



The Mar Thoma

ECHO



new year  
new beginnings

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# Message from Diocesan Episcopa



Dearly beloved in Christ,

Greetings from *Sinai Mar Thoma Centre* at this season of Christmas!

As we have come to the close of the year, let us thank God for the Divine blessings that we received as a faith community. Yes, with thankfulness we enter into the New Year with hope and expectation. At this time I wish to express my appreciation to the editorial board of the online magazine ECHO for the service rendered in getting connected to the members of the Mar Thoma Community. Pray that the insights and information passed through ECHO be useful and challenging to all who participate through its readership.

Renewal of life is something that everyone long for and try to attain through the relationship with the Divine. 'See, I am making all things new' is the assurance that we receive through scripture (Rev. 21). The old has value, yet the new brings the promise. St. Paul speaks about the old being and new being. 'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new being. The old has gone and the new has come.' Life is centered with hopes, expectations and promises. The more one becomes close to Christ, the more refreshing one will be. Our desires, habits, attitudes, all will change and there will be renewed power and strength. The 'in Christ' experience will bring this change and all will feel a new relationship and a new life in all respects.

The Christ-centred life in a world of chaos and confusion is what is expected of the faith community. This will bring meaning to our presence and relevance through participation in the mission of God. The commitment to the mission and call for change gives new insights to have a new destiny to live on and a new divinity to live with. Often we are left with the question, where are we moving to and with whom are we journeying forward? Does Christ event bring change to the attitude and perception of the people who are in darkness? Nations need God and people of God should be witnesses to God. The return of religion in many contexts is looked upon with much concern in the modern times. It has been said that 'we now begin to see what is lost in a culture which narrows its concerns to the self, the fulfilment of its desires and the expression of its feelings. What is lost is a meaningful cosmos, a public world, a sense of the past and a sense of the future.' Unless we broaden our vision we will end up in narrow parochialism. This is the caution as we move to the future. Let the celebration of the coming of the Messiah and the vision for the New Year becomes an occasion to fulfil the plan of God and live a life giving glory to God.

It is our wish and prayer that God may continue to strengthen the faith community to reflect Christ in a changing world, with the spiritual power to overcome the worldly pleasures and attractions. May the spirit of God guide and counsel us to journey forward with the peace that we experience and the love that we share as a community of faith.

With love and prayers,  
Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos  
**Diocesan Episcopa**





# ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

Christmas 2016

## The Archbishop of Canterbury's Ecumenical Christmas Letter

Greetings in the name of Jesus, the Word made flesh who by the action of God and the obedience of His blessed Mother, the God bearer, came to dwell among us, Emmanuel.

In November, I visited Pakistan to express solidarity with Christian communities across the country, which have suffered much over recent years. We remember the slaughter of innocent worshippers on Easter Sunday 2016 in Lahore, and before that the attack on worshippers in Peshawar at Christmas 2013 and many other incidents. Such attacks are not only designed to inflict appalling suffering but also to sow fear in the heart of Christian, and other minority communities. During the visit I spoke with some of the survivors of these attacks, and I was deeply moved and humbled by their extraordinary courage in continuing to be faithful witnesses of Jesus. They spoke of knowing now more than ever that Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

In many parts of our troubled, uncertain world, Christian minority communities along with other minorities are being similarly targeted. In some places, this is motivated by a desire to eradicate the indigenous Christian presence completely. These are acts not only of terror but of genocide; criminal acts for which the international community must bring those guilty to account. Yet although so vulnerable and often forgotten and marginalised, our brothers and sisters are being courageous in the Lord. Indeed, 'God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong' (1 Corinthians 1.27).

In other places conflict and corruption have become so normal that the world forgets the suffering of the poor.

I ask your prayers for those of us who live in safety that we may not be bystanders afar off, beating our breasts as we retire to the security of our homes, but that we may draw nearer to the cross of Jesus, stand there alongside our suffering brothers and sisters and be ready to take our part in practical action for change. I pray that Christ will strengthen all his people in our inner being with power through the Holy Spirit to be faithful, to have courage and to live in hope.

More than ever we need Christ like communities proclaiming the good news of the gospel in word and action. In many countries there is no persecution but there is apathy and complacency which leads us, in the striking words of Pope Francis, to be practical atheists.

Lambeth Palace, London SE1 7JU

The measure of a Christ-like community is the extent to which it holds the vulnerable and marginalised of the world at the centre of its life. Jean Vanier, the founder of L'Arche, helped the Primates of the Anglican Communion to see this at our meeting in January this year. He has said elsewhere: 'To live with Jesus is to live with the poor, to live with the poor is to live with Jesus' (*Community and Growth* 1989).

More than ever, we have a strong sense of the unity of Christians. God hears the prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ that we 'may be one, so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (John 17. 21) and even now is fulfilling his prayer. While we are deeply conscious today of the ecumenism of blood, we also live in the ecumenism of hope and we are called to an ecumenism of action. To live with the vulnerable and marginalised, with Jesus Christ at the centre of our communities and at the heart of our ecumenical relations, to act together out of love and in love, love that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, is also to live as those who sow hope. Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life' (John 8.12). John the Evangelist, in words that will be heard in many of our churches during the forthcoming Christmas season, also strengthens us with this message: 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it' (John 1.5).

In our common celebration of the light of Jesus coming into the world, may we then encourage and build up one other, and so may the Church in every place, united in suffering and in hope, shine with his light and act with his strength, today.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Justin Welby', with a stylized flourish at the end.

The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby  
Archbishop of Canterbury

# Editorial

## New Beginnings

The first sentence in the Bible is “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”. It is also the same beginning in St. John’s prologue to his gospel, “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with Go. . . .” New beginning is a favourite theme of every New Year. It is a very common human experience of mourning for the ‘good old times’ even as we wait for the possibilities of a golden new beginning. Every hope is pregnant with a new beginning. New beginnings are not without the pain of birth pangs. New beginnings are risky, but often they are not without rewards as every mother would tell us. At birth we enter the world with a cry and others greet us with joy and smile; at the end of life people often leave the world with a smile on their face, but then people around them cry; these are paradoxes of life and death. Therefore, we live in between these two realities: crying and smiling. T. S. Elliot’s poem, East Coker, ends with a line: “In my end is my beginning.” This thought is also reflected in Natalie Sleeth’s poem, ‘Hymns of Promise’:

“In our end is our beginning; in our time eternity;  
In our doubt there is believing; in our life eternity,  
In our death, a resurrection; at the last, a victory,  
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone  
can see.”

Israel’s history is a composite of endless stories of new beginnings, exile and return; it is the spiritual experience of many people as well, going away from God and then returning to God and repeating it again and again in endless ways. The quantum physics tells about a universe, which is contracting and expanding and the cycle continues. The empty tomb at the centre of the Christian faith tells us that even death is not the end, but it is a life transforming new beginning. Every attempt that God made with Israel to restore relationship and heal a fractured-world failed to certain extent because of human infidelity. But ever patient and merciful God did not give up. God ended those early chapters of human history with a new beginning; Jesus, meaning the one who rescues and one who saves,



becomes God’s new beginning to heal the world. However, even this amazing new beginning of the Christmas story moves towards the climax on Good Friday with the death of Jesus on the cross, but we are blessed with yet another new beginning with the resurrection experiences, and all the grace-filled hope and promises. It is in this ever living sacred mystery of the new beginning in Jesus Christ that we live. St. Paul reminded the Athenians what their poets wrote: “For in him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17: 28). The greatest Persian Mystical poet of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century also wrote the following about a selfless life, and the need of returning to the roots of our being.

“Don’t go away, come near.

Don’t be faithless, be faithful.

Find the antidote in the venom.

**Come, return to the root of the root of your Self.**

Once you get hold of selflessness,

You’ll be dragged from your ego

And freed from many traps.

**Come, return to the root of the root of your Self.”**

There are times in our family, parish fellowship and community living when we need a new beginning under the grace of God. We cannot solve certain destructive issues because of our pride, arrogance and self-centredness. Perhaps, we have moved away from a true relationship with God in spite of our ‘church-centred’ way of doing everything according the rule book of an institutionalised church. Christianity and ‘church-

centred-ways' are not always the same because of ego-centred activities and power games people play, which disturb the miracle of God's amazing grace. We need to 'return to our roots.' One needs absolute humility and self-emptying to have the following realisation:

"In order to possess what you do not possess  
You must go by the way of dispossession."

In order to arrive at what you are not  
You have to go through the way in which you are not.

And what you do not know is the only thing you know

And what you own is what you do not own

And where you are where you are not" (TS Elliot).

This self-realisation is a cathartic process of a new beginning of humbling ourselves for living within the amazing grace of God. A new beginning with God is always possible no matter how hurt, depressed or low we are. This new beginning with God is possible with repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation with God and fellow human beings and the community in which we belong. St. Peter is a prime example for those of us who have failed. Peter's denial three times and his restoration is a good example of a new beginning on a spiritual journey with God; he was reconciled and restored to an intimate relationship Jesus Christ; Peter was hit so low in the darkest hour of his life and journey with Jesus on that courtyard when the cock crowed twice (Mark 14: 66-72). Peter's tears, sincere brokenness, cathartic confession cemented the relationship with Jesus, but Jesus paid a very heavy price for making this possibility available for all of us. Let us accept this never ending offer of reconciliation for leading a 'purpose-driven life,' and having a 'covenanted-vocation' in God and for God. Let God's glory be our supreme concern now and at all times. Nothing, even death, can destroy the hope of a person-in-Christ; on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1945, Bonhoeffer was hanged for his involvement in a plot against Hitler and his last words were, "This is the end- for me the beginning of life." What a man! What courage! What a hope!

'The end is the beginning' is the message that we received during the funeral service of late Mr. T. C. George. He has died aged 87 on 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2016. He was affectionately known as Baby. He stood tall like a mighty oak tree, through storm clouds of many illnesses hovered around him; he carried on with calm serenity. We may remember

many of his characteristic observations, wits and humour, and he was never afraid in making a truly original comment on anything. The poet asked the oak tree, 'why you are so strong?' The tree answered:

"But I have roots stretched in the earth.

Growing stronger since my birth, you will never touch them, for you see, they are the deepest part of me."

Baby was always so strong and his faith never wavered. He taught us so much about life, love and family loyalty and values, but most of all about Christian faith. Let us pray to God to give us that faith, which sustained Baby all these years. We offer our condolences to the family. May his soul rest in peace and resurrect in glory.

We also offer condolences to the family of late Mr. G. F. Thomas, whose obituary is published in this issue. May his soul rest in peace and resurrect in glory.

The Diamond Jubilee celebration of the Mar Thoma Community is also the end of varied experiences of our living in a new country for the last sixty or so years and a new beginning with immense possibilities. Let us offer thanks to our Lord for protecting us and providing us for all these years and depend entirely on God for new beginnings for each one of us. However, we also should consider the wisdom of what Churchill said during the Second World War in his Mansion House speech: "Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning." Our hope for 'the end of the beginning' is in the second coming of Jesus, Parousia (Heb. 9: 28); it is indeed the end of all beginnings, a new earth, a new heaven, and the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21, 22). The ECHO editorial board wishes all of you a very happy New Year.

# New Year Challenges: St. Paul is reaching out to us

“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ” (1Thess. 5: 16).

How often do we pray for real fellowship in our parish? Praise God for all the things that are great about our parishes, and ask God in prayer to transform all the flaws and challenges we face together as a faith community.

St. Paul challenges the Thessalonians to test their faith in his first letter to them, in chapter 5. Below are some questions arising from the passage, they give us a means to measure our commitments. **It is indeed the right time at the beginning of a New Year to ask these questions:**

1. Are we respecting our ordained Christian leaders? (Vs 12, 13).

2. Are we living in unity with our fellow Christians in our parish? Are we welcoming and embracing them? (Vs13,26).

3. Are we caring for other Christians – with patience, admonishing, encouraging or helping them? (V 14).

4. Are we responding well to those who harm us? Or are we reacting with aggression? Are we seeking to do well to all we meet? (V 15).

5. Have we got a good attitude to worship? Joyfulness? Constancy in prayer? An attitude of gratitude? An openness to the Spirit and the prophetic – while testing everything and holding onto that which is good? (Vs 16–21, 25).

6. Are we living a holy life, abstaining from evil? (V22).

7. Are involved in studying Scripture regularly? (V 27).

We hope that the above questions and reflections would be helpful to have a new beginning in our loving Christian fellowship in our parishes in our Diamond Jubilee year.

# For A New Beginning

Revd Alexander Tharakan, Tabore MTC,  
Manchester

We always try to apply new things in our life. That is one of the natures of human beings. People are interested in casting off old habits and putting the new one. Anytime we let go of something old, there is discomfort and even pain; we always try to pursue new beginning in our life or having a desire for new beginning. To start a new beginning, we usually opt month of January. The month was called “January” because the Romans named it after their god Janus means god of the beginning – depicted as having two faces – one looking back at the old year with regret, and the other face looking forward to the New Year with hope. When we are entering into another new year, we should look back and look forward. Let us see what St. Paul says about it.

St Paul’s letter to Philippians chapter 3, verse 13 says: to have a new beginning, we should forget what lies behind, **the things that pull back us from moving forward.** Mainly lost opportunities and bad experiences prevent us from going forward. They are the things holding us back from moving forward to start a new beginning. Philippians 3: 5-7 Paul gives a detailed list, which Paul had lost for the sake of Christ; these were: he was circumcised on the eighth day; he belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, he was a Pharisee; to his zeal, he was a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, he was blameless. But whatever he gained he had counted as loss for the sake of Christ. It is a painful feeling to look back on life and forgetting the past. But we must not allow the failures of the past to cloud our vision of the future.

And in 2 Corinthians 11: 24-27 Paul explains the bad experiences he had gone through while he was serving for Christ. These included: five times he received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one; three times he was beaten with rods, once he was stoned, three times he was shipwrecked; a night and a day he was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. But from



Roman prison, he writes to the Philippians that, he is forgetting what lies behind for a new life with Christ. We do not allow our past failures, hurts, and disappointments to keep us from experiencing God's best for our lives.

Former American president George Washington once said, "We should not look back unless it is to derive useful lessons from past errors, and for profiting by dearly bought experience."

We need to read about the past in order to understand the present. People without a grasp of history are like a person without a memory; you know how dangerous it is. Many of our current beliefs and traditions are properly understood only when we see how they have emerged. Sometimes it's good to look back to remind ourselves of the greatness of God's grace. It keeps us humble – it makes us thankful. But to dwell on the past bad habits may persuade you to repeat it. As I have said before, look at the difference between the windshield and the rear-view mirror. The rear-view mirror is much smaller, because it is designed for us to briefly glance at – not stare at. Safe driving requires you to focus on what's in front of you, not what's going on behind you. And the same can be said of life. If you want to succeed, you've got to let go of the past.

God is the God of new beginning. He is the God of second chances, third, and beyond. His new beginning and new life allow us to live our lives to the fullest, regardless of what we've lost or let go. He is our hope. He will help us to forget all our wounds and pains. For in Christ, we are never alone. We are always loved. We can always expect the best from God. He sees far beyond our pain and suffering and has a way of making every new beginning beneficial to us and to those around us if we let Him. Through this process, we're able to thrive and even discover peace and joy amidst the letting go.



## New beginning

*Revd Abraham. P. Mathew, St. Thomas, MTC,  
Bristol*

We are in a new year with new vision and new expectations. As we say 'good bye' to 2016, we are giving up many things and moving forward with 'newness'. Our human life is influencing by various social cultures. Many of them are with good values, but on the other hand many are not. Here as a true Christian believer, our responsibility is to convey the good values to the next generation through our life.

Let me try to examine 4 different movements that can be practiced in our life as a new beginning. These are very common to us in our social, spiritual and cultural levels.

### **1. A true witness**

The word 'witness' is common to all of us. This means to produce to the society, what we absorbed. This can be in words and deeds. In all court cases witness plays an important role. In our day to day life we can become witness of Jesus Christ. This means we accept Christ and produce the qualities of Christ to others, in words and works. If we cannot do it we are simply hiding Christ. So we may be called as false witness. So, right witness at the right time is essential today.

- a) **Accepting others:** Jesus said 'love your neighbour as you'. Everybody have their own identity. The reason for almost all problems in the church and other groups in the society is our inability to accept others. This means we are not ready to listen to others' voice, ideas and needs. Our attitudes are 'I am OK, but you are not OK'.
- b) **Encouraging Others:** Throughout his public ministry Jesus taught many lessons to the disciples as well as other people. He encouraged the disciples when they failed in different situations. E.g.: In the feeding of the 5000, Jesus gives them a second chance to feed the common people after they lose the faith in Jesus. Similarly Strengthening of Peter when he betrayed Jesus etc. Here Jesus shows the kingdom values to them. This is actually Jesus' witness about the kingdom. Our church and society are the places where we can witness the kingdom values: love, joy, peace. . . . Etc. are best examples.

## 2. Real confession.

We are familiar with the word 'confession'. It is not only a word but a clear action. We need confession when we fail to do. By confessing we are dedicating ourselves for a new beginning. We need to admit our failures and sins before God almighty. Here also we can see the accepting nature of God. He accepts all those who are confessing (coming back to God). E.g. Lk.15:11-32 – the parable of the prodigal son. Here the father accepts his younger son when he returns.

a) **Our Self:** we are living with our 'self'. The level of self may vary according to our own perceptions. We think that our understanding, opinion, quality, qualifications, habits, character and doings are of high values. Here the question is can we give a space to others?

b) **Relationship Vs Prejudice:** To keep good relationship with others is our responsibility. But now the problem is the quality of our relations are going down day by day. Now the world is in our fingertips, but on the other hand our attachment become detached. The reasons are our self and prejudice about others. This is because of some false information or because of some negative attitudes etc. Can we have a new movement in this matter as a new beginning?

## 3. A word of gratitude.

Thanksgiving is another attitude that we learn to practice. It is to God and man. We have very much blessings from God almighty in the past years as individual, family and as a church. God expects a thankful heart from us for all our blessings. Are we really thinking about this? Today the human beings are neglecting this element. They are not thinking about God's blessings. If we truly counting the blessings we need to have some changes in our attitudes. We can live according to God's will and produce the fragrance of God in the society as our gratitude. This is our obligation. We are selected and appointed to witness God's blessings to our generations.

## 4. Be faithful in all our activities.

We believe that God is so faithful to us. God expects the same faithful movement from us. It is a movement which is next to God. When we lose faithfulness between two persons, even it is between husband and wife, they can't continue

the relationship. Likewise God is expecting that we should be faithful as He is faithful.

a) **Money:** we must be faithful in money matters. In Mathew 25 Jesus says about the story of talents. In this story he tries to teach us about the faithful dealing of talents/wealth. A faithful and accountable dealing of money. But now people are not faithful in money matters. So there should be a new movement.

b) **Talks:** What we are talking is important. Our topics and intention of talking to each other need to be taken care of. Many people are wounding others by words directly and indirectly. Gossips are other important meaningless talks among people. Our phone calls, e-mails, messages and other form of communications play very valuable role in this society. Through these mediums we can encourage and discourage others. Again the question is can we talk faithfully? People may get badly hurt by our loose talks.

To conclude, we can correct ourselves by keeping all the above mentioned movements carefully. This is the new beginning of our life. May God almighty help all of us for a vibrant future.



# God has a Plan: A Diamond Jubilee Thought

Everything happens for a reason. God has a plan for each and every single person He has put in this world. We have influenced positively or negatively the life of every single person we have come across. Everything we say and do can leave footprints in people's hearts. Some memories may not be good, but we need to trust and carry on. We need to have an 'I-Thou' attitude of reverence and respect for everyone. God has given us privilege to address him as 'our Father.' Therefore, it should be our response to believe in the brotherhood and sisterhood of humanity.

God has a purpose for our lives regardless of how weak or untalented we or others may think we are. God knows what we are capable through His grace and has chosen us to be a part of His plan. Despite our shortcomings and faults, God loves us and wants us to be a part of His ultimate plan. We may not feel this at all times, we may have our disappointments and criticism from unexpected quarters, but God has promised to help and support us all to do amazing things through the power of the Holy Spirit. God continues to choose people, who are not expected to be important, to play a big role in His overall plans. We are all ultimately chosen by God to do His work. There is indeed a covenant of vocation. Let us pray and dedicate ourselves for completing the proposed projects of the Diamond Jubilee. We need the



whole-hearted support of each and every member for its success.

# The boy who met God



*[The boy who had the following amazing experience of an encounter with God wrote the following in 2001 is now a fine English gentleman of 80 years of age. He was born in Hong Kong and his father was a colonial officer; he spent his childhood in Hong Kong. He had a mystical experience of God in 1952. We became friends in 2016 and continue to talk confidentially about our life and experiences. I publish this with his permission, but keeping his identity anonymous. I hope this living testimony is of help to you. This was the beginning of many other miraculous incidents in his life when God protected him, which still continues through the grace of God. Should you have any questions, please direct them through me. Dr. Zac Varghese, Sinai MTC, London, UK]*

I had reached the tender age of sixteen and was in the depths of total despair, GCE O Level Exams were only weeks away and my school reports were not pretty reading, quite simply my teachers had given up all hope of my passing.

In abject misery I threw myself on the settee, buried my face in the cushion and said out loud with complete conviction, "I wish I was dead". Immediately everything went black and I seemed to be falling and rotating like water down a plughole. At the same time there was the most hideous and triumphant laughter that you could possibly imagine. I was terrified and as I spiralled downwards then a small voice said "Do something before it's too late" and I didn't know what to do. Finally in desperation I cried, "Dear God, please help me". For a fraction of an agonising second nothing happened and then everything changed and I seemed to be coming round in a vertical position with a Presence on my left and my right, they were being mildly rebuked for the situation I was in. I then heard my left Presence say that I

was difficult. The voices seemed to be aware I was coming to and stopped. Eventually my vision cleared and I appeared to be in a large dim hall facing a very bright light enclosing a tall human shape. Even though I was aware of the two Presences on my left and right, my entire attention was focussed on this light; it was not a blinding piercing light that you would get from looking into a spotlight, but at the same time, no matter how hard I tried I could not look directly at it.

A wonderful soft voice came out of this light and it said in a loving fatherly tone “You must live your life”, then a pause followed by “It will be a good life”. The scene before me disappeared and then every worry I ever had seemed to be lifted off my shoulders and at the same time I was enveloped in a kind of love that was so intense that there is no word in any language that could adequately describe how I felt. The best description would be absolute joy, elation, a huge weight off my shoulders, a feeling of renewal, massive confidence and that my very existence had real meaning and purpose. I felt as if I could fly and do anything I wanted to do. I then felt myself dropping slowly and going through what I could best describe as layers of negativity which seemed to dull the vivid intensity of love and joy I had experienced, however the memory of it was retained. I finally came to in my body.

For a brief moment I could not move a muscle, my body felt like it had not been used for some time; there was no pain or pins and needles, just a huge inertia as if I was made of lead. Gradually I could move my arms, legs, lift my head, then suddenly everything functioned and I literally jumped for joy.

After the euphoria died down I began thinking about what I should do and the first thought was about becoming a priest, but then I realised that I had not been asked to do anything except live my life, there were no conditions. I had been given second chance of life and was to experience it with an infinitely more positive attitude than previously. Also I received the feeling that life is to be enjoyed, as well as being a learning process, but the most important thing of all I now knew that there was a loving heavenly father exactly as Jesus described him and that he had intervened for somebody as insignificant as me. Up to now I

have mainly kept this to myself in case I was put away in an institution as some kind of neurotic. But as I have become older the need to inform others has overcome the fear of criticism, also the world has moved on from my youth and has more empathy.

I am living proof of the existence of a loving God. That does not make me feel special but it does allow me to look at all of you and know that you also are living proof of that same God, in fact your belief is based on pure faith which demands far more and in my eyes makes you all special.

I am living proof of the existence of Evil and if you follow its path there may be a point of no return; however before that point is reached good can overcome evil.

I am living proofs that if you are in serious trouble ask for divine help and it will be granted; do not think you will not be helped for any reason. By my plea I acknowledged the existence, his existence and his power to help me.

I am living proof that something truly wonderful awaits us when our time is up and that this life has purpose and meaning and that we cannot imagine what it all means from our limited physical perspective of the world.

Most important of all I hope I have given you a practical insight of what to expect and what to do if you have a similar experience. Please do not repeat my experience knowingly and recall Jesus’ statement to Satan in the wilderness – “Do not put the Lord thy God to the Test”.

I find it ironic that we are bombarded with vast amounts of paper and advice on how we should live our lives but very little on how to die and yet as human beings that is our inevitable destiny. For me, I hope that I may return and face my maker with gratitude, love and appreciation at the fact that I am actually allowed to exist at all.

Finally, it is impossible to make judgements on matters spiritual from our limited perspective to any doubters, the first person who saw me after my experience was my mother who said to me “I do not know what it is about you but somehow you have changed”. For the record I left school with nine O Levels and left behind a collection of extremely embarrassed and confused teachers. I

obtained two more O levels after a two week cramming course in the RAF and ended up as a professionally qualified electronics engineer with letters after my name. I was not gifted with a bucketful of extra brains just motivated to apply what I had.

I hope the knowledge of my experience will help you live your lives not only with faith and prayer but also with the absolute confidence that a future existence wonderful and vivid beyond all human conception awaits each and every one of us.

May God Bless You All.



## Faith-based Constructive Resistance

### Study Based on the Book of Daniel

*Rev. Dr. Alexander M. Isaac*

Book of Daniel has a series of inspiring stories which give us hermeneutical tools to analyze the tone and content of the art of Christian living today. The maxim, 'when the going gets tough the tough gets going' can be true with those who are morally upright. Daniel and his friends had to prove this when they found themselves sandwiched between an alien culture and pristine Judaic faith.

Many scholars believe the book of Daniel to have exilic origins in the sixth century BCE. Others agree that that it as a re-telling of the exilic story as a resistance literature for a persecuted religious community in the second century BCE when faith was again under fire. The scope of this study is to have an ethical reading of the story of Daniel as the prophet-statesman and his three friends stage a constructive resistance to alien culture saying No to a world of convenience and compromise. The ethical question is what kind of faith it takes to survive and thrive in a hostile and alien culture.

### Ministry of Convenience vs. Discipline

We are familiar with convenience stores where one gets a selection of basic amenities packaged and readily available for the convenience of the shoppers. In a world of convenience we are familiar with words like accommodation, pragmatism, and maintaining the status quo. In a fast-track world we need a fresh look at the religious disciplines to keep us connected with God and the world. As a prophet and a statesman, a man of spiritual disciplines, Daniel is a role model for a faithful community.

Nebuchadnezzar enlisted the most promising youngsters of the empire into government service and they could get the best and rigorous training in the Royal Academy. At the outset Daniel and comrades set their priorities straight by resorting to a vegetarian diet, and thereby possibly avoid ceremonial defilement. At the time of crisis they turned to God's wisdom and the discipline of prayer and a partial fast. They deliberately said 'No' to royal life style and tempting food and 'Yes'

to God's commandments and faithfulness. It is non-conformity with the values of the dominant culture but endorsement of an alternate worldview.

The roaring fiery furnace was a reminder for compliance with the royal edict. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego but do not conform and their disobedience has fatal implications. They proved that a Jew can truly be faithful to *Shema* (Deut. 6: 4-5) even in exile while one walks on a tight rope of faith. ". . . . The God we serve is able to save us from it . . . . But even if he does not . . . . we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Dan. 3: 17-18). This is a powerful statement of faith in the face of a threat of life. A disciplined life of training in faith could yield divine wisdom that enabled them to interpret dreams and visions with far-reaching consequences to the empire.

### **Ministry of Compromise vs. Integrity (Faithfulness)**

Faith requires courage. Daniel and his friends face a trial of faith. In times of adversities and crisis situations the genuineness of a person's faithfulness is tested harshly. The real trial of Jesus was not before the Sanhedrin or Pilate but at the outset of his ministry during temptation and later at the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus could win both temptations with integrity of character and submission to the will of God. Stephen L. Carter defines a key concept 'integrity' having its origin from a Latin word 'integer' meaning 'whole' similar to what integer means in mathematics as a whole or complete number. Carter elaborates the key concept of integrity having ethical implications in our discernment, action, and acknowledgment of a life of integrity.

Integrity does not always require following the rules. Sometimes—as in the civil rights movement—integrity requires breaking the rules. But it also requires that one be open and public about both the fact of one's dissent and the reasons for it. A person who lives an integral life may sometimes reach moral conclusions that differ from those of the majority; displaying those conclusions publicly is a crucial aspect of the wholeness in which integrity consists. (Stephen L. Carter,

*Integrity*, (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 12.

As a person of integrity, Daniel was left with only one choice between obedience to God and loyalty to his government. It was like placed between a rock and a hard place ending up in the lion's den. In the Acts of the Apostles Peter takes a clear stand: "We must obey God rather than any human authority (5:29)." Daniel's practice of praying three times a day empowered him to shut the mouths of lions and enemies. It is worthwhile to note that the first immigrants to New England had nothing but Bible and their Puritan faith to cling to when they faced hostility from the aboriginals and bad weather. Religious leaders need a sacred space for renewal and reorientation in ministry.

There are myriad instances of compromising moral integrity through adjustments, mutual concessions, and settlements in a bid to resolve conflicts and crisis situations in ministry. Those who enter the ministerial vocation today often have meticulous calculations and goals that would enhance the 'survival of the fittest.' Have we lost a sense of discipline and integrity? What is required is a ministry of creative resistance.

### **Ministry of Constructive Resistance**

Daniel could have had a good career and an honored status in life, but he was ready to take risks in life in lieu of those privileges. The moral question today is whether we would 'dare to be a Daniel!'

Mahatma Gandhi used *Satyagraha* as a tool for constructive resistance in the struggle for Indian independence. Reformation in the Western Church and the Malankara Church were similar acts of resistance as a mode of corrective towards orthopraxis. Arch Bishop Oscar Romero of El-Salvador was a great defender of faith leading the faithful in creative resistance against state-sponsored oppression, and subsequently silenced by an assassin's bullets.

### **Conclusion**

Migrant communities encounter faith in transition. Exile is still a social and religious reality. Religious faith and practices are placed in jeopardy in today's world with displacement due

to war or ecological injustice rendering people homeless and uprooted as refugees.

Has religious tolerance become a moral choice in a secular society? Does tolerance today mean indifference or else compromise to evil as against taking a firm prophetic stand? It is safe to move along with the crowd when 'everybody is doing it.' We don't want to take a principled stand when our moral integrity is challenged. Our Pharisaic behavior tends to make us ritually pure but ethically unclean. We take ritual seriously but our orthodoxy does not lead us to orthopraxis.

Our calling is to be a public witness of the reality of our private life. Our personal integrity is tested at the public sphere in the world. Commitment of the faithful leads not to a ministry of convenience and compromise but to discipline and integrity through a life towards faith-based constructive resistance as a prophetic vocation.



**Rev. Dr. Alexander M. Isaac**, M. Sc., B. D., Th. M. (Princeton); Th.D. (Boston) [Ethics & Theology]

He Completes 30 years of ministry in the Mar Thoma Syrian Church in 2017.

Present occupation: Vicar, Kottayam St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church; Visiting Faculty, Dept. of Theology and Ethics, Kottayam Mar Thoma Theological Seminary.

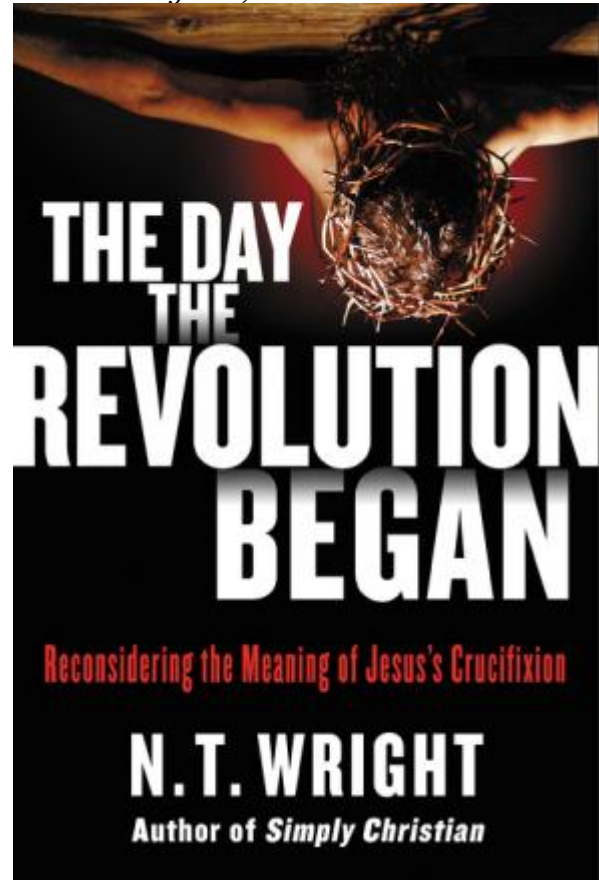
Son of late Rev. M.I Alexander & late Mrs. Mariamma Alexander

Spouse: Prof. Mary Mathew (TKM College of Engineering, Kollam)

Daughter: Irene Miriam Isaac (B. Tech. student at TKM, Kollam)

## Book Review: 'The Day the Revolution Began'

*Dr. Zac Varghese, London*



'The day the Revolution Began' by Tom Wright is published in Great Britain by SPCK and by Harper One in the USA in 2016, SPCK. ISBN 978-0-281-06145-7.

Tom Wright, the former Bishop of Durham, is a most distinguished Pauline scholar and writer of our venues. This book is a treasure-trove of theological insights to be explored. Like some other books by this author, this book also includes the lectures given by the author at various venues; therefore, one may come across many repetitions, but these are like listening to music that one likes. It is a refreshingly interesting book with many fresh insights about Christian faith, theology of the cross and resurrection. The book has 440 pages and is in four parts.

**The first part** is about a new way of looking at the theology of the cross. It challenges the commonly held belief that the sacrificial death of Jesus was about saving mankind from their sins so that they could go to heaven. This book provides new insights into our understanding of the theology of the cross and resurrection. Early

Christians believed that Jesus' death launched a revolution on Good Friday and it had changed the world. This study is an attempt to explain why the crucifixion of Jesus seems to have generated a wide range of interpretation over the last two thousand years. The book is written to make sense of these. He says, 'Theology, after all, was made for the church and not church for theology.' He gives a reason for this fresh interpretation: "It is perilously easy for individuals and communities to drift away from the life-giving meaning of the Gospel, unless someone in each generation is working on foundational Christian truth." He reminds us that we need to press beyond one-line summaries and popular slogans. In this book, he is making an effort to make us understand what Jesus' first followers meant when they said, 'The Messiah died for our sins in accordance with the Bible.'

The Author is asking us to replace the common vision of the Christian hope of 'going to heaven' with the biblical vision of a 'new heaven and new earth.' He argues that Jesus' death on the cross is for restoring human beings with a vocation to play an important role in God's redeeming purposes for the world. It is about replacing a 'work contract' of doing seemingly good things as an investment to go to heaven with a 'covenant of vocation' to establish kingdom values on the earth, which is indeed the essence of radical Christianity. He questions the idea that this world is not our home and Jesus through his death and resurrection taking us to a better place. The cross is not a sign of death, but a sign of the end of death. The cross of Jesus means that we can be forgiven and have a new start, a new life as a new creation.

Some have portrayed God not as a generous creator, the loving Father, but as an angry despot. The powerful love of God is central to every aspect of Christian faith. The cross was the moment when something happened and as a result the world became a different place for loving and caring, inaugurating God's future plan. Jesus died in our place and by doing so God in Christ won a great victory. In the common understanding, what stops us from going to heaven is sin and the sin is dealt with on the Cross once and for all. In the biblical model, what stops us from being genuine humans (bearing the divine image, acting as the royal priesthood) is not only sin, but idolatry that underlines it. This idolatry is

everything that is self-centred and not God-centred. Jesus stands in for Israel to fulfil the divine plan to restore creation itself. This is the short version of the thesis in this book.

**In Part 2** of the book, he talks about sin being bad behaviour deserving punishment and heaven being in fellowship with God. The human problem is not so much sin seen as breaking moral codes, but idolatry and the distortion of humanness sin produces. The common view has been that heaven is a place where 'good people' end up so that human life is gauged in relation to moral achievement or lack thereof. This is the work contract.

The real goal is not heaven in a distant place, but a renewed human vocation within God's renewed creation. Much preaching about the Cross has produced the idea of a 'Work contract'. The work contract is about keeping the moral code that God has given to humanity. Failure would incur punishment and death. Jesus obeyed the moral code and in his death, paid the penalty on behalf of the rest of the human race. Those who avail themselves in Jesus' achievement by believing in him will go to heaven where they will enjoy eternal fellowship with God (Romans 1-3). Righteousness is now considered as a gift because of the cross. What the Bible offers is not a 'works contract', but a 'covenant of vocation'. Vocation is that of being a genuine human being with genuinely human tasks to perform as part of the Creator's purpose for his world. The main task of this vocation is image bearing, reflecting the Creator's wise stewardship of the world and reflecting the praises of all creation back to its maker. We humans are called to stand at the intersection of heaven and earth, holding together in our hearts, our praises.

Sin then is the human failure of vocation; when we sin, we abuse our calling, our privileges, and our possibilities. Through the death of Jesus the original human vocation has been reestablished, so that redeemed humans are now seen as the royal priesthood. Heaven and earth belong together. Humans were made for a purpose, Israel was made for a purpose and that humans and Israel alike have turned from that purpose, distorted the vision, and abused their vocation. Some critics have suggested the whole point of talking about sin is really a way of controlling people. The purpose of the cross is to take us



back, from where we presently are, to God's intended goal.

Western culture has been so wedded to the platonic idea that God's purpose for humans is to leave the world and go to heaven to be with him—as opposed to the biblical ideal that God's purpose for humans is to reflect the praises of creation back to him and reflect his image in the world, as ambassadors, so that ultimately heaven and earth will be one. It is not a rescue from the present world, but a rescue and renewal within the present world. We are here for being part of the healing ministry for healing the fractured world through prayer and complete surrender to God's will. If the exile was to be undone, sin would have to be forgiven. There is beautiful analogy about sin in this book: 'when God looks at sin, what he sees is what a violin maker would see if the player were to use his lovely creation as a tennis racquet.' The biblical promises of redemption have to do with God himself acting because of his unchanging, unshakable love for his people. Non-Jewish sources spoke of a noble death on behalf of others, but in the Bible the rescue has been achieved by Israel's God himself. It was his initiative, his accomplishment, and his love.

**Part 3** is about God's rescue operation of the world in Jesus Christ. The Christian world has so far clung to and taught a meaning of redemption that involves 'saved souls going to heaven.' The NT message is really about the kingdom of God coming to earth as in heaven." It is new heaven and new earth in which justice will be at home" (2 Peter 3: 13). Heaven means God's space. Heaven is where God is, If God is love, and then we meet God where love is. The kingdom of God is accomplished through Jesus' death and then implemented through the suffering of his followers. "With your blood you purchased a people for God" (Rev 5). In this book an effort has been made to explain what "dying for sin" or even "in accordance with the Bible" might actually mean. "For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10: 4). Jesus did indeed go to Jerusalem and die at the Passover time, but why? With the resurrection we find the beginning of the interpretation of the crucifixion. The resurrection convinced Jesus' disciples that he really was Israel's Messiah, despite his shameful death.

Why did Jesus choose Passover to die? Many scholars found it difficult to connect what Jesus meant by God's kingdom with the ancient Jewish expectation. To announce God's kingdom is to announce that God is at last overthrowing the dark powers that enslave his people. To announce God's kingdom is to say this is the time for God to reconstitute his people, rescuing them and regrouping them for a new life with new tasks. To announce God's kingdom is to say, as in Isaiah 52: 7-12, God himself is coming back to display his Glory in person and in power. In any case, what matters for our purposes is that Jesus chose Passover to do what had to be done and indeed to suffer what had to be suffered. Jesus was announcing an event on that day through which freedom and kingdom would become realities in a whole new way. He was launching a new revolution. The kingdom of God is already, but not yet a reality;

When we put Jesus' Temple action (Mark 11: 12-18) into a Passover context, however, it suddenly carries the memory of Moses's confrontation with Pharaoh. Jesus believed that through his death not just Israel but also the whole world would be liberated: ransomed, healed, restored and forgiven. The victory over the powers would be won by Jesus dealing with the people's sins. A new way of looking at the atonement theology is given here: At the centre of the whole picture we do not find a wrathful God bent on killing someone, demanding blood. Instead, we find the image—of the covenant keeping God who takes the full force of sin on to himself. The mention of blood indicates a sacrificial interpretation of Jesus' death. This would, of course, be scandalous, since no good Jew would dream of drinking blood. Jesus chose Passover for his kingdom moment, because Passover always was a kingdom moment, and this was the ultimate one, real victory over the powers of evil. Wherever Jesus went, he celebrated the arrival of the kingdom and offered forgiveness of sin. God was reconciling the whole world to himself in the Messiah (Cor. 5: 19). Jesus will die for the nation, but will thereby do for the world what Israel was called to do but could not do, setting the nations free from their ancient bondage so that they can join the single people of God. Kingdom is not a place called heaven detached from earth. Jesus' death is seen, right across the New Testament, not as rescuing people from the world so that they can avoid hell and go to heaven but as a powerful

revolution—that is, a revolution full of new sort of power—within the world itself. A new sort of power let loose upon the world, it will be the power of self-giving love. This is the heart of the revolution that was launched on Good Friday. Humans were to be saved not for ‘Heaven,’ but for the new creation. They were to share in the royal priestly human work within the present world and the world that was to be.

The call of Abraham, had always envisaged a glorious future not just for Israel, but for the whole world. One can leave behind the old work contract and as new Passover-people, embrace the biblical covenant vocation. The Cross establishes the kingdom of God through the agency of Jesus. In whatever way the NT tells the story of the cross, it is always the story of self-giving love. When Jesus was crucified, the ‘powers’ lost their power, because sin itself had been defeated and sinners forgiven. Jesus’ achievement is a new creation, a new heaven-and-earth world in which humans can resume their genuinely human vocation as the ‘kingdom priests,’ the royal priesthood.

The old covenant is not just with Abraham, but is the promise that through Abraham and his family God would bless all the nations. The early Christian view of Jesus’ death was focussed on the Passover and hence on the Exodus story, now to be experienced as the new liberating event that was also the great one-off ‘sin-forgiving event. Roman Road (Romans 1-4) is the works contract: God requires perfect obedience; all fail, and sin; all must die; Jesus dies in our place; we are forgiven and assured going to heaven. Jesus takes our sins and we take his righteousness. God’s action in Christ gives us the credit, the righteousness we need. We are there for justified.

The world is indeed in a mess; but the Jewish people, armed with the Torah are God’s chosen solution to this problem. Jews have been given the divine vocation of sorting out the mess, of putting the world right. Sometimes, Israel is left out of the salvation story through Jesus and it becomes an anti-Jewish story. We sometime forget that the incarnate Son is also Israel’s Messiah. Romans 4 are all about the covenant that God made with Abraham. Jesus is the Ark of the Covenant, the place of mercy. The restoration of true worship is the goal. When God called

Abraham, he had the Messiah’s Cross in mind all along.

The real revolution took place on the Cross, and the resurrection is the first sign that it took place. God purifies his people in and through the shed blood of Jesus, so that the covenant may be renewed, and not just renewed for Israel, but for the whole world. If exile is the punishment for Israel’s sin, the punishment now falls on the Servant alone. Jesus in himself, and in his death, is the place where the one God meets with his world, bringing heaven and earth together at last, removing by his sacrificial blood the pollution of sin and death that would have made such a meeting impossible.

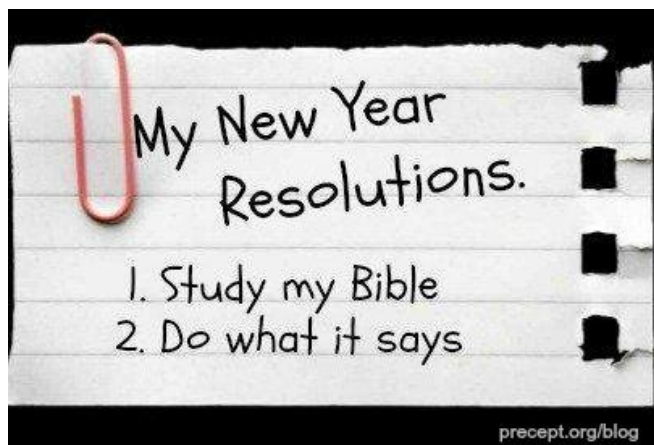
**In Part 4**, Tom Wright writes about the ongoing revolution, which started on the Cross. In recent years several thinkers have made a distinction between mission (church’s task in the world) and evangelism (telling people about Jesus’ death and resurrection and what it means for them). Jesus message is not well summarised by saying that Jesus died so that we can go to heaven. It ignores Jesus’ claim to be launching God’s kingdom on earth as in heaven. It ignores the NT emphasis on the true human vocation, to be the image bearers reflecting God’s Glory to the world and the praises of creation back to God.

He argues the case that ‘victory’ was achieved because Jesus gives himself for our sins rescuing and forgiving humans and so breaking the deadly grip of the power they worshipped is very important. Victory and triumphalism without forgiveness of sin at its heart will be seriously wrong. On the other hand, a mission based on forgiveness of sin where we see things only in terms of saving souls for heaven will go wrong in another direction. The NT insists on both and in their proper relations. When we get this right, the church’s true vocation emerges once more. Christian movement is not a religion in the modern sense, but it is a complete new way of being human in the world and for the world.

The biblical view of what it means to be human, the royal priesthood vocation is more multidimensional than either of the alternatives. “You are in the world and not of the world.” The revolution of the cross set us free to be in-between people, caught up in the rhythm of worship and mission. Very often, when Christian people set out

to make the world a better place, they have sadly left the world a worse place instead. What we have to do is to respond to the love poured out on the cross with love of our own. “The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church.”

Image-bearing humans, obedient to the Creator, are meant to exercise delegated authority in the world in order that life can flourish. Forgiveness is utter gracious love and it is not weakness. Because of the cross, the world as a whole is free to give allegiance to the creator God. Gospel will not allow us to retreat into private Christian space imagined by those for whom the death of Jesus does little except forgive our sins so that we can go to heaven. Tom Wrights concludes: ‘When NT tells the meaning of the cross, it gives us not a system, not a theory, but a meal and an act of humble service (of foot washing) not a celestial mechanism for punishing sin and taking people to heaven, but an earthly story of a human Messiah who embodies and incarnates Israel’s God and who unveils his glory in bringing his kingdom to earth as in heaven.’ I hope this book will encourage people to think afresh about the importance of the Cross in our life and a new outlook on the covenant of vocation to build a world as it should be so that God’s kingdom will flourish on earth. I found the reflections and the analysis of the author inspiring and enriching.



## Diamond Jubilee Convention

29<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> October 2016.

*Noble Mathew, St James MTC*

As part of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations of the Malankra Mar Thoma Syrian Church in the UK and Europe, a two day convention was organized by COMPE from 29<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> October 2016. On Saturday, 29<sup>th</sup> October the meeting was held at Mar Thoma Centre, New Eltham, London SE9 2EX and on Sunday, 30<sup>th</sup> October 2016, holy communion was celebrated in the morning and which was followed by the final session of the convention. It was held at St Katharine Cree Church in the City of London. The program was hosted by St James Mar Thoma Church.

Revd K. Y. Jacob achen, Director, Christian Agency for Rural Development (CARD), celebrated the Holy Communion. Very Rev VT John achen, Rev Dr. Jacob Abraham achen and Revd Stanley Thomas achen were also present. Revd K Y Jacob achen was the main speaker for the convention.

Jacob achen conveyed the blessings and best wishes of the Metropolitan, Most Rev Dr Joseph Marthoma, on all the arrangements and program of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

Achen in his opening remarks said that the jubilee is a time to look back, remembering the wonderful ways God has lead us. It also a time to remember and acknowledge the many contributions and sacrifices of those gone before us. It is also a time to look forward and move forward, carrying the spirit and good memories, trusting in God, to the destination set for before.

Achen also remarked how much he enjoyed celebrating the Holy Qurbana in a church of historic significance and magnificent architecture. St Katharine Cree church was built over thousand ago years. Achen said that those who built the church never imagined that a Mar Thoma community from Malankara will be worshipping here as we have been doing for the last 27 years. Achen remarked, “That’s God’s plan” and encouraged the congregation to sing together with him the Malayalam hymn of thanks giving, as an offering to God.

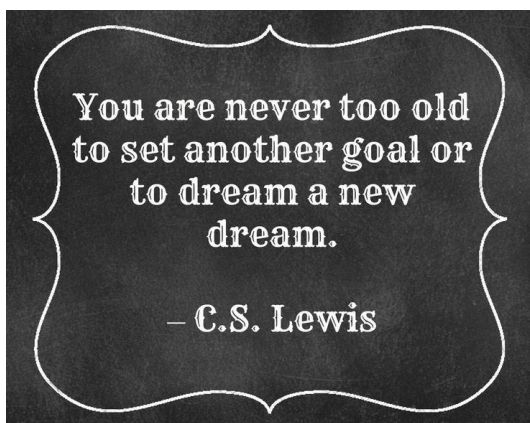
**“Ennodulla nin sarva nanmakalkkai njan enthu cheyendu ninakesupara-ippol. Nandi kondenteyullam nanne nirayunne sannahamode sthuthi padidunnen-Deva”**

Achen’s message was based on Luke’s Gospel chapter 24, verses 29 and 32. He started the sermon with the question. Who is Jesus? Jesus had no servants, yet they called him master; no formal qualification, yet they called him teacher; he had no army, but kings feared him; he fought no battles, yet he conquered the world; he not committed any crime, yet they crucified him; he was buried in a tomb, yet he lives today. Achen went on to say: as we celebrate the Diamond Jubilee it is time to rediscover who Jesus is in our personal life, in our family life, in our church life, and return to the word of God.

Based on the gospel portion where Jesus appeared to the two disciples who were going away from Jerusalem to Emmaus, achen said that the Diamond Jubilee is a time to examine the direction we are going and, if needed, reset the direction of our journey of faith.

Achen’s messages were timely, relevant for the time and set the tone for the Jubilee celebrations. The program was attended by representatives from the sister parishes. The COMPE executive committee members Mr. PM Mathew, Mr. Jaffey Chacko and Dr Zac Varghese graced the occasion with their presence. Very Revd V. T. John, Vicar general, presided over the meeting. Mr. Noble Mathew welcomed every one to the meeting and Mr. Jaffey Chacko proposed the vote of thanks.

Rev Stanley Thomas achen, Vicar of St James Parish and members of St. James Parish were very happy to host the two day convention and the Holy Communion service.



## The Presidents of Churches Together in England unite with 'Thy Kingdom Come'

### Press Release and Video

For immediate release and general circulation:



In May 2016 many of the churches in England took up the invitation of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to set aside the days leading up to Pentecost Sunday to pray for the renewing and

empowering presence of the Holy Spirit to 'make Christ real in our midst, for the flourishing of all'. In Sept 2016, the Presidents of Churches Together in England said, 'we are delighted to join together to extend this invitation to all the churches in England to participate in this movement of prayer in 2017'.

In a joint statement, the Presidents went on to say, 'We want to encourage our brothers and sisters in churches of all traditions to partner in praying 'Thy Kingdom Come' in the days leading up to Pentecost, from 25 May - 4 June, 2017. There is no prescription about how we should pray; we hope each church will participate in a way that is authentic to them and where possible to engage in this with their partner churches in their area.

**The aim of 'Thy Kingdom Come 2017' is simple and threefold:**

- To join with the whole family of God the Father**
- To pray for the empowering of God the Holy Spirit**
- That we may be effective witnesses to God the Son Jesus Christ**

The statement concludes: 'As Presidents, we will be writing to our churches and congregations to encourage them to share this aim and to take part in this movement. We pray to the Father that his family, called to be one in Jesus Christ, may see the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to transform many lives and communities in our land'.

[The 6 Presidents](#) of Churches Together in England. To use the photograph please acknowledge: [www.cte.org.uk/TKC](http://www.cte.org.uk/TKC)

[Statement: 'Thy Kingdom Come - Praying Together at Pentecost 2017'](#) PDF version (to cascade keeping the format)

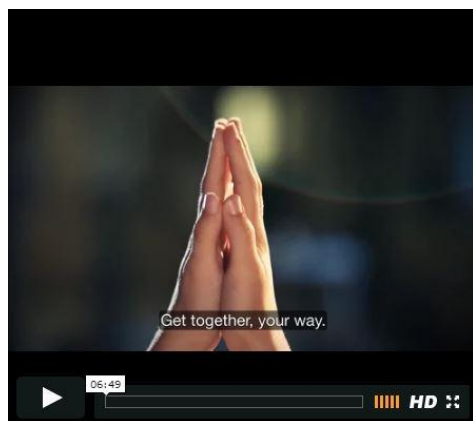
[Statement: 'Thy Kingdom Come - Praying Together at Pentecost 2017'](#) Word version (to cut and paste for other media - including text,



photographs and video stills with permission to use).

### **Accompanying video:**

<https://vimeo.com/183026876>



To accompany the statement, the 6 Presidents were filmed at Lambeth Palace. Resources for prayer and evangelism will be posted on the dedicated website: [www.thykingdom.co.uk](http://www.thykingdom.co.uk)  
Global website: [www.thykingdomcome.global](http://www.thykingdomcome.global)

Recorded 09.09.16 at Lambeth Palace, by Frogspawn Creative TV. Video direct link: <https://vimeo.com/183026876>  
The video is also on the CTE website as a News item: [link here](#)  
Information re CTE  
Presidents [www.cte.org.uk/presidents](http://www.cte.org.uk/presidents)  
CTE staff contact: email: [Jim.currin@cte.org.uk](mailto:Jim.currin@cte.org.uk)  
Tel: 07837 973214  
A short web address to find this page is: [www.cte.org.uk/ThyKingdomCome](http://www.cte.org.uk/ThyKingdomCome)

**Please cascade information re Presidents' Statement**

## Common Declaration of Pope Francis and Archbishop Justin

This text is from the website of the Archbishop of Canterbury: <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5786/common-declaration-of-pope-francis-and-archbishop-justin>

On Wednesday 5th October 2016, Archbishop Justin and Pope Francis issued a Common Declaration today. The Archbishop is in Rome to join in celebrations to mark 50 years of closer and deeper relationships between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church.

### **Common Declaration of His Holiness Pope Francis and His Grace Justin Welby Archbishop of Canterbury**

Fifty years ago our predecessors, Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey met in this city hallowed by the ministry and blood of the Apostles Peter and Paul. Subsequently, Pope John Paul II with Archbishop Robert Runcie, and later with Archbishop George Carey, and Pope Benedict XVI with Archbishop Rowan Williams, prayed together here in this Church of Saint Gregory on the Caelian Hill from where Pope Gregory sent Augustine to evangelise the Anglo-Saxon people. On pilgrimage to the tombs of these apostles and holy forebears, Catholics and Anglicans recognize that we are heirs of the treasure of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the call to share that treasure with the whole world. We have received the Good News of Jesus Christ through the holy lives of men and women who preached the Gospel in word and deed and we have been commissioned, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, to be Christ's witnesses "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1: 8). We are united in the conviction that "the ends of the earth" today, is not only a geographical term, but a summons to take the saving message of the Gospel particularly to those on the margins and the peripheries of our societies.

In their historic meeting in 1966, Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Ramsey established the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission to

pursue a serious theological dialogue which, “founded on the Gospels and on the ancient common traditions, may lead to that unity in truth, for which Christ prayed”. Fifty years later we give thanks for the achievements of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, which has examined historically divisive doctrines from a fresh perspective of mutual respect and charity. Today we give thanks in particular for the documents of ARCIC II which will be appraised by us, and we await the findings of ARCIC III as it navigates new contexts and new challenges to our unity.

Fifty years ago our predecessors recognized the “serious obstacles” that stood in the way of a restoration of complete faith and sacramental life between us. Nevertheless, they set out undeterred, not knowing what steps could be taken along the way, but in fidelity to the Lord’s prayer that his disciples be one. Much progress has been made concerning many areas that have kept us apart. Yet new circumstances have presented new disagreements among us, particularly regarding the ordination of women and more recent questions regarding human sexuality. Behind these differences lies a perennial question about how authority is exercised in the Christian community. These are today some of the concerns that constitute serious obstacles to our full unity. While, like our predecessors, we ourselves do not yet see solutions to the obstacles before us, we are undeterred. In our trust and joy in the Holy Spirit we are confident that dialogue and engagement with one another will deepen our understanding and help us to discern the mind of Christ for his Church. We trust in God’s grace and providence, knowing that the Holy Spirit will open new doors and lead us into all truth (cf. John 16: 13).

These differences we have named cannot prevent us from recognizing one another as brothers and sisters in Christ by reason of our common baptism. Nor should they ever hold us back from discovering and rejoicing in the deep Christian faith and holiness we find within each other’s traditions. These differences must not lead to a lessening of our ecumenical endeavours. Christ’s prayer at the Last Supper that all might be one (cf. John 17: 20-23) is as imperative for his disciples today as it was at that moment of his impending passion, death and resurrection, and consequent

birth of his Church. Nor should our differences come in the way of our common prayer: not only can we pray together, we must pray together, giving voice to our shared faith and joy in the Gospel of Christ, the ancient Creeds, and the power of God’s love, made present in the Holy Spirit, to overcome all sin and division. And so, with our predecessors, we urge our clergy and faithful not to neglect or undervalue that certain yet imperfect communion that we already share.

Wider and deeper than our differences are the faith that we share and our common joy in the Gospel. Christ prayed that his disciples may all be one, “so that the world might believe” (John 17: 21). The longing for unity that we express in this Common Declaration is closely tied to the desire we share that men and women come to believe that God sent his Son, Jesus, into the world to save the world from the evil that oppresses and diminishes the entire creation. Jesus gave his life in love, and rising from the dead overcame even death itself. Christians who have come to this faith, have encountered Jesus and the victory of his love in their own lives, and are impelled to share the joy of this Good News with others. Our ability to come together in praise and prayer to God and witness to the world rests on the confidence that we share a common faith and a substantial measure of agreement in faith.

The world must see us witnessing to this common faith in Jesus by acting together. We can, and must, work together to protect and preserve our common home: living, teaching and acting in ways that favour a speedy end to the environmental destruction that offends the Creator and degrades his creatures, and building individual and collective patterns of behaviour that foster a sustainable and integral development for the good of all. We can, and must, be united in a common cause to uphold and defend the dignity of all people. The human person is demeaned by personal and societal sin. In a culture of indifference, walls of estrangement isolate us from others, their struggles and their suffering, which also many of our brothers and sisters in Christ today endure. In a culture of waste, the lives of the most vulnerable in society are often marginalised and discarded. In a culture of hate we see unspeakable acts of violence, often justified by a distorted understanding of religious belief. Our Christian faith leads us to recognise the inestimable worth of every human life, and to

honour it in acts of mercy by bringing education, healthcare, food, clean water and shelter and always seeking to resolve conflict and build peace. As disciples of Christ we hold human persons to be sacred, and as apostles of Christ we must be their advocates.

Fifty years ago Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Ramsey took as their inspiration the words of the apostle: “Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3: 13-14). Today, “those things which are behind” – the painful centuries of separation – have been partially healed by fifty years of friendship. We give thanks for the fifty years of the Anglican Centre in Rome dedicated to being a place of encounter and friendship. We have become partners and companions on our pilgrim journey, facing the same difficulties, and strengthening each other by learning to value the gifts which God has given to the other, and to receive them as our own in humility and gratitude.

We are impatient for progress that we might be fully united in proclaiming, in word and deed, the saving and healing gospel of Christ to all people. For this reason we take great encouragement from the meeting during these days of so many Catholic and Anglican bishops of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM) who, on the basis of all that they have in common, which generations of ARCIC scholars have painstakingly unveiled, are eager to go forward in collaborative mission and witness to the “ends of the earth”. Today we rejoice to commission them and send them forth in pairs as the Lord sent out the seventy-two disciples. Let their ecumenical mission to those on the margins of society be a witness to all of us, and let the message go out from this holy place, as the Good News was sent out so many centuries ago, that Catholics and Anglicans will work together to give voice to our common faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, to bring relief to the suffering, to bring peace where there is conflict, to bring dignity where it is denied and trampled upon.

In this Church of Saint Gregory the Great, we earnestly invoke the blessings of the Most Holy Trinity on the continuing work of ARCIC and

IARCCUM, and on all those who pray for and contribute to the restoration of unity between us.

Rome, 5 October 2016 His Grace Justin Welby  
His Holiness Francis

## Obituary

### Mr. George Francis Thomas

(2nd Feb, 1936 – 18 Oct, 2016)

George Francis Thomas, who has died aged 80, was associated with the Indian YMCA student hostel in London; he later became the warden of the Indian Student Hostel. He was an accomplished pianist and church organist. He was from Thrissur and came to London in 1964. He lived with his family at Hounslow for over forty years. He was a member of the Church of South India. He helped with the formation of the choir of the St. Johns Mar Thoma Church, Hounslow. He was a great lover of music. Thomas was a happy and generous man and helped many people when they first arrived in London for studies or employment. The Christian community from Kerala is grateful to him for all his kindness and charitable work. He is survived by his wife, Elizabeth, and children, Maria and Joseph. May his soul rest in peace and resurrect in God’s glory.



## Thalikallumkal Chacko George

*Zachariah Abraham, Bristol*



“I have seen the fulfilment of all my aspirations, and I am ready to go . . . .” “With these words George (Babychayan) encouraged his friends and loved ones in the last few years of his earthly abode. Despite many health challenges and painful afflictions, requiring continuous medical treatment, he never drew attention to his pain or illness but used every opportunity to encourage and bless others. He was bestowed with a gift to uplift those who were

going through painful circumstances and was always able to comfort others with the deep comfort that he had received.

Babychayan lived a simple life, but to the full. He had the amazing capacity to generate friendship, love and goodwill with the young and the elderly, with no bias to class, creed or religion. He and his family embodied hospitality. His home was open at all times to one and all, with an insistence to share at the meal table.

Hailing from the picturesque village of Kumplampoika, Kerala, he was the youngest of 9 children. After his initial education, Babychayan spent two decades of his working life in Singapore & Malaysia, primarily with the Royal Air-force. In 1970 Babychayan re-located to the U.K. His zeal for life and his ability to work tirelessly won him many accolades from his employers.

In 1978 Babychayan co-founded the UK Malayalee Association and served as its founding joint-secretary. Babychayan played an even more active role in the life of the emerging and young Mar Thoma Syrian Church in the UK, holding various key offices such as Treasurer, Accountant and Mandalam Representative. Babychayan was pivotal in the conception of the Church acquiring its own Place of Worship in the UK, which materialised in the 1990's, and resulted in the formation of the St John's Mar Thoma Church in West London.

Babychayan's deepening faith and his prayers were manifested in his generosity towards to the needy, and his utmost reverence for the clergy and the institution of the church. It is undoubtedly a measure of the Lord's favour that he was able to, graciously supported by his beloved and prayerful wife, inculcate the deep divine values into the life of his three precious children, their family lives and the six grandchildren, he was blessed with.

Words are but shallow to truly express the rich legacy of this blessed life. In the early hours of the 4<sup>th</sup> of October, peacefully in his sleep, Babychayan was promoted to the eternal abode. Within a few minutes, thanks to the social media, the sad news was flashed to family and friends across the continents. The sheer number of people who rushed to the house to express their grief, and the innumerable messages of sympathy from around the world is a small reflection of the impact of friendship and love generated by this blessed life.

The funeral Service on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October, with over 500 family and friends participating, on a working day, led by our Bishop Rt. Rev Dr Geevarghese Mar Theodosius, along with several clergy including Babychayan's three nephews, was indeed a beautiful finale to the earthly life of a father and friend to many.

May the witness of Babychayan's abundant life continue to bless and inspire all his loved ones, near and far for the years to come?.

## Mr. C. M. Koshy (1936-2016)

Mathew Koshy (Baby - Colindale), who has died aged 80 on the Christmas Day, was a pioneer and builder of the Mar Thoma Community in Europe; he was a corner stone of the Sinai Mar Thoma Church - North London, a man of great faith and vision. He was a most-loved gentleman of amazing qualities, loved gardening and working on his allotment; he willingly passed on his talents to others. We will miss him. He leaves his wife Sally Mathew, his children: Ray, Jasmine and their spouses; Lincy and Symon, and grandchildren. May his soul rest in peace and rise in glory.





# An Important Item for our prayers

The Episcopal Nomination Board of the Mar Thoma Church met several times and after detailed enquiries and due consideration, has prepared a list of the following four Achens as provisional Episcopal Nominees:-

1. Rev. Dr. P.G George, Paduthottu of Narakathani Salem Mar Thoma Parish.
2. Rev. Saju C.Pappachen, Chemmannoor of Aarthattu Kunnankulam Mar Thoma
3. Rev. Dr. Joseph Daniel, Karamvelimannil of Kochukoickal Trinity Mar Thoma Parish
4. Rev. Dr. Mothy Varkey, Olikkara Puthenparambil of Thalavady St.Johns Mar Thoma Parish

Our Metropolitan in Circular no. 272 wrote: “It is to be borne in mind that the office of the Episcopa is most sacred and that it is absolutely essential that only upright persons for such a sacred office should assume the same. Therefore no one should act under the influence of self-interest, fear or favour. All of you are hereby exhorted to prayerfully cooperate in order that only persons fit for this office, endowed with qualities of good character, proper conduct, right doctrines, consistent faith, devotion to God, mature thinking and efficiency, helpful for the growth of the Church, the benefit of the people of God and above all for the glory of God, are elected. . Dearly beloved, let us fervently hope and pray that the Heavenly Father who had blessed us from time to time with eminent leaders as Episcopas for the Church in the past, would help us in this hour of need as well.”

# Image Gallery



## Colonel John Munro, Evangelical Christian

Phillip Tovey\*



*\*[Revd Dr Phillip Tovey is an Anglican Priest of the Diocese of Oxford. His ministry spans 40 years as a lay evangelist, missionary in Uganda, parish priest and theological educator. He has written a number of books mostly on liturgy and has visited Kerala more than 10 times. He is also a Franciscan tertiary and a friend of the Mar Thoma Church for 30 years. Revd Dr Phillip Tovey works for the Diocese of Oxford (Church of England) and is Liturgy Tutor at Ripon College Cuddesdon.]*

*Colonel Munro came as the British Resident replacing the very first British Resident, Colonel Macaulay. It was Colonel Macaulay who gave three thousand Guineas (Rs10, 500) to Mar Thoma VIII to be held in Trust for the benefit of the Malankara Syrian Church. This Trust Fund, known as the Vattipanam, became a bone of contention in later church history and as the source of prolonged court cases. Colonel Munro, an evangelical Christian, was also Dewan of Travancore under the rule of Rani Lakshmi Bai As we read from the following article, he was a great friend of the Syrian Christians and helped them enormously.]*

One of the most significant influences on the state of Travancore and on the history of the Syrian church in the early eighteenth century is Colonel John Munro. The history books concentrate on his reorganisation of the state <sup>i</sup> and the church

histories look at his support of the Syrian community.<sup>ii</sup> The latter however discuss him in manner of Melchizedek, someone who comes onto the stage of history for the purposes of the Syrian community and is labelled an evangelical Christian, but for whom no other information is given, either before or after his time in Travancore. In the absence of a definitive biography this article aims to fill in some of the details about John Munro, some of which make his story even the more remarkable.

### **Early years**

John Munro was born 1778 in Teaninich, county Ross, on the eastern side of the highlands of Scotland north of Inverness. He was baptised the same year in the local church, where his family were 'proprietors' of the parish of Alness,<sup>iii</sup> local leaders who had traditional rites on the appointment of the minister of the Kirk (the local church). He was baptised in the Church of Scotland, the established church of the land which is a Presbyterian church, and thus was not an Anglican or Church of England. There was and is a small episcopal church in Scotland, which is a part of the Anglican Communion, and while there were Munros who once were part of this church, they had become members of the Presbyterian church. This does not make him a natural supporter of the Church Mission Society and avowedly episcopal missionary organisation.

He was the son of James Munro and Margaret Mackenzie who married in 1768. His father was Laird of Teaninich, the hereditary lord of the manor, who had also been in the navy. They had seven children, two of whom died young, and John was the fourth.<sup>iv</sup> His eldest brother inherited the estate; his next eldest brother inherited his mother's estate, which left him and his third brother to join the army. At that time many young men, particularly from respectable families in Scotland and Ireland joined the army of the East India Company to make fame and fortune overseas. Many were 'one monsooners', those that died in less than two years of their arrival.

In Scotland the Munros are a large clan. This leads to complication in unravelling John Munro's history, as there were other Munro's in India at the same time, including his brother Hector Munro. The most famous was Sir Thomas Munro, who became Governor and Commander in Chief in Madras, having come from Glasgow,

but is no relative. But to add to complications, there were other John Munros in India at the same time, one of which was his son.

Little is not known about his early education, but Scotland had developed a strong schools system after the reformation, each parish having a school, something that had not been achieved in England. He also attended Fortrose Academy, where in the schooling of the time he would have learnt classics.<sup>v</sup> He may have been a Gaelic speaker, as the language was more common in the Highlands at that time. What is clear that he joined the East India Company at a young age, in those days that could mean 16 or 17. He was sent to Madras.<sup>vi</sup> According to Aiyer he arrived in 1791, he would have been 13, which is very young.<sup>vii</sup> It is more likely he arrived 1794/5. It is clear that he had an aptitude for languages. His journal for the voyage to India is full of practicing the grammar of Sanskrit. He became fluent in a number of Indian languages.

### **Munro in India before Travancore**

His early career in India has been succinctly summarised by MacKenzie: He took part in the battle of Seringapatam, and was shortly afterwards appointed Adjutant of his regiment, in which office he displayed a thorough acquaintance with military duties. He also very soon became an accomplished linguist, being able to speak and write fluently in French, German, Italian, Arabic, Persian, and several of the Indian dialects. He held various appointments on the Staff, and was private secretary and interpreter to successive Commanders-in-Chief in India. He was personally acquainted and in constant correspondence with Colonel Arthur Wellesley, afterwards the famous Duke of Wellington, during the Mahratta war. He assisted in quelling the Nellore Mutiny, and was soon afterwards appointed Quartermaster-General of the Madras army, at the early age of twenty-seven years.<sup>viii</sup>

*The Asiatic Annual Register* gives some indication of dates for John Munro; 1802 Captain and secretary to the Commander in Chief;<sup>ix</sup> 1804 Major and deputy Quartermaster-General;<sup>x</sup> 1805 Major and Persian translator at Head Quarters,<sup>xi</sup> Lieutenant Colonel and Quartermaster-General 1807.<sup>xii</sup>

This summary glosses a very controversial part of his life. As Quartermaster-General of the Madras army he got into serious controversy over tent

contracts. January 20<sup>th</sup> 1809 he was arrested and charged with conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman.<sup>xiii</sup> He was finally exonerated but just prior to coming to Travancore he had been the focus of much debate and it looked like his career was finished.

Nothing in the history gives any indication of his development of evangelical convictions. There are however some important indications of spiritual influence. In 1808 he becomes one of the directors of a charitable fund to provide for destitute families of officers of the East India Company, and to support sick officers to return to England.<sup>xiv</sup> One of the directors of the fund was Rev Dr Kerr, the chaplain in Madras. That he was a part of this fund might be an indication of his evangelical convictions.

### **The godly Chaplains**

Chaplains of the East India Company were employed to minister to the British in India and not as missionaries. Many in the company opposed missionary work to Indians as they viewed it as potentially disruptive of trade. The renewal of the charter in 1793 was accompanied by an attempt to get clauses to open up India to missionaries, but it failed. It was not until 1813 that the 'pious clauses' were included in the charter, which allowed missionary work in India, although this was not against opposition. The campaigning of William Wilberforce, supported by information from another chaplain Claudius Buchanan, and pressure by the Church Missionary Society resulted in the inclusion of these clauses in the charter. This group also successfully petitioned at the same time for the setting up of the Church of England episcopate in India.

Dr Kerr is perhaps one of the less famous of the visitors to Travancore and Cochin to look into the Syrian church, and this he accomplished towards the end of his life. Richard Hall Kerr was born in 1769 in Ireland. He was ordained deacon by the bishop of Sodor and Man in the Church of England in 1789. He went to Bombay in 1790 teaching school and only arrived in Madras in 1792 being left there as too ill to continue the journey to England. He co started a school in Black Town and was appointed a chaplain in 1793. He not only started this school, he built the Black Town chapel, set up a press and established the Charitable Committee. He wrote reports for the

Government on the Chaplains recommending an increase in numbers, which was acted upon.<sup>xv</sup> He was also asked to write a report on the Syrian Christians, the East India Company writing reports on all aspects of life in India, but realised at the time that Dr Buchanan was also being asked to conduct such a survey.

In 1802 he returned to England to be ordained priest. Controversially it had been discovered that he was only in deacon's orders but was acting as a priest. Kerr had a paper from the Bishop of Soder and Man dated 18<sup>th</sup> Nov 1793 granting him licence to execute the office of a priest. He was not the only chaplain who had fulfilled the duties of a priest on this basis. An investigation in 1802 led to his irregular situation becoming public and while not being censured, for the paper clearly came from the bishop, he was required to return to England for priestly ordination.<sup>xvi</sup>

Kerr was a man of evangelical sympathies. He introduced the London Missionary Society in Madras. He employed a Baptist missionary to teach boys in St Mary's to sing. In 1805 he left for Mysore to recover good health and then went on to visit the Syrians in Travancore and Cochin. He wrote his report in 1806,<sup>xvii</sup> and encouraged by Buchanan remained in India. He died exhausted in 1808, aged 39.

Munro living in Madras would have known Dr Kerr. There would have been services in St Mary's, which while he was technically a Presbyterian, it would have been politic to attend. It would seem a reasonable speculation that at some point Munro came under the influence of a godly chaplain, possibly Richard Kerr, and a developed evangelical faith. Certainly by 1808 he was a director of the Charitable fund with Dr Kerr and would work with him in the complexities of its administration.

There is another factor that might suggest a move to serious religion, and that is his marriage on 8<sup>th</sup> Dec 1808 to Charlotte Blacker.<sup>xviii</sup> She was the daughter of Rev St John Blacker a distinguished Church of Ireland priest, Rector of Moira, county Donegal.<sup>xix</sup> She was the ninth child of a family that saw the first son be ordained and other sons go to the army overseas. Two of the sons were in India, St John and Valentine Blacker, the former serving in Cochin and the latter who had a notable army career and who was to write military books.<sup>xx</sup>

Valentine Blacker took up the Quartermaster-General job after Munro departed. This suggests that Munro and the Blacker brothers had become friends in India, as perhaps the only plausible explanation as to how a Scot suddenly went to Ireland to marry the daughter of a Church of Ireland priest. This marital connection gives another illumination as to Munro's support of CMS, an Anglican missionary society, that is, he was married to an Anglican, the daughter of a priest, and with a brother in law who was a priest.

### **Munro in Travancore**

This is perhaps the well-known section of Munro's life.<sup>xxi</sup> He initiated reforms in society that transformed the finances of the country.<sup>xxii</sup> He supported the Syrian Christians and invited CMS to come and work at the Kottayam College for the improvement of the Syrian community. He was in an extremely powerful position and used it to benefit Christians in a way that has never quite happened again. It may well be that his success in reform of finances and state apparatus gave him the platform on which to advantage the Christians. Each of these points needs some elaboration.

Munro was unusual as British Resident in that he also became the Dewan of the country, which gave him enormous political power. This appointment was made to rectify the finances of the country, not least to make sure the East India Company was paid. Aiyer gives a detailed explanation of the reforms to the royal revenue.<sup>xxiii</sup> By removing various officials and modernising the taxation system he was able to raise sufficient tax with some reduction of the tax base of the people, and raise the income to the Royal family. This was not without resistance and in 1812 he faced a rebellion with the aim of removing foreign influence and returning a local person as Dewan. It failed miserably and the local leaders were executed. Increased revenue could lead to the government supporting local projects.

Ramban Joseph Pulikottil had the idea of building a seminary for the training of clergy. This does not seem to have been unanimously supported by Mar Thoma VIII. However, Ramban Joseph had conversations with Munro and this became one of Munro's lasting legacies. Munro persuaded the Rani of Travancore to donate the land in Kottayam, and further land to provide it income. The foundation stone was laid in 1813. Joseph

Ramban was consecrated bishop in 1813 and the government recognised him as Malankara Metropolitan, effectively deposing Mar Thoma VIII.<sup>xxiv</sup> The college exists to this day.

Munro then wrote to the Church Missionary Society asking for help in teaching at the college. While this is an Anglican missionary society, Munro was in fact a Scottish Presbyterian; it was his wife who was Anglican. This was another powerful intervention and the Society diverted a missionary who was supposed to be going to Ceylon for the work. The vision of the missionaries went beyond teaching at the college, with the intention of setting up a school in every parish, something that was true in Scotland but not in England at the time. In all 52 parish schools were opened. There was to be a harmonious relationship between CMS and the Syrian community for two decades. This was in part because of Munro's careful eye on the project, making at times quite critical comments of the missionaries to CMS. On Norton he wrote to Pratt in London: I am afraid that Mr Norton is not qualified for the charge of such an establishment (the mission at Alleppey). He has knowledge and zeal, but perhaps not exactly of the kind suited to insure his success as a missionary...I believe he has not acquired a single Protestant convert since his arrival.<sup>xxv</sup> He was also involved in the appointment of the next bishop with the death of Mar Dionysios II. He was of course in the position to recognise, or not, any bishop and made sure that bishops would be appointed who were sympathetic to his project.

Munro was also a keen supporter of the project for the Bible in Malayalam. Again this project was already in hand but slow in execution. Munro paid the salaries of the priests who were translating in order that the project progress as quickly as possible.<sup>xxvi</sup> He took an interest in the printing press being set up in order to print the Bible and other literature.

There were other more social policies that Munro introduced which benefited Syrian Christians. In 1812 he issued a proclamation that women converts to Christianity could cover their breasts.<sup>xxvii</sup> In 1815 a proclamation was issued that exempted all Christians from taxes to support Hindu temples and shrines. In 1816 he engaged in reforming the judiciary. Part of his policy was to select officers from Brahmans, Nairs, and Syrian

Christians. This put the latter in an important place in society, one that was a development of their position. Munro, however, found it hard to find sufficient men of the calibre in the Syrian community of the time, leaving some places vacant.

Munro brought the temples in Travancore under state control and by improving the management of the temples fostered the practice of Hinduism. In 1812 he influenced a proclamation that prohibited the purchase and sale of slaves other than those connected to agriculture. He taxed the sale of Arrack, not only to raise revenue, but also to discourage drunkenness.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Thus there was a wider social reform in his policies.

While in Travancore John and Charlotte began their family with James St John in 1811. They had six children. James St John Munro was to enter the army and then leave to become the Consul-General at Monte Video in South America. His second son John Munro was to take up an army career in India. His third son Stuart Craddock eventually became Laird. His daughter Charlotte married Hon. George Augustus Spencer, Lieutenant-Colonel Coldstream Guards, second son of the first Lord Churchill in 1834.

The Cochin Royal Family Historical Society website reports that on leaving post the Rajah of Cochin wrote to the Governor General saying: Since Col. John Munro was appointed resident in my country in the year 1811, that gentleman, has by his indefatigable exertions and vigilance, rescued me from an ocean of debt in which I was unfortunately involved by the corrupt and treacherous conduct of my ministers, enabled myself, my family and my subjects now to live happy and unconcerned, with favourable circumstance I cannot in justice avoid bringing to the notice of your Lordship in council.<sup>xxxix</sup> He returned to Britain in 1820.

### **Munro and family after 1820**

On return Munro returned to his ancestral home. He was given a life directorship of CMS, an honorary post, but does not seem to have been very active in the society, possibly because of his living in Scotland. He became a local magistrate and Deputy Lieutenant of Rosshire. He was asked at times to report to parliamentary committees about his actions in India and that of the Company. The history becomes difficult to follow

for the rest of his life. In 1817 his eldest brother had founded a whiskey distillery, which is now the basis of the family fortune.<sup>xxx</sup> It was not unknown for leading evangelical families to be owners of breweries and distilleries, the other famous example being the Guinness family in Ireland. He had a reputation for caring for the poor in the area. It would appear that he had a short return to India in 1830 but had to retire from ill health. In 1845 it appears that he took over the family business, but gave this up in 1850. He was a part of 'the great disruption' in 1843, which was a division of the Church of Scotland over state interference in the church. He is included on the famous painting of the First Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland.<sup>xxxi</sup> He became an elder in the Free Church of Scotland. In earlier life he had appointed bishops in India, in later life he rejected state interference in the church. He may have returned to India later, perhaps to visit relatives, but finally went back to Teaninich, where he died in 1857.

Particularly confusing is the continuing Travancore connection. Some of his descendents became involved in developing plantations in the highlands. An Urban Verres Munro, who is said to be John Munro's son, was the first conservator of the forests of the Cardomom Hills.<sup>xxxii</sup> John Daniel Munro his grandson set up plantations in Peermade in the 1860s.<sup>xxxiii</sup> He wrote a book on the high ranges.<sup>xxxiv</sup> He entered into a lease with the Rajah for the land in 1877.<sup>xxxv</sup> The connections of these people with John Munro are not clear, however it may be that books of genealogy in England have not researched the Indian connections fully. It might be that before his more evangelical days he had a Bibi with whom he had children, which was common at that time. It was also the time when bringing wives from Britain was being encouraged, one of the key people supporting this being Arthur Wellesley. It is possible that John Munro his first son who died in India was married but as he died in India this was unknown in Britain. The most reliable source for the Indian connection is Hunt who reports that UV Munro son of the Resident married the daughter of Kohlhoff, one of the German Missionaries.<sup>xxxvi</sup> It is also reported that John Daniel Munro married a granddaughter Benjamin Bailey.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Thus in this union the Resident and missionary were united in holy matrimony and continued to live in India.

## Conclusion

Although by no means a full account of the life of John Munro there is a lot more to his life than the few years as resident in Travancore and Cochin. It is because of his political position that he had such influence, and he set in train a number of events. Many of his desires for revival of the church have happened but at the terrible cost of division. The development of his evangelical convictions is still a matter of conjecture and deserves a fuller treatment than his standard simple introduction in the church histories as an evangelical believer, as if this is an explanation for this religious policy. It is ironic that a Scottish Presbyterian called on an Anglican mission society to work in Travancore and thus accidentally helped to found a part of the Anglican Communion, as only one part of his legacy. It is also ironic that as Resident and Dewan he virtually appointed bishops for the Syrian church, while later in life leaving the Church of Scotland over state interference in the church. He introduced reforms to Travancore society in slavery and in the reorganisation of the temples helped foster Hindu worship. John Munro still remains an enigmatic figure in the history of the church in India and a fascinating example of the pious influences in the East India Company.

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