would have been inflicted to them. Those deeds can as well fall within the purview of Section 427 of the Indian Penal Code punishable with imprisonment which may extend to two years. If Jesus Christ had done those deeds in India, after Indian Penal Code came into force I don't know what defense he could possibly have adopted if he was charge sheeted before a court where I am a judge. I do not know under what exception Jesus could have been saved from conviction. It was not only Jesus, Lord Krishna had also committed crimes. Lord Krishna made a massive onslaught

on the properties and persons of King Jerasandhan and he was killed along with many of his cohorts. Those acts fall within the purview of serious offences under the Indian penal code. Lord Krishna and Lord Jesus Christ belong to a divine scenario and therefore if they have committed any crimes we have to find out whether there is any theology in such crimes.

It was Mother Teresa's words which really inspired me to speak on this subject. When I visited her in 1987 at Calcutta with my wife and Justice Fathima Beevi (the present Governor of Tamil Nadu) Mother Teresa asked me to which denomination I belong. I said that I belong to the Mar Thoma Church. She paused for a moment and then she understood it and said "Oh Bishop Chrysostum's Church." But she made an unexpected suggestion to us. She wanted all of us to visit Kali Temple of Calcutta. She said Kali Temple is the founding inspiration of the spiritualities of Calcutta. It was in deference to her wishes that we all went to Kali Temple. That suggestion really amazed me and gave me proof of her secular credentials. Once she was asked: "How many persons were converted by you?" she said many-many. I converted many bad Christians into good Christians, many bad Hindus into good Hindus and many bad Muslims into good Muslims but I have not converted a single non-Christian into a Christian. Her perspective towards Jesus Christ was also special and not like the one I heard from many others. She gave me a small booklet written by her containing a very thought provoking and inspiring sentence. This is what she said "Jesus is the prisoner to me." In fact, Jesus himself spoke about prisoners and once identified himself as one among them. In the gospel according to Matthew (Chapter 25 verse 36) Jesus told some persons that "when I was in prison you visited me" and to some others he complained that "when I was in prison you did not visit me." If Jesus was in prison for which offense he would have been convicted and imprisoned? Only those who committed offenses can go to prison. Of course, Chrysostom Thirumeni has a different version. He says that all had committed offenses and there are only two classes among them. Those who succeeded in escaping from punishment and those who failed to escape therefrom.

From the teachings of Jesus two categories of persons can be discerned. One category consists of those who are conscious of the crimes committed by them and they are prepared to retrace therefrom. The second category consists of those who are not prepared to retrace.

Judas Iscariot is treated in the Christian literature and Sermons as one of the most despicable characters in history being the great betrayer. The crime committed by him is considered even among the criminals as most abominable and unethical. The legend is that Leorno Da Vince, the

great painter who etched the celebrated portrait of "Last Supper" had to grope through the prison cells to trace out a criminal having such a cruel physiognomy as to suit the imagination of the great painter about the face of Judas Iscariot. But a different look at what Judas would have been persuaded by might make out the other profile of Judas Iscariot. He would never have anticipated that his act would lead to the most horrible persecution inflicted on his Rabbi, and that his Lord would be nailed on the cross like a brigand. The fact that he threw away the ransom money paid to him right at the seat of the high priests in the temple and the fact that on that very night he hanged himself would reveal the intensity of his grief and the uncontrollable degree of repentance which overwhelmed him. He did not want to live even for one more day. Well, what was the reason for such a virulent form of repentance? Who would have heard his version? Is it just and fair to dub Judas Iscariot as a great betrayer without knowing what he had to say about his act of identifying Jesus to the High Priests through a pre-arranged signal. If there is some element of self explanation regarding the crime committed by Judas, then I feel we are not fair to that man. But I understand that people are even happy for being unfair to Judas Iscariot. It is because our minds are blinded by the great prejudice developed against him due to the one-sided picture about him portrayed by some gospel writers. This is the theological side of a crime.

Nathu Ram Vinayak Godse, the assassin of Mahatma Gandhi made an unusually lengthy statement before the special judge Mr. Atma Charan Agarwal, ICS who tried the case — Mahatma Gandhi Assassination case. Godse perhaps would have been one of the rarest few accused who owned before court that he committed the crime. But he told the court why he did so. I had the opportunity to read the book "May it please your lordship," written by Gopal Godse who tried to make out a case for Nathuram as to why he killed the Father of the Nation. At the end of his long statement in the court Nathu Ram Godse paid reverence to Mahatma Gandhi and then said the following:

"It is a fact that in the presence of a crowd numbering 300 to 400 people I did fire shots at Gandhiji in open daylight. I did not make any attempt to run away; in fact I never entertained any idea of running away. I did not try to shoot myself. It was never my intention to do so, for, it was my ardent desire to give vent to my thoughts in an open Court. My confidence about the normal side of my action has not been shaken even by the criticism levelled against it on all sides. I have no doubt, honest writers of history will weigh my act and find the true value thereof on some day in future."

After reading the book I must tell you frankly that I was not at all convinced with Godse's justification for assassinating Mahatma Gandhi, though Godse was convinced of its justification. Finally the judge declared him to be hanged. But Godse did not challenge the sentence,

nor did he file an appeal against the sentence. Of course, he filed an appeal against a finding that he was involved in a criminal conspiracy to assassinate Gandhiji ten days prior to January 30. The Punjab High Court constituted a Full Bench to hear the arguments of that appeal. In the judgment delivered by the Full Bench of the High Court the judges paid tributes to Godse, who was only a matriculate, for the excellent English language he used. Justice Khosla, one of the judges of the Full Bench has written an article reminiscing Godse's arguments. This is what the judge said:

"The highlight of the appeal before us was the discourse delivered by Nathuram Godse in his defense. He spoke for several hours, discussing, in the first instance, the facts of the case and then the motive which had prompted him to take Mahatma Gandhi's life.....

The audience was visibly and audibly moved. There was a deep silence when he ceased speaking. Many women were in tears and men coughing and searching for their handkerchiefs. The silence was accentuated and made deeper by the sound of an occasional subdued sniff or a muffled cough..."

Before he was taken to the gallows on 15th November 1949 at the Central Jail of Ambala a customary question was put to him whether he had any last wish to be disclosed. His answer to that question is reported to be the following:

"Yes, I have a last wish. After I am hanged my dead body should only be cremated and not buried, but my ashes should not be immersed in any one of the Indian rivers because all Indian rivers are polluted with the ashes of Mahatma Gandhi. My ashes may be kept in an urn until Akahand Bharat is achieved and those ashes may then be immersed in river Indus."

Nathuram Godse never believed that what he was going to do was a crime and never repented for it later though the crime he committed was of the most superlative dimension. Any sensible man can discern from the statement made by Nathuram Godse as to how religious bigotry and misguided patriotism can transform an idealist into a murderer. I have a realisation that if those who knew Godse and his capabilities had endeavoured to re-channellise his spirit of dedication and idealism from the path of destructiveness to purposive and creative routes, perhaps Nathuram Vinayak Godse would have been an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi. Such a transformation happened in history 2000 years ago when a misguided scholarly adult called Saul became a killer and privy to killers, but was transformed into the most vibrant propagator of those ideals which he initially tried to crush into smithereens. He is later known as St. Paul. Perhaps a similar thing could have been repeated in the case of Nathuram Godse also.

I have come across two vivid but distinct portraits in one city. They were in the city of Amritsar. The first portrait was in the Memorial for Jalianwala Bagh where the portrait of Udham Singh stands adorned and illuminated at the prime place of India's most premier martyr's column. Udham Singh was the sikh youth, who was in his adolescence when Jalianwala Bagh massacre took place. Perhaps he was a descendant of one of the victims of that carnage. When he grew up into a stripling he managed to travel up to England, lived there incognito until he traced out General O'diar (who ordered the massacre of Jalianwala Bagh) and shot him dead. English police caught Udham Singh red handed, tried him and sentenced him to death. He was put to death in England. Every Indian is proud of Udham Singh and his photo in Jalianwala Bagh would electrify us. But a few furlongs away, at the Golden Temple of Amritsar, the Jathedars took us to their picture gallery. There in the martyr's column I found three portraits adorning the wall with garlands and lights. They are the portraits of Beant Singh, Balbir Singh and Kehar Singh, the three persons who were found guilty of murdering Indira Gandhi. One of them died at the spot, and the other two were sentenced to hanging and were hanged. It is for the Golden Temple governing body members to justify how the murderers of Indira Gandhi would be martyrs.

Let me deal with another side of crime. What is a crime? In a broad outlining, any violation of law which is punishable is a crime. The conventional crimes are enumerated in the Penal Code. Many newer crimes are now being created by law to meet social and economic advancements. Education is a field where the legislature must take a special look to see whether new crimes are to be created through law. When the Government is paying salary to teachers and lecturers in the educational institutions, from the public exchequer how many school managers and college managements are collecting huge amounts from teachers or lecturers at the time of their appointment. No such amount is accounted to public treasury. Practically such amounts go to the income of managers. Money is collected for giving admission to students in aided schools and colleges by calling it donation. If such donations are collected in unaided schools it is a different aspect, and I do not wish to deal with that aspect at present. But in aided schools such collections are clearly in violation of law. Such collections are immoral and unethical also. But the pity is that such things are done in the name of religious institutions, and the illegality of such collections are concealed and insulated. If such illegalities are made punishable they too become crimes. Such crimes would then be theological crimes.

When I was District and Sessions Judge I had many occasions to visit jails including central jails. I conversed with a lot of life convicts. You must know a reality that among the life convicts only two or three percentage can be said to be hard-minded criminals. A good number of life convicts told me how unfortunate they were; they are now languishing in the prison for long-long years because on one moment in his lifetime a wrong had been committed.

Some of them told me: "Why God brought that moment in my life and consequently kept me away from my home, my beloveds, my friends and my kith and kin for long-long years." One of the prisoners looked upwards and muttered: "O God, how nice it would have been if I were not at that spot when the occurrence took place."

Another person was heard blaming God for not helping him to avert the calamity. Yet another told me that if he were brought up in the manner I was brought up, most probably he would not have committed a crime which had landed him behind prison bars for the major portion of his life.

The above are some of the lamentations of life convicts and the prison walls are reverberating with the wailings of such unfortunate children of God. When we visited the cellular jail of Port Blair in Andamans we heard the gruesome tales of how the political prisoners were tortured there. We went inside some of the small cells in which many convicts were interned for decades and decades like caged birds till they died. We were also told that the crimes committed by them were waging war against the British Government. They too were treated as criminals and the woeful life they spent had been impressively portrayed by Priyadarshan in one of the most touching films called "Kalapani."

While dealing with the theology of crimes I must project the unknown and unattended side of the so called prisoners who are convicted for long term imprisonments. The innocent wife of the prisoner lives the life of a widow though her husband is alive. The children of the convict are deprived of their only breadwinner and such children suffer social boycott everywhere. In the schools such children keep away from other children because of the stigma attached to them.

The society and the law are concerned only to punish the man whom they consider to have committed the crime. The Supreme Court had once said that victimisation of the family of the convict is the weakness of our jurisprudence, that the dependents of the prisoners do not attract the attention of law. Nor does our print media echo their woes at any time. Law seems to be anxious to wipe the tears of the victims of the offences committed by criminals. Society seems anxious to see that persons who committed the offences are severely punished. It is well and good. But law and society must also see the spouse, the children and the old parents of the life convicts. The new century must turn to those unfortunate innocent victims of law enforcement. Nobody speaks for them, and therefore, nobody knows about them. This is the theology which I wished to present to you. I don't know whether this can be called theology of crimes. If such a divine word like theology cannot be dovetailed with such an unpalatable word like crime let us find out a better expression. I leave it to my listeners to suggest any other alternative in due course of time. ■

A Culture of Conferences, Competition and Conflict

Thomas Mathew, Arlington, Texas

The members of The Mar Thoma Church in U.S.A. make up a relatively small portion of the Christian populace from India. However, in many ways we are talked about and perceived as one of the leading Indian Christian denominations from India, especially in the matters of growth, structural stability and discipline. In my opinion every denomination represents a certain culture. Thus we can talk about ourselves as representing a 'Mar Thoma Culture,' the main component of which is our faith and practices. Other factors that make up ourselves are what we are and how we transact with others within the community and outside the community. As a community we also represent certain values, whether we are aware of it or not. As a community we are in the process of evolving a new culture in U.S.A., called The Mar Thoma Culture. What we transfer from one generation to the other is a sum total of our values and culture. I am attempting to point out some deficiencies in our joint effort in evolving a culture. I choose three areas in which our present culture needs some change.

Conference

We are a community of conferences. Every year we hold a lot of conferences, on a regional or national basis. We hold the Family Conference, Youth Conference, Yuvajhana Sakhyam Conference, Regional Conferences, Doctor's Conference so on and so forth. For a moment let us ask what goes on in these conferences? We travel long distances and spend a lot of time and money in holding these meetings and attending them. We have a certain style, format and structure which we have been living with for the last twenty years or so. The primary objective of the conference at the time it was begun was an annual get together, to meet and discuss our common problems and aspirations, and to see new places. Those objectives are not relevant anymore. We are living in a changing world. Our life has changed significantly since we started to have these conferences. So instead of holding these conferences for the sake of having a conference, let us ask some serious questions. What are the issues of the community today? Do we talk about these in conferences? Do we have any exchange of ideas, opinions and interaction during these conferences. We must make some fundamental changes in the format and style. Instead of having people from outside come and talk about issues that are not relevant to us, why don't we have more interactive sessions? We mix up conventions with conferences. I have attended several of our conferences. They are well conducted and managed. However, they lack defined purpose, opportunity for interaction and feed back mechanism. There is no feed-back from these conferences to the parish level or vice versa.

Competition

A second area we are extremely good at is competition. Recently I attended our parish picnic. The most interesting part of the picnic was when the competitions started, especially the tug of

war. We have a culture, which is extremely competitive. Let me give some examples. when we meet on a regional level, there is competition. Some of these are, memory verse competition, singing competition, choir competition and finally a competition to compete. Our Sunday School holds what they call national level examinations! It is held with the seriousness of SAT or some major tests that children must take with excruciating pain to get to college. There is competition for everything. This culture we live in is a culture of extreme competition. The only place that one would like to see no competition is the Church. Unfortunately that is where it is extreme. Let's ask the question, is it really worth it? Is church a place for competition? Or is it a place where people learn and practice how to cooperate, grow and see another individual as a person rather than an opponent to compete against. What values do we uphold? What values do we impart to the next generation? Do we think of the losers in these competitions? Do we even care of children who feel miserable because they are not competitive and cannot even win a prize? Do we even think about the damage it can do to the children? Are we not 'throwing the baby with bath water' in all these processes? The Church should promote ways to cooperate than to compete. It should not create the environment where there is a loser. If we do not change what we are doing now, our children will find it hard to believe that Church is a place where they can go and have some peace, where they do not have to compete with the one sitting next to them.

Conflict

Competition prepares the ground for conflict. Conflicts and confrontations have become essential parts of our parish life. There may be parishes where there are no conflicts. I thank God for them. My parish is one of them. However, I find several parishes that struggle through conflicts. Church life is reduced to a secular type of life. I do not pretend to believe that Church going people do not disagree with one another nor will they avoid conflict at all times. But, the way we handle the conflict does not go well with a Christian culture.

I would like to conclude by asking some simple questions ourselves. Do we demonstrate a true Christian culture in our parish life? Why don't we emulate some good examples either from other Churches or community around us? What example and legacy are we leaving for the next generation? Shouldn't we take these things seriously? Is Church not different from secular organizations? Where is our civility? What about our witnessing? Are competitions causing more damage than good? Should we not get rid of unhealthy competitions completely? Shouldn't we find what local Churches are doing to motivate kids to memorize verses and learn the Bible? Are we happy with the way things are going? Can each one of us make a difference in our common problems? ■

Reformed Church in America

Dr. T. M. Thomas

I attended a special event of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), a combined meeting of the annual General Synod and the celebrations for "Mission 2000: Discerning the Spirit, Engaging the World" as a preparation for the New Millennium during this Jubilee year. After presenting a short account of this event I shall give a general profile of this church. It is my belief that we must try to learn more about the churches in America, especially the ones that have common commitments and programs.

Mission 2000

The event called "Mission 2000" was held in conjunction with the General Synod at Hofstra University, New York, June 9-12 bringing together about 1200 members including 400 Synod delegates. There were a few (dozen) ecumenical representatives including me from the Mar Thoma Church. It seems that our church was invited because of our membership in National Council of Churches (NCC). I shall present some highlights of this celebrations instead of a detailed report.

In this four-day gathering, one day was set apart for working in groups, some of them going to New York City for witnessing with the support of local RCA members while other groups conducted discussion on a variety of topics and sharing experiences. In addition to it, there were "Discernment Groups", not usual in a conference. All 1200 participants were divided into about 40 groups with 30-35 members in each. Considerable time was devoted for these group meetings, one or two hours each day. The purpose was to discern the guidance of Holy Spirit in understanding God's will for the surrounding, the World. Hence group members spent much time sharing life experiences, what they are doing in the community and what else could be done as a church for the world as well as in praying. I shared with them what the Mar Thoma Church is doing in the reformed spirit of evangelism.

The Pentecost celebration on Sunday evening (Pentecost Sunday, June 11) was like one of our revival meetings with expressions of joy in praise and singing. Beautiful displays were exhibited on the stage in tune with the mood of the audience. During the day, members coming from other places were taken to local RCA churches in several buses for worship and meals with other church members. Also, being a special event several outstanding speakers were brought and they include RCA members such as Robert Schuller (TV evangelist of Crystal Cathedral, California) and Arthur Caliendo of Marble Collegiate Church in New York City as well as from other denominations, such as, Emilio Castro, former General

Secretary of WCC and James Forbes, senior pastor of Riverside church, New York City. The meeting was an enriching experience for me. Since I learned much about RCA—let me give you a profile of their church.

RCA: A Profile

While considering the governing practices, various churches can be brought under three categories. The episcopal system is the one ruled by the bishop, the examples being Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist and others. At the other extreme is the congregational type and the examples are Baptists, United Church of Christ (known as Congregational) and Pentecostal independent churches. A third practice is the presbyterian system which has a representative form of government drawn from pastors, elders, deacons etc. and the examples are Presbyterian and reformed churches. The Mar Thoma Church follows an episcopal system while giving an important voice for laity in decision-making.

Reformed Church in America is one of the founding members of the World Council of Churches along with the Mar Thoma Church as well as the National Council of Churches—USA. The Mar Thoma church became a member of NCC two years ago and it is a great achievement of our church in ecumenical relations. Also, RCA is a member of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches which is a gathering of 138 Reformed denominations from around the world.

RCA has a long history beginning with the Reformation of the 16th century initiated by Martin Luther and John Calvin. For long it was the Dutch Reformed Church following the writings of John Calvin, 1509-1564, an outstanding Biblical preacher in Geneva who wrote "The Institutes of Christian Religion". People from Netherlands came to America and established a Dutch colony even before the English landed in Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1620. For a while New York City was known as New Amsterdam Colony of the Dutch (at the beginning of the 17th century). The Dutch language was used for worship and prospective ministers were required to go to Netherlands for training. The language was changed to English after more than one century in 1764. The Reformed Church became independent from the Dutch in 1867 when it used the name Reformed Church in America. The new immigrants coming from the Netherlands during the 19th century settled in Midwest, especially Michigan and Iowa, as members of RCA. Most of the RCA members I met are from the Midwest, if not from the New York area.

(Continued on page 23)

Youth Ministry: Some Fragmented Observations

Rev. M. O. Oommen, Jr.

A paper presented at the Regional Clergy Conference held at Dallas on November 5, 1999

Introduction and Definition

The occupations, such as the clergy, medicine and law have provided our major examples of the relations of commitment, theory, and technical or professional skill to social action. They are now the scenes of searching and anxious reappraisal of their purpose and form for our time and future. A lot of labor has to be done for this reappraisal, and this reappraisal should welcome the increasing attention by the social scientists, historians, psychologists, and theologians to the way in which particular world views or faiths are expressed in the occupational or professional structures of our major institutions and how reorientation toward life and work takes place in a rapidly changing world. Due to our Diocesan Bishop's reappraisal of theologizing and deepest missiological and personal convictions, His Lordship has initiated a youth ministry over here in this diocese/land.

The educational institutions of our time, no more officially, assume an obligation to improve its students understanding of religion and spirituality just as it assumes the obligation of improving secular understanding. Here lies one of the major challenges of youth ministry. One of the aims of this ministry is to bridge religiosity, spirituality, higher education and learning in a coherent, subjective manner. Therefore youth ministry is an important meaningful model of pastoral concern and of a significant reinterpretation of the meaning of the gospel. We need to wait and see what patterns of youth ministry emerge or will emerge and what factors and events influence their development and meaning.

Problems and Crisis

Some critics (observers) have noted a lack of specificity in youth ministerial duties. They say that a person coming to a new position has little idea of what is expected of him, and that little agreement exists among others of what he is to do. In short, they say the youth ministry has a vague job description. The problem of establishing guidelines, making contacts, and frequent necessity of having to invest considerable time before results begin to show—all these factors contribute, no doubt—to instability among first practitioners. The very intrepidity associated with “pioneers” probably signifies a reduced need for the security of tenure and steady career. We are not surprised if the first ones in may be quick to get out. Therefore one of the crises

of this ministry is particularly manifest in its confused professional expectations, and poverty of the churches' provisions for the training and research.

The role of Mar Thoma Youth Chaplain placed as it is between eastern oriental church, her theology and youth and their milieu in the west and their spirituality, might be viewed as a vulnerable candidate for “role conflict” a situation in which contradictory demands meet. Ecclesiastical hierarchy could hold certain expectations of chaplain and youths and also certain opposing expectations. Youth chaplain recognizing the legitimacy of both sets of expectations, but unable to conform to both, would experience the result as conflict. Whoever occupied the role of youth chaplain would be subject to this experience. Therefore chaplain should equip himself with sound theological grounding with ministerial perceptions in a philosophical framework.

Youth chaplain may variously suffer from the indifferent reactions of some leaders (self-styled) of laity and some local clergy. But this indifference arises out of lack of understanding of ministry and mission; in other words, indifference is a problem related to the church's understanding of its mission.

Path of Institution

Occupations which are ambiguous and whose practitioners feel less than committed to remain in them, can be said to be poorly institutionalized. Institutionalization in this sense is the degree to which positions are socially structured, a process that typically is thought to consist of two empirically related but analytically distinct components. First is the question of how widely understood are the expectations relevant to the position, expectations held both by the occupants and by others who interact with occupants. Second is the degree to which these expectations are taken seriously, that is, the degree to which partners to the interaction are committed to the fulfillment of the expectations.

To assert that the youth ministry is poorly institutionalized, then, is to suggest that:

1. Expectations of what the youth chaplain shall do are not shared to any degree.
2. Commitment to whatever are the expectations is not great, including the expectation that the youth ministry is or should be a long-term career.

Vagueness and low career commitment are thus seen not only as casually related to each other but as related indications that the youth ministry is not yet institutionalized. Institutionalized patterns of activities imply the substitutability of persons but the non-substitutability of expectations. That is to say, if a pattern of behavior is sufficiently "set" then various persons may enter, learn and conform to the expectations and leave the arena without noticeably altering its normative structure. Similarly, attempts to alter the normative structure will meet with resistance. This of course is not to deny that individuals may effect change or that change may in fact occur. But an "institution" is not simply a creation of the persons who happen to be active in it now, nor is it infinitely malleable or malleable without consequences. An institution involves persons but is itself the amalgam of procedures they follow and uphold as right. A pattern of activity, to the degree it is institutionalized, is therefore marked by shared expectations and commitment to them. However, differentiation of the role of youth chaplain will clearly be occurred. The youth ministry will claim to be moving in the direction of distinctive set of expectations. As the amount and specialized nature of the youth chaplain's education increase, such differentiation can be expected to continue.

Work of a Youth Chaplain

Youth ministry may be evolving a unifying philosophy of its task. What is the work of a youth chaplain?

- To become acquainted with the students/youths
- To establish close personal relations with them
- To introduce them to each other, to the members and ecclesiastical leaders of the church

- To help them in their intellectual difficulties, religious doubts, and trying Christian experiences
- To stimulate them in their best endeavor in their academic work
- To advise and counsel them
- To minister them in sickness and other emotional stress
- To bring them the claims of Christ in their lives
- To facilitate and cultivate in them a spirit of cooperation, fellowship, service and action
- To lead formal and informal study groups in religious/ethical/theological topics and scripture
- To help them to organize religious programs
- To advance ecumenical spirit and understanding
- To discover in them capacity for the work of the ministry

By Way of Conclusion

But who can pursue them all successfully and equally well and simultaneously? Obviously decisions have to be made to decrease attention in one place in order to increase it in another. Such decisions when they occur are made in terms of values, an establishment of priorities, and thus a way of making decisions according to some coherent plan. Freedom from lay evaluation and control and expectation that the chaplaincy is a terminal occupation will help to be more effective, courageous and meaningful.

Let me conclude by a saying that "What is a decrease in ambiguity is an increase in limitation." Therefore chaplaincy must be preserved in a role that is necessarily ambiguous. ■

Reformed Church in America – *Cont'd from page 21*

There are about 200 thousand members of RCA in nearly one thousand congregations in the United States and Canada. There are other reformed denominations in America, especially the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) with about the same population. Each congregation is governed by pastors, elders and deacons known by the name consistory, comparable to our executive committee. Regional governing bodies are called classes (20 to 25 congregations in the classes) and regional synod at the next level (8 synods). The highest representative body of the church is called the General Synod which meets once every year and the delegates to this body are elected from the classes, not from each congregation as we do in the Mar Thoma Church for Sabha Mandalam.

I shall conclude by mentioning some differences and similarities. While our church is Episcopal, the RCA is

Presbyterian in the organization. Another difference is in the style of worship. Along with other Protestant denominations RCA worship focuses on the pulpit with its sermon and some prayers of people gathered. Being an Eastern Orthodox Church, our church focuses on the altar with a written liturgy repeated every Sunday. The first RCA worship which I attended in New York a few days ago seems to be one of the typical Protestant worship with which I am familiar. The major similarity in the two denominations is th emphasis placed on the mission program. RCA has many mission centers world-wide comparable to the Ashrams of the Mar Thoma Church in India. Both denominations initiate several outreach activities responding to the needs of the community. In my view, our new diocese in North America must give more attention to proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ in the surroundings that we are in. ■

VIA MALAYSIA TO INDIA

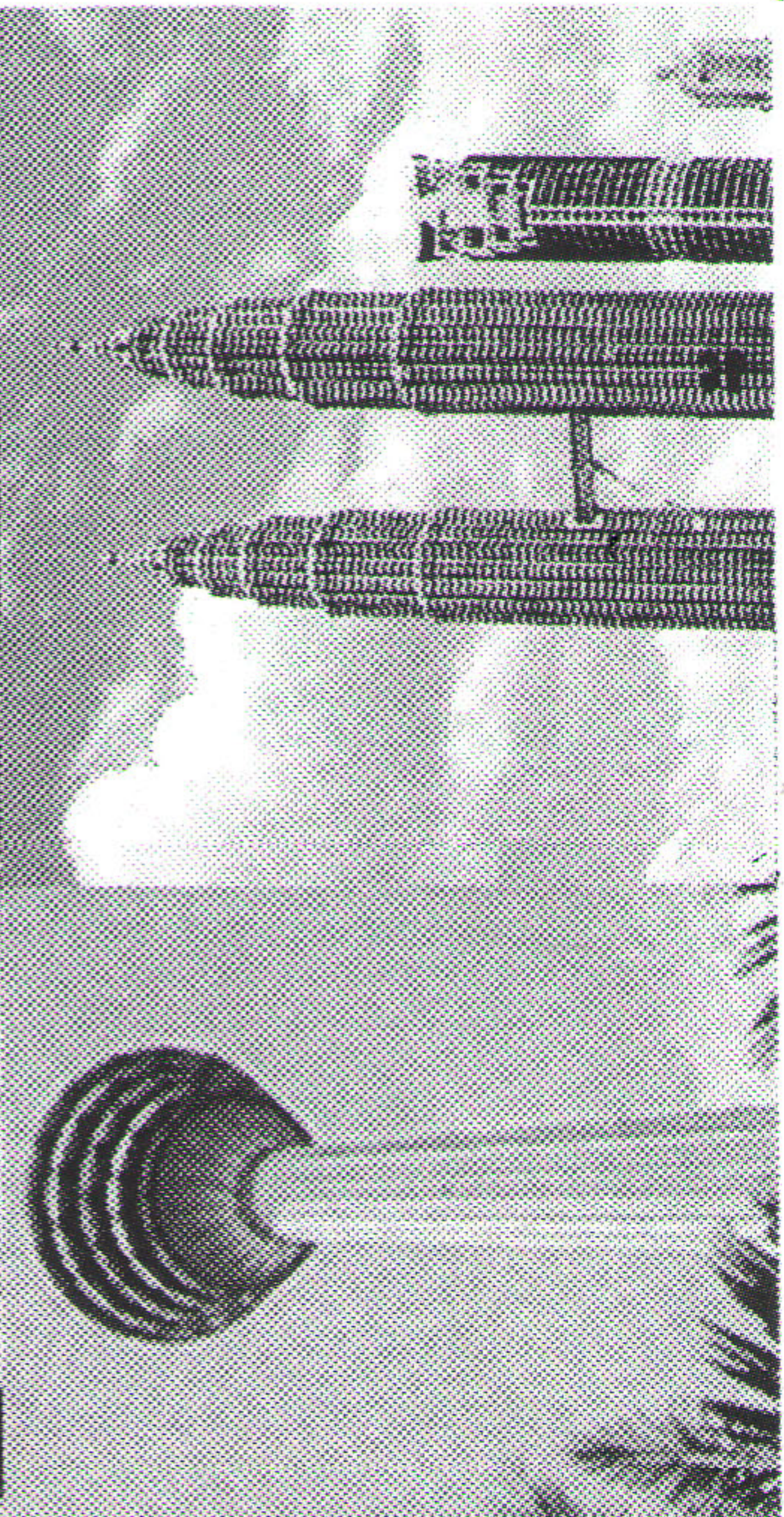
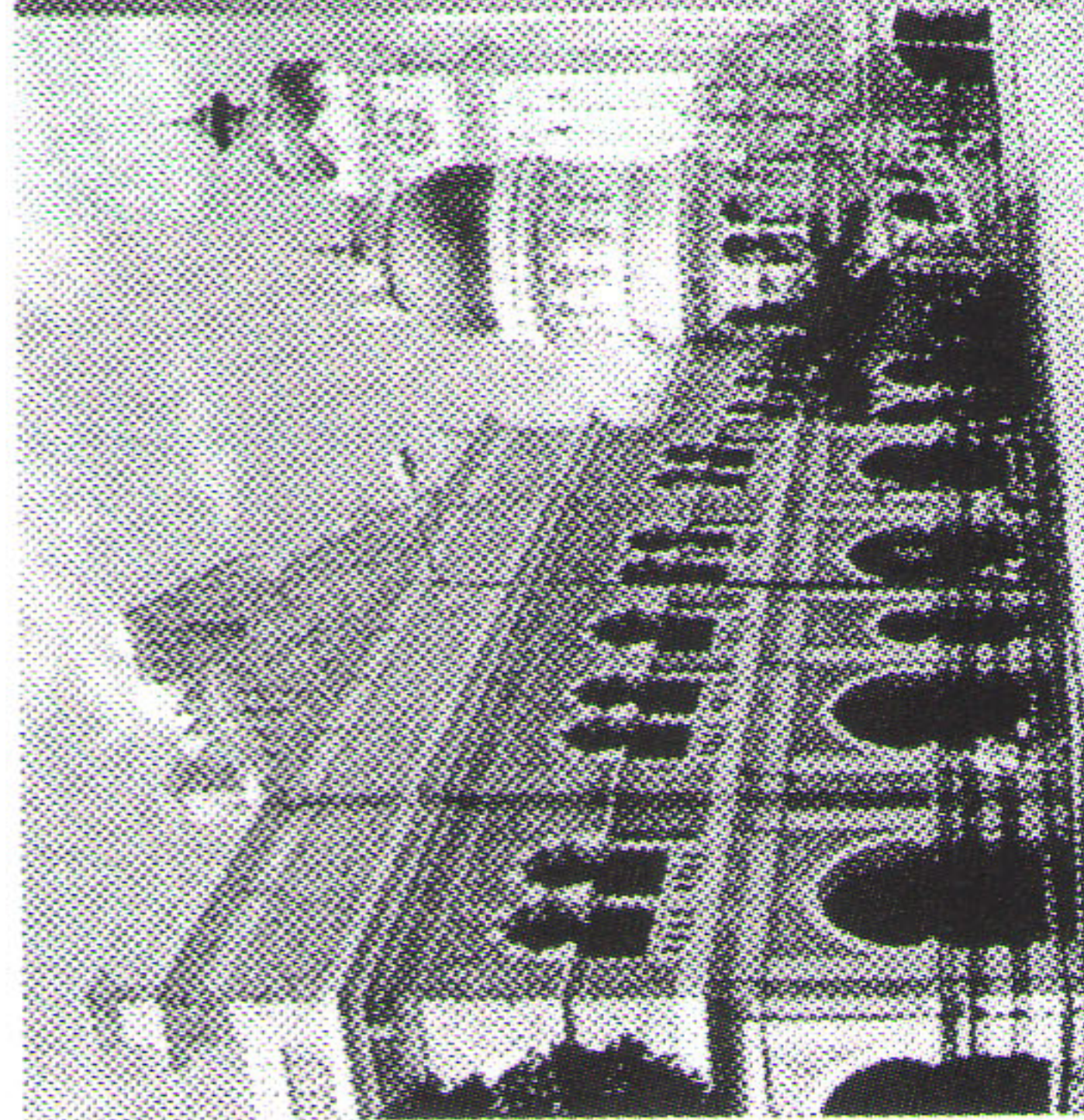
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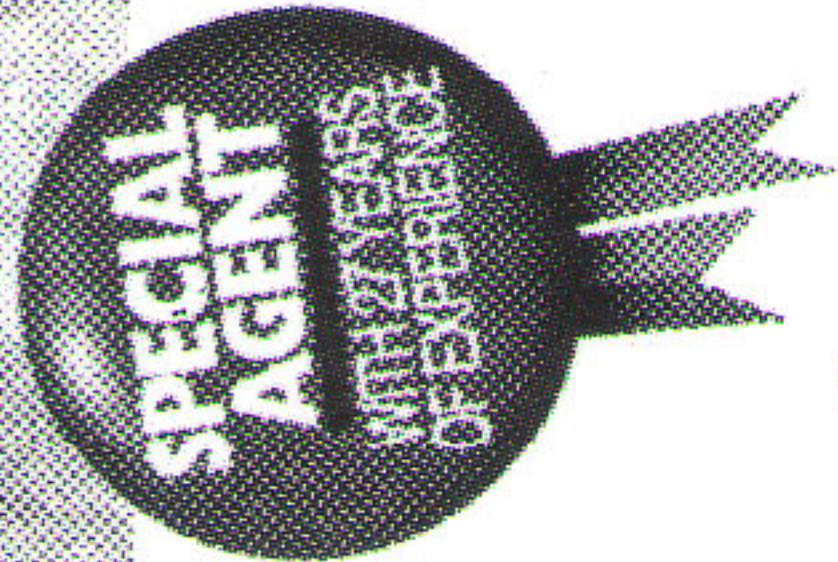
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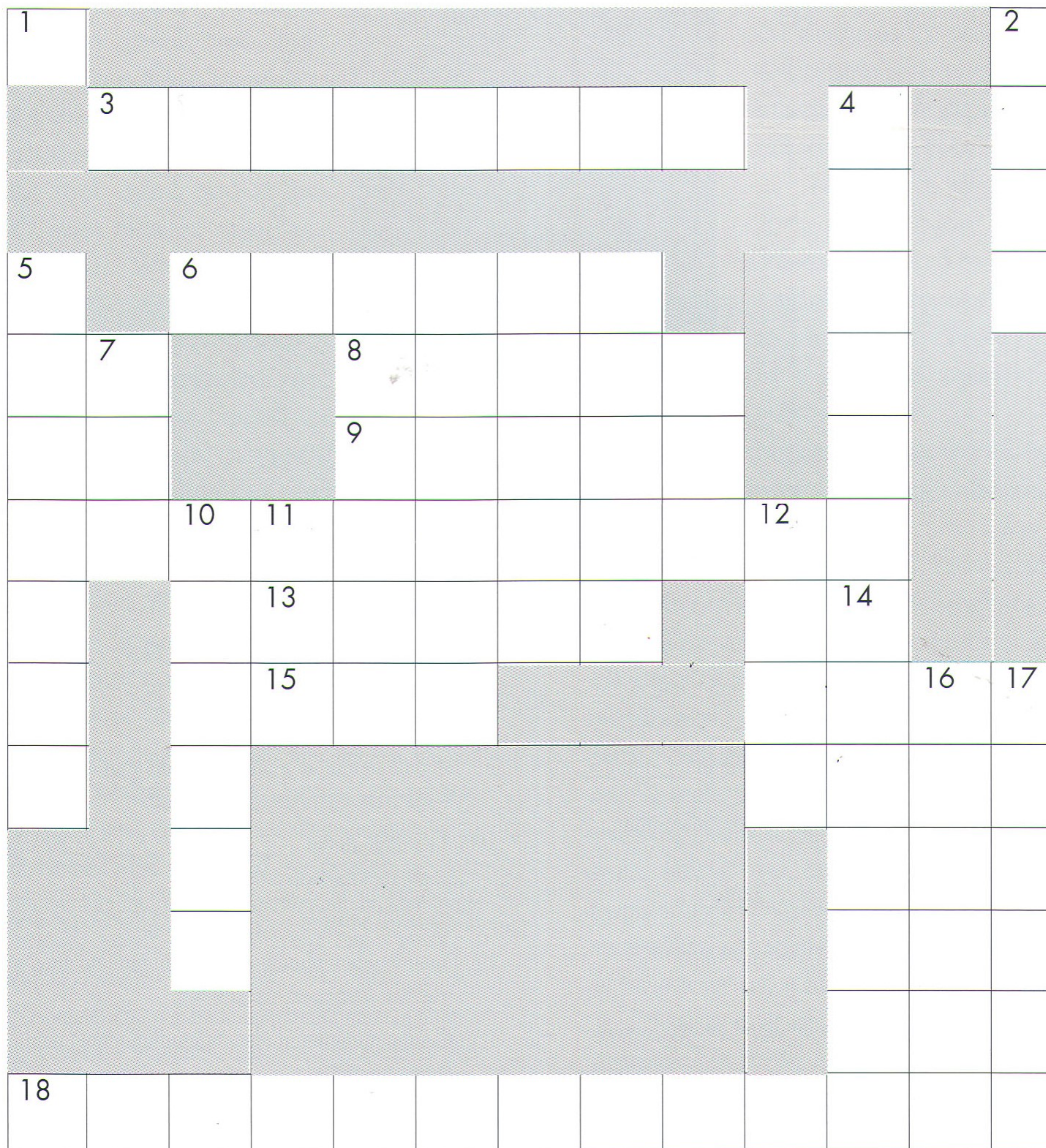
SHIP STUDIOS

BIBLE CROSS WORD PUZZLE

AS IN THE NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

(based on Epistle of James)

Mrs. Jessy Kurien (New York)



Across

1. The testing of your faith develops _____.
3. Mercy triumphs over _____.
6. Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by _____, is dead.
8. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without _____ is dead.
9. Name the prostitute considered righteous for what she did.
11. Which is a small part of the body that makes great boasts?
13. Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an _____ of God.
15. Whose perseverance is mentioned in this epistle?
18. _____ who sow in peace, raise a harvest of righteousness.

Down

2. He who doubts is like a _____ of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.
4. Epistle of James was written to _____ tribes scattered among the nations.
5. He was called God's friend who?
7. Desire has conceived and it gives birth to _____.
10. Ships are steered by a very small _____.
12. The tongue also is a _____, a world of evil among the parts of the body.
14. _____ yourselves before the Lord and He will lift you up.
16. Who was the prophet who prayed and it didn't rain on the land for three and half years and when he prayed for rain, the heavens gave rain?
17. _____ of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

ATTENTION ALL CONTESTANTS!!!

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

BIBLE WORD SEARCH

AS IN THE NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION
(based on the letters I Peter and II Peter)

Mrs. Jessy Kurien (New York)

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

- Do not conform the evil desires you had when you lived in _____.
- You were redeemed from the empty way of life with the precious _____ of Christ.
- Like new born babies, crave pure _____ milk.
- You, like living stones are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy _____.
- You are a _____ people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.
- Christ himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might _____ to sins and live for righteousness.
- _____ obeyed Abraham and called him her master.
- God waited patiently in the days of _____ while the ark was being built.
- If you suffer as a christian, do not be _____, but praise God that you bear that name.
- The Elders be _____ of God's flock that is under their care, serving as overseers.
- Cast all your _____ on God because He cares for you.
- Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring _____ looking for someone to devour.
- God condemned the cities of Sodom and _____ by burning them to ashes.
- The Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the _____.
- Who is the father of Balaam?
- Balaam was rebuked for his wrong doing by a _____.
- The day of the Lord will come like a _____.

Bible Word Search Finders (October 2000)

- Ansu Koshy
- Siby David
- Melanie Zacharia
- Anika Sara Chacko
- Christopher George Chacko
- Jay Mathew
- Ansu Andrews
- Kunjamma Thomas

Bible Cross-Word Puzzle Winners (October 2000)

- Ansu Koshy
- Siby David
- Melanie Zacharia
- Anika Sara Chacko
- Christopher George Chacko
- Jay Mathew
- Ansu Andrews
- Kunjamma Thomas

DEADLINE FOR ANSWERS March 15, 2001

Reflections on the Role Of Women As A Spiritual Leader In The New Millennium

Dr. Elsy Mathew, Los Angeles

Those three days in Bishop Mason Retreat Center, Wichita Trail, Flower Mound, Texas, were three days of peace, joy and happiness. Joy, joy, joy! The full joy of His presence, was a heavenly experience transmitting a thrill into our bodies. It was a chill through our minds, a joy that blended our whole life, soul, mind, and spirit. Sixty-two souls, 62 chosen ones blended together, praising the glory of Almighty Lord! What a splendid and marvelous experience!

The night of intercessory prayer and witnessing, that silent night, a night of pure joy, unalloyed joy, heavenly song lit up on everyone's lips created a legacy of divine glory, singing heart, peaceful mind, joyful faces, tears of joy and lamentations. A joy of descending thoughts poured from above. Heavenly doors opened. Angels flowing in "That is the full joy of thy presence." The melody and rhythm of prayer opened the heavenly realm pouring out showers of blessings to all of us with divine experiences. This was a real Pentecostal experience leading to witnessing of 62 souls from different parts of the United States, to bring light to every parish, a day of peace, serenity, living as with vigor, vitality, and abundant energy blended with the power of the Holy Spirit. Candle lighting performed by Sevika Sanghom members, one from each parish, was symbolic of our great role to enlighten others out of darkness, and the need to put all of our burdens on the cross. Matthew 11:28 "Come to me, all ye laboring and burdened and I will refresh you." What a great experience, a period of renewal and reconciliation with God. A good leader should have a vision of the Kingdom of God, commitment, perfect health, goal directedness and resourcefulness. So also, prayerful life, commitment, good judgment, and willingness to transfer our visions to others. Finally, a leader should be able to inspire others.

The leadership training was excellent and reminded us that a real leader is a servant with humility, compassion, empathy, willingness to listen to others, spiritually oriented, not a leader competing for power and position.

Transformational leaders require: 1) Complete surrender to God; 2) Listening to others to recognize their needs; 3) Live with cooperation not competition; 4) Not afraid of confrontations; 5) Constantly reminded that we work for God's purpose; 6) Private time everyday for spiritual life in the midst of a busy work schedule.

Let us pray to have leaders in our parishes who are touched by God, spiritually oriented leaders with empathy, compassion and those who encourage others to excel. Transformational leaders can bring a radical change within our community who give the message of working solely for the divine purpose, to glorify and honor our master who owns this universe with all its creations. Trust is another important factor which we need in a good leader. A leader should take time for self evaluation and for communication with other members. A leader should be willing to accept criticism and also should be a "walk the talk" role model.



This retreat is the beginning of a great revival which is going to happen within our parishes through the divine touch of God in our lives. I saw the faith, dedication, commitment of the children of God, who shared their life experiences, their sufferings and the miraculous work of God in their lives.

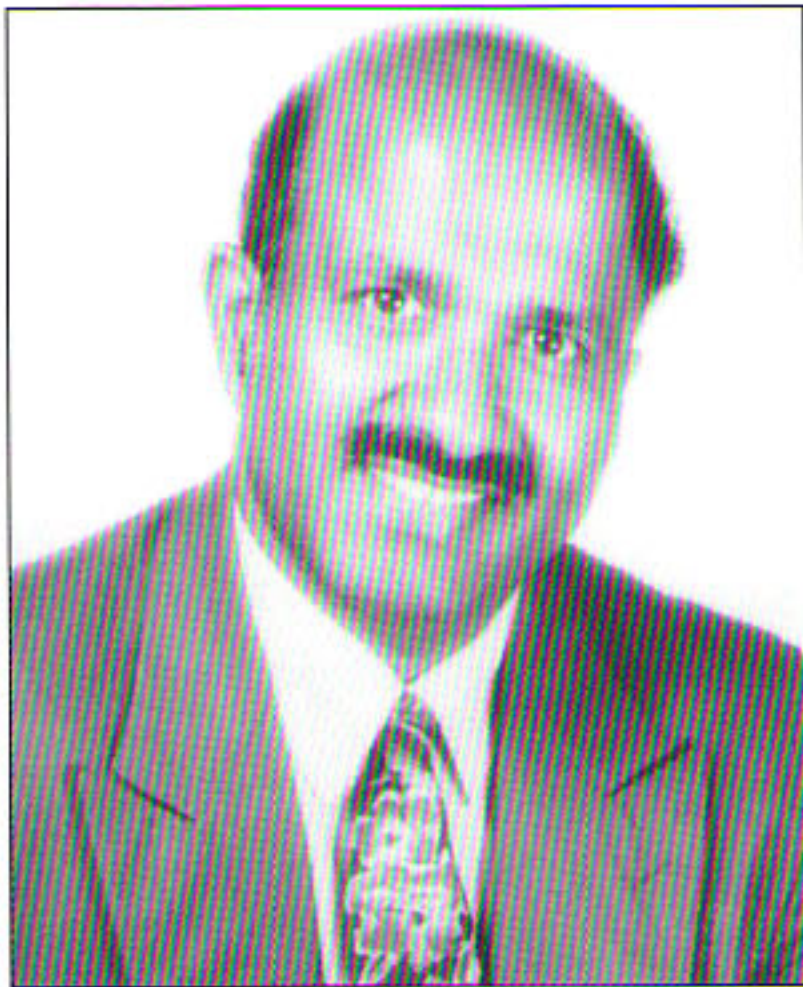
Fellowship among believers with a common goal, the kingdom of God, leads us to *Shared Visions*. Powered by a Common Caring People have a similar picture of the vision; People are committed to one another; People are connected, bound together by a common aspiration; People are excited; It is growing.

"System thinking and shared visions reinforce this underlying shift of mind towards creating rather than just reacting."

During our retreat I felt like, I was having a vacation in Kerala with south Indian breakfast of Iddaly, Sambar and chutney served by our extremely friendly Sevika Sanghom members from Texas. Their hospitality and kindness is beyond my words to express. Our Diocesan Secretary Mrs. Elizabeth John was everywhere with lots of enthusiasm, vigor, taking care of everyone who came from other states. My five friends and I from Los Angeles who attended the retreat really felt at home. I had mixed feelings when I went to Texas with my friends. Our thoughts were, of course, that we could have some fun of our own away from our family. Moreover, it is an opportunity to meet other Sevika Sanghom members from other states. But it turned out to be a totally different experience for all of us which we enjoyed with the abundant mercy of God.

This retreat reminded me about the need for leaders to be grounded in faith, motivated by love, transformed to speak of the glory of God and engaged to reconciliation. The Love of Christ urges us to reconcile. We are called by God as ministers of the new covenant and the core of that leadership is God's Grace. We are living letters written not with ink but with spirit. I hope all mothers and our Sevika Sanghom members will actively take part in our parish activities focusing on, what can I do as a mother, wife, grandmother, as a Christian woman to enrich the kingdom of God and how can I glorify God through my day to day life encouraging fellow beings, sharing and caring so that we can change the focus from being self-centered, from me and them to one single issue "The Kingdom of God." Let us surrender ourselves completely to God and let our God carry all of our worries and burdens. It will definitely free us from worldly issues which are not really issues but "false issues." Wake up, listen to the gospel of God and act accordingly to his voice, which leads us to salvation.

I would like to praise God Almighty for this great privilege, bestowed upon my friends and me from Los Angeles Sevika Sanghom, for experiencing His presence and blessings with fellow Sevika Sanghom members from other parishes. Our Diocesan Executive committee members should be commended, for a job well done. I am anxiously waiting for my next trip to Houston. ■



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DIOCESAN/PARISH NEWS

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE MAR THOMA CONGREGATION IN GERMANY



Congregation Members with Diocesan Bishop after forming the Congregation.

It is with great pride that I put forward the origin and history of the Mar Thoma Congregation in Germany. I presume many a member of the diocese of North America and Europe knows little about the existence of such a congregation, perhaps the smallest in the diocese.

The origin of the Marthomites in an organized form goes back to the year 1989. It was during the visit of the present diocesan bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus to Germany, that we felt the need to get together in an organized form. To our luck Rev. Dr. R. C. Thomas happened to be in Germany for higher studies. As the number of Mar Thoma families were limited, we decided to form a Forum with other denominations of protestant churches of Kerala, like CSI and St. Evangelical Church. With the consent of (Late) The Most Rev. Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan and Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus we organized a forum with the name—Indian Protestant Forum in Germany under the leadership and guidance of Rev. Dr. R. C. Thomas.

In later years, during the subsequent visits of Zacharias Thirumeni, he could establish cordial relations with the church of Essen. It is an independent Westfalen Church and its President in those days was Rev. Glade. The relationship between the two great churches developed to that extent, that priests of the two churches were mutually changed. Under this mutual exchange program came Rev. Skaria Abraham to Germany as a parish priest to Essen.

Due to these developments it was inevitable for the Mar Thoma Church to have its own Congregation in Germany so that the relationship between the Mar Thoma Church and the Church of Essen could be strengthened further. Again, during the visit of Zacharias Thirumeni the first steps were taken to

form a congregation. Since 1998 we have a Mar Thoma Congregation and the first parish priest was Rev. Skaria Abraham. After his departure from Germany, Rev. Varghese Thomas from London is appointed to look after the interests of the Congregation.

The Congregation has about 20 families as its members, scattered all over Germany. Divine services, are held once in three months, in a rotation principle, in one of the cities where the members are concentrated. It is no small task for the members to drive more than 300 Kms in one direction to take part in a divine service. So, the belief and

faith in which one is brought up is kept alive. Besides, the congregation is also active in human welfare works by helping the needy in Kerala or elsewhere. The future of the Congregation after the present generation is a dilemma. As in most other Western countries, here too, the second generation live in a multicultural society. In Germany it is comparatively



Parish Members with Rev. Abraham Skaria at his departure.

more than elsewhere, as the Indian population is much less, hence they have only the alternative to mingle with the Germans. But we hope! Tomorrow is not ours, it is in His hands, let Him guide us—they too.

We, the members of the Mar Thoma Congregation in Germany would be very happy if others from our diocese encourage us with moral support. One may visit us, join us during our family meetings. We, the small Mar Thoma Congregation in Germany even look forward to hold a diocesan Conference in Germany.

Vaniethu Abraham

MASS MARRIAGE CEREMONY AT SANTHIGIRI HOSTED BY THE DIOCESAN SEVIKA SANGHOM



Zacharias Thirumeni conducting the marriage ceremony.

It is with a sense of deep gratitude to the Almighty that I report about one of the most important projects ever undertaken by the Diocesan Sevika Sanghom of the North America & Europe Diocese of the Mar Thoma Church.



Zacharias Thirumeni and K. G. Joseph Achen conducting the marriage ceremony.

With the cooperation and support of our various vicars and parish members, our Sevika Sanghom members raised about



Zacharias Thirumeni and Mrs. Lilly Simon presenting the Wedding Saree and Cash to the newly weds.

\$40,000.00 and shared it with 39 couples of different religious faiths in a mass marriage at Santhigiri Ashram on



Hon. George Eden M.P., speaking at the Public Meeting.

Sitting from left to right: Smt. Sajita Siddique, District Panchayat President; Hon. Mohammed Ali, M.L.A., Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Diocesan Bishop; Mrs. Alexi George, Sevika Sanghom Secretary; Mrs. Elizabeth John, Diocesan Sevika Sanghom Secretary; Mrs. Lilly Simon, Diocesan Sevika Sanghom Treasurer and Rev. K. G. Joseph, Director of Santhigiri.

December 16, 2000. These were poor men and women who do not have anyone to help them financially or make decisions for them. Besides our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, 20 vicars from different parishes and many distinguished guests and local dignitaries were present at the occasion. Zacharias Thirumeni conducted two marriages. The marriage ceremony was followed by a public meeting.



Zacharias Thirumeni inaugurating the Mass Marriage fund raising. From left to right: Annamma Mathews, Leelamma Chacko, Mariamma Abraham, Nirmala Abraham, Lilly Simon, Dr. George Zachariah and Rev. Jiji Mathew.

Rev. K. G. Joseph (Director of Santhigiri), welcomed everybody in the meeting. Mr. George Eden, (M.P. of Ernakalam) in his inaugural speech appreciated the Mar Thoma Community and the Sevika Sanghom for taking initiative for this mission project. Mr. Mohammed Ali, M.L.A. of Alwaye distributed the money and Sari to 39 Couples. Felicitations were given by Smt. Sajita Siddique, District Panchayat president, Mrs. Lilly Simon, Treasurer, Diocesan Sevika Sanghom, Mrs. Alexi George, Secretary, Sevika Sanghom, Tiruvalla. The meeting came to a close with



The Young Couples with the Diocesan Bishop The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus and the Sevika Sanghom representatives from our diocese.

the Vote of thanks by Mrs. Elizabeth John, Secretary, Diocesan Sevika Sanghom and prayer by Rev. K. T. Alexander. Almost 600 people attended and lunch was served.

God's abundant grace has made this project a big success and a real blessing. Special thanks to our Thirumeni for his spiritual support, Rev. Jiji Mathews, Vice President Diocesan Sevika Sanghom for bringing up this project with prayer and for his encouragement, Rev. K G. Joseph, Sicily

Kochamma and kids for their sincere efforts and hardwork for arranging this program and by making it really happen.

On behalf of Diocesan Sevika Sanghom and the Committee, we express our thanks to all the Sevika Sanghom members, the Vicars and their Parishes for their sincere support and valuable donations to make this project a reality.

Elizabeth John, Diocesan Sevika Sanghom Secretary



With the newly weds.

WORLD SUNDAY SCHOOL DAY AND WALK-A-THON 2000 CELEBRATION, HOUSTON, TEXAS

The World Sunday School Day was celebrated and the Walk-a-thon was held at Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, Stafford sponsored by both Trinity and Immanuel Mar Thoma Sunday Schools. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa was the chief guest. Mr. Leonard Scarcella, the Honorable Mayor of the City of Stafford was the Keynote Speaker.



The Sunday School children from Trinity and Immanuel Sunday School who received the awards for raising the maximum amount for the Walk-a-Thon fundraising project with Zacharias Thirumeni, Mr. Leonard Scarcella (Mayor of the City of Stafford), the Achens and Mr. T. A. Mathew, the Diocesan Sunday School Secretary on November 4, 2000.

A Walk-a-thon program was also held before the Worship service and the public meeting. About 100 children participated in the Walk-a-thon program. The money raised by the children will be used to help the poor and needy children in our community and also children in India.

World Sunday School Day Worship Service was led by Zacharias Thirumeru and assisted by Rev. T. I. Joseph, Rev. A.T. Philip, Rev. C. Joseph, Mr. Jojy Jacob, Mrs. Liji George, Miss Ancy Kurian, and Miss Shane Ninan.

During the public meeting, Mr. Ajit Chirayil welcomed all the guests and members to the meeting.



Sunday School Children from Trinity MTC Sunday School, Houston singing during the World Sunday School Day celebration.

Mr. Jojy Jacob read the proclamation from Mr. Lee P. Brown, the honorable Mayor of the City of Houston, declaring November 4th as Mar Thoma Sunday School Day in Houston and Miss Ancy Kurian read the greetings from the Governor of the State of Texas, Mr George W. Bush during the meeting. In his message Zacharias Thirumeni, the chief guest told the audience that children all over the world go through various kinds of crises, and we need to pray for the children all over the world as we celebrate the World Sunday School Day. He spoke of when Jesus was a child, He had to go through so many problems and He was a refugee in Egypt because of the threat by King Herod. All modern children have to go through a lot of threats to their lives by the evil forces of the world. He also said that we must fix our eyes on Jesus and Jesus can give us life.

Mr. Leonard Scarcella, the Mayor of the City of Stafford in his keynote address emphasized the importance of Sunday School in children's life, and he reminded the audience about his fond memories of Sunday School when he was a young boy. He told the children to take special interest in the Sunday School activities and learn the word of God when they are young.

Sunday School children from both Sunday Schools sang beautiful songs. Mr. T. A. Mathew, the Diocesan Sunday School Secretary introduced the Sunday School children and teachers who raised the most money for the Walk-a-thon and the following children received awards from the Diocesan Bishop:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 1) Titus Joseph—Trinity, Houston | \$500 |
| 2) Shane Ninan—Trinity, Houston | \$270 |
| 3) Jennifer Chacko—Trinity, Houston | \$201 |
| 4) Reuben Jacob—Trinity, Houston | \$150 |
| 5) Blesson Philip—Immanuel, Houston | \$128 |
| 6) Tobin Thomas—Immanuel, Houston | \$112 |

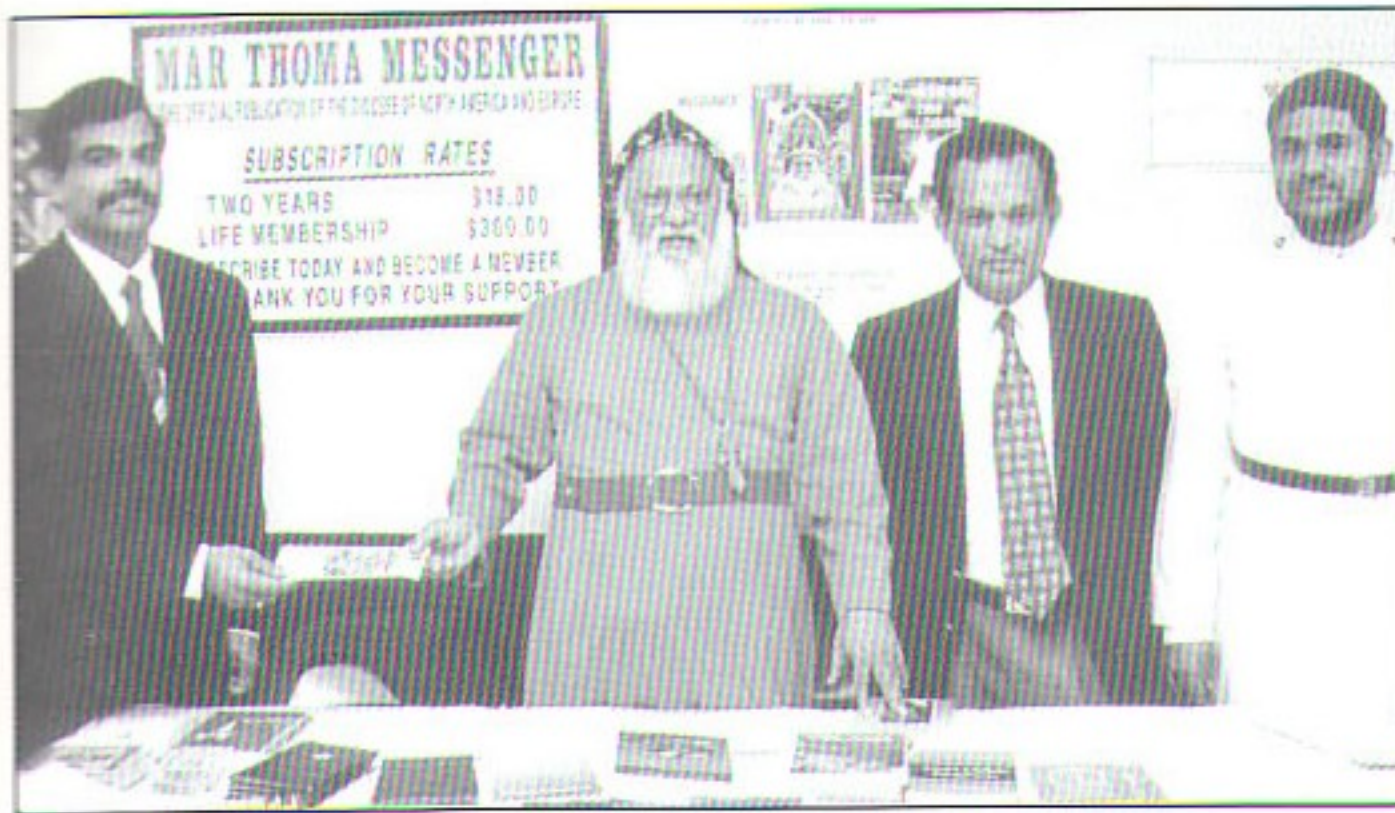
Mrs. Liji George proposed the vote of thanks and refreshments were served to all who attended the meeting. Miss Leny Varghese and Miss Christine Thomas served as MC's for the meeting.

T. A. Mathew
Diocesan Sunday School Secretary

MILLENNIUM CELEBRATIONS—TRINITY/IMMANUEL MAR THOMA PARISHES, HOUSTON



Sunday School Children singing during the Millennium Celebrations in Houston on November 25, 2000.



Mr. Thomas Thyparambil receiving an application form for the Mar Thoma Visa Card from Zacharias Thirumeni during the Millennium Celebrations at Trinity Mar Thoma Church, Houston at the Mar Thoma Messenger booth, on November 25, 2000.

Celebrations are an integral part of human social life. Celebrations done in the true spirit will help transform the celebrants, if not it will turn out to be mere entertainment. Celebrations usually keep the celebrants in high spirits, help reflect on the self, help to strengthen personal relationships through coming together, enabling to move ahead with a renewed vision of the future. This vision of newness comes relevant especially when we confront a time which marks the turn of a century. Here comes the relevance of millennium celebrations.

Under the directive of the Diocese, a millennium celebration was jointly organized by the Trinity and Immanuel Mar Thoma Parishes of Houston. The celebrations were held on Friday and Saturday, November 24-25, 2000. Friday's event was an Evening Retreat hosted by the Immanuel Parish. The highlight of the retreat was a message from Zacharias Thirumeni, our Diocesan Bishop, which followed a brief worship and prayer. Songs rendered by the Joint Choir added attraction to the program.

Saturday's program hosted by the Trinity parish featured a Thanksgiving service, cultural presentations and a Millennium banquet. The Thanksgiving service began with worship, followed by a general meeting. The meeting began with the opening hymn 'To God be the glory...' Rev. C. Joseph, in his introductory remarks, acknowledged the cooperation and prayerful effort of members of both parishes in organizing the millennium celebrations. He said it was time to share the joy of fellowship, a time for meaningful interaction for our Christian brethren. The meeting was blessed by



Mrs. Valsa Mathew receiving a CD of Shanthigatha from Zacharias Thirumeni, when Thirumeni inaugurated the Mar Thoma Messenger and the Mar Thoma Literature Society Booth in Houston, during the Millennium Celebrations on Saturday, November 25, 2000.



Adult Choir (Trinity MTC Houston) singing during the Millennium Celebrations on Saturday, November 25, 2000.

the presence of Zacharias Thirumeni. Thirumeni, in his keynote address, reminded the audience of the importance of a self-introspection especially at the time of the close of the year. He said the celebration was meant to instill a sense of repentance, reconciliation and newness so that the feeling of oneness in Christ is fully experienced. Rev. T. I. Joseph, Rev. A. T. Philip and Rev. M.O. Oommen Jr. greeted the audience through their felicitation messages. Mr. Raju Thomas, the Trinity parish Secretary, welcomed the guests and the celebrants and Mr. P. M. Jacob, the Immanuel parish Secretary, cast the vote of thanks.

Then followed the cultural programs which was a feast for the eyes and ears. There were solo and group performances from both parishes. Candle Dance and group songs served to display talents and convey messages. Ms. Donna Varkey from IMTC stilled the audience with her melodious voice. A pantomime presented by the Trinity Sunday School students was an excellent piece of stage display noted for creativity and lucidity. Adult Choir and Youth Choir of both parishes rendered beautiful choruses. A skit presented by the Trinity Yuvajana Sakhyam members led by Mr. Mathews Chandapillai was a pointer to the dwindling of social values, particularly the creeping in of avariciousness—a canker worm eating in to the very fabric of our Christian society.

The program ended with closing remarks by Rev. C. Joseph and prayer and Benediction by Thirumeni. All the celebrants were then treated to a sumptuous dinner.

Raju Thomas, Secretary, TMT, Houston

ST. PETER'S MAR THOMA CHURCH, NEW JERSEY

The St. Peter's Mar Thoma Church, Teaneck, New Jersey, celebrated, its parish day on October 29th Sunday immediately after the Holy Communion Service. The Chief guest was Rev. Fr. Thomas Tharayil, Chaplain of the Holy Name Hospital. All our organizations took part in the celebration. Sunday school children took part in the procession and instrumental music, Yuvajana Sakhyam members presented a drama and the Sevika Sanghom members presented a play called "The Solomon's Court".

We celebrated our Thanksgiving day and Diaspora Sunday on November 26th and Rev. Kurian George, celebrated Holy communion on that day. Traditional Thanksgiving Lunch was given to all the members after the service.

On December 23rd Saturday our Christmas carol service was held. The chief guest for the carol service was His Eminence, Mar Cyril Aphrem Karim, the Archbishop of the Syrian Orthodox Church. Under the direction of Rev. Jacob David, our church choir sang Malayalam and English carols and turned it into an evening of praise and joy. Our Sunday school children presented a Christmas Skit.

This year our parish sent an amount of \$10,003 to the Niranam Maramon Diocese to establish an endowment fund in the name of "St. Peter's Mar Thoma Church, New Jersey, USA, 10th Anniversary Endowment Fund" to support evangelists at the Orissa Mission, Khariar Road. This amount was raised during our 10th anniversary celebration in 1999.

Thomas Thuthikadathil, Secretary

MAR THOMA VOLUNTARY EVANGELISTIC ASSOCIATION EASTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE



Mar Thoma Voluntary Evangelist Association Eastern Regional Conference was held on Saturday, November 11, 2000 at The Mar Thoma Church Staten Island. Rev. P. T. Jacob conducted the Devotional Talk and Rev. Dr. C. P. Mathew conducted the Main Talk. The theme of the conference was "Cost of Discipleship." Rev. Thomas Jacob

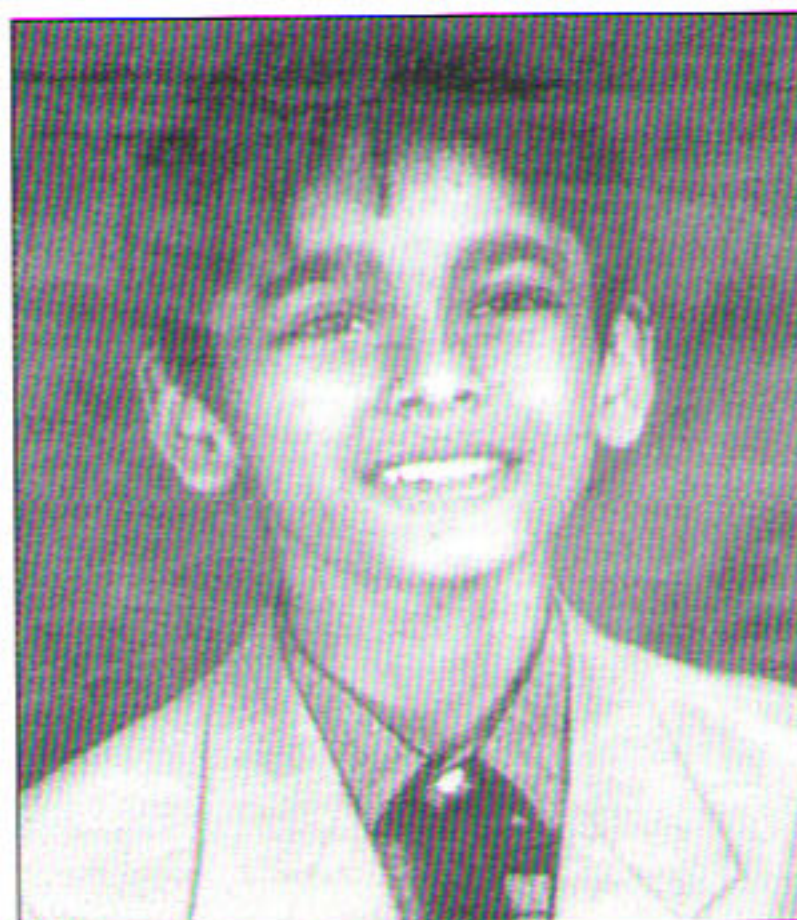


conducted the Presidential address. Rev. John Thomas welcomed the Achens and delegates. Mr. Abraham C. Thomas, Regional Secretary conducted the vote of thanks. Dr. John K. Thomas, Regional Vice President coordinated the meeting.

GOLD MEDAL AND SCHOLARSHIP FOR EXCELLENCE IN MATHEMATICS

Godly John Mathew of Bethel Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia, has won the applause of Philadelphia Malayalee community for excellence in mathematics in Carver Science Fair competition. Sponsored by Drexel University of Pennsylvania, which was held at Washington College. Young Godly has won 1st place in mathematics, he has been awarded the Gold Medal and certification.

Godly's project on "Ring of Gaussian Integern" was commended as outstanding



by all the judges. Drexel University has offered a \$40,000 scholarship to him. Even though other schools have also offered similar scholarships, he has not made future plans as of yet.

16 year old Godly is a 11th grade student of Central High School. He is the only son of John C. Mathew of Kochyil Chovoor Malayl Thiruvella and Valsa John, daughter of Idikula Abraham and Annama Abraham Odikkandathil, Mannamorthuy, Ranny.

MAR THOMA CHURCH OF LOS ANGELES

Sevika Sanghom Retreat

Our Sevika Sanghom arranged a one day retreat at our parish on November 11, 2000. Rev. L. Varghese from Edmonton was the leader for the day's event. L. Varghese Achen also celebrated Holy Communion the next day.

Thanksgiving/Diaspora Sunday celebrations

Our parish celebrated Thanksgiving Sunday as Diaspora Sunday for the first time this year as per the directive of the Diocesan Bishop. After the special Diaspora Sunday Service, the vicar Rev. David Daniel celebrated the Holy Communion. Mr. Abraham Mattackal spoke about the origin and historical background of the Mar Thoma



Zacharias Thirumeni Celebrating Holy Communion on December 25, 2000

Diaspora and its dispersion to British Malaya in the 1920's and later to the Gulf countries, U.K., Canada, United States, Australia and to South Africa and Germany.

Christmas Carol Service

Christmas Carol Service was held on Saturday December 23rd at 6:30 pm. The adult choir, Youth Fellowship choir and Yuvajana Sakyam choir participated in the carol singing. Dr. Doug Pennoyar, Dean of Intercultural Studies, Biola University, La Mirada California was the chief guest who gave the Christmas message. The Sunday School children presented Christmas skit/tableau.

Christmas Service

Our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus visited our parish, December 25-28. Thirumeni conducted Holy Communion Service on

Christmas morning in which a large number of people participated. Before the Holy Communion, there was a dedication service for the first communicants.



First Communicants with Zacharias Thirumeni after the dedication service. Left to Right: Steve Oommen, Christina Thomas and Nisha Thomas.

Ecumenical Christmas Service

The Ecumenical Christmas celebrations were held on December 30, 2000 at the William Bristol Civic Auditorium, Bellflower, California under the auspices of the Kerala Christian Fellowship Association. Mar Thoma Church of Los Angeles is one of the five churches involved in this Association and participates every year in Christmas celebrations. This year too, our adult choir sang Christmas carols and our Sunday School children participated in skits and dance recitals.

Rev. David Daniel, Vicar



Sunday School Children presenting a tableau at the Ecumenical Christmas Celebrations.



Adult Choir of the Mar Thoma Church of Los Angeles singing at the Ecumenical Christmas Celebrations on December 30, 2000

BETHEL MAR THOMA CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA



Bethel Mar Thoma Church Sevika Sanghom members and Achen with the Rolling Trophy they won for the Quiz Competition.

A BRIEF REPORT OF THE ACTIVITIES IN THE LAST QUARTER OF THE YEAR 2000

The year 2000 was a blessed year for our parish in many ways. The year had been so full of activities that time seemed to fly away too soon. As a parish we observed October 22, 2000 as Family Sunday. Rev. K. Y. Jacob, our Diocesan Secretary was with us on that day. During the service there was a special dedication for all working parents. An amount of \$9,257 was collected towards the ENDOWMENT 2000 PROJECT to help the Dalit Christians in Kerala for their educational and Marriage Aid.

Thanksgiving Service was held on November 26th 2000. This was the time for the dedication of all working youth of our parish and a special collection was made to encourage the youth for Charity and Mission Project. An amount of \$1,917 was collected—out of which 50% was sent towards the Bombay Project—Navjeevan Center and 50% was sent to the Salvation Army in America. The Voluntary Evangelistic Association hosted a one-day Retreat on September 30th 2000 in the church. Rev. K. T. Jacob, former Gospel Team Director was the main speaker. It was a blessed time of sharing and dedication.

The Edavaka Mission collected an amount of \$3,000 this year for the Shaddol Mission and Endowment Project for supporting an Evangelist in a mission Field. Our Sevika Sanghom won the Rolling trophy for the Southeast Regional Quiz Competition held on October 7th 2000 at the St. Stephen's Mar Thoma Church, NJ. The Sevika Sanghom has been active in all mission and charity works. An amount of



A scene from the Talent Show on October 21, 2000



The first Communicants with Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos Episcopa and Vicar Rev. Varghese M. Easow.

\$2,000 was sent towards the Metropolitan's Marriage aid fund and \$500 was sent to Girideepthi Trikakkara, \$500 was donated towards charity in USA. An amount of \$1,500 was collected towards the Diocesan Mass marriage Fund.

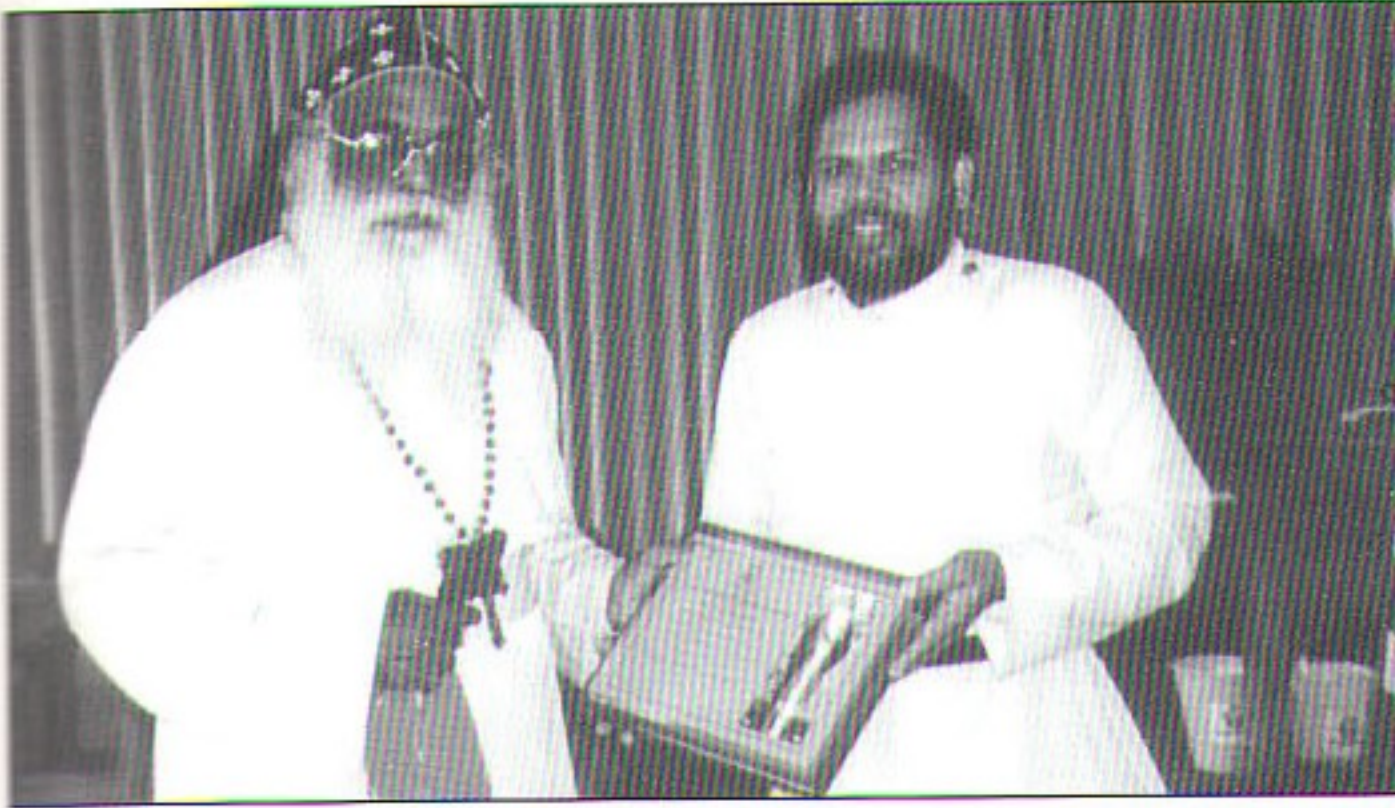
The Youth fellowship is very active and meets every Friday evening at the Parsonage. They have taken an active role in all activities especially giving leadership in Holy Communion Services in English and Praise & Worship Service every fifth Sunday. A one-day Seminar on Pre-marital Counseling was hosted for all the youths above 18 years on December 9th 2000. Mrs. Reena George a Counselor from New Jersey was the main speaker. The meeting was a great success and was well appreciated by all the youths who participated. Sunday school classes began in the first week of September.

The children began the year with the Walk-a-thon Project and a substantial amount was collected towards this Project. In the month of November the Sunday school hosted the Southeastern Regional Competitions and our children did a wonderful job in participation as well as in all the arrangements. The Sunday school decided to set apart \$2,000 towards providing educational aid for the needy in India.

October 21st was observed as Talents Day. It was a time of much enjoyment and opportunity for our children, youth and adults to show their talents. Rev. Jacob George of the CSI Church in Philadelphia was the chief guest. Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos Episcopa visited our parish on November 19th 2000. During the Holy Communion Service twenty children took their First Holy Communion. All the twenty children were presented with Bibles. A colorful and meaningful Christmas Carol Service was held on December 24th evening. Dr. John Suppe a professor from Princeton University was the chief guest. He blessed the occasion by an inspiring message and testimony. A beautiful presentation of the Bible Story from Creation to The Second Coming of Christ was presented under the title REDEEMING GRACE. Christmas Service was held on December 25th at 9 a.m. The year ending Service was held on December 31st 2000 as a Praise & Worship Service and it was a time of sharing and re-dedication.

Rev. Varghese M. Easow, Vicar

MAR THOMA CHURCH OF GREATER WASHINGTON



Vicar, Rev. P. J. Mammachan presenting a Plaque to our Suffragan Metropolitan in honor of his Episcopal Silver Jubilee at a special Washington Parish meeting On November 19, 2000.

The year of our Lord 2000 concluded with delightful memories for the Washington Parish.

We were privileged to have our Suffragan Metropolitan, Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Irenaeus in a special meeting organized to honor the Episcopal Silver Jubilee and ordination as the Suffragan Metropolitan. There were a series of felicitations from the members illuminating Bishop's leadership attributes, humanitarian efforts, and personal care and attention.

Biblical edification is the goal on alternate Fridays, when Edavaka Mission meets for study and intercessory prayers. A witnessing service is generally conducted once in three months. Rev. K. T. Jacob, formerly a Vaideeka Trustee, inspired the parishioners with probing messages in a three day annual convention. Edavaka mission took lead in conducting a one day chain prayer.

The ancient tradition of visiting homes with a group of carolers has prestigiously prevailed in Washington with its original elegance. Two groups of carolers visited 100 homes during two of the December weekends. The gifts received are being used for the church renovation project.



The Honorable Blair Ewing, President of the Montgomery County Council delivering the Christmas Message.

The crowning program of Christmas was on the 24th evening. The new worship book was used for the Christmas worship followed by a message from the Honorable Blair Ewing, Chairman of the Montgomery County Council. Mr. Ewing provided the county statistics on the children in need. He stated the 30 percent of the children are eligible for free lunches and twenty percent do not receive health care. He shared his

Christian passion to serve them and exhorted the audience to make Christmas gifts to people who cannot give a gift in return.

The vicar, Rev. P. J. Mammachan's address was an exposition on the deeper understanding of "Immanuel and Jesus". Achen corroborated the Biblical premises on "Immanuel" teaching that the Person, Jesus, is the manifestation of God's unbroken presence among us. The name Jesus further means that He is a helper, to recover us from the sins that separate us from God. God's Salvation is mediated to us through the life and work of Jesus.

The Malayalam Choir, English Choir, and a special choir of Male voices, directed by Jacob George, graced the occasion in perfect harmony. Youth League, Sevika Sanghom and Sunday School presented challenging Christmas themes that touched our lives.

As a part of our community outreach efforts, the joint choir visited the Arleigh Burke Pavilion, in Virginia, that offers assisted living for the aged patients that suffer from



The Washington MTC Joint Choir at the Nursing Home

significant disabilities. The residents of this nursing care facility received a Christmas Carol Service with a brief introduction about St. Thomas Christians, a full variety of songs and a Christmas message from our Vicar.

The church extended special congratulation to Mr. Jason Thomas of our parish, who was selected for theological studies at the Kottayam Theological Seminary. The church general body decided to offer full sponsorship of his essential expenses. The parishioners made a blessed leap to pay off our mortgage on the church building. Renovations are underway to extend the parish hall conveniences.

The last hours of the year 2000 and the early hours of year 2001 were prayerfully spent at the Church. The Watch Night Service began with a testimony of the members and the communion service began at mid-night.

May the Lord Almighty empower us to continue in His path in the days given to us in the new millennium.

Thomas Koshy, Vice President

KALATHIL VARUGHESE WITH THE CLINTONS



American President, William Jefferson Clinton and the First Lady - Elected US Senator from New York State, Mrs. Hillary Rodham Clinton, at a reception in New York with Kalathil Varughese, Diocesan Council Member.

It's heartening to note that our members are taking more and more interests in Civic duties. In the recent Presidential election, both Democrat and Republican candidates were supported by our members at various stages of election in different regions. Kalathil Varughese, who is a member of the Long Island Mar Thoma Church and our Diocesan Council, worked for Mrs. Hillary Rodham Clinton in her election campaigns.

MIDWEST REGION SUNDAY SCHOOL

Mr. P. T. Mathew, the Diocesan Sunday School Treasurer paid a visit to Chicago Mar Thoma Sunday School on August 26 and 29, 2000. Mr. Mathew was the main leader for the Sunday school teachers workshop conducted on Saturday. "Effective Method of Sunday School Teaching and How to Prepare Lessons" was the topic of the workshop. Mr. Mathew led the teachers to a commitment: "every student, when they go out from our Sunday school, has to have the word of God in his/her mind, a saviour in his/her heart and a purpose in his/her life". During the worship service on Sunday, August 27, Mr. Mathew was the guest speaker who urged parents and Sunday School Teachers to be spiritually alive at all times in order to bring all Sunday school children to Christ and relate them to the church.

Mr. T. A. Mathew, the Diocesan Sunday School Secretary visited Detroit Mar Thoma Sunday School during the weekend of August 25-27, 2000. Mr. T. A. Mathew was the chief guest for the Sunday school anniversary. He conducted a workshop for the Sunday school teachers on Sunday after the worship service. "Sunday school teachers must be role models in the church and also in the community" said Mr. Mathew during the workshop. A model class was taken by Mrs. Anuja Chacko and Mrs. Ejje Mathew. Mrs. Susan Cherian, the Sunday school superintendent thanked Mr. and Mrs. T. A. Mathew and all the Sunday school teachers who attended the workshop.

C. V. Samuel, Detroit

MAR THOMA CHURCH OF GREATER WASHINGTON SUNDAY SCHOOL



Mar Thoma Sunday School of Greater Washington celebrating First Place in overall points at the Southeastern Regional Competitions with Mammachan Achen, Mrs. Sarala Varghese – Superintendent, Mr. Jacob George – Choir Master and parents on November 4, 2000.

The South Eastern Regional Sunday School competitions were held at the Bethel Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia on November 4, 2000. The Mar Thoma Church of Greater Washington Sunday School performed superbly in all the categories—Solo Singing, Storytelling, Elocution and Group Song and won 6 first, 4 second and 2 third prizes.

We also tied for first place in both the English and Malayalam Group Song competitions. In the end, the combined efforts of our students, parents, teachers, choir master and our vicar, Rev. P. J. Mammachan helped us claim the ultimate prize: the trophy for overall points.

Mrs. Sarala Varghese, Superintendent

DETROIT MAR THOMA CHURCH

Detroit Mar Thoma Church celebrated Christmas Carol Service on Saturday, December 23, 2000 at Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma Memorial Hall of the Detroit Mar Thoma Church. This was the first Christmas Carol Service in our newly built Church. Rev. P. Chacko began the carol service with prayer and worship service. Rev. Dr. K.T. Joy in his Christmas message reminded the audience, "the birth of Jesus Christ is the self-communication of God's love to us and urges us to make this message relevant in our daily lives."

Carols by the newly formed Junior Choir under the direction of Mrs. Ejie Mathew was a special attraction. Their performance proved that they are top-notch singers and future members of the adult choir in the parish. As part of community service Sunday School students and Youth Fellowship collected nonperishable food items and warm clothes to make this a merry Christmas for some needy families.

Adult and Youth choirs sang traditional and contemporary Christmas carols in Malayalam and

English. Their performance of traditional and seasonal carols brought lots of warm and positive feelings about the message of Christmas.

Sunday School nativity presentation in song and dance under the direction of Miss. Tina Philip was more fitting and reflecting, and touched the hearts of the audience. A skit by Prayer Group, "If Jesus is Born Today in Florida" was exciting for both young and old in bringing the Christmas message alive in a contemporary world.

We have been very blessed every year to have the visit of the Christmas Carol rounding groups in sharing the gift of music and Christmas message in every homes in the parish. Mrs. Sara Philip proposed the vote of thanks. Mr. George Chacko was the Master of Ceremony for the evening. Christmas Carol service came to an end with carols by Carol rounding groups and a visit by Santa Claus.

C. V. Samuel

OBITUARY

ISSAC VARGHESE (Johnny)

July 8, 1937 - August 20, 2000

Issac Varghese died of a heart attack at the age of 63. He was a long-time member of Detroit Mar Thoma Church from its beginning in 1975. Johnny belonged to Ottathengil family in Anaprambal, Thalavady. He was employed by Ford Motor Company for the last twenty-three years, where he touched many lives with his love for God. Johnny Was a man of honor, integrity and a devout



Christian. He was always willing to lend a hand to those who needed it. His love, friendship and loyalty will never be forgotten. He is survived by his wife, Saramma Varghese, his three sons—Saji, Tiji and Leji, his daughter-in-law Amy, three brothers and four sisters.

To Our Readers

Those who wish to get their photographs returned after publication, please enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope while sending the reports and photos. It's our intention and commitment to get the quarterly issues of the Messenger published on time (January, April, July and October) and therefore, it would help us greatly if reports and parish news are sent immediately after a celebration or a special event in the parish rather than waiting till the month of the next issue. Parish News is an important part of this publication as the members of a parish would be proud to read about the accomplishments of their parish and members outside the parish would be motivated to do things that are not done in their parishes. Similarly, we welcome articles for publication from our aghens and laity which could be forwarded to us from time to time without our request. As usual, all articles, reports and photographs are to be sent to the Chief Editor's address while subscriptions, advertisements, complaints of non-receipt of copies etc. may be sent to the attention of the Manager, Mr. Daniel Thomas in New York.

Chief Editor

ECUMENICAL PROGRAMS IN ROCKLAND, NEW YORK

The following Ecumenical programs were organized by the Rev. Dr. Prof. C. P. Mathews, Vicar of St. James and St. Andrews Mar Thoma Church, New York.

National Seminar on Religion and Society under the auspices of Rockland Christian Movement for Inter-Faith Relations was held on November 15, 2000, 7:00 p.m. at St. Gregorios Mission Center, Suffern, New York. The theme was "The role of Religions in the quest for Human Community."



Inter-Faith Relations National Seminar

Ecumenical Christmas Celebration under the auspices of the Joint Council of Churches (New York) was held on Friday, December 29, 7:00 p.m. at Neighborhood Alliance Church, Pearl River, New York. Mar Thoma, CSI, Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, and Alliance Churches participated in this program.

Christian Missionary Conference for Presbyters and Lay Leaders is a forthcoming program. The topic for discussion is Mission and Evangelism today. Eminent scholars representing Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches will present papers on this topic.

Multi-Cultural Program for Youths under the auspices of Ecumenical Cultural Forum of Youths is another forthcoming program. Rev. Dr. C. P. Mathews will organize and co-ordinate this program in Yonkers, New York for the



Ecumenical X-mas Celebration by Joint Council of Churches, New York

youths of various churches in New York and neighboring states to promote cultural traditions and values of East and West and to encourage an indigenous form of worship. This Ecumenical Cultural Forum of Youths will motivate the members of the Church to understand the Gospel from different cultural perspectives.

Rev. Dr. C. P. Mathews

ST. JAMES MAR THOMA CHURCH, NEW YORK

PARISH DAY CELEBRATION

The 10th anniversary of St. James Mar Thoma Church New York was held at Protestant Chapel of State Hospital Orangeburg on Sunday, January 7, 2001 at 10:30 a.m. Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa conducted the Holy Communion service and also the First Communicants' dedication service. Rev. Ariel Verdesi, Chaplain of the Psychiatric Center was the Guest speaker at the public meeting

CHRISTMAS CAROL SERVICE

The Christmas Carol Service was held on Saturday, December 23 at Protestant Chapel of State Hospital New York. Rev. Moncy K. Philip delivered the Christmas message. Sunday School children presented a Christmas Play depicting the nativity scene.

Rev. Dr. C. P. Mathews, Vicar

ST. ANDREWS MAR THOMA CHURCH, NEW YORK

THANKSGIVING DAY CELEBRATION

The Thanksgiving Day celebration was held on Sunday, November 26, 2000.

CHRISTMAS CAROL SERVICE

The Christmas Carol Service was held on Sunday, December 24, 2000. Rev. Raju Varghese gave Christmas message.

Rev. Dr. C. P. Mathews, Vicar

GLOBAL VISION (Ecumenical Journal)

Rev. Dr. C. P. Mathews vicar of St. James and St. Andrews Mar Thoma Church New York initiated to publish an Ecumenical Journal "Global Vision" for the youths of our church and other Episcopal churches. Global Vision can be an important medium of communication for the youths with the whole Christian community and the nation. It also

serves as a means for them to contribute literary works and to express their opinion on Christian events. This journal is enriched with Christian messages, personal experiences, news reports, guidance of counselors and Sunday meditations. Rev. Dr. C. P. Mathews is the publisher and chief editor of this Ecumenical Journal.

CHICAGO MAR THOMA CHURCH



Malayalam Choir

Chicago Mar Thoma Church celebrated its 27th anniversary on Sunday, November 5, 2000. The church has grown as the largest Parish of the Diocese because of the Grace of God and the hard work and sincere commitment of our past Vicars and members. Rev. Dr. Ipe Joseph, Rev. Dr. Cherian Thomas, Rev. Dr. Moni Mathew, Rev. Ranji Varughis, Rev. George Mathew, Rev. K. Y. Jacob, Rev. Dr. P. P. Thomas and Rev. David Daniel served the Church. We express our sincere thanks for their hard work and valuable services rendered to the Church. Our current vicar Rev. V. T. Josen with his passion for mission and deep vision for the future has been providing dynamic leadership to the parish for the past two years. Rev. Roy Thomas is the first Achen who was born and brought up in the United States and we are fortunate to have his service in our parish. Achen is also providing magnificent service to the parish with his youthful vigor and unique talents to identify with and understand the needs and concerns of our youth. Both of our Achens play a vital role in setting the right framework for helping us march into the new century and beyond with a renewed vision and commitment to the Lord.

Activities of our Church

All of the various organizations of our Church are functioning quite actively. Our Parish along with the regular activities is helping the poor and needy in many ways.

Every year the Parish is giving a minimum amount of \$12,000 for the education of poor students in India. Hundreds of students are benefited through it.

Our Sunday School, the largest in the diocese, is a leader in providing interesting and innovative programs for the children. In addition to the activities within the parish, Sunday school is helping the children in India through mission activities.

The Youth Group is involved in missionary projects such as food drives, soup kitchen, along with their regular programs Friday night singing and Bible studies. Every year the youth fellowship is helping the Navajeevan Centre, Bombay and Gramajyoti Vidyalaya in North India.

Yuvajana Sakhyam with the help of the Parish members has managed to raise funds to build over 150 houses for the



English Choir

homeless in India during the past few years. Every year it supports the mission works in India. This year, our Sakhyam had the distinct honor of hosting the Third National Yuvajana Sakhyam conference.

Sevika Sangahm is involved in programs such as marriage aid fund and support for various institutions of the Church. Every year the Sevika Sanghom is helping 10 poor girls to enter into marriage through the Marriage Aid. Last year Sanghom helped Deepthi Balika Bhawan, Pallippad to purchase a van.

The Edavaka Mission is actively involved in the support of several mission outreach programs. It helped SAVE in Karnataka to purchase a van. *Manjkeri Mission* in Malabar Kunnankulam Diocese is sponsored by our Edavaka mission. It also helps the poor and needy in Chicago through food drives and soup kitchen programs.

Our Choir—Both English and Malayalam—provides leadership in regular worships and enthusiastically participates in the regional choir festival and the ecumenical carol service. Every Sunday we have two services.

Second Church Building

Our greatest and immediate challenge is to find a solution to the problem of overcrowding in our Church. The consensus of our members at this time is to explore the feasibility of purchasing another worship facility in a suitable location. It is impossible to accommodate and cater to the needs of more than 350 families at our current facility. For the first time in the history of the church in the Diocese, God enabled us to take a decision to purchase/construct another Church Building and the inauguration of fund raising was done by our Diocesan Bishop on 7th May 2000. Thanks to the encouragement and guidance of our Zacharias Thirumeni, determination and leadership of our Vicars Josen Achen and Roy Achen and of the Building Committee members and members of the Parish. The fund raising efforts for the new church is progressing remarkably well beyond our expectations. Now it is imperative that we all unite and work constructively to see this dream come true. Yes, let this be the first challenge of the New Year. With God's help we can do it and we WILL do it.

Parish Day

The Rev. K. Y. Jacob, our former Vicar and present Diocesan Secretary was the Chief Guest on the occasion of Parish Day. The website of the Parish www.chicagomarthoma.org was inaugurated on the occasion.

Our Challenges

We are blessed with enormous resources that should be used to address some of the needs of the coming generation. Our young people must also be trained to provide leadership roles in this diocese. If there are hindrances or obstacles that discourage our youth from volunteering for leadership roles, we must take the time to analyze and rectify it. We must recognize the

changing needs, re-evaluate our priorities, plan carefully for the future and incorporate the changing needs into our future plans. Our plans should include programs and projects not only for the coming year, but also on a long-term basis for the next five years and even ten years.

What we see today is the result of our hard work, dedication and unity. We are truly indebted to the entire membership for our growth and success thus far. Each individual and every organization have made their contributions to our collective growth. But we still have a long way to go. We must work together in accordance with our vision and mission for the new century.

Jose Varghese, Secretary

CHICAGO MAR THOMA SUNDAY SCHOOL



V. B. S. 2000—Sunday School Students with Josen Achen and Sajjan Achen

The Chicago Mar Thoma Church, Illinois, has a Sunday school with approximately 300 students and 45 teachers involved in the Sunday school program as recommended by the Diocese of North America and Europe. During the year 2000 regular classes were conducted for children between the ages of 3 and 17. Our students also participated in the Diocesan exams and all other programs conducted this year. A senior student Melvy of our Sunday school was awarded the first prize in essay competition conducted by the Diocesan publication the Mar Thoma Messenger, at the dawn of the new millennium.



Christmas Celebration 2000 and X-mas Play by Sunday School Children

Competitions were conducted during the summer in singing, Musical Instruments, Bible reading, memory verses, drawing, coloring, elocution, essay writing and story telling.

The Midwest Regional Junior Camp was conducted at Chicago this year. About 50 students and teachers attended.

The Rev. Sajjan P. Mathew of Dallas directed the VBS. The children and teachers of the VBS had an exciting time under Achen's leadership and guidance.

A teachers' training workshop was conducted under the leadership of Mr. P. T. Mathew from Dallas.

Our children under the direction of the senior youths performed a play during the Christmas Carol Service.

Mathew Varghese, Superintendent

THE MAR THOMA CHURCH STATEN ISLAND



SENIOR MEMBERS FELLOWSHIP AND HOLY COMMUNION:

Edavaka Mission conducted a Senior Members Fellowship Meeting and Holy Communion Service on Saturday, October 28, 2000 at 9:00 a.m. Rev. John Thomas celebrated the Holy Communion. There was a get-together afterwards and a delicious breakfast was served.

Participants with Rev. John Thomas

THE THIRD MAR THOMA YUVAJANA SAKHYAM NATIONAL CONFERENCE



The Diocesan Episcopa, His Grace Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus giving the inaugural address.

The Third Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam National Conference of the Diocese of North America & Europe was hosted by the Chicago Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam. The conference was held from October 13-15, 2000, at Chicago Mar Thoma Church, Des Plaines, IL. Over three hundred delegates from all over the Diocese attended the conference.

Rev. V. T. Josen, Vicar of the Chicago Mar Thoma Church welcomed the leaders and the participants and expressed his wish for an enjoyable stay in Chicago. All invited guests, leaders and participants were welcomed with "Thalappoli" of Kerala tradition.

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus inaugurated the conference with a word of prayer and



Conference Committee

worship and Theme Presentation & Talent Show. All members of the Chicago Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam under the leadership of Rev. V. T. Josen and Rev. Roy Thomas deserve special thanks for their collective effort in making this a very memorable conference.

Holy Communion Service on Sunday was conducted at Taft High School Auditorium, Chicago. Over a thousand people participated in the Holy Communion. Zacharias Thirumeni and Rev. Thomas P. Chandy, Vice President of the Diocesan Yuvajana Sakhyam gave the closing remarks. New Jersey Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam won the first place in the choir competition. Detroit Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam won the trophy for the most participants. St. Paul's

Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam won the trophy for winning the most points in various competitions. The Third National Conference was concluded with the vote of thanks by secretary Mr. Jacob Mathai and prayer and benediction by Zacharias Thirumeni.

C. V. Samuel, Detroit



Zacharias Thirumeni making the concluding remarks at Taft High School Auditorium.

presidential address. In his inaugural address, Thirumeni urged the participants to take full advantage of everything the conference has to offer, both from the speaker's presentations and the fellowship with the participants. The theme of the conference was, "Christ Event and the Experience of the Kingdom of God," which really captured the thrust of what is happening in the new millennium.

DAVID MATHAW CHACKO - VALEDICTORIAN

PALOS VERDES PENINSULA HIGH SCHOOL—VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

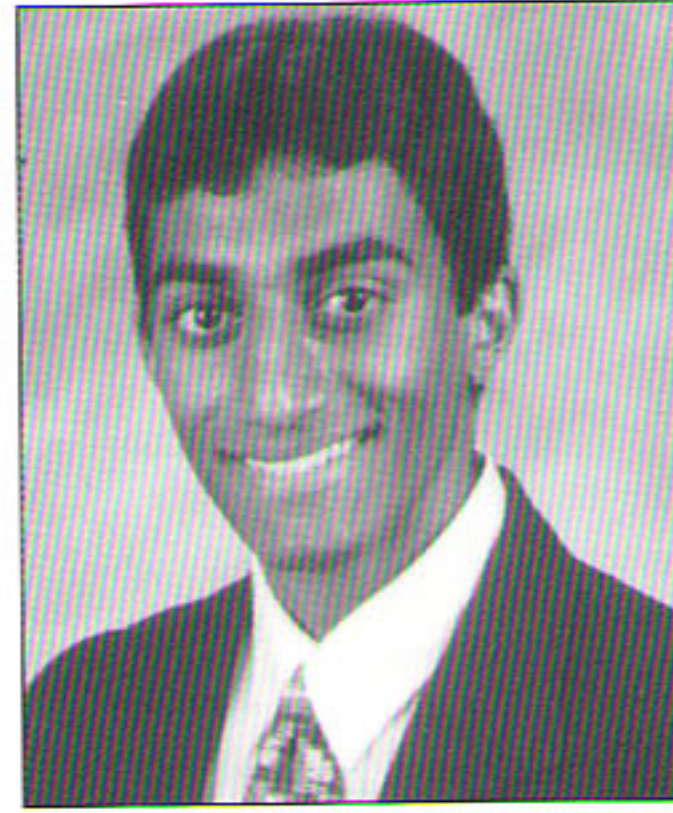
Congratulations to the Palos Verdes Peninsula High School Class of 2000.

The nineteenth century American writer Henry David Thoreau once noted: "If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours . . . If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put your foundations under them."

Over the past four years of high school, we, the graduating class of 2000, have worked to place foundations under our castles. The lessons we have learned inside and outside the classroom have helped us lay these foundations. Through the grace of God, with the support of our teachers, families, and friends, and through our own hard work and dedication, we have built three crucial foundations—courage, perseverance, and faith—that will help us achieve our dreams.

The first foundation, courage, is not the complete absence of fear, but rather the ability to advance confidently despite our fears. At some point during high school, we have all felt fear whether it was from Mr. Poe's English class, a call slip to Vice-Principal Bowles's office, or Coach King's country club. What we have gained from these trying times, whether we realize it or not, is courage. German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once said, "That which does not destroy me, makes me stronger." Indeed the obstacles we have faced in high school have only made us stronger and given us more courage to face the future

Perseverance. We have all shown perseverance on many occasions during the past four years. Just the fact that we are here tonight celebrating our graduation attests to this point.



You all remember the perseverance we showed when we all brought in over three thousand pounds of canned food, had Principal Johnson sing All the Small Things, and everything else we did, all in the name of Blink 182. And while we might have failed in some of our endeavors, we have learned that the only real failure is to give up. Famed football coach Vince Lombardi once said, "It's not whether you get knocked down. It's whether you get up again." Indeed getting up offers one more chance to get knocked down. But we must always remember that getting up also offers

one more chance to succeed.

The final foundation, faith, means more than believing in just ourselves. It also requires us to trust that the people and situations that have shaped us in the past have prepared us well for the future. In another few months, many of us will leave our isolated community on the Hill to face new challenges like college or employment. We will be like the baby bird trying to leave its nest with the wind beneath its wings, unsure of what lies ahead. Nevertheless, we must place faith in what we have learned. We will all face challenges that will test our faith, but we must continue to believe that the education and experiences we have had and our faith in God are more than sufficient to face these challenges.

With these three foundations—courage, perseverance, and faith—the cornerstones of our future have been laid. The lessons and experiences we have gained at Peninsula High School have helped us lay these foundations to ensure our future success. With these foundations now firmly in place, it is only a matter of time before each of our castles is complete.

Once again, congratulations to this graduating Class of 2000.

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MAR THOMA CHURCH OF DALLAS, GRAND PRAIRIE



During his recent visit to the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Grand Prairie, Zacharias Thirumeni cutting a cake to celebrate his 62nd Birthday and the 24th Anniversary of the parish.

Parish Day

The 24th Parish Day of the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Grand Prairie, was held on Sunday Aug. 27, 2000. Our beloved Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus was the chief guest. Thirumeni presented the Diocesan Parish Award '99 to the parish and appreciated parish performance during the year 1999. Thirteen children received the first Holy Communion from Thirumeni. Rev. Jiji Mathew, Rev. Mathew Joseph, Mr. Philip Johns, Dr. George Thadathil, Mr. Alexander Manaloor, Mr. Raji Abraham, Mr. George P. Andrews, Miss. Smitha John and



Diocesan Award Presented

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Diocesan Episcopa, presenting the Diocesan parish award '99 to the trustees of the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Grand Prairie in recognition of the outstanding performance in the life and work of the parish during the year 1999. Rev. Jiji Mathews (Vicar), Mr. Mathew P. Abraham (Trustee), Mr. Santhosh Chacko (Accountant), Dr. George Thadathil (Vice President).

Mrs. Ammukutty Mathew, blessed the occasion by felicitations. The year 2001 is declared as the Jubilee year (28th) of the parish. Parish is preparing to host the 20th Mar Thoma Family Conference in July 2002 and the 6th Texas/Oklahoma (Southwest Region) Junior/Senior Conference on March 9-11, 2001. Parish photo directory will be published January 2001 in connection with Jubilee celebrations.

Rev. Jiji Mathew, Vicar

MAR THOMA CHURCH OF OKLAHOMA

The Sunday school anniversary was held on Sunday, April 2nd 2000 at our parish. Rev. Kuruvilla Philip gave the message and Sunday school children presented many programs.

Our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus visited our parish on July 9th and celebrated Holy Communion. Nine of our youths received first communion on that day.

The annual convention was held from July 20 to 23. Brother George Varghese, Pullad was the main speaker. Vacation Bible School was held from July 27-30.

Our parish picnic was conducted on July 15, Saturday at Ripper park, Bethany and Yuvajana Sakhyam members arranged many games and activities.

Our parish celebrated its 19th anniversary on Sunday, September 17th 2000. Rev. George Alexander was the chief guest. It was a day of thanksgiving and joy. Sunday School

children conducted many programs on that occasion. The offertory collected on parish day was given to the "Roof for Roofless Project."

Our Youth Fellowship hosted the Southwest Regional Youth Conference from November 17-19 at Kingston, Oklahoma. Their dedication, commitment and teamwork made the conference a great success. Rev. C. G. Thomas, Rev. M. O. Oommen, Jr. and Mr. Shino John were the main leaders.

Our Christmas carol service was held on Sunday, December 24th. Rev. C. G. Thomas gave the message. Our talented youth and Sunday School children presented skits and tableaux. Santa distributed prizes to all the children.

**Rev. C.G. Thomas, Vicar
Issac Varkey, Secretary**

MAR THOMA CHURCH OF DALLAS, FARMERS BRANCH



Zacharias Thirumeni handing over a copy of the Order of Worship and Song Book to the Diocesan Council member Mrs. Leelamma Chacko and releasing the book.

Our Diocesan Bishop, The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa released The Mar Thoma Church Order Of Worship And Song Book during his recent visit to The Mar Thoma Church of Dallas Farmers Branch.

It was a vision of our Thirumeni to publish a common worship book for the use of this Diocese for all ages and all generations. The Sunday School of this Diocese took that challenge and compiled it and published for the Diocese.



The Parishmission office bearers distributing Turkey at Thanksgiving for the needy families.

We believe this book helps our younger and older generation to participate more active in our service either in Malayalam or English.

We hope this book helps to glorify our God, to magnify our Christ, to purify our people and to unify our churches more meaningfully.

P. T. Mathew, Diocesan Sunday School Treasurer

XIX MAR THOMA FAMILY CONFERENCE - 2001

We are happy to inform that all the planning activities of the XIX Mar Thoma Family Conference are progressing well. We request your prayer to make this year's conference a spiritually reviving experience. We, the members of the Mar Thoma Church, Philadelphia, consider this a great honor and distinct privilege to have the opportunity to host the next family Conference. The conference will be held at the Radisson Hotel, the historic Valley Forge Convention Center, from July 5 to 8, 2001. Please plan the Independence Day weekend to attend this blessed and joyous conference.

The theme for the conference is CALL THE WIND "Son of man, can these bones live again?" (Ezekiel 37:31). We are extremely happy that the Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Metropolitan has accepted our invitation as the main leader of the conference. In addition to our Diocesan Bishop The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Episcopa, Rev. Dr. Samuel T. Kamalesan, world-renowned Maramon Convention speaker, and Rev. Dr. T. J. Thomas, Director of Mar Thoma Counseling Center, Trivandrum will be the leaders for the conference.

The conference committees are working very hard to make this a spiritually uplifting event. The highlights of the conference include: special sessions for young couples, youths and children, interactive information forums, spiritual fellowship and witnessing Our youth leaders are organizing special programs for children, juniors and youth.

We are committed to make this a spiritually enriching as well as an enjoyable conference. We have special entertainment trips to Millennium Theater - 'Bible on Stage, at the Amish village. There will also be a historic tour of Philadelphia city including Independence Hall and Liberty Bell. Please visit our website for more information: www.marthomachurch.com/conference and e-mail with your suggestions philaconference@marthomachurch.com. We are continuously praying for the conference and we once again request you to remember the conference in your daily prayers.

Rev. Joseph Chacko, President
Mr. John Philip, Secretary

THE CANADIAN MAR THOMA CHURCH TORONTO



Youth picnic



Our Junior Choir



Sunday School Retreat



A scene from the variety entertainment program

SUNDAY SCHOOL RETREAT

A one-day student's retreat was held on March 18, 2000. About 60 students attended the program. Ms. Carolyn Williams of the Anglican Church and Mr. Dan Ryan and group from the Scripture Union were the leaders.

YOUTH PICNIC

A youth picnic was organized on July 8, 2000. 55 youths participated.

VARIETY ENTERTAINMENT EVENING

A variety entertainment program was arranged on August 26, 2000 at the Woburn Collegiate Institute, Toronto. The program included Dances, Fashion Parade, Orchestra, and a Malayalam drama "Gaandeevum." It was a fun filled evening.

DIOCESAN SUNDAY SCHOOL – CALENDAR OF EVENTS

1. March 15, 2001 – Registration Deadline for Diocesan Examination
2. May 13, 2001 – Diocesan Sunday School Examination

“SERVICE AT ANY COST, BUT NOT POWER AT ANY PRICE” is a wonderful motto to follow when we start afresh at the beginning of a new year. Through out the centuries and down to our own time the areas of authority, power and service have attracted different levels of emphasis in the life and ministry of the Church. It is worth laboring this subject at the beginning of a new millennium because most of the problems, which have arisen about the exercise of authority in the Church through the ages, have been provoked by the suspicion that a kind of autocratic power was outweighing the service component and pastoral ministry. All Christians can agree that the source of Christian authority is divine. God’s absolute power and goodness is not questionable, but encourages mankind to express pain and puzzlement as Job did. He encourages movement of His Church out into the world in continuity and line with his own loving response to human need. The Church has a freedom to discover what works best in a given situation, to be open, to be sympathetically responsive and to change within the framework of God’s purpose for His Kingdom. The characteristics of Christ’s own exercise of power and authority are model for the exercise of authority in the Church. He who is the king of all came as the servant of people’s needs. He made no compromise with wrong social orders and administrative structures but showed infinite compassion for the sinner. On the cross, he exerted no magical power, but his authority reached its highest expression. Therefore, the power, which is lodged in the Church, must, then, be the paradoxical ‘power of the crucified Christ’ and that makes it at once fully human and fully divine in both its strengths and weaknesses.

It had been self-evident to generations of Christian thinkers since the ancient world that eternal harmony is built into created structures of the world and into our humanity, as natural law. In the case of Church, this is considered to be an appropriation of heavenly order and harmony and this is understood to be guided by the Holy Spirit. Yet, the exercise of authority through the Church in this world has many imperfections because of human frailty. We need ordered structures, which are designed to protect and safeguard because of this imperfection. This makes structures and methods a necessity as instruments of administration. A group of people cannot exercise any authority that is acquired strictly through compromise, concessions and consensus. There are four points to consider in this context: The first is the source of the authority which is strictly based on scripture, tradition, reason and experience. The second concerns the style of administration, whether it is to compel obedience, whether it should resemble secular models of political or business administration in its shape and style. The third has to do with the type of agents and procedures Church should have. The fourth involves the relationship between the ministry of the clergy and laity. These are important aspects to consider in our anti-authoritarian age where there is resistance to any suggestion of dominion or coercion. What is needed is a model for exercising authority in the church/parish in which obedience and co-operation are not in opposition but in harness; this is the model that we see in the New Testament. Today’s danger is of seeking to replace a paternalistic model with a crudely democratic one in which one imbalance supplants another; for democracy is not necessarily identical with fellowship or the decisions based on majority voting is an expression of love and charity. Our church fathers have wisely adopted a decision making structure which is consultative, incorporating both respect and courtesy, taking into account the strength of a ‘historical episcopacy’ and blessings of an ‘apostolic succession.’ The use of modern media of communication makes it possible for issues to be discussed very widely to keep a balance of ascending and descending elements in decision making. Today we have the possibility of establishing commissions, committees and forums on which bishops, clergy, elected and non-elected lay scholars can be brought together to give a balanced consideration to a problem and to pool their experience and expertise. Reliance on this type of decision-making procedures would help us to understand the wisdom of the maxim: “Service at any cost, not power at any price.”

Dr. Zac Varghese, London, U.K.

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