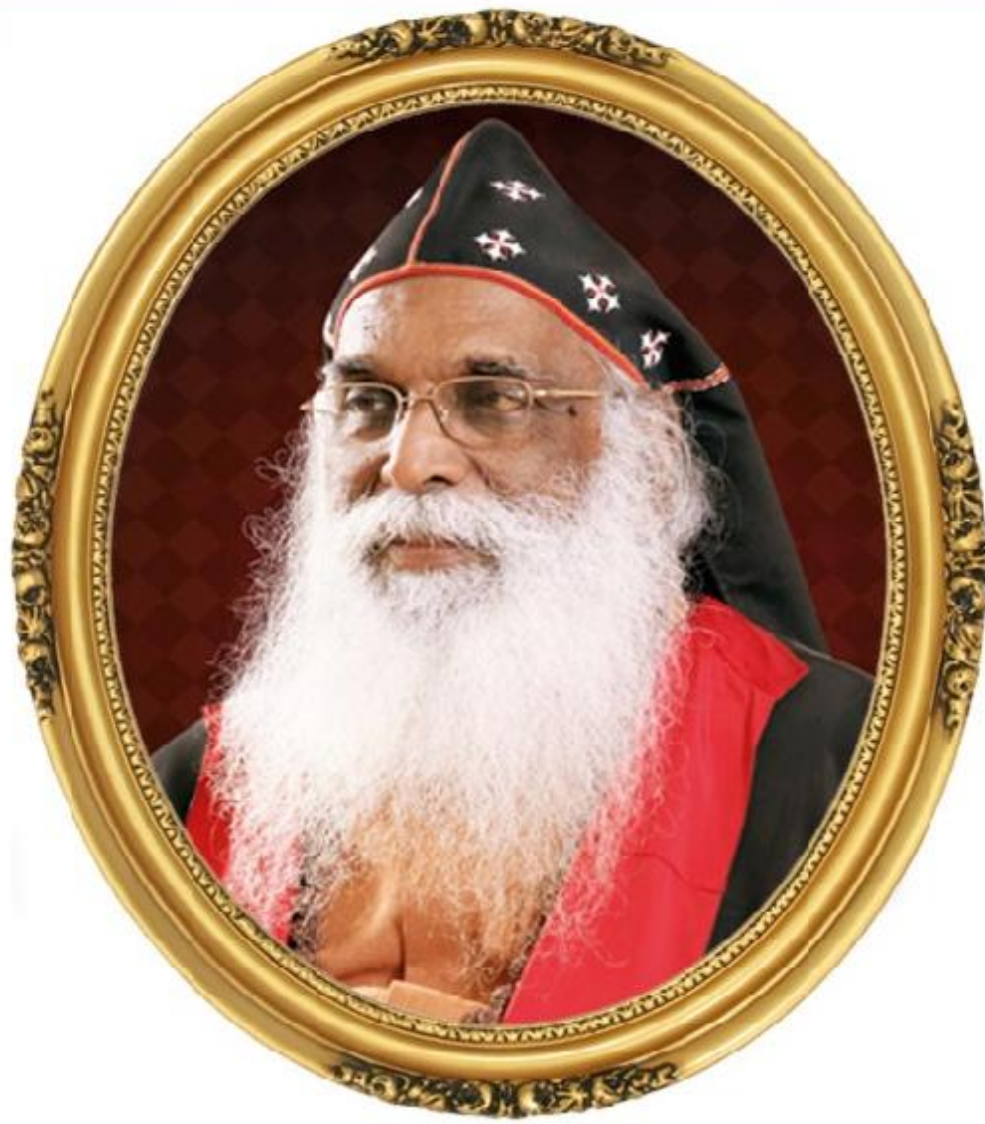




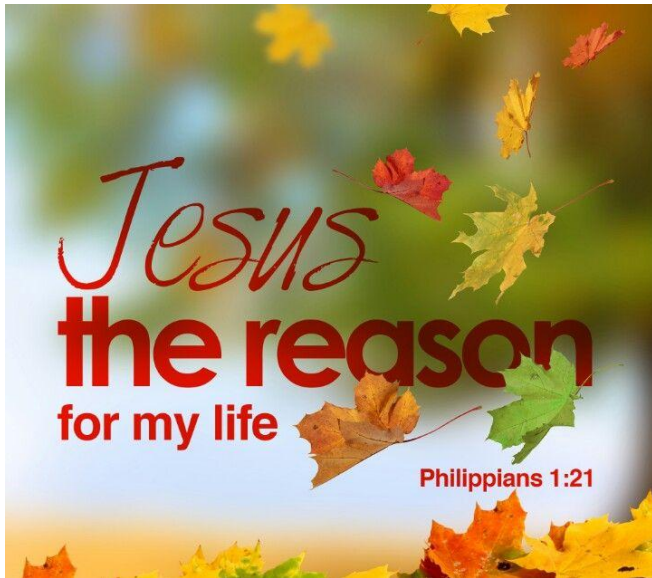
The Mar Thoma

ECHO



A Publication of the Council of Mar Thoma Parishes in Europe





October Edition 2017 Volume  
4(4)



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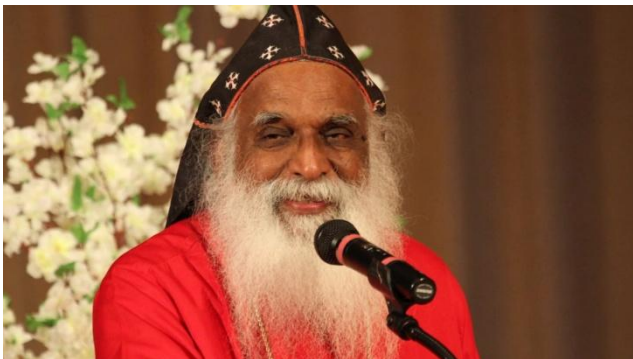
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## Editorial

The October issue of the ECHO has three important functions: firstly, it is to honour our Metropolitan, The Most Revd Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan, on the Diamond Jubilee of his ordination as Revd P. T. Joseph on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1957. We thank God for giving him, divine delegation to be a messenger of the Gospels, health, determination and courage to do God's mission over the last 60 years, of which 18 years as a minister, 42 years as a bishop, and the last 10 years as the Metropolitan and primate of the Mar Thoma Church; secondly, to thank God for the blessings that we received during the Diamond Jubilee year of the Mar Thoma Community in Europe; thirdly, to reflect on the theme, 'Liberation and Transformation', which was selected sometime back for the October issue.



Metropolitan was born on 27<sup>th</sup> June 1931 as the eldest son of Palakunnath Mr. P. T. Luke and Mrs. Mariamma Lukose. Members of this illustrious family played important roles during the reformation of the Church in 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Abraham Malpan, Martin Luther of India, and the first four Metropolitans for a period of hundred and two years from 1842 to 1944 came from Our Metropolitan's family. This is an amazing legacy and responsibility to bear and Metropolitan Thirumeni is very conscious of his historical ancestral linkages, traditions and responsibility. We thank God for Thirumeni's 87

years of God-centred life and the good health he enjoys now as we witnessed during his visit for our Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

Metropolitan's administrative abilities are outstanding; everyone turns to him for advice and solution of trickiest problems our people constantly create. There is an increasing trend in dumping everything on Thirumeni's shoulders. The old dictum of President Truman, 'the buck stops here' is true with Thirumeni; this means he accepts personal responsibility for the administration. Although people carelessly talk about Metropolitan's retirement, it is impossible to think about a period of the Church in his absence and the vacuum it would create. Therefore, let us pray for his health and wellbeing for leading our church and expanding our vision and mission for the glory of God.

Thirumeni spares no time and pain in keeping relationship with people from all sections of the society. He makes it a point of visiting people in their times of need and illness. His crystal clear memory helps him to keep up friendships that he has gained by continuing the contacts in whichever part of the world they may be living. Thirumeni also has an amazing sense of history. He is a master craftsman, when dealing with current issues he always finds suitable biblical reference points and narratives; this is indeed a very effective way of tackling issues, including political and religious, with a modern and historical perspective. Thirumeni's monthly letters in the Tharaka are prime examples of this ability; Thirumeni is always in touch with all aspect of our life in India and elsewhere.

Thirumeni's ecumenical record is phenomenal; he was the president of the Kerala Council of



Churches, National Council of Churches, CASA, and intimately involved in many other national and international organisations including WCC. Thirumeni also played very significant role for the relief of tsunami victims and also for the earthquake victims in Maharashtra. He has also built many educational institutions, nursing schools, caring homes for old people and hospitals. Therefore, his ministry reaches all areas of life and he is recently involved in transgender awareness and rehabilitation programmes. Let us thank God and pray for showering His blessings on Metropolitan Thirumeni so that his influence grows in all creative fields of Christian outreach, mission, and service in the years ahead.

We are very grateful to Revd Dr. M. J. Joseph's personal reflection on the Metropolitan as a 'Karma Yogi'. We also thank Mr. Lal Varghese and Dr. John Lincoln for the excellent biographical sketches of the Metropolitan. Dr. P. J. Alexander's article, particularly on Thirumeni's early years as an achen in Malabar, is an amazing treasure chest of information and insights. As we are celebrating the Diaspora Sunday in November, it is nice to think of the early Mar Thoma settlers in the Malabar and other parts of India. Let us thank God for our Mar Thoma Diaspora communities in other parts of India and across the world. Metropolitan recently reminded us at the Diamond Jubilee that the "Sun never settles on the Mar Thoma Diaspora communities across the world." May God continue to grant our Metropolitan many healthy and blessed years of leadership in the Church.

### **Diamond Jubilee:**

Let us thank God for the amazing ways that He guided us to come to this country, and blessed

us in manifold ways to live, work, and worship him for glorifying His name. God made it possible for our community to come together to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee at the 35<sup>th</sup> Family Conference at Yarnfield, Staffordshire from 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> August. We had nearly 500 members – infants, children, adults and senior citizens – for the valedictory functions.



Our Metropolitan, Most Revd Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma, Diocesan Bishop, Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, Bishop Dominic Walker, Bishop John Fenwick, Bishop Geoff Annas, Canon Mounstephen, Mayor Cllr. Jim Davies, and Revd Dr. Prakash K. George, Very V. T. John and all our other achen and many others blessed us with their messages and presence. It was indeed an amazing experience of thanksgiving and it was also a moment for dedication before our God of unconditional love that we all will strive together for bringing the values of the Kingdom of God in our daily living.

We express our thanks sincerely to many people who worked day and night for the success of the Diamond jubilee from August 2016. The Diamond Jubilee Committee, the Family Conference Committee and members of various sub-committees worked together in achieving our objectives. You all know who they were and let us pray for each one of them and thank God for their help. Let us thank them all for their unselfish service for building a Mar Thoma

community in Europe. Dr. K. John, Dr. Binu K. Mathew and their families carefully, sensitively, and lovingly cared for the needs of our Metropolitan; Thirumeni was happy and relaxed; let us thank them for their help. Philoxenos Thirumeni's quiet, peaceful and reflective manners are helpful to all of us building and expanding this region. We are very grateful to Shibu Kurien achen and his family for looking after the needs of Philoxenos Thirumeni during his visits to the UK. We particularly want to thank Mrs. Geena Ajay and Mr. Sherry Mathew, Revd Shibu Kurien, Mr. Raju Koshy Mathew of the Vettathu printers for bringing out a very beautiful souvenir. Very Revd V. T. John, Mr. P. M. Mathew and Mr. Jaffey Chacko were always there to propose ideas and find ways to give legs to those ideas to reach the destination.

In the middle of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations, Revd Stanley Thomas and Mr. Noble Mathew organised a foundation stone laying ceremony for the St. James MT Church on Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> August. This was indeed a very significant event in the Jubilee year. Jubilee is also about this new beginning and building. Let us pray for the successful completion of this project and thank them and others for their leadership.

Often people have a tendency to deliberately mislead others by giving wrong signals, interpretation of events, or confusing people by planting wrong and unthinkable motivations. We used to see things through the leadership and help given to the community from St. Johns and St. James, but we have the God-given opportunity now to read about the contributions of all our members in the UK and Europe through the local parish histories

published in the souvenir. Our loyalties are often limited to local parishes, congregations, and prayer groups. However, this time COMPE has demonstrated the importance of organising various functions together. It is the responsibility of the members of the COMPE forum of each parishes (six members for every parish) to inform their parishioners the purpose and activities of this important regional organisation. There is no future in pretending that they do not know what the COMPE is about.

The Diamond Jubilee Convention organised by St. James MTC and the Ecumenical Fellowship and dinner organised by St. John's MTC were major successes. There were other centre events at other parishes at Midlands and at Bristol too, where the whole community came together. It is only by working together that we will be able to build a coherent and vibrant community. So far, our loyalties are to local MT parishes; but the Diamond Jubilee should be the beginning to think in terms of a whole, united, cohesive, and integrated Community in Europe. Brexit may present new challenges too. We need the next generation, young people, to come forward to take leadership and build our church here for doing God's mission.

We also thank everyone who sent their complements and advertisements for the Jubilee Souvenir. If you were to come across any omissions or commissions, I am happy to take full responsibility for them and apologise. A technical glitch prevented us from printing a memorial plaque in the Diamond Jubilee Souvenir from Mr. Abraham Varghese, we apologise for this; we thank him for graciously accepting our apology. All in all, it was an amazing experience; let us give thanks to God

for making it possible for all of us. According to Bishop Tom Wright, "Jubilee is a once in a life time exodus moment that everyone could experience." It is when God's time and human time meet in a sacred place for a sacred purpose of creating heavenly fellowship. It is a time to liberate ourselves of our ego and live for others and see goodness in other people.

### **35<sup>th</sup> Family Conference:**

The theme of the conference was 'Celebrating life in the way of Christ'. Philoxenos Thirumeni and Revd Dr. Prakash K. George gave us deep insights about what this way of Christ is and why we should elevate ourselves from an all-consuming prevailing consumerist culture and attain a transformative experience in communion with God and build relationship with others around us in Christ. Prakash achen told us that life is a gift, a task and a mystery. Christ is the human face of God and we should be able to meet God in our encounters with our neighbours and our lasting relationships with them; building communities and celebrating in the life of the community is the way of Christ.

Why do you think Jesus washed Judas' feet knowing that he had made his decision to betray Jesus (John 13: 1-17)? This was simply a celebration of life, 'in the way of Jesus'; it was a continuation of his love for the disciples; it was also to set the tone for how things should be done in a faith community (Church). Peter couldn't bear to see Jesus doing such a menial task of a servant, but Jesus' answer to Peter cuts to the heart of Christian service – 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.' Is Jesus turning our ideas of status in the Church and leadership roles upside down? Or is he doing something more radical – disregarding them altogether?

He gives us an example, teaching us that each one of his followers is to serve all others.



Jesus had set the pattern; he had walked the walk. He had showed them what love looked like over the three years of his ministry and now he gives them a clear command which, if followed, would set them apart from the whole world, as a called out community, for God's mission for healing a 'fractured world'. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13: 34, 35). As we grow in confidence in God's unconditional love, so we are set free to serve those around us, even in the menial tasks, just as Jesus did. We saw a bit of it in the Family Conference. However, it is certainly not about selfies, group photographs, and projecting our acts of services in the face book or other social media and claiming uncalled for importance. It is celebrating life in building true relationships, building communities, and building an 'I- Thou' attitudes with others. This should be the take home message, 'celebrating life in the way of Christ', from the 35<sup>th</sup> Family Conference in our Diamond Jubilee year

It's not about you.  
It's not about me.

*It's about "We".  
Working Together.  
As one.*

The 'Ubuntu' principle of 'I am because you are' or a person is a person through other people is part of the community building. It is in these communal relationships we should be able to see the face of God. Human life only has a meaning in relationship with God and without God life is not worth living. There are many instances of broken relationships in our parish life, but the story of the 'Prodigal Son' teaches us on how to mend relationships and celebrate life in homecoming by avoiding the righteous self-justifying attitude of the elder brother.

Revd Shijoy Abraham who accompanied the Metropolitan was a blessing. His Bible class based on the verse, John 10:27, was very helpful. He asked the question, what is the Church and its purpose? He showed eight ways, eight calls, of following Jesus: listening, concentrating, separating, denying, self-denial, sanctification, and limitation, service and finally call to Jesus.

Mr. Gideon Salter discussed the parable of the 'Prodigal Son' with our youths. Let us thank both Gideon Salter and Mr. Ken Tomita for their contributions to the Family Conference. The Diamond Jubilee was an unqualified success because it was a combined effort of our Mar Thoma Community in Europe and everyone should be congratulated for its success.

### **Transformation and Liberation:**

What does it mean to live a transformed and liberated life in today's society? This is in essence what we have been discussing at the 35<sup>th</sup> Family conference. Transformation and liberation are moments of celebration. The return journey and homecoming is an experience of transformation and liberation. It means to live out the life in the way of Christ by facing our fears and doubts. Living and inspired and transformed life is simply living out the Gospel in our own daily living as a beacon of light in a dark, confused and perplexing world. Let us take seriously the motto of our Church: 'lighted to lighten'.

The best known example of transformation or transfiguration comes to us of Jesus and his closest disciples meeting Elijah and Moses on Mount Tabor. Jesus appeared as a luminous being to his disciples, completely transfigured. Moses also was surrounded by blazing light as he received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. However, Transfiguration does not mean the same thing as the word Transformation. Transformation implies a remaking of the nature of a person or object. Transformation is the moment we become image bearers of God, as we are created in the image of God. Transfiguration implies a momentary revelation, a glimpse, of the glory of God. Saul's Damascus road experience of becoming Paul was indeed a transforming experience and in the process he got liberated from his preconceived notions and intellectual bondage. Liberation is to transform and become a truly spiritual being, a kind of fulfilment of life. We need silence of mind a 'creative emptiness' to listen to the 'still small voice of God'. It is in such moments we liberate ourselves from

selfishness and start finding the importance of living with in the life of others and celebrating life in the community. In this transformed and liberated life we begin to minister to the needs of others, reaching out and making disciples as directed by Christ in the way of Christ.

Revd Dr. Valson Thampu's article on 'From Preservation to Fulfilment' is another important aspect of transformation and liberation. He says, "Surely, the paradigm of 'fulfilment' is at work in transforming a regional faith monopolized by an ethnic group -the Jews- into a universal spiritual heritage into which all are welcome without the mediation of middlemen." Avoidance of middlemen and brokers is an aspect of liberation. Preservation has a tendency to kill the spirit of reformation; it prevents us to make choices and chokes freedom of expression and prevents spiritual growth. Believers are engaged in transforming their lives by renewing or reforming their mind on the foundations of Jesus' teachings. This begins with trusting in God through our faith, cultivating our transforming relationship through Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Transformation is not a simple change, but it is a change that liberates individuals and leads them to fullness in Christ.

Finally, please forgive me for few very personal expressions of appreciation and gratitude. I want to thank all the readers of the Mar Thoma ECHO and my co-editors for the amazing experience of publishing this digital journal for the last four years. I particularly want to thank Mrs. Geena Ajay and Mr. Sherry Mathews for their dedicated and professionally excellent work for this publication. I also want to thank the COMPE executive committee for their

excellent and enduring support. I would like to retire from this responsibility fairly soon. It was an amazing journey together. I thank you all for all your kindness and friendship. May God continue to bless you all.

Dr. Zac Varghese

For the Editorial Board

1<sup>st</sup> September, 2017



# The Most Revd Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan: The Best Is Yet To Be

*Dr. P. J. Alexander, Trivandrum*

The Golden Jubilee of His Grace the Metropolitan, Most Revd. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma entering the ministry, as a Kassissa of the Mar Thoma Church, is an occasion to thank the Lord for an exceptional blessing to the Church, for we have in him an unusual Church Leader, with unique gifts, talents and abilities. He has successfully welded the past, the present and the future – the rich legacy of our past, the many nagging issues and challenges of the day and our soaring hopes, vision and dreams for the morrow, to take the Church forward. Looking at Thirumeni at the helm, with all other Thirumenis with his 'Kaiveipu', every right thinking Marthomite would pray for his good health and long life, to guide the Church during these turbulent times. The Church needs his leadership and cannot do without it. The problem today is not what Kottooreth Achen saw in 1893, felt, and went on to express through voice choking and tears flowing: "Lord, when Moses died you had provided Joshua to lead the people, but now we have no body. . ." It is the willingness to combine the lessons of the past with the needs of today and the dreams for tomorrow at all levels. The dynamics of Church leadership is collective and continuing; not by fits and starts or long absence, selective presence or rash display of disruptive tendencies. Among all these His Grace is a stabilising influence. We are richly benefitted by Thirumeni's presence at the helm, all these years. My prayer on this occasion is for

His blessings on Thirumeni to lead our dear Church for many more years.



As I look back, the earliest picture that surfaces in my mind is that of the Annual Mar Thoma Students' Conference. It was a must for most of us, fortunate to join a College and take the first few tentative steps towards a career, it was the rare occasion to meet and interact with the leaders of the Church, both lay and ordained. Among the participating students came some of our future members in the Civil Services, in the Teaching Community, Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers, other professions, and also our future Clergy. The contingent from Union Christian College, Alwaye, was often the largest, with Varkey Achen, the Chaplain in the lead. Those of us from the Government Colleges were in ones and twos as we lacked a college based community of Mar Thoma students. In the UC College contingent one year, we were introduced to a tall, well-built, handsome student, a wee bit reserved, but actively involved in the Conference schedule. Someone said that he is a scion of the family of Malpan

Achen and the first four Metropolitans after Naveekaranam, and perhaps would be an Achen and Methrachan in due course. We were all impressed, really impressed, and of course watched him with a sense of awe and respect. That was P. T. Joseph of Palakunnath, a senior student of the Union Christian College. Those of us, who were inquisitive and concerned for the Church, used to gather information on his career choice and later were glad to hear that he opted for the ministry. That was sixty years ago.

In fact it was much later, when as an Achen and Travelling Secretary to the Suvishesha Sanghom, that I had my first direct personal interface with him. I was then teaching in the University and preparing for my Civil Services Examination. Achen stayed with us at our house at Kampencode and I went with him to visit houses and receive the small contributions from poor Marthomites; they poor were people, but with rich commitment to evangelization and ready for sacrifices for the Church. It was hard work, going about hillocks and bunds of paddy fields all on foot. I think we were together for about a week and P. T. Joseph Achen had no complaints of the gruelling, punishing schedule. He made a lasting impression on me on his simple, Spartan lifestyle and strong work ethics. It remains so after all these years.

The next station where we were together was good old Calicut, now Kozhikode, and the Head Quarters of the Malabar District where British presence continued vigorously till Independence. Even in the early sixties, the colonial hangover remained in both social-life and administration. Malabar was in the throes of migration from Travancore. Hardy and hardworking people carrying tapioca stumps

and cuttings of pepper vines were buying up land with even dubious titles from the so called landlords to escape the poverty and misery in post-war Travancore. We had our presence in Calicut city, thanks to early Planters who developed estates in Wynad. Nothing beyond Calicut and Calicut was our most important Parish with several well-known lay leaders and substantial presence of other denominations. The migration to Malabar was continuing and new opportunities were opening up. The Catholic Church was in the lead and did substantial work among the "Chettans", a loose and pejorative term for all settlers from Travancore. When a history of the migration from Travancore to Malabar is written, the contributions of the Catholic Church deserve to be recorded in golden letters. As one who witnessed the troubles and tragedies to which the first waves of settlers were victims, I can only say that the Lord and the Church were with the survivors. The young Joseph Achen was ready and willing to travel to interior villages of Malabar and meet our people and with the support of pioneering Planters and raw bureaucrats like me, give the few, just a handful of Marthomites, a sense of belonging and some self-confidence. Most of what was done must continue to remain under wraps because instances are not few when raw horns like me interpreted the rules listening to 'the still-small-voice' and not always to the small prints of Rules and Regulations in Manuals. Be that as it may, but when on a far away hill, in a very small, grass-thatched shed the Holy Qurbana is celebrated by a Thomas Thirumeni, or a Joseph Achen and the suffering Marthomites join the Lord's Table with an young IPS officer, who never hesitated to accept them as fellow believers, well, the Lord cannot but be pleased.

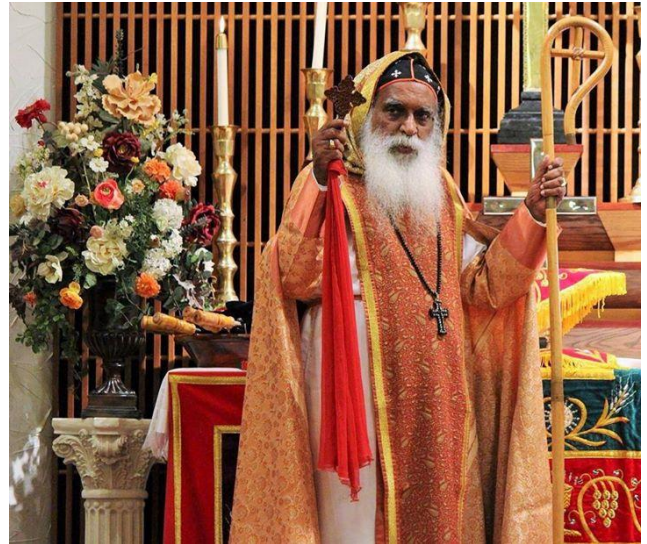
It was Church building at the rudiments. Roads and bridges were built, even with a little arm twisting and the law looking the other way. Here and there small patches of land were acquired for building Churches. Projects like the 'Kasargod School for the Speech Impaired' grew out of such God-inspired initiatives. Joseph Achen was in the fore in all such escapades and clearly hinted that he is an institution-builder. His trail from Trivandrum to Delhi is marked by a variety of institutions he built up or encouraged others to build. Planning for the future of the Church, its growth and development are his main concerns and these flow through his veins.

Our stay in Calicut was not without its flip side. We used to go for small treks and picnics and also to visit Rubber and Tea Estates of Marthomites and other friends. I confess to a little *shikar* on the side, which was encouraged and appreciated by the local gentry still given to admiring the 'Whites' and their ways. But the best was solving a vexing problem disturbing the Sunday worship in the Calicut Church, located at the very entrance to the City. A group of people, styling themselves as a Musical Band used to start practicing, on Sunday mornings, their old, ill-tuned instruments producing eerie and unusual noises, best suited to scare wild life away. Several requests by the parishioners – to shift the Sunday practice to a slot, a little earlier or a little later – did not evoke any favorable response. A visit of Thomas Thirumeni was on the cards and every one was concerned at the cacophony disrupting the melodious chanting of Thomas Thirumeni. It was then that they thought of the young Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) in charge of the area. On being briefed of the problem, the ASP took over, to the great relief of

Joseph Achen. Preliminary studies indicated that the Sunday practice sessions were not spurred by any desire to please the muse of music, but just to embarrass the parishioners, of whom one was the Land lord and he had requested them to seek a new premise as he wanted to rebuild the old structure. This was their reply in kind, a dose of jarring sound, during worship. The young police officer, visited the Band as they held a performance, convinced them that he was deeply impressed, and requested them to play their music at one of his Police Stations where a colleague was retiring. So they came and performed and as time went on, the appreciative audience asked for favorite tunes, and it was non-stop, no-respite music all the way to late in the night. The swelling audience clearly indicated that the almost swooning listeners would not let the music stop even as day was breaking. Then wisdom too dawned and an assurance was given by the musicians that there would not be any practice thereafter during worship in the Church, and all they wanted was permission to stop the 'Music Yagna' (remember, cycle yagna, a rage those days) and go home. All the parishioners welcomed the happy solution and a beaming Joseph Achen did not conceal his relief. Recently, while recalling some similar adventures we thanked God that the Electronic Media had not entered the scene then. Otherwise imagine the Channel Sessions and media hype over the music-addiction of the Police.

Thirumeni had a long spell as a parish priest, nearly fourteen years and it indeed helped him to learn all the ropes, those that strangle and those that untie. He was good at cutting many a Gordian knot to the utter disappointment of all

those who opt for a shortcut or a fast buck, Thirumeni knew the number of bricks, the quantity of mortar and the labor required to build a wall or dig a well. Growing up with Titus II, he also had the inimitable opportunity to learn all that a Prelate of the Mar Thoma Church should know, practice, cherish, and safeguard. He had learned by heart all or most of the prayers and songs long before he became an Achen. On special occasions Thirumeni, could be persuaded to use the songs and prayers which Titus II used while celebrating the Holy Qurbana. A couple of lines from one of these had found its way to the Court, thanks to the late K. N. Daniel who alleged preference to Orthodox practices on the part of the saintly Juhanon Thirumeni. Notwithstanding this unhappy association, Thirumeni has always obliged, to the immense satisfaction and profound happiness of people like me who are proud of and deeply respect our sacred, very sacrosanct, and unique traditions. Thirumeni picked up his Syriac also from the same source and as everyone knows he can use it as good as any other Syrian Christian prelate of our Sister Churches. There have been occasions when slightly irritated by the “Tyranny of the Commercial Orchestra”, poised to hijack the very marriage ceremony, Thirumeni has held forth in Syriac chanting from start to finish, including punctuations, to the utter shock and dismay of all others, including our Achens and total discomfiture of the Orchestra. Enjoying the performance every bit, I used to recall Bishop Fenwick’s observations on Palakunnath Malpan Achen’s contributions to preserving Syriac, as is used by our sister Churches, though it was Malpan Achen who started worship in Malayalam, extempore.



Thirumeni is blessed with an excellent memory besides being blessed with an equally excellent sense of history. He is indeed heir to the legacy of Abraham Malpan and that of Metropolitan Mathews Mar Athanasius the Great, and his three successors from the Palakunnath family. These rare traits and genes have contributed to make him unique, singular, and outstanding. The way he faced a spell of ill health is a shining example of his courage, determination and fortitude. The Lord healed him and he cooperated by rigorous self-discipline and towering faith –nothing short of a miracle.

I could go on recalling vignettes and incidents in which Thirumeni is ever and always the hero and the villains are inevitably and always vanquished. In fact having had the privilege to edit two Festschrifts on Thirumeni, “The Mar Thoma Church: Tradition and Modernity” on the occasion of the Episcopal Silver Jubilee in 2000 and “Heritage and Development in the Mission of the Mar Thoma Church” on the occasion of his 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday in 2011, my stock of materials stand replenished, sufficient for a fitting Volume for the Navathi, if He so wills.



Let me conclude with an observation about his love and respect for the Lay Leaders of the Church. The beautiful memorial, at the most appropriate spot in Trivandrum for T. M. Varghese, who led the struggle for responsible government in Travancore, and the tallest leader of the State Congress would not have materialized but for Thirumeni's interest and initiative. It was Thirumeni who goaded me to take the leadership and use my influence with our political leaders, in and out of office, for the Memorial. And lo and behold, this Marthomite, who has worked with national leaders like Panditji, would love to be an usher at Maramon, and would strengthen Abraham Mar Thoma to defy the all-powerful Dewan of Travancore, stands there in everlasting bronze and granite, a fitting tribute from a grateful community. It also loudly declares the position our Church took in the freedom struggle in Travancore.



Thirumeni never forgets the balance the Church has to maintain between laity and clergy. He forgives, perhaps a bit too soon, errant behavior on the part of Achens. The Aymenis are always

forgiven though their conduct, for instance in the Mandalam, would compel an exemplary disapproval leading to expulsion. His magnanimity is proverbial, those who benefit from it keep it to themselves, keeping their mouths tightly shut, while those who hoped for more, but could not get all, nurse petty grouses and loses and go on airing their grievances, forgetting the beauty of love and gratitude. Well, Thirumeni does not take either seriously to heart. Like, Burke, he believes that "a great empire and little minds go ill-together." He is large-hearted, magnanimous, and generous to a fault. He gets angry too soon and forgets his anger also too soon. How I wish, we understood this unique, good, generous, large-hearted and absolutely committed taskmaster who works hard and expects others too, to be like him. His hours of work are astoundingly long and elastic.

We need him for many more years. The Lord knows the Church needs him. And I pray for his good health and long life to guide the Church fast, forward.

## Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan-A Karmayogi with a difference

*Revd Dr. M. J. Joseph,\* Kottayam*



I am indeed grateful to Dr. Zac Varghese, the editorial director of the Mar Thoma ECHO publication for asking me to write a brief felicitation article on Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan as the Metropolitan Thirumeni is completing 60 years in the Ordained Ministry of the Church of which 42 years as Episcopa (1975-) including 10 years (2007-) as the 21st Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church. Therefore, it is quite fitting that the Church should take this opportunity to thank God for all the blessings received through the Episcopal ministry and leadership of His Grace.

I would like to recall my association with Thirumeni as a clergyman of the Church. My parents hail from Maramon where Thirumeni was born. His Grace always keeps his ancestral and native relationships

in mind and respond to situations with genuine love and affection. My family is greatly indebted to him as Thirumeni found time to visit our home at Valiyakavu, Ranni after the passing away of my father in 1987 by crossing a flooded canal. I am sure others also will have such stories to tell. I remember to have read an article written by Thirumeni in the Newspaper on the spirituality of Onam Celebrations in his native place and talked about the social harmony contributed by the Boat Race at Pamba River and other festivities in the neighborhood of Maramon. I am indeed surprised to know that he still remembers his old friends and associates in the area and makes a visit to their homes with a message of consolation and care. One should remember that the Risen Lord did not forget his earthly friend, Mary, even in his new status as the Risen Lord by calling her by name, Mary. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma always finds time "to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep" (Rom.12: 15). Thirumeni always finds time to lead the funeral service of aches without fail if found in the Aramana. I have noticed in him great concern and compassion for the clergymen of the Church, if found in their ministerial problems. I remember with gratitude to God for the presence of the Metropolitan Thirumeni as the chief guest when I bid farewell to ECC, Bangalore in 2006. Later on His Grace wrote a Foreword to my Golden Jubilee Felicitation volume, **The Golden Beams**. When I took over the responsibility as the convener of the

Ecological Commission of the Church, he has demonstrated great concerns for the ecological concerns as the patron of the Commission. A student of the Serampore College has written a B. D. Thesis on Thirumeni's ecological perspectives in the mission of the Church. I also found time to guide him. There are several noble pastoral traits such as liturgical and missional concerns are his Episcopal ministry for which the Church has reasons to thank God. The foot prints a leader leaves on the sands of time are lessons for the future generations to imitate and innovate.

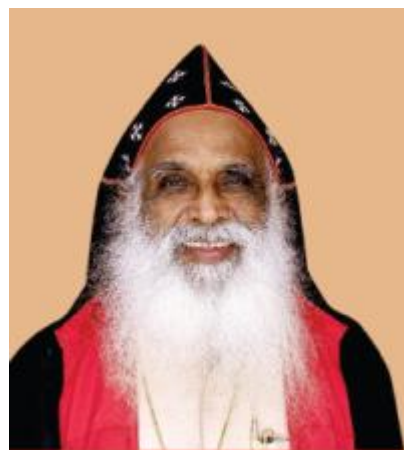


As we search for a life and its lessons, we need to search first for the already written records available with us. On the occasion of his Episcopal Silver Jubilee(2000), a Festschrift Volume under the title, **The Mar Thoma-Tradition and Modernity-** was published. I was also a member of the editorial board and Dr. P. J. Alexander was its convener and editor. There are several articles of *Reminiscences*(13) and *Reflections* on the Main Theme (24-articles). In several of the articles of reminiscences, Thirumeni is qualified as a "people's bishop". In an article under the title, "*Mission of the Mar Thoma Church in the global context*", Dr. Zac

Varghese wrote: "... he (Rev. P. T .Joseph) is born to be a bishop of the Mar Thoma Church. . . Here was an achen who utterly proud of the rich heritage of the Church and was fully aware of the role that his family played in the preservation and restoration of the great traditions of St. Thomas Christians of Malankara". In an erudite article in the Second Festschrift volume, Rev. Dr. Mathew Daniel, speaks highly of Thirumeni's commitment to the heritage of the Malankara Church . Yes, he has the passion "to preserve the timeless while adapting to the times" (Dr. Zac Varghese). "Search for the timeless " is to get involved in the affairs of the world as a good steward of God. In his association with CSI-CNI-MTC Joint Council, NCCI, ECLOF,CCA , WCC and other ecumenical bodies as a negotiator,Thirumeni has proved his leadership qualities with a difference. I am sure his recent leadership in Church union negotiation with the Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite) Church will help the Mar Thoma Church to strengthen its age old Malankara identity. Each of the Bishops and Metropolitans of the Mar Thoma Church has been endowed with a particular charisma. St. Paul reminds us that "we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us"(Rom.12:6).The second Festschrift volume(2011) entitled, **Heritage and Development in the mission of the Church**, published on Thirumeni's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday contains articles of reminiscences and tributes (15) and essays relating to heritage and development in the mission of

the Church (55- articles). I too was a member of the editorial board and Dr. P. J. Alexander was its Chief Editor. In its preface, Dr. Alexander wrote: " . . . The Festschrift is a collection of papers written by a galaxy of eminent people, both from the ordained ministry and the laity, from India and abroad". . . "During his long tenure as a priest, a Bishop and the Metropolitan, His Grace has made a large number of friends, has a number of admirers and those who are quite fond of him who appreciate his zeal and commitment to work, and his ability to face problems and crises". Needless to say, as a Karma yogi, his focus is on possibilities rather than on problems. Thirumeni has had several opportunities to do something for God's glory. The Institutions he had established in different parts of India have several stories to tell. "Arise, awake, stop not until your goal is achieved"(Vivekananda) is Thirumeni's work ethic. For him, understanding is deeper than knowledge. There are many people who know us. But there are very few who understand us. The three pillars of success such as "commitment, persistence and courage" are quite visible in all the initiatives under taken by Thirumeni as an Episcopa of the Church. As an ecumenical leader and head of the Church, Thirumeni believes in the words of wisdom attributed to Buddha: "When you move your focus from competition life becomes a celebration. Never try to defeat people, just win their hearts". One should always keep in mind

the words of wisdom uttered by the sages: "Bad people give you experience; worst people give you a lesson and best people give you memories". So also weak people revenge us; strong people forgive us and intelligent people ignore other's misdeeds. The Metropolitan, being a Karma yogi is being carried away by the life principle of Dr. A. P. J Abdulkalam: "If an egg is broken from outside forces life ends; if broken by inside force life begins and great things always begin from inside". The humanitarian initiatives he had launched in the Church particularly *Snehakaram*, rehabilitation of the Transgenders, radical concerns for the deaf and the dumb school & college at Kasaragod , institutions of medical and humanitarian care testify to this. This is the legacy that has been handed down to the Church as the Metropolitan of the Church. Let us, therefore, thank God for these bold concerns. "O Come , let us sing to the Lord"(Ps.95:1).



There are a few who have misunderstood the Metropolitan for reasons of their own. This has been found in the history of the Church right from its early period . One may come across



several opponents of Jesus during his earthly ministry and in the gentile ministry of St. Paul. It has been rightly said, “When some is so sweet to you don’t expect that person will like you all the time. Remember, even the sweet chocolate has its expiry date!” If our theology does not lead us to love others, we should question our theology. In his style of functioning, Metropolitan Thirumeni is always being guided by the Chanakya philosophy of life: “I am thankful to those who left me, because they taught me, I can do it alone”. “Walk alone; walk alone, if they do not follow you” (Rabindranath Tagore). The work principle held to his chest by Rattan Tata is well known. “None can destroy iron, but its own rust can. Likewise none can destroy a person, but his own mind set can. . .” The true measure of success lies not so much in what one has achieved, but in knowing about to what extent he or she has touched the lives of others.

May God of Grace continue to bless the Metropolitan Thirumeni with good health and cheer for the glory of His name.

*\* Revd Dr. M. J. Joseph is the former Professor of New Testament and Principal at the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam. He is also the former Principal of the Indian School of Ecumenical Theology (ISET- ECC) and former director of ECC, Bangalore.*



## **His Grace the Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan**

*Lal Varghese, Esq., Dallas*

His Grace the Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma was born to Maramon Palakkunnathu Kadone Lukose and Puthoor Mariamma on June 27, 1931. Thirumeni was ordained as a Deacon on June 29, 1957 and as Kasseessa on October 18, 1957. Subsequently on January 11, 1975, Thirumeni was ordained as Ramban and consecrated as Episcopa on February 8, 1975. Thirumeni was designated as Suffragan Metropolitan on March 15, 1999 and enthroned as the 21<sup>st</sup> Mar Thoma of the Church on October 02, 2007.



**Photo of Mar Chrysostom Valiya  
Metropolitan and Joseph Mar  
Thoma after enthronement as 21<sup>st</sup>  
Mar Thoma on October 2, 2007.**

Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan hails from the famous Palakkunnath family in Maramon from where the Mar Thoma Church had Abraham Malpan, the reformer of the Malankara Syrian Church in Kerala and the first four Bishops of the Mar Thoma Church namely Mathews Mar Athanasius, Thomas Mar Athanasius, Titus I, and Titus II. He had his theological education at the United Theological College, Bangalore and Protestant Episcopal Seminary in Virginia, USA. He also studied in Canterbury and Oxford. He was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity by Virginia Seminary. Thirumeni has been confirmed with honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity from Serampore University, Calcutta. He was the President of the National Council of Churches in India and Member of Executive Committees of different development agencies like CASA and ECLOF. At present he is one of the senior Presidents of CCA and the chairman of CASA.

The place Maramon and river Pampa are part and parcel of Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan since he was born and brought up on the banks of river Pampa in Maramon. Metropolitan is a very simple man with lot of humor in his private speeches. The speakers for the Maramon convention use to stay during the earlier period at Palakunnath house before the present retreat center was built. As a young boy (baby was his pet name) he spent memorable time famous speakers including Dr. Sherwood Eddy and Dr. Stanley Jones, which prompted Thirumeni to the mission

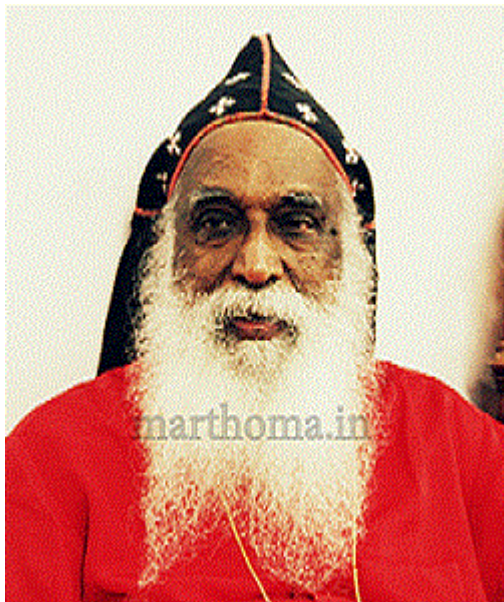
and then gradually in to the ministry of the Church. Beginning Abraham Malpan through the first four Mar Thoma Metropolitans, the Palakunnath family played a key role in reforming the Church especially after the Royal Court verdict in 1889, during which time the Church lost everything it had, but Thomas Mar Athanasius led the reformed group of the Malankara Syrian Church which helped the Church to grow to its present status. It is quite natural that Joseph Mar Thoma inherited the rich legacy of Palakunnath family including the commitment and leadership quality of the forefathers of the Church. He is a conservative person in religious matters but always willing to accept the challenges of the society. One example is his ability in leading and guiding the Church and the society to accept the transgender community and the mission started among them through the Mumbai Diocese.

Thirumeni knew very well that the ministry would be difficult and hence he kept himself away from it when family members suggested him to join the full ministry of the Church. When his uncle Titus II was sick, young Joseph spent most of his weekend during his high school days (1940 – 1944) taking care of the ailing Metropolitan. Abraham Mar Thoma, who was the Suffragan Metropolitan during that time, influenced him so much to become an ordained minister of the Church. He joined at U. C. College, Alwaye in 1948, one of the very few Christian colleges during that

time, for intermediate and also completed his bachelor's degree in economics as major and political science subsidiary. After completing his studies Joseph was thinking about a teaching position at U. C. College, but the Church wanted him to become a priest and he obliged to the invitation letter sent by Secretary to attend the interview for Vaideeka selection. He was hesitant to accept the Church sponsorship for theological study, which would have forced him to become a priest of Mar Thoma Church. With the permission from then Metropolitan Yuhannon Mar Thoma, Joseph joined as an independent student at Union Theological Seminary, Bangalore. After graduating in 1957, Rev. K. P. Philip, then Vicar of Maramon Church helped young Joseph to take the decision to join the fulltime ministry in Mar Thoma Church. He became an ordained minister of the Mar Thoma Church in October 1957. Thus Joseph Mar Thoma is completing 60 years in this October 2017 as a priest of the Mar Thoma Church.

Initially, he was given charge of parishes around Ranni with a salary of about Rs. 55 per month. In 1959, he was appointed as traveling secretary of Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association which helped him to interact with various mission fields in Kerala and different parts of India. Rev. P. T. Joseph was a perfectionist and very diligent in every thing. If any program is not well planned or goes beyond control it is natural that he gets upset often, which drew several criticisms in the past and also

at present. It is not because he is arrogant, but he wants everything to be done perfectly and in an orderly manner. In 1963 when he was making preparations to take charge parish in Delhi, the Synod asked him to take charge of the Malabar region where lot of people from central Travancore began settling during that time. It was a challenging experience for Metropolitan especially the majority of the people in that region was Muslims.



Later Thirumeni joined Protestant Episcopal Seminary in Virginia where he specialized in Reformation theology by studying in detail the writings of Martin Luther, Cramer and Bonhoeffer. In 1966 he joined Oxford and obtained his masters degree in Divinity and Sacred Theology. He returned to Kerala in 1967 and served as parish priest at Madras, Kundra and Trivandrum until December 1974. He was consecrated as a Ramban on January 11, 1975 at Trichur and consecrated as a Bishop on February 8, 1975 by choosing the name of St. Irenaeus, a 2<sup>nd</sup>

century theologian, who was martyred during Roman persecution. Thirumeni served as Bishop of Kollam – Kottarakara (1975-1980), Delhi – Bombay (1980-1988), Trivandrum – Quilon (1988-1997) and Adoor- Mavelikara (1997- 2007) His determination to success in every thing he does is always related to his quest for excellence and perfection. His determination to get things done at any cost often puts himself into difficult situations but he has the ability to turn around all disadvantages to possibilities. His leadership qualities are excellent which proved during Kuwait crisis and he took extra leadership to provide all support for those returned to Kerala. He is an ecumenical leader associated with Kerala Council of Churches (KCC), National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), CASA, ECLOFF and several other national and international organizations.

Joseph Mar Thoma is builder of the Church, both building the people and building the structures. His approach to the common view that 'Church is for building people and not for building structures' his reply will be 'Church is for both building people and building the structures and without structures a Church cannot build its people and community around'. St. Thomas School in Trivandrum, St. Thomas School, Ranchi, St. Thomas School, Singapore, The College of Science and Technology, Ayoor, higher education facilities at St. Thomas Mission Hospital, Kattanam, recent development projects for Vellore Guidance Center are



examples of Thirumeni leadership and vision about providing quality education and care to those who are in need. Starting dialysis at reduced charges for poor people both at Kattanam and Kumbanad at his initiative shows his caring nature for the poor people. The Church at the desire of Metropolitan has initiated the 'snehakaram Project' when Thirumeni completed 80 years by providing free cataract surgery for poor people. Thirumeni was elevated to Suffragan Metropolitan on March 15, 1999 and finally to Metropolitan on Oct. 2, 2007. Thirumeni is also completing 10 years as Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church in October 2017, a time during which a lot of false allegations were leveled against Thirumeni from various sources.

The newly built Poolatheen for Metropolitan led several controversies in the Church, but everyone forget the reality that the Poolatheen in which Metropolitan was staying was built in 1964. His leadership and commitment to the Church is often being criticized. He will do anything for the priests who need his support. Recently, when one of our Achen has to transplant his liver, Metropolitan took initiative and send that Achen to Vellore and the liver was successfully transplanted and the Achen recovered completely. As per the Kalpana of Metropolitan enough funds was raised for the treatment of that Achen. I had the privilege to interact with Thirumeni since 1984 while I was practicing as an Advocate at Pathanamthitta.

Even though Thirumeni is subject to several controversies recently, they're none to come in par with his leadership and bravery in making decisions. Thirumeni stands out as a prominent Christian leader, still making his own identity and it is glorious moment in his life to complete 60 years of ministry in His service. His boldness to face any controversies and extra ordinary courage remain firm on his stand makes him a different person. This trait of strong determination and stupendous sturdiness enables Metropolitan Thirumeni to move ahead as a successful leader without being fallen as a prey to many false allegations. His words are with a tone of authority, which is not pleasing to many, but he is very good person and a friend in need to anyone who approaches him for help. He seldom stoops for pressures and never afraid of criticisms of whatever nature. His courage, probably received from Abraham Malpan and all four Mar Thomas from Palakunnath family makes him a leader of his own kind and nature, which helps him to carry out his responsibilities under any circumstances whether cordial or confronting. I wish and pray that our Lord may continue to keep Metropolitan Thirumeni under His providence to lead and guide Mar Thoma Church in to the unknown future.

*Source: Heritage and Development in the Mission of the Church, Dr. Alexander, P.J. (Ed.), 2011.*

# **The Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma- The 21<sup>st</sup> Metropolitan of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

*Dr. P. John Lincoln, USA*

What an honor for me when I received an E-mail from my good old friend Dr. Zac Varghese, asking me to write an article for the publication of Mar Thoma ECHO in October honoring our Metropolitan, Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma. During the Silver Jubilee of his Episcopacy a similar publication was done, in which I also submitted an article for publication. Today I am privileged to write one more article for his Diamond Jubilee ordination.

The Mar Thoma Syrian church is his family, which was reformed from the Jacobite Church. Abraham Malpan from Palakunnathu and a few other Malpans jointly geared to introduce reformation changes in the church in 1843. This was the family chosen by God for this movement. There were four other Metropolitans from the same Palakunnathu family who headed the church until 1943. If they would not have sacrificed their lives for such a calling and dedicated their lives they would have not generated a great multitude of population in this community. Celibacy is not for all but it is only for the called ones. To my understanding he is the last link of the Palakunnathu family genealogy to be a Metropolitan. This Mar Thoma Church is historical, evangelical and of course with

great heritage, respected by global churches. The church was formed on a one-on-one relationship with God's agape' love and continues in that path today. Power and dictatorship are unseen in the church as it is democratic in origin. To start with it was a small church but had a wonderful relationship and efficient leadership. Reformation and translation of the liturgy into native language made the worship meaningful for the participants. This introduced people to have a personal relationship with God rather than following and performing rituals to please God. I have had the privilege to see Abraham Mar Thoma, Yuhanon Mar Thoma, and I have had the privilege to work with Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma, Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma, and our present Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma and all other Episcopas before and after him.

I have known Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma for the past 50 years. My cousins, who were his college classmates, know him more closely, even before he became an ordained priest. I have known Thirumeni since 1968 to the present, which is 50 years. I have known him from the time he served as our vicar of the Madras Mar Thoma Church, a young Achan with a heavy beard and a deep and powerful voice and was an eloquent speaker. His voice was melodious and his chants were appealing for a soul thrusting worship service. He uses some Syriac language in the Holy Qurbhana service

making people feel as though they are in a heavenly abode. His theme of life is “love one another”. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma is a lover of God and a lover of mankind. He has a personality and character unshakable to criticism and opposition. He always believes that necessity is the mother of invention. He is aware that rules and regulations are very important as a leader of the church, but when it comes to humanitarian circumstances, then rules and regulations are secondary. He values life more than anything and that is why he is called the shepherd who enlightens the suffering souls. He has extended a helping hand to all who need it, including his critics and those who consider themselves as his enemies. He is always at close proximity for the tormented families, sick people or those who have lost their loved ones. His needs and care for his own health always comes second to others in need.

He was awarded his first doctorate in 1985 from Virginia Theological Seminary, where I was also one of the invitees, and the second one in 2007 from Serampore Theological College. He still keeps up good relationships with all his teachers, friends, fellow clergy and Bishops within the Mar Thoma Church and interdenominationally. Some people may feel that he is serious and a difficult person to approach, but after knowing him for so long and dealing with him closely I know him to be very personable, easy to approach and gentle in

action. I consider him to be a good shepherd who can spark inspiration into any hopeless person. In his life he has had to undergo many metamorphoses as a common man called upon to be a clergy, ramban, Episcopa, Suffragan Metropolitan and finally as the fifth Metropolitan from the Palakunnathu family today after 60 years. He is a good soldier as he is always in the forefront undefeated because he knows God is lifting him up. I consider him to be a modern day Moses.



His day always starts at 4:00am on his knees talking with his Father in heaven face to face for strength and guidance. Even though his days are long with humanitarian services, all his office work is completed before sunrise. He has been chosen out in this generation as a member of the Royal priesthood, called out of darkness into His marvelous light. He does not have any enemies because he considers all to be his friends. He is a good friend to all and his love to all is shown in his actions.

In this maddening labyrinth of times when we are tossed by storm and flood, but Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma is grounded as his spirit clings to God. St. Chrysostom once said,

“Depart from the highway and transplant thyself in some enclosed ground for it is hard for a tree, which stands by the wayside to keep her fruit till it ripens.” The statement, “to keep her fruit till it ripens” is another way of saying that it takes a long time to achieve excellence and maturity. A barren tree will always have many leaves but will never get hurt or pelted because it has no fruit. When there is plenty of fruit on a wayside tree it may get hurt time and time again. I compare Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma to that big tree with plenty of fruit for all to enjoy.



He is like an older brother to me and my family. He solemnized my marriage in 1970. I had the great privilege of attending his Episcopal Consecration in Tiruvalla in 1975. Even after becoming an Episcopa our relationship has never changed. In 1985, I was invited to the University of Virginia to attend his doctoral convocation. He has always been available for all my family's needs. He conducted all three of my children's marriages and all my grandchildren's baptisms in spite of his health limitations. I feel like I have the freedom to discuss and share all our family matters with him since

our families have known each other for a long time.

Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma is a visionary, organizer and a great builder. He has given helping hands to build healthcare institutions, university colleges, postgraduate institutions and vocational training institutions. He always has constructive ideas and is a go-getter. No job is too little for him. The Maramon Convention is always in his thoughts and there is not a moment that goes by without him making plans for the next convention. He is very involved in organizations and has been president of Kerala Council of Churches, National Council of Churches and Christian Council of Asia. His involvement with the World Council of Churches has allowed the Mar Thoma Church to have an important role in ecumenism. He always extends his undivided support to those suffering and in need after natural calamities like earthquakes, tsunamis, floods and hurricanes.

I have known Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma for the past 50 years. He considers our home as his own and visits us when he can every year. I have also taken care of his dental needs for a very long time. I have never seen him have any health problems, but for a few years his health has been a little disturbed, but due to timely care from his healthcare professionals guided by God's providence, he is gaining momentum in his health day



by day. God has given him more favor in the midst of his disturbed health to continue to do his duties as the Metropolitan. He still travels inter-continentially attending to his calling in spite of his health.

I could fill this entire book by myself with a magnitude of knowledge, appreciation and love of Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma, but I will conclude so that others may have the honor of showing their love and sharing their appreciation of this great man and leader. My family and I wish him good health and a long life so that he can carry out his calling to bless this great church with his good will.



## From Preservation to Fulfilment

*Valson Thampu*

*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them, but to fulfil them -St. Matthew 5:17*



Jesus makes an important distinction here. Clearly, it is not enough to be zealous about preserving one's tradition. As philosophers and social scientists have told us many times over, it is simply impossible to preserve. Or, preservation, *in respect of what is dynamic and vital*, is an impractical and unspiritual approach. Only mummies are preserved as they are.

Let's see why. Change is of the essence of nature and life. Nothing remains the same. We cannot step into the same river twice because it is, insofar as it flows, changing continually. We ourselves are not the same from day to day. Scientists tell us that once in six months nearly all cells in our body - apparently numbering some 100 trillion! - are replaced. In that sense, each one of us is only six months old at any given point in time!

Now, imagine a religious tradition, committed inflexibly to orthodoxy, that remains the same over centuries. The identity of anything, including traditions and individuals, is contextual. That is easy

to understand, if you consider for a moment a person living alone in an island. He has no identity. That's because identity is a collaborative construct between you and your species. Or, imagine your becoming a space person, orbiting the earth or any other planet lifelong. Your identity will change at once. Now you are a space man, not a human being who belongs to the species Homo Sapiens. Or, consider another possibility. You became a sleeping beauty, slept for two hundred years, and woke up in a different world. You cannot be you, then. You were you, two hundred years ago; but now you are anachronistic, which you were not when you slipped into sleep two centuries ago. You were preserved exactly as you were, but you have ceased to be you! This illustrates the paradox at the core of a living faith.

According to Jesus, therefore, there is a need for a paradigm shift. To be spiritual at all, we need to shift from 'preservation' to 'fulfillment'. Preservation is a static concept. Our idea of tradition is, alas, static and petrified. It does not have to be; but, sadly, it is. It leaves no margin for fulfillment. But that was not the original, or true, purpose of tradition. Tradition was a living thing. To that extent, it was open to change. *Not any kind of change; but change necessary for its own fulfillment.*

There are three things, relevant, to our theme we know already. First, nothing is in a statement of fulfillment at the given time. Second, what stops transcending itself is

death. Third, what approaches fulfillment is transfigured; which is why the episode of Transfiguration is there in the Gospel. There is a direct spiritual link between the Mountain of Transfiguration and Calvary, which still echoes with the words, "It is fulfilled". Jesus' clothes became radiant at Transfiguration. After that clothes are superfluous. That's why the Body on the Cross is not perceived by us as 'naked'.

## fulfillment



What did Jesus mean by saying that he came not to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them? Why would the Law and the Prophets be not fulfilled through the Judaic religious establishment?

That's simple. The only concern the custodians of this great tradition had was to *preserve* and to protect. They were too blind; spiritually callous, to see the contradiction inherent in this outlook. This needs to be understood clearly, as it continues even today to be a widespread aberration. The outlook of 'preservation' stems from *ownership mentality*. To own a spiritual tradition, it has to be reduced to a lifeless and static object. You keep your jewels in lockers. You don't keep your children there, do you? It is as simple as that. Children need, and have the potential for, fulfillment; jewels don't. The worst form of atheism is

degrading the living faith into a dead object, shrouded and embalmed in orthodoxy.

Now, let us see how Jesus went about *fulfilling* the Law and the Prophets.

The first thing to note is that Jesus had profound respect for the Law and the Prophets. But, to him, they did not constitute orthodoxy. They were livewire realities impacting the world. Most people, even while praying to God, think of God as pretty distant and ancient! That was not how it was with Jesus. Recall, once again, Transfiguration. Why was Jesus in the company of Moses and Elijah, both separated by centuries? To Jesus, Moses and Elijah were contemporaneous with him; they had no relevance as relics of the past. This outlook is the key to the outlook of 'fulfillment'. In contrast, preservation is rooted in the past.

The proof that we value a living thing is that we do all we can to ensure that it is developed to the utmost and fulfilled. A spiritually responsible husband, for example, will not treat his wife as an object, or feel insecure on account of her empowerment. He will be mindful of his duty to minister to her need for fulfillment. That is the essence and energy of love. How do we love our children? By freezing them in time and holding them back from the world? Or, by doing our best to ensure that they sprout wings and fly towards the fulfillment of the promise in them? Jesus said to his disciples: "Go!" The world out there, with its multiple challenges,

responsibilities and opportunities, is the theatre of our growth. The stereotypical 'mission compound' is, in comparison, a hide-out.

If we are convinced of the spiritual importance of the purpose of Jesus' mission, as under consideration here, surely we would want to know: how did Jesus go about the task of fulfilling the Law and the Prophets.



This ministry has a two-fold dimension: positive and negative. The positive part is the revelation of the true scope of the spiritual tradition inaugurated by God through the Law and the Prophets. This made him proclaim the Kingdom of God. The seemingly negative task - which is also essentially positive - was to remove the limitations and hindrances on the path of this spiritual tradition, as it was institutionalized and preserved. To preserve is to impose man-made limitations and conditions.

Personally, I am convinced that it is wrong to present God as preserver of life. God is the giver of life. Giving is different from abandoning. The latter implies a full stop, and the former a beginning. So, he conjoined a mandate with the gift of life: seek is fullness (Mtt. 5:48, 7:7, Jn. 10:10). Jesus came to lead all people into life in all its fullness. Fulfillment of life is God's spiritual agenda. It is by this yardstick that we need to measure religions, religious establishments and denominations.

I am aware that this could sound heretical! My only comfort is that this is purely biblical. It issues un-adulterated from the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

What was the main hindrance or limitation in the path of the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets?

There were two main issues here. First, the Jews -misunderstanding what it meant to be a chosen people- appropriated the Law and the Prophets as their exclusive religious property. This was a blatant contradiction of the prophetic truth that they were called to be *a light unto the nations* (Isaiah 49:6). The Law and the Prophets were the oil in the lamp of their spiritual calling and witness. Most importantly, they were to shine for the sake of humankind as a whole. Jesus affirmed the same truth in St. Matthew 5: 13-16. We are the salt of the earth, the light of the world! Our resource for functioning as such is Jesus who is the light of the world (Jn. 9:5) and not light for Christians alone.

We do no better than the Jews of Isaiah's time. Perhaps we are a shade worse. We think that Jesus is a tribal hurricane lamp, meant only for 'believers and denominations'. What we are to do with that lamp, is a question rarely asked.

Be clear about this one thing: so long as we think that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is property of believers and denominations, we will not take a single step forward towards fulfilling the Gospel.

Secondly, Jesus removed the baggage of territoriality and ethnicity from the Law and the Prophets and made the spiritual tradition they unveiled universal. This meant insisting on the changes it took to do so. The Kingdom of God, we often forget, can have no walls or boundaries. Jesus came, as St. Paul says, to dismantle the walls of division. We repeat these words largely because we do not care to understand their *practical* application and liberating power.

Surely, the paradigm of 'fulfillment' is at work in transforming a regional faith monopolized by an ethnic group -the Jews- into a universal spiritual heritage into which all are welcome without the mediation of middlemen. Building on this Peter emphasized 'the priesthood of all believers'. Our Lord denounced the clergy of his times as whited sepulchers. Sepulchers may be venues for embalmed preservation, but certainly not for fulfilment.



Then, as now, the most formidable stumbling block to 'fulfilling' the faith is the clergy. Out of good intentions, they become experts in preservation. Hardly anyone realizes the subtle sarcasm Jesus embedded in the parable of the good Samaritan. Why couldn't the priest respond to the misery of the wounded, bleeding man? The clue lies in the attire of the priest. It is so designed, as scholars point out, as to prevent the priest from doing any manual work. The Samaritan was a worker. He was not bound within a comprehensive and cumbersome uniform. But the spiritual mission Jesus entrusts to us is not confined to the scope of a maintenance department.

Imagine, for a moment, what our plight would have been if Jesus, instead of fulfilling the Law and the Prophets had merely preserved it. We would have been Gentiles -aliens and strangers to the way of life. That is a measure of the gravity of the theme we address here.

Herein comes the sting in the tail. How can we be more than 'aliens and strangers' to the way of Jesus, so long as we continue to remain stuck, body and soul, to the preservation of our many traditions, and not the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets? Hence it is that Jesus says-

*Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name, drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I*

*will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evil doers." (St. Matthew 7: 21-23).*

This is serious, straightforward stuff!

In my three decades of serving the Christian community, I haven't come across more than a handful of people who see a scope for the biblical faith beyond mouthing, "Lord, Lord." In many pockets, it is a lot worse. They speak in tongues! The best you can do when you cannot speak sense in a single tongue is to speak in several tongues. If you watch "news hour" programmes on Indian TV channels, you will understand its logic at once. What do party spokesmen do when they have to defend the indefensible? They too speak in tongues! As a result, no one knows what is being discussed. How is our idea of speaking in tongues different from this? Is there no limit to the despicable mockery and dishonesty we practice in the name of Jesus, who is the truth? (Jn. 14:6)

Why, do you think, Jesus had the 'donkey tied to a tree', as a prelude to his Passion and Crucifixion set free? That too is a parable. The donkey in Bethany symbolizes the predicament we have willingly embraced. The tree offers shade, no doubt. Occasionally, provides fruits too. It is easy and safe, besides, to go round and round the tree. But there is no scope for fulfillment in such a condition. Jesus came to *set the captives free* (Lk. 4: 18). In the Kingdom of God, the last must be the first. (Mt. 20: 16). So, the stupendous mission for the liberation of humankind begins with setting

a tied donkey free, so that a beast of burden too may march to the City of God!

The lamentable thing is that preservation as the operating principle effects a pathetic reduction in the scope of our understanding and actions. To the preserve the donkey only two things are necessary: provide fodder and ward off predatory animals. What else?

The High Priest and his religious vigilantes were experts in preservation. We may denounce the cow vigilantes of our times, without wondering how different our religious outlook is from theirs. Cow vigilantes will kill beef eaters; but will not burden themselves with looking after the welfare of cows. This is an accurate illustration of the limitations in the 'preservation alone' approach. It was to preserve their religion that the Jews killed the King of Life. It was for the same reason that they divided the world into two unequal halves: the Jews and Gentiles! It was very piously that they excluded the Gentiles from the sanctuary of God's love and mercy. And built huge dividing walls and kept relentless vigil. All that they achieved was becoming killers in the name of the God of love and compassion.

We have to decide if we want to be Jews or Christians. In doing so, it would be helpful to keep in mind the distinction that Jesus has mercifully provided to us; the reason why we examine it here. Those who think that religion is all about preservation - preservation of God, traditions, and vested

interests- are potential killers. Well, that's what the Bible says; and I have no reason to believe otherwise. Wasn't it to preserve his own interests that Cain killed Abel? And Herod sought to eliminate the new born babe? And Caiaphas, the High Priest, had Jesus killed to preserve his God from the harm?

Recently Swami Agnivesh, the founder president of Bonded Labour Liberation Front and social reformer was my host for a week. He came to discuss the relevant spiritual responses to the emerging situation in our country. I had, earlier, got him to come as the chief guest of the youth conference of the Church of South India, Madhya Kerala Diocese, on the bishop's own request. Agnivesh has addressed several Christian conferences with me, including a seminar on inter-faith dialogue in the World Council of Churches in Geneva. Because of his cooperation with me, and willingness to stand up for the interests of the Christian community in the face of injustice, he was accused of having been converted to Christianity by me!

I thought it desirable to provide my Christian brethren in Trivandrum an opportunity to interact with him informally. Invitations were sent out. A day before the meeting, which happened to be a Sunday, the priest in charge of my congregation, made an express announcement that members of the congregation should not expose themselves to "those who do not receive communion". They are not to meet

such people, even if the meeting takes place “in the house a member of the congregation.”

The congregation was very obedient. None did.

I met the priest a few days later and asked him why he did so? This is what he said-

“I have a duty to protect my sheep and as long as I am in charge I will do it. I know how to do it. No one needs to teach me.”

I quote this instance only to prove that my reflections, based entirely and scrupulously on the Bible, are not mere speculations. There is a hard and harsh reality that needs to be addressed. I conclude by quoting St. Paul-

*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. (Gal. 5:1).*

From the Prophets to Jesus, the message simple and the same-

*Set my people free.*

Years ago, I happened, by sheer chance, to address a Pentecostal meeting in Kuwait. The pastor in charge consented to the Pentecostally unthinkable - a priest from any other denomination preaching to his congregation- because the recommendations were too important to be defied without serious loss of personal income. I shared the message.

Late in the night that day, I got a phone call. Here’s what the caller said-

“Sir, I am a recent convert from Hinduism. After listening to you, I realized that I was no more than an animal tied in a cattle-shed. All of us are kept in darkness.”

Is this true only of Pentecostal outfits?

Well, your guess is as good as mine.



## Transformation and Liberation

*Dr. Zac Varghese, Sinai MTC, London*

St. Paul wrote to Romans about Transformation: “Do not conform any longer to the patterns of this world, **but be transformed by the renewing power of your mind.** Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12: 2). We again read in his letter to Corinthians: “**Now Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect God’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory,** which come from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2Cor. 3: 17,18). Here we see the relationship between transformation and liberation.

Freedom or liberation is not a new idea. We, in India, celebrated 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of freedom from the colonial rule, and yet our people are under bondage and servitude of unforgiving economic and social systems and attitudes, which imprison people in inescapable poverty, gender inequality and rigid caste systems. Therefore, we have an ongoing freedom struggle against many human right violations. Without true transformation, it is not possible to have true liberation. We are also imprisoned within ourselves, our self-imposed prisons of self-centredness and egoism.

St. Paul’s writing, which I quoted above, is based on his personal experience of

transformation and liberation when he encountered Jesus with the question: “Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?” This Damascus road encounter with Jesus was the turning point in his life; he was transformed into Paul, an Apostle of Christ to Gentiles. Paul talks about his freedom in Christ because of this transformation (Galatians 5: 1-15). The source of true freedom lies in seeking the truth and for Jesus said: “Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8: 32). We further read Jesus’ declaration: “I am the way, and the truth and the life” (John 14: 6). Leading the life in the way of Christ is the only way for liberation.



The modern myth is personal and financial independence following the principles of market economy and consumeristic appetite for accumulating more and more things for luxurious living. People want others to see that they possess beautiful things, wife, children, and hope that they can generate admiration in possessing these or knowing important people and having selfies with



them. Jesus told the story of rich fool in Luke chapter 12, this man had an Epicurean philosophy of 'taking life easy; eat, drink and be merry. . .' Jesus told him that he is not rich towards God. We should be seeking for richness in God through our transforming relationship with God. This rich experience comes from a self-emptying, kenosis, moment. It is in this relationship with God we have freedom from sin and its consequences. Those who 'live, move and have their being in Christ' have the existential reality of a transformed and liberated life. These are the people who celebrate a transformational movement from the attitudes of 'being- in-itself' or 'being-for-itself' to 'being-for-others' existential reality.

Humanity is imprisoned by matrices of powerful materials and physical forces in which we are entangled until the moment of awakening. It is only during an encounter with God our minds open and we begin to sense the divine potentials of our life. In our spiritual domain, material forces such as aggression and selfish urges are converted to fruit of the Spirit such as love, joy, patience, kindness and a desire to serve others. This is a process of transformation and liberation because of the blessings of the Holy Spirit in our life as the believing people experienced on the day of the Pentecost (Acts 2). There was heavenly freedom in understanding each other without any language barrier; Holy Spirit brought heavenly love and they pooled and

shared everything they had and adopted a 'being-for-others' philosophy for community building. How happy our life would be if we believed everything good comes to our life through the unconditional love of God.

It may take a long time for the Holy Spirit to transform us to obtain our identity in Christ. One of the aspects of our true identity in Christ is that we are part of the body of Christ, and it reminds us of the absolute reality that the Christian life cannot be lived in isolation; we are created for community living and responsible caretakers of all created things in this world. The process of community (church) building involves the transformation of the whole person in thoughts, attitudes, and humility in relating to God and others. This transformed life should give us the freedom to live within the life of the other; this would help us to support each other in times of need.

Transformation does not mean the same thing as the word Transfiguration. Transformation implies a remaking of the nature of a person or object. Transfiguration implies a momentary revelation, a glimpse, of the divine nature. The Transfiguration was a special event in Jesus' life on Mount Tabor in which God allowed Peter, Andrew, and John to have a privileged spiritual experience that was meant to strengthen their faith for the challenges they would later encounter. But it was only a transitory event; it was not meant to be permanent. It liberated them from their preconceived

notions of the Kingdom of God and the Messiah. Peter wanted to stay put, but Jesus told them that they have many more things to do and they got liberated for the work ahead. When they came down from the mountain top they encountered other realities of life, but were equipped to face them. This is leading a Eucharistic life, taking God's gifts, thanking, breaking, and sharing outside the Sunday worship; it is doing 'liturgy after the liturgy' in daily living.

In the same way, at certain times in our life, God may give certain, special spiritual experiences through His grace that strengthen our faith. We should welcome these experiences as a gift from God, but we should not expect them to continue indefinitely, nor should we be afraid or resentful when they cease. A gift is only a real gift when it is shared and enjoyed in the joy of sharing. We are familiar with the same kinds of moments, both positive and negative in our own lives, among the people we know and love. Have you ever seen the face of a child transfigured with joy at some gift or unexpected event? Have you ever seen someone, we love, so overcome with anger and frustration, that their face becomes transfigured as devil? It is frightening sometimes to see how people really are on the inside when that happens. But a transformed person has a child-like innocence, innocence of wisdom, and innocence of heaven as explained by Swedenborg in his book, 'Heaven and Hell'.

This innocence is the result of the 'thinness of spirituality' and such people's thoughts are often expressed nakedly on their face and they have absolutely nothing to hide like angles. This is a process of transfiguration of reflecting the glory of God and becoming 'God's letter' to the world.

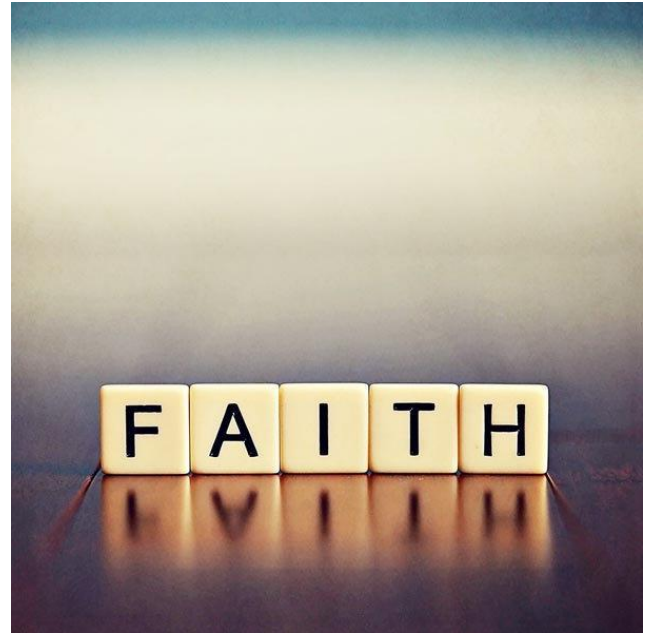
Peter, James, and John went up the mountain with Jesus, and saw him transfigured and not transformed. When they came down the mountain, he was the same Jesus; but they had seen him, literally, in a new light. We are called to reflect the presence of Christ within us. And we're called to do that, not by becoming someone or something we are not already, but by allowing the light of Christ that shines on us to reflect from us out into a dark and weary world. We also see fake transformation of all kind through cosmetic surgery, make up and trendy, fashionable clothing to create a make believe artificial situation. We transform ourselves to, hide our true nature and to stand out or to fit in and to be accepted and valued. These attempts of transformation reveal our insecurities and self-perceived flaws. These have a habit of imprisoning us in our vanity and self-preservation.

However, walking with Jesus, Emmaus road experience would change all these and should provide us freedom in Christ to do His work for building His Kingdom on earth by doing His will. St. Paul further suggest in Romans<sup>12</sup> that it is entirely

possible for a local church to think, act and live according to the pattern that he outlines as a result of the transformation in Christ: humble, considerate, joyful, prayerful, passionate, righteous, hospitable, peaceful, forgiving – and the rest. Let us move through transformation to transfiguration under the divine grace so that the world will see us, literally, in a new light: for the same light that showed the glory of Christ on the mountain top will show the glory of Christ in our lives and in our parishes, and the promise of the glory of Christ for the whole world.

## How should our faith affect the way we live?

*Revd James Mercer\**



A few weeks ago I attended an intriguing course led by Dave Tomlinson\*, Vicar of St Luke's, Holloway. The course title was 'How to be a Bad Christian'. Dave is somewhat impatient with 'churchiness'. He told stories as to how small actions can make a big difference. An example he used was how significant it was for Desmond Tutu when as a young boy he saw a white priest doff his hat in courtesy to his mother who was a domestic worker. Growing up under apartheid in South Africa he had never seen a white man show such respect to a black person before and it had a profound impact on him.

It was only later that Tutu learned the priest he had met as a young boy was the great anti-apartheid campaigner, Trevor Huddleston. In amongst all the 'important' things that Huddleston achieved in his life,

he would never have imagined the impact that this simple act of courtesy had. And yet Tutu cited it as a key moment in his upbringing – a moment which helped set him on the incredible path he took of helping bring hope and change to millions of people.

### **What difference should faith make?**

The story of how Huddleston's small act made such a big difference encouraged me to think about the areas of life which should be affected by our faith. In what ways should faith make a difference to how we live? Here are some ideas shared by Jon Kuhrt on his blog 'Resistance and Renewal' which I found helpful, if challenging:

- **Privately.** Authentic faith should be always changing us in ways that only we know about. Through prayer we seek God's grace to shape and influence our inner lives, to allow divine love to repair, restore and re-orientate us. Real faith makes a difference when *no one* is watching.
- **Personally.** Authentic faith influences our small, daily decisions about how we behave, like our attitude when driving and how we treat our families. But it also influences the big choices that we make about our life: the house we buy, how we use our money, where we send our children to school. Faith

is expressed in the personal values we live by.

- **Practically.** Authentic faith is expressed in actions which make it tangible and visible to others – especially those who are poor and suffering. Beliefs only become faith when they are put into action. This is why the Bible continually emphasises the inseparability of loving God and loving our neighbours. We are blessed by God in order to be a blessing to others.
- **Professionally.** Authentic faith has to be expressed in the realms in which we spend most of our time and our energy – and for many of us that is in paid employment. In reality there is no sacred/secular divide: the workplace is just as significant a realm as 'church' for us to express our faith and hope in the living God.
- **Publicly.** Authentic faith can never accept being relegated into just a private realm. Faith has things to say about how society is ordered and how communities operate. From the start, Christianity was a public movement, described in the New Testament as the 'Ekklesia', which means public assembly. Back then, the Christian faith was never seen as a 'private matter' and neither is it today.
- **Politically.** Authentic faith cares about how the structures and powers



in the world can be shaped to create greater fairness, justice and peace. When we look at the injustices and violence in places such as Iraq, Syria and Gaza, we cannot pretend that faith has nothing to do with politics. If Jesus had not been a *political* threat to the Jewish and Roman authorities then he never would have been crucified.

All this is of course far easier to write than to live out. However, faith must make a difference to how we live. The Roman Catholic contemplative Brennan Manning wrote:

*"The greatest cause of atheism is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, then walk out the door and deny him with their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable."*

\* 'How to be a Bad Christian: ... And a better human being' Dave Tomlinson, Hodder and Stoughton 2012

\*\* Revd James Mercer is the Vicar of All Saints' Harrow Weald, North London.

## 3rd Mar Thoma Youth Conference of Europe



By the grace of God Almighty the 3rd Mar Thoma Youth Conference of Europe took place from the 14th of July till the 16th of July at Youlbury Scout Adventures Centre in Oxford. This year the conference was hosted by St. John's Mar Thoma Church, Hounslow, and It was truly a blessed event with 172 youths along with all of the achenes and their families from the region in attendance. Throughout the three days, the theme of the conference which was "Gates & Guides" based on Matthew 7: 13-27 was deliberated and discussed in length. The two leaders for the conference were Mr. Isaac Thomas and Mr. Ken Tomita, and apart from the main talks both of them had many conversations with individuals to try and answer their questions about faith and the Christian way of life. The main sessions of the conference were divided into two, where the 13-18 year olds and the 18+ year olds were separated. This was done so that the main talks and the group discussions could be more fruitful.

The first day of the conference was mostly about welcoming all the delegates, giving an initial view on the theme through presentations and finally having a talent night which showcased the different talents of the delegates in attendance.

The second day of the conference started off with the worship and devotion lead by the youths from Ireland, followed by singing sessions and then the main talks. After each main talk, the youths were divided into different groups to discuss what was said in the main talk. There was also an apologetics session titled "Cross Examined" and a Q&A session titled "Grill a Christian". During the Q&A, the leaders received a lot of challenging questions, all of which were answered by correctly applying biblical principles. The delegates were given free time in the afternoon to play games and socialise. The day also included a witnessing session in which many youths came forward and witnessed about our saviour Christ Jesus and finally it was capped off with a joyful camp fire where everyone came together and sang songs while enjoying a cup of hot chocolate and marshmallows!

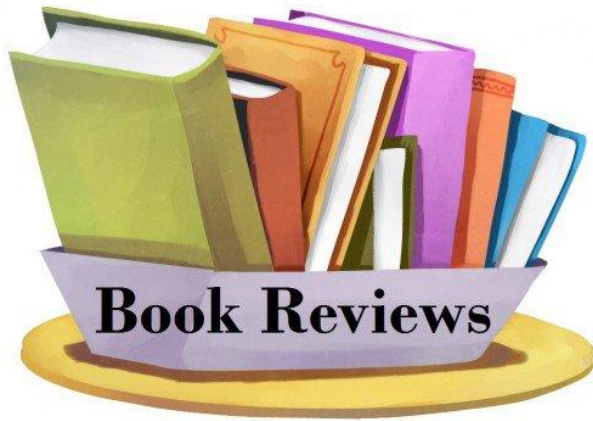
The third day started with the Holy Communion where Rev. Stanley Thomas was the chief celebrant. After which the concluding main talks took place with a lot of questions being answered and the faith of many being rejuvenated and strengthened. At noon, the closing session took place

where the organisers said their thanks to everyone involved and after which the candle was passed on to Tabore Mar Thoma Church Manchester, who will be organising the 4th Mar Thoma Youth Conference of Europe.



## Book Review -1

*Dr. Zac Varghese, London*



'On a stormy course: *My Years in St. Stephen's*' by Valson Thampu, first published in India in 2017 by Hachette India (Registered name: Hachette Book Publishing India Pvt. Ltd) An Hachette UK company. [www.hachetteindia.com](http://www.hachetteindia.com).

This is the memoir of a man whom the Indian media loved to hate. He was christened 'controversy's child'. Everything about his tenure – events trivial and significant- became media fodder and over the 9 years he was principal of India's most coveted institution -St. Stephen's College, Delhi – an unmatched library of reportage accumulated, unequalled by any event or tenure in the history of higher education in India, developed and a great deal of still remains archived with the national print media.

Here is an instance of a personal Memoir also becoming a chronicle of the times. The author quotes Goethe in Chapter six to the effect that the usefulness of a biography is to understand human realities in a historical context. This is true of this book. It is a lucid narration of the struggles the author undertook in his academic and spiritual journey for providing excellence of education in India through St. Stephen's college.

The tasks of a reviewer is to assess the effectiveness of an author's treatment of a theme and to evaluate if he challenges the reader's assumptions and dispositions, with the significance of the experiences he lays bare. A memoir is a sacrament in which experiences are broken and distributed to the reader through the litany of the printed word. The merit of a memoir is impeccable fidelity to facts. As one who followed, to some extent, the events strung together in this narrative, I am persuaded of its narratorial veracity. As for the author's felicity with the art of writing, the reach and depth of his reading, and his capacity for philosophical reflection that makes even routine events unveil surprising depths, the reader does not have to be specially informed, as thousands of them have heard him and read his writings over the years.

The author brings forty years of experiential wisdom to bear of the guided tour he offers through the blind alleys of higher education in India. The author advisedly puts the thematic and spiritual focus of his story on

the illness of academia; and, in so doing, transcends what is painfully personal. He treats his experiences as a mirror held up to the cracked visage of Indian education and anatomizes, through first-hand experience, why the pursuit of excellence in education is as daunting as it has come to be. While reading the book, it is difficult to ignore the possibility that policy makers of Indian education are a major sector that the author addresses, albeit indirectly, in this book.

Predictably, the spotlight is on teachers; for they are the most crucial link in the educational chain. The core strength of our educational heritage, as most readers would recall from personal experiences, were teachers, our gurus, who left lasting impressions on us, not by their scholarship but by their humanness. The authors, in the present narrative, marshals compelling evidence to make all of us worry as to how this asset has got degraded. St. Stephen's becomes, in this context, a case study of how even the best of institutions are losing their foundational values and spiritual wholeness.

How does the author see himself in writing this book? Here are his words: "My situation, in writing the present account, is not unlike that of Prufrock's Lazarus, "come back from the dead, to tell it all. . . To me this is not only the story of a resurrection. The story is a resurrection. The past rises up through the word. What is not told dies. Word is the mirror we hold up to the truth we lived." The reader cannot help

wondering at the grim battle the author had to fight to "rebuild the broken walls" – to use a metaphor from the book of Nehemiah, which the author foregrounds – of a godly institution, the contemporary counterpart of the "City of God" in *Nehemiah*. It is amazing how little human realities have changed in three millennia. "I had to," says the author, "work like Nehemiah and his team, with tools in one hand and swords in the other."

The narrative of the book is greatly enhanced by the vast and varied experiences of the author who, apart from being on the faculty of St. Stephen's, had served in the past also as a Member of the National Steering Committee on Curriculum Review – which crafted the National Curriculum Framework, 2005. He was also a of the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (2004-2007). Additionally, he had written extensively on various aspects and issues germane to education. So, what the reader is privileged to get through this book is, if you like, a 'ring-side view' of the realities that are, otherwise, swept under the carpet.

As the author states explicitly, his home-coming to education, years after he exited academia and abandoned himself to the wider world, was to find for himself answers to two questions: (a) Is it possible and feasible to keep educational administration wholly corruption-free? (b) How valid is the reigning dogma that commitment to social justice is incompatible

with the pursuit of excellence in higher education? Or, to put it in biblical terms, is it possible to 'preach the good news to the poor' especially in institutions of prestige, which are coveted and cornered by the rich and the mighty? Those interested in these questions will find reading this book a gripping and inspiring experience.

The book falls into two broad sections: the chronicling of events that one would have thought belonged to a thriller. This is followed by, in the last three chapters, incisive reflections on the light 'hidden under the bushel' as it were of the events recounted. Administrators and policy makers in education will find the concluding chapters especially significant.

An important question may arise in our minds: did the author write this memoir as a ritual of self-exorcism or is he trying to get even with his erstwhile detractors? After a careful perusal of the book, I think he does neither. If he revisits his old wounds, it is only to share his near-death-experiences so as to shore up the sagging morale of those who struggle to harmonize the pressures and pulls of administration with 'the still, small voice' of their conscience. The author exposes his soul to us in these pages and ends with a request: "This much I expect from you. Next time, when a fellow human being is chased in the jungle of your public sphere, to pipe entertainment into your living room, won't you feel a little prick of unease, a slight twitch of memory, and

refuse to be entertained; so that a creature committed to the education or health, or sanity, or humanity of your children does not have to scream. . ."

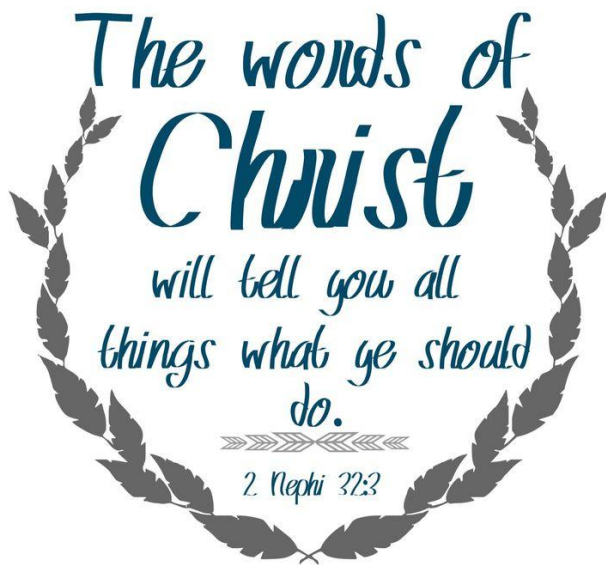
A striking feature of this book, the one I found especially enriching, is the author's ability to see the personal and the particular in light of the universal and the general. What stands him in good stead in this is his eclectic scholarship and his ability to creatively draw from his readings to be able to weave a web of objectivity around what, otherwise, would have been narrowly personal.

The work we do, the service we render, is the foremost medium of our self-expression, which is a measure of our freedom at work. Freedom is at once what is available to us in a given context and how we negotiate the context and to what end. It is here that St. Paul's exhortation to the Romans becomes so very relevant, 'do not conform to the pattern of the world' (Rom. 12: 2). Why shouldn't we conform? Because, conformity is the orbit of entrapment and bondage. As Paul writes to Galatians, it is into freedom that Christ has called us. Do not slip back under the yoke of slavery (Gal. 5:1). The Son sets us free, as Jesus said, by empowering us to be free and fearless in being faithful to our calling in the workplace. Many are unsure and anxious as to what extent this is possible in our times. Read this book, if you are. Read this book, even if you are not. You



will be spiritually rejuvenated to know how one man, pitted against an array of formidable forces, managed to stay faithful, trusting in God alone.

I sincerely recommend this book. I'm sure you will find reading it a powerful experience, as I have.



DeseretNews.com

## Book Review-2

**'The Eucharistic Liturgy – A Liturgical Foundation for Mission in the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church'** by Revd Dr. **Jameson K. Pallikunnil**. Published by Author House, UK, 2017; Pp 300. ISBN 978-1-5246-7652-0 (e).

*Dr. Zac Varghese, London*

This book is the end result of Revd Dr. Jameson K. Pallikunnil's doctoral study at St. Patrick's College, Pontifical University, in Ireland. The front cover page is adorned with the photo of a historically important chalice, as mentioned by the Most Revd Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan at the release of the book at the centenary birth celebrations of Mar Chrysostom Valiaya Metropolitan. The two quotations in the back cover of the book give the gist of this important seminal work. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan Wrote: "The writer explicitly places how the Eucharistic liturgy of the Mar Thoma Church is observed as the foundation for mission in its course of Growth. This study throws ample light on how the Mar Thoma Church integrated Liturgy and Mission in its course of development and the writer systematically illustrates how the Church made a serious effort to bring missional themes employed in the liturgy into the practical realm. This volume asserts that an emphasis on Eucharistic-centred ecclesiology guides and motivates the Church to enliven a mission-

oriented life. Rev. Jameson brings together the liturgical, biblical and missiological aspects of St. James liturgy in the historical context of the Mar Thoma Church.”

The second Quotation is from Revd Dr. Philip Tovey who was one of the external examiners of the Thesis. He wrote: “The relationship between worship and mission is a neglected area of study in general, and in particular the relationship between Holy Communion (the Qurbana) and mission is even less examined. In this book, Dr. Jameson studies these two important topics in a convincing way. Looking at the prayers of the holy Qurbana he shows how mission is rooted in prayer to the Trinity and to the incarnate Son. In both case, there is an outgoing movement of mission based on love and in the incarnation process of redemption. These are central to our understanding of mission and the book shows how the holy Qurbana holds before our eyes a vision of a loving outgoing God which is our model for Christian mission. This is then applied to the life of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church which is noted for its evangelistic outreach and mission to society. This is timely book and brings together what is kept apart, the study of liturgy and the study of mission. Dr. Jameson should be commended for this work which will be a source of inspiration and challenge to many.”

The timing of the publication of this book is very significant, particularly in the context of the celebration of the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther’s reformation in Europe. This Reformation was a process of both renewal and division amongst Christians in Europe. Reformation started with Luther’s protest against indulgences and other corrupt practices in the Catholic Church, which he highlighted in the 95 articles of his Wittenberg declaration. The proclamation of the gospel of grace, the declaration of the ‘Sola scriptura and Sola Fide’, the availability of the Bible to all in their own language and the recognition of the ‘calling of lay people’ to serve God in the world and in the Church were other major contributions of the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. On the other hand, The reformation of the ancient St. Thomas Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century opened up the Eucharistic liturgy and it became meaningful (through translation from Syriac to Malayalam) in the life of the ordinary members of the Church and this helped to integrate mission of the church with the mission of God (*Missio Dei*).

Liturgy leading to mission is the heart of Jameson achen’s study and this book is its result. He concludes in Chapter five: “The anaphora of St. James presents a well-established theology of mission. Overall, the liturgy of St. James gives us the impression that the mission of the Church flows from the Eucharistic Liturgy.” What is liturgy? Liturgy is an inclusive word to describe all

prescribed services of the Church. The Holy Communion and the God's mission leading from the Holy Communion is the main purpose of the liturgy. Often the Mar Thoma Church is described as a liturgical Church or as a missionary Church. This book gives us a balanced emphasis on both, and reminds us that it is the Eucharistic liturgy of the Church which is leading and guiding her members to the Mission of God. In Chapter five, it is further stated that "celebration of the Eucharist is the centre of Christian worship. Through the Eucharist, the Church participates in the very divine life of God. There is a dynamic interaction between the liturgy and mission. The liturgy orients the worshipping community for mission." This is indeed taking us to the root of Orthodox theology of 'liturgy after the liturgy'. Mission is simply the extension of the Eucharist in our daily life of taking God's gifts in love, thanking, breaking and sharing. The book gives a simple and very meaningful explanation of mission as understood theologically, the mission of God sending his own Son, and the mission of Jesus sending his disciples to all nations. This book is an icon, a window, into the history of the Mar Thoma Church, its reformation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and its dependence on St. James and West Syrian liturgical traditions, and the development of missiological traditions and paradigms of mission of the Mar Thoma Church. This book provides a deeper understanding of liturgy, faith and practices of the Mar

Thoma Church and gives us an impetus for further reformation because we believe that our Church is a reformed and reforming church. It provides a renewed enthusiasm for the mission of God in our Church.

I do not want to reveal all the hidden mysteries of this book in this review, which may spoil the appetite of the reader, this is only an appetizer and a rich menu is waiting for you to enjoy at your leisure. It has nine rich chapters and has a very detailed bibliography which is helpful for further studies. This book is very useful to clarify the meaning of mission and the energising power of the Eucharistic liturgy in conducting that mission. The book is written in a lucid, clear style, and apologetic in the best sense of the word. There is so much in this book, every clergy and lay people of the Mar Thoma Church should have a copy of this book. We often think that we know all about Eucharistic liturgy and mission; some may even chant the liturgy from their memory; it is this familiarity which spoils our enquiry and deeper understanding. I strongly recommend this book; I congratulate Jameson achen for this outstanding work and thank God for entrusting this mission to him.

## The Larva and the Butterfly



*Revd Dr. M. J. Joseph, Kottayam*

*I am a butterfly  
How could I have been a larva once?  
I don't like to be compared to a larva  
It's below my dignity.*

*Look at my pomp and show  
Look at my attire  
See the colors on my seamless coat  
Watch the way I live and command.*

*There are so many at my side!  
Many touch my feet!  
I don't go to any one  
All are all coming to me.  
The Larva turned to the butterfly and said,  
Remember you had a past  
Your past is a continuation of my present  
You had undergone a period of metamorphosis  
You were once ugly in the sight of others  
You were confined to your coffin  
You were destined to be a prey of others  
You seem to have forgotten the dark spots in  
your life.*

*As the larva and the butterfly were arguing*

*There came a crow  
The crow said: hallow butterfly,  
You were once helpless  
You would have been my prey .  
  
I allowed you to survive  
It was my mercy, nothing but mercy.*

*Live in gratitude to your begetter  
Live without any arrogance  
Live in humility  
Remember the past  
Your making is a story in different stages.*

*Butterfly said to the Crow:  
Forgive me, I had forgotten my past  
My beautiful attire had deluded me  
My ability to fly above the lake made me proud  
Now I know that my beauty is a threat to my life  
The Death trap is at my door step.*

*\* This poem, describing metamorphosis of an ugly larva to a beautiful butterfly, is as a most interesting metaphor for our spiritual transformation and liberation. Human beings also have the potential for such transformation and liberation through the grace of God as discussed in this issue of the ECHO. Transformation is a divinely guided process by which a human being becomes a spiritual being and attains freedom in Christ. However, we should be careful that our spiritual transformation does not lead us to pride. Mentorship and fellowship with other believers would help us to continue our pilgrim's journey with humility and thanksgiving (Editorial reflection).*

## Reflection of the Month: Rebuilding the Broken Body



From a Feature article in The Tablet, Jenny Sinclair writes:

So many people didn't see Brexit and Trump coming.

Some are still unclear about what happened. Both were symptoms of our broken body. What can be done to heal these divisions and estrangements in our national community? The causes have been building for years.

*Faith in the City*, the Church of England report published in 1985 in which my father, David Sheppard, the Anglican bishop of Liverpool, was closely involved, focused on "communities of the left behind". It reminded us that 'Poverty is not only about shortage of money. It is about relationships; about how people are treated and how they regard themselves; about powerlessness, exclusion and loss of dignity.'

Today, we hear a lot about giving "a voice to the voiceless", rather less about the patient work of forging a common life together.

The Beatitudes teach that the "poor in spirit" are blessed. The churches do their best to honour this. But we must look closer at the relationship between the Church and "the poor". Could it be that, inadvertently, while focusing on the interests of the destitute or of refugees or migrants or other minority groups, some of us have been swept along, and overlooked the interests of

the struggling working class families in our own neighbourhoods?

Who are "the poor"? Pope Francis has said they are people who live with the experience of "non-power", whether economic, social, material, relational, educational or spiritual. Someone who is living with the experience of non-power has a sense of their need for other human beings, their need for community: the very opposite of individualism. To be in a friendship with a person who is poor is to build a common good. This beautiful truth is at the heart of our faith, which is why Francis wants the Church to be outward-facing, to be not only a Church *for* the poor, but a Church *of* the poor.

But sometimes the traditions, opinions and cultures of people who are poor cut across what many in the liberal mainstream are comfortable with. Is the Church ready to embrace everyone who is poor? Not with a patronising embrace, or speaking *for*, but working *with*, on the basis of reciprocity and respect. As Rowan Williams has said, meeting another human person is to be on sacred ground.

Jean Vanier shows us that, to be fully human, we need to live, like Jesus, in relationship with those discarded by the dominant culture, no matter how difficult that may be. Vanier's experience living with profoundly rejected people has taught him that humiliation can lead to anger, and, sometimes, to violence. Those with no power may well be angry. But anger is energy: misdirected it can be divisive, but disarmed in friendship it can be mutually transformational. Indeed, Vanier talks about the "gift of the poor." He says often it is they who can reveal to us, with stunning



clarity, the needs, the pain and the beauty of the whole community.

While those with power (that is, most of us) are estranged from people who experience non-power, all are impoverished. Shaming the poor even further into silence will eventually hurt us all.

Our task, as people of the Church, is to step outside of our echo chambers, to leave the comfort zone of like-minded friends. All of us in our country are “members one of another”. Rebuilding the broken body involves listening and humility; it is not a matter of persuasion but of encounter. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul says we should “Tell each other the truth, because we all belong to each other in the same body.” He is calling for the unity and reconciliation of the whole of creation through the agency of the Church. This challenge brings the potential for the healing of our fragmented society into convergence with the Church’s mission.

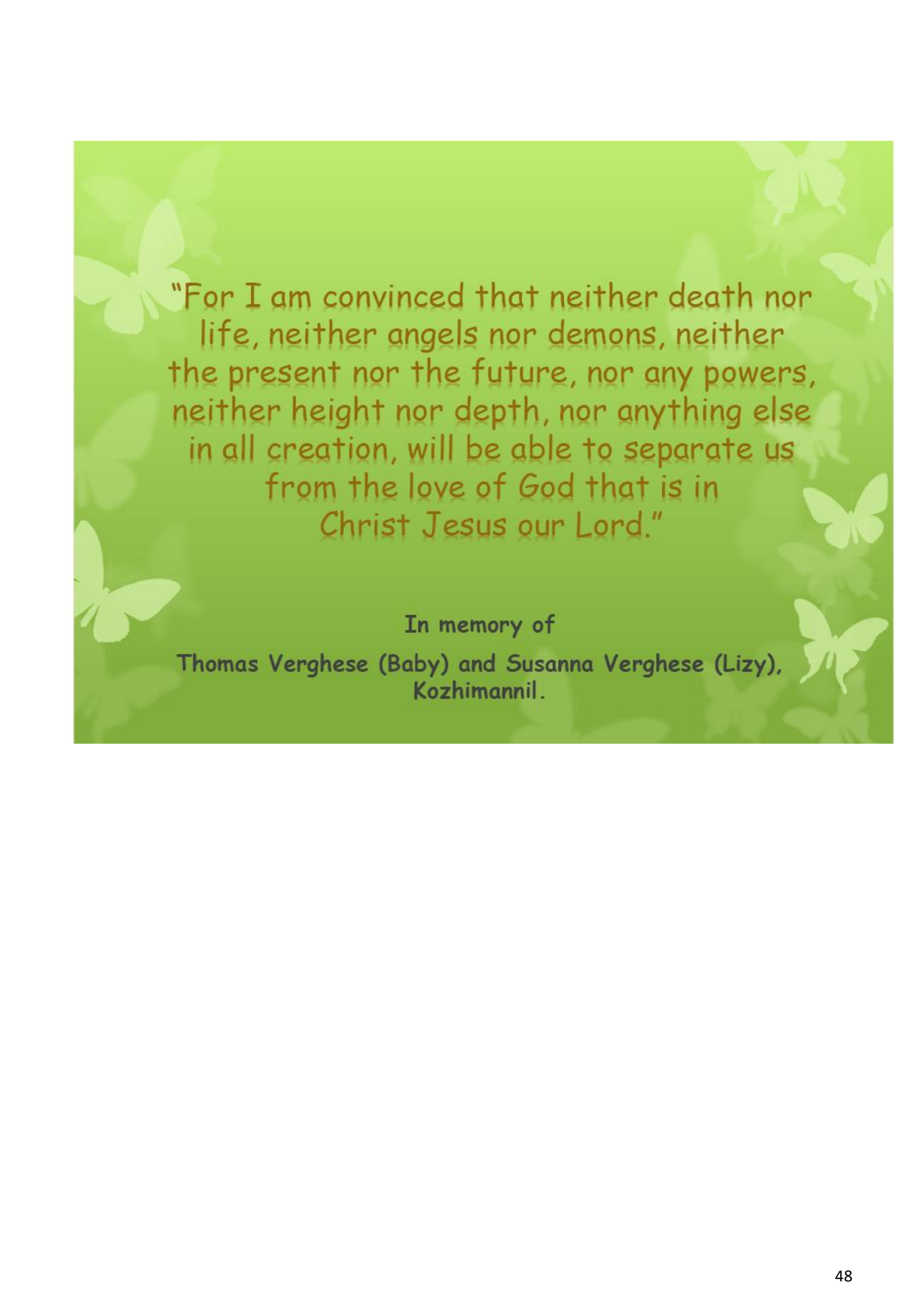
This moment of political turmoil is an opportunity. The old orthodoxies of left and right have been in decline for some time. A new settlement is being formed, and, if it is not founded on relationships between groups currently so estranged, our democracy will remain in crisis. The Church could be a blessing to our national community in this great challenge: the common good correctly understood is never partisan or sectarian. But if it cannot reform its relationship with the poor, the Church risks a sterile internal conversation, sidelining the very person of Jesus.

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[www.togetherforthecommongood.co.uk](http://www.togetherforthecommongood.co.uk)

Original article from The Tablet, April 2017:  
<http://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/9729/rebuilding-the-broken-body>

Jenny Sinclair expands further in *Good Neighbours and the Common Good* (podcast) at a National Justice and Peace Network conference <http://bit.ly/2t3hUbk>

*Calling People of Goodwill: the Bible and the Common Good* - the new bible study booklet from T4CG and Bible Society:  
<http://bit.ly/commongodbible>



"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In memory of  
Thomas Verghese (Baby) and Susanna Verghese (Lizy),  
Kozhimannil.