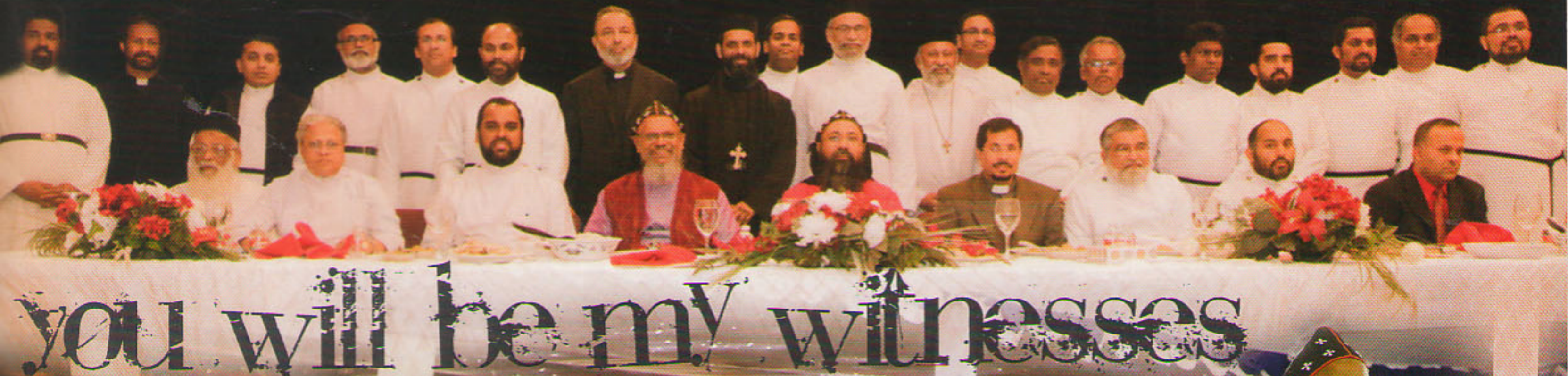




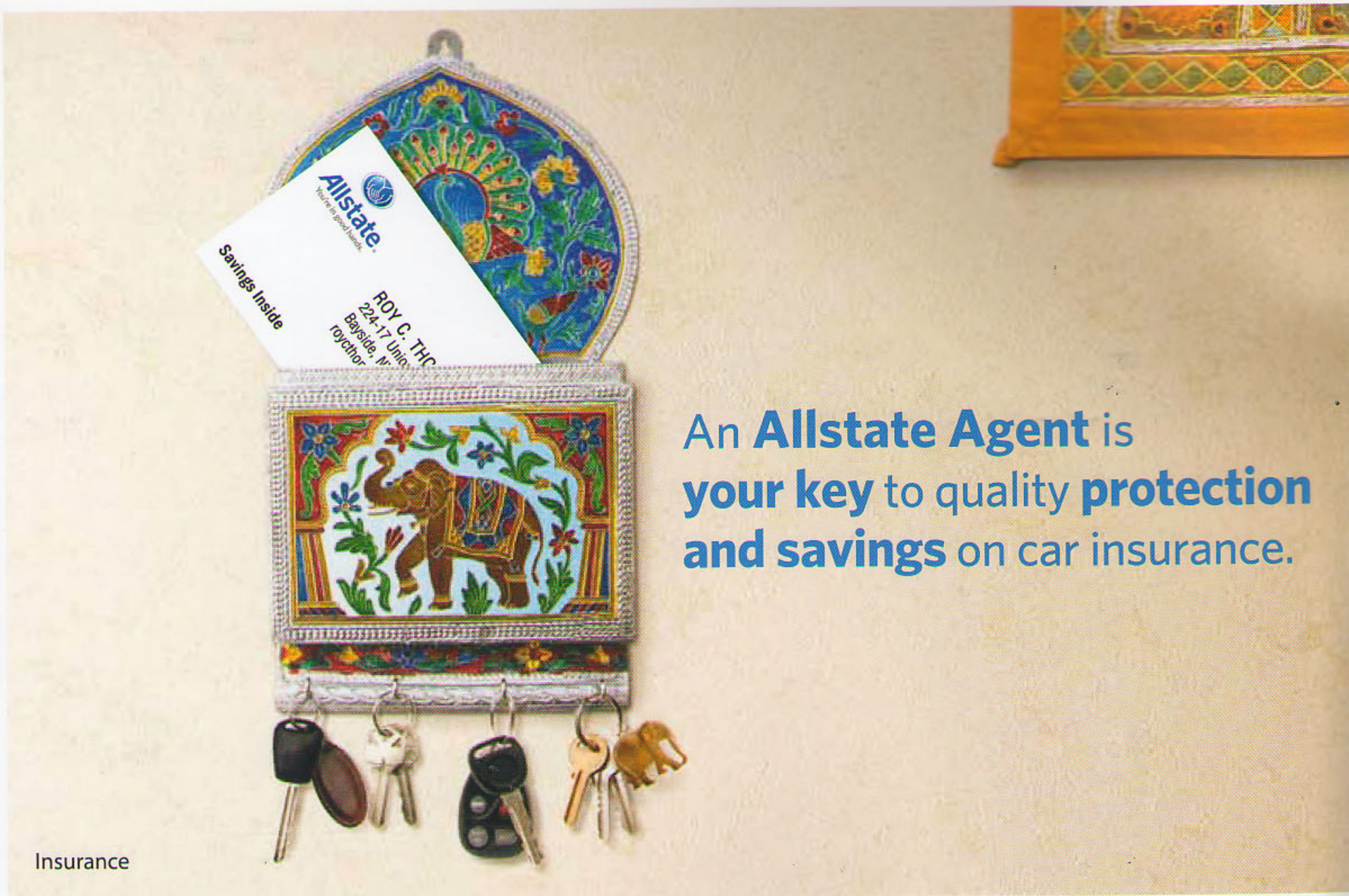
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A PUBLICATION OF THE DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

April 2013



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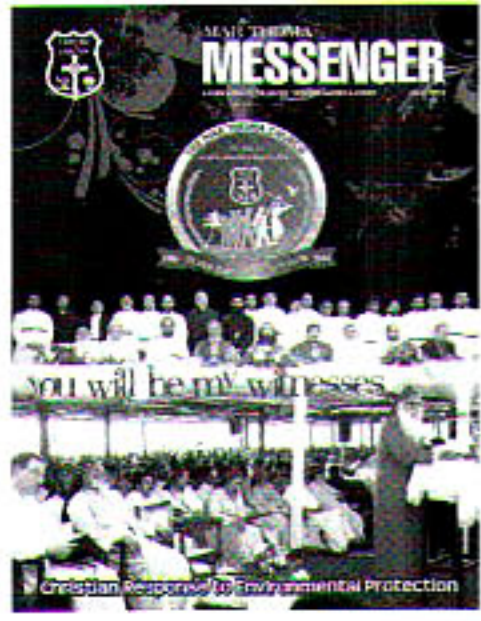
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Rev. K. E. Geevarghese (Manager)
516-377-3311 marthomadiocese@gmail.com

Chief Editor

Dr. Eapen Daniel
215-364-5459 mtmessenger1@gmail.com

Editorial Board Members:

Rev Sabu C. Mathew, UK
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Dr. Nancy George Maliacal, Canada

905-799-2123 nancygmal@rogers.com

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410-418-8018 elias.abraham49@gmail.com

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954-240-7010 varughese61@aol.com

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718-987-5108 koshy@verizon.net

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562-431-6469 tvmammen@msn.com

Mary Varughese, Chicago

847-687-0475 mohan_aswati@wowway.com

Diocese of North America & Europe
www.marthomanae.org

Malankara Marthoma Syrian Church
www.marthoma.in

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Mailing Address

Mar Thoma Messenger - Sinai Mar Thoma Center, 2320, Merrick Avenue, Merrick, NY 11566

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Message from the Metropolitan

Dearly beloved in the Lord,

Another New Year filled with ardor and hope! Our world witnessed many events that caused much fear in social, political, and cultural areas. In many nations new leaders took the bridle of administration. The president of the United States of America came into power again, after successfully facing a big financial crisis. Nations such as Egypt, and Venezuela underwent crises, but were able to make effective adjustments. Many frictions occurred during this period globally. Our relief is no less to see that they did not reach the point of total destruction.

Our state experienced much peace in this period of pilgrimage for which we have to be thankful to the ruling government in Kerala. The question is whether there was an increase in spirituality. But we see the invisible God in Jesus Christ. Moreover, we see the unseen presence of God in His creations. That is why the eminent Indian thinker namely Keshab Chandra Zen said, "In Jesus we see the human face of god." Swamy Vivekananda said, "Jesus is a man who lived for others."

A political scrutinizer has observed that Jesus is the response of the living God when the cries of those humans that were oppressed, exploited, downtrodden, and marginalized reached Him in heaven. He so loved the world and people He created that He came down from the heavenly abode to the habitat of the deplorable humanity to lift them with mercy to the blissful experience of heavenly kingdom, thus setting them to the wholeness of a fragrant humanitarianism. This is what the apostle Saint John says. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). This happens to be the promise of the New Year. God who takes care of His creation. God who is merciful to His creation. God who redeems His creation. In the New Year we are safe in His arms. May God strengthen us in the New year so that we are able to move with Him, and to execute our responsibilities with His blessings.

We will have a confluence at the Maramon Convention within weeks. This year we are going to hear the call for true witnessing. The theme of this year's convention is, "you will be my witnesses"(Acts 1: 8). After the ascension of our Lord, the community of believers gathered in Jerusalem. Among them was the mother of the Lord too. They were given the ennobling mission of witnessing throughout the world.

This is a time of election of office bearers and committee members of parishes. May I advise that the parishes must not, in any way elect to positions those who smoke, drink and use drugs. Let us be self introspective and as a believing community, undergo transformation to become one that adheres to principles and values.

We are going to have ten new Vicar Generals in February. We have to remember at this point, the able leadership rendered by Koorppuzha Ipe Thoma Kathanar. He was an eminent Vicar General of the Mar Thoma Church. Let us hold the new vicar generals in our prayers. May God give them grace to serve with true devotion in the areas they are entrusted.

In February we remember the heroic entry of our Lord in the Temple. Jesus reacted vehemently because he wanted to correct the people who swerved from values. It is in this context that we begin the Great Lent. If we are not prepared to get corrected in our paths of life, we have to closely observe the reactions of the Lord with respect to his entry in the temple of Jerusalem. Let us be self introspective. We have to change. We have to change our attitude in the areas connected with public service, and domestic life. Abstinence is not the only thing related to Lent. Lent is an experience of self control, the willingness to get corrected, and dedication. Salvation is achieved only through grace. Faith without action is meaningless. Apostle James has stressed this point. Witnessing without action is negation of God. It is sin against the Holy Spirit. We have to get away from our bad habits. And we also have the responsibility to correct those who are under the grip of bad habits.

Let us praise the Almighty who strengthened our Church to witness Him all over the world. The prayer of the late Abraham Mar Thoma echoes in the ears. "Lord Almighty, dear Jesus, scatter my people. Strengthen them to be your witnesses wherever they are." May this prayer empower us today. Let it renew our vision. And as the psalmist says, let all the creations glorify God.

"The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made"(Psalm 145:9).
Grace be with you all

Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan

Message from the Diocesan Episcopa



Dear friends in Christ,

2013 is an eventful year for our Diocese. The Silver Jubilee of the Diocese will be celebrated in the various regions at different occasions to mark the 25th anniversary. Although the Mar Thoma members came to UK and Europe, Canada and USA much earlier than 1988, it was on January 1, 1988 that the Church formally accepted the parishes and congregations in North America and Europe as a Diocese. The then Metropolitan, the Most Rev. Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma, issued a Kalpana on January 1, 1988 declaring the formation of the Diocese of North America and Europe, with the Metropolitan presiding as the first Diocesan Bishop.

Today as we celebrate the Silver Jubilee, we are very grateful to all the early immigrants who in spite of their pain and struggle found time, money and convenience to group together first as prayer fellowships and later as congregations and parishes. The book 'In the Beginning' published by the Diocese with Dr. T. M. Thomas and Mr. Abraham Mattackal as Editors gives us the history of the Mar Thoma congregations and parishes that came into existence in different regions of this Diocese. We are grateful to the bishops, clergy and lay leaders that guided and ministered to us during the past years.

This Jubilee year is a time to remember the journey of the people of God (Mar Thoma people) with Christ; not only for the last 25 years, but from the very day they landed in the respective regions. The celebration year is to be an occasion for the present parishes and congregations to remember the historical growth, to acknowledge the senior members and also to hear the story of growth together as a worshipping family. The Diocese is setting apart the first Sunday of July to give thanks to God for the journey we had in the previous years. This will also be an occasion for the covenant people to re-establish their covenant relationship with God. This is to affirm that we are God's people and we believe in God. The transcendent God as we see in the Bible journeys with His people. We have His promises. We trust Him. As He is faithful in His promises, we are called to follow Him faithfully.

The theme that is taken for the Jubilee year is Church: Journeying with Christ. Christian life is a journey from where we are now to where we ought to be. This is a journey of faith, with the turning of our minds and hearts toward God and turning to the world with God where God has placed us. There will be a series of Bible Studies appearing in the Mar Thoma Messenger on this theme. The faith and practices of the Mar Thoma Church are based on the 66 books of the Bible. Therefore, it is necessary for each parish or congregation to take time for studying the Bible and particularly understand the theme. This will involve time for prayer, meditation, study, and reflection. The Diocese is expecting each parish to do this during the course of the year. As Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights in the wilderness before His public ministry, it will be beneficial for members in each region to take time for prayer and meditation before starting with the Jubilee celebrations in each region. Our liturgies are all Bible-centered. So the study of the Bible will help us also to appreciate the various liturgical forms we use for worship and sacraments.

Today when we look at the cross-section of our community, we see not only the immigrant community but also the children and grandchildren who have become citizens of this country. What is the heritage with which we continue the spiritual journey? No one can be alone in this world. Whether we acknowledge it or not, we move together and our time now is significant. We are a privileged people witnessing the celebration and moving together to the future. The beauty of the nature of the Church is that irrespective of age or gender we are all members of the Church family and we hold each other in our spiritual journey with Christ. When there is a tendency to insulate and isolate ourselves as families and congregations, let us remember that the great love of God binds us all together as one family with God as the heavenly father and we all as His children. As we take time to self examine our community living we should take away all tendencies of being introverts craving for self sufficiency. Meaningful communion with God, our fellow beings and the created world is the only alternative for our dangerous consumerist life-style. Caring for each other is only possible with the sharing of our time, talents, and resources. The mission and the ministry that we have today are to help us to reach out to others. While we celebrate our diversity, the Church helps us to grow in unity.

We are a reforming Church. What are the reformations that are needed as we march towards the coming decades? While our means may change, our purpose must endure.

The Jubilee programs include: (1) Dialogue on the journey and growth of the Diocese; (2) Seminar on 'Identity, Vision and

Mission of the Diocese'; (3) Lay Leadership Training with classes on Sacraments and Church History. While engaging in such discussions and training, we must become more systematic, learn more, work harder, and reach higher. We cannot be satisfied with only the senior members contributing and administering the matters of the Church. We need to consciously incorporate the new generation to support and administer the ministry and mission of the Church. Can we resolve in our Edavaka Sanghams (General Body of the Parish) to reserve 35 percent of our seats in the Kaisthana Samithi (Executive Committee) for the younger men and women below the age of 35? Together we must act knowing that our parish ministry will have set backs during this process. Such acts, although imperfect, are stepping stones to success. The Mar Thoma Church as a reformed Church gives emphasis to the language of the people. The Malayalam liturgical language and sermon vocabulary are not comprehensible to those who are born and brought up outside Kerala. However, our Diocese has miles to go before providing services in English on all Sundays. Each parish in our Diocese has to look in to the possibilities of adjusting the timings of worship service and Sunday School to enable the children and teenagers to attend our English services. Those who have two English services a month can attempt to have one more (third) service in English for the present. Those who have Youth Chaplains conducting the service can aim at both English and Malayalam service on the same Sunday at different timings. Those who have more than 150 to 200 families can attempt to get the service of an additional Achen for service. Some radical steps are necessary, if the parish desires to retain the new and younger generations.

The Diocese is planning to send five groups of young people to five different places in India to know the roots of our church, expose themselves to the activities in the mission fields and then to plan mission activities in the respective regions of our Diocese. While strengthening our ministry to the Mexico mission field and the ministry among the Native Americans, each parish is required to attend to the 'Neighborhood Ministry'.

Altar Boys is a new concept where two or three of our boys above the age of 12 and are communicant members are dedicated to the ministry in the Sanctum Sanctorum, called Madbaha. They follow a schedule prepared by the Vicar in ministering at the Altar. They will also take time to study the lessons on the Faith and Practices of the Church for a term of three years. They are required to participate in the Holy Qurbana along with their participation in the offertory and in the prayer of Confession. What then is the role of girls? Can we organize leadership camps at the regional level for their study and then empower them to lead the contemporary divine services, Holy Week services, the ministry of the Word of God, preparing the Hykala for public worship, etc. We need sincere, earnest, and radical actions from all to promote equality and to avoid gender discrimination.

It is God who gives us vision. The Holy Spirit helps us to capture it. The vision is to be translated and interpreted. The Jubilee year must be a time for us to have seminars on the local level to discuss the vision, mission and identity of the Church. It is through such a thought process that we commit ourselves to make specific and concrete steps for the future. Let us put our hands in the hands of the One who calmed sea. Let us put our feet on the foot prints of the One with whom we journey to the full experience of the Kingdom of God. Journeying with Jesus is an ongoing commitment to the Lord and to the values of His Kingdom.

May the Lord of the Church bless the Diocese and all of us to be members of His body where He will remain as Lord and Master! Unto Him be all honor and glory.

God bless us all

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March 16th**



We occupy a world that is blessed with great abundance of natural resources that had sustained man's healthy life from time immemorial. As prescribed in genesis, God created this great earth for us to live happily and enjoy his provisions at large. God entrusted us to take care of the land and its surroundings, including its inhabitants – plants, animals, and all related atmosphere. In Old Testament, Isaiah 24 verse 4-6 states: "The earth mourns and withers, the world fades and withers, the exalted of the people of the earth fade away. (5) The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant. (6) Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and those who live in it are held guilty. Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left". This is a clear statement pointing to the continued abuse of land and its surroundings. Misappropriations of this beautiful earth are having, and will have, major consequences that will be inevitable and uncontrollable, if we continue in our path of active and passive misuse of our precious resources and its environments.

Changes in our attitude and actions are warranted by the many signs of environmental disintegration and major climatic changes around the globe. Polluting our environment is clearly an act of disobedience and dishonesty to its creator. Although there are major undertakings at different levels to protect our planet earth and its atmosphere, as Mar Thoma Christians, we can initiate programs at parish level and Diocesan level to enhance awareness on the importance of environmental protection, and join forces in their efforts to hold on to the motto "Go Green". Let us rethink and reinvent ways to protect what God has entrusted us with and let us not disobey our creator.

Messenger family expresses our sincere gratitude to our outgoing Achens who have successfully finished 3 years of fruitful ministry in this Diocese. We hope and pray that their experiences in this Diocese will enrich their future ministry and will become greater blessings for the people whom they may serve in the coming years. We also welcome our new Achens who are transferred to the Diocese of North America & Europe from outside this Diocese and offer our continued support for their effective ministry. Pray that your stay on this land will be a pleasant experience and will help our believers in their spiritual growth.

For the past 12 years Mar Thoma Messenger did not make any increase in its subscription rates within the US. With added cost of printing and mailing, we are forced to increase our rates by a slight margin. We value our readers and count on your continued support for the growth of this Diocesan publication and request your full hearted support in our future endures. Staying within our resources, the editorial board and the managing committee are working together to make Messenger a world class Christian Magazine and we request your valuable opinions and prayerful support to make it a reality.

Dr. Eapen Daniel

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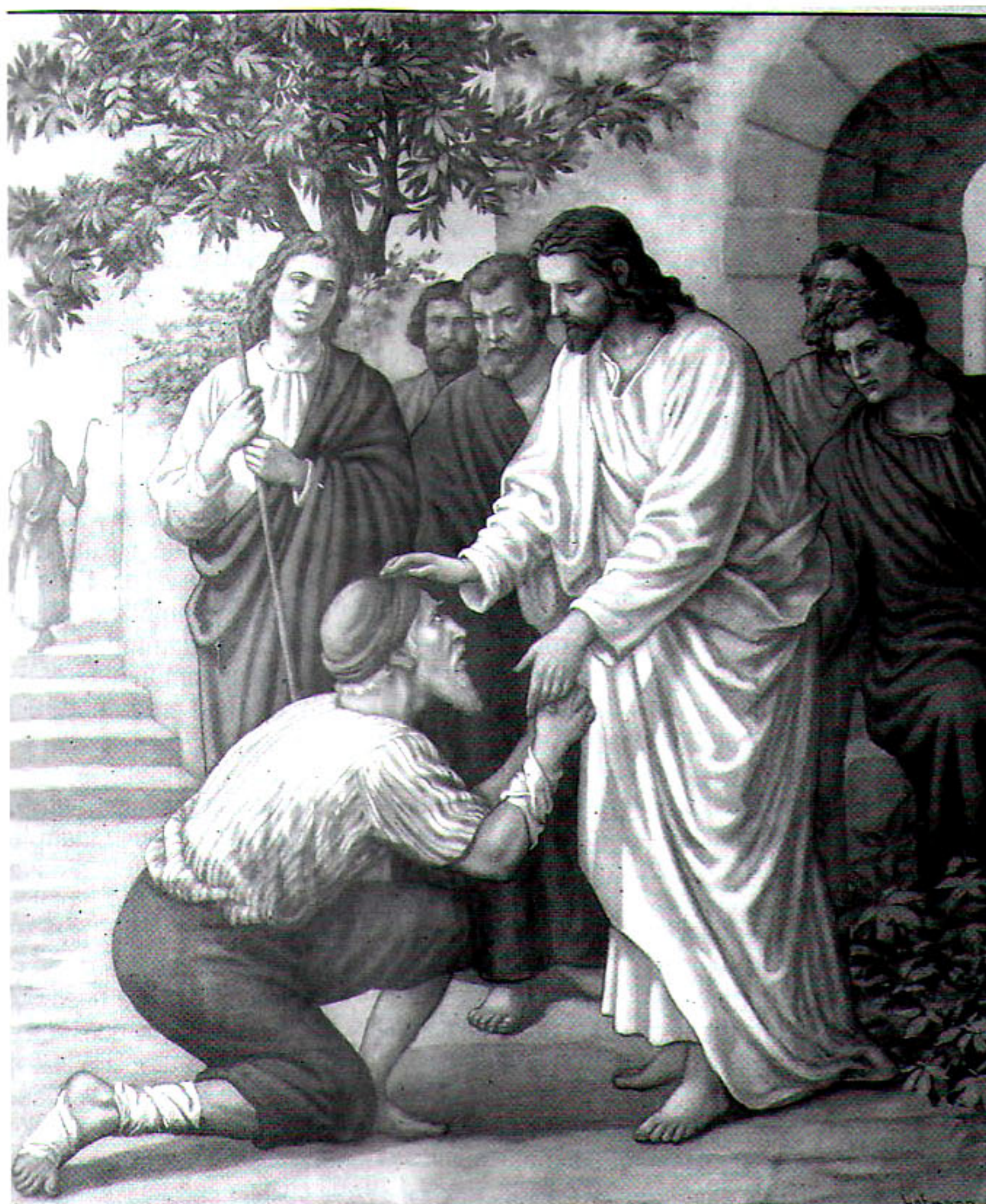
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Bartimaeus: From Way Side to the Way (Journeying with Christ)



Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary



Church: Journeying with Christ is the theme chosen for the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the Diocese of North America and Europe. This Bible Study is based on this Jubilee theme.

Journey is an everyday experience of human beings. Life is a journey. In an age of travel and tourism, people journey for various reasons. Usually people tend to make their travel enjoyable and memorable. There are some journeys, which will alter our lives and give us a renewed vision. The means and modes of travel can be different and the journey could be long and leisurely one or a short and hasty one. In every journey the destination is very important and so are the people with whom we travel.

In the Bible, we can see a God who journeys with His people. The exodus event in the Old Testament is the journey of the Israelites from the land of Egypt to Canaan. This is a journey from a land of oppression to a land of promises, flowing with milk and honey, which denote prosperity. During their journey through the wilderness, the Lord was with them as pillars of cloud during the day providing them comfort and as pillars of fire during the night providing them light. That journey with God in the wilderness disciplined the Israelites and

gave them a new identity as the 'people of God'.

In the New Testament we see the Incarnation as a journey of God from the heavenly realm to earth, and a transformation from the Divine to human. During His earthly ministry Jesus was a journeying master moving from place to place and invited people to his discipleship. He showed the way and set an example for them to follow. The resurrected Christ promised His everlasting presence to His disciples. Today, the Church, the community of believers, is called to journey with Christ, the author and perfecter of faith.

The Gospel of Mark is generally known as the 'Gospel of the Way'. The ministry of Jesus is portrayed as a journey from Galilee to Jerusalem and to the rugged cross. The heart of the spirituality in Mark's gospel is the way of 'Discipleship'. The evangelist begins this gospel with the command to 'prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight' (Mark 1:3). The word 'way' is used more frequently in Mark from 8: 27 to 10: 52, which is generally known as the path of glory and suffering.

Mark 10: 46-52 describes the healing of a blind man, whose name is Bartimaeus, which means the 'Son of Timaeus' (10: 46). This is the only place where the name of a person healed by Jesus is mentioned in the Bible. In all other instances the person who approached Jesus is known by his or her deformity (e.g.: the man with the withered hand, the crippled woman, the blind man, the leper etc). From the narrative it is clear that Bartimaeus was a blind beggar. The place where he was sitting is Jericho, a cursed city of destruction (Joshua 6: 26). Therefore, Bartimaeus is pictured as an insignificant person who is physically disabled, economically poor, ceremonially unclean, religiously polluted and socially marginalized. He was suffering from a physical ailment, poverty and powerlessness. It was festival season and there was a large procession leading to Jerusalem. However Bartimaeus was excluded from the festival, possibly because of the stigma of his disability or his dishonorable trade of begging. In the beginning of this narrative, we see the blind man as sitting on the way side and later entering into the way and journeying with Christ to Jerusalem, the city of Peace. **According to Mark, Discipleship is a conscious entry into the way, from the way-side, to journey with Jesus.**

The story of Bartimaeus concludes the travel narrative that bridges Jesus' passage from His Galilean ministry to His activities in Jerusalem. This is also a conclusion of the ministry of Jesus to the outcasts, the

oppressed, the less fortunate, and the neglected ones. Jericho is the last stop in Jesus' journey before entering into Jerusalem. The position of this passage in Mark's narrative is also very insightful. Mark 10: 46-52 comes after the predictions of the passion of Jesus Christ. The passion predictions (8:31-33; 9:30-32 and 10:32-34) give a detailed summary of the episodes like the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem. **Through this, Jesus tried to prepare His followers to face sufferings and to teach a new way of discipleship.** Here the call of a disciple is to participate in the suffering of Jesus Christ. Jesus pictures himself as a suffering servant and His ministry as a new model of discipleship, which is revealed through His declaration in Mark 10: 45, "For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." The sad fact is that the disciples could not understand the meaning of Jesus' teachings. Their response and behavior were totally unrelated to their master's instructions. Two episodes, which come prior to the Bartimaeus story, are worth of mention. The first is the story of a rich young man (10: 17-22), who came to Jesus in search of eternal life but went away sad because he had great wealth. He turns down the invitation of Jesus to follow him. The second is the story of the sons of Zebedee (10: 35-45), the ambitious disciples. They looked forward to a Messianic coup and aspired to obtain the first and second cabinet positions in the glorious kingdom of Jesus Christ. The young man and the sons of Zebedee were on the path of non-discipleship.

Immediately after these stories of non-discipleship, the healing of Bartimaeus comes as a story of true discipleship. Unlike the rich man, Bartimaeus was poor and disabled. He was the victim of the system, not its beneficiary. Unlike the two disciples, Bartimaeus enquires not after the mysteries of eternal life or seeking a top position in the administration, but was pleading for mercy, despite those who would silence him. Bartimaeus symbolizes a counter culture to the non-discipleship of the so-called disciples. Therefore, true discipleship is a journey with Christ unto the cross. There are some characteristics for this journey that can be drawn from the life and journey of Bartimaeus.

A Journey with true conviction and authentic understanding

Though Bartimaeus was a blind beggar, he had insight. He was sensitive to his surroundings and he raised relevant questions at the appropriate time. According to Luke's narrative, 'when he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening?' (Luke 18:36) He was sensitive to his surroundings. His curiosity to know even the small movements in the surroundings prompted him to raise some questions. His story of discipleship starts with this question inquiring about what is happening around him. Again, when he heard that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by, immediately he shouted, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mark 10: 47). Bartimaeus proclaims Jesus as the 'Son of David'. This usage represents a messianic figure, which is a deviation from the more common 'Son of Man' designation in the gospel of Mark. The evangelist has not used this image prior to this passage. This is a symbolic representation of Lordship. The crowd introduced Jesus to Bartimaeus as 'Jesus of Nazareth', which refers to a person from the place Nazareth. Nevertheless, Bartimaeus is identifying Jesus as the Son of David, which demonstrates that he had the insight about the person and work of Jesus, despite his physical blindness. Bartimaeus progresses in his understanding of Jesus' identity and reaches a healing faith. The use of the phrase 'Son of David' refers to the Messianic time, which is a time of expectation, where the blind receive sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor (Lk 7: 22-23). Despite his mishaps in life, Bartimaeus surprises us by his authentic understanding of Jesus. He could understand who Jesus was, where others failed to see Jesus, despite their sight. Such a realization is necessary for journeying with Christ. **He realized Christ as the Savior and believed that He is sufficient to give light and sight to his eyes.** Here we see that the person in the periphery sees Jesus but the so-called insiders failed to understand the identity of Jesus. Bartimaeus' authentic understanding of Christ led him to enter into the way of Jesus, which was the demonstration of Discipleship.

Journey with Christ demands an intimate relationship and an authentic understanding of the Master who is going ahead of us. Our relationship with Christ that helps us to make sense of our life journey and our destiny. The living Christ should become a reality in every disciples' life. Our relationship with Christ should not be a superfluous one or to please anybody else. It should become a life-touching experience for a disciple to journey with Him. The testimony of Paul in Phil 1: 21, is very significant, 'for me to live is Christ and to die is gain' and that is really a challenge for any believer. Everyone should ask himself or herself, How is my personal relationship with Christ, the Master, today?

A Journey to Protest the Systems of Oppression

The persistent cry of Bartimaeus is noteworthy. The crowd who was with Jesus was an obstacle in the path of Bartimaeus' discipleship. 'Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet' (Luke 18: 39). The usage of 'those who led the way' refers to the so-called leadership class in that community, who were able to gain easy access and who appeared to be closely associated with Jesus. They were the insiders and due to the social norms at that time, they tried to silence and prohibit the entry of a person at the periphery of the society to the center. The ones 'who led the way' controlled the life of the people on the wayside and assumed the right to speak on their behalf. They wanted the beggar to be silenced in order to maintain the status quo of the society. The people on the wayside are the nameless and faceless masses without any identity of their own or anything to claim. Here Bartimaeus is a victim of the system and is considered as an outsider to the community. Therefore his cry for healing was rebuked by the insiders to make their positions comfortable. However his response to the injustice shown towards him is remarkable. 'He shouted all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me' (Mark 10: 48). He continues until his cry is heard. Bartimaeus refuses to be defined by his circumstances or by the expectations of the crowd. He mobilized his available resource, his voice, against the oppression and ensured that his cry was answered. His cry is the powerful protest of a person in the periphery against systems of oppression. His cry ultimately resulted in his healing, his liberation and his salvation. **He had the courage to cry out against circumstances that perpetuated powerlessness by a community that wanted to silence him and keep him in his designated slot that the community had predetermined for him.**

Even today, there are oppressive systems, which persecute the people in the margins, push them to the wayside and silence them. An ability to discern such harsh systems and a will to raise our protests against such injustice are necessary in the path of Christian Discipleship. Remaining silent to such systems and institutions will cater only to the needs of the powerful and help maintain the status quo. Bartimaeus' response to Jesus is also liberative. He asked for sight and light. That signified he wanted to be independent and whole. Today the question is who speaks and whose voice do we hear. When the powerless speak up, the history will change and transformation will follow. Discriminations, negative attitude to the weaker sections, and exploitation of natural resources are to be seen as areas that need a voice. A church that is journeying with Christ cannot go forward without addressing such issues. We have to question ourselves about whether our systems and institutions define others as marginal. Are churches becoming an arena of power, manipulation and coercion? As a community journeying with Christ, let us give voice to the voiceless instead of silencing the groans of the less fortunate.

A Journey without counting cost

Among the people whom Jesus heals in Mark's gospel, Bartimaeus is the only one who followed Jesus on the way. This is a sharp departure from the normal

pattern of healing stories in the Bible. In Mark 8: 22-26 we see the healing of another blind man, where Jesus sends the healed man home. In some cases the healed person was sent away by Jesus with a strong command not to tell anybody about the healing and about the person who healed him. (1:44; 5:19, 37, 43; 7:36, 8:26). However the decision of Bartimaeus differed from others resulting in a life altering decision. His cloak represents his most treasured possession. It gave security to his life and kept him warm through the cold nights. It may also hold the little earnings from his trade of begging. However in his leap of faith into the 'Journey of Discipleship' he disregarded all his self-sought securities. This is a journey of faith without counting the cost as the procession is marching towards Jerusalem. What is there in Jerusalem? Jesus himself foretold that there would be suffering and rejection. **He finds security in the cross after abandoning the man-made securities. Here the cross became the supreme source of power in his weakness.** This understanding enabled him to set a new direction for his life journey. In the earlier story of the rich man, we saw his return journey from discipleship. He was not ready to abandon the socio-economic prestige of being rich in order to be a disciple. Our faith journey becomes mature only through a preferential option for the cross and suffering without counting the cost. On April 8, 1945, Dietrich Bonhoeffer held a service in Flossenbürg prison in Germany, where he was imprisoned. Just when the closing prayer was said, two soldiers came in and said: 'Prisoner, Bonhoeffer, come with us'. That word meant the journey to the gallows. Bonhoeffer said to an officer in the same cell, "This is the end. For me, this is the beginning of life". According to St. Paul, knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection is possible only through fellowship in His suffering (Phil. 3: 10). Are we in the path of discipleship and journeying with Christ today?

A Journey to Witness the Power of Resurrection

The journey to Jerusalem is the way of cross. Here Bartimaeus is journeying with Christ. The followers of Jesus will witness suffering and death in Jerusalem. Jesus will die and the disciples will return to Galilee defeated. Nevertheless this is not the end of the journey with Christ. All the gospels end with the message of resurrection and a commission to

spread the good news. In Mark's gospel, a young man, dressed in a white robe, tells a group of women that Jesus is risen. The command is to continue the Journey, a return journey to Galilee with the resurrected Christ. "But go and tell his disciples that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see Him, just as he told you" (Mark 16:7). The assurance given to the Church is that the resurrected Christ is with us, and leading us and guiding us through the way. **We are not alone. Christ is present in the pathway of our life. Through His resurrection Jesus opened His followers' eyes to see the good news of Christ's ongoing journey.**

It is Christian conviction that our purpose in living the life of a discipleship correlates to being in relationship with God. The church is the community of believers who enjoy the everlasting presence of the resurrected Christ. We are called to journey with Him. This is a movement from blindness to sight, insensitivity to authentic understanding, disbelief to experience, silence to protest, gaining to losing, and despair to delight. In this journey, the route may be unfamiliar and there may be experiences of the Cross. Nevertheless the presence of Christ and the power of His resurrection will strengthen us to move forward. May God give us the courage to be sojourners with Christ!

Cross Word Winners List (Jan 2013)

George Chiramel	Ascension MTC, PA	Susan Thomas	Phoenix MTC AZ
Manju Mathews	Ascension MTC, PA	Benson Joseph	Phoenix MTC AZ
Shanta Varghese	Ascension MTC, PA	Samma Koshy	Salem MTC, NY
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Thomas Geevarghese	Bethel MTC, PA	Josh Jacob	St. Andrews MTC, NY
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Kevin George	Carmel MTC, Boston	Justin Babu	St. John's MTC NY
Lysamma Mathew	Christos MTC, PA	Maria Stephen	St. Marks MTC Tampa FL
Sara Philip	Emmanuel MTC Houston	Sheline Samuel	St. Peters MTC, NJ
Sosamma Varghese	Emmanuel MTC Houston	Anamma Varghese	St. Peters MTC, NJ
Molly Mohan	Emmanuel MTC Houston	Monica Abraham	St. Peters MTC, NJ
Samma Chacko	Epiphany MTC NY	Thomas George	St. Peters MTC, NJ
Jeremy Abraham	Horeb MTC, Colorado	Annamma Thomas	St. Peters MTC, NJ
Aleyamma Mathews	Horeb MTC, LA	Sosamma Varghese	St. Peters MTC, NJ
Thankamma Paul	Horeb MTC, LA	Aleyamma George	St. Peters MTC, NJ
Aleyamma Mathews	MTC Dallas Famers Br	Elsie George	St. Peters MTC, NJ
Sicity Skariah	MTC Dallas Famers Br	Mary Simon	St. Peters MTC, NJ
Shaila Mathew	MTC Dallas Famers Br	Sally George	St. Peters MTC, NJ
Sneha Mathew	MTC Detroit	Aleyamma Ninan	St. Thomas MTC NY
Sheila Chandy	MTC San Francisco	Annamma John	St. Luke MTC, FL
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Merrill A Mathew	MTC Los Angeles	Omana Rajee	Staten Island, NY
Soosy Thomas	MTC,PA	Achamma Chacko	Trinity MTC, Houston
Maya Mathews	MTC San Francisco	Kunjamma Thomas	Trinity MTC, Houston
Susan John	MTC San Francisco	Samma Sreeba	Trinity MTC, Houston
Sara Mathew	Oklahoma MTC	Leya Mathew	Trinity MTC, Houston
Allan Jiji	Phoenix MTC AZ	Mariam K Thomas	Trinity MTC, Houston
Alvin Jiji	Phoenix MTC AZ	Gracy Vattakunnel	Trinity MTC, Houston
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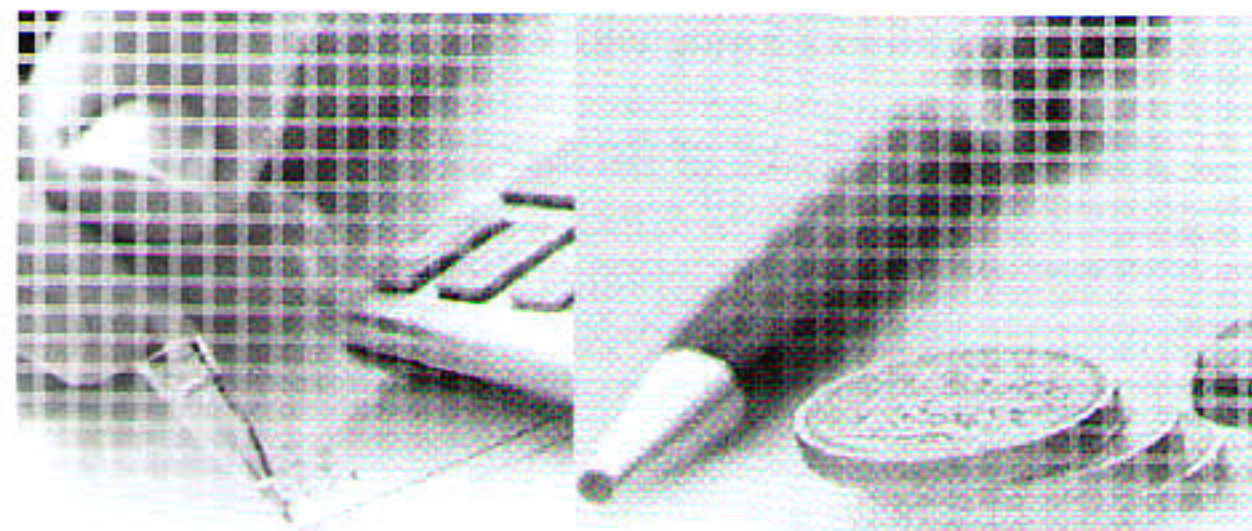
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“Truly He was the Son of God!”

Bible Study - 2 Matthew 27:54



Prof. Plammoottil V. Cherian, Detroit



So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, “Truly He was the Son of God!”

Introduction

The Bible Study for this issue, “Truly, this was the Son of God” is a very affirmative statement by a powerful military officer who presided over Christ’s physical death. Along with this, the theme “The Church: journeying with Christ,” is a very relevant subject to reflect upon our past 25 years when we celebrate the Silver Jubilee of the Diocese of North America and Europe. Both subjects are very appropriate at a time when the culture is shifting to the secular away from Christ which is manifested in social injustice, poverty, suffering, senseless violence against children and women; the global economy is in turmoil and the hopes and aspirations of many for a better tomorrow are being shattered. With the confounding problems we face today, it is apt to say that what we see is only the tip of the iceberg and Christians must awake to the reality of accepting the fact that unless Christ is at the helm of our boat we face danger. In order to understand the depth and breadth of this affirmation we must analyze the context; the supernatural events that happened at the moment Christ died, and the overwhelming effect of the message of the cross that led to the confession by the centurion. There have been volumes written on the miracles of the cross, from the cross and on the cross since the old rugged Cross was raised on Calvary.

Glimpse of the Centurion

We have a glimpse of the man and his brigade who confessed this statement about Jesus. It is very likely that the same centurion was present from the time Jesus was brought before Pilate right until the Lord’s body was lowered and handed over to Joseph of Arimathea. Before they exclaimed, “Surely He was the Son of God!” they witnessed few extraordinary statements made by a dying ‘Man’ on the central cross and few unusual events by which they were terrified. He was a Gentile military officer to whom death and crucifixion were not new but routine. This centurion in all likelihood must have presided over the crucifixion of hundreds of criminals. He was familiar with the reactions of the criminals, thieves and

murderers, whom he put to death, and needless to say he had heard these people screaming and shouting curses and mocking, as evidenced from the behavior of the robbers on either side of Jesus. Yet something had penetrated the centurion’s spiritual darkness, a spark of realization in the stone walls of his heart. The centurion is mentioned in three of the four gospel accounts (Matthew 27:45-56; Mark 15:33-41; Luke 23:44-49) not for his cruelty, mercilessness or ability as a commander of the Roman army. He is mentioned for something far more important, for a marvelous and wonderful experience than many of the crucifixions he ordered. The thief who asked for the Lord’s mercy and this centurion became the first persons to confess the deity of Jesus Christ on that brutal day. How did this transformation take place?

A. The Message from the Cross

The strange events surrounding Jesus’ death, and the words spoken by Jesus on the cross become the heart of the entire message of Scriptures. The words from the cross and the extraordinary miracles on the day show Jesus Christ as a unique human being, who was God in human form (truly the son of God), and the only Savior of mankind, without a doubt. There is a striking contrast between the centurion and everyone else around the cross. The disciples who followed Jesus, who had been taught by Jesus at length that this day would come – were completely confused and terrified. The religious leaders who handed Christ over to be crucified had thwarted the deepest wisdom of God and rejected it; and the Cross of Christ has become a symbol of foolishness to them, whereas it was the saving power of God for the centurion. The centurion had watched many people die on the cross, yet even for him Christ’s death was unique. He saw something about Jesus’ death that was unlike any other. As he stood guard and observed a dying Jesus he listened to the final Gospel message from the Cross. 1. The message of forgiveness: Father forgive them (Luke 23:34). 2. The message of salvation: Today, you shall be with me in Paradise (Luke 23:43). 3. The message of Compassion: Woman, behold your son, and behold your mother (John 19:26, 27). 4. The message of anguish: My, God, My God, why have you forsaken Me (Matt: 27:46; Mar 15:34). 5. The word of physical torment and human need: I am thirsty (John 19:28). 6. The message of triumph: It is finished (John 19:30). 7. The message of Committal: Father into Thy hands I commit My spirit ((Luke 23:46).

A Gentile pagan as he was, he confessed that the “Man” on the middle cross was indeed the Son of God, worthy to have been listened to, obeyed, praised, and worshipped. The leader of the brigade, who ap-

parently had not restrained his soldiers in the cruel mocking of the Savior, now changes his demeanor, rises up courageously and becomes a witness to and for the crucified Christ. Whereas the people chosen by God to prepare the rest of the world for the Messiah rejected him, the centurion accepted the Lordship of Christ as He hung on the cross. It is paradoxical that the Gentiles who never were waiting for a Messiah accepted Jesus as the true Son of God fulfilling what John said, "He came to his own, but they did not receive him but rejected" (John 1:11).

B. Convincing Language of Natural signs

Before the confession of the centurion there happened few natural signs that were true miracles: 1. Darkness filled the earth, 2. The Jerusalem Temple curtain was torn followed by Earthquake, and, 3. The dead bodies of holy people rose from the grave and they came alive.

1. Darkness filled the Earth (Matthew 27:45-54; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44, 45)

According to the synoptic Gospels, there was a period of total darkness occurred during Jesus' crucifixion, which took place on the first day of the Passover. Darkness covered the earth beginning at the sixth hour (noon) and continued until the ninth hour (3 o'clock) because of the terrible sacrifice of God's only begotten Son on the Cross of Calvary. These miracles happened on that day. Jewish historians record that there was an unexplained darkness on the Feast of Passover in the Spring of AD 30. Secular medieval writers record it as the "crucifixion eclipse." The moment Christ gave up His life, darkness covered the earth. Passover was always celebrated during a full moon, but on this day when the Lamb of God was slaughtered darkness prevailed over the earth in fulfillment of the prophecy. "On that day, says the Lord GOD, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight" (Amos 8:9). What does this miracle of darkness at Calvary mean to us? Christ claimed that "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12). When the light of this world is out, it is an undeniable fact that the world will be in dark. The gloom of Calvary for three hours was reminiscent of the prevailing darkness; a sinful world without Christ, the light of the world. The darkness showed that Jesus was bearing our sins on the cross. Because God's Son had taken our infirmities and carried our sorrows upon Him, God shrouded Him in darkness to illustrate that He is pure and holy. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush and cause him to suffer for us (Isa. 53:4-6, 10-12). While it dramatically portrayed the sin and darkness of all people, it also dramatically demonstrated the love of God stepping into time and history to free us from the darkness of Satan's kingdom, sin and death. In the dying words of Christ, the centurion began to see himself as a sinner in darkness in need of a Savior's light, in whose brightness he saw the rays of redemption. No wonder, Herbert Lockyer said, "Through the gloom of the Calvary fell the gladsome sunshine of heaven's forgiveness."

2. Rending of the Temple Veil and Earthquake (Matthew 27: 50-53; Mark 15: 38; Luke 24: 45).

At the very same moment Jesus died, the temple curtain was torn from top to bottom followed by a violent earthquake with such ferocity that rocks were split. According to Josephus, a contemporary of Jesus and a Jewish historian, the curtain in Herod's temple would have been nearly 60 feet high, 30 feet wide and 4 inches thick. We learn from Hebrews (Hebrews 9:1-10) that this curtain was representative of the separation between God and man, beyond which only the High Priest was permitted to pass only once each year (Exodus 30:10) to enter into God's presence and make atonement for the sins of people (Leviticus 16). Many theological expositors agree that the tearing of the veil is symbolic of Jesus establishing a new and living way of reaching God personally in our daily life (Hebrews 9:11-15). With Christ's death and atonement God granted us a free right of way to the holiest, the throne of God by the indwelling of Christ within us, henceforth to all who want to reach Him. We are the temple of God (2 Cor. 6:16).

The miracle of the earthquake and the splitting of the rock at the moment of Christ's death provide evidence to the unbelieving that Christ has control over nature. Jesus Christ was the Creator. It was through Him God had created the entire universe, including this earth. It was truly an earthshaking event to see that God's Son, who had come as the Savior was now dead. In Colossians we read that He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together (Col. 1:15-17). Jesus has control of storms, winds and waves (Matthew 8:23-27) and he walked on the water just as a paved thoroughfare (John 6:19-21). The rock splitting was also a foreshadow of the resurrection to follow proving that a grave cut out of a solid rock and

sealed by another rock cannot hold him.

3. Resurrection of the dead Saints (Matthew 27:51-53)

The Gospel of Matthew records that "the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. Coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. Death has been a fact of life since Adam and Eve disobeyed God. From the day of their disobedience (Gen. 2:17) not only a physical death but a spiritual death also looms on human life. But through this miracle of Calvary, Christ has power and authority to recapture life which He created, from the grip of death. It is interesting to note that all dead people did not come to life, but only the bodies of saints (holy people) who believed and died before His death, and people who believed in the promise of Messiah who died before His incarnation in flesh. When Jesus had raised Lazarus from the grave, He reminded Martha, Mary and others "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies" (John 11:25). This also bolsters our belief and hope in eternity with the Lord God. "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (2 Thess. 4:16, 17). Through this miracle, we have the promise of a new life in resurrection of all the dead in Christ. Yes, by Jesus' death, we have eternal life.

Jesus, Son of God: Word in Flesh

The Old Testament, written many centuries before Christ, reveals that He was the Son of God. He would be the seed of a woman (Gen. 3:15). It reveals the when, where and how He would be born (Mic. 5:2; Dan. 9:26; Isa. 7:14). It was foretold that He will be the son of Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 15:5) through the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10) and in the line of David (2 Sam. 7:12). It was predicted that Christ would die for our sins (Ps. 22; Isa. 53; Dan. 9:26; Zech. 12:10) and would rise from the grave (Ps. 2:7; 16:10). Christ's uniqueness is seen in His conception, life, sinless nature, death, resurrection and ascension. His teachings were unique and He is superior to all the prophets, Abraham or Moses. Oswald Chambers writes, "In the Cross we may see the dimensions of Divine love. The Cross is not the cross of a man, but the exhibition of the heart of God. At the back of the wall of the world stands God with His arms outstretched, and every man driven there is driven into the arms of God." As the centurion watched the Good shepherd, God's High Priest being slaughtered for us, the rushing blood washed his stone heart, brought peace to his conscience, peace between him and the God he offended, and peace for all men of all generations. Our lives as individuals and the life of the Church depend on journeying with Christ affirming He is truly the Son of God. Only by journeying with Christ, we can finish the race. Our personal life and church life should be a life of introspection as apostle Paul instructed us to see whether we live in true faith in Christ (2 Cor. 13:5). Truly He was the Son of God!

A Cosmo-centric Theological Vision for the Endangered Planet Earth

Rev. Dr. Alexander M. Isaac



"A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever" (Ecclesiastes 1:4).

Introduction

The days of the planet earth are numbered. The fast depleting earth 'commons' (shared resources) and the alarming rate of species extinction are but early warning signals. Humanity envisions a looming shadow of the disastrous consequences of an impending global eco-crisis amidst the fast pace of development since the Industrial Revolution. The first issue of Time Magazine for 1989 named the "Endangered Earth" the "Planet of the Year" with a cover picture by artist Christo depicting a globe wrapped in plastic and tied up with twine. The lead article quotes Genesis 1:28 holding the motif of 'dominion' responsible for the present practices of environmental exploitation: "The idea of dominion could be interpreted as an invitation to use nature as a convenience." Earlier in 1967 Lynn White brought out a severe criticism that the "Judeo-Christian tradition bears a huge burden of guilt" when they rationalized the exploitation of nature. But the Biblical tradition is replete with instances of ecological awareness and respect for the created order. The environmental crisis has thus become the most profound and urgent secular and theological concern for humanity. The future of the earth is still threatened by a large pile of nuclear weapons. Environmental degradation has tragic consequences such as species extinction, desertification, unpredictable natural disasters, and global warming, all of which are induced by human interference in the ecosystem. Earth has become an 'endangered planet.' Ecological Crisis is thus a challenge to the integrity of the cosmos. The church as a redeemed community needs a theological vision for the future of our endangered planet. It requires a re-structuring of the traditional theological doctrines and a radical ecological consciousness that leads to a cosmo-centric theological vision.

Eco-crisis, Evolution of the Cosmos and a Cosmological Vision

The human is the latest link in the evolutionary process. The late coming species Homo sapiens has the advantage of taking care of a several billion years old planet with several million species of life. The WCC Canberra Assembly report analyzes how the social and economic systems affect the ecological system: All of creation seems broken, wounded and hurt. It is shocking and frightening for us that the human species on this earth, which came on the scene somewhere around 80,000 years ago in the 4.5 billion-year-long history of this earth, has been able to threaten the very foundations of life on our planet in only about 200 years of industrialization. This crisis has deep roots in human greed, exploitation and economic systems which deny the elemental truth that any and every economic and social system is always a sub-system of the eco-system and is totally dependent on it.

The alarming factor of the eco-crisis is that its effects are often irreversible. Science and technology are creative human endeavors. But in the hands of selfish multinational corporations and developed nations, they are but tools of exploitation and destruction. In order to sustain life on earth the human has to depend on the ecosystem. But it is a fact that all other life forms could afford to live in the planet without human presence. Regarding the future course of evolution, G.G. Simpson brings together the paradox which is expressed through the unique characteristics of humanity. The human broadly manipulates the environment, thereby introducing finalism into the process of organic evolution. "The human has a hold over the power of life and death. While one has to be blamed for the extinction of other living organisms, the very same power includes the human prerogative for self-extinction as well." This is ironical. Do we really have a purpose or a vision about the future of the cosmos? Let us look at some secular and theological responses to the eco-crisis as a limiting factor for the cosmos.



Secular Global Initiatives: UN Conferences

The first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment was held in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1972. Twenty years later, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, which met at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992, discussed the alarming situation of global warming, ozone layer depletion, and environmental changes. After 20 years, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development was held again at Rio in June 2012. These conferences defined sustainable development as one that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Viewed "as the guiding principle for long-term global development, sustainable development consists of three pillars: economic development, social development and environmental protection." Despite these noble initiatives, the developed nations must acknowledge their guilt for creating unjust economic structures having a direct impact on global ecosystem. All scientific and technological progress asserts human creative ability. But the helplessness of scientists to combat environmental crisis which has gone out of control is

alarming. Scientific enquiry must initiate a symbiotic and reciprocal relationship involving humanity and ecosystem as well as dialogue between scientists and theologians to evolve a cosmic perspective.

Theological Response: WCC Conferences

A world conference on "Faith, Science and the Future" met at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on 12-24 July 1979 as a climax of a ten year program by the unit on Church and Society of the World Council of Churches. Rev. Dr. K.V. Mathew represented the Mar Thoma Church in the conference. The conference was a sequel to the 1975 Nairobi Assembly which authorized a continuing program to explore "The Contribution of Faith Science and Technology in the Struggle for a Just, Sustainable and Participatory Society." The theme of the WCC Canberra Assembly (1991), "Come Holy Spirit, Renew the Whole Creation," added new dimensions to the prophetic role of the church leading to a renewed commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation, with faith, courage and hope. The report points out two major problems: the world-wide social justice crisis; and the global ecological and environmental crisis. "Social Justice for all people and eco-justice for all creation must go together. Social justice cannot happen apart from a healthy environment, and a sustainable and sustaining environment will not come about without greater social justice." The question of justice, poverty, powerlessness, social conflict, and environmental crisis are integrally related. The prophetic calling is to take sensitive care of the earth with anticipation for a renewed relationship with nature. WCC Tenth Assembly (Busan, 2013) theme, "God of Life, Lead us to Justice and Peace," is a prayer and statement of faith that reflects "the growing sense of urgency to care for life and seek justice," calling Christians to engage with God's vision of justice and peace, so that all may have life in fullness." It is a call to work together fostering the values of justice, peace and integrity of creation. It is imperative that new hermeneutical tools be employed to interpret Biblical traditions for a contextual re-reading in the light of the emerging ecological consciousness.

Theology of Creation Refurbished

Traditional Christian understanding about the role of humanity in God's creation revolves around an anthropocentric model. Judeo-Christian tradition faces an ecological complaint for its contribution to the ecological crisis. The Genesis account of creation is called into question. The second creation story in Genesis 2 incorporates a stewardship motif, a garden to be taken care of, as the Yahwistic writers in Genesis 2 interpret. Yet the stewardship model came to be viewed as very much anthropocentric. Kwok Pui-lan writes: "The ecological crisis...challenges us to reflect on whether Christianity has promoted inter-relatedness, mutuality and eco-justice. Many eco-conscious Christians are aware that an anthropocentric, hierarchical and patriarchal religious system is part of the problem, and not part of the solution." It could be argued that Christianity with its anthropocentric theological affirmations has been indifferent or hostile towards the ecosystem. In the first creation story, however, God orders the human to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth (Gene.1:28)." The 'dominion' motif became the object of severe criticism as Lynn White points out. But note that this divine blessing includes five verbs, viewed as an authorization than a command for a people who just emerged from bondage in exile to inhabit their land of inheritance. The Priestly writers are confident that God who created the heavens and the earth has a divine purpose that is sustainable and blessed. It is a fact that in exile the people of God experienced exactly the opposite experiences as these verbs denote. The re-entry into the Promised Land thus shows a cosmic vision re-read and re-interpreted in the light of the Babylonian exile. The theology of creation as presented by the Priestly writers entails a cosmic vision. The whole created order is a unity. Creation story is in fact the story of the biosphere. The biosphere existed long before the human beings. It is arrogant on the part of the human to think that earth is solely at their disposal for dominion. The spirit which broods over the primordial waters in creation catches up the notion of God as a loving Mother. The Biblical creation stories affirm that God is the giver of life and that humanity forms an integral part of the created order. God, humanity, and nature are inter-dependent and inter-related. Traditional biblical interpretation of creation history is problematic because of its anthropocentric and soterio-centric orbital plane with its incompetence to address the ecological complaint. It is hermeneutically naïve to expect the biblical authors to share the agony and guilt that the present reader holds. Poststructuralist approach allows for interpretations not visualized by the author. Anthropocentric texts can be juxtaposed with other texts that share a broader cosmo-centric meaning such as Psalm 104 and Genesis 9 depicting the Rainbow Covenant.

Cosmo-centric Theology: The Rainbow Covenant

The Rainbow Covenant (Gen. 9: 8-17) symbolizes a cosmic covenant that is built into earthly eco-spheres with a rational order of interdependence, a purposive order of relationality and ecological integrity. God's faithfulness and the human responsibility towards nature and other living beings are vividly portrayed in the Rainbow Covenant, thereby making it a cosmo-centric covenant. It aims at harmony of the created order with a tangential hope for the future of the creation. But human sinful nature has always tried to break the covenant and as a result, the creation is endangered, manipulated and destroyed. The biblical writers were familiar with the sad plight of the earth. "The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled... the earth dries up and withers... The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant (Isaiah 24:3-5)." The people in exile interpreted their national humiliation and spiritual alienation as the result of divine judgment for violation of God's covenant with earth. Ecological crisis is the progeny of human greed and selfishness. Mahatma Gandhi's aphorism, "the world has enough for everybody's need, but not for everybody's greed" rightly depicts this precarious situation. The ecological and social struggles of the present day are integrally connected to economic exploitation and injustice.

Cosmo-centric Eschatology: Hope for the Renewal of the Cosmos

The theological affirmation about the cosmos as created by God and sustained by God naturally points to an eschatological dimension. Just as the Hebrew theological affirmations evolved a doctrine of creation and eschatological vision from their salvific experience, we need to develop a holistic view about the cosmos and a vision and hope for the future as part of a redeemed community. The creation, while it is groaning in travail (Rom. 8: 19-22), is still expecting a cosmic redemption and renewal. H. Paul Santmire holds the view that apart from having an 'inner agenda' of guilt and forgiveness of sins, we need to foster an 'outer agenda' with a hope for the future of the cosmos. He points our attention to a new direction: "In this time of increasing despair about the future of our species, and the future of our cosmos as a whole, the church needs a theological vision of the future that is larger and deeper than the hopelessness of our soul." The traditional Western Christian theology is silent about the redemption of the cosmic order. Instead, it overemphasized the salvation of human beings. The hope for cosmic redemption is rooted in scripture (Isa. 11:6-9; 65:17, 25; Col. 1:14-20; 1 Cor. 15:28; Eph. 1:10; Rom. 8:19-22). Santmire draws a paradigm of hope from a biblical perspective from the vision in the Book of Revelation about 'the new heaven and the new earth (Rev. 21:1-2).' He further states that the paradigm of hope moves us toward a vision of reality which is temporal. God's universal history has a universal dimension including the whole cosmos, and thus is a holistic movement. The vision of reality is therefore theocentric. God's

"universal will is to embrace all things, to unify all things, in perfect harmony in the perfected kingdom of God, when God will be all in all." The divine telos of the universe is "ecological and communitarian." The vision identifies "a new born city, a new born human community, rooted in its own renewed cosmic home." The ecological implication of cosmic redemption is manifested in the Creator embracing the cosmos through incarnation in Christ.

The culmination of history is the new heaven and the new earth. It is the very same earth, history and life that will evolve through a process of renewal towards a new heaven and earth. It is interesting to note that though the creation did not require our involvement, the redemptive process needs our participation in the divine purpose.

Conclusion

What prompts us to have a vision for the future of the cosmos? Of course, the biblical understanding of God as the Giver and Sustainer of life motivates us for a cosmic vision for the created order. But the anthropocentric pattern that permeated the traditional theological affirmations is problematic. The ecological complaint calls for Christian theology to be contextual and eco-friendly. The cosmic redemption is the basis for eschatological hope. It has ecological implications. Thus it follows that a contextual and relevant theological response requires a Cosmo-centric re-reading of the Bible and re-structuring of Christian doctrines of creation, covenant, and eschatology.

The church is called as a covenant community. The church has a crucial prophetic role to speak-forth about the blatant violations of covenant relationship, and strive for a renewed covenant relationship with nature and God. The scientific community must be vigilant to tell the hazards of human manipulation of the cosmic life. New political initiatives must be evolved to restructure exploitative economic structures.

A Cosmo-centric theological vision for the endangered planet earth must aim at building up an eco-just community. Our prayer for the renewal of the whole cosmos must result in a cosmic vision for tomorrow and appropriate eco-sensitive actions for today.

Writer's brief Profile: Rev. Dr. Alexander M. Isaac

Email: ikemary@gmail.com

Rev. Dr. Alexander M. Isaac was ordained in 1987. He is the son of late Rev. M.I. Alexander. He took his Th.M. from Princeton Theological Seminary in Christian Ethics and Th.D. from Boston University School of Theology in Social Ethics and Theology. Currently he serves as parish priest at Cheriyanad Mar Thoma Church, Kerala. Formerly he served in the US parishes of Boston Carmel and Philadelphia Bethel and as Youth Chaplain for the New York region.

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Themes for July & October Issues

July:

Church, Journeying with Christ
(Dead line for articles / reports May 15, 2013)

October:

God of Bible - People of Migration
and Mission of the Church
(Dead line for articles / reports Aug 15, 2013)



OBITUARY

Annamma Chacko Dharma, Dallas



Mrs. Annamma Chacko Dharma was born on May 18, 1926 at Eraviperoor, Moothedathu House, Kerala. She was trained at the Government Hospital for Women and Children in Madras in midwifery. She worked as a registered nurse at JIPMER, Pondicherry, India. She immigrated to United States in 1969 and worked at Parkland Memorial Hospital, Dallas until retirement. She was married to Captain D. Dharma in 1954 and is survived by her sister, Mrs. Mariamma Varghese and her husband, Dr. T.V. Varghese; her children Dr. Shashi Dharma, Mrs. Rebecca Ravi Martin, Dr. Kala Dharma, Ms. Geetha Dharma; her sons in law, Dr. M. Mahatma, Mr. Doug Martin; her grand children, Ms. Gina Mahatma, Ms. Asha Mahatma, Ms. Ashley Haynes, Ms. Alex Haynes, and Ms. Sterling Hahn. She was one of the founding members of the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas and continued to be a member of the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch. She was called to eternity on Feb. 3, 2013 and the memorial service was conducted on Feb. 8, 2013 at MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch and funeral service was conducted on Feb. 9, 2013 at MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch and she was laid to rest Hillcrest Memorial Park, Dallas on Feb. 9, 2013. Rev. K. P. Thomas, Vicar of MTC Dallas, Carrollton, Rev. Saji Thomas, Vicar of Sehion MTC, Plano, Rev. George Jacob, Youth Chaplain, Dallas, Rev. P. V. Thomas (retired) and Rev. Jose C. Joseph Mathew, Vicar MTC Dallas, Farmers Branch participated in the memorial and funeral service and also in the burial service. She touched many lives with compassion, love and understanding. Her dedication to humanity and public service was felt by many. Her spirit will always be with us, her memory in all our prayers.

Rev. Jose C. Joseph Mathew, Vicar, MTC Dallas, FB



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How the Church Can Act As a Catalyst in Building Up a New Sustainable Ecology?



Prof. Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackadu, Kerala

God's purpose in Christ is to heal and bring to wholeness not only persons but the entire created order. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross. (Col.1: 19-20) The Church should work for godly, just and sustainable economy which enables all humans to flourish along with diversity of creation. We should be open to all models. We may accept one model as the starting point but should be open to learning from the others as well, thus broadening and deepening our commitment to the renewal of God's creation.

1. Monastic Model

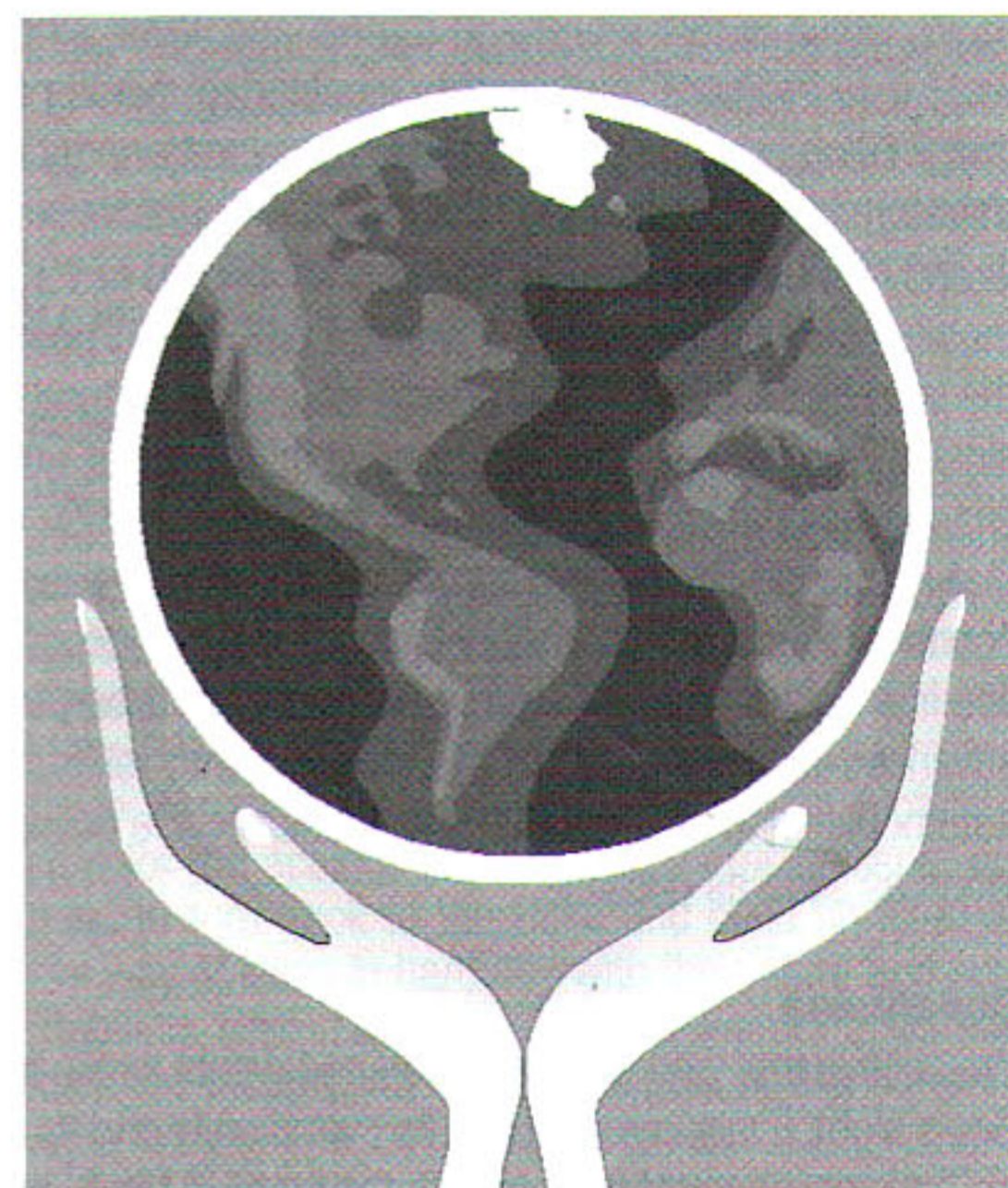
Ascetic or monastic model is the oldest form of the Church's responses aimed at integrating some concerns relating to ecology as well as the crisis created by the misuse of the natural environment. Living in harmony with Nature and keeping her needs to a minimum, the monastic communities proclaimed the message that the earth is the Lord's and that it should not be indiscriminately used to satisfy human avarice and greed. It was also a powerful protest against a wasteful lifestyle that is devoid of any responsibility to the world of nature. The Indian philosophical tradition culminated in an organic, holistic and spiritual world view and renunciative way of life. Hence, reduced consumption is an obvious outcome of the philosophy. There emerges, thus, a pattern which is eco-friendly and sustainable.

2. Liberative model

Ecological liberation approach is based on the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus. Bringing about the Kingdom of God is an active process of removing the sources of oppression and working towards the day when God's justice will reign in the human and non-human world. The Church must recognize and challenge the sinful socio-economic and political systems that oppress the Earth, its environmental systems and its people. The church in solidarity with the weakest, with that part of the creation that is victimized, seeks the renewal of whole creation. The Church has to declare its solidarity with the groups like Chipko, Appico, Narmada Bachavo Andolan (NBA), National Fishworker's Forum (NFF), Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangh (KRRS), etc., which are struggling for ecological justice.

3. Eco-friendly Outlook- Study from Nature

The resources in Nature are finite or limited. These finite resources are used for an infinite period of time by getting constantly renewed. This is possible only if the resources are recycled. That is the reason behind cyclicality. One of the most inevitable results of this cyclicality is that all the living and nonliving things get connected to one another. Such connected or inter related things are involved in a constant process of give and take. Every living organism accepts something either from other organism or from the environment, and in return gives something to it. E.g. honeybee accepts honey from nature as her food, and gives pollination (gives honey and pollination done). Environment maintains diversity. It doesn't allow any particular species becoming so dominant that it will affect the existence of other species. There is no VIP-ism in nature. Environment is a system which is of all, by all, for all. Everything in nature is decentralized. Through decentralization, Nature tries to divide the burden equally at all places. Food gets produced or is available everywhere; water quenches thirst everywhere; waste is decomposed everywhere. Everything in nature is biodegradable. Human attitude is responsible for all the problems of environment. We only take everything from nature, there is no giving. Whatever goes away from us to nature is hazardous, toxic or non-biodegradable. This affects the Natural cycles.



4. Catalyst in building up a new economy

The Church should act as a catalyst in building up a new sustainable economy. Building a new economy involves phasing out the old industries, restructuring the existing ones, and creating new ones. It is being replaced by efficiency gains in some countries; by natural gas in others, such as the United Kingdom and China; and by wind power in others such as Denmark. The new economy will also bring major new industries, ones that either do not yet exist or that are just beginning. Wind electricity generation is one such industry. Now in its embryonic stage, it promises to become the foundation of the new energy economy. In effect, there will be three new subsidiary industries associated with wind power: turbine manufacturing, installation, and maintenance. Manufacturing facilities will be found in scores of countries, industrial and developing. Installation, which is basically a construction industry, will be more local in nature. Maintenance, since it is a day-to-day activity, will be a source of ongoing local employment.

5. Training the personnel for a new ecological system

The Church already owns scores of educational institutions. If we have a vision about a new society emerging, then we should start institutions to train the personnel for the new ecology. And it shall come to

pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions (Joel 2:28). It is true that Church could not bring out such a new ecological order which has political, economic, social, and other dimensions are involved. Church should have an ecological vision of the new society that should emerge. A prophetic Church should foresee such changes like expanding professions in an eco-friendly world economy. This will be a catalytic work for building up a new economy. Here the role of the Church is the role of a midwife.

6. Restructuring the Economical System

These aspects give us some idea of the size of the ecological crisis of the planetary system. The Earth is sick and wounded. Human beings, especially with the advent of the industrial revolution, have proved that they are exterminating angels, veritable demons of the earth. But human beings could also become guardian angels, intent upon saving the earth, which is fatherland and motherland. What kind of society do we want? Surely we want it to be more participatory, egalitarian, aiming at solidarity, and capable of uniting imagination and analytical reason. The world energy economy is on the verge of a major transformation. Historically, the twentieth century was the century of fossil fuels. Coal, already well-established as a major fuel source in 1900, was joined by oil when the automobile came on the scene. It was not until 1967, however, that oil finally replaced coal as the workhorse of the world energy economy. Natural gas gained in popularity during the closing decades of the century as concern about urban air pollution and global climate change escalated, moving ahead of coal in 1999. We know the kind of restructuring that is needed. In simplest terms, our fossil-fuel-based, automobile-centered, throwaway economy is not a viable model for the world. According to Lester R Brown, the alternative is a solar/hydrogen energy economy, an urban transport system that is centered on advanced-design public rail systems and that relies more on the bicycle and less on the automobile, and a comprehensive reuse/recycle economy. And we need to stabilize population as soon as possible.

Conclusion

We believe that God loves creation and wants its life to flourish. No creature is different in God's sight. Every creature has its own dignity and its own rights, because all are included in God's covenant. So it is said in the story of Noah: behold, says God, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and every living creature (Gen 9: 9-10). The fundamental human rights come from this covenant with us. The rights of future generations come from the covenant with us and our descendants. The rights of nature come from the covenant with us and our descendants and with every living creature. Before God, the creator, we and our descendants and every living creature are equal partners of God's covenant. Nature is not our property. All living beings must be respected by humanity as God's partners in the covenant. Whoever destroys the nature destroys him/her. Whoever injures the dignity of the animals injures God. We should consider earth as a single complex system, as a living organism. Every subsystem is linked to all other subsystems through the blowing of the winds, the oceans, and the migration of species, the cycles of growth, maturation, ageing and death. By means of the air that we breathe we are united with all animals, all plants, but also our vehicles, factories, and all our industrial chimneys. Hence we have to build an ecology that will support, not undermine, future generations. As an organized body, Church can work as a catalyst in this transformation for a sustainable ecology. Green Church movements are for building up a sustainable ecology to protect the rights of future generations.

Editor's Note: Edited version of paper presented in the first International Expert's Workshop on Faith based Organizations and Education for Sustainable Development, at Barcelona (Spain) held in 2007, under UNESCO's auspices by Dr. Mathew Koshy M.Sc., M.Phil., Ph.D. He is an Environmental Scientist, Writer, Convener of CSI Synod Ecological Concerns Committee and former Principal of Bishop Moore College, Mavelikara, Kerala. He also initiated the Green Church movement in India with the support of Episcopal churches. He is also the Secretary of the Nilackal Trust Ecological Commission. Web site: www.drmathewkoshy.com and he can be reached at his e-mail: drmathewkoshy51@gmail.com.

The Dazzling Crowns

Prof. Elias Abraham, Baltimore



The dreams that rise

to the top of Zion
cry in endless pain,
"We want to live."
The mystic flight
of misery's wings
that carry the bitter pangs
of nightly souls
suddenly stops
the air-breached desires
squeezed in shaking distress.

Like the sleeping disciples,
that yielded and vanished,
when, just a few feet away,
the cross its meaning expressed,
man, from social commitments
flees, leasing time and space
for the foe to fix the flag.

Ah! The victory
of this ambushing virus,
'robbing Peter for paying Paul,'
makes me tremble and fall,
marking no antidote
for life's hopeful return.

Don't we see the silver lining
far behind the colorless clouds?
It's time, the bell is ringing;
we, the Body, be
the desert man's voice,
and lead the world
to victory, and peace,
where, love's sweats,
and truth's weapons
will keep them safe.

This time,
not the doves and merchants
he targets,
but the rapists and racists,
and the rated nocturnal Tarquins,
who do heist on human minds.

He is coming
on wings of fire,
holding the sword of plasma
erupted from the solar wrath,
to hold us on,
to our diamond dreams,
defending and defeating,
offering us,
the dazzling crowns.

Eco-concern and its Biblical Roots



Koshy Bijo Samuel, BD Final Year MarThoma Theological Seminary

Introduction:

Environmental concern is the most pressing issue the global community is facing today; hence environmental movements have begun in the last few decades to find an amicable solution to this problem. With increasing scientific consensus the environment has become a central issue in international politics. The level of public and political concern is reason enough to make the environment, or ecology, a topic for reflection by theologians, ethicists and biblical scholars whose agenda is to some extent set by contemporary issues and priorities. Theologians and scholars have used the Bible to foster a positive Christian response to the challenge of environmental care.

Discussions of the impact of the Bible and the Christian tradition on contemporary environmental attitudes and practices have been hugely influenced by Lynn White Jr's now classic article, 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis. White argued that the Christian worldview, rooted in the creation stories and the notion of humanity made in God's image, introduced the idea that nature is meant to serve human interests. Thus, Christianity, according to White is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen and bears a huge burden of guilt for introducing the western world view that has essentially permitted and fostered our contemporary ecological crisis. Ernest Conradie notes that many biblical contributions to ecological theology have been deliberately aimed at defending Christianity against the accusations of Lynn White.

Hermeneutics of Gen. 1:28

White criticizes Gen 1.28 and its theme of human dominance in a major essay on Human Authority in creation. But Richard Bauckham argues that in the pre-modern period, 'the dominant theological tradition did articulate a strongly anthropocentric view of the human dominion, but that this was largely as a result of imposing on the biblical texts understandings of human relationship to nature that were of Greek, rather than of biblical origin. Moreover, in the medieval view dominion was understood as a static fact, not a mandate for extension, and the world was understood as created, ready and adapted to human use, not requiring large-scale technological modification. This differed crucially from the interpretation of human dominion that accompanied the rise of the modern project of technological domination of nature. The medieval view was not itself sufficient to authorize that project. It was only with the separation of these anthropocentric ideas from their broader context in a theocentric worldview during the Renaissance that the notion of human dominion came to acquire a new significance.

Jesus and the Environment in the New Testament:

New Testament portrays Jesus as a positive ecological role-model (Mt. 6:25-34/ Lk. 12:22-31). As we can see, parables mentioned by Jesus included nature, trees and agricultural surroundings. Thus Sean McDonough writes that "A Christian theology of creation has much to learn from the attitude of respect which Jesus displayed towards the natural world. Gospels reveal the fact that nature played an important role in the life and teachings of Jesus

Conclusion:

The rising concern for the preservation of the earth and reducing the damage to the eco system has made thinkers to turn to the Bible and search for options from the Bible. Biblical tools have helped us to understand that though there are no explicit eco-concerns in the Bible, humans lived in harmony with nature and respecting the laws of creation. Today our lack of concern for the ecology has become a crucial issue. We need to turn back to the Bible and build an alternative way of living in harmony with the nature and surrounding. God created us to be stewards, to till and keep the ground. We are the keepers of this universe and we need to act in such a manner.

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MAR THOMA VOLUNTARY EVANGELISTS ASSOCIATION 10TH NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Hosted by the Mar Thoma Church of Dallas Farmers Branch
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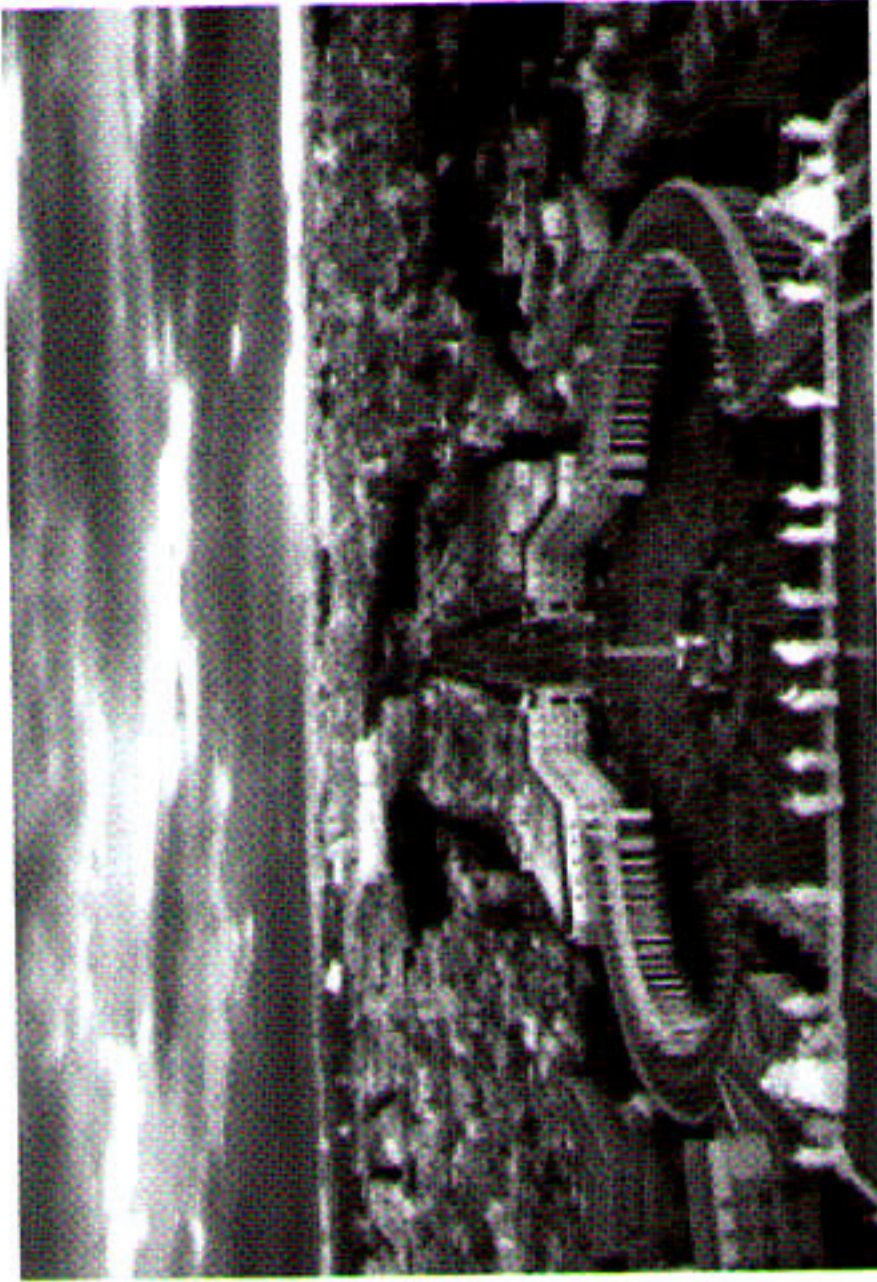
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Infertility of Soil and Womb

Rev. A. C. Thomas



Most human activities have environmental consequences and that change in natural systems almost inevitably affects human beings. Petri Liukkonen puts it, "In a very real sense the land does not lie; it bears a record of what men write on it. In a larger sense a nation writes its record on the land, and a civilization writes its record on the land... a record that is easy to read by those who understand the simple language of the land." This environmental history will remind us the famous statement of an anonymous writer, "Civilized man has marched across the face of the earth and left a desert in his footprints."

1. Formation of Soil Community on Earth

The beginning of the universe was probably 15 or so billion years ago. About six or seven billion years ago our solar system was born. Over the next couple billion years it cooled, solidified. When the earth was young there was no life and no soil on this planet. Life appeared in the chemical broth of our ancient oceans about five billion years ago according to the most generally accepted estimates. Bacteria, microorganisms developed into higher forms, more complex forms. For about one and two-thirds billion years living things were restricted to the waters of the oceans, seas, lakes and rivers. There was no soil as we know it today. Life gradually spread to the land. The amphibians at the edge of the oceans moved inland, and reptiles appeared. Then mammals appeared a billion years ago. May be ten or fifteen million years ago one branch of the primates left the trees and species followed species and finally human appeared on the scene some 2.5 million years ago. Then primitive plants and animals began to establish themselves on land. This was the beginning of the soil formation—soil that support life. Through millions of years the valleys were being covered with thicker layers of soil and denser vegetation. The soil layer on the hillsides was thin at first, but it became thicker from millennium to millennium. As each plant died, it added its organic remains to the minerals of the rock particles. Bacteria and other forms of simple plant life began to live off the organic matter in the newly made soil. Soil community recycled organic matter, retained moisture, fixed nitrogen, and made nutrients available to the roots of plants. Instead of honoring them like diamonds, we treated this soil community like dirt. An acre of good topsoil may house eleven tons of insects, worms, nematodes, fungi and microbes each with a major role in the great Passion play of death and resurrection. Even without counting roots, there is often more living biomass below the surface than above it. These decomposers are at once at the top of the food chain and at the bottom, taking nutrients from the loftiest organisms and passing them

down to the lowest. They are the clasp of the food chain, without which it dangles limp and broken. One teaspoon of good grassland soil may contain 5 billion bacteria, 20 million fungi and one million protozoists. Expand the census to a square meter and we will find besides unthinkable numbers of the creatures already mentioned, perhaps 1000 each of ants, spiders, wood lice, beetles and their larvae and fly larvae; 2000 each of earthworms and large myriapods; 8000 slugs and snails; 20000 pot worms, 40,000 springtails, 120,000 mites and 12 million nematodes.

These citizens are often in motion move in the dark, constantly doing business with one another. All soil creatures add their quota of organic matter to the soil; all excrete, all die, all play a role in the process of decay. Earthworms eat soil and refine, enrich and mix with the proceeds of the leaves that the worms have dragged into their burrows and eaten. They deposit their feces on the surface of the ground. These castings are fine, dark fabulously rich, having twice the calcium, thrice the magnesium, five times the nitrogen, seven times the phosphorous and eleven times the potassium of the surrounding soil. On a single hectare of ground, in the course of a single year, earthworms may deposit five hundred metric tons of castings. These are excellent media for the growth of bacteria and fungi. Thus, the city of dirt was not built in a day. It is the product of millions of years of natural process. The soil population grew gradually supporting the rest of the terrestrial life, including for the last two million years human. Each generation of plants left a new carpet of humus. Thus death is not opposite to life, death and decay are necessary for the continuation of life. Violence and killing is opposite to life. Instead, modern human fear death and try to avoid death and engaged in violence.

No species of plant could long survive on sloping hillsides unless it helped check soil erosion. If a species of plant or animal did evolve that tended to destroy the soil, it usually destroyed itself by destroying its primary source of food. This should be the basic factor when we evaluate human civilization.

2. Human Kingdom

Primitive human who came on the scene about 2.5 million years ago did no upset the natural process of the soil, plant and animal growth. Nevertheless, over the earth as a whole, the soil-building process went on. Like other animals, human were forced to adapt themselves to the natural environment in order to survive—that is, until they became civilized enough to master the other animals and the plants and attempt to master Nature herself.

The human intelligence developed a social organization called tribe and lived for millions of years with the same tribalism. They followed the pastoral way of nomads. In this report we call it 'tribal civilization.' With the invention of agriculture, they began to de-

velop a social organization commonly called civilization. It was hierarchical rather than tribal. This civilization paved the way towards settled life and urbanization. Thus we may call it 'urban civilization.' "The first man who, having fenced in a piece of land, said, "This is mine," and found people naïve enough to believe him, that man was the true founder of civil society." This transition occurred independently in numerous locations around the world, but emerged first about 10,000–12,000 BCE in the Fertile Crescent in the present-day countries of Syria, Turkey, and Iraq. The geographical area around the rivers Tigris and Euphrates witnessed one of the earliest urban civilizations, called Mesopotamia. The Egyptian civilization was the other one developed around the river Nile. With the advent of civilized human about six thousand years ago, the soil-building process was reversed in most areas where they resided: the quantity of soil and the amount of life the soil supported all began to decline. Their superior tools and intelligence enabled civilized human to domesticate or destroy a great part of the plant and animal life and the productivity of the soil. Tom Dale and Vernon Gill Cartor observe, "His chief troubles came from his delusions that his temporary mastership was permanent. He thought of himself as master of the world, while failing to understand fully the laws of nature."

3. Agriculture and Urban Civilization

The discovery of agriculture is an alliance between human and mainly grass for grains. In the last ten thousand years, roughly half the earth's soil has been consumed by this alliance: alliance of species that has failed to put back what it took out. This is the departing point from earlier alliances among other species in the development of soil. Laid bare by plowing, its roots systems ripped to shreds, the soil remained bare much of the year—bare to wind and rain, which carried off great gouts of it, and bare to sun, which baked the nutrients out and ravaged the soil population.

When the rain came, they washed away the fertile topsoil from the sloping grain fields, deforested hillsides, and overgrazed grasslands. The land was often ruined for farming in a few generations. When this happened, the people had to move to new land or eke out an existence on impoverished land. These civilizations declined or perished in a few centuries, as they depleted or exhausted the lands on which they were built. All across the continent of Asia and into Europe and North Africa, we find the seats of former leading civilizations that are now among the backward areas of the world and the infertile land.

Contrary to the phase before agriculture, on the world's farmland today, the rate of erosion exceeds the rate of soil formation by a factor of thirty. Like that of fire, the more destructive a form of agriculture is, the more quickly it expands. Humanity was divided into two groups namely gathering community and producing community with the beginning of agriculture. The history of civilization is the constant conflict between these two groups. Those who belong to gathering community are the victims and producing community are the benefactors. Historical records of the last 6000 years show that civilized human with few exceptions, was never able to continue a progressive civilization in one locality for more than thirty to seventy generations. (800 to 2000 years). After a few centuries of growth and progress in a favorable environment, their civilizations declined, perished or were forced to move to new land. We may look into two major civilizations that exceeds this period—the Nile Valley, Mesopotamia.

4. Mesopotamian Civilizations

Mesopotamia in the sixth and fifth millennia BCE became ready for the first development of a strong urban civilization associated with the Sumerians. The phenomenon of the city first appeared on the face of the earth in Mesopotamia sometime between 4000 BCE and 5000 BCE marking a significant moment. The decisive factors that brought about the early urban civilizations were the new kinds of economic and social organization, the large-scale exploitation of human energy, the formation of ruling classes, hierarchical organization and the administrative division of labor.

Jared Diamond in his *Collapse* comments that salinization contributed to the decline of the world's oldest civilizations, those of Mesopotamia. We call present day Iraq, Turkey and Syria "Fertile Crescent," formerly the leading center of world agriculture. Salinization made it a desert and it is a cruel joke to apply the term "Fertile Crescent" today. It is now an acceptable fact that agricultural development in the Mesopotamia resulted in desertification, salinization caused by irrigation which reduced population numbers in the area. Mesopotamia's food source was subject to quick breakdown through all its history due to the silt deposit by the Twin Rivers in the valley. Whereas the Egyptian source of food was never seriously threatened.

5. Egyptian Civilization at Nile Valley

The desertification of Sahara was a process continuing for the last 4000 years. The Nile valley is one of the exceptions to the rule that civilized human can prosper in a given

area for only thirty to seventy generations. The original Egyptians prospered and developed their civilization for more than a hundred generations. At last they submitted to conquest, their land still served as a principal granary to help enrich the conquerors for more than two thousand additional years. It was mainly due to the unique features of the valley. The water of Nile rise each summer. It was rich brown water pouring down from the Abyssinian Alps and the highlands of Central Africa 1500 miles away. When the waters withdrew, the farmers cast their seed in the mud. As centuries passed, population grew. The delta and the narrow flood plain are deposits laid down by this mighty river through geologic time. Egypt is the gift of Abyssinia, Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda, Congo and Sudan. The water, the silt, and the humus came from these areas made Egypt. Thus Egypt is truly the gift of the Nile. The silt from the Blue Nile and humus largely from the jungle and swampy sources of the Nile were laid on Egypt in a thin annual layer. The records show that in the first thousand years after Christ, about fifty inches of silt were deposited on the flood plain. This thin skin of new soil was the secret of Egypt's long and productive career. During the Macedonian Ptolemy's rule, Alexandria became the foremost cultural center of the Mediterranean world. This Greek culture also was supported by the rich soil of the Nile Valley. With the death of Cleopatra (30 BCE) Egypt became a Roman colony. To feed the Rome, great part of the surplus products were shipped out of the land. Alexandria remained great city from where the surplus grains and goods that the Romans exported. The civilization regressed during the period of the British rule and exploitation. Dale and Cartor opines that it is almost impossible to have another resurgence of Egyptian civilization, "Man has finally become civilized enough—he has acquired sufficient engineering skill and egotism—to start the destruction of this almost indestructible land." The dams constructed in the Nile Valley to control flood choked the deposit of twentieth of an inch silt and humus through the land of Egypt. The Nile Valley no longer is receiving the annual replenishment of minerals and humus that made it so productive for more than six thousand years. Egypt is no more gift of the Nile. The Egyptian farmers tried to compensate for the loss of declining yields due to the lack of annual replenishment by liberal applications of chemical fertilizers. In due course, the humus supply in the soil became less and less. They hastened the depletion of humus by growing cotton on a large scale, for cotton leaves almost no organic matter in the soil. The perennial irrigation has created serious problems of waterlogging and accumulation of toxic salts in the soil. It started the ultimate destruction of this most durable home for civilized people. It is observed that production will almost certainly decline unless Egyptian farmers adopt a system of farming that will provide for a regular replenishment of the organic matter that the White Nile used to give to the lower Nile Valley. "Man finally became civilized enough to start destruction of this stable land. He upset the natural balance with his axes, plows, herds, dams and chemicals. The region is now threatened with going the way that most other regions have gone."

6. Garden of Eden and Gathering Community

Cain and Habel story represents the conflict between gathering and producing communities and it claims that God is with the victims of this development. Cain, who is the first civilized human developed city represents the producing community whereas Habel, the gathering community. The story of the Tower of Babel can be seen the myriad lights and fractures of city life. Civilization brings people together—in the most literal sense—but also divides them. Indeed the city thrives on division: of labor, of classes, of ethnic groups. If the tip of the tower should reach at heaven, its base should cover the whole earth. It is true! The civilized human is now covering the whole earth. The infertile womb of Sarah is a sign that the infertility of the land leads to the infertility of the womb. Sarah had to wait twenty-five years after departing from the seat of Mesopotamian civilization, Ur to be with the fertile womb. Obedience, as for Sarah is a change in life style, from urban center to rural. It was a journey from false security of city to the fullness of life with rural, from affluence of wealth to abundance of life. Cities are active outside but dead inside whereas villages are calm and quiet inside but life is teeming inside. The growing rate of infertility among the urban dwellers and in the desert area is a revelation. The health of people is directly proportional to the health of the soil. In most cases, the more brilliant the civilization, the shorter was its progressive existence. These civilizations declined in the same geographical areas that had nurtured them, mainly because human despoiled or ruined the environments that helped them develop their civilizations. Most of the poor people of the earth are poor mainly because their ancestors wasted the natural resources on which present generations must live. There have been from ten to thirty different civilizations that have followed this road to ruin. The dynamic growth of civilization rests on a surplus production by those who supply the necessities of life. A surplus production of food, clothing, shelter and other necessities by farmers, herders, fishers, loggers, miners, hunters, trappers and other primary producers is necessary before civilization can start. The primary producers must supply a surplus before artisans, designers, engineers, scientist, philosophers, writers, artists and other civilizers can exist and function contributing to the growth of civilization. Trade and commerce must be developed so that the primary surplus products reach to the potential civilizers. With the decrease of these resources, the decline of the civilization starts. The prophets already warned it. About Babylon, Jeremiah warned, "Her cities have become an object of horror, a land of drought and a desert, a land in which no one lives, and through which no mortal passes" (51:43). About Egypt, Ezekiel warned, "When I make the land of Egypt desolate and when the land is stripped of all that fills it, when I strike down all who live in it, then they shall know that I am the Lord" (32:15). In Psalms 107:33-34 we read "He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground, fruitful land into a salty waste, because of the wickedness of its inhabitants."

The creation story tells that the age of the people in the Garden of Eden, where they enjoyed nomadic life was counted in centuries and outside the Garden it was counted in decades. Gatherers practiced the most successful and longest lasting lifestyle in human history. Suppose we try to explain human history using a twenty-four hour clock. On which one hour represents 100,000 years of real past time. If the history of the human race began at midnight, then we would now be almost at the end of our first day. We lived as gatherers for nearly the whole of that day, from midnight through dawn, noon, and sunset. Finally, at 11:54 p.m., we adopted agriculture. As our second midnight approaches, the plight of famine-stricken peasants gradually will spread to engulf us and the urban civilization is in its dead end. Decline of the most civilization rests on the ecological side. The agriculture destructed soil fertility. Free and civilized activities of the civilized were utterly dependent on the economic surplus produced by a captive majority. Pulitzer Prize-winner and American evolutionary biologist, physiologist, Jared Diamond opines "Agriculture is the worst mistake in the history of human race." The Genesis story of creation and the response of the Patriarchs to the urban civilization would say this dimension of the story. Paleontology and paleo-pathology shows that this shift in the lifestyle of human has a dreadful effect on the human on many grounds. Professor and Chairman of the Department of Anthro-



Diocesan Episcopa with Most rev. Zachariah Mar Nicholovos Metropolitan and Most Rev. Thomas Mar Eusebius Metropolitan.

pology at the University of Florida George Armelagos and his colleagues at the University of Massachusetts show how these early farmers paid a price for their new-found livelihood. Compared to the gatherers who preceded them, the farmers had a nearly fifty percent increase in enamel defects indicative of malnutrition, a fourfold increase in iron-deficiency anemia, a three-fold rise in bone lesions reflecting infectious disease in general, and an increase in degenerative conditions of the spine, probably reflecting a lot of hard physical labor. Life expectancy at birth declined significantly in post-agricultural community compared to the pre-agricultural community. Infections and most other health problems are more commonly found in later farming sites than in either earlier or later nomadic groups. Tuberculosis and leprosy continued to increase in frequency with continued sedentary living, and high frequencies are found in the middle ages in Hungary. Thus we cannot swallow the progressivists' party line that we chose agriculture because it was good for us. Actually humanity was trapped by it. Humanity is now entering a new era in which most of the world is civilized except for a few tropical and sub-polar regions. Most of the areas are fully settled—that the base of the Tower of Babel to cover the whole earth. Then, the pattern of the past, -use up the natural resources and move to new land—is no longer an adequate solution. Conquering the earth is the easy part. The hard part is running it once you have it. A piece of tail: Forest is the only entity in the universe that converts the salt water to fresh water, Carbon dioxide to oxygen, sand to humus and the energy of sun into food. Desserts are formed not because there is no rain, but because there is no forest causing rain. Civilizations declined not because of war, but because of decline of soil fertility made them conquering more fertile land in search of food and other resources.

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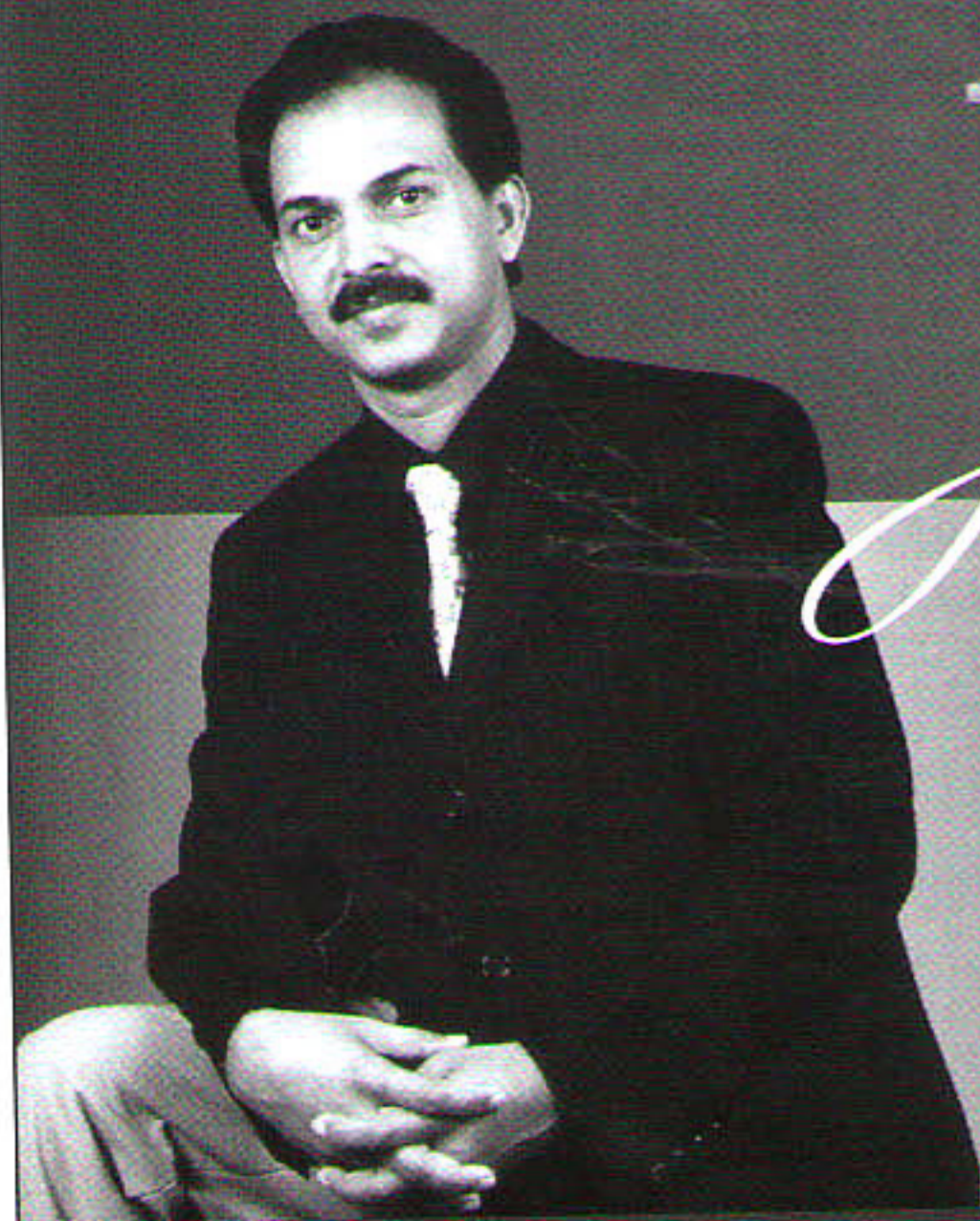
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Caring for Creation: A Theological Perspective

Rev. Christopher Phil Daniel



Introduction

We are living in a time in which ecological concerns cannot be ignored. The world is undoubtedly facing a number of crises that can be claimed to have originated from the activity of the human community. Humankind's perspectives on creation and its role in the universe need to be re-examined in the light of the ecological crises of today. When we possess a proper theological understanding of creation and our role within the created order, we will gain valuable insight into how we are to live in solidarity with and as a part of God's creation. The aim of this article is to provide a theological basis on the topics of creation and human responsibility in order to foster concern for the environment and its present state.

Understanding Creation

The creation narratives of the Bible, found in Genesis 1-2, are not scientific documents composed to satisfy the intellectual curiosity of the reader concerning exactly how the world came into being. They are a special type of narrative; they are doxological, theological assertions of who the Creator is and what creation is in response to the creator God. There is widespread agreement that the creation narratives of Genesis convey a sense of God's design for properly ordered relationships in creation. The first and foremost relationship is that of God with all that he has created. Likewise, humans, created in the image of God, are designed to function in loving relationship with God, other humans, and the rest of creation, and themselves. The presence of sin, however, is what distorts all these relationships.

The Intrinsic Value of Creation

As stated above, a main thrust of the creation narratives is to emphasize the loving relationship of the Creator to the created order. Thus, the most basic reason for humans to care for creation is out of love for God. We love God and others because God first loved us (John 13:34; 1 John 4:19; Ephesians 5:1-2). Humans often restrict their love to those who benefit them, but Scripture makes it clear that to love God requires we love everyone. Although these passages concern love for our human neighbors, it is clear that God's love does not stop there. God's love and concern extends to animals, sparrows (Luke 12:6), and the lilies of the field (Matt. 6:28-30). By extension, we ought to show concern for what concerns God, and love what God loves. Love of creation extends to all, irrespective of any utilitarian benefit we may derive from it. God's love for and inner satisfaction with all of creation is established in the first chapter of Genesis itself in God's personal evaluation of his handiwork as being "good" (used six times – 1:4,10,12,18,21,25). "Good" is a comprehensive word; it can mean "beneficial, correct, pleasant, beautiful, or delightful." The text emphasizes God's inner contentment and pleasure with creation when it says that God saw that creation was good, and after the sixth day, "very good" (v. 31). Some think that the goodness of creation relates primarily to humans – "the crown of creation" – for whose benefit, they say, God has made everything. But Genesis bases the goodness of creation on God's evaluation, not on human utility; each part of the whole is pronounced "good" for its own sake.

Ultimately, it is God who gives value to creation according to his proclamation that it is "good." When humans seek after lesser "goods," we do not have the right to rescind God's greater "good" by destroying habitats or obliterating species. Evolutionary theory also adds a new dimension to our understanding of creation as intrinsically valuable. We now know that God took fifteen billion years to create the universe as it is today, that life on earth began about four billion years ago, and that humans (*Homo sapiens*) have only been here a fraction of that time (200,000 years). For the nearly four billion years before the arrival of our first human ancestors, God was sustaining and bringing into being new creatures about each of which God considered "good."



The Place of Humans in Creation

From what has been said above, it is apparent that the Bible designates human beings as fellow creatures with the rest of creation. It is also true, however, that humans are distinctive because they are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28). Since at least the time of Francis Bacon, people have argued from the Genesis mandates that God has given humans unrestrained dominion over nature. When this passage is read in isolation from its literary and historical context, such anthropocentric interpretations seem justified. But when it is seen in context, a much different interpretation emerges.

It is widely recognized that the description of the image of God is grounded in royal language, i.e. humans are created to convey God's rule on earth. God's rule is not the rule of tyranny but the rule of benevolence that serves the interest of all of his created subjects. As James A. Nash states, "The image incorporates God-given assignment to exercise dominion or governance in accordance with God's values."

Gen. 2 contains another version of the account of creation that more explicitly highlights the role of humans as fellow creatures and caretakers of the earth. The Lord God forms the man, 'adam, out of the dust of the ground, 'adamah. Thus, humankind is part of the earth – made from dust and in doing so is called to be the caretaker for the whole created order. Being a caretaker does not involve complete dominion or freedom but is to be understood within the profound limits that are set on human conduct with reference to the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

Humankind is placed in the garden to “serve” and “watch over” (or “protect”) the soil (Gen. 2:15; 3:23). In the agrarian setting of this passage, humans are given the charge to protect the garden. It is not stated that this care-taking responsibility is only for the sake of human life, for all of created life depends upon it. The Bible and science both teach us that we are connected to the rest of creation. This affirmation of relationality is, moreover, enhanced by the theory of evolution. Even recent genetic research confirms how closely humans are related to other creatures in that we share over half our genes with plants and animals (almost 99% is shared with chimpanzees). We are not only all caught up in the same web of life but also we are all made from the same raw materials. This “ecological kinship” brings with it “moral responsibility” toward the rest of creation. Care for creation is care for our own kin is simply the right thing to do.

But isn't evolutionary theory, when applied to humans, actually anti-human and anti-environmentalist? If humans are part of the evolutionary process, it could be objected, then that wars, theft, greed, self-aggrandizement, and environmental destruction can be justified on the grounds of natural selection and evolutionary design. If other species prey on one another and compete for habitat, then why not say that humans are only following their evolutionary instincts when they conquer other species and occupy their habitats? At its worst, evolutionary theory seems to reduce humans to just another animal guided by instinct. What this should teach us about our place in the environment is that we should take and exploit as much of the environment as possible because that is what we do. We, like the rest of the animal kingdom, survive by destroying and consuming; something has to die in order for us to live. Unlike other animals, however, we are not limited to an ecological niche or by natural selection. Rather, we have the ability to adapt to almost any environment to our liking through creative capacities. Herein lies the problem: we are capable of unlimited pursuits to fulfill desires beyond what we actually need, resulting in harm to our neighbors, human and non-human alike. Being “creative predators,” we have a moral responsibility to choose not seek out unlimited power. We can opt to be either “profligate predators” or “altruistic predators.” God makes us morally accountable creatures.

Humans have moral responsibility to rise above a mere animal existence and make self-conscious choices for the benefit of all of creation. This is where our study of Genesis might help to avoid our sinful tendency to grasp at unlimited power and possessions. Since we are part and parcel of the rest of creation, we can learn from the rest of creation that as natural predators we should limit our desires to inhabit a limited niche, respecting the niche of other creatures, and taking only what we actually need. The domain mandate in Gen. 1 and the service mandate in Gen. 2 not only assure humans a place in creation, but they limit that place to what furthers God's benevolent rule and enhances God's power of blessing to all of creation. In short, when we humans do not limit predatory acts toward the rest of creation, then we violate God's creation mandate for the rest of the creation.

The Redemption of Creation

Often the idea of redemption is associated with creation. This idea of “cosmic redemption” or the restoration of creation is a common theme throughout the Old Testament as well. Genesis 1 and 2 tells of God's design for all of creation, both for the present and for the future. Humans are on earth to extend God's care for the earth and its creatures so that God's benevolent intentions for creation might be fulfilled. This is nothing short of redemption itself. When speaking of the people of Israel, it can be understood that they were called to begin the process of restoring all nations, peoples, and ultimately all creation back to their intended state. Redemption as restoration provides the background for many of the “cosmic” passages of the Bible. For example, the theme of a “new heaven and earth” (Isa. 65:17-25; Rev. 21:1-8) concerns the restoration of creation. Christ, as the image of God (Col. 1:15), fully embodies God's beneficent rule of blessing ordained in Gen. 1: “And through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven” (Col. 1:20; cf. Eph. 1:10). Likewise, in his role as Messiah, Christ conveys God's rule by blessing all of creation. Paul speaks of the entire creation in travail as it hopefully awaits the completion of God's work, releasing it from “bondage to decay” so that it might “obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:18-24). This passage clearly intertwines human redemption and the redemption of creation. Christ's cosmic work is literally “grounded” in the incarnation. By assuming human flesh and redeeming it, Christ embodied the evolutionary history that humans share with the rest of creation. Nature will finally be redeemed as it is in the process of being redeemed. Just as God's power transforms us and his grace daily sustains us, so God is sustaining all of creation, and this is redemption. As Holmes Rolston observes, the evolutionary process of growth and reproduction, or “regeneration,” is the primary way that nature is being and will con-

tinue to be redeemed. Redemption of nature includes rescue from the effects of past and present human sin, but more importantly, it is the constant renewal that enables creation to fulfill God's ongoing purposes. This redemption of nature is the broader context of human redemption, and not vice versa. If nature is the object of God's redeeming love and reveals the glory of God, then why does it sometimes appear to be out of control? The “dark side” of creation appears in the power of natural disasters, animal predation, sickness, plague, death, etc. . . . which all necessary components of evolutionary theory are. These occurrences should not serve as reasons for not embracing our human responsibility to care for creation. From an evolutionary perspective, death and decay are necessary for the emergence of new life. Death is a necessary as we cannot conceive of life without it. For anything to live, it is at the price of the death of others. As such, the suffering of creation may be viewed as a parable or symbol of God's suffering work in Christ. It was through the unjust suffering of Christ that the power of a new resurrection life arose. But this new life, like the resurrection of Christ, also points us forward in hope that life will someday conquer the final enemy, that death will be defeated (1 Cor. 15:26).

Conclusion

Evolution asks questions of the past not out of idle curiosity concerning origins but out of earnest desire to understand what creation is now, and where it is headed. This is also the task of creation care: to look back at the creation narratives to determine what God intends for creation now, and what God's future for creation might be.

In closing, let us reflect on Ps. 104, which expresses the comprehensiveness of God's work as a call to worship the Creator. We are summoned to enter the cosmic sanctuary. We are to marvel at the diversity of life in creation, each part of which invites us to join in praise of our Creator. The Creator has given us the power to convey his blessings to all creation, a power that we sometimes turn selfishly towards ourselves. But God cannot rejoice forever in the glory of his works if humans destroy them (v. 31). Just as the psalmist warns, sinners will be consumed from the earth (v. 35). And if we continue in our sin of destroying and exploiting creation rather than caring for it and preserving it, we cannot worship. We cannot worship with our brothers and sisters in Christ if we are preoccupied with manipulating and dominating them to satisfy our lusts for power. Neither can we worship with our fellow creatures if we are obsessed with turning them into consumables. Let us tend to the creation below and seek the things that are above. It is only then that we can sing the praises of our Creator.

Editor's Note: Rev. Christopher Phil Daniel is born and brought up in Dallas and is a member of MTC Dallas, FB. He is the 9th ordained youth from this Diocese as a priest of the Mar Thoma Church. At present he is serving as the Vicar of Kattickallaruvi St. Paul's MTC and Thonikadavu Christos MTC under Ranni-Nilackal Diocese. He can be reached at his e-mail at chrisp-daniel@gmail.com.

Climate Change/ Crisis as a Call for New Ethical Discipleship



Mr. Satheesh K. S., Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam



1. Introduction

Climate change/crisis is the most serious environmental problem in the world. The climate change is negatively affecting in the Green Earth. The result of the climate change is based on the reasons of the global warming, for example the using of fuel oil, chemical raw materials in the factories, military weapons, etc. These reasons are effecting in negatively in the Green world. The climate change is created by modern industrial and technological growth and modern life-style. Global warming is the consequences of the colonization of the life world by imperial, capitalistic and neo-liberal projects and their systematic interventions. Climate crisis is a issue of justice. We are called by Christ to be His disciples for social justice and sustainable development in all communities.

2. Climate Change - Definition

According to Thomas Manickam, "climate crisis is a deadly war humans have been waging against nature. It is reflected in the contamination of air, water and soil, deforestation and species loss, in ozone depletion and emergence of deadly disease." The increase in extreme weather conditions is associated with what is called "climate change". It simply means, a change in the "average weather" that a given region experiences. Climate change on a global scale refers to changes in the climate of the earth as a whole, including temperature increases or decreases, and shifts in wind patterns and precipitation. These changes are real and are the result of human activities since the industrialization. The decades of rapid agricultural expansion, industrial process and transport revolution following the Industrial Revolution led to the huge release and accumulation of green house gases in the atmosphere. This has resulted in the trapping of higher than normal levels of reflected solar heat by the atmosphere, leading to the gradual rise of the earth's surface temperature, or global warming. Rising global temperature in turn have led to alteration in the earth's climate-affecting temperature and rainfall patters, rising see level

and contributing to extreme weather events among other things, thus leading to climate change. Derived from the Greek word 'klima' for inclination, referring to the angle of inclination of the sun's rays above the horizon, climate is generally defined as average weather. The climate system consists of the earth's atmosphere, oceans, land surfaces, ice sheets, and its flora and fauna, whose processes and interactions are driven by the balance of incoming and reflected solar radiation. A W.C.C. document in 2008, declares, "climate change as the variation in the earth's global climate or in regional climates over time", and its effects we being experienced already in many regions of the world. Global warming, i.e. the increase in the average temperature of the earth's near-surface air and ocean; is one of the most evident aspects of climate change. The average temperature of the "earth is rising... other effects of climate change are hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons, which are increasing in strength, causing loss of life and destination of the environment and property." The climate change is a crisis of the cosmos. So the climate change and climate crisis are using as same meaning.

3. Causes of Climate Crisis

Climate is a complex and interactive system. It consists of the atmosphere, land surface, snow and ice, oceans and other water bodies, and living beings. Climate is the long-term average of a region's weather events combined together. The entire climate system gets the power and energy from the sun. The radiation balance of the earth may get modified by three fundamental ways. 1) by changing the incoming solar radiation 2) by changing the fraction of solar radiation that is reflected 3) by altering the long wave radiation from earth back towards space. Climate, in turn, responds directly to such changes as well as indirectly, through a variety of feedback mechanisms. The global warming is to the main reason for the climate change. Global warming is to an average increase in the Earth's temperature, which in turn causes changes in climate patters. A warmer Earth may lead to change in rainfall patterns, arise in sea level reduction in food production and a wide range of impacts on flora and fauna including humans. The rapid rate of urbanization has led to increased fossil fuel burnings and ultimately leading to increased co2 emission. Toxic - terrorism which is the dumping of highly hazardous toxic wastes such as nuclear and e-wastes turns a few countries of the world as "garbage dumps" resulting in climate change. The profit-oriented technology encouraged the maximum extraction and burning of

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Carbon-based fossil fuels by to generate maximum profit within a short span of time. Human consumption patterns, life style changes, economic and social inequities, lack of concern for future generations, lack of awareness of the rights of creation, population growth, military activity, deforestation, flawed spiritual perceptions, all of which based on selfish human interests, have been largely responsible for creating situations that global warming and climate change.

4. Results of Climate Change

The unprecedented occurrences of drastic variations in climate and global warming, frequent and intense devastation of land and communities due to severe draughts, floods, and hurricanes, eruption of epidemics and new diseases; sea level rise, subsistence farmers and fishers, higher incidence of malnutrition, cardio-respiratory unmatched increased in the number of the impoverished, displacement and exile of the climate change refugees. The main results are following: Green House Effect, Sea level rise, Drought, The Earth's Protective Ozone Umbrella is fast being ripped off – by the industrial activities, Acid Rains, Energy Crisis, Depletion of forests, Soil has already become dead – uncontrolled and continuous use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and pollution have destroyed the basic structure of soil and made it sterile, Pollution, Biological Diversity – Rare species of plants, birds, reptiles, and flies are becoming extinct day by day.

5. Biblical and Ethical Debates on Climate Crisis

In the Bible there are covenants and laws and status to be observed if the earth and its inhabitants are to experience oneness and harmony. And the most important covenant is between God and humanity. We are God's gardeners, and when we forget this, then not only does the earth suffer, because all things are connected. We believe that God love creation and want its life to flourish. No creation is different in God's sight. Every creation has its own dignity and its own rights, because all are included in God's covenant. God says to Noah, "I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and every living creature" (Gen. 9:9-10). So, whoever destroys nature destroys him/ herself who ever injures the dignity of the creatures, injures God. According to Lynn White in his article 'The Historical roots of our Ecological Crisis' he maintained that because modern science and technology are products of western culture, as because western culture has at its roots in Christian attitudes and principles, and because Christianity is arrogant toward nature and views nature as having no reason for existence except to serve humankind, then Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt for our current ecological crisis. Bible says 'the earth is the Lord's and everything in it'. At one point it has to be accepted that Christianity has paved way for the present ecological crisis. Church has failed to exercise her prophetic role when larger injustice was done to the nature by depleting, degrading and plundering in the name of development.

6. Our call is to protect God's Creation

"We humans have the responsibility as well as the capability to protect the earth and its habitats – animals, plants, insects and even micro organisms. If they are to be known by future generations, we must act now" Dalai Lama. According to Dr. David G. Hallmann, "in order to protect human dignity and to respond to the growing of creation positively, the eco-challenge is to live sustainable in the 21st century with ethical and spiritual values such as gratitude, humanity, sufficiency, justice, faith, hope and love."

Governments of countries have responsible in multifarious way. UNO Christian organizations, Health organizations, tourism departments and ecological organizations are introducing many types of helping ways on climate in local national and international levels.

In the biblical accounts there is an integral connection between God, humanity and the world of nature. God is the creator and sustainer of the creation that consists of the humans and nature. Bible conceives human sin as the cause of disturbance in the harmonious relationship between human kind and the world of nature. Bible describes we are the protectors of the cosmos. God call is to protect our world and to avoid destroying powers of our eco-system. So we must to follow ethical values and to obey the laws of the nature.

8. Evaluation

The present day climate crisis is a man-made product of our civilization, the results of our fast life and the outcome of the type of development. We are called by the disciples of the God to nurturing to the nature and to avoid the causes of climate crisis. We must aware of, the climate crisis's ethics is basically a human ethic based on a social justice for all without discrimination of caste, creed, color, race, sex, ideology, religion or nation. The problem of climate crisis must not solve by as single effort, but the effort will start in locally and spreading internationally. All nations and people must participate against this evil. Every single effort is valuable. So we are must join to the social action movements and start our

effort to avoid causes of climate crisis. We need to act in re-ordering our personal life styles. Encouraging and promoting ecologically helpful programs and projects. Speak against and participate in agitations that highlight ecologically unavailable developments. Commit to use and promote only ecologically helpful products.

The Christian mission aims at the transformation of the whole cosmos to New Heaven and New Earth. The same vision is expressed in phrases like New Jerusalem, eternal life, shalom, fullness of life etc. It is a call to engage ourselves concretely and creatively in the ongoing reality of the life of the world so that it may be transformed into a realm where God's will be done. We are called to live according to the spirit by fostering, defending and affirming life in all life threatening situations. Our call is to be advocates of eco-justice and to be promoters of eco-spirituality. It is also an invitation to keep on listening to the cry and joy of the world. It is to feel the passion of the people and the nature for freedom and dignity, and to work for their liberation. It is a journey towards a New Heaven and New Earth. ●

Book Review

The Book of Prayers

by Isaac George, Published by St John's MTC, UK
Review by: Dr. Jansen Jacob

Tools help us to be effective in our jobs - whether it be carpentry or office administration. In today's world we are constantly trying to use our time more effectively. I see this book of prayers as a valuable tool to help us be more effective in our personal and family devotion times.

Ecclesiastes 3 reminds us that "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens". We all have to face different seasons in our life - from birth to death and everything in between. It is soul quenching to be focused in our prayers during the different seasons in our lives. This book of prayers helps the reader focus the mind on God rather than on the situation at hand. Whether it is joyful times, sad times or stressful times we need to keep things in perspective by focusing on God and his perfect will for our lives. The author's suggested worship songs, scripture, and prayers help us put God in the centre of our situation rather than letting the situation preoccupy our minds and God being placed somewhere in the distant periphery. In fact the Lord's Prayer printed on the cover page offers a visual reminder of the best model for our prayers as well as the need to place God in the centre of our life

I find the suggestion to read Psalm 91 before praying particularly inspiring, for it helps set the scene by offering great words of comfort in our situation. The passage speaks of God as the Protector of those who put their trust in Him. The promise is that those who place their trust in God, who run to Him for safety, will be rescued. Use this tool regularly and be blessed.

The Role of Religion in Ecology

Ms. Clara Changxin Fang, Baltimore



'The world is not the product of manifold power, but of one will, of one mind; and that one mind is everywhere active. It is a mountain air. It is the embalmer of the world. It is myrrh and storax, and chlorine and rosemary. It makes the sky and the hills sublime, and the silent song of the stars is it.' Ralph Waldo Emerson, Divinity School Address, 1838. Jennifer Karsten, Executive Director of Pendle Hill, a Quaker study center, was at a protest demonstration of the Keystone XL Pipeline in Washington DC when she suddenly found herself standing next to Bill McKibben, the organizer of the event. Wanting to encourage him, she said "Don't worry Bill, a bus load of Quakers is on their way!" It wasn't the first time that a religious group was active in the fight against climate change. All over the country, Christians as well as other religious groups have been rallying around climate change as a way to express their beliefs. One of these organizations, Interfaith Power and Light, hosts an annual Cool Congregations Challenge, where religious congregations compete to reduce their carbon emissions. Last year over 550 congregations of many different faiths from 44 states participated. In addition to activism, religious scholars have been fervently reinterpreting theology to accommodate environmental ethics. The Evangelical Environmental Network created the slogan "What Would Jesus Drive?" to "discover new ways to love your neighbor as we strive together to reduce fuel consumption and pollution from cars, trucks, and SUVs." Climate change is arguably the most important issue of our time and religious institutions are uniquely suited to be a leader in this movement. I would like to articulate what I see are the most important reasons for religion to be involved in this seemingly secular issue. First, religion's Golden Rule is a direct indictment against a practice that disproportionately harms billions of people in the poor countries of the world. While climate change affects everyone, the most severe impacts have fallen on the poorest segments of the population, many of whom depend on natural resources for survival. These are also people who have contributed least to the problem, whose emissions, even when billions of them are added together, are a mere rounding error in the accounting of global greenhouse gas emissions. Even though they have done nothing to contribute to the problem, climate-induced droughts are destroying their crops and drying up their water supplies; climate-induced floods are washing away their homes, and climate-induced sea level rise is eroding their shorelines and in some cases submerging entire island nations. These people pay with their livelihoods and their lives the price for people in developed nations to drive our cars, power our homes, and advance our industries. The fundamental principle of "do unto others what you would have them do unto you" is at its heart a statement about fairness, that we should not treat anyone with less regard than how we would

treat ourselves, our family, or our own people. As institutions that champion the caring of human beings and doing what is right in inter-human relations, religions have tremendous authority in framing climate change as a moral issue and working to alleviate the injustice and suffering caused by climate change.

The principle to do unto others is usually applied to living parties, but what about the care of future generations? Should the living be morally accountable for actions that will affect future generations? In the Bible's Old Testament, Malachi writes, "And he [God] shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." In the last century, mankind has been tearing through the earth's supply of nonrenewable resources and putting the burden of pollution on future generations. Should the present generation be allowed to cause irreversible harm to ecosystems simply because they will not be around to deal with the effect of their own actions? A Native American proverb teaches, "We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children." Christianity as well as all religions have the resources to articulate an ethic of care not only for the living but also for the unborn.

Second, many world religions espouse an ethic of stewardship towards the Earth. Christianity teaches that God created the plants, animals, and everything on the earth and commanded men to have dominion over it. This phrase has often been used to justify man's domination of nature, but it is also interpreted to mean that humans should care for creation, use it wisely and not abuse it. In his 2010 World Day of Peace message, Pope Benedict XVI said: "Man's inhumanity to man has given rise to numerous threats to peace and authentic and integral human development ... yet no less troubling are the threats arising from neglect – if not downright misuse – of the earth and the natural goods God has given us. For this reason, it is imperative that mankind renew and strengthen that covenant between human beings and the environment, which should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying."

In Buddhist teaching, human beings are not seen as superior to other living beings but as sharing its consciousness with other living beings. The concept of Atman, or no self, means that individuals are part of a whole, a universal soul manifest throughout the world. The belief in reincarnation supposes that an insect or

bird could have been a human being in its past life and therefore deserving of basic respect. As such, Buddhists regard all of creation as being interconnected, and if one is hurt, the whole cannot be unaffected. Material consumption and the quest for power are seen as egoistic grasping that only reinforce our sense of separateness, which can never make us happy. Instead, Buddhism teaches compassion, moderation in living, and transcending the self through meditation. Strict Buddhists are forbidden to kill, eat meat, or possess property. The voracious way in which humans obtain and use energy today, using within a few generations the entire store of the earth's supply of fossil fuels, surely does not qualify as moderate or wise use of God's gift to man. Greed and overconsumption are problems which all religions agree are bad for the soul. Third, religions have the capacity to awaken our sense of the sacred in the natural world. So much of the stories, traditions and practices of religions involve nature to help us connect with the divine. In Hinduism, the river Ganges is a focus of rituals of purification. The Buddha found enlightenment while sitting under a Bodhi tree. In Christianity, it is no coincidence that the celebration of the birth and resurrection of Christ coincide with the winter solstice and the coming of Spring. Religion prompts us to seek out the sense of perspective and wonder that nature so effectively provides. Away from the light pollution of urban centers, who can help but marvel at the dazzling profundity of the night sky in all its star-studded wonder? On top of a mountain overlooking forests and fields, how can we not feel the majesty of the earth? In the forest by a stream, the beauty of nature has the power to heal and penetrate our souls. Is it implausible that contemplation of nature is what gave birth to religion in the first place? We have ample evidence of the inspiration of nature in art, music, literature, and all the noblest expressions of human civilization. On the influence of nature on culture David Orr writes: "We have good reason to believe that human intelligence could not have evolved in a lunar landscape, devoid of biological diversity. We also have good reason to believe that the sense of awe toward the creation had a great deal to do with the origin of language and those early hominids wanted to talk, sing, and write poetry in the first place If natural diversity is the wellspring of human intelligence, then the systematic destruction of nature inherent in contemporary technology and economics is a war against the very sources of mind." If we destroy nature then surely we also destroy the source from which sprang the diverse expressions of human culture around the world. If nature could move us to spiritual reflection, then perhaps religion could also awaken in us the love of nature.

Lastly, religion is uniquely suited to mobilizing the widespread support needed to fight climate change. Whether one is rich or poor, educated or uneducated, religion has adherents in all cultures and all levels of society. Religion speaks to fundamental human needs for meaning, community and continuity. By appealing to these powerful impulses, religions have tremendous influence and authority throughout the world. The largest religions are also well-organized institutions that are able to mobilize deep financial, social, and cultural resources quickly in response to a crisis. During natural disasters such as the Japanese Tsunami or Hurricane Katrina, religious organizations were the first to respond and provide physical, emotional, and spiritual aid. Religious people are also some of the biggest contributors to humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders. Politically, religious organizations have been powerful in mobilizing people towards specific causes. In 2008, Jews and Mormons were instrumental in helping to pass Proposition 8 in California to ban same sex marriage in an otherwise very permissive state. Buddhist groups have mobilized popular support for the liberation of Tibet and the release of political prisoners in China. Religion has the potential to be a powerful force in the fight to stabilize the earth's planet and bring environmental justice; what is needed is a clear connection of climate change as a moral issue from the pulpits and pamphlets.

Even though religion can be a powerful force for good, it has its challenges. Religion can be anthropocentric, or focused on the welfare of human souls to the exclusion of other types of sentient beings. It can also be overly concerned with transcendence by viewing the physical world as limited in favor of liberation in a transcendent spiritual world. This attitude can result in a denial or indifference towards environmental problems. Religions can also become dogmatic, in which independent thought is suppressed in favor of rigid adherence to doctrines or rituals. Many individuals come to religion for refuge from the complexities of the modern world; for such people religion can be motivation for inaction rather than action. Christianity in particular has a history of being dismissive of science in favor of literal interpretations of the Bible. In Lynn White's "Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" he writes:

"Our science and technology have grown out of Christian attitudes toward man's relation to nature which is almost universally held not only by Christians and neo-Christians but also by those who fondly regard themselves as post-Christians. Despite Copernicus, all the cosmos rotates around our little globe. Despite Darwin, we are not, in our hearts,

part of the natural process. We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim. Is Christianity able to put aside its anthropocentric roots and take a role in the battle to defend creation? I believe the answer is yes. Increasingly, religious leaders are using the substantial resources in their power to motivate and mobilize their congregations to protect the environment. The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change and its campaign for education and action, called the Catholic Climate Covenant, works to spread education and action about climate change. The nonprofit organization, Christian Ecology, was founded specifically to form an eco-positive response to Lynn White's argument that Christianity is at the root of the ecological crisis. Interfaith Power and Light, which organizes the Cool Congregations Challenge, was founded in 1998 with several Episcopalian congregations. Today it includes Lutherans, Baptists, Catholics, Jews, Buddhists among others and has a 1.5 million operating budget. These and many other religious organizations are making a tremendous difference.

Perhaps the potential leadership role that religions can take with regard to climate change could be compared to its role in the abolitionist movement. In the 19th century, religious leaders such as Theodore Weld and Lucretia Motts used Christianity to voice a theology of freedom and equal rights for African Americans. Publications such as *The Bible Argument Against Slavery* were widely circulated and had a profound impact on public sentiment towards slavery. Their battle was long but ultimately successful. A hundred years later, Martin Luther King Jr. also used the church for moral appeal and as a social base to advance civil rights. The crisis of climate change today threatens social justice in much the same way that slavery did in the 19th century. Through droughts, floods, rising sea levels, and other disasters, climate change robs the poor, third world countries, and other species that share this planet with us their right to liberty and pursuit of happiness. So far, science and politics have failed to move us on an issue in which there is little economic or political benefit. If we are to make the marked transitions needed towards a sustainable future, then it must matter to us as a moral issue. Climate change cannot only be an issue of economic or ecological sustainability, but a fundamental question of right and wrong, the way that slavery ultimately mattered as a moral issue. We are running short on time against climate change; and the contribution of religions is greatly needed in the effort to create an ecologically just world.

Editor's Note: Ms. Clara Changxin Fang is Sustainability and Campus Planning Manager at Towson University Baltimore, MD. Ms. Fang earned a Master of Environmental Management from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. She earned the LEED AP credential in green building and design construction from the U.S. Green Building Council. She is a recipient of the John and Barbara Yellott Award from the American Solar Energy Society. Her web site is <http://residenceonearth.net> and she can be reached by e-mail at: cfang2@gmail.com.

Hope of Christians in this World of Crisis

Dr. Anna Panackal



The world we live in is created by God and humans are placed in it so that they may live happily and abundantly. We read in Gen. 1 how God was pleased with His creation. However, as time passed we find the world has changed drastically and it is facing manmade and natural disasters. We now live in a world created by God but modified and recreated by man in the form of his inventions, culture and value systems that make life more complex, demanding and often painful. We find ourselves racing against time for worldly possessions, recognition and achievement and we find ourselves being exploited and in turn exploiting others. Life is often viewed as a struggle instead of being a happy and satisfying experience. We are always in the middle of conflicts with political, social and religious forces as well as needs, desires and aspirations. Often we feel helpless under the poignant forces that surround us. Christians, who have repented their sins, accepted Jesus Christ as their personal savior and have submitted themselves to the will of God, have great hope of sharing the Glory of God. They hope for the promises guaranteed to all of Abraham's descendents: that they will inherit the world; that they will receive life which God gives to the dead and that they will live by faith, by love and by the hope of righteousness.

Who We Are

On the sixth day of creation God said "And now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us. They will have power over the fish, the birds and the animals; domestic and wild, large and small. He created them male and female, blessed them and said, Have children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control" (Gen 1:26-28). Thus the ecosystem was created and God was pleased with what He accomplished. The sin of Adam and Eve resulted in their alienation from a world of satisfaction and contentment to a world of shame and hate as well as hard work and pain. From a world where they had control over things around them, they had to move to a hostile world where they had to work hard for sustenance. Their ambition or greed to be one like God was not satisfied; but they had the knowledge to differentiate between good and bad and they had to live in a world that became more and more complex with time and they had to make harder choices.

God has given us the freedom to make choices. When we look around we see that present society is distancing itself from the teachings of the Son of man who was sacrificed on Calvary as atonement for our sins. In the Bible there are passages (Psalms 24:1; John. 1:3; Col. 1:16-17) which direct our attention to the importance of our role in sustaining the healthy ecosystem that God has created for us. As Christians we have a responsibility to protect, nurture and preserve His creation. He does not want us to be apathetic or torpid in our approach, in maintaining a healthy environment within our means and in doing as much as we can within our limits and being conscious about the havoc it can wreak if we ignore God's demand to be good stewards of His creation. Even though there are lots of discussions about global warming, a depleting ozone layer and the greenhouse effect, little has been done to preserve a healthy universe for our progeny due to political rancor and discord. It was gratifying to hear President Obama addressing climate change as a top priority during his second term. Let us hope and pray that the political leaders will be able to set aside their differences and work towards the betterment of humanity.

Christian preachers who exhort the conscience of ordinary people to turn away from sin and violence and to be followers of Christ in word and deed, through their powerful sermons on TV and elsewhere are doing it with the Bible in one hand and a gun in the other, which makes me wonder whether they missed the gospel of St. Matthew 26:52. I say this because of the overwhelming support against gun control among conservative Christians despite the terrible tragedy in Sandy Hook Elementary school in Connecticut as well as several other disasters due to gun violence in the past few years.

We Christians who are redeemed with the blood of Jesus Christ should be able to perceive

everything from the right perspective, think right and act right. Sin should have no control over us.

What Is Crisis

The Greek word "Krisis" means decision or turning point. The Chinese word for crisis is a combination of symbols for danger and opportunity. In current literature, crisis is a term used at the individual level to mean an emotionally significant event or radical change of status in a person's life.

When crisis is considered at the group level or national level it means unstable or crucial time for the state of affairs. Currently we are experiencing a more than higher volume of catastrophic events around us. Natural calamities, manmade disasters, and violence have become common phenomena. We are witnessing a decline in ethical and moral values. The beauty of the universe which God has created in all its glory seems to be fading due to the polemic environment created by man whom God made in His own image. Dr. David Jeremiah has pointed out in one of his books, "Within the pages of the last book of the Bible are the hope and encouragement we need to lift us from the grey gloom of present events to the promise of a brilliant future."

At the individual level, most of us pass through some sort of crisis in life; for some may be once in a while and for others more frequently. Most of us have the tendency to question God when tragedy strikes. We may wonder if He really cares. Sometimes God is so present in our lives we can almost reach out and touch him. But there are other times when God is so absent we may question if He is really there. Most of us have experienced the non-answering silence of God at one time or other. But as Christians, we have developed endurance and coping ability to face problem situations from the encouraging and prolific letters of St. Paul when he said "I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me" (Philippians 4:13). The world may make us suffer, but we have peace because Jesus defeated the world.

When we look at the life of early Christians, their aim was not in the secular life of this world, but in the satisfaction and social benefits they experienced from the church. We are in a similar situation because majority of us are not part of mainstream society and our social life is built mainly around our church. Some Christians view their religion as a social agency supporting the total humanity and undertaking the responsibility of holding the world together by the principles of love that transcend political frontiers. In this attempt, per-

haps Christian religion may have lost some of its spiritual intensity, but it gained social influence and felt power to affect the social processes.

Christian Hope

The theme of the World Council of Church's second assembly in 1954 was 'Jesus Christ, the Hope of the world'. The term "Hope" has a wide range of meaning in different countries. But for us Christians, hope comes from God. Christianity arose in the might of eager hope. We can never establish its boundaries or chart its course. We can only bring our minds and deeds in harmony with it. The Old Testament reiterates many times that God alone is the hope of the individual. It is futile for men to rest their hope in wealth (Prov. 11:28; Psalms 49:6-12; 52:7; Job 31:24) in houses (Judges 18:7, 10, 27; Job 18:14) in horses (Isa. 30:16) in human leaders (Psalms 146:3) and in empires and armies (Isa. 31:1-3; 2.Kings 18:19-24). Thus, the conception of God as the only hope of men is clearly a characteristic of the Old Testament.

But in the New Testament, the emphasis falls on Christ as our Hope. He is the source and goal of hoping. Jesus is explicitly called "Our Hope" (I Tim. 1:1). Jesus Christ is presented as the foundation and cornerstone, the rock on which false hopes are crushed and true hope is built (Rom. 9:33; 1 Cor. 1:23,24; Mark 12:10; 1 Peter 2:4-7; Eph. 2:20-22). These writers do not contradict the Old Testament in that they also speak of God the same way (1 Peter 1:21; 1 Tim. 4:10; 2 Thess. 2:16; 2 Cor. 5:1-5; Heb. 6:13-20). The Christian hope in the Son simultaneously represents His hope in the Father because Father and Son are one. Hope is the source of present strength for us because we know that we are moving towards "Glory that is to be revealed" (Rom. 8:18).

No individual or group has all the perception needed to bring humanity to its full potential. But we can show Christ's love to our fellow human beings by extending a helping hand, big or small, to those going through crises or tragedies in life irrespective of the cultural barriers that separate us from the love of Christ. Our hope should not be on riches or status of this world. We are not of this world, but are in this world for some time and our duty is to serve our fellowmen in their needs and give them emotional and social support necessary to encourage them to resolve their problems. When we come across a friend, a neighbor or a relative who is consumed with grief due to a crisis or tragedy, it does not help much if we just preach God's love and the hope of Heaven without reaching out and helping them deal with the situation. Once we show them Christ's love with a kind gesture, a helping hand, a reassuring word, it can assuage the pain and renew the hope that these crises are temporary and they will pass.

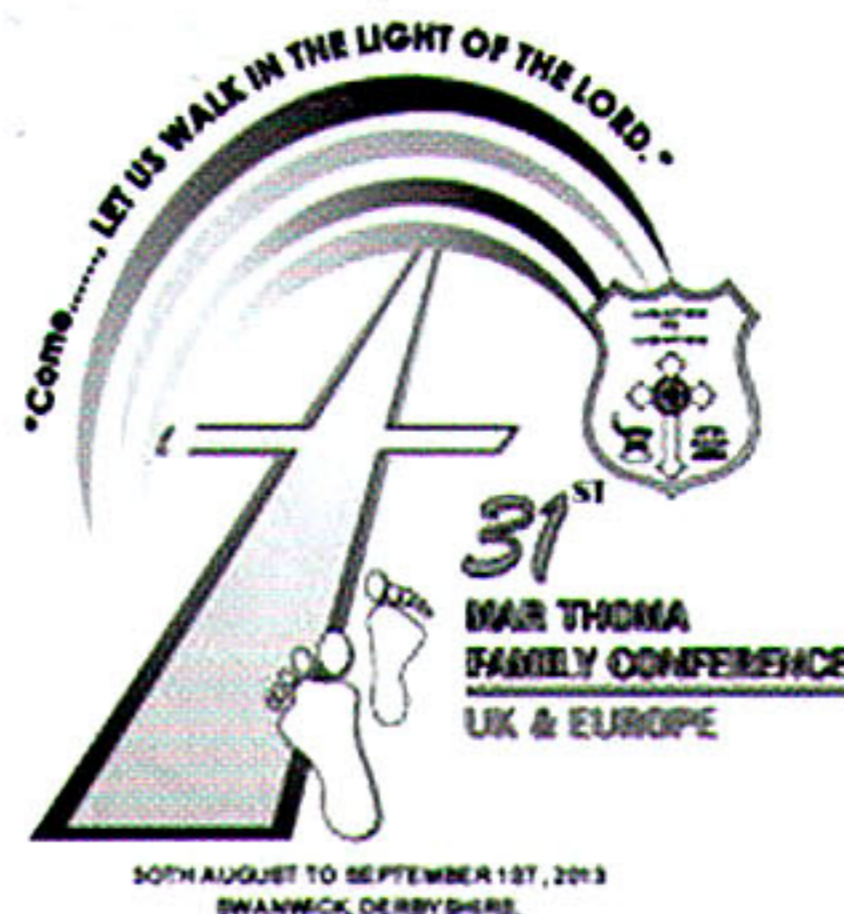
There is and will be crisis in this world; but we have hope because we look forward to His Kingdom where there is no crisis or pain or death." A life without Christ is a hopeless end; but a life with Christ is an endless hope" (Evan Lou). We don't know when God is going to intervene to end all suffering in this world. But in the meantime our role is to spread the good news to all around us and pray for His kingdom come and His will be done on this earth as it is in Heaven. Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).



Our Diocesan Episcopa, the Rt Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Thoedosius, celebrated his 64th Birthday at the TMAM Research and Orientation Center at Manganam, Kottayam on February 19, 2013.

Rt. Rev. Dr. Mathews Mar Makarios blessed the occasion with his presence and prayers. The orientation center staff and delegates of Clergy orientation programme 2013 participated in that joyous occasion.

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Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius
(Diocesan Episcopa)

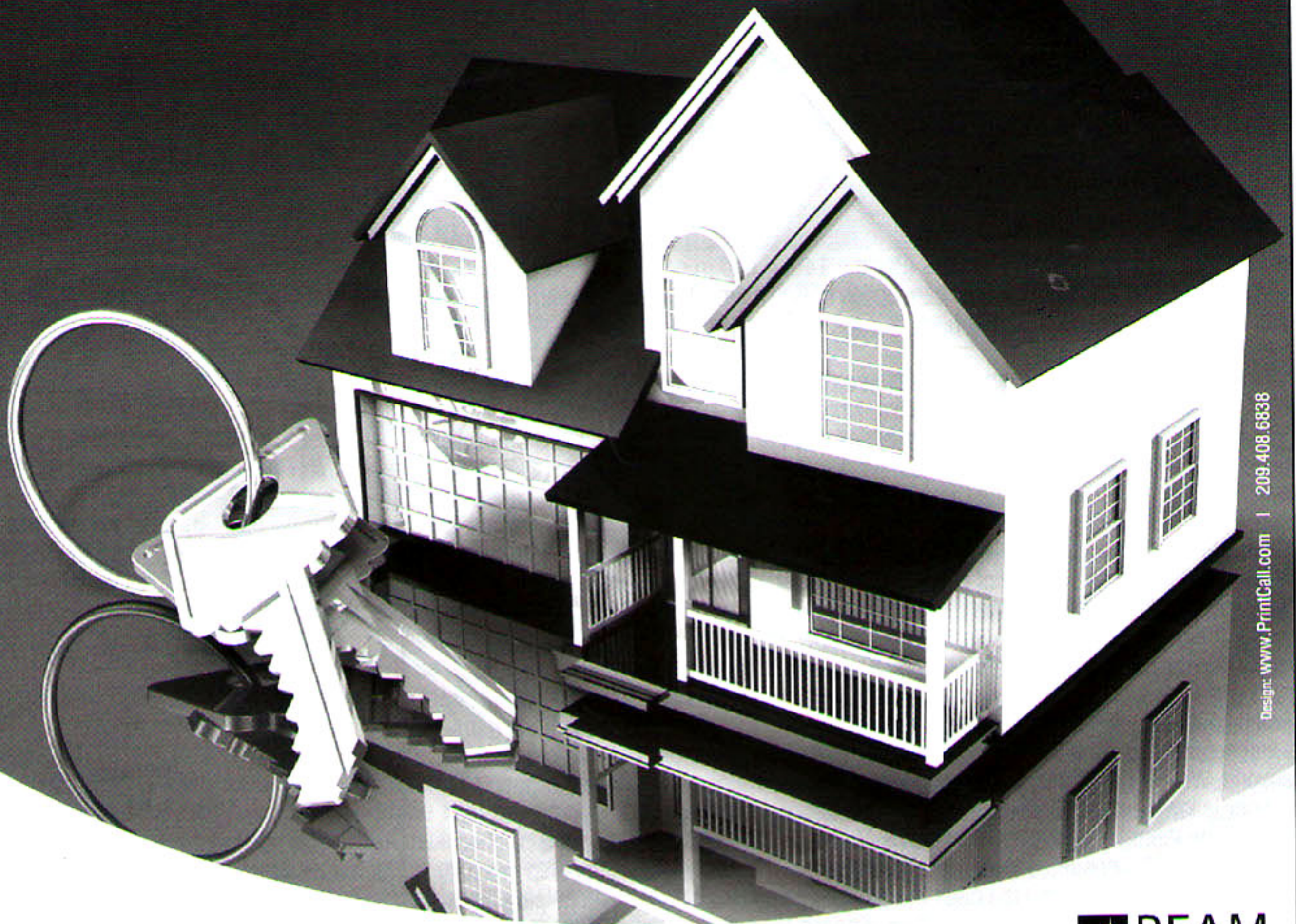
Rt. Rev. Gregorious Mar Stephanos
(Episcopa- Kunnamkulam- Malaber Dioces)

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Rev. Dr. David Wenham

.....
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Church: Journeying with Christ - History and Growth of the Diocese

Dr. T. M. Thomas, New York, Lal Varghese, Esq., Dallas

Introduction:

The theme 'Church journeying with Christ' is an apt one, when we celebrate the 25 years of existence as a Diocese. Abraham Mar Thoma, once prayed during Maramon Convention like this – 'Dear Lord, please scatter my people,' which is often quoted by our present Metropolitan Joseph Mar Thoma. We believe the Lord has heard the prayer and scattered Marthomites all over the world including North America and Europe, the two continents forming the North American Diocese of the Mar Thoma Church. The main reason for migration of people to North America and Europe was for higher education and later for employment opportunities. The missionaries in the 19th century helped the Christians in Kerala to attain higher education by starting schools and colleges in Kerala. Hence so many people used that opportunity to attain higher education and then sought further higher education in North America and Europe. This is true for the theology education also. The laity, who immigrated, earlier also felt the need to keep the rich heritage, faith and practices of the church and by continuing as its faithful believers in the new lands where they are planted by God. They also wanted to keep their own identity in the newly adopted lands by remaining faithful to the church and its leaders. They also felt the need for worship services being conducted in their own native language namely Malayalam. The conference and meetings conducted by Bible Society, theological institutions, and other national and international ecumenical organizations gave the opportunity for our Aghens and Bishops to visit the laity in different parts of this Diocese, who encouraged them to begin congregations and parishes. All these opportunities given by God paved the way for the church to establish itself a strong foundation and to journey with Christ by providing the much-needed pastoral care to the laity in this Diocese.

The laity is an integral part of any denomination and its growth and we should always remember the sacrifices undertaken by the earlier immigrant laity of church by beginning prayer groups, later congregations and finally with the approval of the church parishes in this Diocese. The respect for the church and its rich heritage, faith and practices and traditions handed over from forefathers have prompted the earlier laity to congregate themselves as faithful believers. The Aghens, Bishops and laity who came here for higher education also helped the earlier laity to establish congregations and later parishes. Even though in many places the worship began jointly with other denominations like C. S. I., and Orthodox, later our people formed their own congregations and arranged worship services with the help of student Aghens and Bishops who occasionally visited them. The church in order to journey with Christ is taking several steps to cater to the needs of the laity especially the second and third generation Marthomites in this Diocese. But as with any other immigrant churches, Mar Thoma Church is also has its own limitations to cater to the needs of the second and third generation Marthomites born and brought up in this Diocese. It is a good trend that more and more youths form this Diocese entering in to the ordained ministry and being posted here in this Diocese, with expectation that they would cater to the needs of the second and third generation Marthomites.

Growth of Parishes in United States:

The first Mar Thoma worship was conducted in this Diocese in Boston in January 1969 by Rev. Cherian Thomas and in New York in February 1971 by Rev. Thomas Varghese. When more and more Marthomites migrated to United States, the need for regular worship became a necessity. But the Mar Thoma Church leaders were not in favor of establishing Mar Thoma parishes and directed people to obtain membership in the local Episcopal Churches in United States, Anglican Church in Canada and England. But this policy of the Church was changed later, when it approved the first Mar Thoma parish in New York in 1976 with the name Mar Thoma Congregation of Greater New York. The first full time Vicar appointed was Rev. M. V. Benjamin in 1979 for the Mar Thoma Congregation of Greater New York for two Sundays, one Sunday for the Mar Thoma Congregation in Philadelphia and one Sunday for the Mar Thoma – C. S. I. Congregation in New York. New York became the

center where most of the Marthomites came first and then moved to other different cities in United States due to better opportunities. There were early Mar Thoma immigrants in Philadelphia, Chicago, Boston, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, Detroit, and other cities in United States, who also began congregations and later parishes. The first church building built in United States was in 1984 by the Trinity MTC, Houston.

Growth of Parishes in England:

Similarly, the opportunities for higher education in England prompted many of our people to migrate to England beginning thirties. The available records reveal that the occasional worship being conducted according to Mar Thoma rites from 1930 in England. But it was in 1957 that Rev. V. V. Alexander started a regular service according to Mar Thoma rites at the chapel of the Indian YMCA at Fitzroy Square, London, and it continued there for 21 years. In 1978 the gathering became an official congregation of the Mar Thoma Church. In October 1978 the Diocesan Bishop Mar Chrysostom, approved the congregation as a parish. The first vicar was Rev. Philip Varghese and by the grace of God Rev. V. V. Alexander remained as emeritus vicar until 2010. On 1st April 1996 the original parish was divided in to two parishes namely St. Johns parish at Hounslow, and St. James Parish in the City to provide pastoral care for the growing population of Marthomites in London. Rev. V. V. Alexander from 1957 - 2010, Rev. P. T. Joseph (Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan) from 1965-1966, Very Rev. P. M. George (Vicar General) from 1968-1969, Rt. Rev. Easow Mar Timotheos 1976-1977, and Rev. Dr. Philip Varghese (1978-1980) served the congregations and parishes in England. The Diocesan Assembly held in 2010 approved a subcommittee namely Council of Mar Thoma Parishes in Europe (COMPE) under Clause 217 of the Sabha Constitution to have effective co-ordination between the Diocese and the parishes and congregations in Europe region. We have at present eight parishes in Europe and four congregations conducting regular worship services using the liturgy of the Mar Thoma Church.

Growth of Parishes in Canada:

The higher education opportunities in Canada also prompted several people to migrate to Canada in the sixties and seventies. The first congregations were formed in Edmonton and Toronto in 1976 at the initiative of the laity who came to Canada for both higher education and employment opportunities. The congregation at Edmonton was approved as a parish in 1982. Regular worship services began in Toronto since 1972 with the arrival of Rev. Abraham Lincoln. In 1981 the

Toronto congregation was approved as a parish and Rev. Ipe Joseph was the first Vicar. In 1980 our present Diocesan Bishop, Theodosius Thirumeni, then Rev. George Jacob, who came for his Masters and Ph. D studies at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario gave strong leadership to the parishes and congregations during his time. Thirumeni was in charge of the laity in Kingston, Ottawa, Montreal, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Calgary and Rochester. It was Thirumeni's foresight to have separate Family Conferences for parents and Toronto MTC hosted the first Family Conference in 1983. Similar to the agreement signed with the Episcopal Church in United States in 1981, an agreement was signed in 1983 for Episcopal oversight by Anglican Church in Canada for the parishes in Canada. The Mar Thoma Congregation of Southern Alberta in Calgary was formally organized in 1979 and formal approval was obtained in 1980. Similarly, Fort McMurray congregation was formally recognized as a congregation in 1989. There are few families in Winnipeg since 1970 and pastoral services are being provided to them also. At present there are eight parishes and one congregation in Canada.

Formation of Diocesan Organizations and Zonal Assembly:

During the time of the formation of congregations in various cities, there developed Sunday Schools also since 1979. The Zonal Assembly held in 1980 discussed about the formation of Diocesan level organizations in detail for various organizations including Sunday School. The Mar Thoma Students conference was held in 1977 in New York and the first National Students Conference was held in 1979 in New York. In 1980 the Students Conference was approved as an official body of the Zone. In 1981 when the Students Conference was held in Chicago, it really achieved a national character. In 1982 the Students Conference was held in Allentown, PA in which the Zonal Council came in to existence, later turned in to the Zonal Assembly. The next Students Conference was held in Toronto, Canada, in 1983, which was the beginning of Mar Thoma Family Conference. This joint conference continued for five years and was held in Dallas in 1984, New York in 1985, Chicago in 1986 and Los Angeles in 1987 and this practice continued until in 1988. Along with the separation of the two conferences, the name of the Students Conference was changed to National Youth Conference since 1988. The first separate conference for the youths and parents was held in Houston by Trinity MTC in 1988. The Sevika Sanghom and Yuvajana Sakyam also formed at the Diocesan level in the nineties and they have their own separate national conferences at present. The Yuvajana Sakyam held its first national conference in Dallas in 1997 hosted by Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch. The Sevika Sanghom also held its first national conference at Dallas in 2000, again hosted by Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch. Similarly parish mission had its first national conference held in Dallas in 2003, which was also hosted by Mar Thoma Church of Dallas, Farmers Branch. Since the need for Achens from India is a necessity to cater the laity an agreement was signed between the leaders of the Episcopal Church in United States and Mar Thoma Church in 1981 by which the Episcopal Church agreed to sponsor the priests from India for the parishes and congregations in United States. In 1980 Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Mar Athanasius Suffragan Metropolitan took charge of parishes in North America and the parishes were considered as a zone of Kottayam-Ranny Diocese.

Formation of Diocese in 1988:

The history of the Mar Thoma Church in the North America and Europe continues to represent the dreams and aspirations of faithful laity who migrated to these continents beginning in the late fifties and early sixties. When the number of parishes increased, the Episcopal Synod constituted the Diocese of North America with effect from January 1, 1988. The late Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan issued the Kalpana dated November 5, 1987 announcing about the formation of the new Diocese with name 'Diocese of North America', and Metropolitan was the first Diocesan Bishop, who administered the same until Chrysostom Thirumeni took charge of the Diocese with effect from March 1, 1988 as per Kalpana of Metropolitan dated January 27, 1988. The inauguration of the Diocese was held on August 14, 1988, at Yonkers, New York during National Youth Conference by Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan. The Kalpana forming the Diocese dated Nov. 5, 1987 is attached at the end of this article. Later the name of the Diocese was changed to 'Diocese of North America and U. K.' and presently to 'Diocese of North America and Europe'. From a humble beginning, the Diocese has grown immensely over the last 25 years. The leadership of the late Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Mar Athanasius Suffragan Metropolitan and the late Most Rev. Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan guided the Diocese to its present status. The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Metropolitan (1988-1993), first non - resident Diocesan Bishop and Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Suffragan Metropolitan (1993-2001), who was the first resident Bishop,

and Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos, (2001-2008) served as the Diocesan Bishops. At present, Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa serves as the Diocesan Bishop since January 2009. The first diocesan headquarters was located at Richboro, Pennsylvania from 1994 through 1998, and in 1998 it was relocated to its present location at 2320 S. Merrick Avenue, Merrick, New York 11566. Representing the Church, the Diocese actively takes part in the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCC-USA), in addition to several other ecumenical bodies like World Council of Churches (WCC). In Canada, our church has been admitted as a member of the Canadian National Council of Churches recently. In England, our church is a member of Churches Together in England (CTE). The Diocese is also actively involved in maintaining ecumenical relations with the Episcopal Church in United States and Anglican Church in Canada and Europe and other Churches with similar faith and practices. We are also listed in Year Book of American & Canadian Churches under the title Mar Thoma Syrian Church of India.

Growth of the Diocese:

The Diocese of North America & Europe has been dynamically involved in the socio-cultural aspects of laity living in North America and Europe for the past 25 years. Fundamentally an immigrant Church, she has contextualized her ministry in new life situations without compromising the rich ethos and tradition received from her motherland Kerala. Currently, under the rubric of the Diocese, there are 66 parishes and 9 congregations. In order to cater to the ministerial needs of the laity, there are 70 clergy including retired clergy and five youth chaplains located at Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Dallas and Houston. Nine youths from this Diocese have been ordained as clergy and are serving the Church in this Diocese and most of them were born and brought up in North America. There is one youth studying at the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary in Kottayam at present and two have been selected in 2012 and is undergoing training before theological studies to become the ordained ministers of the Church. We challenge the youths from Canada and Europe to come forward to the ordained ministry of the Church in the coming years. The Diocese continues to equip youth to grow in Jesus Christ through the foundations of witnessing, worship, study, and service. The youth of the Diocese are vibrant and relentlessly contribute to the life and ministry of the Church. Youths also actively take part in the administration of the parishes at the local level and also involve in the administration of various diocesan organizations, diocesan assembly and also in the diocesan council. The diocese is taking several initiatives to make use of the technology to communicate with the younger generation including publishing liturgy, worship orders etc., in CDs, and other electronic formats. Diocese is also publishing an electronic newsletter, 'Besorah', every month with news and information about the different activities of the Diocese. The Mar Thoma Messenger – a quarterly publication of the Diocese has reached its 31st year of publication 2013 and is growing in readership.

Present Diocesan Organizations and Activities:

The present diocesan organizations are Sunday school, Youth Fellowship, Yuvajana Sakhyam, Sevika Sangham, Voluntary Evangelistic Association and Senior Citizenship Fellowship. Physicians and Dentists Association, Young Couple's Fellowship, Business People's Fellowship, Nurses Fellowship, Fellowship of Educators, Researchers and Counselors are organizations of the Diocese. The various sub committees of the Diocese are Publication Board, Literature Society, Lay Institute (LEAD Program), Ecumenical Relations, Finance Advisory Board, Legal Affairs Committee, Archives Committee, Media and Public Relations, Planning Board, Diocesan Web Site Committee, Vaedictorian Award Committee, Vaideeka Selection Committee, Mission Board, Mexico Mission, and Native American Mission all help in the development of the Diocese in various ways. All of the organizations and committees take an active part in the mission activities of the Diocese. National Conferences are conducted every year for Youth Fellowship, Yuvajana Sakyam, Sevika Sanghom and Voluntary Evangelistic Association. Since 2010 Young Couples Fellowship has began their National Conference and the first conference was held in Baltimore, MD in 2010. In 2005, the Diocesan Sunday School created a new curriculum called 'God's Purpose for God's World', rooted in the faith and practices of the Mar Thoma Church and geared to the needs and challenges of the immigrant church after using the Coxbury curriculum for over two decades. Young Couples Fellowship, Choir were also formed in all parishes during the nineties. The Diocesan Choir has been approved as an organization of the diocese and permitted have its representative in the Diocesan

Assembly with effect from its term 2011. We also began separate leadership conference held every year for the youths since 1998. Most recently the Senior Citizenship Fellowship has been approved as an official organization of the church and it is active in the parishes in this Diocese at present.

Conclusion:

The Diocese has completed 25 years of growth with the providence of God and during this time of celebration of existence for the past 25 years, we need to recognize our responsibilities and to realize that we are growing to yield fruits. Our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa challenged the laity to 1) promote the growth of the Diocese 2) increase the participatory growth of various regions in the Diocese and 3) energize our membership to action. Presently there are 68 parishes, 9 congregations, and 7,895 families and 70 clergy (including retired clergy) serving in this Diocese. The mission and vision of a strong lay leadership as well as that of the Bishops, Clergy, Diocesan Secretaries, Diocesan Treasurers, Diocesan Council members, and Diocesan Assembly members who served this Diocese and various diocesan organizations have contributed and continue to contribute towards the molding of the Diocese to serve God's purpose in this Diocese. The Church's possibilities in this Diocese are vast and she is grounded in the vision of providing identity while contextualizing to dynamic realities. As a Diocese, we should not be confined to the four walls of our sanctuaries centered on our culture as a mere worshipping community, but as a faith community, which is journeying with Christ by living the gospel.

Word for the Day Daily Meditations Released



The Christian Education Forum of the North East Region of the North America and Europe Diocese has published the daily meditations – Word for the Day – for the whole 365 days of the year. “These devotions are written by a large number of people around the globe. In the foreword to the book, Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, Diocesan Episcopa said: ‘It is the desire of my heart that all who come to know of this book “Word for the Day” will possess a personal copy so that you can read the Bible by holding it in one hand and this book on the other. May each reader find delight in studying the ‘Word of God’ with the help of ‘Word for the Day’ and applying it daily to one’s life.’” The book was released on Dec. 30, 2012 by Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa at a function held in Salem MTC, NY. The book is available from the Mar Thoma Literature Society, an official organization of the Diocese or from the Diocesan office.

Orientation program for the Achens joining the Diocese in 2013



An Orientation programme was organized for all the achens joining the Diocese of North America and Europe in the year 2013 at the TMAMOR Center, Manganam, Kottayam from February 18 to 19, 2013. The Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan inaugurated the programme. Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, the Diocesan Episcopa, chaired the meeting and gave a talk on ‘Nurturing the Mar Thomites in the Global Context: Challenges of the Priest’. Rt. Rev. Dr. Mathews Mar Makarios Episcopa, the Diocesan Bishop of Kottayam-Kochi Diocese, also spoke on the occasion. Rev. Dr. M. C. Thomas, Rev. Mathew Scariah, Rev. Susheel C Cherian, Rev. Dr. K. A. Abraham, Rev. K. C. Varghese and Rev. Sunny George led classes on various subjects. A Holy Communion was celebrated in English on the morning of Tuesday, February 19. A birthday cake was cut to felicitate Mar Theodosius Episcopa on his birthday.

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Christian Response to Environmental Issues



Dr. Kuruvilla Mathew, Perth, Australia

Introduction

It has only been in the last three decades that we have started thinking about the environment in terms of conservation (1972 Stockholm, UN conference on the Environment). Until then there was little or no official attention given to the environmental matters. It was assumed that the environment could withstand whatever was done to it and that the earth was so full of resources that there could be no exhaustion of them. The market economy was the main concern for everyone. The market system is geared to the consumption of resources rather than its protection. It is important to acknowledge that the environment provides the global capital for life; humans cannot exist without clean air and water and the produce of the land. The market cannot put a price on the environment. When this essential environmental asset is depleted we deprive the existence of future generations.

Intergovernmental Action

Environment is a shared resource and hence the responsibility for its protection is a shared one. The United Nations has set an overall framework for intergovernmental efforts to tackle the challenge posed by climate change. There has been a series of meetings and conventions and the foremost of them is the Kyoto Protocol, an international agreement created in 1997 under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Kyoto, Japan. It contains legally binding emissions limitation or reduction objective for the developed world. For the first commitment period 2008-2012, individual developed country targets were assigned ranging from 8% below to 10% above the 1990 level. The objective being that parties implement domestic policies and measures to limit or reduce emission to their assigned amount by improving technology or increasing carbon sinks (managing forests). There is also an option to purchase emission units from other developed countries. This is a flexible mechanism called ETS.

In December 2007 another summit took place in Bali where a number of forward-looking decisions essential to reaching a secure climate future were taken. In December 2009 the Copenhagen Accord was formulated. Unlike the previous occasions this was a comprehensive global deal inclusive of developing countries and represented a global response to climate change at the highest political level. More recently, a meeting of the parties of the Kyoto protocol took place in 2012 at the Doha Climate Change Conference during which a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol was adopted.

Greenhouse Effect

Pollution in the world is increasing at an alarming rate. The level of Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere since the inception of industrialization has increased and it keeps increasing. The atmosphere contains 78% nitrogen 21% Oxygen, 1% accounts for CO₂, Methane, Water and other gases. It is the atmosphere that surrounds the earth that plays a central role to maintain an even temperature on the earth's surface like the glass in a green house. The atmosphere absorbs some of the long wave radiation emitted by the earth and radiates it back to the earth. If the atmosphere is not present then the temperature on earth would be much lower than it is currently.

But industrial activity is changing the atmosphere's structure. As gases like CO₂ are produced in large quantities and released into the atmosphere they absorb more of the earth's reflected radiation and returns more of it back to the earth. This energy which otherwise would have escaped harmlessly into space, is already increasing the earth's temperature, though so far by only small amount (0.5C over the past 20 years).

CO₂ is the most important of the greenhouse gases and is produced primarily when fossil fuels are burnt to produce electricity. Automobiles account for the second largest emitter of the gas. The level of CO₂ in the atmosphere has already increased by 25% and is still on the increase. The concentration of other gases in the atmosphere is



much lower than CO₂, but they too are increasing and many of them produce a strong greenhouse effect. Scientists calculate that over the next half-century or so a temperature rise produced by the increasing concentration of CO₂ will be matched by the increasing presence of other gases. These cumulative effects will essentially double temperature rises. The oceans take a long time to warm up and even a very small change in ocean temperature can create a domino effect on the biological and climatic conditions causing disastrous implications to the life on the planet. Even after 15 years of the Kyoto Protocol the scientific evidence proves that we are nowhere near a global agreement or consensus for a future control. Our governments behave as if global warming is not a serious issue.

The Doha meeting in December 2012 was preceded by the news of Arctic Sea Ice shrinking to its lowest level since reliable records began. Around 80% of Arctic sea ice has been lost. The melting of ice and the consequent loss of permafrost releases large quantities of methane, a more powerful greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. The science is clear; to have a chance of keeping the increase in average global temperature below two degrees we need to reduce the rate of burning fossil fuels tremendously by 2020. Individual national commitment is inevitable as well as collective and global.

Fossil Fuel is a Limited Resource

It was once believed that fossil fuels would last undi-

minished into the future. Now it has become very clear that the availability of all kinds of fossil fuels such as oil, coal, and natural gas is limited. It is important that we change our dependence from fossil to renewable energy such as solar, wind, geothermal, wave and tidal. Great effort has to be taken by governments, community organizations and individuals to promote renewable energy and opt for a sustainable lifestyle.

Christian Response

Global warming is the greatest challenge to social justice in the 21st century. Any increase in temperature will cause sea levels to rise and create changes to climatic conditions that can disrupt food production. Furthermore rapid growth of pests and the spread of disease can all result in mass exodus of human population especially from the poverty stricken islands and countries. Any slackness and refusal to take any sacrifice to prevent this catastrophe is like keeping quiet in the face of an approaching tsunami that can devour our children. To the people of Israel who were meticulous in temple worship Prophet Isaiah says "when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer me many prayers I will not listen yours hands are full of blood wash and make yourself clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight Stop doing wrong learn to do right, seek justice, encourage the oppressed" Is 1: 15 - 17 Lets take heed to what the prophet has said and make our worship meaningful.

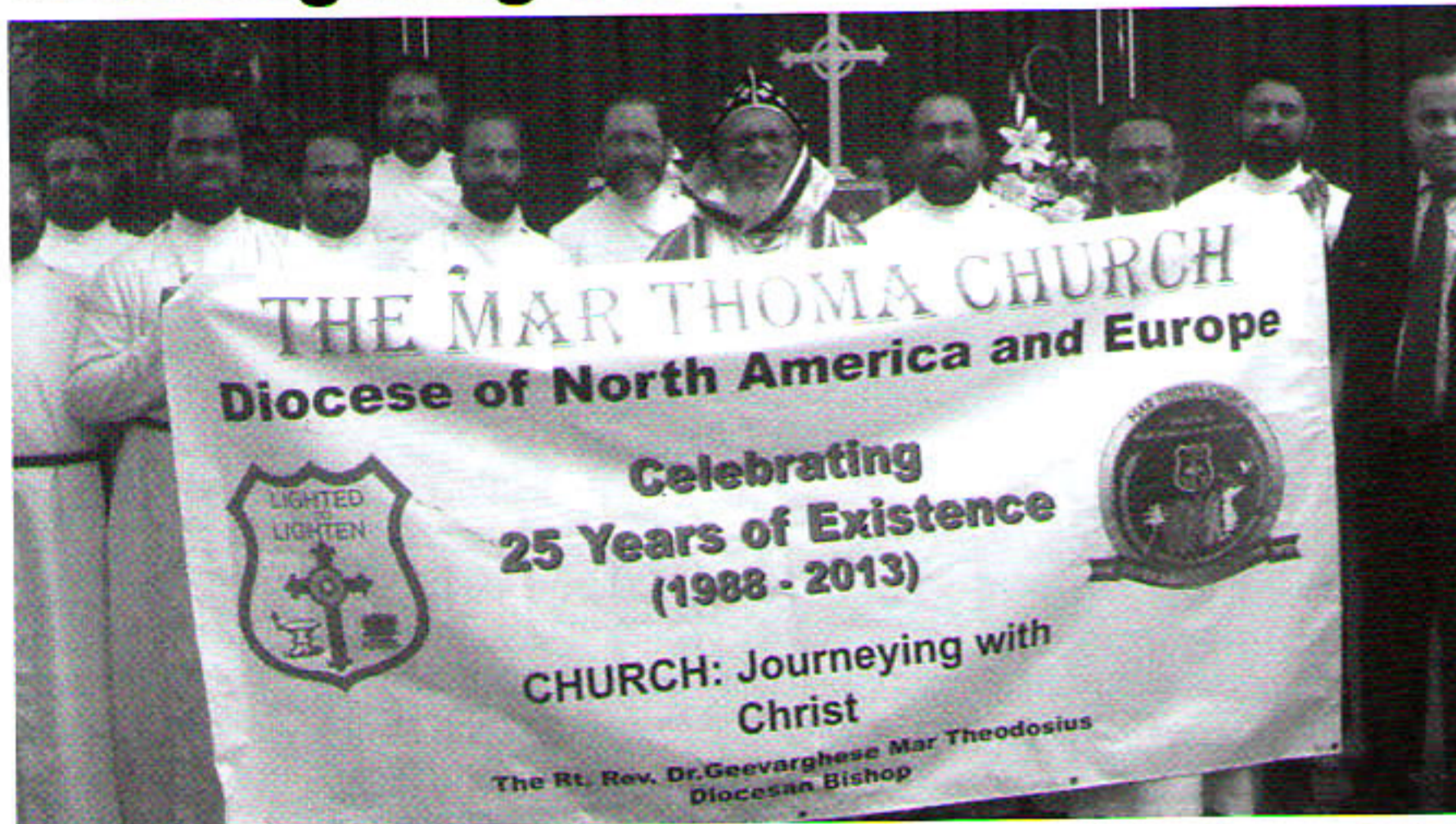
What Can We Do?

The increased greenhouse effect will put our life on the planet at a great risk. The carbon price the Australian government introduced in 2012 is the small price we pay to mitigate

the global disaster on the way. We have no choice other than going for a clean energy future and adapting ourselves for a sustainable lifestyle. Think globally and act locally is the catch phrase. Be an environmental enthusiast. Encourage government policies to cut down waste of energy, promote renewable energy, and most importantly be prepared for a low energy lifestyle whatever that may be. It is human tendency to have a luxurious lifestyle. Reducing consumption, recycling and reusing are to be promoted. This involves personal decision and commitment, which may sometimes cause inconvenience. Walking humbly with God means living humbly and showing compassion to all of his creation that is groaning in travail.

Editor's Note: Dr. Kuruvilla Mathew, Pulimootil, Pullad belongs to Salem MTC, Kumbanad and is presently a member of the MTC in Perth. He is also the Sabha Council Member from Australia. He is an Environmental Engineer and worked in the area of renewable energy for the past 35 years. He is also Adjunct senior lecturer at Murdoch University, Australia. He can be reached at his e-mail: k.mathew@murdoch.edu.au

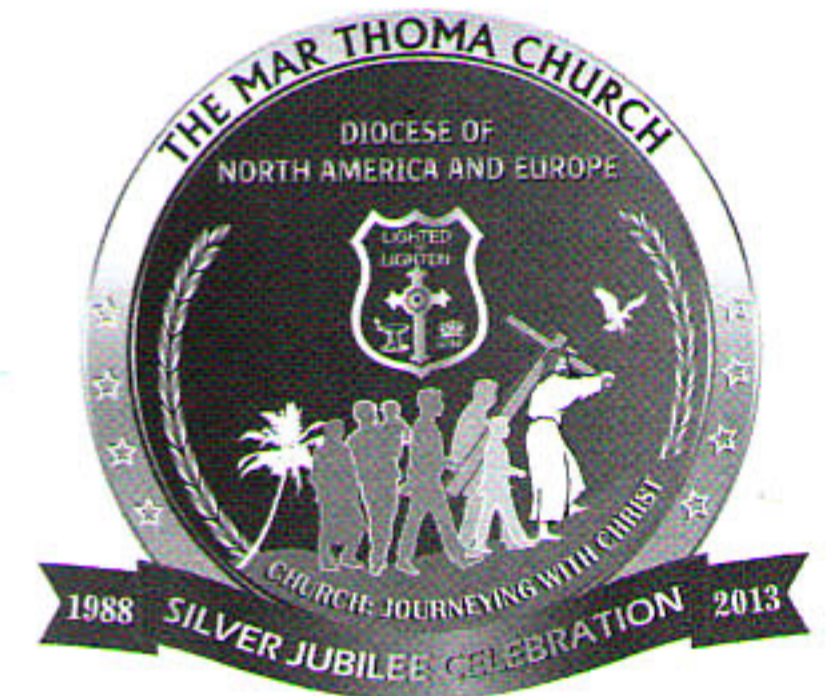
Thanksgiving Service at Sinai Center



The year 2013 marks the completion of 25 years of existence of the Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church. As a mark of giving thanks to God almighty for the providence and guidance through the 25 years the representatives of the Mar Thoma Church from various parishes in Boston, New York, New Jersey and Washington area gathered together for a worship service at Sinai Mar Thoma Center, Merrick, Long Island on Jan. 1, 2013. The Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius celebrated Holy Qurbana with the help of the clergy and the lay members participated in the function. The diocesan Secretary Rev. K. E. Geevarghese welcomed the gathering and spoke on the importance of the occasion. The Diocesan Council member Dr. Mathew T. Thomas recalled the growth of the Diocese through the resident Bishops and felicitated the present Diocesan Episcopa Mar Theodosius on his completion of 4 years of tenure as Diocesan Bishop in the Diocese. The Diocesan Treasurer Mr. Chacko Mathew requested the Bishop to release the banner that marks the Silver Jubilee Year of the Diocese. Thirumeni released the banner and held it with Achens from various parishes along with the Diocesan Treasurer. The theme selected for the jubilee year is Church: Journeying with Christ. The logo of the jubilee year was released earlier by Thirumeni and the logo of the Mar Thoma Church is also printed on the banner. The Diocesan treasurer also extended the gratitude to those who assembled. There was a fellowship get together and the Diocesan Bishop cut the New Year cake also during the occasion. The Diocese has planned a yearlong program spread over the 8 regions of the Diocese with finale program to be held in New York.

Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary

**Diocesan Silver Jubilee - 2013
Charity Programs**



Yuvajana Sakyam

25 Housing Aid. Giving Rs 100,000 each

Youth Fellowship

Dio. Mission Projects, Scholarship in Mexico and Manna Project

Sevika Sanghom

25 Marriage Aid: Giving Rs 100,000each

Vol Evg Assn.

Support for 5 institutions for the Differently Abled (Rs. 2,00,000. 00 to each institution)

Sunday School

Education Aid for higher education

Senior Fellowship

Support for the Mandirams of our Church

Parish Choir

Musical Instruments in mission field \$ 200 each

ഭിന്നിപ്പിക്കുന്ന വിശ്വാസം ഒന്നിപ്പിക്കുന്ന സന്ദേശം



Shebi George, Canadian MTC, Toronto, Canada

മാനവ സമൂഹം എന്നും വിശ്വാസത്തിലധിഷ്ഠിതമാണ്. അത് സമൂഹമായും വ്യക്തികളായും അങ്ങനെ തന്നെ. വിശ്വാസമില്ലാതെ ജീവിക്കില്ല. ഒന്നിലും വിശ്വാസമില്ല എന്ന് പറയുന്ന വ്യക്തികളും എന്തെങ്കിലും എപ്പോഴെങ്കിലും എന്തിലെങ്കിലും വിശ്വാസമർപ്പിച്ചവരാണ്. വിശ്വാസമില്ലെങ്കിൽ ആഗ്രഹമില്ല, പ്രതീക്ഷയില്ല, ലക്ഷ്യമില്ല. ക്രൈസ്തവ സമൂഹം കൃസ്തുവിൽ വിശ്വസിക്കുന്നു, ഇസ്ലാമുകൾ മുഹമ്മദ് നബിയിൽ വിശ്വസിക്കുന്നു, ഹൈന്ദവർ അവരുടെതായ ദൈവങ്ങളിലും പുജാരി കർമ്മങ്ങളിലും വിശ്വസിക്കുന്നു, ആദിവാസികളും ഗോത്രവർഗ്ഗങ്ങളും തങ്ങളുടെ വിഗ്രഹ ദൈവങ്ങളിലും മലദൈവങ്ങളിലും മന്ത്രവാദങ്ങളിലും വിശ്വസിക്കുന്നു. നിരീശ്വരവാദികൾ തങ്ങളുടെ പ്രത്യയശാസ്ത്രത്തിലും ഈശ്വരനില്ല എന്ന വാദഗതിയിലും വിശ്വസിക്കുന്നു. ചുരുക്കത്തിൽ വിശ്വാസമില്ലാത്ത അവസ്ഥ ഏതൊരു ചരാചരങ്ങളിലും ഇല്ല തന്നെ. പക്ഷിമൃഗാദികൾ പോലും ആഹാരത്തിലും പാർപ്പിടത്തിലും ഹിംസ്ര ജീവികളിലും വിശ്വസിക്കുന്നു. അത്തരത്തിലൊരു വിശ്വാസമില്ലെങ്കിൽ രക്ഷയില്ല എന്നവയും വിശ്വസിക്കുന്നു. അങ്ങനെ വിശ്വാസം പരസ്യമായ ഒരു രഹസ്യവും രഹസ്യമായ ഒരു ആശ്രയവും ആശ്രയിക്കത്തക്ക ഒരുത്താണിയും ആയി മാറുന്നു. എന്നാൽ ഈ വ്യത്യസ്ത വിശ്വാസങ്ങളിൽ ഏതു വിശ്വാസമാണ് യഥാർത്ഥ വിശ്വാസം? വിചിന്ത നീയമായ വിശ്വാസം? വിലക്ഷണമായ വിശ്വാസം? വിചിത്രമായ വിശ്വാസം?

വിശ്വസിക്കുന്ന ഏവനും രക്ഷയുണ്ട്. പക്ഷെ എന്തിൽ? ഏതിൽ? എങ്ങനെ? ആരെ? വിശ്വാസം ബഹുവിധമായതിനാൽ അത് ഭിന്നാഭിപ്രായങ്ങൾക്ക് വിധേയമായാൽ തെറ്റ് പറയാനാവില്ല. അത്രത്തോളം ഭിന്നത വിശ്വാസങ്ങൾക്കുണ്ട്. അങ്ങനെയെങ്കിൽ ഇത്ര വ്യത്യസ്തമായ വിശ്വാസ മനോഭാവങ്ങൾക്ക് എങ്ങനെ ഒരു ഏകീകരണം അഥവാ ഐക്യമത്വം തെളിയിക്കാനാകും? സാധ്യമോ? അസാധ്യമോ? നാം എന്തിലാണോ വിശ്വസിക്കുന്നത്, ആ വിശ്വാസം നമുക്കെന്തു നേട്ടം നൽകി എന്ന് തിരിഞ്ഞു നോക്കിയാൽ നമ്മുടെ വിശ്വാസം യഥാർത്ഥ വിശ്വാസം ആയിരുന്നോ എന്ന് മനസിലാക്കുവാൻ സാധിക്കും. ഒരുവൻ താനോന്നിലും വിശ്വസിക്കുന്നില്ല എന്ന് പറഞ്ഞാൽ ഞാൻ പറയും 'അത് ഞാൻ വിശ്വസിക്കുന്നില്ല' എന്ന്. അപ്പോൾ ആ വ്യക്തിക്കു പറയാതിരിക്കാനാവില്ല 'നിങ്ങൾ വിശ്വസിച്ചാലും ഇല്ലെങ്കിലും അതാണെന്റെ വിശ്വാസം' എന്ന്. ശരിയാണ്, അതാണ് ശരി, അത് തന്നെയാണ് ശരി. അതവന്റെ വിശ്വാസം. ആ വിശ്വാസമാണ് അവന്റെ ശരി യും. ആ ശരിയിൽ അവൻ വിശ്വസിക്കുന്നു എങ്കിൽ അവനും ഒരു വിശ്വാസി തന്നെ! നമ്മുടെ വിശ്വാസം ഉറപ്പുള്ളതോ, മുദ്രവായതോ എന്നതല്ല; ആ വിശ്വാസം നമ്മെ എവിടേക്ക് നയിക്കുന്നു എന്നതാണ് മുഖ്യം. നീ വിശ്വാസത്തിൽ ഉറപ്പുള്ളവനായിരിക്ക എന്നും ശീതോഷ്ണവാറായിരിക്കാതെ ശീതവാനോ ഉഷ്ണവാനോ ആയിരിപ്പിൻ എന്നും, നിന്റെ വിശ്വാസം നിന്നെ രക്ഷിക്കട്ടെ എന്നുമെല്ലാം വേദങ്ങളിൽ ആഹ്വാനമുണ്ട്. അതിൻ പ്രകാരം നാം പലവിധ വിശ്വാസികളായി ജീവിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നുണ്ട്. ജനനം മുതൽ മരണം വരെ സകല ചരാചരങ്ങളും തങ്ങൾക്കു ലഭ്യമായ സാഹചര്യത്തിലൂടെ നേടിയെടുത്ത വിശ്വാസങ്ങളിൽ വിശ്വസിച്ചു ജീവിക്കുന്നു. ആ വിശ്വാസം നമ്മുടെ സംസ്കാരത്തെ പ്രതിഫലിപ്പിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു. ഒരുവന്റെ വിശ്വാസം മറ്റൊരുവന് അവിശ്വാസമായി തോന്നാം. അവിടെയാണ് യഥാർത്ഥ വിശ്വാസത്തെപ്പറ്റി ചിന്തിക്കുവാൻ തുടങ്ങുന്നത്. ഉള്ള വിശ്വാസം തന്നെ സ്ഥിരതയുള്ള വിശ്വാസമായി ജീവിതത്തിൽ പ്രതിഷ്ഠിക്കുവാൻ സാധിക്കാത്ത അവസ്ഥയിൽ, ആ വിശ്വാസം ശരിയോ തെറ്റോ എന്ന് വിലയിരുത്തുന്നതിനും യഥാർത്ഥ വിശ്വാസത്തെപ്പറ്റി പഠിക്കുന്നതിനും എങ്ങനെ സാധിക്കും?! നിലവിലുള്ള മത ഗ്രന്ഥങ്ങൾ ഗഹനമായി പഠിക്കുവാൻ

നമുക്ക് സമയവും ക്ഷമയും ലഭിക്കുമ്പോൾ മാത്രമേ യഥാർത്ഥ വിശ്വാസം എന്തെന്നും വിശ്വാസം ആശ്രയിക്കത്തക്കതാണെന്നും, വിശ്വാസം വിധേയത്തിലധിഷ്ഠിതമാണെന്നും മനസിലാക്കുകയുള്ളൂ. അല്ലാത്താൽ വിശ്വാസം ഭിന്നിപ്പിക്കുന്ന വിശ്വാസമായി സമൂഹത്തിൽ നിലകൊള്ളും. അതിനാൽ നാം വീണ്ടും വീണ്ടും 'സർപ്പസന്തതികളെ' എന്ന സംബോധനക്ക് പാത്രീഭവിക്കും. ഉല്പത്തിയിൽ ആദമിന്റെയും ഹവയുടെയും കാലം മുതൽ കായിന്റെ കാലം തുടങ്ങി യേശുവിന്റെ ക്രൂശു മരണവും പുനരുത്ഥാനം വരെയും അവിശ്വാസം തുടർന്നു കൊണ്ടേയിരുന്നു. ഇന്നും നമ്മുടെ ജീവിതത്തിൽ വിശ്വാസങ്ങളേക്കാളേറെ അവിശ്വാസത്തിനാണ് മുഖ്യസ്ഥാനം. കാരണം തിന്മയെക്കാൾ നന്മ ചെയ്യുവാൻ പ്രയാസമേറിയതു പോലെ വിശ്വാസിയാതിരിക്കുന്നതിനേക്കാൾ അവിശ്വാസി ആയി ജീവിക്കുവാൻ എളുപ്പം! എളുപ്പവഴിയിൽ ക്രിയകൾ ചെയ്യുവാനുള്ള മനുഷ്യന്റെ മിടുക്ക്, സ്വന്തമായി പടച്ചുണ്ടാക്കിയ അവിശ്വാസ പ്രമാണങ്ങൾ കൊണ്ട് സത്യവിശ്വാസ പ്രമാണങ്ങളെയും സ്വർഗ്ഗീയ പ്രാർത്ഥനയെയും വിഴുങ്ങുവാൻ നമ്മെ കെൽപ്പുള്ളവരാക്കി കഴിഞ്ഞു. വെറും കൈയായ് വന്നു വെറും കൈയായ് പോകുന്ന രണ്ടു സ്വർഗ്ഗീയ അവസ്ഥയുടെ മധ്യേയുള്ള കുറച്ചു കാലത്തേക്കുള്ള ഭൗതിക ലോകത്തെ കാത്തിരിപ്പിൽ നാം എത്രത്തോളം അസ്വസ്ഥരായിരിക്കുന്നുവോ അത്രത്തോളം നമ്മുടെ സ്വർഗ്ഗീയ പിതാവിന്റെ സാമീപ്യത്തിൽ നിന്നും അനുഗ്രഹത്തിൽ നിന്നും അകന്നിരിക്കുന്നു എന്ന് വേണം മനസിലാക്കുവാൻ. നമ്മുടെ സൃഷ്ടാവ് ആദമിന്റെ കാലം മുതൽ തന്റെ സൃഷ്ടികളൊന്നും തന്നെ ഏകരാധോ അസ്വസ്ഥരാധോ കാണപ്പെടുവാൻ ആഗ്രഹിച്ചിട്ടില്ല. ചേർന്ന ഇണയെ നല്കി സകല ചരാചരങ്ങളെയും അവൻ സ്ഥിരപ്പെടുത്തി. എന്നിട്ടും ഇന്ന് നാം തൃപ്തരല്ല എങ്കിൽ സാത്താൻ വെച്ച് നീട്ടുന്ന കനികായി നാമിന്നും ദാഹാർത്തിയോടെ ജീവിക്കുന്നു എന്ന് വേണം കരുതാൻ. ദൈവം ആദിയിൽ മനുഷ്യന് നൽകിയ പറുദീസ, തെറ്റുകുറ്റങ്ങളുടെയും അവിശ്വാസത്തിന്റെയും ആർത്തിയുടെയും പകുപ്പാടിനാൽ നാം നഷ്ടമാക്കിയെങ്കിലും അവന്റെ രണ്ടാം വരവിൽ നാമെല്ലാം അവനോടൊപ്പം വീണ്ടുമൊരു പറുദീസയിൽ അവനാഗ്രഹിച്ച

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വണ്ണം കാണപ്പെടുവാൻ ദൈവം ആഗ്രഹിക്കുന്നു. അതിനുള്ള പരിശീലന മൂറയാണ്, മർമ്മമാണ് സ്വർഗാരോഹണത്തിനു മുൻപ് യേശുവിലൂടെ ദൈവം നമ്മോടോതിരുന്നത്. 'ഞാൻ സ്നേഹിച്ചതു പോലെ നിങ്ങളും പരസ്പരം സ്നേഹിപ്പിൻ'; നമ്മോടു ക്ഷമിച്ച് നമ്മുടെ പാപങ്ങളെ കഴുകി നമ്മെ വെടിപ്പാക്കുവാൻ തക്കവണ്ണം തന്റെ സ്വന്തം പുത്രനെ മറുവിലയായി നൽകി നമ്മെ വീണ്ടെടുത്ത നമ്മുടെ സ്വർഗീയ പിതാവിന്റെ പരസ്പര സ്നേഹം, പരസ്പര ക്ഷമ എന്നീ രണ്ടു മർമ്മങ്ങൾ നമ്മുടെ ജീവിതത്തിലുടനീളം പ്രാവർത്തികമാക്കി ജീവിക്കാൻ, അധര വ്യയാമത്തിലൂടെ എന്നും നാം പുലമ്പുന്ന സ്വർഗീയ പ്രാർത്ഥനയും കല്പനകളും നിർജ്ജീവാവസ്ഥയിൽ നിന്നും ജീവാവസ്ഥയിലേക്ക് വരികയും സ്വർഗീയ പാപദീപ്തി എന്ന വാഗ്ദാനം നമുക്ക് ഈ ഭൂമിയിൽ തന്നെ, കല്ലുകൾ തുറക്കപ്പെട്ട് ഉയർത്തപ്പെടുന്നേല്ക്കപ്പെടുവാനിരിക്കുന്ന നമ്മുടെ പ്രിയരോടൊപ്പം അനുഭവിക്കാനിടയാവുകയും ചെയ്യും. ആ പാപദീപ്തിയിൽ പിന്നെ പാപമരണത്താലുള്ള നരണായാട്ട് ഉണ്ടാവുകയില്ല. നമ്മുടെ സ്നേഹ പിതാവിനോടൊപ്പം നിത്യ ജീവനാംശികളായി, അല്ലെങ്കിലും, അനാരോഗ്യമോ രോഗപീഡകളോ ആകുലതകളോ സംശയമോ ഇല്ലാതെ ഉല്ലാസത്തോടും ഉത്സാഹത്തോടും ആവേശഭരിതരായി ജീവിക്കുവാൻ നമ്മിലാർക്കാണ് ആഗ്രഹം ഇല്ലാത്തത്? അതിനായി മർമ്മത്തെ അറിഞ്ഞു ജീവിക്കുവാനും ഓട്ടം തികയ്ക്കുവാനും നമുക്കുകണം. വേഗത്തിലാകണം. ഇന്ന് തന്നെ അതിനായി നമ്മെത്തന്നെ ഒരുക്കുകയും ഇന്ന് മുതൽ അങ്ങോട്ടെന്നും അങ്ങനെ തന്നെ ആയിരിക്കുകയും വേണം. ഇതുവരെയുള്ള ജീവിത യാത്രയിൽ എല്ലാ അർത്ഥത്തിലും എല്ലാം ആവോളം അനുഭവിച്ചല്ലോ നാം; ഇനിയും ഒരു വ്യതിയാനമുണ്ടാകുന്നില്ലെങ്കിൽ ഇത് വരെ നാം നടത്തിയതും നടത്താനിരിക്കുന്നതും ജീവിത യാത്രയല്ല, മറിച്ച് മരണയാത്ര ആയിരുന്നുവെന്നു ഉറപ്പിക്കേണ്ടി വരും. മരണത്തിലേക്കുള്ള

യാത്രക്ക് ഇത്രയേറെ സാഹസങ്ങളുടെയും അട്ടഹാസങ്ങളുടെയും ആലോചനകളുടെയും ഒന്നും ആവശ്യമില്ലല്ലോ. അതിലേക്കു നാം നിപതിക്കുക മാത്രമാണല്ലോ ചെയ്യുന്നത്. നാമറിയാതെ നമുക്ക് ലഭിച്ച വരദാനമാണ് നമ്മുടെ ഈ ജീവിതം. ദാനമായി ലഭിച്ചത് അവകാശമാണെന്ന് തെറ്റുദ്ധരിച്ച് അഹങ്കാരത്തോടെ ജീവിക്കുവാനല്ല, പിന്നെയോ അനുസരണയോടെ, വിധേയപ്പെട്ടു, സൃഷ്ടാവിന്റെ പിതാമഹിത്തു ജീവിക്കുവാനാണ് ദൈവം നമ്മിൽ നിന്നും ആഗ്രഹിക്കുന്നത്. പാപദീപ്തിയിൽ അവനോടൊപ്പം വീണ്ടും കാണപ്പെടുകയുള്ളൂ. അല്ലാത്താലോ നിത്യംനിന്നി നരകമെന്നു വചനം പറയുന്നു. അത് തന്നെയാണ് സത്യം. എന്തെന്നാൽ വചനം സത്യമാകുന്നു! നമ്മെ നാമും ദൈവവുമായി ഒന്നിപ്പിക്കുന്ന സ്നേഹത്തിൽ നമുക്ക് ആശ്രയിക്കാം. ദിനിക്കുന്ന ഭൗതിക വിശ്വാസങ്ങളിലല്ല!! സ്നേഹം സർവ്വവും ക്ഷമിക്കുന്നു, സർവ്വ രോഗ പീഡ സംഹാരിയായ സ്നേഹത്തിലാശ്രയിച്ചാൽ സ്നേഹമല്ലാതെ മറ്റൊരു വിശ്വാസമില്ല മർമ്മമില്ല മറുമറുനില എന്ന് മനസ്സിലാകും.

India Mission Trip – 2013

The Diocesan Council has decided to arrange Mission Trips in 2013 to the mission fields in India. Since 2013 is the Jubilee year of the Diocese, the India Mission Trip will be for five different groups which will give more rooms for the younger generation in the Diocese to know about the Indian mission fields, the people over there and the mission programmes that are going on at various centers. The Diocese is considering to send different teams from USA, Canada and UK to Mumbai, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka - Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu and Kerala, depending on the availability of candidates and also volunteers to lead them. The visit will be for 10 to 15 days in the months of June - August, 2013.

Those who are interested please contact Mrs. Anita Sujit (San Francisco). Email:- anitasujit@yahoo.com / Phone: 650-759-1420

1. Mumbai Mission Tour

Dates: June 1 to 15, 2013.
The team will visit the following Mission Centers in the Mumbai Diocese. Ahwa and Dang, tribal belt of Gujrat, Boichipada and Vidharbha Region (10 Mission fields). Those who are interested please contact Mrs. Laila Annie Philip, Boston (varampath23@msn.com), Phone number - 978- 663-3203.

4. Delhi-Satna-Sihora-Jabalpur Mission Trip

Dates: July 10 - July 24, 2013 (14 days)
Trip starts and ends from Canada. Trip starts and ends from Edmon, Canada. The team will visit the mission centers and programmes in the following places: New Delhi Diocesan Center, Faridabad Dharmajyothi theological college, Agra, Satna, Khajuraho, Sihora, Jabalpur and Mumbai. Those who are interested please contact Dr. Varghese Manaloor (Edmonton). Email:- ushavar@hotmail.com / Phone: 780-672-8566.

2. Karnataka - Andhra Mission Tour

Dates: August 8 to 20, 2013 (12 days).
The team will visit the mission centers of Chennai - Bangalore Diocese in the states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The team will be visiting and experiencing life in the rural mission fields of Devenahalli, Vijayapura, Siddlaghatta, Sivanapuram in Karnataka and Madanapally and Chaglamari mission fields in Andhra Pradesh. Those who are interested please contact Mr. George Thomas, New Jersey (georgie4christ@gmail.com), Phone number - 201-214-6000.

5. Delhi-Sattal-TibetanBorder-Faridabad-Am-bala Mission Trip

Travel Dates: June 28 to July 13, 2013 (15 days)
Trip starts and ends from Washington DC. The team will visit the mission centers and programmes in the following places: New Delhi Diocesan Center, Sattal Ashram, Munshiari, Tejuam, Tibetan Border, Katgotham, Sreekakulam Mission field, Parvathipuram hostel, Visakhapattanam, Faridabad Dharmajyothi theological college, and Jaipur. Those who are interested please contact Dr. Mathew T Thomas, Washington DC. Email: -drtn@verizon.net / Phone: 301-526-8723

3. Kerala/ Pollachi (Tamil Nadu) Mission Trip

Dates: July 15 - July 26, 2013 (12 days)
Trip starts and ends from Trivandrum. This team will visit mission centers in the South Travancore area in Kerala which will include visits to HIV - AIDS rehabilitation center and de-addiction centers and also the Pollachi mission field in Tamil Nadu.

For more details about the five groups, contact the Diocesan Office: marthomadiocese@gmail.com

Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary

വിലും ആശ്രയിക്കുകയും ആകർഷണീയമായ ഒരു തൊഴിലായിരുന്നു അടിമ കച്ചവടം. ദക്ഷിണ അമേരിക്ക, യൂറോപ്പ്, തുടങ്ങിയ കരിമ്പ് പാടങ്ങളിൽ വേല ചെയ്യുവാൻ ആയിരക്കണക്കിന് മനുഷ്യരെ അടിമകളാക്കി ഇറക്കുമതി ചെയ്തിരുന്നു. 1861ൽ അമേരിക്കയിൽ ആഭ്യന്തര യുദ്ധം പൊട്ടി പുറപ്പെട്ടപ്പോൾ അവിടെ നാൽപ്പതു ലക്ഷം അടിമകൾ ഉണ്ടായിരുന്നു. വേദ പുസ്തകത്തെ ദുരുപയോഗിച്ചു ദുഷ് പ്രചരണം നടത്തി ചെയ്തിരുന്ന ഹീനമായ അടിമ കച്ചവടത്തെ പാശ്ചാത്യ മിഷനറിമാർ അപലപിക്കുകയും അതിനെതിരായി പ്രവർത്തിക്കുകയും ചെയ്തതിന്റെ ഫലമായിരുന്നു ആഭ്യന്തര യുദ്ധം. അടിമകൾ പുതിയ സ്ഥലങ്ങളിൽ വന്നു ചേർന്നപ്പോൾ അവർ വേദ പുസ്തകത്തിലെ സന്ദേശങ്ങൾ അറിഞ്ഞിരുന്നില്ല. അടിമകളുടെ ഉടമസ്ഥന്മാർ അവരെ വേദ പുസ്തകം വായിക്കുവാനോ പഠിക്കുവാനോ അനുവദിച്ചിരുന്നില്ല. ഈ ഹത ഭാഗ്യവന്മാരായിരുന്ന അടിമകൾക്ക് പ്രത്യാശയും ധൈര്യവും നൽകിയിരുന്നത് വേദ പുസ്തകമായിരുന്നു. യേശു ക്രിസ്തുവിന്റെ പീഡയും നിന്ദയും അവർ സ്വയം ഏറ്റു വാങ്ങി എന്ന് അവർ സ്വയം വിശ്വസിച്ചു. പ്രധാനമായും ഇവർ യഹൂദന്മാരുടെ ഇഴജീവിതത്തിലെ അടിമ വേലയും അതിൽ നിന്നും ദൈവം അവരെ വിടുവിച്ച കഥയും വായിച്ചു സമാധാനം കണ്ടിരുന്നു. ദാസന്മാരെ ജഡ പ്രകാരമുള്ള യജമാനന്മാരെ സകലത്തിലും അനുസരിപ്പിൻ. മനുഷ്യരെ പ്രസാധിപ്പിക്കുന്നവരെപ്പോലെ ദ്രിഷ്ടിസേവകളാലല്ല കർത്താവിനെ ഭയപ്പെട്ടു കൊണ്ട് ഹൃദയത്തിന്റെ ഏകാഗ്രതയോടു കൂടെയത്രേ അനുസരിക്കേണ്ടത്. യജമാനന്മാരെ നിങ്ങൾക്കും സ്വർഗത്തിൽ യജമാനന്മാരുണ്ട് എന്നറിഞ്ഞ് ദാസന്മാരോടു നീതിയും ന്യായവും ആചരിപ്പിൻ. (കൊലോസ്യർ 4:1) അടിമകളുടെ നിർത്തലാക്കിയത് കൊണ്ടാണല്ലോ എബ്രഹാം ലിങ്കൻ തന്റെ ജീവൻ ബലി കൊടുത്തത്. രണ്ടായിരം വർഷങ്ങൾക്കു മുൻപ് യേശു ക്രിസ്തുവിൽ കൂടി നടന്നതായ രക്ഷയുടെ

ചരിത്രം വേദ പുസ്തകത്തിൽ കൂടി ഇന്നും ജീവിക്കുന്നു. ഞാൻ ആൽഫയും ഒമേഗയും ആദിയും അന്തവും ആകുന്നു. ദാഹിക്കുന്നവനു ഞാൻ നീരുവയിൽ നിന്നും സൗജന്യമായി കൊടുക്കും. ജയിക്കുന്നവന് ഇതു അവകാശമായി ലഭിക്കും. ഞാൻ അവനു ദൈവവും അവൻ എനിക്ക് മകനും ആയിരിക്കും. ഇനിയും രാത്രി ഉണ്ടാകയില്ല. ദൈവമായ കർത്താവ് അവരുടെ മേൽ പ്രകാശിക്കുന്നത് കൊണ്ട് വിളക്കിന്റെ ആവശ്യം ഇല്ലല്ലോ. ഈ വാഗ്ദത്തങ്ങളാണ് യോഹന്നാൻ അപ്പോസ്തലനിൽ കൂടെ ജീവിക്കുന്ന യേശു നമുക്ക് നൽകിയിരിക്കുന്നത്.

ഭൂമുഖത്ത് ആറായിരത്തി അഞ്ഞൂറ് വിവിധ ഭാഷകളാണു ഉള്ളത്. അവയിൽ പ്രധാനപ്പെട്ട മൂവായിരം ഭാഷകളിൽ വേദ പുസ്തകം പരിഭാഷപ്പെടുത്തിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. ലോകത്തിലെ ജനസംഖ്യയിൽ പത്തിൽ ഒൻപതു പേർക്ക് ഒരു വിധത്തിൽ അല്ലെങ്കിൽ മറ്റൊരു വിധത്തിൽ ഈ സത്യ വചനങ്ങൾ ഹൃസ്വമായിട്ടെങ്കിലും ലഭ്യമാണ്.

Book Review

A Study of the Fasts and Feasts in the Church

Author: Rev. Dr. George Mathew Kuttiyil
(Published by CSS, India, on January 2013)

Review written by Rev. Biju P Simon, Chicago MTC

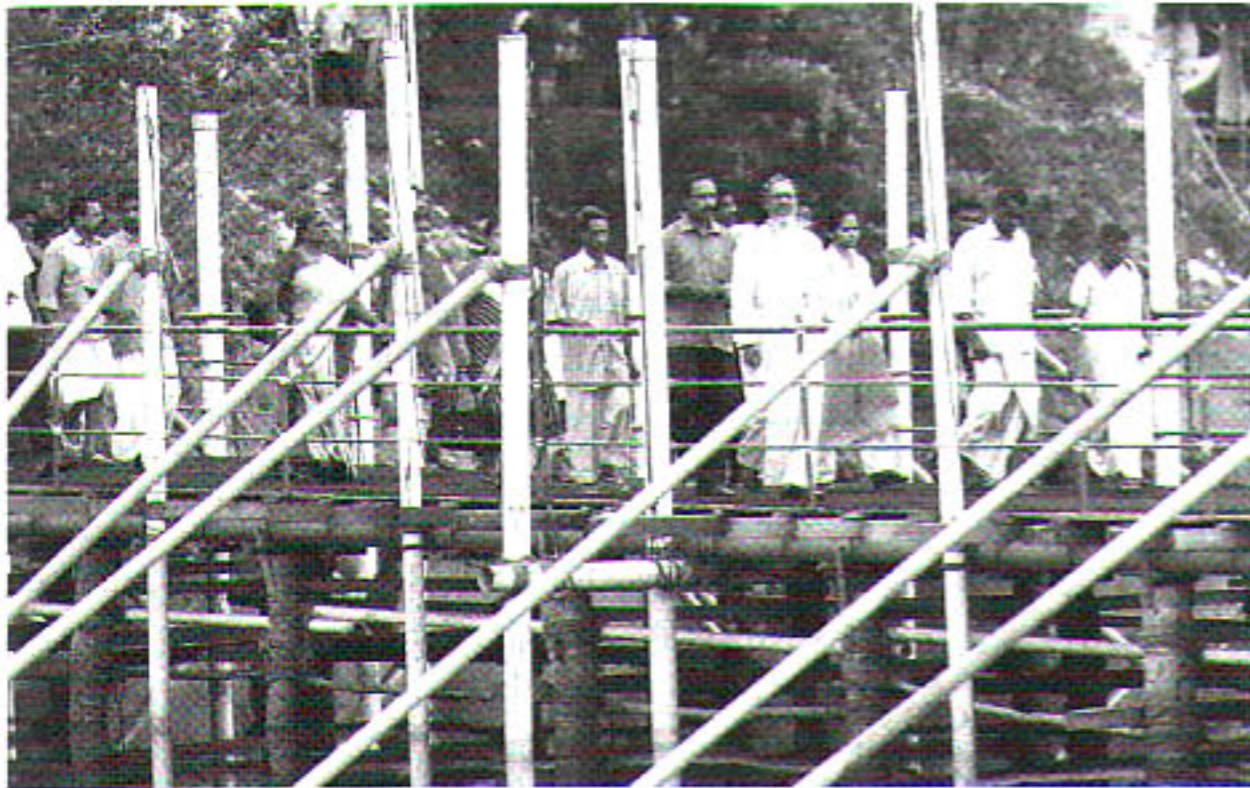
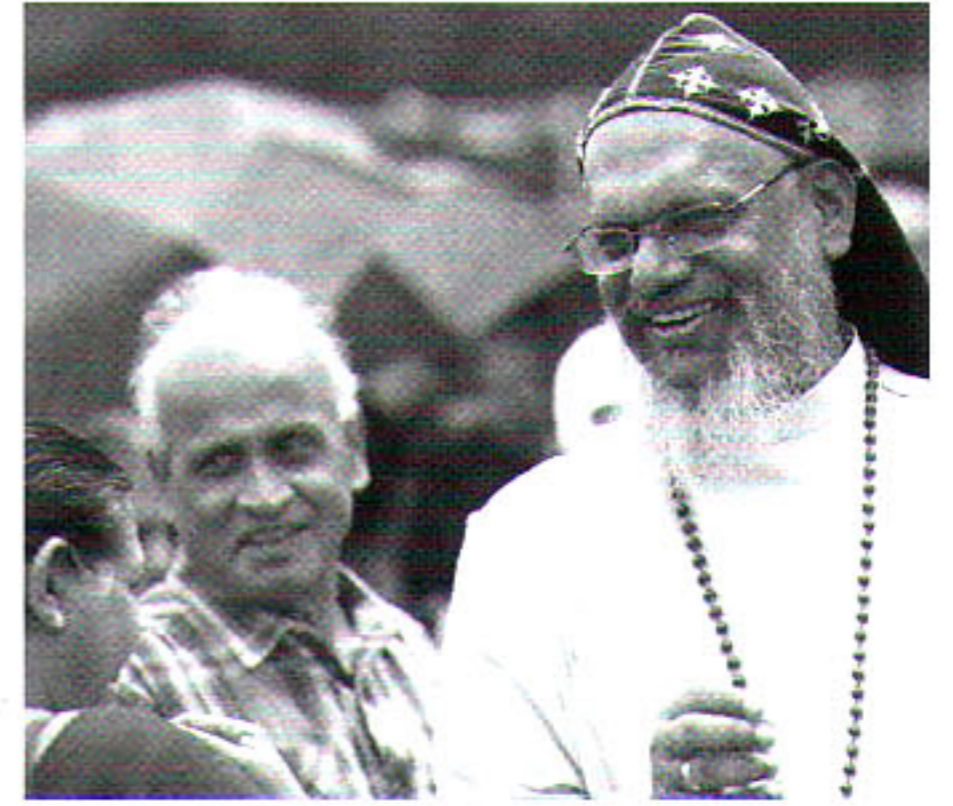
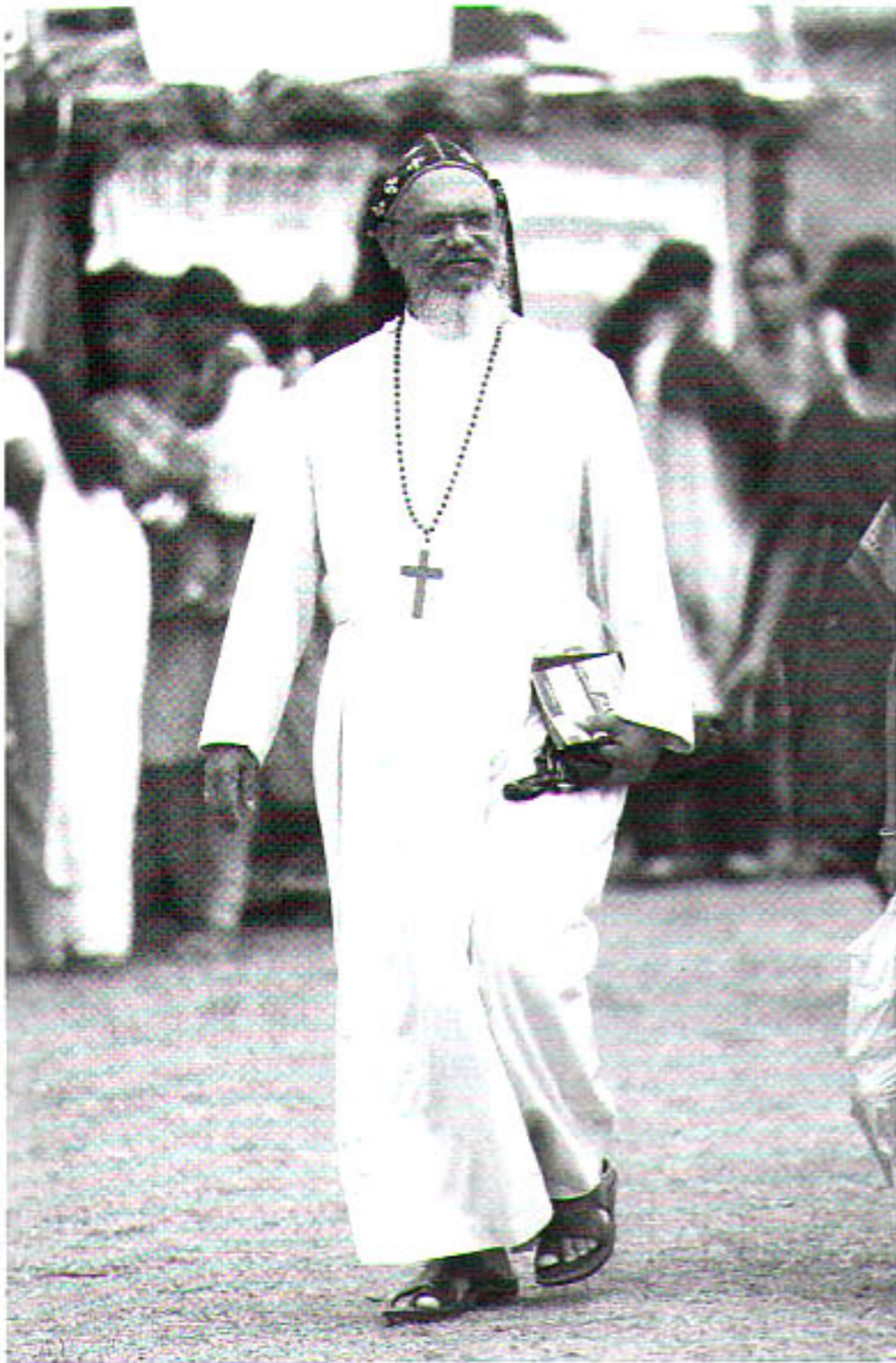
Reverend Kuttiyil's A Study of the Fasts and Feasts in the Church is an insightful and relevant book that would bring forth productive thought process very much needed for Christians of our times. Have you ever wondered about the purpose of observing Christmas and Easter, Annunciation time, and the periods of Transfiguration, Pentecost and so forth? We are living in a time where the basis of everything is questioned and reasoning is necessary for everything we believe in and require evidence to settle our rational minds. To a certain extent the worshipping community is also in need of reason though faith in general also involves mystery and ambiguity where we may not get conclusive answers for all our queries. I have heard that our young generation questions the validity and relevance of the liturgy and worship life of our church. This book provides intelligent and Biblical answers to many of these concerns. The Christian Church has organized the year to teach us and remind us of the events in the life of Christ and in the lives of the saints. Awareness among our faith community regarding the Fasts and Feasts of the church would enable us to participate in these events more meaningfully.

This book is mainly divided into three parts. First part of this book deals with theological dimensions of the Feasts and Fasts observed by the Church. Author covers the biblical, liturgical, and theological importance of these observances. The rationale for these observances are aptly captured in the book's opening paragraph, "What is intended through the festivals of the Church, the liturgical year (Christian Year), and the lectionary system and Fasts is an exhortation to meditate on Jesus Christ's redemptive action all through the year and to live with him throughout." Author gives a very good account of the major cycles and periods of the Church calendar.

Second part of the book focuses on the observance directly linked to the life and witness of Jesus Christ known as Christological Fasts. This section also covers the feasts related Holy Spirit (Pneumatological), Holy Church (ecclesiological) and feasts of the saints and so forth. Third part of this book deals with why the fast and lent observed in the bible and its significance. This section provides biblical and theological basis for the Lents of the church and especially on the twenty-five days Lent, three days Lent, and the fifty days Lent. The author also gives skillful interpretation on the spirituality and social dimensions of the Lent, and other observations and celebrations.

This book is a valuable resource for all our congregations in general and specifically for the Sunday Schools, Youth groups, and adult bible classes. First Communicants preparatory classes across our congregations would especially benefit from this book and evermore so in the diaspora context. In order for our generations to understand and appreciate the rich historical heritage of our faith tradition it is important that we keep a copy of the book in our personal library collections as well.

(This book is also available in Malayalam under the title "Sabhayile Nombhum Perunalum")

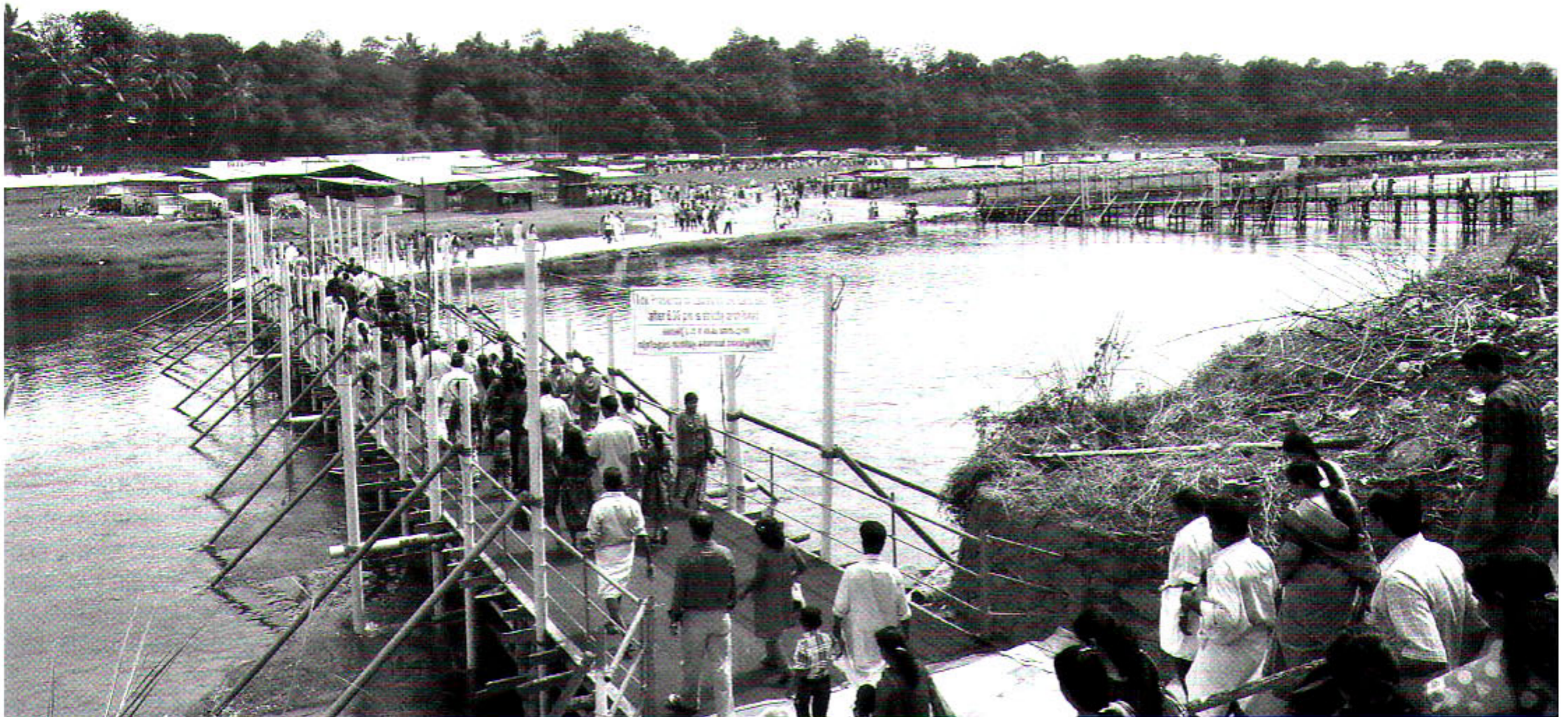


118th  2013 Feb: 10-17

maramon convention

Asia's Largest Christian convention started 113 years ago 1896 Banks of River Pampa

Photos: Emlin Mathew Abraham



Life and Environment: A Biblical Perspective

(2012 Sabha Mandalam Study Material - Chapter 1)

Translated by Dr. Anita Daniel, New Jersey

A study on the topic 'Life and Environment' is undoubtedly very relevant today. The fact that God's beautiful creation in its totality has been made ugly and distorted by man should lead us towards repentance and instill a sense of responsibility within us. Life and Environment are not to be considered as two different entities. The term 'Environment' encompasses both, the living and the non-living things. Therefore, it is not just the living objects that come under the scope of the green vision. We need to see beauty in the completeness of creation. Nevertheless, for the growth of life and for its sustenance and stability, a living and life generating environment is indispensable.

The fullness of life is what God intends for, and anticipates of his creation. It is important for us to whom Christ has entrusted the role to be the custodians and the protectors of life to discover what these two terms indicate in the present-day scenario. For this, it is desirable to seek passages from the scripture that underscore the importance of building a sound eco-foundation. However, paucity of time and space prevents us from reflecting on this issue by going through every book of the Bible that recognizes this issue. Therefore, certain pertinent passages of the scripture that would address the issue in its totality would form the basis of this study.

Why such an endeavor?

In recent years, scientific and theological interventions have been seriously contemplating and devising means to sustain life and to address environmental challenges. The study of this kind will facilitate thinking along the lines of change and enable us to constructively participate in it. Sustaining life has forever been the focus of man's efforts and the drive behind every discovery. Why it is so, is hard to explain in a word, but as far as man is concerned, this issue evokes interest in him only when he realizes that his very existence on earth is imperiled. Such an attitude is beset with problems. Instead of seeing man as part of the created universe, he is placed at a platform higher than the other beings, and his existence on earth assumes more significance than the existence of the other elements of the universe. A mindset of this kind will make the study on 'Life and environment' more Anthropocentric (treating humans as preeminent) in outlook and never biblical in approach.

The other reason to embark on this study is to understand the historic basis of how to approach and perceive the challenges in its totality from what has been revealed through the Jewish and Christian stances on this topic. Both schools of thought focus on God's intervention in human life and His incarnation in human form. But the basic understanding of these concepts and the problems arising out of varied interpretations that go along these thoughts are to be carefully reflected upon. The prominent theological and ethical discourses have given more emphasis on the history of mankind and the society they belong to. But the reality that man's history is basically connected to the history of the wide universe that embraces both the living and the non-living elements equally, and derives its existence and identity only in relation to the vast cosmos has never been given serious thought previously. This study strives to do so by considering the various aspects in relation to this topic, and the indispensable outlook to be inculcated so as to nurture the biblically sound thoughts on eco-foundation.

Tight spot of faith

Our earlier studies on life were focused on the various consortia of faith like; life and death, life and salvation, life and redemption, life and sin, and life and eternal life. All these are certainly vital aspects. But the combination 'life and environment' is undoubtedly different from all of the above clusters. Therefore, when life and environment become our new components for study, the different approaches and thoughts prevalent in these realms need to be examined closely so as to form a sound biblical basis for our study. Also, extensive research is being undertaken in the realm of faith, regarding its essential features, and, its vision and objectives in the light of the ecological changes in the world around us. So it is relevant to check as to what extent our faith is bio-centric or eco-centric

in focus, and to rediscover the eco-orientations of our faith. Just as our relationship with God and with the other person comes under the wing of faith-related issues, we also primarily need to see our relationship with environment and with each created being of the universe as a faith-related issue. In this context, all problems facing the environment today are essentially and undoubtedly the problems of faith.

A New Sign

To be modern has come to mean as having no relationship with the soil and being distant from one's environment. Besides, the fundamental perception of modernism has created a dichotomy between nature and culture. To be 'cultured' has come to imply as one who bears no connection with nature or the environment in which one lives. Therefore, it is vital to trace the eco-orientations of our faith. A research of this nature is essential so-as to help formulate the true meaning of faith. That is to say, we need to re define what constitutes our faith, what forms the basis of our goals in life, and what our responsibilities ought to be in the light of these reflections. In recent years not just in academic discourses but in all life-related aspects it has turned out to be a topic of serious discussion. In this context our study titled 'Life and Environment' is a new benchmark. We are in, to unfold the eco-foundations of life. We are achieving the beauty of tracing the eco-foundations of our faith and our responsibilities. Environment is taking the central position of our faith. Therefore we must be able to see environmental crisis as a faith-related crisis. We must consider the threats to environment as threats to our faith.

Biblical misconceptions regarding the Dissolution of Eco-orientations:

We need to constantly engage in identifying the implications and the profoundness of our faith. If our faith rests on the God of all creations, then we should never try to perceive God through a narrowed vision. God is not the god of a particular race or of a certain individual. Instead, God is the Lord and sustainer of all beings as revealed through the pages of the scripture. The Nicene Creed that we proclaim repetitively is an affirmation of our faith. The faith assertion that declares that God is the God of the heavens and the earth, and the protector and sustainer of everything seen and unseen is a revelation of the eco-orientations of our faith. But even though we regularly keep upholding our faith in the Nicene Creed, our confirmations have become mechanical and with little thought to its implications.

The eco dimensions of our faith should be

translated into our lives and our actions. This is the import of the biblical and theological understanding of our faith. Such an insight should lead us to reread all detrimental observations made against nature and revise these observations. That is to say that we need to review all references in the Bible that have been misinterpreted so as to engender a destructive stance about nature. Studies reveal that the exploitation of the universe by man stems from his wrong understanding of biblical texts. For instance, the biblical text of Genesis 1:28-29 has been misconstrued to be a license to exploit every other being created by God and to exercise dominion over them. But this is not the right interpretation of the text. The role of faith in our journey towards a better environment should form the basis of our investigations. In order to make our study on life and environment meaningful, we need to find answers to a few questions like: 'What is the eco-foundation of our faith? What scriptural passages strengthen eco-orientations of our faith? What eco-vision is envisaged in the scripture?'

God's own creation:

The Bible opens by avowing faith in God as the creator of all things (Genesis 1). This creation is God's. God saw each of his creation as good. He enfolds each one of his creations. In Genesis 1 we read of God resting or celebrating the Sabbath after having created everything. The Sabbath is a philosophy of life that stems from, and rests on, the all-encompassing nature of relationships. It signifies the completeness of the process of creation and the interconnectedness of God, man and the created order. The Sabbath is the celebration of the wholeness of creation. God has prepared a time of rest for the land, the soil, and for man. Exploitation of fellow humans, the soil or natural resources means, means going against the very purpose of God's creation as revealed through the celebration of the Sabbath. The celebration of Sabbath challenges us to enter into a covenant relationship with god, man, and the created universe.

Conratulations to Pope Francis



Diocese of North America and Europe of the Malankara Mar Thoma Church extends our prayerful congratulations to the newly elected Pope. As a worshipping community, we offer our continued cooperation to Pope Francis and the whole of the Catholic Church. May the Lord abundantly shower His blessings upon the Supreme Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church.

SILVER JUBILEE YEAR 2013 - Regional Programs

Region	Common Holy Communion	Dialogue on the Journey and Growth of the Diocese	Seminar on Identity, Vision and Mission of the Church	Study on Church History & Lay Leadership Training
North East	St. John's MTC, NY July 6	St. Thomas MTC, NY September 28	Epiphany MTC July 13	St. Andrew's MTC, NY March 9
South East	Ascension MTC, PA March 30	St. Peter's MTC, NJ	MTC, Greater Washington May 4	Christos MTC, PA June 8
Southern	Regional Family Conference Center (Tampa) Nov 3	MTC, Atlanta Jun 16	Hermon MTC, Atlanta	St. Luke's MTC, FL
Mid West	Chicago MTC April 13	Bethel MTC, Frankfurt, IL	Detroit MTC - July 27 & St. Thomas MTC, Lombard	St. Thomas MTC, Lombard IL
South West	Immauel MTC, Houston January 19	MTC of Dallas, FB August 7	Shion MTC, Dallas June 8	St. Paul's MTC, Dallas October 2
Western	Los Angeles MTC June 1	Mar Thoma Church, LA	Seattle MTC & Phoenix Congregation	San Francisco MTC
Canada	Vancouver (Family Conf.) June 30	St. Mathews MTC, Toronto	Trinity MTC, Edmonton March 16	Canadian MTC, Toronto
Europe	Family Conference Center, Swanwick UK August 30	St. James MTC, London	St. Thomas MTC, Bristol	St. John's MTC, London,

Diocesan Silver Jubilee Inauguration in Houston

The Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church has completed 25 years of its existence and blessed ministry. To mark the Silver Jubilee year the Diocesan Council has planned an yearlong celebration.

The inauguration of Silver Jubilee celebrations was held at the Immanuel Mar Thoma Church, Houston on Saturday, January 19, 2013.



The program was started with a Holy Qurbana service at 9 a.m. by the Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius.



7 altar boys were dedicated during the service. This was followed by a public meeting. Very Rev. Dr. Douglas Travis, the Dean of South West Episcopal Seminary was the chief guest.



The opening prayer was led by Rev. O. C. Kurian, Vicar of St. Paul's Mar Thoma Church, Dallas. Rev. Roy A Thomas offered welcome speech. The Diocesan Episcopa inaugurated the Jubilee celebration by unveiling the Jubilee logo. In his presidential and inaugural address Mar Theodosius remembered the significant milestones in the history and growth of the

Diocese. The role played by the lay leadership in forming congregations and parishes in the local level and in organizing zonal and Diocesan set up in North America and UK was also well appreciated. The contributions of Bishops and clergy in the nurturing of the Diocese are specially remembered during the occasion. The early immigrants who came to North America before 1988 and worked very hard in the formation of this Diocese are honored in the Jubilee inauguration. As a symbolic expression of handing over the faith and traditions of the church from generation to generation, Mr. T. A. Mathew, a pioneer of this Diocese and representative of first generation Mar Thoma immigrants, handed over a copy of the Holy Bible to Master Ruben Varghese, a representative of third generation Marthomites.



The Trinity Mar Thoma Church choir sang the Jubilee Song. The chief guest of the day, Very Rev. Douglas Travis gave the keynote address. Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary thanked the leaders, dignitaries and the delegates in the meeting. The Inaugural function came to a close with prayer by Dr. P John Lincoln and benediction by Mar Theodosius.



A fellowship lunch was served. All the participants were in a festive mood, praising God, strengthening the fellowship and committing themselves to continue the spiritual journey with Christ.

Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Diocesan Secretary



Copy of 'Kalpana' from the then Metropolitan Rt. Rev. Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma, Proclaiming the Formation of the North American Diocese

മലങ്കര ശ്രീഹായിക്കടുത്ത സിംഹാസനത്തിന്റെ

അലക്സാണ്ടർ മാർത്തോമ്മാ മെത്രാപ്പോലീത്തായിൽ നിന്നും

സർക്കുലർ നമ്പർ 231

നമ്മുടെ അധികാരത്തിൽപ്പെട്ട സകല പള്ളികളുടെയും വികാരിമാരും ദേശത്തു പട്ടക്കാരും പള്ളി കൈക്കാരും ശേഷം ജനങ്ങളും കൂടി കണ്ടെന്നാൽ നിങ്ങൾക്കു വാഴ്വ്.

കർത്താവിൽ പ്രിയരേ,

നമ്മുടെ സഭാഭരണഘടന 60, 61 വകുപ്പുകളിൽ പറഞ്ഞിരിക്കുന്ന പ്രകാരം ഒരു ഭദ്രാസനത്തിൽ ഒരു എപ്പിസ്കോപ്പായുടെ സേവനകാലം സാധാരണയായി 7 വർഷം ആയിരിക്കുമല്ലോ. എപ്പിസ്കോപ്പാമാർക്ക് നൽകപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കുന്ന അധികാരങ്ങൾ ആവശ്യമെന്ന് കണ്ടാൽ ഭേദപ്പെടുത്താൻ മെത്രാപ്പോലീത്തയ്ക്ക് ചുമതലയുണ്ട്. ഇപ്പോൾ തിരുവനന്തപുരം കൊല്ലം ഭദ്രാസനത്തിലും, ബോംബെ ഡൽഹി ഭദ്രാസനത്തിലും ചുമതല വഹിക്കുന്ന എപ്പിസ്കോപ്പാമാർ ആ ഭദ്രാസനങ്ങളിൽ ചുമതല ഏറ്റു 7 വർഷം പൂർത്തിയായിരിക്കുന്നു. ആ ഭദ്രാസനങ്ങളിലെ ചുമതലയിൽ വ്യത്യാസം വരുത്തുന്നത് പ്രയോജനകരമെന്നു കരുതുന്നതിനാൽ 1988 ജനുവരി 1 മുതൽ താഴെ പറയുന്ന വിധം ക്രമീകരണം ചെയ്യുന്നു.

- 1) അടുർ മാവേലിക്കര ഭദ്രാസനത്തിന്റെ ചുമതല ഈശോ മാർ തിമോത്തിയോസ് എപ്പിസ്കോപ്പയിൽ നിന്ന് വിടർത്തി ഫിലിപ്പോസ് മാർ ക്രിസോസ്റ്റം സഫ്രഗൻ മെത്രാപ്പോലീത്തയെ ഭരമേൽപ്പിക്കുന്നു.
- 2) തിരുവനന്തപുരംകൊല്ലം ഭദ്രാസനത്തിന്റെ ചുമതല ഫിലിപ്പോസ് മാർ ക്രിസോസ്റ്റം സഫ്രഗൻ മെത്രാപ്പോലീത്തയിൽ നിന്നും വിടർത്തി ജോസഫ് മാർ ഐറേനിയോസ് എപ്പിസ്കോപ്പയെ ഭരമേൽപ്പിക്കുന്നു.
- 3) ബോംബെ - ഡൽഹി ഭദ്രാസനത്തിന്റെയും മലേഷ്യ - സിങ്കപ്പൂർ ഭദ്രാസനത്തിന്റെയും ചുമതല ജോസഫ് മാർ ഐറേനിയോസ് എപ്പിസ്കോപ്പയിൽ നിന്നും വിടർത്തി ഈശോ മാർ തിമോത്തിയോസ് എപ്പിസ്കോപ്പയെ ഭരമേൽപ്പിക്കുന്നു.

തിരുവനന്തപുരം കൊല്ലം ഭദ്രാസനത്തിൽ വികാരി ജനറാളായിരിക്കുന്ന വന്യ ദിവ്യ ശ്രീ എ. എ. പൈലി കഴ്ശിശാ 1988 ജനുവരിയിൽ ചുമതലയിൽ നിന്നും വിരമിക്കുന്നതിനാൽ ഇപ്പോൾ അടുർ മാവേലിക്കര ഭദ്രാസനത്തിൽ വികാരി ജനറാളായിരിക്കുന്ന വന്യ ദിവ്യ ശ്രീ കെ. വി. ജയിക്കബ് കഴ്ശിശാ 1988 ജനുവരി മുതൽ തിരുവനന്തപുരം കൊല്ലം ഭദ്രാസനത്തിൽ വികാരി ജനറാളായി നിയമിക്കുന്നു.

വടക്കേ അമേരിക്കയിലുള്ള നമ്മുടെ ഇടവകകളും കോൺഗ്രിഗേഷനുകളും നിരണം മാരാമൺ ഭദ്രാസനത്തോട് ചേർന്ന ഒരു മേഖലയായി (Zone) ഇപ്പോൾ ക്രമീകരിച്ചിരിക്കുകയാണ്. നമ്മുടെ സഭാ കൗൺസിലിന്റെയും എപ്പിസ്കോപ്പൽ സിനഡിന്റെയും ആലോചനയോടു കൂടെ മേൽപ്പറഞ്ഞ മേഖലയെ 1988 ജനുവരി 1 മുതൽ ഭദ്രാസനമായി രൂപീകരിക്കുന്നു. വടക്കേ അമേരിക്കൻ ഭദ്രാസനം (Diocese of North America) എന്ന് ഈ ഭദ്രാസനം അറിയപ്പെടുന്നതാണ്. അതിന്റെ ചുമതല മെത്രാപ്പോലീത്താ വഹിക്കുന്നതാണ്. വേറെ ക്രമീകരണം ഉണ്ടാകുന്നത് വരെ ഇപ്പോൾ ഉള്ള Zonal Assembly, Zonal Council ഔദ്യോഗിക ഭാരവാഹികൾ എന്നിവർ പ്രസ്തുത ഭദ്രാസനത്തിന്റെ ഭദ്രാസന അസ്സംബ്ലി, ഭദ്രാസന കൗൺസിൽ, ഭദ്രാസനത്തിന്റെ ഭാരവാഹികൾ എന്നിവരായിരിക്കും.

മേൽപറഞ്ഞ ക്രമീകരണങ്ങൾ പ്രസ്തുത ഭദ്രാസനങ്ങളുടെയും ഇടവകകളുടെയും സഭയുടെയും പുരോഗമനത്തിന് പ്രയോജനകരമായിരിക്കുമെന്നു വിശ്വസിക്കുന്നു. സഭാംഗങ്ങളുടെ അനുഗ്രഹത്തിനും കിസ്തീയ ദൗത്യ നിർവഹണത്തിനും ഇതു സഹായകരമായി തീരുവാൻ കർത്താവ് കൃപ നൽകട്ടെ എന്നു പ്രാർത്ഥിക്കുന്നു.

കർത്താവ് നിങ്ങളെ അനുഗ്രഹിക്കട്ടെ എന്ന് 1987 നവംബർ 5 -ാം തീയതി. തിരുവല്ല സഭാ ആഫീസിൽ നിന്നും.

അലക്സാണ്ടർ മാർത്തോമ്മാ മെത്രാപ്പോലീത്താ.



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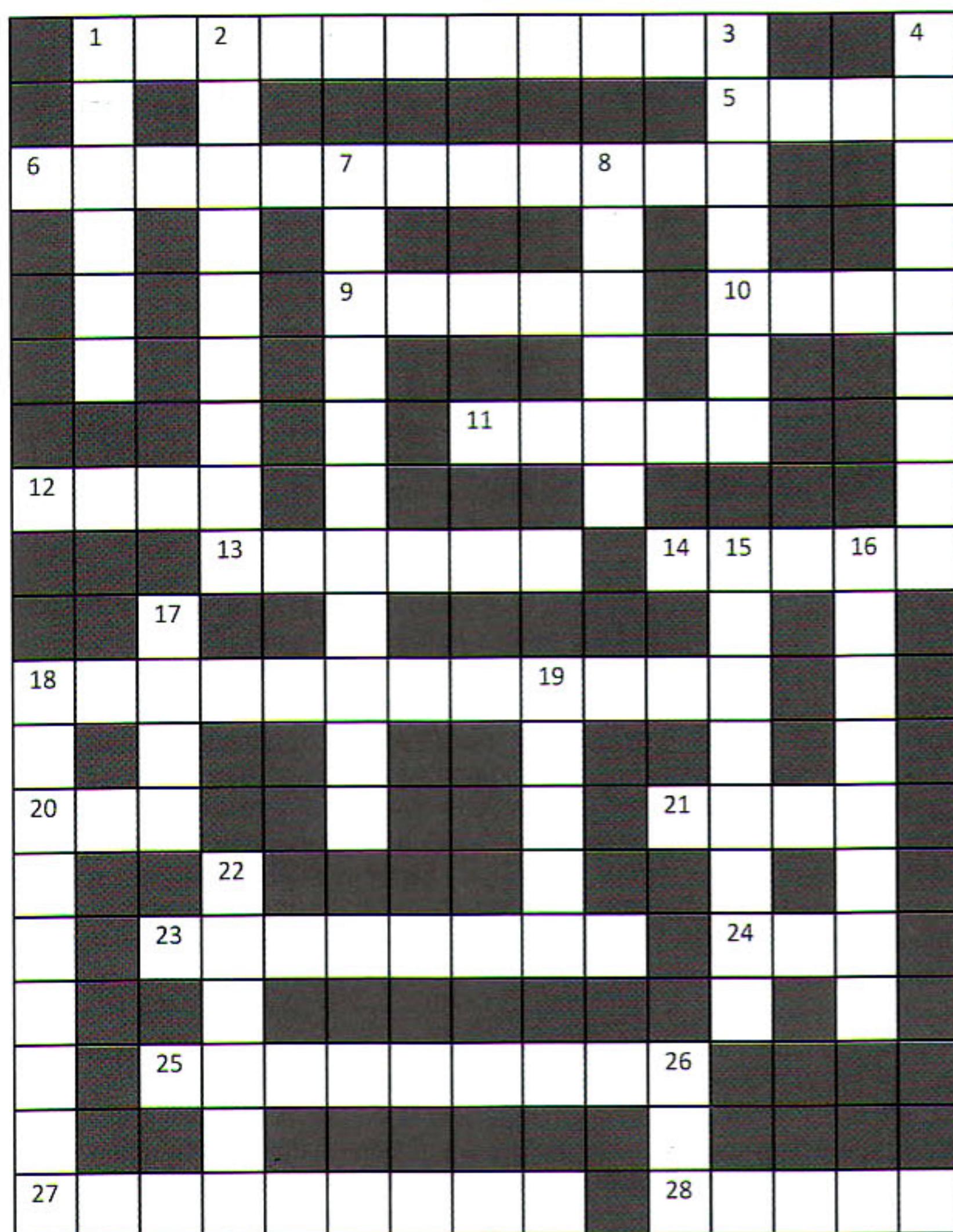
JOHN CHACKO

Financial Services Representative
3700 W Sam Houston Pkwy S Su400
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Bible Crossword Puzzle



ACROSS

1. The _____ were afraid. " a god has come into the camp"
5. Elkanah, a Zuphite, was from the _____ country of Ephraim
6. Eli's sons had made themselves _____ and he failed to restrain them.
9. The Levite decided to spend the _____ in the city square because no one took them into their home.
10. "No, my friends don't be so _____.don't do this disgraceful thing."
11. When Boaz greeted the harvesters, they called back, " The Lord _____ you"
12. "May the _____ make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah."
13. Micah returned the _____ hundred shekels of silver to his mother.
14. When the five men came to _____, they saw the people living in safety, unsuspecting and secure.
18. The people of Laish lived a long way from the Sidonians and had no _____ with anyone else.
20. This _____ of the young men was very great in the Lord's sight.
21. "My heart rejoices in the Lord: in the Lord my _____ is lifted high"
23. All Israel recognized that Samuel was _____ as a prophet of the Lord.
24. " he will renew your life and sustain you in your old _____"
25. They brought back the ark of the covenant of the Lord Almighty, who is _____ between the cherubim.

27. The Lord declares, "those who honor me, I will honor, but those who despise me will be _____"
28. " _____ is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech."

DOWN

1. "Your _____ will be my people and your God my God".
2. " If a man sins against the Lord, who will _____ for him?"
3. "Please let me glean and gather among the _____ behind the harvesters."
4. _____ had two sons named Mahlon & Kilion.
7. Samuel was _____ before the Lord - a boy wearing a linen ephod.
8. The Israelites went to _____ and sat weeping before the Lord
15. The priest answered, " Go in peace. Your journey has the Lord's _____.
16. "The Lord will guard the feet of the saints but the wicked will be _____ in darkness."
17. Boaz, a man of standing, was from the _____ of Elimelech.
18. The Lord _____, " Go, for to-morrow I will give them into your hands."
19. The Lord said to Samuel, "at that time I will carry out everything I _____ against his family"
22. " The guilt of Eli's house will never be _____ for by sacrifice or offering".
26. The Danites rebuilt the city and named it after their forefather _____.

Chapters

**Judges
17-21 & Ruth: 1-4
& I Samuel: 1-4
NIV**

Deadline for Answers:
May 28, 2013

Mail to:
Philip Manuel
23 Lake Street
BillERICA, MA 01821
Phone: 978-663-3203

By Email (pdf format only):
Varampath23@msn.com

Please include your name,
name of Parish,
State and phone number.

Prepared by Mr. Philip Manuel
and Mrs. Laila Anie Philip
Carmel, MTC Boston

Jesus Christ and Woman at the Well: Paradigm for Mission and Ministry Today



Rev. Dr. Joe Joseph Kuruvilla, Philadelphia

The Diocese of North America and Europe has reached a historic milestone. It is celebrating its 25 years of its formation and functioning as a diocese. I am happy that I could also be a part of the ministry of the diocese during the last three years and as I leave this wonderful country to take up new assignment in ministry, I want to thank the Lord for the rich experiences that He has given to me in my work and ministry in this diocese. But then as we celebrate the silver jubilee, along with our celebration and our thanks to the mighty working of our Lord in the ministry of the diocese, this should also be a time of reflection and also re-examination of our ministry in the diocese. Questions that should be raised as to whether the church is ready to move forward to accept challenges of the future in formulating a relevant mission and ministry in North America.

The challenges that the community of believers face now is very different from the initial time when people started migrating. I think it has been no more than four decades. Hence even the word Diaspora is sometime is not relevant to the present context as the present generation Marthomites are citizens of this country. Majority of families have settled down and the initial issues of settling that was present in the families is not there, but the challenges today are different. Hence what is important today is to address the issues as to how the church can do a ministry that is blessing to the society and relevant to the community of faith. To draw some lessons, I would want to use the encounter that Jesus has with the Samaritan woman in John 4, to formulate a paradigm for a relevant ministry in the present day context in North America.

One of the hallmarks of the ministry of Jesus Christ was that he always envisaged new ways of working in his ministry. These new and unique ways was not done for the sake of doing the ministry that His Father had entrusted to him, on the contrary Jesus always wanted His ministry pointing to the already established reign of God and also about the eschatological hope of the coming kingdom. Moreover the signs of the Kingdom meant "proclaiming the freedom to the prisoners and recovery of the sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" [Lk 4: 18]. It also meant that everyone would be able to experience fullness of life [John 10:10]. Here is Jesus proclaiming that everyone one would be able to experience fullness of life, fullness of life that come from liberation, deliverance from sin, deliverance from all forms of exploitation, deliverance from sin and also sickness. It is to this holistic concept of life that Jesus wanted to lead his people to. It is with this focus that Jesus did his ministry. These entire objectives could be found in part or in whole as he dealt different sections of people, calling them to work along with him, or correcting them or giving them healing and liberation.

The encounter with the Samaritan woman is one of the most enthralling encounters mentioned in the Bible. There are different encounters that are mentioned in the Bible, but the writer John has taken pains to write the intimate details of the encounter. It is this encounter between Jesus and Samaritan woman that is a paradigm for mission and ministry in the context of North America There are few concepts that we need to consider which we can understand in this encounter that will help us to formulate a relevant style of mission and ministry.

Breaking Linguistic, Cultural and Traditional Boundaries

The first aspect for doing a relevant ministry and mission is to understand what boundaries are and how we can redefine what boundaries are or whether it is time to broaden or expand or break certain boundaries that inhibit us to do relevant mission and ministry. In this encounter with the Samaritan woman, we find Jesus consciously breaking certain cultural, social and religious tradition that existed at that time. A woman comes to draw water from the well and that too in the afternoon and Jesus also come to the well as He feels tired and was waiting to refresh himself with a drink. Both Jesus and the woman meet at the well for reasons that are varied, but Jesus uses this opportunity to have a dialogue with the woman and bring about a change and transformation in the life of the unnamed Sa-

maritan woman. For Jesus Christ, every opportunity is an opportunity to do ministry. I think that is where our focus of ministry starts. We don't do ministry at a particular time or place, ministry is a lifestyle, a vocation that we do all the time. Here when Jesus encounters woman, he is well aware of the social and cultural animosity that existed between Jews and the Samaritans and also about the etiquettes of man-woman relationship at that time. But we see Jesus is not concerned about the social etiquettes, He is not concerned about the cultural and social laws that bar the Jews and Samaritans from having relationship or fellowship among themselves. He is concerned only about the need of the Samaritan woman and the change and the transformation that He wanted to bring in her life. He understands the life situation of the woman and he wanted the woman to experience liberation from all forces that had oppressed her and made her a tool of exploitation. Jesus breaks boundaries so that He could show a new path, a new way of living to the woman who has been constantly been exploited and now lives in the margins of society. Condemned to live without fellowship nor meaningful and qualitative relationship. It is this paradigm of re defining boundaries that Jesus gives to the Church, as we work to continue His ministry on the earth. One of the factors that limits or put constraints in the ministry of the church is the so called boundaries that we have put in the name of tradition, in the name of culture or in the dictum " we do it this way". One of the aspects that I have found while working in the North American context is that, people says that they want change in the way we do our ministry here in North America or the way we function as a church, but when practical ways are suggested or when new innovative changes are sought in the way we do our ministry, the very people who wants changes start opposing the new and innovative and contemporary ways of doing ones ministry. We are comfortable only when we do ministry in the way that we are comfortable or familiar with. We are not ready to break boundaries nor are we even ready to broaden the boundaries of our parish to make even our parish more inclusive. One of the complaints that is said about our Church is that it is still an Indian Malayali Church. I have no problem in affirming yes that we have certain linguistic identity, but then the next generation of marthomites has no linguistic connection or affinity to Malayalam, other than their parents have this Indian or Malayali connection. Thus in such a context it is imperative that we need to consciously think as to why as a church we still are very rigid in our outlook and are not ready

to incorporate and expand the boundaries of the church so that church is more open, to accommodate others who are not Indians or Malayali's. Even in some parishes where the strength of the youths and the people who are born and raised in United States are more in number than the members that have migrated from India, the onus and the focus is still to do the ministry in the typical Indian, Malayali focus and context of things. Sometimes even we the clergy is guilty of doing ones ministry without thinking about what should be focus and objective of our ministry as we work in this diocese. Sometimes the focus and paradigm that we bring in this diocese is the focus that we had in the Niranam- Maramon or Adoor or Chenganoor- Mavelikara diocese, not even the paradigms of Mumbai or Delhi diocese. It is high time that boundaries that define our ministry need to be re built or made wider so that the Marthoma Church becomes more and more inclusive catering in a meaningful ways to the needs of its members in this part of the continent.

Church: A Community of Faith Empowered Relationship

Another focus that Jesus always did in his ministry was the emphasis on empowering people through the relationship that he built with them. For Jesus Christ empowerment of people was through the context of relationship. Relationship was the basis of empowerment. Even in this context when Jesus converses with the Samaritan woman, what He does is that He enters into the crisis areas of her life. He deliberately forges a relationship and through the building of the relationship, he enters into her private world, convicts her and empowers her. The focus was on the establishment and building of relationship. I think what the need of the hour is as the church does its ministry is to see what the focus of the ministry of the church is. One of the tragedies that the church is facing today is that, we are more concerned on building structures or concrete foundations as marks of our ministry and as an assessment of how successful we are in our ministry. Ministry is seen more as success, successful if we have more and more building and structures being built, having a sense of pride and honor when our names are inscribed on the foundation stone. It is high time that we need to focus on a ministry where empowerment of people or strengthening of relationships is what is focused on.. It is neither this lack of focus that has caused dissensions and divisions in parishes where one is unable to find the building up of qualitative relationship nor empowerment of people. It is because Jesus could establish a quality relationship with the woman could he intervene in her life and bring change and transformation. One of the drawbacks that has happened in the ministry of the church is that sometimes as a clergy most of us are more concerned only in doing our sacramental functions and duties. In a context like North America, I find clergy scared to enter or forge a relationship with the new generation marthomites. We are comfortable when people talk to us in Malayalam and the moment people start speaking in English or would want to build a relationship in a language that we are not familiar, either we just escape from the situation of building a relationship or we stay rigid by sticking on to the linguistic terrains that we are familiar. Observe some of the sermons that are preached from the pulpits. The high sounding Malayalam words or jargons that are used, resound only in words, words that has no meaning or significance to the people nor to the youths, making sermons just a play of eloquent words. It shows that we are not ready to break boundaries nor are willing to humble ourselves to enter into the world of our parishioners. The topic of Kenosis is a wonderful topic to be preached only from the pulpit, but sadly the experience of kenosis is not implemented in our life and ministry. I think it is high time that the focus of our ministry is garnered towards building of relationship, where the clergy and the people are ready to enter into each other's life so that the ministry the church is made relevant.

It is only when qualitative relationship is established that the church can creatively enter into the lives of people bringing about change and transformation. In this context of John 4, we find Jesus through the establishment of relationship enters into the sensitive confines of her life. The life of Samaritan woman is shattered because of marital or the moral issues that was involved. But with this encounter, Jesus is able to bring about a new thought pattern in her life, leading to change, transformation and liberation. What the need of the hour is not for the church to focus its ministry to train its mission workers especially the clergy to be person who does the job of a sacramentalist, but on the contrary, consciously enter into the sensitive confines of the life of parishioners so that they experience change and transformation through the creative relationship that exist between them and the clergy. Unless this aspect is not focused in ministry, the future of the diocese could be very bleak and made ministry becoming irrelevant to its members and community.

Redefining the Concept about Worship and Mission

Every encounter that Jesus had with the people helped them to have new understanding about life, its existence and ones calling. It is this new understanding of life that helps a person to have a mission concept in life. But this mission concept comes only when we redefine worship. In this encounter with the woman, as Jesus build up relationship, he also helps her in a new understanding of what mission and worship is all about. As they both converse with each other, with boundaries broken or extended,

with relationship now built on a confidential basis, the woman also starts sharing her faith and her understanding of worship. What she has been taught by her tradition of faith is that worship is all about worshipping in a particular place, a specific mountain, while for the Jews it meant worshipping in Jerusalem. Worship that had no connection with ones heart, mind or soul neither connected to the Holy Spirit. Worship was all about a ritualistic expression of going to a mountain or going to Jerusalem just as another observance of worship. It is this concept of worship that Jesus redefines. He tells that true worship is that when worship transcends a particular place or location, worship is worship when connected to the Holy Spirit, when connected with God with true frame of mind, body and spirit. Worship is not ritualistic; worship is an expression of one's dynamic relationship with the risen Lord, being empowered by the Holy Spirit to ascribe praise and glory in every moment of one's life. Worship that helps to every worshipper to do mission. The woman is astonished at the new understanding of worship and now she is convicted that whom she met at the well is indeed the Messiah. She forgets about the primary duty for which she had come, and she rushes to her village to tell them about the good news not only about the new understanding about her life, worship but also the good news of encountering the messiah. We find later in the passage that many of the Samaritans believed in Jesus Christ because of the witness of the Samaritan woman. Here is a woman who is empowered because she has a new understanding of worship and it is this new understanding of worship that leads the Samaritan to be a sent out woman, a missionary for Jesus Christ.

I think the need of the hour today in the church is to redefine our concept of worship so that we could redefine how we understand mission. For our community of faith today worship is still just another activity that means an attendance to the church, not critiquing whether the worship that they involve is meaningful and life changing event for them. Worship in much church has to do with just passive attendance in the sanctuary. For many the presence in worship means presence in the social hall rather than present in worship and considering as worship that should be life-changing, leading to a new understanding of mission. When we don't have the correct understanding of worship, we will be reluctant to involve in the mission of the church. Whenever the topic of mission comes or when financial implication is being discussed on how to support mission work, people tend to be very critical or even just backtrack with the assumption that mission activity is something that the diocese or the Marthoma Church does and that parish has nothing to do with mission activities. It is this distorted concept that often forces the clergy also to be a mute witness to all that happens in the parish and being contented and satisfied in doing just ones sacramental functions. The rich tradition of faith that the forefathers of the church expounded was that each parish has to be a mission centers, but today sadly many of the parishes is neither a mission centre, nor a gathering of the community of faithful, just another social club that serves the selfish agenda of socializing and fellowship meals. It is high time that parishes are empowered and the members strengthened and

enlightened to make their parish a mission station, not catering to mission activities in India but at least to the neighborhood of the church, in the community that they live. One of the complaints that the community that lives along with our worship place is that, we are an exclusive community that does not involve in the need of the community. Whenever the church has a need, we go in large numbers to the city council to get our needs passed and once our needs are taken care we just don't care about the local issues of the community. It is in such a context that we need to redefine our parishes as nurturing ground for doing mission work. Every Sunday as we meet for worship, the worship should lead us to encounter the risen Lord and thus in the process helping us to go out as missionary people. A community of faith, one who goes out into the world, entering the issues of the community and bringing change and transformation. This is what is the need of the hour as we do ministry both as a parish and as a diocese.

We have reached a stage where our needs as family or as a parish have been met in very satisfactory manner. Rather than focusing on concrete structures, I believe the church needs to focus its attention and its mission and ministry in strengthening its members to have a new understanding of mission and ministry, helping them to broaden the boundaries of their individual parish, and being a blessing in the community that they live. It is when the church is able to achieve this, can we proudly say that Marthoma Church is doing a ministry that is relevant and is a Church that exhibits in its life the signs of the Kingdom.

XVI DIOCESAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE – 2013



The XVI Diocesan Leadership Conference 2013 was hosted by the Youth Fellowship of the Staten Island Mar Thoma Church from Thursday, January 3rd to Sunday, January 6th, 2013. A total of 85 delegates, representing 26 parishes/congregations in the Diocese, attended the Leadership Conference of which included 63 youths from outside the host parish. The main leader was Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, Diocesan Episcopa. Theodosius Thirumeni's presence was notable and appreciable throughout the entire conference. Track sessions were led by the Youth Chaplains of the Diocese, Rev. Dr. Joe Joseph Kuruvilla (SE Region), Rev. V. M. Mathew (NE Region), Rev. George Jacob (Dallas Region), Rev. Roy A. Thomas (Houston Region), Rev. Jaisen A. Thomas (Baltimore, Washington DC, Virginia), and Rev. Alex Peter (MW Region).

Praise and Worship sessions were led by members of the Youth Fellowship of the Staten Island Mar Thoma Church throughout the conference. Rev. Baby John, President and Vicar of the Staten Island Mar Thoma Church, assisted by two host youth members, led opening Worship. A theme presentation video was played for the delegates presenting this year's Leadership Conference theme, "Leadership in a Covenant Church", based on Mark 10: 43b-45. The welcome program was presided and inaugurated by Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, Diocesan Episcopa. Rev. Baby John welcomed all delegates and conference leaders to the Staten Island MTC. Mr. Mathews Athiyal, Diocesan Youth Fellowship Council Secretary and Rev. Dr. Joe Joseph Kuruvilla gave felicitations.

The leadership conference commenced on Friday, January 4th, 2013 with Praise and Worship session was followed by worship led by Rev. George Jacob and youth members from the Dallas Region. Rev. Biju P. Simon led Bible Study which focused on the Humility of Christ based on Philippians 2:5-11. Immediately after the Bible Study, the delegates were separated into 5 small groups for track sessions led by the Youth Chaplains on Biblical Hermeneutics, Dealing With & Confronting Abuse, Leadership Patterns in the New Generation, Relevance of Worship & Liturgy in Contemporary Times and Christian Ethics in an Unethical World. There were two track sessions on Friday and three track sessions on Saturday. Rev. Alex Peter and the youths of the Midwest Region led the evening worship. Mr. Prijo Thomas, a guest devotional speaker from St. Andrews MTC, New York was invited to speak to the delegates.

Theodosius Thirumeni presided and presented a talk on the challenges in the ministry of the Church. This was followed by an open discussion session where Theodosius Thirumeni answered questions and concerns from the delegates. Rev. Roy A.

Thomas and the youths of the Houston region led Saturday morning worship. Morning Bible study was led by Rev. Jaisen A. Thomas which focused on submission, worship, prayer, experience of confession and an "others-centered" lifestyle based on 1 Kings 3:1-13. A presentation, led by the Staten Island MTC youths, regarding the Navjeevan Center, Mumbai was shown to announce the sale of the Leadership Conference T-shirts to all leaders and delegates. An amount of \$810 from the sale of T-shirts was donated to the Navjeevan Center. A send-off meeting for Rev. Dr. Joe Joseph Kuruvilla and Rev. Alex Peter was presided by Theodosius Thirumeni on Saturday evening. They were presented with gifts from the DYFC and thanked for all the faithful service, hard work including the distant travels, did by them during their ministries in the Southeast and Midwest Regions respectively. The day was concluded with a Dedication service led by Rev. Alex Peter which focused on the amazing strengthening of God in leadership based on 2 Timothy 1:7. All the delegates participated and dedicated themselves through prayer and praise singing. Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, Diocesan Episcopa led the Holy Communion service on Sunday morning. The closing program was led by Rev. Biju P. Simon and commenced with a welcome by Rev. Baby John. The Leadership Conference slideshow containing the theme presentation and pictures taken during the conference was shown to the delegates. Conference convener, Mr. Anish Chacko, said vote of thanks. The leadership conference concluded with prayer and benediction by Theodosius Thirumeni followed by Kaimuthu and fellowship lunch.

Anish Chacko, Conference Convener

Youths Responses

“Christian Response to Environmental Protection”

Christina Mathew, MarThoma Church of Baltimore



“I’m biggering my company, I’m biggering my factory, I’m biggering my corporate sign! Everybody out there take care of yours, and me? I’ll take care of mine mine mine mine mine!” -Dr. Seuss, The Lorax.

This is the reality for the majority of our global brothers and sisters, marginalized by the lavish lifestyle of twenty-first century corporations. Our global economy is driven by the resources found in underground oil wells. Did you know that Nigeria is ranked 6th in the global market for oil? Royal Dutch Shell

began drilling in 1949 and since then, oil spills have contaminated local vegetation, and the consumption of contaminated food is linked to the area’s high rate of birth abnormalities and mental retardation in children.

This year I visited Quito, the capital city of Ecuador, which is a South American country dependent on the export of petroleum. Presently, companies are interested in drilling in the largest rainforest in the world, the Amazon. The Vice President of CONAIE, an alliance of indigenous communities in Ecuador, explained that everything in nature has a precious spirit. Each day Amazonians ask what they can consume from the environment.

God created everything on Earth and added humans in the end of his design. We are blessed with dominion over creation, but Adam’s purpose in the Garden was to “cultivate it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15). It is our duty to maintain the Earth that God has entrusted us with. Perhaps Nigeria and Ecuador seem millions of miles away, until we hear about hydro fracking in New York that threatens our supply of fresh water. Our global world is not as distant as it seems.

We are all interconnected and “UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.” -Dr. Seuss, The Lorax.

“Christian response to environmental issues”

Juby John, Philadelphia MTC

When we hear the word “environment”, we usually imagine the scenes of pollution from man-made catastrophes, animal cruelty, and anything to miss out on the marvel of God’s creations. Christians struggle with and recognize environmental issues, but instead, we should start by being thankful for God’s gift. We should ask, “How does God want us to look after his creation, planet Earth?” As Christians, we believe that God created the Earth and gave us a responsibility to use it sensibly. He created us to be like himself; creative, caring and in control. Psalm 8:6 says, “You put us in charge of everything you made, giving us authority over all things.” Christians should celebrate God’s creations and care for them. Nevertheless, the Bible shows that sin brought and still brings problems for man. In Genesis 3:18-19, man’s defiance to God’s commands resulted in pollution, “The ground will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains. All of your life you will sweat to produce food.” It is now time for us to try to learn everything the Bible teaches us about creation, the Creator and how to be stewards of His world. We should learn what creation teaches us about its God given order, but we shouldn’t keep the good news to ourselves, we should tell others about it as well.



Ecumenical Involvement International Consultation of Stateless People



An international consultation Towards an Ecumenical Advocacy on the Rights of Stateless People organized by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA) in Washington D.C. was held on 26 February to 1 March 2013. The delegates gathered together to assess the situation of stateless people including those that are stranded and confined to refugee camps during several generations and to explore ways to bring the issue of statelessness to the WCC 10th Assembly in Bussan, Korea. The delegates also sought to influence policy at the global, regional and national levels by projecting a Christian perspective to address the concerns of stateless people worldwide.

Report on the Candle Light Vigil: Sandy Hook Victims, Newtown Candle Light Vigil: North East Philadelphia

The nation was stunned last week by the shooting that happened in the Sandy Hook Elementary School, Newtown, Connecticut. Though lot of deaths have occurred through gun shooting in this country, this particular shooting was a tragedy that crossed all barriers, and the nation was stunned in grief as the victims of the shooting were



young kids studying in first grade and their teachers.

The Youths of the Mar Thoma Church’s in Philadelphia showed the solidarity and offered condolences to the families of Newtown by organizing a Candle Light Vigil on December 19th, 2012 from 5.30 PM to 6.30 PM at the busy junction of Red Lion Road and Bustleton Avenue in North East Philadelphia. Rev. Dr. Joe Joseph Kuruvilla began the Vigil with a word of prayer and enlightened the youths about the need for observing the candle light vigil. Mr. Daniel Thomas briefed the youths on the way the whole candle light vigil needs to be conducted. Following this the youths along with Joe Achen walked in a straight line to the space where the candle light vigil was to be observed. The youths all stood in a straight line with lighted candle and posters in their hand. After a brief moment of silence, the group started singing songs like “Silent Night” and “Mighty to save.” Though the weather was very chilly, the youths continued to stand in a straight line, with a banner of the diocese also held high, expressing condolences to the victims of Sandy Hook. The candle light vigil was supported by the Police Department, and there were cops to help monitor the candle light vigil. As the youths stood in a straight line with banners and posters held high, the people driving in cars waved and honked in appreciation and in support of the cause that the Church represented.

At 6.30 pm the candle light vigil came to a close with a closing prayer by Rev. Dr. Joe Joseph Kuruvilla. Youths from Ascension, Bethel, Christos and Philadelphia Mar Thoma Church's along with few elders attended this candle light vigil. The Youths who attended felt that they could do a small effort to express solidarity with the suffering community in Newtown. The event was made possible with the vision, support and prayers Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, Diocesan Bishop which made this endeavor a witness to the community and as a service to the Lord.

Rev. Dr. Joe Joseph Kuruvilla, Youth Chaplain, South East Region

Vigil for the New Delhi Rape Victim in London

A candle light vigil was held on Saturday, 29th December 2012 in memory of the 23-year-old Indian girl, who was brutally physically assaulted, gang raped and thrown off a moving bus in New Delhi, India and left to die. The gruesome incident happened on 16th December 2012 and she subsequently died on 29th December 2012. The vigil was held on Saturday, 29th December from 5.30 pm onwards outside



the Indian High Commission office in London. Around 30 people attended the vigil, which was held peacefully with everyone holding a lighted candle in the busy London street. The people who gathered chanted slogans for "safety of women, especially in India", prayed, distributed leaflets, stood in silence holding candles & placards to remember the victim and for safety of women around the world.

The youths of St. John's MTC, Hounslow, UK participated in the vigil and led the group in lighting the candles and leading the prayers. Ms. Maelo Manning, a 13-year-old schoolgirl from London helped organize the vigil.

Rev. Eapen Abraham, London

Midwest Regional Youth Conference



By God's Grace Midwest Regional Youth Conference was held on Dec 26th 2012 – Dec. 29th 2012 at Gull Lake Conference Centre in Michigan. The theme of the conference was "Clear Eyes, Full Hearts, Can't Lose" based on Colossians 1: 9 - 10. 212 Youths from the five parishes - Chicago MTC, Chicago St. Thomas MTC, Frankfort Bethel MTC, Detroit MTC & Indianapolis St. Thomas MTC participated in the conference. This year's conference was hosted by Chicago MTC Youth Group. Pastor Jon Ramos & Aioli Ramos were the conference speakers.

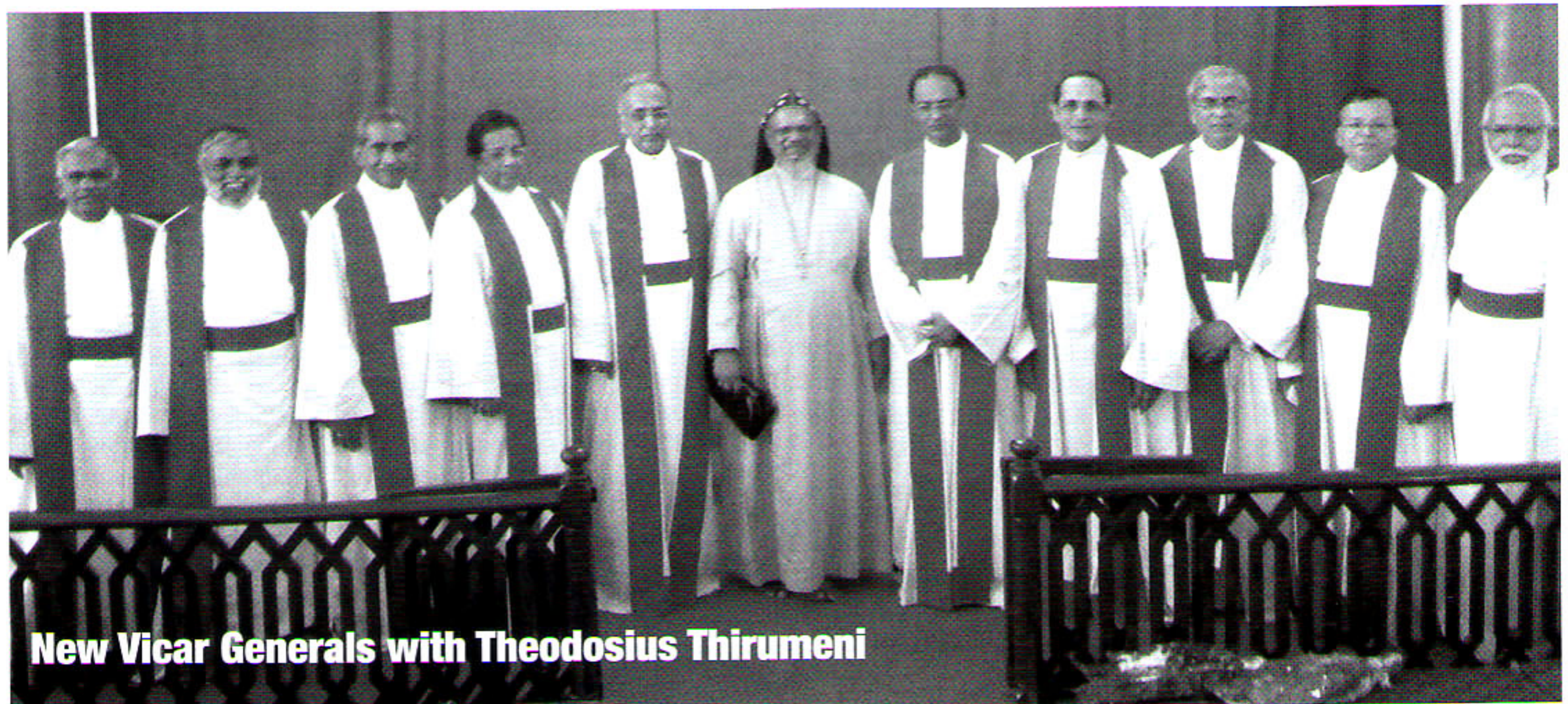
Each day began with the meditation time where Rev. Alex Peter and Rev. Biju P. Simon explained the background of the assigned Bible passages. Along with these main talks and tracks, every day in morning & evening there were small group reflections led by different senior leaders, where the theme of the conference was further reflected. Along with all these the greatest blessing was Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Thirumeni's presence on the closing day. Thirumeni conducted the Holy Communion and gave the closing message on Dec. 29th. In closing message – Thirumeni very elaborately expounded on the theme from 1 King 19 and closed with the call to be part in God's Mission. The 2013 Midwest Regional Conference will be hosted by Detroit, Mar Thoma Youth Group.

Rev. Alex Peter Youth Chaplain Midwest Region

COMPE Meeting on February 2, 2013



A general meeting of the Council of the Mar Thoma Parishes in Europe, called COMPE was held on Saturday February 2, 2013 at St. John's Mar Thoma Parish, Hunslow.



New Vicar Generals with Theodosius Thirumeni

MISSION CORNER

Christmas at Colonia Mar Thoma (Mexico Mission)



The members of 'Colonia Mar Thoma' in Mexico Mission along with seven youth members from the Mar Thoma parishes in Houston celebrated X'mas on Saturday, December 23, 2012 at the Mission Chapel. There were about 90 children and their family members from the residents of the Colonia Mar Thoma community. The participants along with the help of residents in Colonia Mar Thoma made gift packages and distributed the same to the families. Ms. Arlene Mathew, Diocesan Council member gave Christmas Message. Mr. P. T. Abraham (Brownsville) and Mr. John Thomas (Immanuel MTC, Houston) organized the program and gave overall leadership.

GENERAL NEWS



A felicitation meeting was held at the Mar Thoma Church head quarters in Thiruvalla to felicitate the newly installed cardinal His grace Major Archbishop Moran Mor Baselios Cardinal Cleemis Catholicos. His grace Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan spoke on the occasion and conveyed the best wishes of the Mar Thoma Church to the new Cardinal. Metropolitan also gave a ponnada to the Cardinal on behalf of the Mar Thoma Church.



The Midwest region activity committee for the Jubilee Celebrations of the Diocese was met with Thirumeni and discussed the various programs to be held in Midwest region. The representatives from the Chicago MTC, Des Plaines, St. Thomas MTC, Lombard, Detroit MTC, Detroit, Bethel MTC, Frankfort, participated in the discussions

Diocesan Ecumenical Dinner at Houston



The fourth ecumenical dinner of the Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Church since 2009 was held at the Immanuel Mar Thoma Center, Houston on Friday, January 18 2013. The event this year coincided with the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the Diocese of North America and Europe. This was an occasion to strengthen the ecumenical relationship between various church denominations in the neighborhood. The leadership of Bishops, clergy and lay leaders from sister churches gave an ecumenical flavor to the gathering. The presence of Diocesan Council members from various regions of the Diocese, including Canada, made this occasion more significant.

The Diocesan Bishop of North America and Europe Diocese of the Mar Thoma Church Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius presided over the meeting. The Ecumenical fellowship meeting was started with a procession to the dais of the reception hall. The Trinity Mar Thoma Church choir sang the welcome song in Syriac while the leaders and dignitaries entered the conference hall and the participants welcomed them by standing in ovation.

The opening worship was led by Rev. Roy Abraham Thomas, Diocesan Council member and youth chaplain of Houston center. The junior choir of both Trinity and Immanuel Mar Thoma Churches in Houston led the worship songs.

Rev. Zachariah John, Vicar of Trinity Mar Thoma Church welcomed the gathering. Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius gave presidential address in which he emphasized the significance of local and wider ecumenism in the contemporary context. The Diocesan Metropolitan of South and West Diocese of Malankara Orthodox Church Rt. Rev. Dr. Alexios Mar Eusebius gave felicitation message. He congratulated the Mar Thoma Diocese in North America and UK for the blessed completion of 25 years of its existence and ministry in this hemisphere. Also he spoke on the theme of Jubilee year, Church: Journeying with Christ. The Immanuel Mar Thoma Church choir sang a melodious song. Rev. Roy Varghese, the President of Ecumenical Fellowship in Houston also gave a felicitation speech.

Mr. George Samuel, the Diocesan Council member invited the dignitaries to receive the gifts arranged by the diocese. The Diocesan Treasurer Mr. Chacko Mathew expressed vote of thanks. The ecumenical fellowship meeting came to an end with prayer by Rev. John N Abraham, the regional clergy convener and benediction by Mar Theodosius. Ms. Arlene Mathew, the Diocesan Council member, was the Emcee of the program.

മലയാളി

മനുഷ്യൻ്റെ നമ്മുടെ സുഹൃത്ത്

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EPISCOPAL VISITS

Sehion MTC, Dallas



Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa visited to Sehion MTC Dallas from December 1-2, 2012. On Saturday Thirumeni attended the meetings of different organizations of the parish. During the evening Thirumeni was the chief guest at the Kerala Ecumenical Christian fellowship's United Christmas Carols and delivered the Christmas message, where about 22 choirs from churches of different denominations took part. On Sunday Thirumeni celebrated the Holy Communion in English and led the first communicant's dedication service, in which three of our children participated and became full pledged members of the church.

After the service a public meeting was held in which the parish directory and a book published by one of our church members also released. Thirumeni gave necessary guidance to the parish and announced the programs of the silver jubilee celebrations of the Diocese. The Executive committee met with Thirumeni and explained the silver jubilee projects of the Diocese and the projects to be taken up by the regions and parishes. A large number of parishioners participated in the service and it was a blessed experience.

Rev. Saji Thomas

Long Island MTC, New York



Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius visited the Long Island MTC on Sunday December 16, 2012. Thirumeni lead the Holy Qurbana Service. Thirteen of our children took the first Holy Communion on this day. Bishop Rt. Rev. Johncy Itty of Episcopal Church was also present and blessed the occasion. Diocesan Secretary Rev. K. E. Geevarghese and Vicar Rev. A. B. Binu assisted the service. During the message Thirumeni urged the parishioners to work in unity as revealed in the scripture for the glory of God as we are celebrating the Christmas and New Year. Thirumeni welcomed the first communicants to the fellowship of the church and upbringing as they grow and continue their faith journey with the parish. A fellowship lunch was also served. During the occasion, Thirumeni also visited the aged and sick members of the Parish who are not able to attend the worship service on a regular basis and also suggested that we should consider having a special service for such members.

Rev. A. B. Binu, Vicar

Minneapolis Prayer Group



blessing to Minneapolis Prayer Group by the Episcopal Visit of Mar Theodosius. On December 8th 2012 Thirumeni led the Holy Communion service. During service Thirumeni's Message on "Necessity of leading a committed Christian life" was a moment of dedication for the Prayer Group members. Thirumeni gave details of the Jubilee celebrations of Diocese in 2013 and the different projects planned during the jubilee year along the different needs and activities of Diocese. After the communion service an open forum was also held everyone joined in the fellowship meal.

Rev. Alex Peter Youth Chaplain Midwest Region

Phoenix Congregation



Our Diocesan Bishop visited Phoenix Congregation from Saturday December 8th to Monday 10th, 2012. Thirumeni was the chief guest at the Ecumenical Christmas Carol Service held at Dobson High School Auditorium, Mesa Phoenix organized by the Arizona Malayalee Christian Association. Thirumeni gave a thought provoking Christmas message and later spoke about the long association he had with Mathews Mar Barnabas Metropolitan of the Malankara Orthodox Church and expressed deep condolence on behalf of the Diocese of North America and Europe at his demise. On Sunday Thirumeni met the members of the Executive Committee and later spoke at the Youth Fellowship and Sunday school. Thirumeni led the Family Fellowship Bible Study.

The Communion Service was held at 5.30pm at the En Canto Community Church, Phoenix. The Phoenix Mar Thoma Congregation was privileged to have Thirumeni to celebrate Holy Communion on the 23rd Anniversary of His Lordship's consecration. Thirumeni cut the anniversary cake and thanked God for His guidance all these years and the congregation for arranging the function. Dinner was served at the Fellowship Hall when the choir sang a special carol in honor of Thirumeni. Everyone was really blessed by Thirumeni's visit. Thirumeni left for New York on Monday.

Roy Thomas, Secretary, Phoenix MT Congregation

St. Luke's MTC, Florida



The Diocesan Episcopa Mar Theodosius visited St. Luke's MTC on December 24 and 25, 2012. There was a carol service at the Church on the evening of 24th at 6.30 p. m. Both the English and Malayalam choirs participated in singing carol songs. Sunday school children were dressed up as angels and the crib was adorned similarly with Joseph and Mary with the child. Youths of the parish performed a skit and the children sang the 12 days of Christmas explaining the symbols to the audience. Mar Theodosius spoke during the service and exhorted the people to be human with quality and to have human touch in all dealings with people. As Christmas is about seeking space for the birth of Jesus, Christmas celebration will be more meaningful when people are prepared to give space to those who seek for it and are dispossessed.

The Christmas Service and Holy Qurbana were on the morning of December 25th led by Diocesan Episcopa and assisted by the Vicar Rev. M. P. Yohannan. He spoke on the importance of having God-consciousness in everyday living and living as a worshipping community in the world. There was a dedication service for the four first communicants. There were six Alter boys who also came prepared for their dedication service. Thirumeni gave details of the programs of the Silver Jubilee celebrations, particularly that are taking place in Florida in 2013 and asked the members to cooperate with all the events. The service came to a close with Kaimuthu service and all were invited to join in the fellowship meal hosted by the First Communion members and their parents.

Rev. M. P. Yohannan, Vicar

South Florida MTC



Diocesan Episcopa Mar Theodosius visited South Florida MTC from December 21-24, 2012. Thirumeni met with parish executive committee and discussed and evaluated of the activities of the entire year of the parish. On Saturday, December 22nd at 9:30 AM, Thirumeni led a meeting of the youth fellowship of the parish. Discussion regarding the upcoming regional youth conference to be held from July 5-7, 2013 was also held during the meeting.

A Christmas Carol Service was held at 7 PM on Saturday, December 22nd. The parish choir and Sunday school students sang carol songs. Thirumeni gave the Christmas message based on Luke 2:10 "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people". He spoke of the numerous atrocities that occurred recently such as the Sandy Hook school shooting and the assault of the

23 year old girl in Delhi, and described Christmas as a time of healing and sharing to transform the wicked to beauty.

On Sunday, December 23rd, Thirumeni led the Holy Communion Service. The service was conducted in new liturgy for the first time during Thirumeni's visit. The General Body of the parish was conducted in the presence of Thirumeni. The agenda included the election of office bearers for 2013, election of building committee, the Regional Youth Conference, and the Southern Regional Family Conference in 2013. During this visit, Thirumeni visited few member families who are not keeping well and are unable to attend the worship service regularly. Members received several opportunities to meet with Thirumeni and discuss their concerns regarding the parish activities.

Georgy Varghese, Diocesan Council Member

Salem MTC, Long Island, New York



The New York Salem Mar Thoma parishioners are blessed by the visit of Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa on Sunday, December 30, 2012. Thirumeni celebrated the HQ service. There were 12 first communicants and 4 Altar boys for whom special dedication prayers were conducted.

After the service Thirumeni released the newly released the Daily Meditation book "WORD FOR THE DAY" published by the Christian Education Forum of the North East Region. During the function Diocesan secretary Rev. K. E. Geevarghese, Rev. Joseph Johnny, Rev. A. B. Binu, Rev. Mathew George and Christian Education Forum Members also were present at the meeting. There was a fellowship lunch for all the participants.

Rev. Mathew George, Vicar

Bethany MTC, Orangeburg, New York

The Diocesan Episcopa Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius visited the Bethany Mar Thoma Church on Monday, December 31, 2012. The watch night fellowship service was led by Rev. Varghese George, Vicar with songs, intercessory prayer and thanks giving. The Diocesan Episcopa celebrated the Holy Communion. The Dedication Service for the Executive committee was done by the Thirumeni during the service. In the devotional message Thirumeni reminded the parish that this is a time of thanksgiving, which is a time to introspection and a time for dedication. Few minutes before 12 midnight time was given to dedicate their life and a prayer for God's blessings. Then with the lighted candles after ringing the 12 bells all stood up and sang the song 'Innayolam Thunachone..'. The Vicar prayed on behalf of all present. People greeted each other as God enabled everyone to enter into 2013. Thirumeni continued Qurbana in the New Year. New year cake and refreshment were served.



Rev. Varghese George, Vicar

Chicago MTC



Chicago MTC was blessed to begin the New Year 2013 with an Episcopal visit of Diocesan Bishop from January 11th through 13th 2013. Chicago MTC also hosted various regional events during this Episcopal Visit. Thirumeni started his official engagements with presiding over mid-west region clergy meeting. In the evening Thirumeni chaired the first ever mid-west Regional Activity Committee (RAC) meeting at Chicago Mar Thoma Church.

On Saturday, Thirumeni visited Parish members in the morning. In the evening, Thirumeni presided over a meeting of Chicago MTC Youth Fellowship members to understand the pastoral care needs, resource limitations, challenges and changes required for future generations. Thirumeni led a short Biblical devotion based on St. John 21:22. Thirumeni highlighted Apostle Peter, his leadership, Peter being follower of Jesus and his affinity towards Jesus. In spite of difficulties in life and limitations in life, Thirumeni exhorted everyone to follow Jesus. Thirumeni mentioned Christian life cannot be neutral as either we are with Christ as followers or in the clutches of evil spirit. Bishop reminded that journeying with Christ is mandatory in life and the closeness with Jesus has to be maintained all through the life. It's important to maintain the dynamic relationship with Jesus so as not to fall from the presence of Jesus in life. After the Bible devotion Thirumeni spent a quiet candid time with Youth Fellowship members addressing their questions and concerns.

Followed by the youth meeting, Thirumeni chaired a 2012 & 2013 joint parish executive committee meeting. Mar Theodosius Thirumeni began his presidential address by reminding the committee members of them being chosen by God to serve the Lord and parish. Thirumeni expressed his Lordship's joy in working with the executive committee of Chicago MTC. Thirumeni took a moment to appreciate the contribution of former Priests, spiritual leaders and laity for Chicago Mar Thoma Church. Thirumeni moderated the Parish Vision 2020 discussion after the presentation of Secretary Mr. Monish K. John, which gave an opportunity for executive committee members to deliberate on immediate concerns, challenges and opportunities for future. Member's enjoyed the fellowship dinner with Thirumeni and spent time exchanging pleasantries. Thirumeni and members called it a day promising to be back and part of the holy day next morning. The Holy day for Theodosius Thirumeni began with free flow interaction with Sunday school students in the early morning. Little one's enjoyed the presence of Thirumeni and Thirumeni enriched them with blessings, and morals embedded in humor. Thirumeni celebrated the Holy Communion and the highlight, 32 Parish children were dedicated as first communicants. It was blessing to have the presence and leadership of three Achens including Vicar Rev. Daniel Thomas, Associate Vicar Rev. Biju P. Simon and doctoral fellow Rev. Y. T Vinayraj.

Parish also dedicated two of its youngsters as Altar Boys. After the Holy Communion, Thirumeni presented the LEAD (Lay Person Education & Development) institute certificates to the 24 LEAD Phase-1 participants who completed the training successfully. Thirumeni also launched the new parish web site for Chicago Mar Thoma Church. Diocesan Bishop and all parishioners participated in the fellowship lunch arranged by the parents of first communicants. The parents also contributed \$2000.00 towards the Parish education charity fund. Post lunch, These events marked the conclusion of 2013 Episcopal Visit of Diocesan Bishop, which saw a blessed and hectic schedule that resulted in new direction filled with joy and enthusiasm.

Rev. Daniel Thomas, Vicar, Chicago MTC

PARISH NEWS

Christos MTC, Philadelphia: Parish Recreational Facility Expansion



Christos Mar Thoma church, Philadelphia is enhancing its recreational activities by adding new specially Volley Ball and Badminton courts outside the parish hall. A raffle was conducted to collect funds for the same. Thanks to the parish members and Marthomites from Philadelphia area for their full-hearted support in this matter.

Philadelphia MTC



This year the youth fellowship was able to do many outreach activities in and around our neighboring communities. The money that was collected as offertory for the year 2012 was donated to an organization called "Healed with Scars" to support and encourage individuals suffering from burn injuries. The proceeds from a Coffee House were donated to the Oklahoma Mission and the Durant family in Broken Bow, Oklahoma. The Youth Fellowship was blessed to participate with Cradles to Crayons to make packages of clothing and school supply kits to be donated to children. The Annual Turkey Drive was conducted in collaboration with the Second Chance Community Church by supplying turkeys along with the appropriate sides. The Annual Host-A-Christmas event, held in the month of December helped nine families by providing for their Christmas needs.

Rev. P.A. Abraham, Vicar & Sherin Thomas, Secretary

St. Thomas MTC, Lombard, IL



STMTC Sunday school students and teachers celebrated Indian Republic Day on January 27th, 2013. The program included a slide show about India highlighting the National flag, the national symbol of India, the father of our nation Mahatma Gandhi as well as the national animal, bird and flower. The children were also taught the National Anthem by Mrs. Binu Thomas. At the end of the program, all the students and teachers joined in singing the National Anthem while the Indian National flag was hoisted.

Mary Varughese (Aswathi), Sunday school superintendent

Trinity MTC, Houston



The Episcopal visit of Bishop Geevarghese Mar Theodosius on January 20th was an unforgettable event for the members of the Trinity Mar Thoma parish. The visit in connection with the colorful Silver Jubilee inauguration of the Diocese had special significance since this was the first Mar Thoma church building dedicated in the US in 1984 by his predecessor Late Thomas Mar Athanasius Suffragan Metropolitan.

In a solemn service during the Holy Eucharist, 30 youngsters renewed their baptismal oath and received the first communion. They were presented lighted candles, Bibles and certificates by Thirumeni.

The kick off for fund collection for the proposed multipurpose Mar Thoma Center, Houston, was a grand success through receiving checks and pledge totaling \$ 52000. The Trinity pavilion fund kick off was also held afterwards. Mr. Varghese Joseph and Mr. Joseph T. George were awarded plaques by Thirumeni for their exemplary services to the parish. A large number of people, including the Diocesan Council members, attended the function which ended with a love feast.

Rev. Zacharia John, Vicar, Trinity Mar Thoma Church

Lay Leadership Training of Voluntary Evangelists Association South East Centre B

South-East center LLT was held at Christos MTC, Philadelphia sponsored by Christos MTC Edavaka Mission on the 23rd of November 2012.

Leader: Rev. Shiby Varghese (Ph D Candidate, Princeton Theological Seminary)

Theme: Biblical Hermeneutics: Reading Understanding and Interpreting the Bible.

Program started with the song and Prayer by Rev. Dr. Joe Joseph followed by a brief welcome by Mr. C. G. Daniel, Christos Edavaka Mission Secretary. Rev. Roy Geevarghese made the presidential remarks. Classes were very informative and the lively discussions provided more insight into the presented themes. Thirty-two participants from various parishes of this region attended this great program.

Rev Roy Geevarghese

Regional Clergy Conference, U. K.



UK and Europe Clergy Meeting was held at Dovedale Retreat Centre in Birmingham on March 1 and 2, 2013

MATRIMONIAL

Marthomite parent settled in New York invites proposal for son, who is born and raised in U. S. A. He is 30 years old, 5 feet 7 inches tall, fair and good-looking. He is a graduate of Stonybrook University and working as a software engineer in New York. He is very God fearing and family oriented. We are looking for a good looking professional girl with good Christian values. If interested, please respond with a photograph and details to remanypappy@gmail.com or call (516) 248-0892.

US settled Orthodox Christian parents invite alliances from professionally qualified boys of similar background, brought up in US with a height of 5' 10" and above for their daughter. She is 27, 5' 7" tall, fair complexion and did her medical school in US, currently doing second year residency in internal medicine in a reputed university in US. She is well disciplined with exceptional family values. If interested please forward a recent photograph with details to: kavanal@outlook.com

Orthodox Parents invite proposals for their 27 year old daughter, good looking, fair color, family oriented, God fearing 5' 1", currently working as certified teacher in New York City School, looking for a boy with similar values between ages of 27-31 yrs. Interested parents from Mar Thoma, CSI, Jacobite, Orthodox, please contact with recent photos and details to sphilip1@yahoo.com

Marthomite parents well settled in Florida invite proposals for their son - 29 yrs old 5'5, MBA in finance working in a reputable company as a sr financial analyst. Seeking proposals from well educated, god fearing, and family oriented girls. If interested, please respond with photograph and details to abr3600@yahoo.com

Jacobite parents settled in Houston, Texas invite proposals for their handsome and fun-loving son. He is a 33- year old Physician, currently practicing as a Nephrologist and has his own clinic. He was born and raised in Houston with Christian values and is very active in church. He is family oriented and interested in a girl with similar values. Interested parents, please contact atmathewmthomas46@gmail.com

Marthomite parents, well settled, invite proposals for their 29 year old daughter. Very fair, good looking, family oriented, God fearing. 5'6", currently doing final year residency in Internal Medicine, from parents of doctors, in USA or Canada, having good Christian values. Interested parents please respond with recent photograph and bio data to thomas6059@hotmail.com

Marthoma parents settled in New Jersey invite proposals for their daughter, 26 years, 5'-4", currently working as a RN. While she completed her schooling in a convent school in India, she finished her BSN in the US; she has throughout had a bright academic career. She is a committed Christian with strong family values. We are looking for boys with strong Christian background . If interested please respond with details to msy_ann@yahoo.com

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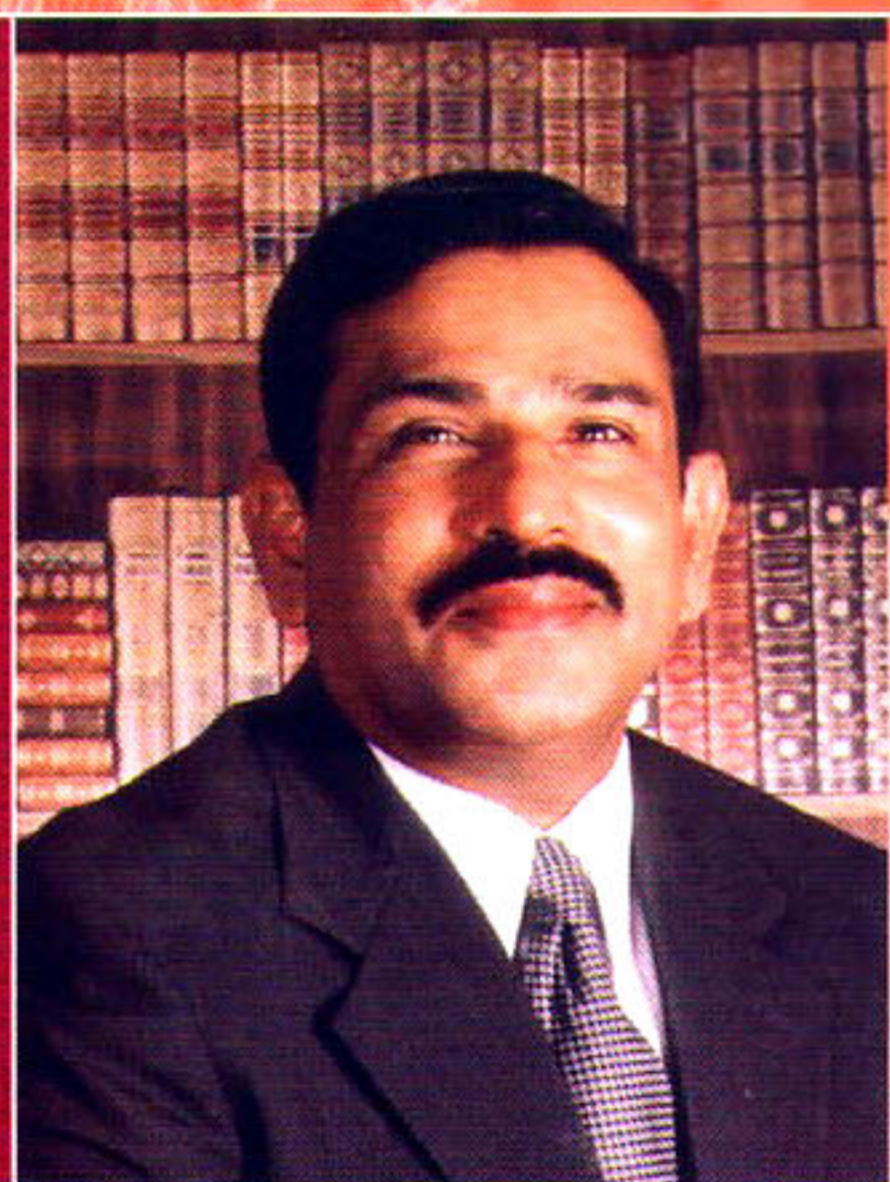


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