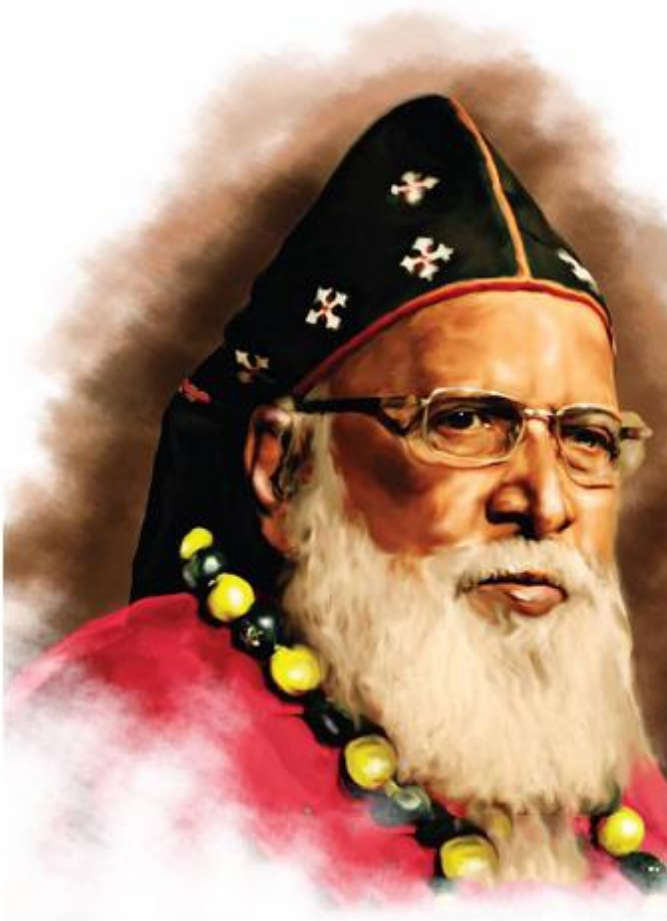




The Mar Thoma

ECHO



Revering
a most revered
centenarian

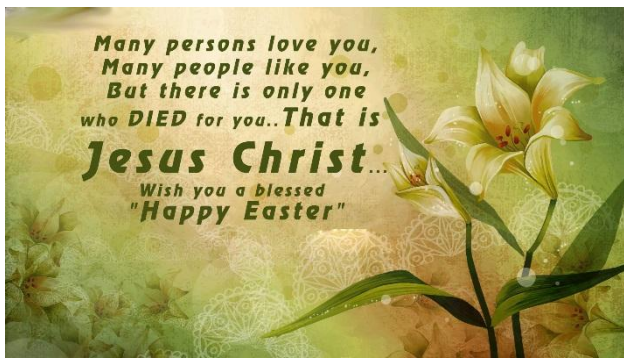
The Mar Thoma
ECHO

His Grace Philipose
Mar Chrysostom Mar
Thoma Metropolitan,

ON HIS
100TH
BIRTHDAY

A Publication of the Council of Mar Thoma Parishes in Europe





April Edition 2017 Volume 4(2)

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Message from Diocesan Episcopa



Chrysostom Thirumeni – A life in faithfulness

We are very happy to set apart the April issue of ECHO in honour of our beloved Valiya Metropolitan Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Thirumeni, on the occasion of his birth centenary celebration. Thank God for the life and ministry of Chrysostom Thirumeni. A life lived in faithfulness to God; he is the embodiment of peace and reconciliation. Well acclaimed for his skills as an orator, he resembles the early father of the Eastern Church, Archbishop John Chrysostom who said, “Preaching improves me, when I begin to speak, weariness disappears.” The gift of the ‘Golden tongue’ and the sense of humour in his interactions with people make Valiya Metropolitan Thirumeni a unique person. His clarity of thought, eloquence in exposition and the ability to communicate even to the common man and woman, makes him great.

The love and care Thirumeni shows to the people of all walks of life is remarkable. His lifestyle as an ascetic expresses the care for the poor and needy. This gives him the quality to consider the educated and illiterate, the privileged and the underprivileged as equals and relates to everyone as brothers and sisters. Mar Thoma church is blessed with the leadership of Thirumeni. God’s abundant grace was showered on him at every moment in his life. He could experience the faithfulness of God in sickness and at all times of his life journey. He continues to hold the philosophy of life, where he considers every man and woman as the image of God, and is worthy of receiving respect and human touch. This makes him a ‘loving *Thirumeni appachan*’ of all people whom he comes in contact with.

As Chrysostom Thirumeni celebrates his birth centenary on April 27, 2017, we also join the celebration by offering our gratitude to the Lord. His strong motivation to the laity of the church in their faith formation, equipping the congregations with interactive engagements and helping to identify the inherent potential in everyone, was a mission technique Thirumeni adopted especially for the edification of the church. This was possible because, as he affirms by his remarks in the book, ‘*Mission in the Market place*’, “As a servant of God and Minister of the Church, I must always be in dialogue with the Holy Spirit, who leads each one to a new understanding and different insights about the faith handed down to us by the fathers.”

The ecumenical vision practiced by Thirumeni is broad-based and promotes respect to the other human being. It reflects the inclusive approach of Christ to culture and community, and in locating the place of the individual within the society. It also goes in close proximity to the views of the Protestant theologian Oscar Cullmann who propagated the concept of ‘unity in reconciled diversity’. In his book – ‘*Unity through Diversity*’ – he wrote, “Every Christian confession has a



permanent spiritual gift, a charisma, which it should preserve, nurture, purify and deepen, and which should not be given up for the sake of homogenization.” Along this line, Chrysostom Thirumeni will say, ‘Ecumenism should not be

seen as the pruning of our differences but as the pooling together of our resources” (*Mission in the Market place*). He often argues that disunity is the main obstacle to Christian witness today. The oneness of humanity and the pursuit of happiness in living a life of common humanity become more relevant in our association with Chrysostom Thirumeni.

It is our wish and prayer that God may continue to strengthen Thirumeni, with riches of Divine blessings in the years to come. Let the words of ‘good and faithful servant’ be a real life experience of Thirumeni.

With prayerful regards,

† **Rt. Revd Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos**

Editorial

**Chrysostom Valiaya Metropolitan:
A blessing, through whom we are blessed!**

Church has an established hierarchical order for ecclesial life: deacons, priests and bishops; this is not to rule over the people of the Church. Chrysostom Thirumeni understood this fundamental fact very early in his ministry and encouraged a lay-centred, people-oriented 'church of the people'. Pope Francis has the same vision; Holy Father often talks about a 'church of the people' that focuses on the needs of others rather than the one that is preoccupied with its own power and prestige. William Temple, the war time Archbishop of Canterbury said, "The Church is the only institution that exists primarily for the benefit of those who are not its members." This inclusiveness is the hallmark of Chrysostom Thirumeni's ministry which endears him to people of all faiths.

In the first part of the 20th century Mar Thoma church was known outside India as the church of Bishop Abraham Mar Thoma, but in the later part of the 20th century and today Mar Thoma has become linked to the name of Mar Chrysostom. Justice KT Thomas has an interesting story to tell about how Mother Teresa recognised their membership of the Mar Thoma church: when he and his wife were introduced to Mother Teresa at Calcutta – she asked, "Is it not the church of Bishop Philipose Mar Chrysostom?" What does this mean? Thirumeni earned recognition and a name for all of us and he always shared all the tributes showered upon him with all of us, from head to foot he is our Thirumeni. He shares our sorrows and happiness, successes and failures. Anyone one who would like to know something of the unique circumstance used by God to call Chrysostom Thirumeni to make him a freedom-fighter in the colonial India, missionary, priest, bishop, Metropolitan, a Valiaya Metropolitan and also a prophet of our times should read his autobiography, 'Athmakatha'. As there is a whole sale drift from the faith, worship and fellowship of the church over the years; this book gives us a guided tour of the spiritual journey of Thirumeni, so far, for our benefit and guidance. In this book, Thirumeni describes amazing people that he met thus far and how through various incidents he was able to experience the presence of God in his

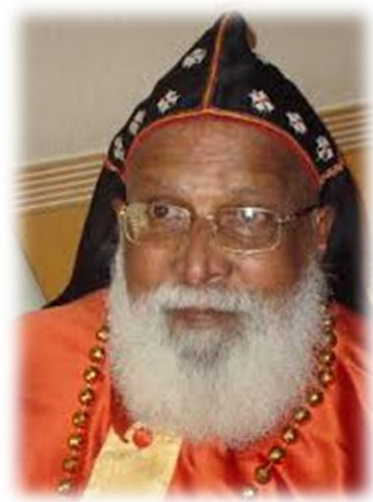
interactions with people and nature. There is a beautiful story of an incident in this book, which prompted late V.P. Mammen achen to make a profound comment on the life and philosophy of Thirumeni: **"When we see God of the church, Philip Oommen** (Thirumeni's given name before consecration as a bishop) **sees God through ordinary people and their day to day existence."** At a young age Thirumeni could see the difference between the God of the church and the God he saw in human situations and interactions.



God of the church is a caged-god, made in the image of a particular church for exercising power over its members.

This is the measure of the man who was ordained as a priest on 3rd June 1944 and a bishop of the Mar Thoma Church on 23rd May 1953. By the grace of God, Thirumeni is continuing his priestly ministry actively on his birth centenary. This is indeed an amazing grace-filled life, and I once wrote an article on him entitled 'People's Bishop.' He experiences God in everyday interactions with people from all walks of life: intellectuals, illiterates, theologians, politicians, porters, field workers, social workers and reformers, priests and missionaries, rich and poor people. He is not the bishop of an institutionalised church; he transcends all those limitations, and he is an amazing free spirit. It is because of this, people are keen to listen to him, respect him and love him. The prophet Micah told Israelites that God is not interested in rituals and sacrifices. He said, "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Institutionalised church is mostly interested in rituals, prescriptions, rules and regulations for exercising authority and controlling people, but Thirumeni has a longing for justice, hunger for spirituality, a quest for relationships and truth.

He sees humour in many situations of life and he has the amazing ability to express them with deep reaching theological insights. People often get carried away with his jokes, but there is a very serious, thinking man behind those jokes who studied human nature and its vulnerabilities. They are like parables that Jesus told, they have profound meaning. Who else could vividly explain the theology of the Holy Spirit as ‘the blowing of the wind or puff, *katt or katt poyi*’? It is much better than reading a treatise on Trinity. We often forget the sermons that we hear, but Thirumeni’s sermons have a lasting effect. They are not sermons; they are memorable conversations of an amazing kind like the taste of one’s mother’s culinary skills or the memories of a melody or a recollection of a beautiful display of nature and its choreography or time spent reading a memorable book or time spent with a very dear friend. He has an extra ordinary and indescribable talent to mingle with young people to enter into a dialogue with them and make them internalise biblical stories in their own idioms. Moving on to his 100th birthday, Thirumeni is able to remain youthful in thought, vision and words. His spiritual leadership and sense of direction is a great blessing for the Church and society.



The world is in a critical state, as it always has been in some form or other, in every single department of human life. In politics and religious conflicts there is a huge chasm. There is a cataclysmic revolt against establishments

and conformities, as we have seen during Brexit referendum and the recent American election. There are deep problems between the haves and have-nots. Social media is becoming a challenge and difficult to comprehend. In philosophy men are reduced to discussing the meaning of meanings. We are living now in a post-modern, post-Christian, post-truth and ‘post-everything-ism moment’ and ‘selfie-culture’. There is a God-shaped hole in our living. Therefore, there is a void, an existentialism which is wholly wrapped

up in self. We always want to be at the centre of everything, every picture that we take or stories we craft. Others are expected to orbit around us. Material gains and personal advantages are predominant interests that dictate the pattern of life. Christianity has become more and more relegated to a private matter of spirituality and personal salvation without social and ecological concerns. Therefore, we are living in an age of excessive individualism and ‘I- centredness’. Chrysostom Thirumeni prophetically warns us about all these destructive tendencies all through his life, and hence he is indeed a prophet of our times.

What is the secret of his long and fruitful life? Jean Paul-Sartre, the influential existentialist philosopher, wrote: “No finite point has any meaning unless it has an infinite reference point.” Thirumeni’s reference point is Jesus and because of this Thirumeni is able to contribute substantially to the metaphysics of dealing with the questions of ‘Being and Existence’, and epistemology – the theory of knowledge of how we know or how we can be certain that we know. He is concerned with the moral issues of our times by appreciating and respecting the nobility of man and his responsibility to the created world. Thirumeni is wise, meaningful and makes sense to us because his reference point is Christ. This is the reason why that he has a relationship and friendship with beggars in the street, porters at railway stations and at all other lower and higher stations of life, and have a partnership in people’s lows and highs. All these people proudly claim the ownership, “Chrysostom Thirumeni is my friend.” Who is Thirumeni trying to imitate? It is none other than Jesus in His Galilean ministry.

Charles Kingsley, who was a 19th century Church of England priest, philosopher and poet, wrote about his interactions with nature in the following way, “I was aware that I was immersed in the infinite ocean of God.” The success and longevity of Chrysostom Thirumeni is entirely due to his ‘immersion in the infinite ocean of God’ and through his everyday interaction with people of every age, culture, faith groups and political ideologies because he has a God-given ability to sense the presence of God in human situations and interactions as mentioned above. It is the experiential knowledge of the Triune God, the unity of love, that alone gives meaning to

Thirumeni's ministry and life. Thirumeni has shown us that the Christian way of regarding life and living out the gospel is more than alternative to the breakdown and confusions of the current world situation. For Thirumeni, the mission of the church is God's mission (*missio dei*); it is not building walls, but breaking them down so that Christians could welcome and embrace the strangers, 'the other'. He has been a beacon of light and a source of wisdom and is 'lighted to lighten'. May that light continue to shine on us and encourage us to do God's mission.

Thirumeni is the most blessed man on earth on his 100th birthday because he can hear, read, taste, touch, and see that we love him. He is a blessing to all of us and to the land. He is indeed a blessing, through him we are blessed. He is indeed 'immersed in an ocean love' of people of all ages, of castes and creeds. Let us individually and collectively say to Thirumeni, 'thank you for offering your whole life for our spiritual growth and mentorship.' Let us offer Thirumeni our prayers and good wishes on his 100th birthday and continue to pray for his health and happiness.

Editorial Board



www.marchrysostom.com

Birth Centenary Greetings!

Lord Williams of Oystermouth

(From the Former Archbishop of Canterbury and The Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge)

I am very glad to send my warmest wishes and congratulations to Valiaya Metropolitan Dr Chrysostom Mar Thoma on reaching his one hundredth birthday. The Metropolitan has faithfully served God's people in India faithfully for so many years, and now, as the longest-serving bishop in India, he has a very special place in the honour and affection of Christians there and throughout the world. His work to support and enable home-building for those who might otherwise struggle to find secure and good quality housing



has been an exemplary labour in the cause of justice and a beacon of good practice. The sister churches of the Mar Thoma community join you in giving thanks to God for this wonderful ministry and pray God's blessing on Thirumeni Mar Dr Chrysostom and all the communities he serves and has served over the years.

With every blessing and many prayers,

+Rowan Williams

The Life World of Valiya Metropolitan Chrysostom

Revd Sunny George*

Traditions and Genealogies:

The family genealogy of the Valiya Metropolitan Chrysostom shares the heritage of Nazrani Christians and the Brahmin lineage of the traditional world. It says, the great grandmother of the family Sreedevi was the daughter of Edappally King's sister. She converted to Christianity and was married to Avirah from Sankarapuri family. Sankarapuri family is one of the four traditional family claimed to be joined Christianity by the arrival of Apostle Thomas along with Paklomattam, Kalli and Kalliangkavil families. The family history notes with pride that they were able to build up Kalliooppara Syrian Church with the favour of Edappally kings.

Avirah and Sreedevi sent their son for vaideeka studies and was ordained by the Archdeacon at Ankamali. The family narrates the genealogy of its priests of the family in detail. The Joseph Kathnar of the 19th priest of the family was a progressive minded person who helped missionaries from Church Missionary Society, in translation of the four gospels to Malayalam. He was also an ardent supporter of the reform movement led by Palakunnathu Abraham Malpan and Kaithayil Geevarghese Malpan, and tutors of the Seminary founded with initiative of Col. Munro and Church Missionary Society at Chungam, Kottayam known as 'Pazhaya Seminary' (Old Seminary – at present Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam). Very Rev. K. E. Oommen was 22nd priest from the family and his second son the Valiya Metropolitan Philipose Chrysostom is the 24th priest in the genealogy of the family.

Kalliooppara, where 'Adangapurath' the family of Metropolitan belongs was traditionally known as Perumbra Nadu. It was the regional headquarters of Elangalloor Swaroopam or the Rahja of Edappally. They were Brahmins. Kalliooppara with about 25,555 acres of land was previously with the Tiruvalla taluk at present with the Mallappally Taluk. When we stretches the span of two thousand or more years in history we will get different layers of social formations and its

practices in the threads of life today. Though at Kalliooppara we have more or less the same geography today, the social spaces of its inhabitants changed with changes of institutions, practices and discourses. So we have to look at the institutions, practices and discourses which alter the symbolic world of the inhabitants in these spaces. Or when we map the traditional, modern and postmodern world were dealing with inhabitants varying aesthetics, consciousness, taste and practices in life.



Our Thirumeni is the treasure house and custodian of an amazing tradition, culture and faith ranging over 2,000 years. Thirumeni is most generous in sharing his inheritance with everyone irrespective of cast creed and colour. He is an apostle of wider-ecumenism and interfaith understanding, and let us continues to thank God for his life and ministry.

**Revd Sunny George served as Chrysostom Thirumeni's secretary for over 10 ten years. He is writing a book on Thirumeni, and we are very grateful to achen for generously sharing the amazing genealogy of Thirumeni. Achen was the vicar of the Mar Thoma Church in Philadelphia in the 90s; now achen is in charge of Nirnam St. Thomas Church.*

Mar Chrysostom Valiya Metropolitan

Revd Dr. Jameson K. Pallikunnil, Dublin,
Ireland.*

It is a time of thanksgiving . . . a moment of happiness and gratitude to Triune God, as our Valiya Metropolitan Philipose Mar Chrysostom celebrates his 100th Birthday on 27th April 2017. Along with the Church and millions of people around the globe, let me reverently offer prayers and best wishes to Thirumeni. It is my humble prayer that God the Almighty may continue to shower His amazing grace upon our Thirumeni to witness the power of Gospel more profoundly.

When I think about Chrysostom Thirumeni, memories go back to my childhood. At the age of six, I was attending a Sunday school programme with my mother at Kottarakara Jubilee Mandiram. We the children were sitting near the guests. When Chrysostom Thirumeni, the then Diocesan Bishop of the Thiruvananthapuram-Quilon Diocese arrived, we the children were excited to see that great figure with his colourful bishopric vestments and attractive *maala*. We approached Thirumeni for his blessings. With a smiling face Thirumeni asked my name, took me in his hands and kept me in his lap. I became the hero among my friends!!! Still that moment is very live in my memory. When I grew up, this memory grew along with me. Even though I have changed a lot, Chrysostom Thirumeni remains in my heart as the same loving and caring person who has extended a remarkable influence in my life. His words and actions are the same as a 'sweet aroma' that instils a positive energy to many. His presence itself is a motivating factor. In the future, we can proudly say to our ensuing generations that, "there lived a bishop with a magnetic power" in our Church.

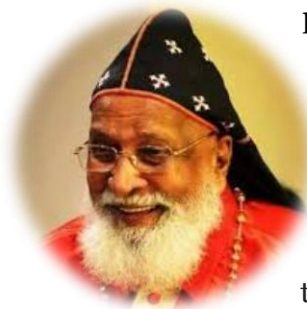
Even though the Mar Thoma church do not patronize any individual in considering her great missionary commitment, one cannot deny the influence and the contribution of Mar Chrysostom in the overall development of the Church. Our Valiya Metropolitan, Mar Chrysostom possesses a privileged position in the society not only as a bishop but also as a philanthropist and as an icon of unity and peace.

He unites the people irrespective of their caste, class, colour, religion, denomination and sex. Even though our society is divided in many ways, Mar Chrysostom with his magnanimity unites divergent people in society and encourages them to perceive goodness and happiness in common. When society is fragmented, Thirumeni is brave enough to address pertinent issues seriously and confront the situation by his charismatic personality and powerful words which is popularly known as 'golden tongue'. Thirumeni is not hesitant to encounter any situation which degrades the dignity of life and freedom of speech. Thirumeni always gives his heart to the less privileged and the marginalized in the society.

Mar Chrysostom in an apostle of unity. For him, unity is not uniformity rather an experience of feeling the oneness by sharing the divine providence with everyone for the common goodness. For Mar Chrysostom, God is a transcended reality but at the same time an imminent truth which can be experienced through the day today experiences of life. Through his encouraging attitude, comforting words, and motivating actions, Mar Chrysostom reveals the immanent nature of God very clearly. He teaches that we can experience God through our serious concern for justice and peace, truth and unity and by solidarity with the underprivileged. Mar

Chrysostom always preaches the power of resurrection through his life. The apostle Paul exhorts us to uphold this great truth and witness what we believe. Resurrection of Christ reminds us of our victory over sin, death and all type of evil powers. It gives us

new hope, strength and vision for a responsible life. This provides us the courage to stand against the oppressive structures and inhuman practices. It invites us to show our solidarity with the poor, to speak for the voiceless and act for justice and peace. The power of resurrection enables us to share the pain and pathos of the last, the least and the lost and this is the fuel for Christian mission. As a missionary bishop, Mar Chrysostom has been trying to converse the power of resurrection through his words and deeds. Thirumeni attempts to translate the meaning of resurrection with his humbleness and openness. As Christians when we move



forward to proclaim this great truth, we should ask a question- “Has Christ been divided or has Christ been shared?”

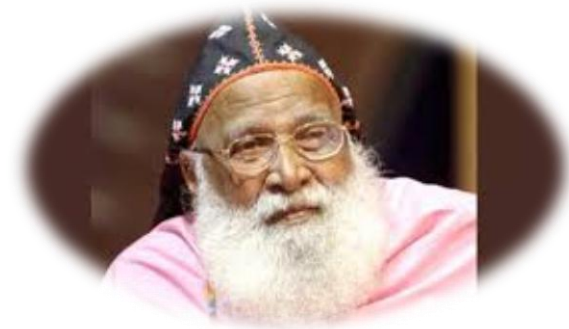
For Mar Chrysostom, the power of resurrection is the power of unity. A divided church cannot share the Gospel. Even though there are differences in culture, tradition, rituals and practices, there is only one faith, one baptism and one Gospel. Christ is the Gospel and we too are called out to be gospels to our brothers and sisters through our lives. There are not only four gospels but five... the fifth gospel is myself and yourself, we the Church. People may belong to different denominations such as Roman Catholic, Oriental orthodox, reformed or evangelicals... But Christ is our unifying factor and the focal point of our mission life. Instead of finding our own differences we are called out to see the similarities within us and find out common platform for proclaiming the good news. Thirumeni always upholds this vision and which is very evident in his ecumenical interactions. For Thirumeni, unity is not homogeneity but accepting and respecting the distinctions. Thirumeni is open enough to accept the similarities in common and respect the difference which cannot be accepted. His attitude was not of an adjustment and diplomacy rather of mutual respect and kindness. Thirumeni profoundly preaches and teaches that the common mission of the Church is nothing but to proclaim the Gospel together with the power of unity. When I think about Thirumeni, the insightful word of Hellen Keller echoes in my mind; “Alone we can do so little, but together we can do so much.” Yes, as an advocate of unity by his clarity of **thoughts**, liberal views on spirituality and in-depth theological insights, Mar Chrysostom made a lasting impression in the hearts of many. As a champion of peace and unity through his **words**, -which are always “delicious with salted” - has been influencing the mass positively. Finally, as an icon of unity through his humanitarian **activities**, social interactions and timely involvements in the society, Chrysostom possesses an honoured position as a “Bishop of the Society”. May God continue to bless our Thirumeni with good health and abundant grace.

** Revd Jameson has just completed his doctoral studies in Ireland. We are very grateful for his ministry and contributions to ECHO.*

Valiya Thirumeni - An Exemplary Christian-Witness in a Multi Faith Community

Rev. Shibu Kurian, St. John's Mar Thoma Church UK

If plurality of religion/multi-faith context is a part of the plan of God, how do we understand the mission of God or the mission of the church?



His Grace the Most Respected Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan – affectionately known as “*Valiya Thirumeni*” is a visionary – a Christian witness in a multi faith community. His magnetic personality inspires each and every one who engages with him. Through his humorous and simple messages, he challenges the worldviews and ideologies of the communities. In his key-note address on Sunday February 16, 2013 at the Marmon Convention, he said “God’s goodness unfolds before our eyes like a flower opens itself to the sun. Everything in the world is mutually dependent and the whole is dependent upon God.” Through his sermon he emphasized the need of the mutual dependency among the people without any boundaries of caste, color and creed. This year as a church we are celebrating Our Valiya Thirumeni’s Centenary year. Therefore we need to analyze the witness of the church in the multi faith context in United Kingdom.

Our Valiya Thirumeni in his book, ‘*Mission in the Market Place*’, (edited by Jesudas Athyal and John J. Thatamanil, considered “mission as permeation of the fragrance of the Gospel rather than any act of arrogant display of the superiority of Christianity, in the name of uniqueness of Christ.” The role of the church is to proclaim and practice the Good News in our community. The question we faced is how this can be achieved in a

multi-religious and pluralistic society in United Kingdom. In the Sermon on the Mount (St. Matthew 5: 13-16) Jesus used two powerful metaphors of salt and light for an assertive identity and constructive participation in the multi-faith context. Both these elements (salt and light) are highly explosive elements, yet God has combined them in such a way that they are stable, edible, valuable and both have the ability to alter the world. It shapes and strengthens the community's identity and lifestyle. The interrelationships with one another and with the surrounding society are important aspects for the existence of the society. Integrity or wholeness of the Christian community defines their relationship with one another.

The Sermon on the Mount is not, though, a comprehensive manual or rule book, not a step-by-step "how to" book. Rather it offers a series of illustrations, or "examples" or "case studies" of life in God's reign, vision of the identity and way of life that results from encountering

God's present and future reign. The sermon provides a direction rather than giving absolute commands, thereby being suggestive and illustrative rather than comprehensive. Therefore, Jesus does not start the Sermon by telling His disciples what they should do and what they are not allowed to do. Instead, He describes the new heart and perspectives from different viewpoints.

When Jesus proclaims the secret of the kingdom of God, He uses the simplest pictures taken from every day of life. The simplest pictures contain something very challenging. To St. Matthew the point of comparison between the congregation and the "salt and light" images are the new life in Christ, which has been outlined in the Beatitudes (5:3-12). The new life in Christ gives evidence of God's power to create anew. God created humanity to live not for them but for the world. To be a disciple is to be involved in every aspect of humanity's existence, including the cultural, social, and political dimension. Not only

horizontally to the ends of the earth but also vertically to every area of life from top to bottom.

Both the images "salt and light" emphasize active involvement in the public sphere/space. It reminds us that the believing communities have the responsibility to be an influence in the world. Salt in the Scripture is said to be a symbol of binding covenant (Lev.2:13), a healing and a cleansing aid (2Kings 2:20-21), a stimulant to the appetite (Job 6:6), a promoter of peace (Mark 9:50), a preventive of decay (Luke 14:34-35), a stimulant to our testimony (Matt 5:13) and an evidence of Grace (Col.4:16). Light conquers darkness (Psalms 119:105), colors drabness (Phil. 1: 27), changes deadness and remove darkness. We do not look into the light or on it, but on the things which light makes visible. The light serves to makes them visible. In comparing His disciples to salt and light, Jesus wants to teach them a radically different self-estimation. In St. Matt.5:16, the followers of Jesus are called to shed light among their fellows by doing good works. The "good works" is for the total transformation of the community. In the pluralistic context, it is not so easy. We need a new openness to bridge the gap in the community.

Salt can cease to be salty. If salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? If saltiness cannot be restored, it has no value whatsoever. In the same way, a light under a bushel shines for nobody and will soon die out for want of air. God has appointed us as lights and salt in the world. The purpose is to become a dynamic force of transformation in society. Jesus came to announce the arrival of the kingdom of God and not the church. Church is only a manifestation of the kingdom of God. The kingdom is a new reality, a new relationship of God and humanity, a new ethos where peace and justice prevail. It is a new lifestyle marked by sacrificial love, humanity, and dignity. As a manifestation of the kingdom of God, it can become a sacrament of God's love within the society. Our calling is to participate in the suffering of God in the secular life, to proclaim the freedom that Christ has given us (Galatians 3:27-29; 5:1) and to restore the humankind to harmony with its Creator.

As a great visionary our Valiya Metropolitan always emphasizes human beings become human only in relation to God and to nature. God created human beings differently from other creatures.



He molded human beings out of dust. Dust contains elements of everything in nature. God thus created the human out of nature. The created order was put together in the human so that humanity would be related to God, the Creator, as well as the created nature. God is actively involved in the whole creation and that the salvific act of God continues even outside the church among all people and communities. The Church itself is a Diaspora community – a pilgrim community that is involved in a journey to fulfilling God’s ultimate purpose for the well-being of the humanity and for all God’s creation. We need this new openness and it is helpful in bridging the gap in inter faith relationships. Chrysostom Valiaya Metropolitan is all these and much more; may God continue to bless Thirumeni to enlighten us.

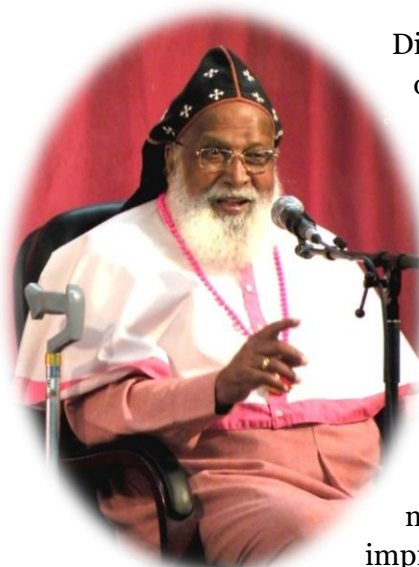
The Philosopher Bishop

(Brief reflections on his life and ministry)

Revd Dr. K. A. Abraham*

It is indeed a privilege to be asked to write some of my reflections on Chrysostom Valiaya Metropolitan. At the outset, in order to justify the title of this article, let me say a few words. In the Western philosophical tradition, very often a question is asked: Are you an idealist or an actualist? It is as if there is a dichotomy between idealism and actualism. In the life and work of Mar Chrysostom we can see a harmonious blending of these two.

I had two stints in my pastoral ministry with Thirumeni. The first one was in Neyyatinkara where he was the Diocesan Bishop of the Trivandrum-Quilon Diocese. The second one was in Kuttapuzha where he was the Diocesan Bishop of the Niranam-Maramon Diocese. In order to be brief, let me highlight three aspects of his ministry which made an indelible imprint on me.



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dr.abraham thomas eettickal

One: He is an effective communicator. He always uses two elements in his messages: humors and diatribe method. In order to drive home a cardinal point, he sometimes a devil’s advocate! Yes, Thirumeni is a good story teller. His theological method can be compared to the “story method” of C. S. Song, the Asian theologian.

Two: Thirumeni has a developmental mind-set. Let me point out two instances: During my tenure in Neyyatinkara, in the late 70’s, I was in charge of two Parishes of the South Travancore Mission field. I had two evangelists working with main those days, the mission field used to give self-employment loans to our people. They used to make palmyra baskets, mats etc. There was local retail merchants from whom our

people used to buy the palmyra leaves as bundles. The merchants gave them on credit with the condition that they would sell the finished products to them. When I made a study of the situation, it became clear that the real beneficiaries of the loans given to our people were the local merchants. I decided to present this concern before Chrysostom Thirumeni. It was my first encounter with him as a young clergy at his office in Mannanthala. I presented my case. He asked me several pertinent and probing questions. The first part was explosive because I was asking for a thorough revision of our developmental work, such as loan scheme in the Mission field. Afterwards, when I presented the facts such as the price of palmyra leaves in Thoduvatti, Tamil Nadu where palmyra plantation is in plenty and the exorbitant price charged by the merchants, I found in him a patient listener. I pointed out that if a truck load of dry leaves were taken on whole sale price and given to our people, it would be much lesser a price than the local merchants' price. Thirumeni was convinced with the data I presented to him. To make the story brief, he authorized me to do so and also gave an advance of Rs.15, 000 (if my memory is correct) for the first load of palmyra leaves to be purchased. This shows Thirumeni's developmental mind-set and also the willingness to listen his clergy and the preparedness to make amendments in the style of functioning.

My 2nd encounter was in Kuttapuzha. Once we had the Regional clergy Conference at Kuttapuzha Parish. Thirumeni chaired the meeting. There was a theme presentation by one clergy on "Contemporary Dimensions of Mission". Thirumeni challenged the clergy whether they can give local manifestations to the Mission of the Church. Some of us pointed out the plight of around 40 families on the outskirts of Kuttapuzha. In that meeting a three member fact finding committee was appointed. I was one of the members. We did an on the spot study of the community who were mostly people of other faiths. As per Thirumeni's instruction, we convened a 'Nattukoottam' (informal General Body). Rather than imposing our project on them, they were asked to reflect on themselves. The local MLA also came to assist. Within a period of one year, all the houseless got new houses (one room kitchen), common toilets, bath rooms etc. We could also arrange a "People's carol" there on

Christmas Eve in which people of other faiths also took part.

Three: Thirumeni's ultimate concerns. "Ultimate Concern" is considered as the theological methodology of Paul Tillich, the philosopher theologian of the 20th Century in Ursin all his actions and reactions, Chrysostom Thirumeni would ask: "Why do we do what we do?" In other words, instead of presenting Jesus as the panacea to all human problems, he makes one ask the question "What is the question to which Jesus is the answer?" This reminds me of the words of Bishop K .H. Ting of China "Jesus doesn't merely provide us with the answer; he would rather challenge the foundations of your question." Yes, Chrysostom Thirumeni does the same.

After relinquishing his post as the Metropolitan of the Church, he is owned by the public at large. He is Valiya Thirumeni for the faithful in the church, for the politicians, film world, people of other faiths, and people of no faiths and so on. Let us thank God for Thirumeni's blessed life and ministry. Rather than glorifying him; our task is to emulate his higher ideals, theological convictions and pastoral commitments. Last but not the least; I am deeply indebted to him for my theological nurture and pastoral concerns.

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Chrysostom on the Church in the Diaspora

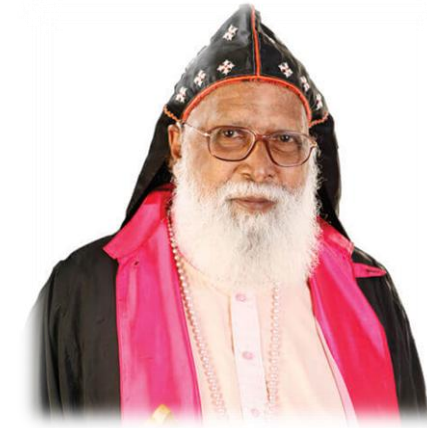
Jesudas M. Athyal

Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Valiya Metropolitan has clear and rather unorthodox views on the Church in the diaspora. He discusses in detail his thinking on these lines in the book, *Metropolitan Chrysostom on Mission in the Marketplace*. This short article takes a close look at Thirumeni's thinking in these areas.

The question, why is it that in the pluralistic situation outside Kerala, our parishes often remain as potted plants brought from Central Travancore was posed to Thirumeni. He admits that even though a large section of our church has been based outside Kerala for the past several decades, even today, our people do not try to be friends with the local churches or communities. We often use the term 'identity' to establish that we are different from other people around us; identity on the other hand, should contribute to the well-being of the community. Today we are not part of the community. In the Communist thinking, community is the most important thing and you exist only for the community. But when the Rationalist thinking came, the individual became the center and the community existed only for the convenience of the individual. The Christian understanding however is persons – in - community. 'Identity' is to ensure that you are not lost; in other words, identity ensures that you are recognized in the community. If you are alienated from the community, you lose your identity.

Thirumeni asks the question, what is our primary identity? Is it the family? The church also can be treated as your primary community. The traditional understanding that the parish is within a specific geographical area is today being increasingly discarded, as for instance, in Mumbai where the Syrian Catholics have formed a diocese separate from the local Catholic community. Their understanding is that the parish is a *worshipping* community, not a geographical entity. All the same, we should not reduce our identity to certain historical periods

alone, when we moved from one geographical location to another. We should also remember that we are the makers of history *today*. The church is not a static body, but a pilgrim community.



This reality should be reflected in the diaspora church too, especially with regard to our youth. Wherever they are, and whatever idiom they use to express their faith and culture, we should remember that they are adding to our heritage.

Chrysostom clarifies that *identity* does not necessarily mean separation. In marriage, two people are brought together, but they do not become one physical entity. The point is *oneness*, as we visualize in the Bible. The problem is that the doctrine of Trinity is not taught properly in our parishes - that while Jesus was in the womb of his mother, he was in heaven. The Christian understanding of identity is *oneness*; it is not giving up our *specialty*. Diversity is necessary in the church. If the church is to be Catholic, there must be diversity. It is not complete uniformity. Identity does not mean that you should be separate. What is the church? What we need to stress in the church is the corporate aspect of worship, not what is being done by the Achen alone. The laity are the representatives of priesthood. In our worship, lay people are the sign and symbol of the church. So also the bishop and the clergy.

All of us, both members of the diaspora community and others, should collectively reflect on the relation between the ultimate and the particular. S. Radhakrishnan used to say, you should discover *Svadharma* in the context of *Visvadharma*. The ultimate, to be divine, needs to be reflected in the particular. The Kingdom of God is both 'now' and 'beyond'. The infinite should enter into history, or should become finite. In Jesus, the infinite came to history.

The American Context

Why Mar Chrysostam will be remembered?

Revd Dr. M. J. Joseph, Kottayam*

In an article on the 92nd birthday of former Prime Minister of India, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, under the title ‘Why Vajpayee will be remembered’— published in the New Indian Express, Dec.25, 2016 – the writer, Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu, quotes a poem by Vajpayee under the title, ‘Why Vajpayee will be remembered’. “Remember your leaders...and imitate their faith” is also the Christian imperative (Heb.13:7). Let me quote a few lines from the article on Vajpayee: “What road should I go down. . . Do I gather these scattered leaves? Or do I fashion a new universe?” In the history of the Christian Church, Chrysostom Thirumeni has woven new fabrics of mission concerns for the 21st Century. One may qualify him as a bishop with a difference. He is 100 minus one of age. Quite qualified to find a place in the scroll of honour of the Gunnies book to remember is divine; to forget is natural; to forget willingly is devilish. Chrysostom Thirumeni’s speech is like *Amrut* and it is a call to extend a helping hand to the needy. “For him, the great city is that handles art and garbage equally well” (Bob Talbert). This personal trait creates ripples in the vast ocean of the Universal Church for years to come.

He has not built any edifice to be remembered, but he used to appreciate what others built. Truly, “Really great people make you feel that you too can become great” (Mark Twain). He did not write any immortal books, but his oratorical skill has created indelible marks on the sands of time. He is not a poet, but his poetic sense of humour has commanded respect across caste and creed. He is not known as the head of a bigger Church with millions of faithful, but he has attained the spiritual authority to navigate the Ecumenical ship of the Universal Church. **He will be remembered for what he is and how he lived the gospel of the Kingdom of God.** The late Thomas Mar Athanasius Suffragan Metropolitan, if he had been alive today, would greet him on his

100th birthday with the prophetic words of wisdom: “*The inspiration of humanity is the roll call of its great men*” This reminds me of a recent publication of the Jaico publication Mumbai (under the care of Reader’s Digest) **25 Magnificent Indians of the 20th century** by S Lal. If such a literary piece comes out from the portals of the Indian Church, I am sure; Mar Chrysostom will certainly find a place among the legends of Indian Church history.

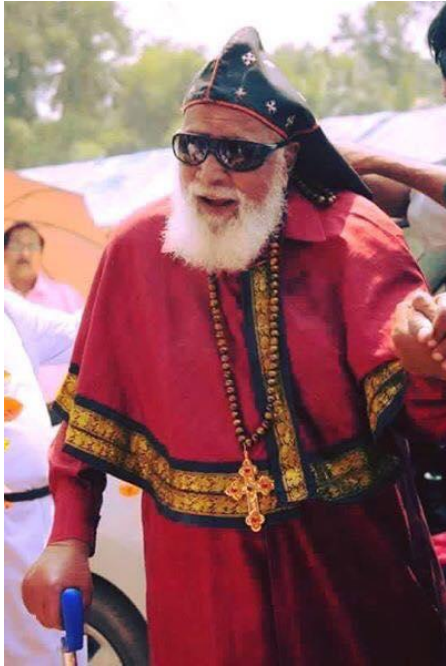
It is indeed great that the FOCUS group around the globe would like to greet Thirumeni on his 100th birth day as his ideas always meet the future with a HOPE. It is to be remembered that the FOCUS online fraternity has dedicated a volume to him under the title **Expanses of Grace** as a mark of love and affection. For him, “Yesterday is a cancelled cheque; tomorrow is a promissory note; today is ready cash”. His sense of mission in Christ’s way extended beyond the borders of the church and it could be regarded as a legacy of the Mar Thoma Church to *the oikoumene*. He is truly a man ahead of his time and he could *well be considered as* a man of all seasons. He always believed that “our times are in HIS hands” and he acted accordingly for the glory of God.



Personal reminiscences

I am deeply indebted to Chrysostom Thirumeni as His Grace had ordained me as the *Kassissa (Priest)* of the Church in a service held on August 14, 1965 at the St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church Tiruvalla. When I completed 50 years in the ministry of the Church (2015), I went to Mar Irenaeus the Jubilee home, Maramon where he lives and got his blessings. Earlier I presented a Festschrift Volume of mine under the title, **The Golden Beams (CSS, 2010)** to Thirumeni. Maramon Kolathu *Kudumbayogam* is indeed privileged to have a group photograph with Thirumeni at the Jubilee home. Thirumeni always has kept a close relationship with the

Maramonkolathu *kudumbayogam* of which I serve as its president; it was Thirumeni who released the second edition of the *Kudumbayogam* history book in 2003. I am indeed proud to say that Evangelist Mathew John, the present secretary of the *Kudumbayogam* is a great admirer of Thirumeni.



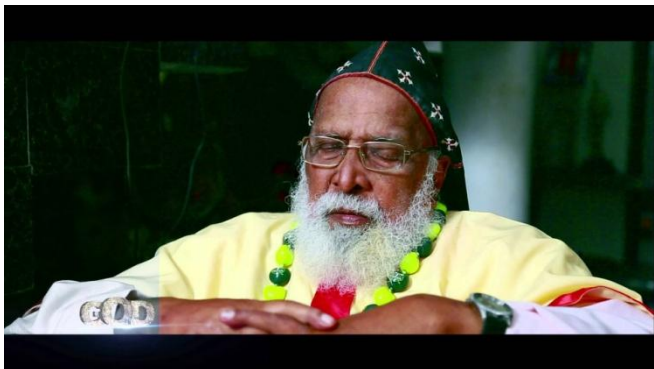
Thirumeni wrote a preface to my first book, *Adima Sabha Pitkkanmar* (CMS Press, 1971). I remember to have read Thirumeni's several thought provoking foreword to several

books. In one of his letters while soliciting an article for a church publication, he wrote to me: "I am not good at writing and so the work gets procrastinated .I hope to keep to the schedule" (Nov.20, 1989). What a great sense of frankness and humility. I have had opportunities to write in the Festschrift Volumes published by the Church in honour of Thirumeni. He used to appreciate my writings particularly my prose-poems. I remain grateful to Thirumeni as he had shown willingness to present Dr. Herman Gundret Award-2008(initiated by late Mr. Mammen Philip) to me for my book, **Beyond the Seen and the Unseen**(Published by ISPCK, Delhi) in a function held at Mallappally. In his speech, Thirumeni very graciously qualified me "as a mystic poet". Quite an undeserved title! In a conversation at Manganam in 2009, when I told him that I am writing my memoirs, he asked me whether I write it in prose or poems. In all my personal encounters with him, he has always impressed me with his enquiring mind and debating skill. For him "beauty is truth; truth is beauty" (John Keats). Probably he follows, the credal dictum, "*Cogito ergo sum*".

Relationship: A pastoral trait with genuine love
As one who is committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ, Thirumeni always tries to establish and maintain his vast chain of friendship in the Community. His friends include the rich and the poor, the literate and illiterate, the Cinema actors and producers, church dignitaries and lay people, his school mates and classmates, politicians and religious leaders. In his spectrum of relationship, he is always particular to add new friends daily. Travelling and speaking in public meetings create "kinetic spiritual energy" in him. I am sure he will agree with the words of Fr. Murray Rogers (A British pilgrim),"if friends are my assets, I am the richest man in the world". For him travelling is not just an activity, it is an art of broadening his vision through the priceless experiences. When Revd Dr. M. V. Abraham achen and I were doing our doctoral programme at the Ecumenical Institute, Tantur (Jerusalem), Thirumeni found time to visit us there (1974). So also my friend Dr. Zac Varghese (London) visited us in Jerusalem. At that time Israel has been under Yom Kippur war trauma. For Thirumeni "courage is the mastery of fear-not absence of fear" (Mark Twain). His biographical book, **Mission in the Market Place** compiled and edited by Dr. Jesudas Athyal, is full of life narratives of Thirumeni. Dozens of articles that appeared in the New Vision Magazine carry the life-experiences of Thirumeni in a lucid manner. Thanks to Dr. Mathew Koshy, the editor. I remember to have organized a seminar at UTC, Bangalore (2004) on the book, **Mission in the Market Place**. There were quite a few presentations on the multifaceted personality of Thirumeni gleaned out of the book. Quite a few representatives of the Action Groups in Bangalore participated in the seminar initiated by ECC, Bangalore. In all his relationships, Thirumeni upholds the traditional Ideals of life treasured in our country such as *sucha* (purity), *Santhosha*(joy),*Tapas* (Meditation), *swadhyaya* (Love for others) and *Isvara-pranidhana* (Prayerful attitude). More than that, the component elements of India's cultural Legacy (*Yamas*-Principles of Restraint) find a vivid manifestation in his speeches. They are *ahimsa* (non-violence),*Satya* (Truth). *Asteya*

(Commitment to one's own faith), *Brahmacharya* (God as supreme) and above *all aparigraha* (selfless life) find a blending in his spirituality and social vision.

I am reminded of two incidents which carry great meaning for the pastors and lay people. While Thirumeni was giving a message in a public place, a beggar who happened to be there, pointing out Thirumeni from a distance, said to his fellow beggar: "See, that bishop who is speaking there in MY FRIEND". What a great sign of relationship. While speaking in the presence of the late



Metropolitan Geevarghese Mar Osthathios of the Orthodox Church Chrysostom Thirumeni narrated a story to illustrate his friendship with him. An Orthodox woman, married to a Mar Thoma layman came to know that Osthathios Thirumeni will be delivering a Convention message in the nearby place. She wanted to attend the convention there. But her husband dissuaded her first to go to an Orthodox convention. Finally the woman was allowed to attend the convention under one condition. She was asked by her husband to keep her jewels including the ear rings, bangles and the chain on her neck safely under his custody and go. He was afraid that she will be moved to give away all her ornaments to Osthathios Thirumeni's charitable causes. Osthathios Thirumeni liked the narration of the story in the same wave length. This will illustrate his appreciation of the Sermons preached by Osthathios Thirumeni. They were thick friends till the demise of Mar Osthathios Metropolitan even though there are ecclesiastical differences between them. To respect others with their differences is the sign of Christian maturity and the noble trait in an ecumenist.

Thirumeni's sense of humour has attracted the wider section of the society. There are several books to his credit written by others. For example,

if you ask Thirumeni the following questions, I am sure one will get an instantaneous answer (*I add 3 imaginative questions*). Q.no.1 "River Pampa flows in which state?" "Thirumeni will reply: **Liquid state** Q.no.2: What is the main reason **for divorce**? Thirumeni will reply "*marriage*" and may add remain single "as **I am**". Q.no.3; "What is the reason **for failure**": Thirumeni might say: *Exams! The rationality coupled with humour in his replies is indeed a vehicle for establishing authentic relationship in the community for a better tomorrow.*

Remembering Chrysostom Thirumeni

I would like to end this article with the following salient points which I am sure will go down the Memory Lane of the Church.

1. Keen interest to get involved in conversation, debate and informal talk.
2. Showing readiness to listen to others
3. A greater vision for the Church and its ministers
4. Endowed with communicative skills as a theological educator.
5. Showing readiness to appreciate others particularly the people of other faiths and no-faith, being rooted in his own tradition.
6. Relevant interpretation of the Scriptures citing examples from different sources.
7. Seeking God's will in all human affairs
8. Maintaining mutual trust and respect in keeping up dialogical relationship.
9. Showing readiness to acknowledge and thank others for the little kindness he had received from them
10. Willingness to continue the pilgrimage of life till the end as integral to God's plan for him.

*"Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime
And, departing, leave behind us
Foot prints on the sands of time."*

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Chrysostom Metropolitan, a Free Spirit

(Dr. Zac Varghese, London)



It has been a very special blessing and privilege to live in an era that has witnessed the most amazing ministry and varied contributions of the Most Rev. Dr. Chrysostom Mar Thoma Metropolitan. Through the grace of God I had the opportunity to know him in my childhood, when he was the vicar of my village parish at Kalayapuram and later as a diocesan bishop and a Metropolitan. I give thanks to Almighty God for giving the Mar Thoma Church such an outstanding leader who has given us so many blessings and charming leadership. God blessed Thirumeni so that he could be a blessing to everyone. I am sure that he will continue to guide us at this critical time in the history of mankind. His voluntary retirement as the Metropolitan gave him the space and freedom that he very much needed to enjoy and use his free spirit for extending God's unconditional love to everyone irrespective of caste, creed and colour.

During Thirumeni's busy schedule at the Mar Thoma family conference at Philadelphia in July 2001, he gave late Dr. Thomas Abraham, Sabha Council member, and me 45 minutes of his time for a private audience. It was one of those very special spiritual experiences. An inner voice made me aware that I was in the presence of an amazing free spirit and one of the intellectual giants of our time. We talked about so many things. He was so much aware of everything that is happening in the Church, in the FOCUS Movement, in the community, in the society, in the ecumenical world, in interfaith relations, in national and international politics. In the middle of all this very heavy discussion Thirumeni had that rare and mischievous insight to ask me how I happened to come for the family conference from London. In

his characteristic style, with childlike curiosity, he enquired whether I was attending any international conference as part of my itinerary as well. He then tried to explain why he asked me that question by telling us a personal childhood story. In his childhood, an agriculture inspector used to visit them at Kumbanadu and stayed in their house during weekends. On the following Monday morning this man invariably used to ask Thirumeni's father for a letter stating that while the inspector was staying at the house he examined so many coconut trees for pest infestations. This letter helped the inspector to claim his travelling expenses. Therefore, inside that apparently innocent question there was a more serious hidden enquiry, which was whether I was having a free ride to the family conference on the back of an academic visit to the United States. It was an eye opener for me to see the acute awareness of Thirumeni of certain mundane things and prevailing aspects of expense claims in some circles including the Parliamentarians of the UK. This is just a simple illustration of how his sharp intellect can penetrate any barrier sensitively and selectively like x-ray beams. Let this awareness of Thirumeni be a lesson for everyone and there is something for everyone in this story. This interaction with Thirumeni was a most amazing experience, which I will never forget. I was certainly aware that I was in the presence of a very spiritual person. On reflection, I thought that perhaps this is how disciples felt in the company of Jesus during His Galilean ministry.

At the 122nd Maramon Convention, 2017, Thirumeni's theme for the talk was the journey of Jonah to Tarshish instead of going to Nineveh as God demanded. Thirumeni in his message took an emphasis, with his trademark humour, on a forgotten fact in that story, which was the fact that Jonah paid the fare for the journey. 'Paying the fare' is an important aspect of our lives in an age where people are looking for free rides everywhere. One is always on the lookout for shortcuts, concessionary deals, gift vouchers, and free rides. Thirumeni reminds us that for doing God's mission, for establishing God's kingdom on earth, one has to pay a price – a price of removing 'I-centrism' and allowing God to occupy the centre of our lives. This is exactly what Thirumeni did, he paid a price to restrict himself to the official title of being a bishop for sixty-four long

years; he restricted his freedom to accommodate the demands the church made on him. The responsibility as the Diocesan bishop and the Metropolitan of the Church perhaps restricted him in many ways because of his bondage to the Church as the custodian of the tradition and the constitution of the Church. This is a price or fare that we made him pay. Even on his 100th birth day we are making demands on him without thinking about his health and wellbeing. He continues to pay the fare with a smile for his ministry; life indeed has not been a free ride for him.



He is a born communicator with a feel for words, blessed with a tenacious memory, anecdotes filled with humour and circumstantial details of an amazing nature. Spin doctors brainwashed the

media few years ago to make us believe that the former president Ronald Regan was one of the great communicators of twentieth century, but those who have listened to Chrysostom Metropolitan know that Thirumeni is the greatest communicator they have ever come across in their entire experience. With a gentle smile, with a searching question, with an effortless joke or with an empowering stance he could lay a magical spell on any audience. He is a mirror and through him and through his honest back to front or inside out analysis of events we can see the realities of things more sharply around and beyond. The sharpness and biting edge of his humour is very redemptive. He has a rare ability to inflate the pomposity of people around and at the next moment bring them down to self-realisation of their gullibility through his incisive intellect and witticism. Thirumeni does this without any effort and it is so natural to him. Thirumeni is a great entertainer and humour is a very effective weapon in his hands. Thirumeni knows full well that when an audience laughs, they have consented to be vulnerable and he uses this opportunity most effectively for a merciless frontal attack and a direct hit.

All humour springs from a gap between reality in itself and our perception of it. To be able to laugh we have to distance ourselves from the situation we laugh about, Thirumeni is a great technician in creating this distance. The more pretentious is the subject of the joke, the funnier we find the subject, provided we are detached from it. When someone falls down, we laugh automatically and the laughter stops when we start attending to the consequences of the fall, his wounds. Therefore, detachment is important in laughing. Thirumeni has the ability to lift people up and bring them down gently from a great pompous height with a gentle painless prick. I do not think he does it deliberately, but there is a little child in him, who is marvellously and enjoyably mischievous.

At one of the Mandalam meetings, at Thirumeni's last appearance before he announced his retirement, a senior achen made a point of order for a ruling from Thirumeni for removing a video camera and the crew from his line of vision to the dais so that he can have a good view of everyone without shifting from his comfortable and cosy posture. Thirumeni's response was spontaneous which brought the house down. In an apologetic sort of way Thirumeni set out to demolish the achen totally. Thirumeni said, "If I understand you correctly, you are asking me to ask the cameraman to move from the front of your seat to another place so that he can cause much more difficulties for others and obstruct the vision of many other people." He then added, "We need to learn to tolerate certain degree of personal discomforts for the common good of the many." He gave people something to laugh about and then taught them something fundamentally important about personal freedom and responsibility. It is once again about 'paying the fare' as I indicated before. When you study Thirumeni's jokes we see an element of this reality in them. One should study Thirumeni's jokes. There is so much material there for many doctoral studies.

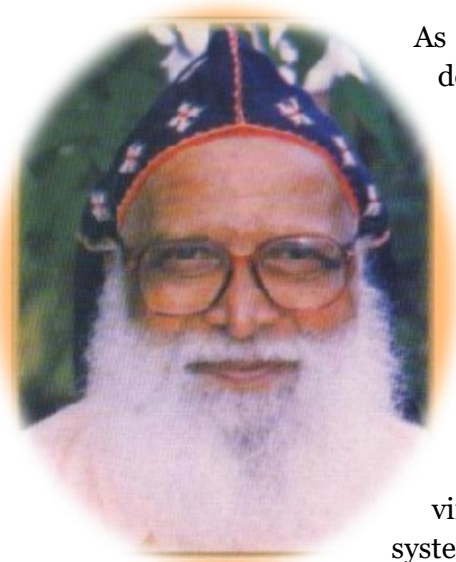
Thirumeni's preaching is not about speaking loudly, thumping the table or displaying the breadth and depth of his intellect, but it is about projecting the message and keeping the attention of the congregation focussed on the message of the original messenger of that life saving message. He often tells us that the defining paradox of our time is that an age of affluence coexists with

devastating forms of material and social poverty. We are responsible for creating this poverty, which includes broken marriages and families, depressed neighbourhoods, a lack of community, failing schools, homelessness, isolation, alcoholism, suicide, marginalisation and destruction of the reputation of individuals. Children growing up under such circumstances are robbed of everything every child needs and deserves, namely hope. Our pastoral care should be addressing these issues. Thirumeni reminds us of the need for Para churches to address these problems.

Thirumeni's emphasis on these issues reminds me of a great story about Rabbi Schneersohn. One night this Rabbi was so immersed in his study of religious books that he failed to notice that his son had woken up and was crying. But his father heard the noise, went up to the child's room, soothed the grandchild and sang the baby to sleep. Then he went to his son, the Rabbi, who was immersed in his religious thoughts and said: "My son, whatever you are learning, it is of no service to God if it makes you deaf to the cry of a child." Chrysostom Metropolitan is an unusual visionary; we probably need special glasses to see what he sees and a deeper understanding to grasp the width and depth of his far reaching and at times revolutionary statements. He is a very private person leading a very public life, every one has an opinion, as expressed in this special issue of the ECHO, about the public persona of this amazing person, but who knows the real Chrysostom Thirumeni? Where is he going? Where is he leading us? These are interesting question for serious students of the history of the Mar Thoma Church.

Thirumeni is fully aware of the gulf between institutionalised Church and Christianity; the Church is not expressing in a meaningful way God's concern for humanity and all created things. Thirumeni is not content with the popular theological expositions and rhetorical answers to various problems confronting the society and the environment. Against the institutionalised corruption of Christianity, he is eager to set the record straight with a positive exposition of truth of the Christian faith. Being an intellect, he has a wider sweep of the realities to place the acquired wisdom of instant experts on various aspects of the life of the Church in their proper places. He is

not overwhelmed by their skin-deep scholarship. The fact remains, however, that none of the so-called instant experts by themselves can match the comprehensive sweep of Thirumeni's vision and outlook. Today, under the pressure of wider ecumenism an urgent need is emerging to weave from the rich and diverse sources available a single narrative statement of the truth about God and humanity without upsetting other religious sensitivities. To those who say religion is just a crutch, his answer is yes, but there are lot of people out there who are limping. Thirumeni's originality lies precisely here, but I wonder, as alluded earlier, whether the administrative demands of the Church had curtailed Thirumeni from developing his revolutionary spirit against the rigid straightjacket attitudes of the institutionalised Church.



As a Church we need to decide whether Mar Thoma Church is an Episcopal Church guided by the mythical blessings implied in the continuity of an Episcopal succession or simply guided by a show of hands in a virtual democratic system of church government. The dynamics of

oratorical gimmickry are short; it has no staying power. What is needed today is an action packed agenda fit for the twenty-first century more than attractively orchestrated sound bites. In a mature democracy people may find that responsibility is the currency that they pay for personal freedoms; there is indeed a fare to pay for the ride. Enlightened people in the Church have a responsibility to create a critical mass of other enlightened people to bring necessary the restoration of our faith and traditions. Chrysostom Metropolitan and late Valiya Metropolitan have been advocates of this type of engagement and education for a long time. As we are celebrating the birth centenary of Thirumeni, let us also gratefully remember the contributions made by late Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Mar Athanasius and late Valiya Metropolitan who were consecrated in 1953 together with Chrysostom

Thirumeni. This was indeed the Golden age of the Mar Thoma Church and let us thank God for all our bishops for their outstanding and enduring contributions. Through bishops, Metropolitans, patriarchs and prophets, under these circumstances, humanity gradually gets accustomed to following the Word and receiving the Spirit. Let us allow our bishops the necessary freedom to do so under divine guidance. Chrysostom Thirumeni is a custodian of a tradition, which proclaims that 'tear is a universal language and help is a universal command.'

How does one comprehend and write about Chrysostom Thirumeni? In the limited time and space available to me, I only could say that he is a free spirit and it is difficult to chase this refreshing wind, but his visitations leave indelible impacts on our lives. Let us thank God for our Metropolitan's ministry as a bishop of the Mar Thoma Church over the last sixty-four years. Our prayer is also that God may grant him many more years of good health to let him continue to guide and bless us. Your Grace, I want you to know that like thousands of your other admirers out there I only have total and unqualified respect and love for you. May God continue to bless your Grace and our Church. I join the world-wide Mar Thoma Church and everyone else to wish Thirumeni a very happy 100th birthday.

A Personal Tribute to a Great Church Father

Dr. George K. Zachariah,
Mar Thoma Church of Greater Washington

To be asked to write about Chrysostom Thirumeni is a great privilege and it gives immense pleasure. Personally, I am grateful to God for enabling me to know His Grace rather intimately. He always had a good word for what I did. I have known him almost all my life that spans over eight decades. His maternal uncle was my teacher and lived on one side of our home in Karthicappally and his father's sister lived on the other. He used to acknowledge that my father taught him Sunday school classes when he visited his relatives. Both of us are alumni of the Union Christian College at Alwaye, even though we were there at different times.

We were all very happy when he got elected as an episcopa. Then I was teaching at Union Christian College. I was at his consecration on May 3, 1953. Soon after that, along with the other two new bishops, Alexander Mar Theophilus and Thomas Mar Athanasius, he was given a grand reception by the Kayamkulam Parish. They were taken in a well-decorated chariot for a long procession. I was one of the three who were designated to be their escorts. Juhanon Mar Thoma and Mathews Mar Athanasius rode in another car ahead of us. After that huge procession, there was a public meeting.

Looking at my diaries, I note that I had the



opportunity to be with Thirumeni in many meetings, some of which were sponsored by me. As I served as vice president and later, one year as acting president of the Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam, I was a speaker in some meetings presided over by Thirumeni. In 1957, when I was president of the Mar Thoma Students' Conference at the annual conference held in St. John's High School, Eraviperorr, Thirumeni was one of the leaders along with his esteemed father, the Very Rev. K.E. Oommen. Earlier when I was general secretary of the Youth Christian Council of Action,



Kerala, and was active in the Sarvodaya and Bhoodan Movements, I conducted the first Bhoodan Camp in Kerala in which, along with other bishops and social service leaders, he was present. From 1958, for many years, I was away from Kerala in the United States and it was only after a few years when, along with a few others, I organized the Mar Thoma congregation of Greater Washington that I had any contact with Thirumeni when he came as Diocesan Bishop of North America (1988-1993) where I served in the Zonal Assembly and had the privilege of meeting him on many occasions. Thirumeni visited Washington on many occasions and we were privileged to host him at our home. I would receive His Grace at the airport and take him home before church programs. His Grace was one of the leaders in our Diocesan Family Conference of which I was then vice president. He was also a leader in the annual Youth Conference, co-sponsored by our local young people with a Baltimore group. Our son, Mohan, was the secretary and I was a member of the coordinating group.

He showed great confidence in me and respected my suggestions. One time, when he was visiting us, one of our young people who had married a Hindu girl and wanted to get his marriage solemnized, I invited him and his father for breakfast with us to meet Thirumeni for what he had to do. Thirumeni suggested to them to consult with me and follow my instructions. Sadhu K.I. Mathai of Christavashram Manganam was one of his mentors. He was mine as well.

His gargantuan frame holds within it a gargantuan mind, a colossus; we have to walk around him to get some perspective. He, without any doubt, is a humanist of tremendous versatility, one of the great geniuses of our times. His chat on serious matters may seem frivolous but were gems. At home, when he visited, he would be fully awake until 1:30 or 2 in the morning talking about many things. He was probably given the name “Chrysostom” by Juhanon Mar Thoma as he was consecrated, as he probably reminded him of John Chrysostom, the fourth century preacher and great church Father who was very eloquent. Chrysostomas means “golden mouth”. With his boundless physical energy, natural shrewdness, self-confidence, and eternal optimism, he could have become anyone he wanted. Instead, he was destined to become one of the great bishops of the 20th and 21st

centuries.

I have assisted him several times when he celebrated Holy Communion. I was quite impressed with his tenacious memory as he recited the liturgy without even looking into the book. Once I heard him at Santigiri Ashram during the Focus Seminar, a talk by him on the history of the global church. I was amazed at that presentation which demonstrated the breadth and depth of his grasp. He referred to no notes. When Thirumeni was elevated as Velia Metropolitan, the Mar Thoma messenger asked me to contribute. I wrote a piece entitled “Three Cheers for Our Awesome Velia Metropolitan”. In another number, honoring his Navathy, some of us were asked to give a brief statement about him. “This robust, Gibraltar of a man, towering but childlike; sincere (what you see is what you get); warm but refreshingly ‘cool’; a bishop of uncommon distinction with lively enthusiasm; level-headed and sensitive with sympathetic concern; disarming, crusty good nature; intellectually impeccable, disciplined, lucid, so relentlessly logical; in his vicinity through his magnetic presence, one feels an electric current circulating; his warm eyes to flash with energy, revealing his charismatic personality; most basic to his effectiveness, his endearing innocence; this ‘golden mouth’ preacher, true to his name, as a God-given imagination and God-given delivery, speaking out unsparingly about the follies of Laity as well as clergy with humor; able to be at home in many places; behind his charming smile and compassionate nature, exist a laser-like shrewdness that has totally captivated me; this Patriarch, a quintessential Christian, looms larger than life; God’s wonderful gift to the Mar Thoma Church.”



A Living Legacy

Rev. Dr. K. V. Simon, Kizhakeparampil, Kottayam

Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan is a long-term reigning centenarian bishop of the Christendom. His conversation covers a wide range of issues like theology, mission, pastoral issues and ecumenical relationship. His ministry is extended to a vast majority of people irrespective of religion, caste, creed, colour and culture. He is a bishop with a golden tongue and golden life. His life itself is a powerful sermon. His humour is unique. He is a person with a deep insight, sharp thinking, sincere commitment to mission, wide outlook to social issues. He has a broader audience within and outside the Mar Thoma church. He is an Indian Bishop, at the same time a minister to the Church universal.

Konrad Raiser comments about him in the following words: "It is the most unusual thing for the head of a church to speak so freely about weakness, strength and challenges of the church". He has special concern and compassion for the socially and economically backward people and community. His magnetic personality impresses each and everyone who is in touch with him. A person has commended him as "The Prophet of the Divine Universe". His unparalleled and touching style of speech, broadminded love for humanity are worthy to be praised. He mingles with people of all ages- from children to old age.

He has given a new meaning to retirement. Retirement is not a period to be idle, but to be more active, more fruitful and more encouraging to the people around. My personal attachment to Thirumeni is to be noted. My pastoral ministry started with him in his diocese. His fatherly affection, Christian mentoring, and timely encouragement helped me to prosper in the ministry. Our marriage was solemnized by him on April 27th (His birthday). Our house was also dedicated by him. As Thirumeni is at the threshold of his centenary, my family and myself offer our sincere prayers and best wishes for the years ahead.

In Christian terms, our greatness depends on the radiation of Christ in us. It is good to remember what Marian Anderson, the great singer, said quoting her mother, "Grace must always come before greatness". Ezra Pound once remarked that "We have an obligation to visit the great men of our times". Our Thirumeni is such a great man and I am grateful that I have met the obligation. Greatness is the grandeur in the things we do and simplicity in the way we do them, doing things that influences the lives of many people, but preserving always the greatest personal simplicity. For greatness is simplicity.

His disarming ability to be home in many places, his uncanny way of making friends with very diverse types of people, his great sense of humor, and sharp wit are known to all. He probably has been a bishop longer than anybody in the history of the Christian Church (64 years).



Bishop Mar Chrysostom: A great Wisdom Guru

Revd Dr. Prakash K. George*

The Most Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Valiya Metropolitan is not only a great leader of the Church and society, but also a great communicator and theological educator. He is considered by many people, irrespective of religion and ideology, as a great Guru. His Grace served as the Principal of the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary and taught for a short period at the Kerala United Theological College, Thiruvananthapuram. He still cherishes the experiments he adopted during his teaching ministry, especially his experiences in trying to change assessment procedures – he had asked the students to write answers to questions referring to certain books instead of writing a normal written examination at the end of the semester.



Like our great master, Jesus, the Metropolitan communicates divine truth in the language of the common man through stories and humour. His teachings are marked by simplicity and insightfulness. He often shares his own personal experiences mixed with humour to explain truths about the world, God and humans. As a theological educator, he has always grounded his teachings in God and in His word. His teachings and sermons contain profound truth in a language that everybody can understand. He interprets mundane experiences as divine experiences and invites the listeners to have a new perception of God and the world.

Another great distinctiveness of the Metropolitan is that his teachings contain subversive wisdom. This does not mean he undermines all the accepted norms and truths but he subverts whatever is considered as normative that excludes or alienates the weak and the vulnerable. He challenges systems and religious

institutions that fail to respond to the needs of the marginalized and the vulnerable. He questions the political and religious dominant systems that look after the interest of the rich and powerful, who neglect the rights of the less privileged.

Bishop Chrysostom always gives preference to people in need. His Grace exhibits genuine love for the people and their needs. He believes the Church, as a hermeneutical community, should exemplify the biblical stories in life and deed to the concrete circumstances of time, place and culture. His life and teaching is a great attempt to translate the Gospel in the contemporary world so that it may be relevant and significant. As we celebrate the 100th Birthday of Chrysostom Thirumeni let us thank God for this great Guru.

** Revd Dr. Prakash K. George is the Principal of the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam. Earlier he was on the faculty of the Gurukul Lutheran Theological Seminary as professor of Old Testament. He is a former member of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC.*



Most Revd Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Valiaya Metropolitan

Roy Abraham, Sinai MTC, London

[We are very grateful to Mr. Roy Abraham for this unique black and white Photograph Revd Philip Oommen before his consecration as a bishop in 1953]

As I write a few words about Chrysostom Valiaya Metropolitan, I cannot claim any close encounters with him personally, but only through my late father who is the same age as this illustrious human being. They were young students while in Kumbanad and their paths took a different journey when my father left for East Africa in 1937.

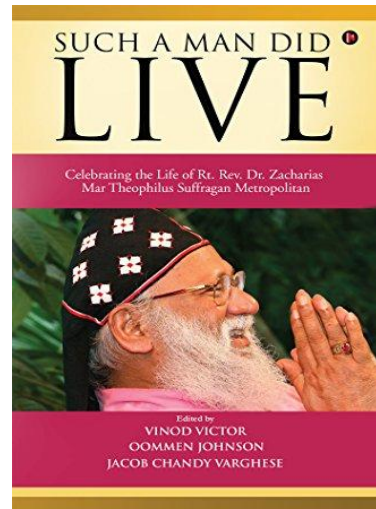
In 1989 while Chrysostom visited the UK, my father invited him home over for dinner and as a family we met him at close quarters and had the opportunity to observe his humility and wit in a very personal way. Again when the UK Mar Thoma congregation celebrated the Silver Jubilee in April 2007, Chrysostom was the star of the evening when he spoke to over 500 people and his talk was that of a painter creating the picture on a canvass for all to appreciate, but at the same time challenging us to examine ourselves in the ebb and flow of our lives. He managed to thread the goodness of the human beings faith and restlessness to the ever demanding needs of individuals.

It was per chance that Dr Zac Varghese mentioned quite recently to me that he was co-authoring a book of the life of Chrysostom in celebration of his 100th birthday. I then began scrambling for a picture of his visit to East Africa in 1952 while I was still in my shorts. His visit was as an ordained priest of the Mar Thoma Church, shortly before being ordained as a Bishop in 1953 and he is still on this spiritual mission even into his 100th year.

I thought I would share this picture of Chrysostom as many of us remember him only in his attire as a Bishop and how he stood tall then as a young man, and still remarkably taller today in his pronouncements and humour as a human being. Chrysostom today is a standard bearer, an icon and has the stature cut from the same cloth as the late Nelson Mandela of South Africa.

Book Review: Such a Man Did Live

Celebrating the Life of Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Suffragan Metropolitan.



Edited by Vinod Victor, Oommen Johnson & Jacob Chandy Varghese (Paperback: £11.83 from Amazon; the book is also available from Santhigiri Trust, Edathala

North, Aluva- 683564, Kerala, at Rs600.)

Dr. Zac Varghese, London

This book is published to thank God and celebrate the life of Bishop Zacharias Mar Theophilus who passed away on 27th December 2015. The highest tribute that we could give to this gentlest of human being is that he was indeed a God-centred man with full of humanity. Jesus is quoted as saying that He came so people could have life, 'full to over flowing' (John 10:10). This fullness and overflowing of humanity had happened in the life of Zacharias Thirumeni. Hundred or so of Thirumeni's friends, co-workers, and members of the family, tasted the life of this man with overflowing humanity, love, kindness, and fruit of the Spirit. They have written their many-sided reflections in most personal, intimate and touching ways in this book. They together weaved a beautiful and rich tapestry of a human life, which they experienced in their intimate relationship with him. For Thirumeni, friendship was simply living within the life of the other. This aspect is the strength of this book.

It is difficult sometime to think how such a man could ever live in this world of contradictions: endearing rich moments of happiness, problems, violence and human misery, richness and poverty; yet, he lived through all these situations and seasons of life to spread the 'good news' that he received from his parents very early in life. He

was the propagator of that 'good news' through living out the gospel truth. Therefore, the title of the book is quite fitting to justify our surprise and amazement; yes, 'such a man did live', and he touched us in many ways. He spread the 'good news' by walking in the path shown by Jesus, teaching, preaching, writing his reflections about his faith journey in prose and poetry. He also felt the needs of the community and responded to those needs in many different ways and settings. He was also an ecumenical ambassador who influenced his associates in the WCC and in many other national and international forums.

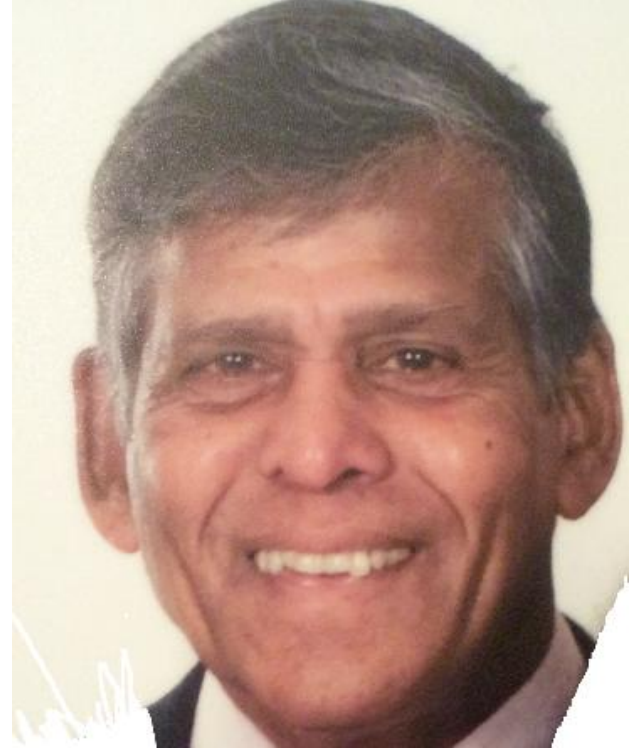
Thirumeni was first and foremost a bishop of the Mar Thoma Church, an apostle of Jesus Christ. St. Paul said, *in Church God has put all in places: in the first place Apostles, in the second place prophets and in the third place teachers.* After that came healers and miracle makers. It is rare that all these gifts can be found in one man. This book tells us that Zacharias Thirumeni was a true combination of all these ministries. He was indeed a genuine human being whose influence transcended boundaries. I have no hesitation in recommending this book.

Obituary

In Memory of Mr. C.M. Koshy

(Funeral Oration, 04-01-17)

[Mr. Mathew Koshy, affectionately known as Baby, was born on 26th July 1936, the eldest of children, of the late Mr. Varghese Mathai and Mrs. Annamma Mathew, Chittazhathu, Nellimala, Kerala. He passed away on the early morning of 25th December 2016. He is survived by his wife Mrs. Sally Koshy, Jasmine, Simon, Ray, Lincy, and grandchildren.]



Revd Fathers and Dear friends in Christ: At the very outset, I wish to thank Mrs. Sally Koshy, Jasmine, Ray, and other member of the family for allowing me few minutes on this most sacred occasion. Let me also express my thanks to Very Revd V. T. John and Revd Simon Rowbory.

We are assembled here, to thank God for late Mathew Koshy who was affectionately known as Baby. It is also to express our condolences, and to recollect the philosophy and meaning of his meaningful life, in a world which seems to be meaningless in all sorts of ways according to Ecclesiastes. Baby's life was meaningful because he was a God-centred man; he listened to God in prayer and worshipped God to give Him Glory. Giving glory to God was his supreme concern. Therefore, he had a longing for justice, a hunger for relationship, a quest for spirituality, and a delight in truth and beauty. Yes, he had a

meaningful life in every sense of the word, in all its fullness, because he was a caring husband for 46 years, a loving father, a father-in-law, a grandfather, and for others of us he was a very loyal friend. Let us offer our condolences... and assure Sally and the family that at the going down of the Sun, and in the morning, we will remember Baby. . . He was variously: a family man, a church-man, a community builder, a good gardener, a God-centred gentle giant, and a dear friend to all of us. To the very end of his life, he maintained an innocence, which is unusual, because we live in an age, which has lost its innocence. There was nothing complicated about him, he was pure and simple, an honest gentleman.

There are three levels of existence in this world: one can be a 'being-in -it' or a 'being -for-itself' or a 'being-for-others' kind of person. It is in this third level of existence 'of being-for-others' that Baby lived. . . . Lord Tennyson Wrote: "What am I? An infant, searching in the night, an infant, searching for the Light, And with no language but a cry." Some of us have no adequate words today to express our sorrow, but a cry. Baby had a very special kind of God-given sensitivity to hear the cry of people in need, and he responded to spoken and unspoken needs through his ability for friendship, and to provide hospitality by living for others.

Dr. George Mathew quite eloquently talked about Baby, his talents, and contributions. Therefore, I cannot tell you anything new. His life was an open book. He was a gift from God to us, he simply loved others. He opened his heart and mind for us to write, our names on it. That was the secret of his friendship. He knew that friendship is living within the life of the other. He found a perfect partnership in Sally for 46 years, and created a Christian family. On the wall of his living room, it is written: "But for me, and my household, we will serve the Lord." He was indeed the head of a family, which served God faithfully.

As we heard, Baby had many good technical DIY skills; he was blessed with green fingers, enjoyed his allotment and cultivated vegetables. He had a very famous vine and few fig trees and other interesting plants in his garden, which he tendered well. He taught others these skills, particularly Dr. George Mathew, and Mr. Simon

McNaught. He loved books and read extensively, it was reflected in his calm, mature, and philosophical outlook to life.

He had a very simple, but beautiful philosophy, which said, "What I cannot do, God can; what I do not have, God has; what I lack, God supplies." He also had a natural respect for others with an 'I-thou' attitude, which is one of the highest qualities of life. Baby was actively involved in worshipping with a very small Mar Thoma Community that existed here in 1965. He was an inspiration for expanding that community for over 50 years. The idea of starting a north London parish of the Mar Thoma Church was very dear to Baby's heart, because he believed in worshipping at a local church, to have closer fellowship. Out of his initiatives we organised occasional worship at this church when Revd Oliver Osmond was the vicar; it is fitting that we say farewell to him from this church.

He was one of the founding members and a corner stone of the Sinai Parish. He was a co-signatory of the parish constitution for registration with the Charity Commission, and opening a bank account. He was a prime mover and donor for the purchase of the parsonage. He represented the parish in the Mandalam, Diocesan Assembly and at the Council of the Mar Thoma Parishes in Europe, COMPE. Baby was a well-loved member of the Mar Thoma community in this country. He was a pioneer, who contributed much to build a Mar Thoma Church in Europe over the last 50 years. Because of his prayers and efforts, we are very near to establishing a Zone or a Diocese here now, I am sorry that he is not to be around to celebrate that, and also our Diamond Jubilee.

An Irish, proverb, reflects the reality of Baby's life: 'It is in the shelter of each other that people live.' Baby and Sally gave loving comfort to their five lovely grand-daughters and many other people. When we established the Sinai Church in April 2010, we did not have a suitable house for accommodating the Vicar and his family, Baby and Sally happily provided accommodation for them. The words, Gorky used for describing Leo Tolstoy is appropriate to express our appreciation for Baby: 'I am not an orphan on the earth as long as this man lives on it.' Now we are orphans for Baby's love. He was indeed a fountain of love.

Dryden in his poetic imagination wrote: 'When water met its maker, it blushed and became wine.' This, I am sure, happened to Baby as well; he met his maker early in life and got transformed into a most desirable vintage quality. Today, we celebrate Baby's life as it was, and as it would be because it is a new beginning for him. It is a new beginning for him, in Christ and with Christ, Angels and saints, and all his ancestors. TS Eliot wrote, "In my end is my beginning" It is in this ever living sacred mystery of the new beginning in Jesus Christ that he now lives. He heard the call on Christmas Day, 'Come, return to the root of the root of your Self.' We celebrate Baby's life because he returned to the root of his self. He was created in the image of God and it is to his creator, his saviour Jesus Christ that he returned. He ran the race with faith.

Thus, Baby was a true pioneer, a family-man, a responsible and dependable employee, a great lay leader, and an ambassador of the Mar Thoma Church in Europe. He gave us a very rich legacy to build on. Let us pray for Sally, her family, and the church and the community that he loved and worked for. Let us thank God for this most loveable and loved Baby. Let us honour this most loveable man of God, and say thank you, most... dear... friend, and goodbye... Love remembered and consecrated in grief is eternity. May his soul rest in peace and rise in glory. Amen.

When I think of you

Hope McNaught*

[* A granddaughter's recollection: a poem recited at the funeral service of Mr. Mathew Koshy on 4th December 2017.]

*When I think of you,
I think of bright eyes and an everlasting smile,
The hearty laugh that encircled us,
With peace and happiness.*

*When I think of you,
I think of your absolute kindness,
And the continuity of your love,
The guidance that helped and encouraged many,
The witty jokes and sense of humour,
Will stay with us forever.*

*When I think of you,
I think of our regular trips to the park,
Blackberry picking in the allotment,
Adventure filled trips to India,
And regular pick-ups from primary school.*

*When I think of you,
I think of your love for reading and current affairs,
And the desire to expand your knowledge.
For example, your holiday book choice was
'A Brief History of Time' by Steven Hawking,
Which none of us could actually understand!*

*When I think of you,
I think of your unannounced outings,
Where no one would know where you were,
But you would come back with random pieces of
recycling,
Adamant you could create another one of your DIY
inventions.*

*When I think of you,
I will think of our laughs and our hugs,
And all the precious moments we shared together,
Which I will treasure in my heart forever.*

Thank you for being the Appa you were.

Meditations

We Are Connected!!

Abraham Varghese, Hermon MTC, Midland
Some of you may have read the news item [Mar '17] about IKEA, the popular furniture retailer, and one of the trucking companies that transport IKEA's flat-packed furniture all over Europe. The drivers employed by the trucking firm, it appears, were paid so poorly that they could not even afford to buy a simple meal, or get basic accommodation in the countries they had to pick up, pass through and drop off the goods. It shocked me; this story is from Western Europe, not central Africa. I have always thought of IKEA as a good, ethically conscious and progressive retailer, and there are many items of IKEA furniture in our house. It shocked me that the good prices I get at IKEA are due, in part, to the poor wages received by the Romanian (IKEA) truck drivers. It brought to my mind the fundamental fact about all humanity – we are all connected, in more ways than we imagine. The decisions we take and choices we make affect the lives of many others, both near and far, like ripples in a lake that spread far and wide when a stone is dropped into the water. Our lives are intertwined with those of strangers who we may never know, like a giant spider web; touch any part of the web, the whole web shakes.

Remember Jesus' response when questioned by a scribe what the greatest commandment was: "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these" [Mark 12: 29-31]. Jesus put two things immediately next to each other – God and man, the Divine and human. It was not, "...you shall love the Lord . . . and by the way, there are people as well, you know. . ." All the Law and the Prophets depend on [Mathew 22:40] the two commandments on God and fellow humans, declared Jesus. Our gateway to eternal life is not just 'vertical', our relationship to God; there is an accompanying 'horizontal' part, our relationship with fellow human beings. In the Lenten season such as now, we tend to

focus purifying ourselves for a closer relationship with God. Jesus, in these golden verses, reminds us that we are connected to each other and all of humanity. As William Barclay says in one of his prayers, 'we live and move and have our being in God.' – we are, at the core of our being connected to God Almighty. But that's not all; the stranger on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho (whose story immediately follows these verses), the Romanian truck driver, the dinner ladies at schools who feed our children, the test cricket umpire who surely made the wrong LBW decision and upset us terribly, we are all connected. And Jesus' words leave no room for doubt as to what our relationship should be – "...Love your neighbour as yourself..."

How do we demonstrate this connectedness? There is a conversation that takes place between Gandhiji and the leaders at a crucial time in the Indian freedom struggle with the British, in the well-known Attenborough movie about the life of the Mahatma. Many of the leaders are, rightly, very angry at the British, having faced years and decades of exploitation, and want to resort to armed conflict. Gandhiji, however, would have none of it. 'We want to see them off as friends. . . .' he says in the movie. Friends, nothing less! Imagine! No calculation of how much pain and indignity was inflicted, what was the loss of GDP for India, or what reparations should be paid. Gandhiji wanted friends, and wanted India to be friends with Britain. He could see the essential humanity of the Brits he was dealing with. 'Seeing people as friends', rather than as a mob out to get you, in various situations, is a good way to demonstrate and practice our connectedness.

One of the first questions that many of us ask instinctively when we meet someone from Kerala is about their family name. We are trying to establish a connection with the stranger. I can recall many long, lively conversations where people in my grandparents' generation would try to probe and establish distant family connections with people they meet; I'm sure many of you can as well. Establishing a blood relationship was what opened the gates to any kind of association with the stranger for many in that generation; this was true in many traditional cultures, including the one Jesus was part of. Hence Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan, where a foreigner (an immigrant, for us today) goes out of his way to help a stranger, must have shocked many in his

audience. And it challenges us today to look beyond our families and established relationships to the wider world, and recognise the invisible threads that bind all of humanity, past, present and future, together.

I heard a story about a farmer who grew award-winning corn. Each year he would enter his corn in the state farm fair, and would come out the winner for the best corn. After a few years of non-stop awards, a newspaper reporter interviewed him and learned something interesting about how he grew it. The reporter discovered that the farmer shared his seed corn with his neighbours. "How can you afford to share your best seed corn with your neighbours when they are entering corn in competition with yours?" the reporter asked. "Why sir," replied the farmer, "didn't you know? The wind picks up pollen from the ripening corn and swirls it from field to field. If my neighbours grow inferior corn, cross-pollination will steadily degrade the quality of my corn. If I am to grow good corn, I must help my neighbours grow good corn." The farmer is very much aware of the connectedness of life – life of his corn plants, and his own livelihood and that of his neighbours. His corn cannot improve or stay on top unless his neighbour's corn also improves.

We live in a very competitive world, where at times we feel it is necessary to step over others in order to thrive, or even survive. Therefore keeping the truth of connectedness real and alive in our hearts and souls is all the more essential, if we are to be faithful to Jesus' words, if we are to love our neighbours as much as we love ourselves and our children. And it's important to keep this truth alive at all times. Often, in times of disaster, people come together naturally; the thought 'we're all in it together' is on top of people's minds when going through a crisis. I'm sure you have all read stories of kindness and extraordinary generosity in Chennai last year when there were serious floods in the city. The crisis goes away and we go back to our shells the very next hour. This is very much our nature, our sinful nature in action. The truth is we're all in it together all the time. I recall a few weeks ago noticing the absence of lettuce the vegetables' section of the Sainsbury's I normally go to, something very unusual; we don't expect to see empty shelves or lack of variety in our supermarkets. Lettuce was missing that time because the harvest was quite poor – not in Shropshire, or in West Midlands, but in Spain. We are connected, not by WhatsApp

or social media or the internet – we are connected by flesh and blood and sweat and tears. According to Wikipedia, there are about 2.1 million blood donations annually in England, making up the NHS requirement of about 8000 units of blood every day. In biblical terms, that's 2.1 million good Samaritans handing over their two denarii to the innkeeper, asking doctors and nurses to take care of a stranger whose face they will never see.

The Lebanese poet Kahlil Gibran said: "Speak not of peoples and laws and Kingdoms, for the whole earth is my birthplace and all humans are my brothers." This Lenten season, as you turn your attention to God, spare a thought for your (and my) army of sisters and brothers in every part of the world – created in the image of God, proclaimed as our neighbour by Jesus Christ, our Lord.

‘Tear down the barriers!’

Revd Dr. David Cornick*



Five hundred years ago an Augustinian monk who was also a professor of theology in an upstart new university in Saxony unwittingly changed the world.

Martin Luther was a complicated man, a passionately devout monk; a perceptive, original and courageous theologian unafraid to stand up for what he considered the truth even though the church and the world stood against him; a foul-mouthed reactionary polemicist who actively encouraged the slaughter of the peasants who dared rebel against the state in 1524; a devoted husband to Kate and in that sense a pioneer of the Protestant family; a skilled linguist whose gave German speakers a peerless vernacular Bible, and an innovator whose command of the new media (in his case print and pamphlets) would have trumped President-Elect Trump.

The legacy of Luther’s quest for the peace of God and his ‘re-discovery’ of justification by faith led to the invention of Protestantism, the division of Europe into religious blocs, and a consequent series of religious wars which wrecked and scarred almost every European nation for the next century and a half. He could never have foreseen those unintended consequences, nor can he be blamed for them. However, half a millennium on, we are the inheritors of that ambiguous legacy.

Its appropriate therefore, that the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity material, which we will begin to use next week (18-25 January) was prepared by the German churches. Germany was permanently scarred by the Thirty Years’ War (1618-48), one of the unintended consequences of Luther’s reformation. The armies of Europe marauded across the states of Germany for thirty years bringing terror and plague in their wake. So deep was the scar that Albert Speer, Hitler’s Armaments Minister, explained their capitulation in 1945 as preventing the decimation of Germany from reaching that scale again.[1]

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Germany knew the pain of religious division as large swathes of the population had to move into either Catholic or Protestant territories. That movement of peoples was echoed in the long wake of the Second World War. The division of Germany into East and West, and the erection of the Berlin Wall, ushered in a new politics of division, symbolised by a literal, physical barrier that ran the length of Berlin, until it fell, extraordinarily and dramatically, in 1989, paving the way for re-unification in 1990.

Speaking out of that unique, terrible, pain-ridden history, the German churches call us to reconciliation. As they considered how they should celebrate the 500th anniversary of the promulgation of Luther’s 95 Theses in October 1517, they decided on a ‘Christusfest’ – a celebration of Christ. They took inspiration from Pope Francis’s *Evangelii Gaudium*. He reminded us that ‘unity prevails over conflict’, for ‘...Christ has made all things one in himself; heaven and earth, God and man, time and eternity, flesh and spirit, person and society’.

The sign of that unity is peace, a peace that is only possible in Christ’s victory. As Pope Francis reflects on that peace, he argues that its locus is first of all within us, for ‘...if hearts are shattered in thousands of pieces, it is not easy to create authentic peace in society.’ This isn’t about negotiation, but about the work of the Spirit who ‘...can harmonise every diversity’ and bring from that conflict a new synthesis, full of new possibilities.[2] Should we wish to see proof of that, we could do no better than look to the experience of the German churches, who out of a cruel, long and deep history of division, call us now to break down barriers. Christ has broken the ultimate barrier, the barrier of death through his death. As we all share in that death, so we all share in his life, the new creation, his reconciliation of all things to himself. Our unity resides in him, and he gives us that ministry of reconciliation.

This Week of Prayer, we need to re-dedicate ourselves to that costly ministry. This year Christians will also commemorate the centenary of the birth of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, one of ten modern martyrs

commemorated in stone on the front of Westminster Abbey. Romero was remarkably talented priest. Ordained in 1942, he had obtained a doctorate from the Gregorian by the age of 26, and seemed set for an exemplary career. After twenty years of admirable parish work, he became a seminary Rector and then the Secretary of Bishops' Conference for El Salvador before being raised to the episcopate. In 1977 he became Archbishop of San Salvador. The government were delighted, left-wing priests disappointed, for he was a judicious conservative. A close friend, a Jesuit priest, Rutilio Grande, was assassinated a month later for his work amongst the poor. Romero was deeply moved – ‘...I thought, if they have killed him for doing what he did, then I too have to walk the same path.’

The El Salvadorian government must have felt like Henry II when he appointed Thomas Becket as Archbishop of Canterbury – that they had the church sorted. Like Henry II, they were wrong, for as the Revolutionary Junta came to power in 1979 with the backing of Carter's America, they found in their Archbishop a determined champion of the rights of the poor. In less than three years, six priests were murdered, more than fifty attacked and calumniated, and thousands of ordinary worshippers were threatened, tortured or ‘disappeared’.

It was but a matter of time, and on 24th March 1980, Romero was shot down whilst celebrating mass in the chapel of the Divine Providence cancer hospital where he lived. The week before he died, Romero preached on the same texts chosen by the German churches for this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity – 2 Cor 5 and Luke 15:11-32 (the prodigal son). Look at the ways, he said, in which left condemns right, and right left. Look at the hatred and the violence – ‘So many people are members of different groups and they are polarised and perhaps members of the same group do not love one another because in reality love cannot exist when there is so much polarisation and hatred. We need to tear down the barriers! We need to realise that there is one Father who loves everyone and awaits us all!....I am not able to speak about reconciliation with any other words except by saying that we must be united with Christ....God is in Christ reconciling all things to himself.’[3]

We too are called to that costly ministry in our deeply divided nation and world. May God grant us the grace, insight and courage that he gave to those two remarkable servants of his whom we commemorate this year – Martin Luther and Oscar Romero.

The Revd Dr David Cornick is General Secretary of Churches Together in England.

[1] Neil MacGregor *Germany: memories of a nation* (London, Allen Lane, 2014) p.xxxiv

[2] *Evangelii gaudium* paras 226-30

[3] Oscar Romero ‘Reconciliation in Christ, true liberation’

www.romerotrue.org.uk/sites/default/files/homilies/reconciliation_christ_true_liberation.pdf

Accessed 13.01.17

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Happy Birthday

May God Continue to bless our Thirumeni Appachan
with the comfort of good health and happiness



100
BIRTH CENTENARY
CELEBRATION

MAR CHRYSOSTOM
BIRTH CENTENARY CELEBRATION

