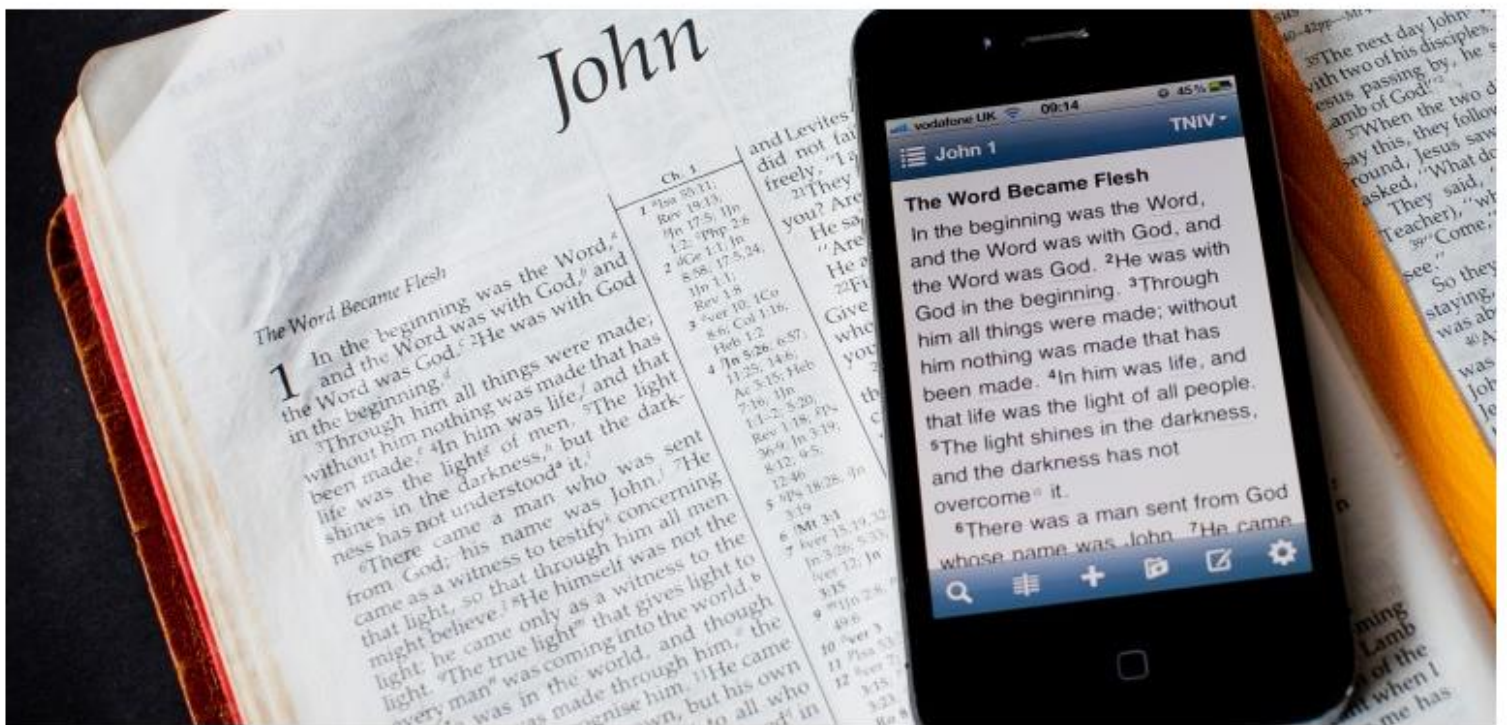




The Mar Thoma

ECHO



A Publication of the Council of Mar Thoma Parishes in Europe





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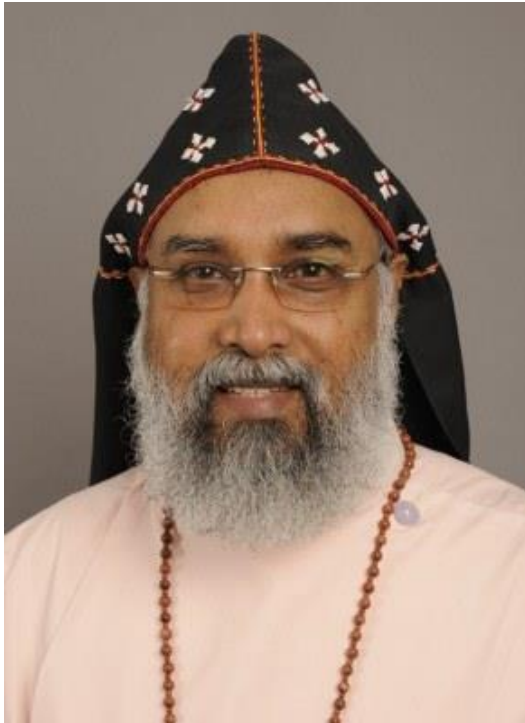
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Message from Diocesan Episcopa



Dearly beloved in Christ

Greetings from *Sinai MarThoma Center!*

We are happy to greet everyone with warm regards from the Council of Mar Thoma parishes in Europe. Glad to note the progress in the community formation and the renewed commitment of the members and the parishes in the ownership of the Zonal activities. The family conference hosted by Harmon Mar Thoma parish, Birmingham was a clear indication of the interest in the common programs and keeping the spirit of fellowship among the Mar Thoma community.

Special appreciation is to be given to the organizing committee of the 36th family conference of UK & Europe in August. The theme 'Spiritual journey in a digital world' was well expounded and articulated, which helped the

participants for a meaningful engagement in analysing the trend to use digital technology in the fast-changing world. The positive signs of bringing awareness and developing a sense of solidarity with the people are to be kept in mind even though the scope of misinformation and the addictive tendency can adversely affect personality, social life and spirituality. The question of data protection and to provide clear perspectives are challenges the technological communication especially social media face at times. It has been observed that human impulse and human behavior to develop negativity is faster than the positive elements. The impact of digital technology on human behavior is to be considered seriously in the present times.

The spiritual impulse in humanity that transforms the inner being and behaviour of a person has to be given priority in Christian life. God communicates to people in different ways. The need to know the mind of God through Jesus Christ is pivotal to a faithful member of the church. The gift given by God to humanity is the use of free will. One should not become insane while using the mind blogging images and ideas, rather proper use of the free will for the good of oneself and others is much desired. The spiritual journey of a person is to be guided and guarded by the Divine and the inspiration that is received through the Word of God. Every person needs to be aware that 'to dream, to seek the unknown, to look for what is beautiful is its own reward'. We are happy that this issue of ECHO deals with the same theme for further understanding.

Pray that God may guide us to move forward with renewed vision in our spiritual journey. Let us uphold the richness that we received and work for the wellbeing of humanity through our committed action.

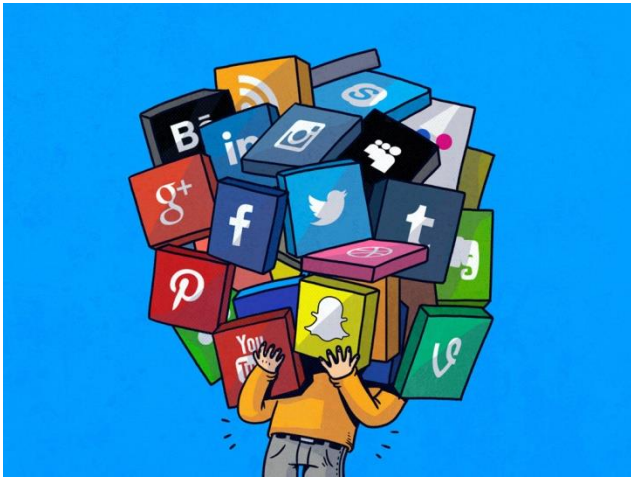
With prayerful regards,

Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos
Diocesan Bishop

Editorial

“Perhaps you were born for such a time as this”... (Paraphrased, Esther 4:14)

...”He has send me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.”
Isaiah 61:1



Heraclitus of Ephesus, a 6th Century Greek philosopher has been quoted as saying “The only thing that is constant is change”. What a great time to embrace the changes than a time as this, a time where we have evolved from using the scrolls and codex to digital means of communication. As Christ followers we have come a long way in adapting changes in the way we use technology to reach the masses. The theme of our 36th family conference in August 2018, ‘Spiritual Journey in a Digital World’ presented us with an opportunity to discuss and debate the changes evoked by the digital era. The current issue of Echo rightly focuses on the theme to get us ponder over the facts presented. The digital revolution, also known as the Third Industrial Revolution is an unstoppable creative force which can be hugely transformational if accepted in the right mind set.

In Nehemiah, we see Ezra the scribe reading the law from the scrolls to a once exiled community. There was no one to communicate the law of God to the people and they needed to hear what God

had to communicate to them. We face similar challenges as a diaspora community. If in Ezra’s time, it was the lack of communication to the people of Israel, in our times it is the discernment of God’s voice from the overwhelming voices blared through different forms of media and social platforms. We, as diaspora community, need a platform to bring our focus back to God. It can be aptly said that more than the means of communication, it is how we want to communicate God’s love to people who are broken hearted and bound by fetters. Instead of our voices becoming insignificant amongst the millions of expressions that digital era has brought about, it is time to quieten our heightened senses to listen to the still small voice of God.

Perhaps we were born in such a time as this to be the change the world needs now. During a TED talk in April, Pope Francis brings the world’s attention to a ‘culture of waste’ and ‘to growing inequality and to the disruption brought about by technology’. Instead of demonising the technological advances, let us contemplate and converse to meaningfully embrace the change to win others for Christ.

Farewell Note

Farewell note to our outgoing ECHO Chief editor Dr. Zac Varghese

farewell

On behalf of the entire community of ECHO, its Authors and Readers, we would like to thank the outgoing Editor, Dr. Zac Varghese who have part ways with ECHO since

Sept 2014. He deserves a big round of applause for the enormous time and effort he has invested in this Journal, encouraging its growth and quality. Following is a small snippet from the speech delivered by Revd.Dr.M.Joseph, Kottayam on July 7, 2018 at Kalayapuram Mar Thoma Church, Kottarakkara on his 80th Birthday.

“Dr.Zac Varghese is Emeritus Professor at the University of London who has earned a medical specialty in Renal Transplantation and Immunology. By God’s grace he has excelled in his field. He is a distinguished “ecumenical lay theologian of the Mar Thoma Church” who has graced the medical, scientific ,religious and ecumenical fields. I am reminded of the words of the well known mission theologian Henrik Kramer who had made a comment on the laity of the Church-“ For effective mission “ the frozen credit of the Church must become liquid cash”. The Mar Thoma Church is blessed with several distinguished lay men and women who have left their foot prints on the sands of time. They are like the Abel of old who though dead, are still speaking to us. Zac as an ecumenist being deeply rooted in his own Church traditions branches out with shady leaves and fruits. His involvements, speeches and writings bear witness to it. As the home of Aquila and Pricilla, the home of Zac and his wife Elzi, in London has open doors and it is known for its ecumenical hospitality.

He took the initiative in 1999 to convene the first meeting of the members of the Mar Thoma

Diaspora community at Santigiri, Aluva. His concerns shared by a few of us started the publication of a quarterly by name DIASPORA FOCUS from Texas,USA.. It is an online publication which has touched a readership of 1M till now. (FOCUS-For Christian Understanding and Solidarity)

Zac has a social vision. For him, as Helen Keller believed, “Life is an exciting business when it is lived for others”. He has an amazing capacity to make friendship with people across the community For him, love is a verb..

I am reminded of the words of Fr.Murray Rogers who is also known to Zac: “If friends are my assets, I am the richest man in the world”. Zac always tries to build friendship with Church dignitaries and others with great enthusiasm. He is never tired or retired. We are reminded of the words of St.Basil: “He who sows courtesy reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness gathers love”. The ability to have true friends is an index of the sincerity and credibility of any man or woman.

As a biographer, Zac has a special gifts and talents. I have a collection of Festschrift volumes in which he had written. With great admiration, he has penned on late Dr.Thomas Mar Athanasius Suffragan Metropolitan, lateRev.C.V.John, and late Rev Dr.M.A.Thomas. His articles in the Festschrift volumes of Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Valiya Mteropolitan,Dr.Joseph Mar Thoma and in my Festschrift Volume bear witness to his love and care of other people. On this occasion, let us pray that the God of all Grace grant Zac health and wisdom to keep the spirit of service at the boiling point. May God’s name be glorified “

As editors of the ECHO we take this opportunity to thank Dr. Zac Varghese for all the inputs and encouragement he has given for the growth of the journal for the last 4 years. May God bless you and keep you safe and strong. Appreciating all his efforts for the continued support and wishing him all the goodness of life.

Share the wisdom of the elderly

Dr. John Thomas St. Johns Mar Thoma Church,
UK



When we use the term Senior Citizen or the elderly or the Aged there is several synonyms that come to our mind, such as, Passed the prime, Spent force, those passed the Sell by Date or Best Before Date or use by date, Surplus to Requirement, One foot in the grave, Burden on the society and NHS. They are often marginalised and not in the mainstream. They are labelled as non-productive members of the community. Some are physically weak and perhaps even financially weak. But those are the people, who have lived through various conditions and survived all that were thrown at them. Those who have reached their seventies or eighties have lived through war, floods, droughts, financial downturns and built up a lot of skills for survival.

Old aged people have been through many different hardship experiences that will help our walk of faith. They have made mistakes and they will help guide us so we don't make the same mistakes. An elderly Christian never truly gets old. You only get old when you stop seeking the advancement of the kingdom of God. You only get old when you cease building up others in Christ.

Research carried out at Texas University has found that older people are better at making choices that led to long term gain, while younger people were quicker to make choices which led to

immediate rewards. The researchers suggested that this could be because younger people make choices using a part of the brain called ventral striatum which is linked to the immediate rewards. As this declines with age, older people are forced to compensate by using their prefrontal cortices, which control rational and deliberate thoughts.

But how do we consider the Senior Citizens? What does the Bible say?

“They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green,”(Psalm 92:14)

“The glory of the young is their strength; the grey hair of experience is the splendour of the old.”(Proverbs 20:29)

“You shall stand up before the grey head and honour the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD”.(Leviticus 19:32)

“Grey hair is a crown of splendour; it is attained in the way of righteousness.”(**Proverbs 16:31**)

If you have spent your years walking with God, and learning from Him, then you have earned every grey hair on your head. They should be celebrated and worn like a crown, as a testament that you are the living, breathing child of a King.

Some life lessons come in an instant, and others must be learned from years of experience and growth. The older we grow, the more we learn about kindness, patience, heartbreak, love and mercy. All of these experiences lead us to a deeper understanding of life's seasons, and a greater wisdom of God's presence through them all.

“Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers.”(1 Timothy 5:1)

“Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.” (Exodus 20:12)

But how is it in the eyes of God? God does not operate and age bar or a retirement age.



God chose Noah when he was 600 years old to build an ark to save the animals of his creation from the flood.

God chose Abraham to be the father of a great nation when he was 100 years old and Sarah to be the mother of a great nation when she was 90 years old.

God chose Moses to lead the Israelites from slavery in Egypt when he was 80 years old Aaron when he was 83 years old.

God chose Zachariah & Elizabeth as parents of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ when they were too old to have children.

“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.”(2 Corinthians 4:16)

Our body may appear older, but our insides are being renewed daily. Old age is a blessing from the Lord. We should never be afraid of aging. Christians have a responsibility to show kindness, respect, and to take care of the elderly. When living by the Word of God old age brings wisdom that is able to help and guide others in need.

“Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?”(Job 12:12)Older people should be valued for their experience.

Yes! With age comes Wisdom.

When people think of wisdom they immediately think of it as someone who has scholarly knowledge or received a lot of learning but it could be defined as having the knowledge of what is true and right. When asked what is wisdom?the common answer is the gift of knowing everything but it is more of a person having an open

mind to further increase their knowledge. People gain most of their wisdom not from classroom but from their life experience as books can only teach us so much.

Knowledge and wisdom are not synonyms.

Knowledge is the accumulation of facts and data that you have learned about or experienced. It is being aware of something, and having information. Knowledge is really about facts and ideas that we acquire through study, research, investigation, observation, or experience.

What is Wisdom?

The Greek philosopher Socrates defines wisdom as follows: - “The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing.” Or the more you know, you know that more you do not know. Wisdom is the ability to discern and judge which aspects of that knowledge are true, right, lasting, and applicable to your life. It is the ability to apply that knowledge to the greater scheme of life. It is also deeper; knowing the meaning or reason; about knowing why something is and what it means to your life.

Knowledge is what is gathered over time through study. It can be said of wisdom, in turn, acts properly upon that knowledge. Wisdom is the fitting application of the knowledge. Knowledge knows when you are driving your car that the traffic light has turned red; wisdom applies the brakes. Knowledge sees a puddle of water; wisdom walks around it. Knowledge memorises the Ten Commandments; wisdom obeys them. Knowledge learns of God; wisdom loves him.

Biblical Definition of Wisdom

The biblical definition of wisdom is the fear of the Lord as that’s where it begins and God is the source of that wisdom. Paul makes a clear distinction between worldly wisdom and God’s wisdom. The earthly wisdom is really no wisdom at all because “the wisdom of this world is folly with God” (1 Corinthians 3:19).



True wisdom is found in obedience to God, fearing Him and by praying or asking for it.

“The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honour” (Proverbs 15:33)

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight”.(Proverbs 9:10)

“Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.” (Job 28:28)

The fear referred to here is not the fear of being struck down by lightning, or being struck dead, but it is deep, abiding, holy reverence and the respect for the Lord and for His word. Where there is reverence there tend to be obedience and God has said He prefers obedience over sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22; Hosea 6:6)

Paul writes;“Yet I do proclaim a message of wisdom to those who are spiritually mature. But it is not the wisdom that belongs to this world or to the powers that rule this world - powers that are losing their power. The wisdom I proclaim is God’s secret wisdom, which is hidden from mankind, but which he had already chosen for our glory even before the world was made”.(1 Corinthians 2:6-7). God’s wisdom which is revealed through the spirit is so special.

“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.” (James 3:17)

What is the Source of this wisdom?

King Solomon was not born wise perhaps was not a scholar but he sought wisdom. He located the source of wisdom and he found a way of getting it. He realised that wisdom was with God and to get it is by asking for it. He had to get close to God and had to have a conversation with God. One should have ones communication channels open with God.

“For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding”. (Proverbs 2:6)

“For to the one who pleases Him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind”. (Ecclesiastes 2:26)

“And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”(1 Corinthians 1:30)

“That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, **which is Christ**, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:2-3) Or“He is the key that opens all the hidden treasures of God’s wisdom and knowledge.”

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubt is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.”(James 1:5-6)

Jesus speaking of troubled times when you are persecuted said:“For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.”(Luke 21:15)

Why should we listen to old people? A very good question.

There is ambivalence about the wisdom of older people, if popular culture is any guide. We are provided with buffoonish images of old people in popular media. Despite these negative images the young people are open to the idea of older people as potential repositories of wisdom. Still young people are right to ask: Why should I spend time listening to old people's advice about how to live my life? Let me offer three reasons why the wisdom of older people can be a uniquely important source of guidance for the not-yet-old.

1. Listening to the advice of older people has promoted well-being and even survival.



For centuries the accumulated wisdom of older people was a key to human survival. Not only did the old improve the survival chances of their tribe. They also were the source of tried and tested experience, the true “elders” to who group members would go in time of crisis.

2. Elders are a unique and extraordinary generation.

People in their seventies and beyond have lived through experiences many of us today can only imagine. Their lives have often included “ultimate limit situations”; the situations that cannot be undone and were nonetheless faced with consciousness and resolve. It is precisely these situations that lead to wisdom.. This unique perspective is a valuable lens through which younger people can view their own lives.

3. The elders offer an alternative to conventional wisdom.

Conventional wisdom is what the members of a society learn while they are growing up. Conventional wisdom offers up images of the good life and reinforces the values of the culture. It ultimately becomes the basis of our identity and self-esteem. And it's very hard to see beyond conventional wisdom, even if it makes us live smaller and less happy lives, but it is in the challenge to the conventional worldview that the true value of their wisdom lie. The elders make us examine our assumptions and make more conscious decisions about our own scripts for happiness.

“Look for a moment at ancient wisdom and consider the truth our fathers learnt.”

Our life is short we know nothing at all; we pass like shadows across the earth.

But let the wise men teach you; Listen to what they had to say” (Job 8:8-10)

“Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you” (Deuteronomy 32:7)

All generations have been entrusted with different lessons based upon the time they lived. There is much to be learned from those that have gone before us. God places people in our lives who can teach us these lessons- parents, grandparents, church elders- and they can explain so much about God. We just have to take the time and consideration to ask for help.

“Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old”. (Proverbs 23:22)

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” (Ephesians 6:1-3)

Consequence of not taking the advice of the wise elders.

After Solomon's death his son Rehoboam succeeded as king. He went to Schechem where all the people of northern Israel gathered to make him king. People made a request that if he made their life easier than Solomon who put heavy burden on them, then they would be his loyal subject. He consulted the older men who were the advisers of Solomon who advised him to give a favourable answer to the people. But he refused the advice and took the advice of his younger friends who were his new advisers to be much tougher than Solomon. We know what happened next. The nation was divided into two- Judea where Rehoboam ruled as the king and Israel where Jeroboam was appointed as the king.

Responsibility of the Older people.

Old Christian men and women have a duty to help the younger generation.

"And now that I am old and grey, don't forsake me. Give me time to tell this new generation (and their children too) about all your mighty miracles." (Psalm 71:18)

This should be the prayer of many, asking God to stay with them and to remember them, throughout their lives. We live long enough to see God's wonderful work and should ache at the thought of someone not getting that chance. We hope that we can help others to know Him as we have known Him

Counsel for Senior Citizen

"Teach the older men to be serious and unruffled; they must be sensible, knowing and believing the truth and doing everything with love and patience. Teach the older women to be quiet and respectful in everything they do. They must not go around speaking evil of others and must not be heavy drinkers, but they should be teachers of goodness. These older women must train the younger women to live quietly, to love their husbands and their children, and to be sensible and clean minded, spending their time in their own homes, being kind and obedient to their

husbands, so that the Christian faith can't be spoken against by those who know them." (Titus 2:2-5)

Just to summarise:

God does not operate an age bar. Older people gain wisdom from their long life experience. Worldly wisdom is a folly in the sight of God. God's wisdom is the true everlasting wisdom. God is the source of that wisdom which will be given to those who ask in faith. Old Christian men and women have the duty to pass on that wisdom to new generation.

Conclusion



There is a common belief that we gradually become less useful as we grow older; that this world is made for the young. Noah, Moses, Abraham-some of our greatest biblical examples-all went on some of their greatest adventures at a time when most would be settling into retirement. Should you be finding yourself feeling a little bit forgotten, overlooked, unappreciated, take care to remember that God will use you at any age? There is no age limit to the way He works, and His is a love that never grows old.

The young man knows the rules, but the old man knows the exceptions.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

The Need for Creating Authority in a Digital world

Dr. Zac Varghese, London



“Goodbye, Mr. Chips” is a classical film about Mr. Chips, a venerable and gentle Latin teacher, who advises his loyal students at Brookfield Public School that ‘they must have hierarchy and points of references in their lives’. We live in a time of chaotic changes, including the uncertainties of BREXIT, which is both exciting and challenging. It is at such times, we anxiously look for authority and reference points for guidance.

Churches face a severe crisis too, a crisis of losing emphasis on biblical truths and pastoral ministry by following modern eye-catching trends such as a virtual ministry of watching Holy Communion on the ‘box’ and various ‘Apps’ for blessings, rosaries, and other ministries by ‘robotic priests’. At such a time, where parental and religious influences are declining, where do we find authority and reference points to navigate our lives? This is the thrust of this article. We are now living in a ‘dot-com’ world, being very much influenced by social media, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to filter out fake-news and fake-spirituality to search for dependable guidance. It is in this context we should revisit the theme, ‘Spiritual Journey in a Digital world’, of the 36th family conference of the Mar Thoma

Community in the UK and Europe in August, 2018. I congratulate the organisers for such a good conference.

The Rt. Revd Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, Revd Dr. Mothy Varkey and Revd Larry Varghese treated the theme in a very helpful way for us to assess the amazing changes that are happening to many areas of our lives because of the digital revolution, and how to handle the new technologies including social media. The biblical verse selected to help with the theme was “Let my people go, that they might worship me” (Ex. 9:1). It is the story of a journeying people and their liberation. The fundamental idea is of a journey, movement, liberation, transformation and worship for giving glory to God. We, as a Diaspora community, are also a journeying people and are beginning to use digital technologies for helping us in our spiritual journey; it is a journey with God and for God for brining blessing to the whole world.

We are in the middle of a digital revolution that will have an enormous impact on all our lives as the printing press (Gutenberg 1440CE) did in the 15th century. Hence we need to be very careful and disciplined in using these new technologies for interacting with people and not exploiting people who may be emotionally vulnerable. Anyone can post their thoughts on social media, but without any defined source of authority of a church or a priest or a bishop. Evolving technologies can be used for God’s mission. Technologies do shape our lives in a major way. But we should appreciate the fundamental coordinates of life such as space-time-order dynamics. Chronological and spatial boundaries collapse and social roles blur. But these coordinates, dimensions, distances and directions get fused into one when we are ‘in Christ’, as St. Paul observed. We sometimes think that the social media based ‘Jasmine Revolution’ has helped in getting rid of dictatorial regimes in Egypt and Libya, but it also shook the peace and destabilised the whole region, killed so many, and created an on-going massive refugee crisis.

It is said that no technology is inherently immoral. The World Wide Web (www) has been central to the development of the 'Information Age' and is the primary tool billions of people use to interact on the Internet. It was an amazing Englishman, Tim Berners Lee, who invented it in 1989 and made it available to the world, he could have made billions and that is the nature of his philanthropy. The problem with technological innovations is mainly on the question of how we use them. Human beings are not gadgets, but gadgets are becoming humans or taking over the functions of humans, this will have economic consequences and well-being of people. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the possibility and potential for replacing professional people.



Fingers have replaced pen, but do we use our fingers in the right way? Do we understand the meaning of words in its right context or have lost the grammar of expressing our ideas, and lost the grammar of living to appreciate the poetry of living. Do we use these new technologies for helping others or exploiting others? Plastic products are useful at one level, but they are destroying the oceans' biodiversity. Modern Technologies have an impact on the climate change and ecological balance. We need to find appropriate solutions under the grace of God to prevent the destruction of the world that He

created so lovingly and so beautifully for us. The one of the amazing phrases I carried with me from the conference is 'making pillows our altars'. An altar always represented a sacred place of consecration. It is indeed the place for self-emptying and prayer to become agents for living in a 'heaven-on-earth-reality' for the whole created world.

The present generation has a problem with authority. Where does the authority come from? In the post-modern world, every author of the text is dead; s/he has no authority over the text in the sense that it is the reader who interprets the text using his or her contexts. In addition to this, truth is no more discovered, but it is created. It has no respect for metanarratives. One of the reasons for this rejection is that metanarratives are often considered to be the cause of religious violence and ethnic cleansing. Postmodernists strongly reject any kind of all-encompassing universal explanation through stories or metanarratives. There is no single unifying worldview for them. However, the 'people of the Book' rely on metanarratives for their spiritual journey; for Christians, the Bible is their guide and the voice of the Almighty God. Postmodernists challenge foundational concepts. They reject the idea that among many beliefs there is a single irrefutable foundation. Therefore, the classical understanding of the authority is fundamentally challenged in the post-modern, post-Christian world.

In a democracy, one only needs just the majority of one to make a binding decision, which may have far reaching consequences. Some people have extraordinary charisma to stamp their authority and ignore the ground swell of opinions or interest of margins or periphery. At the other end of the spectrum, real authority is compromised by giving way to public opinion generated through print, digital and social media, and communication networks. The importance of authority varies with context in which it is applied; it is different at home, schools, offices, defence establishments, judiciary, and playing

fields. For us as Christians, the authority of the Bible is important. The authority of the Bible is derived from the authority of God; and Church derives her authority from the Bible. Denominational divisions and church-planting on someone else's grounds of fellowship are also based on our limited understanding and application of biblical authority. Everyone in Christian circles tends to claim biblical authority for their actions. Within the Church we have different levels and degrees of authority. What are we looking for when we are looking for authority in the Church? Where would we find it? We find it in the scripture, liturgy, tradition and reason.



When we think about authority we are often thinking about controlling people or situations. We want to make sure that everything is regulated properly, that correct theology and practices are upheld and transmitted to the next generation. Authority is the place we go to find the right answers to key questions in our lives. Do we look to search engines and Wikipedia for authenticating ideas and finding reference points for our lives? Do we use the Bible in a twisted sort of way to support our own views, prejudices, and inclinations? It is important to remember that in the Bible all authority lies with God himself.

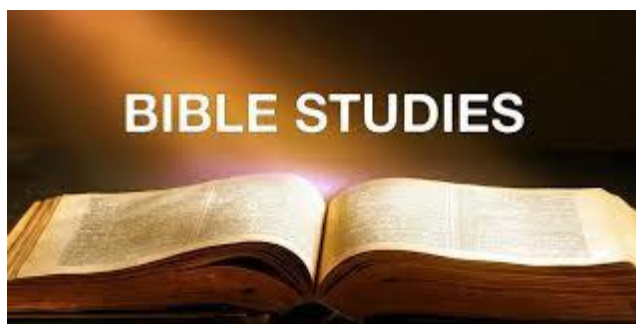
Some people may think that the Bible is a rule book or a reference manual, but it is a repository of timeless truth including the Ten Commandments. It is also a narrative, a story book. Here, we have a problem, how can these stories of the ancient times be authoritative for us today? What is its relevance to us? Here we need help in identifying and internalising these stories

in our context; we too have a relevant story to tell about our faith journeys and we are the only people who can say it authoritatively and that is our mission. This authority comes out of the lived out experience of people in Christ. St. Paul had authority because he became a new creation in Christ – lived, moved, and had his whole being in Christ. For him, he experienced the abiding presence of God in his life and his missionary journeys; it was not a virtual reality; it is a real person to person experience, like a ‘vine and its branches’. In the digital world, we are hyper-connected with unlimited information, but are we correctly connected and wired up? We are fragmented, but simply imagine that we are connected or are we distancing ourselves from our neighbours? There are many positives in the digital world; it is up to us to use it correctly for building kingdom values.

People accept various biblical stories in a literal or allegorical way; there is also an accommodative way of making us understand God's love for us. The spiritual nourishment is given according to our needs and limitations also. The Holy Spirit is there to help us through. The authority of God is tempered with His love for us and our freedom to choose. As Bishop Tom Wright said, ‘God's authority is not the power to control people, and crush them, and keep them in little boxes. The Church often tries to do that—to tidy people up.’ Therefore, we see God's authority vested through the ‘elected and adopted’ individuals in the Old Testament such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and the prophets. In the New Testament, we find that the authority is ultimately placed in Jesus Christ: ‘all authority is given to me in heaven and on earth.’ Then we see the authority is invested in the apostles and through their successors through the ‘laying-on-of-hands’ and such ordination blessings for deacons, priests and bishops. This threefold ministry has given authority to the Church. Ordained ministers are expected to use their authority under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The question for us is simply this: do we accept and value this authority? Very few people

exercise this authority responsibly, which is indeed the reason for the decline in the influence of Christianity and the sort of argument that we are seeing about gay marriages, sexual adventures outside the institution of marriage, and gay ordination. Where do we find authority these days?

It is good that we have serious Bible studies in our parishes to answer some of these questions. We do have the benefit of using the internet or web casting for such studies, The Scripture Union's 'WordLive', and Christian Education Forum's 'The Word for the Day' studies from the Diocese are helpful for daily meditation. As discussed in the conference, there is nothing wrong in reading the Bible through the mobile phone or the tablet, but it is not an ideal medium for studying the Bible or digesting the Bible. Mar Chrysostom's advice is not to read the Bible, but to study it. St. John's advice in the book of Revelation was to eat the scroll; so it was for Ezekiel (Eze. 3:1-3). I have the habit of underlining and highlighting the text and I find it difficult on the mobile phone, but for few it is a part of the current fashion accessory to draw attention to self and avoid eye contact with the 'other'.



The Bible is culturally conditioned and it is written in the language and idiom and cultural context of particular periods of history. Many teachers do not start with Genesis; they start with one of Paul's letters and such. There are people who read the whole Bible over a reading cycle of a year, but the difficulty is to discover the essential unity of the Bible. It is not one book but a collection of books with different writing styles, and the fact that it was written over 1100 years

further heightens our difficulty in studying the Bible seriously in the context of present day realities including the need for women's ministry and gender equality in all areas of life.

Genesis is the book of beginnings and it is always good to start at the beginning of a story than in the middle or end. Bishop Tom Wright of Durham is continually asking us to think of the Bible as a book in five acts as follows: (1) creation stories; (2) fall and the flood; (3) Abraham and Israel; (4) Messianic expectations and the story of Jesus. The New Testament would then be seen as the first scene of the fifth act of a continually developing story with the involvement of the Holy Spirit. How the book is supposed to end depends partly on us and subsequent generations too, as we are God's letters to the world. We usually dip into this book without any degree of continuity and often get confused. We often do not appreciate that we are part and parcel of a continually developing story of God and His people. What do we want to say to the next generation about the authority of the Bible? The world they face is different from ours; as are the challenges and opportunities, but some things do not change. God, the gospel, and the need to live a committed life for Christ remain as important as ever. Paul's letter to Timothy is helpful. Paul wrote to Timothy to secure the legacy of his life's work and ensure that the gospel is proclaimed faithfully and protected from distortion. We need to pray continually and study the Bible carefully to avoid distortions and follow the fashions and trends of the day.

The authority that God has invested in the Bible is a very special kind of authority that is exercised through the people of God, telling and retelling their stories of exile and return, of going away and coming back to God. It is a love story, God's unconditional love for 'the whole inhabited earth'. This is indeed the story of the world and the story is all about healing of a fractured world. The cycle will be repeated endless times until kingdom values and God's authority are established in this world. God has given us a

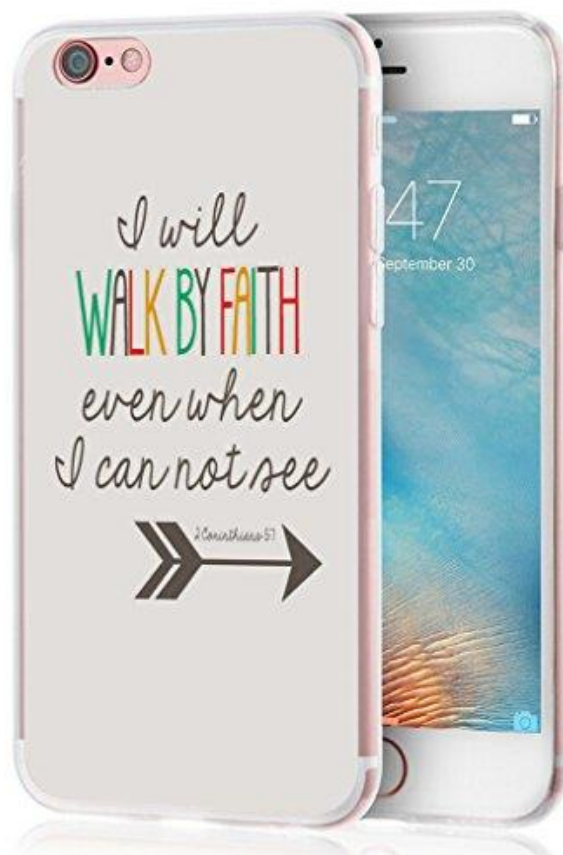
purpose-driven life to become agents of his healing process. We, in our turn, have our own stories to tell. We should empty ourselves by making ‘pillows of altars’ to become a medium to carry God’s amazing grace and in the process become His love letter to the world. We have a God who is moving with us all the time, we are his walking tabernacles.



Doing gospel work online may seem a strange thing to begin with; it can certainly take you to new places and creates new relationships in the virtual space. However, such virtual ministry will never replace meeting people in person on Sunday morning worships or fellowship meetings. It has its negative side as well, as we notice in TV evangelism and parading the Holy Communion on the box. It is refreshing to see how Pope Francis is effectively using twitter to reach his people and is leading the way; he has a twitter account in nine languages with over 18 million followers; it is indeed an amazing transformation. We hope that our community will rise to the challenges of hyper-connected super highways of communication with courtesy and discipline. Being disciplined in using the digital communication may be counter cultural, but that is what the Christian message is all about; our involvement may bring the necessary discipline in propagating the Christian message of love under the grace of God.

Internet-based applications including websites, blogs, face book, podcasts, and apps are opening up new frontiers for church’s mission, ministry and pastoral care. Training in social communication is an essential area where more emphasis should be given if future ministers are

to deliver their ministry effectively; it is time to float the pulpit to reach out to people. Do not expect people to come to the church at all times, take the pulpit to the people in the pews. It is so easy to share a prayer with a friend over the mobile phone and so forth. The technology is there for giving glory to God. We need to find ways for intergenerational communication that are creative, challenging and convincing. The challenges of today’s globalized culture demand new and deeper efforts not only to read the signs of the times but also to see the challenges for beginning a new way of being a church in the digital age; it would be a church without walls.



Spirituality in a Digital World: Challenges and Opportunities

Dr. Amal Cherian (Trinity College, Dublin)

One of our major concerns during the end of last century was the influence of television, films and other visual media on spiritual life. While the debates were on, the scenario transformed further, and what we are witnessing now is the digital technology taking lead in all pace of life. Even a single day off this digital world has become practically impossible for us. Apparently, the concerns of churches and believers are now pointing at the weakened spirituality caused by this in individuals, families, church and the society. The haunting question is how our spiritual lives are affected and what to do in this regard. We could only expect this to increase in the coming days and years and time has come where an evasion or complete reversion could not be thought of, thus necessitating us to find practical ways to stay strong in spiritual life.

Most recent and inseparable form of technology is smart phone or gadgets, which provide us numerous applications, games, information, and social platforms. A responsible use of it will largely improve the quality of our life, and providing wide range of access to information. It is appreciable that our communities have taken nourishment from it, for growing in Christ. The churches also have been nurtured by digitalization. Although these are the best opportunities to grow, they cast a threat in the form of addictions. We are seeing such cases in several news reports every day. This raises us the question of how we are going to keep our integrity and intensity of Christian life in each new segment of changing scenario.

Therefore, it is important to self-evaluate if these facilities are distracting us from the divine relationship with God. The distraction basically constricts that space to converse with our inner selves and with God. This is exactly the fate of seeds which fell on the thorns in Jesus's parable

of farmer sowing his seeds. Unless handled wisely, we may forfeit souls.

The modern-day socioeconomic and cultural etiquette of mankind was evolved as a result of the continuum of changes, ever since God's creation. The pace of change is so rapid these days, gaining an exponential momentum. In this revolution, our churches have taken a series of spiritual iterations in coping up with the altering circumstances. Addressing those challenges from time to time lays the foundation of our church reformations. Reformation might have been started by Jesus, 2000 years ago, by proclaiming the will and word of God, which fitted best into the then Jewish society. Those who didn't believe in him perished, and those who followed him nourished. As Jesus said, He never came to change the Law, but to implement it the right way, for which God and His word itself was the foundation. The word of God was in the beginning, is with us, and forever, and this is a unique one in the universe that remains unchanged from alpha to omega. The wisdom from Holy Spirit when keenly sought, would talk to you; whom Jesus has left with us in helping with all sort of challenges until his second coming, irrespective of era or circumstances. In a manner similar to the scientific concepts of operators, constants and functions, the spirit of God operates on the universally constant love and word of God to result in the best guidance for us to live in this ever-changing world. It is his grace that is everything which we need to pass this. "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." We Marthomites are blessed to be the successors in understanding this and reforming ourselves, thus becoming a good example to all Christian communities. With this in mind, no matter how mind-boggling the future transformations would be, we still could maintain that strong foundation and faith in Jesus. Let us pray to the Lord for the blessing of Holy Spirit in helping us abide thy words. Amen.

Family Conference 2018: Reminiscences

Abraham Varghese
General Convenor

On the rainy afternoon of Sunday, 26th August, a number of us from Hermon MTC were heaving a big sigh of relief. Some of us were even smiling. FC18 had come to a close; it seemed like a huge ocean wave had come and gone but we had not been swept away with the wave!

Planning for FC18 started early, back in October 2018. Our Achen, Rev. Jacob Mathew, and the Core Committee were helpful and co-operative from the start; ideas were shared and plans built up in a very prayerful and collaborative environment, particularly over Skype calls lasting late into Saturday evenings. Information on previous conferences came in through various sources, like pieces of a puzzle; this was shared with sub-committee leaders, who started putting the pieces together, and filling the gaps with their own ideas the initiatives. The leaders were finalized by Dec '17; the Conference brochure was done and dusted by end Jan '18; and starting Feb '18, we hit the road for publicity. We remember with gratitude the warm welcome received from sister churches during our visit. We hope you enjoyed the publicity video, which was, to the best of our knowledge, a first for Family Conference publicity!

We the Core Committee were hoping that the early start of publicity would bring its rewards in the form of early registrations; that was, we discovered, a bit ambitious. The numbers did cross our target of 400, but only as late as August; and that did not last long as many dropped out due to circumstances both personal and otherwise (like the flooding in Kerala) and the final numbers were under 400. If there is one change I could make in the organization of the next Family Conference, it would be to make each church and congregation responsible for a certain number of registrations; after all, this is

an event run for the UK & Europe Mar Thoma community, and it's only fair that the responsibility for participation is shared. This will allow the host church to concentrate on the programme and related arrangements, rather than worry about delegate numbers.

Sub-committees with responsibility for various aspects of FC 18 were also initiated early, with participation from the Hermon Exec Committee as well as the General Body. The pace of all sub-committees and tasks quickened in July, and never stopped accelerating till the Conference conclusion. Phone calls, e-mails and messages were flying all over; after church services on Sunday, some of us were pulled into ten different things related to FC18 or Hermon itself, all of which had to happen simultaneously. The Core Committee wondered whether we should have another round of visits to sister churches, to make the delegate numbers. Sub-committee meetings on Sundays carried on and on, with some melodious choir practice in the background. Remote working was initiated; many of us were working for the Conference from hospitals, offices, homes, and even while driving! I was on my laptop morning to evening for work, and then evening to late night for the Conference. It started raining in Kerala in early August, which soon brought things to near panic. The last weekend before FC18, we had to live through the uncertainty of whether Mothy Achen will be able to travel or not. God's provision prevailed, and Mothy Achen arrived well in time for the start of FC18, gracefully putting up with an extended and strenuous journey, both on land and in air.

The 48 hours of the Conference worked like a dream, by God's Grace. Our Leaders delivered wonderful talks, enjoyed by one and all. Thirumeni set the tone for the Conference talking about the Digital World and how it affects us in our every day lives. Mothy Achen made us laugh a lot, and made us think even more with his penetrating analysis of the theme. Larry Achen endeared himself to the youth with his unique style; and he was very much a role model for all

males at the Conference, combining child-minding with his lead role in the Youth session. Rebecca had the challenge of making a complex theme real and transparent to a very young audience, a task she performed admirably along with the team. The Youth choir was a wonderful surprise; we had some thoughts about involving external leadership for the youth music, but the decision to trust our young talents turned out to be the right one. The Intercession team also brought something unique to FC18 in the form of a chain prayer, which was much appreciated. It was hard work for the PA and IT team throughout the 48 hours; there were many constraints for them but the job was very well done. The choir was complemented by many, if not all – including a complement from Thirumeni himself. The accommodation team had their own excitement; temperatures were dropping at night, and some delegates started calling up about lack of heating in their rooms – in the month of August!



The Conference Theme – ***Spiritual Journey In A Digital World*** – was one rich with content. None of us can escape the reach of digital technology – it is a 24 x 7, 365 days presence in our lives. The printing press, when introduced as a new technology in the 15th century, revolutionized many areas of life, spreading knowledge and literacy. Digital technology is taking this revolution to the next level; once, we had to go in search of books for information; now the digital world puts information at our fingertips. Having all the information we want, however, does not give us wisdom; we are weak and sinful, and find ourselves and our children in danger of being slaves to the fruits of digital technology. Our spiritual journey will be fruitful

only when we turn away from being constantly dazzled by the *creation* around us, and stay focused on worshipping the *Creator*. The Creator, in turn, allows us to be free to live our lives, enjoying the creation and using it for God's glory.

For all of us at Hermon, FC18 was a very satisfying and successful event. We as a church were running such a large event for the first time, and none of us had much experience with organizing, co-ordinating or even listing all the tasks required to run FC18! In such situations, there is only one way forward; pray, and do the best one can, with the resources available. And all of us at Hermon worked hard, putting our best foot forward; the planning, energy, enthusiasm and co-operation was visible at the Conference to all. Everyone pitched in as and when needed, wherever they were needed – and that, we believe, was the reason FC18 was a blessing to everyone attending. Many of us have received very positive feedback about FC18 in person, through phone calls, e-mails as well as other media; thank you for your generous praise. Of course, it was not a perfect event; we apologise for anything and everything that we did not pay attention to, did not respond to or could not sort out when requested. And we also thank everyone in our sister churches and congregations who contributed in various ways – advice, time, talents, volunteering - to making FC18 the happy and blessed occasion it was. In closing, we join the Mar Thoma community in UK & Europe in wishing Carmel Mar Thoma Church, Liverpool the best of everything as they go about organizing the next Family Conference in the summer of 2019, to take us further on our spiritual journey.

Episcopal Visit

Carmel Mar Thoma Church, Liverpool celebrated 11th Parish day on 23rd June 2018 with our Diocesan Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Issac Mar Philoxenos Episcopa. We also had the privilege to celebrate Thirumeni's silver jubilee of his Episcopal Consecration. Thirumeni was the chief celebrant and the chief guest of our parish day celebrations. He gave an inspiring devotional message on "His purpose for us". After the service, Thirumeni had the cutting of Fathers' day cake which was followed by fellowship dinner.

Thirumeni also visited the Bishop of Liverpool (Church of England), Rt. Rev. Paul Bayes along with executive committee members. We were blessed with Thirumeni's 3 days visit.



Metropolitan's Visit

The Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan visited Carmel Mar Thoma Church, Liverpool on 14th June 2018 and celebrated the Holy Qurbana Service. To mark the occasion of his 88th birthday and Diamond jubilee celebration of his priestly ordination, we had the unveiling of the church name board, planting of the apple tree and after the service he enjoyed cutting the birthday cake with the children of our church. Rev. Shijoy Abraham Zachariah, Rev. Aji John and family from Manchester Tabore MTC, and Rev. Sijo John from Canterbury MTC attended the evening. The day ended with the fellowship dinner.



Photo Gallery





