

THE MAR THOMA
ECHO



For Engagement, Communication, Harmony And Outreach.



A Publication of The Mar Thoma Church : UK & Europe Zone

**A special edition commemorating the life of
Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan**

Table of Contents

Legacy of a Visionary3
Man of Conviction and Compassion.....4
Editorial6
ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY8
Church of Ireland8
Church of England9
A Tribute to Most Revd10
Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan.....10
With a GRATEFUL HEART.....11
Life of a Legend12
His Grace the Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma
Metropolitan15
A little sketch of Thirumeni17
Friend of Diaspora Communities His Grace the
Metropolitan Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Remembered
.....18
Tribute to Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma21
In Loving Memory and Gratitude to Irenaeus
Thirumeni23
Late Joseph Mar Thoma: A Bishop who was Loyal to
the Royal.....28
Theological contributions of His Grace Dr. Joseph
Mar Thoma30
Delineating the Dynamism of the Late Lamented
Metropolitan with Special Reference to Ministry to
the Marginalised.....34



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Legacy of a Visionary



***Most Revd Dr.
Theodosius Mar
Thoma Metropolitan***

40 days have passed since Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma received the call from the heavenly father and left us for his eternal home. As a person who was with him as the Suffragan Metropolitan, I have fond memories of his last days. Though he fell sick for the last 6 months he remained healthy and mentally alert for the 90 years of his earthly life. In the month of September and October he was hospitalized at believers' hospital, Tiruvalla. He was given the best medical care and he remained cheerful till the end. Even on the Hospital room he made it a point to see the close relatives of his family, converse with the staff members who served him and consoled some bereaved members who were in the USA. He knew that his end was near and faced the last moments with faith and hope. He even instructed the dress that he wanted to wear and the manner in which the funeral was to be conducted. I was watching him as his pulse went down and he left the earthly home very peacefully.

The greatly Lamented Late Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma was an ecumenist. He has chaired many of the ecumenical forums and participated in many of the ecumenical meetings. He was widely known by the ecumenical leaders in the East and the West. He was a man of action. He had gone as a mediator to many of the places where disputes prevailed between Christian denominations. He has resolved problems and brought together the conflicting groups to stand united with a spirit of reconciliation. He believed in the wider ecumenism. He did participate in interreligious

meetings and spoke at different platforms where leaders of different religious groups were present. He always spoke about seeing the face of God on every human being. He used to say: Accept those which you can accept and respect those which you cannot accept. He always thought about the unity of the created order by reflecting upon our common pilgrimage to the kingdom of God.

Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma was a great visionary. Whenever he faced hard realities of life, he used to reflect upon it and sort the will of God. When there was an issue of women participating in the evening meetings at Maramon Convention, where they were not allowed earlier, he placed it before God in prayer and came about rescheduling the convention meetings so that women can attend all the sessions of the convention. He was a person with practical wisdom. Coming from the Palakunnath family, he continued the ancestral historical leadership in the Church. He knew Church history very well and carried out the administration of the Church with boldness and courage. He was well respected among the various Christian denominations in Kerala and outside.

Late Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma was very unique when we look into his life and work. He came as a gift of God to the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and to the Church, Universal. Through the 90 years of his life he contributed greatly for the growth of the Church and the extension of the God's Kingdom. Let us glorify God for his life and work.

***+ Dr. Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan
Poolatheen, November 28th 2020***

Man of Conviction and Compassion



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

*Diocesan Episcopa,
North America
Europe Diocese of
the Malankara Mar
Thoma Church*

Dearly beloved in Christ,

Greetings to all in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

While the world undergoes the pain and grief of the loss of thousands of people through the pandemic, our church experiences the sadness due to the demise of our most beloved Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan. I appreciate the editorial board for setting apart this issue of ECHO online publication, remembering the life and contribution of the late Metropolitan who left a legacy as a visionary with a difference. Born in the *palakunnath* family, brought up in the staunch faith tradition of the Mar Thoma Church, his life and service exemplified that of a great spiritual leader, who transmitted a faith tradition with its newness. On the day he completed sixty three years of his ordination as a minister of the church, he was called to eternal rest on 18th of October. His contribution to the church as the bishop was 45 years and as the Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma church for about 13 years.

He had peaceful days towards the close of his life, planning and preparing himself to be with the Lord. On 2nd October he could handover the responsibilities to his successor Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Suffragan Metropolitan and said while the members of the Episcopal Synod were present, "I am at peace, and very happy to be with the Lord". Within few days he was taken to the heavenly abode, well prepared. Thank God for his life and ministry to the church and society.

One special quality that we find in Thirumeni is his conviction. Many a time he could not compromise on matters that he considered right. His determination in taking strong decisions was the result of his experience of the Divine grace. Of course, this kept the confidence in him till the end. He had the courage to his conviction. Kept no ill feeling and never complained about his physical sickness. He will go to any extent of getting things done, if he is convinced. He often prayed, O God transform the world by your grace, which was an echo of the prayer of World Council of Churches for a world with justice and peace. Often his commitment to Christ and the church is well appreciated. As a faithful servant of the Lord, and having trust in the Lord, Thirumeni could very well say with St. Paul, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God on Christ Jesus." Yes, trusting in the Lord at every moment give confidence in life. To carry on the faith and tradition of the church, to overcome the crisis in ecclesial diversity, and in identifying the challenges that the church may face in future, there needs clear vision and readiness to risk without even considering self image.

The compassion he had shown to others was remarkable and many admired the way he extended love and care to the needy, to the down trodden and marginalized. He always found time to "rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep" (Rom.12: 15). His concern and compassion for the clergy and lay persons were definitely an expression of the right relationship that he maintained. This often prompted for right action, which may be seen in the context of a call of grace, a call of mercy, a call of great love and a call of understanding that each person is related to one another, with the closeness to the One Lord who makes every relationship possible. The often quoted passage from Micah, "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and walk



humbly with your God”, reveals his passion for the needy and God’s plan for humanity. The humanitarian initiatives he had launched in the Church particularly Snehakaram, rehabilitation of the Transgenders, concerns for the Deaf and the Dumb at Kasaragod, and involvement in the relief and rehabilitation of the people affected by floods and earthquakes at various parts of India were expressions of participating in the great compassion that Christ shown through his ministry. The Church has several reasons to thank God for such a great visionary, Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan. The words of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, in his poem ‘A Psalm of life’, is appropriate to mention,

“Lives of great men all reminds us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us,
Footprints on the sands of time”

Yes, the footprints to tread on that of the great leaders of the church, who participated in the struggles of people, will definitely make the present generation to continue the task set ahead of us. We value very much the guidance and great support that we received in the past from Thirumeni, for the development in the Diocese of North America and Europe, especially for the formation of UK and Europe Zone as a separate entity of the Mar Thoma Church. At this time we look forward the leadership of the Dr. Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan, and pray that God may strengthen Thirumeni to take the church to new heights through the dedicated service.

Let God’s name be glorified through our feeble action and Let Jesus the Prince of peace bring joy and hope to humanity at all times.

With prayers and regards,

+ **Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos**



Editorial



Most Rev Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan, 21st Mar Thoma of the Malankara Church, has entered into Eternal glory.

An era in the history of the Mar Thoma Church has come to an end.

Praise be to God for the leadership we received through Thirumeni for the Mar Thoma Church, in spiritual, ecclesial, sociological, ecumenical spheres and in the secular arena of our community.

Thirumeni was a unique personality with unique features- a faithful Shepherd in God's vineyard, an incomparable administrator, a philanthropist in many activities of the church, a far-sighted person in planning and execution, a theologian who made meaningful dialogue and interventions.

Thirumeni's brilliant and glorious leadership for the spiritual evangelical and multifaceted-sociological upliftment of our church equipped the church to have a meaningful engagement with the realities of the 21st century.

Thirumeni succeeded in creating a unique and magnificent place for the Mar Thoma Church in the wider multicultural and multi-religious global community.

Thirumeni's theological vision of a new humanity in Christ Jesus should persuade the faith community to work for the building up of a society which is deeply rooted in peace, justice, love, and integrity of creation.

Thirumeni was able to unite the faith community in the diaspora and made constructive decisions by understanding and appreciating their various spiritual needs.

Let us celebrate the life of Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan and let Thirumeni's memories be with us always as living memories cherishing memories.

Editorial Board





ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

The Reverend K G Joseph
Sabha Secretary
Mar Thoma Church
Thiruvalla
Kerala 689101
India

LP Ref: WA/AL 68567

19 October 2020

Dear Fr Joseph

I was greatly saddened to hear of the death of Metropolitan Joseph Mar Thoma Thirumeni yesterday.

I count myself blessed to have met the Metropolitan on a number of occasions both in London and in Kerala. He was a spiritual leader of great significance within India and around the world, a spiritual father to the Mar Thoma Church and a brother bishop in communion with the bishops of the Anglican Communion. He will be much missed, but always fondly remembered.

Jesus said 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.' (John 14. 1). As the faithful of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church gather to give thanks for his life and to commend him into the tender care of Almighty God, I join my prayers with yours that he may rest in peace.

In the peace of Christ and in the hope of the resurrection

+ Justin Welby

The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby
Archbishop of Canterbury

Lambeth Palace, London SE1 7JU



**Church of Ireland
United Dioceses of Dublin & Glendalough**

**Church of Ireland House
Church Avenue
Rathmines
Dublin 6**

The Most Reverend Dr Michael Jackson
Archbishop of Dublin and Bishop of Glendalough
Primate of Ireland and Metropolitan

Tel: 00353 1 4125663
archbishop@dublin.anglican.org

18th October 2020

Psalm 23.4: Even were I to walk through a valley of deepest darkness I should fear no harm, for you are with me; your shepherd's staff and crook afford me comfort.

It is with deep sadness and personal grief that I write to all members of The Mar Thoma Church worldwide on the death of Metropolitan Dr Joseph Mar Thoma, Metropolitan xxi. Not only are we in communion as sister churches in The Lord. I also have a very special bond of personal communion with Metropolitan Joseph, having had the gracious opportunity to meet him on his visit to Ireland in 2018 and again on my visit to Thiravalla, India in 2019 where I was received generously and warmly and with charity. The joy of fraternal greeting on both occasions remains palpable and tangible to me. I wish to express my sorrow in loss and my assurance of prayer in grief to all members of Metropolitan Joseph's household and also to all members of The Mar Thoma family in India, in Ireland and across the world.

In the heart of this current coronavirus crisis, members of The Mar Thoma Church in Ireland have provided significant and selfless work and care in so many fields to ensure the wellbeing of the Irish people. For this we are eternally grateful and appreciative. It flows from a combination of personal faith and civic duty. May they be blessed and kept safe, and their families too, in all they do by day and by night.

The date of the sad death of Metropolitan Joseph in the Church Calendar is The Feast of St Luke. As well as being an apostle and evangelist, we learn that St Luke was also a doctor. Therefore, healing was part of what our Lord discerned in Luke when he called him to follow and to serve. In my mind, there is a strong sense that Metropolitan Joseph lived out a ministry of healing, of reconciliation, of compassion and of blessing. St Luke's Day is the day of his passing from this world to the next with good reason in the providence of God.

My prayers continue. My grief continues. My love for the Mar Thoma Church continues. May God uphold and receive Metropolitan Joseph. May we all continue to serve in his sense of service, in his sense of witness and in his sense of compassion.

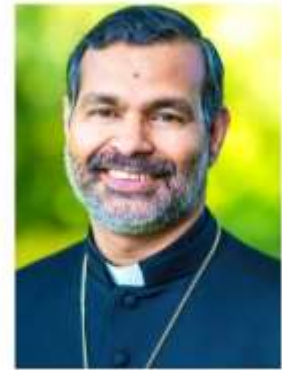
St Luke 10.33: But a Samaritan who was going that way came upon him and when he saw him he was moved to pity.

The Most Reverend Dr Michael Jackson
Metropolitan of Ireland and archbishop of Dublin and bishop of Glendalough

The Rt Revd Dr John Perumbalath
Bishop of Bradwell



The Church of England
in Essex and East London
Diocese of Chelmsford



The Revd Binu J Varghese
Secretary to the Bishop
Mar Thoma Church: UK & Europe Zone
80-96 Cambridge Road
Hounslow TW4 7BH

10th November 2020

Dear Achen,

I join the UK-Europe Mar Thoma Church family offering thanks to God for the life and work of the late Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan whose ministry as a priest, episcopa and metropolitan touched the lives of many individuals and institutions.

It was a great blessing for me as a young priest to get to know him and then to share a few occasions with him, the last being the dedication of the new Mar Thoma parish church in Manchester last year. I was always touched by his commitment to get to know his clergy and people and to care for them. His infectious enthusiasm, deep knowledge, liturgical competence, and capacity of sharing friendship made a great difference to the people he served.

Thirumeni will be fondly remembered for his leadership in the ecumenical world too. He was all about building bridges, not erecting barriers. He demonstrated his ecumenical passion through his leadership in various events and association with local, national and international bodies.

Thirumeni lived out a gospel that was holistic and transforming. That faith found itself expressed in his advocacy for the protection of the environment, his initiative to bring the transgender community to the mainstream society, and his commitment to serve the poor and the downtrodden.

Thirumeni will be greatly missed by those who knew him and were served by him but the gifts he gave us will remain in our hearts and lives. May his soul rest in peace and rise in glory.

With every blessing,

+John Bradwell

Bishop of Bradwell

Bishop's House, Orsett Road, Horndon-on-the-Hill
Stanford-le-Hope, Essex SS17 8NS Ph: 01375 673806
b.bradwell@chelmsford.anglican.org



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

A Tribute to Most Revd Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan



**Rt. Revd Dr. John
Fenwick**

*Bishop Primus of
the Free Church of
England*

I first recall meeting the late Metropolitan in 1988. I was then the Assistant Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs at Lambeth Palace. It was the year of the Lambeth Conference and one of my duties was to help host the ecumenical guests. Thirumeni was among them.

I had visited Kerala for the first time the previous year as the guest of Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan to give some lectures at the annual Clergy Conference at Cherral kunnu. I must have met the then Mar Irenaeus there but can't remember the details. But at the Lambeth Conference in Canterbury we had several extended conversations and I remember drinking in all that he told me of the Mar Thoma Church and its rich traditions.

Since then we met many times, both in Kerala and the UK. We were together, for example, in the madbaha at St George's cathedral, Thozhiyur, for the consecration of Cyril Mar Basilios, Metropolitan of the Malabar Independent Syrian Church, and at St George's, Headstone, for the inauguration of the Sinai Mar Thoma parish there. He was always unfailingly gracious.

Thirumeni was in many respects a link with the past and we are the poorer for his loss. He was a link with the past in the Anglican context. He had studied in the UK under such teachers as Bishop Kenneth Cragg, and retained a respect for a generation of Church of England leaders

who were men of scholarship and worldwide vision. If I have a gentle criticism of Thirumeni it is that I don't think he appreciated how much the Church of England had changed by the end of his life, with liberal tendencies such as the ordination of women, tolerance of same-sex relations and a loss of confidence in the power of the Gospel to change lives. The Church of England is not the Church he knew in his youth and is very different to the Church that sent the Mission of Help to the Syrians of Kerala in the early 19th century.

But, more importantly, in the context of the Mar Thoma Church, Thirumeni was a link to the community's origins. He had known his great-uncle, Titus II Mar Thoma, through whom he had a living continuity to the first generations who had shaped the Reformed Syrian community after the loss of most of the historic churches following the court case of 1889. He grew up in the family whose members had led the work of reform, reconstruction and renewed witness. As a result of his upbringing Thirumeni never lost a sense of the Mar Thoma Church as an *Eastern* Church of Syrian heritage. I used to meet him regularly at the four-yearly international Syriac Conferences at the St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI) in Kottayam. He himself used Syriac in the liturgy and carried a sense of being the custodian of an ancient heritage. This, it has always seemed to me, to be the Mar Thoma Church's greatest potential – to witness to historic ways of Christian discipleship and worship that do not capitulate to current Western norms, while retaining a strong sense of the power of the Gospel in all cultures and contexts.

I wish the new Metropolitan and the other bishops well and pray that they may nurture this unique combination as a blessing to us all.

+ John Fenwick

With a GRATEFUL HEART...



**Dr. Anthimos Matthews
Metropolitan**

*Syriac Orthodox Bishop,
Metropolitan of
Muvattupuzha Region
and Patriarchal Vicar of
U.K. & Ireland Dioceses*

The Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan, the former supreme Pontiff of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, was a renowned ecclesiastical and ecumenical leader. He was a stalwart in promoting the essence of ecumenism - '... in one accord'. **"Accept what we can Accept and Respect what we cannot Accept"** - an evergreen ecumenical proverb, was proposed by him to break the 'walls' of differences. This principle made him a revolutionary church leader of India, who stood firmly with the have-nots, transgenders and the downtrodden and worked towards building a just society where 'basic necessities should be met and decent living guaranteed'. His unflinching loyalty towards the Syrian Tradition and its liturgy earned wide appreciation in the Syrian Orthodox Church.



St Ephrem the Syrian, the Harp of the Holy Spirit, describes about the first bishop of Nisibis, Jacob of Nisibis (signatory in the First Council of Nicea in 325). He says:

The first priest was her vinedresser; he made her branches to grow even unto heaven.

Lo! Being dead and buried within her, he has become fruit in the midst of her bosom:

when therefore the pruners came, the fruit that was in her midst preserved her.

(Hymns on Nisibis 13:19)

The primates are the 'Keys of the Trinity', a symbol of Apostolic Succession, and flag bearers of the True Faith. They open the 'door' towards 'Love, Grace and Fellowship' of the Triune God (Hymns on Nisibis 13:3). The Late lamented Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan committed his life to uphold the Doctrines and True Faith of the church and made the Church grow to its highest glory. He shepherded the Church as a witness to Jesus' values and as a true disciple of Christ Jesus.

The warm relationship between the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church started during the tenure of the late lamented Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan and attained new heights in the days of Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan, due to his personal conviction towards a common Syriac heritage. Since 2015 the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church had an Ecumenical Dialogue and discussed the road maps for the future, a

great achievement indeed.

As a member of that Dialogue Commission, I got the privilege to have a close

relation with the Metropolitan and enjoyed his paternal care and love. We are both the alumni of the Union Christian College, Aluva and the United Theological College, Bangalore. On behalf of the UK Patriarchal Vicariate of the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, I would like to record and offer our deepest respect to the saintly leader, Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan. Adieu Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan.

Life of a Legend

(Extract taken from www.marthoma.in on 24/11/2020)



Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan was born in the Maramon Palakunnath family which was the ancestral home of the father of the reformation of the Malankara Church, Abraham Malpan and the first four Metropolitans of the Mar Thoma Church. He was born on 27th June 1931 as the son of Puthoor Mariamma and Lukochen who was the son of Palakunnath Kadon Thomachen, elder brother of Titus II, Mar Thoma Metropolitan. The childhood was formulated in the context of a very noble tradition. After school education in Kozhencherry St. Thomas High School he graduated from Union Christian College Alwaye. Having dedicated himself to serving the Church he passed Bachelor of Divinity degree from United Theological College, Bangalore. He was ordained Deacon on 29th June 1957 and Kasessa on 18th October 1957.

He served as Vicar of Ranni, Kozhikode, Kundara, Madras and Thiruvananthapuram Parishes. As the Church deputed him, he served as the travelling secretary of the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association for a few years during a crisis in the organization. He got Master of Divinity and Master of Sacred Theology degrees after higher education in Virginia Seminary, Oxford and Canterbury St. Augustin Colleges. The Sabha Prathinidhi Mandalam in its meeting in November 1974 selected him as Episcopa. He was ordained Ramban along with Rev. V.T. Koshy at Trissur Mar Thoma Church on 11th January 1975. Joseph Ramban was ordained Joseph Mar Irenaeus Episcopa on 8th February 1975 at the temporary Madbaha in the courtyard of SC Seminary, Thiruvalla. He was given charge of Kollam - Kottarakara Diocese. He did his utmost for the overall development of the Diocese. At the same time he gave good leadership as the President of Sunday School Samajam, President of Yuvajana Sakhyam, Chairman Development Committee and President of Kerala Christian Council. During the second half of the seventies as the head of Sunday School and Yuvajana Sakhyam he was able to introduce VBS and cassette ministry respectively. Next he was in charge of outside Kerala Parishes and prepared the path for the development of the church in those regions. He was instrumental in acquiring property in Delhi, Bombay and Madras to establish Church centres there. He gave leadership to procure land from the Government to establish churches outside Kerala in Delhi, Hyderabad and Vishakhapatanam. Later he was appointed as the head of the Thiruvananthapuram - Kollam Diocese. He took special care to start Anchal ITC, student centres at Sasthamkotta and Pandalam and to register South Travancore Agency for Rural Development (STARD) for the developmental activities of South Travancore.



In 1988 he took charge of Thiruvananthapuram - Kollam Diocese again. In consequence of the unexpected demise of Easow Mar Timotheos Episcopa he had to take charge of Bombay - Delhi Diocese also along with the responsibilities of the Diocese for some years. He organized the starting of Ayoor Mar Thoma College of Science and Technology after procuring land near MC Road for the Diocese. He was the first Manager. He played a pivotal role in the development activities of Thiruvananthapuram St. Thomas Residential School.

A student centre was started in Nagarcoil. Thiruvananthapuram guidance and counselling centre was completed after settling the liabilities. The liabilities of the Women's Centre started in Neyyattinkara also was settled. He concentrated in the completion of the construction work of the Auditorium in Kottarakara, the construction of the wards of the Mandiram and the building construction of Hospice. When the Sevika Sanghom handed over the Punalur Boys' Home it was taken over. As president of the Suvishesha Sevika Sanghom for four years he gave leadership of its activities. As Vice-President and President of the National Council of Churches he gave good leadership. He led the joint protest marches at Thiruvananthapuram and Delhi against the denial of justice to Dalit Christians on the basis of religious faith. He served as the Board

member, Vice-President and President of Christian Auxiliary for Social Action. He provided good leadership to



provide relief to earth quake, flood victims and rehabilitation activities in Lathur of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal and during Tsunami in South India. He served also as the Trustee Board member of Ecumenical Church Loan Fund. He was the Executive Committee member and senior member of the presidium of Christian Conference of Asia(CCA). He worked as the Co-chairman of the Joint Committee of CCA and Asian Bishops Conference. During this period he served as member of the Peace Mission in the context of the tension in Nagaland, Manipur and East Timor. He attended the Lambeth Conference in England and the Anglican Consultant Committees held in South Africa and Hong Kong. He took part in the World Council of Churches (WCC) Assemblies in Canberra, Harare, Porto Aligræe and Busan in Korea. He attended and spoke as special invitee in the Conference of world religions held at UN. General Assembly Hall organized by the UN

General Secretary. The Mayors of California and New York Yonkers in the US have honoured him by presenting Awards of Honor.

He has worked as the President of the Governing Council of St. Thomas College, Kozhencherry, Christian College, Chengannur, Mar Thoma College for Women, MBA College, School Governing Board and Mar Thoma Teachers Training College, Perumbavoor. He was in-charge of Adoor- Mavelikkara Diocese from August 1997. He took the initiative to start nursing schools in Kattanam and Hoskote. His service to organise the Maramon Convention officially and unofficially in the past and at present is commendable. As a man of unique ability to lead Thirumeni pays special attention to the construction activities of the Church. He worked as Chairman of the Sabha Auditorium Fund Committee and gave leadership to collect 84 lakhs. As Chairman he directed the re-publishing of Mar Thoma Vaideeka Directory. In recognition of the distinguished leadership in various fields the Virginia Seminary of America honoured him with a Doctorate.



Moreover, a second doctorate was bestowed on him by the Serampore University on 10th February 2007 taking into account Thirumeni's activities in the Church and society. A third Doctorate to honour him was awarded to him by SHIATS (Sam Higginbottom Institute of Agriculture, Technology and Sciences) Deemed University (Formerly Allahabad

Agriculture University) in recognition of his total contribution in the social field.

He was consecrated as the Supreme Head of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church on 2nd October 2007. In the words of Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan, Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan is noble in heredity, rich in self acquired abilities, well versed in relations, able and talented in construction work and blessed in leadership.

In connection with the 80th Birthday of Metropolitan, Church inaugurated *Snehakaram* project for the critically ill Cancer\Kidney and Heart Patients irrespective of the Cast and Creed. Every year the Church is disbursing about 50 lakhs rupees for the same.

Date of Birth	06/27/1931
Ordained as Deacon	06/29/1957
Ordained as Kasseessa	10/18/1957
Ordained as Ramban	01/11/1975
Consecrated as Episcopa	02/08/1975
Designated as Suffragan Metropolitan	03/15/1999
Installed as Metropolitan	10/02/2007
Passed Away on	18/10/2020
Funeral on	19/10/2020

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



Charanjit Ajit Singh,
Chair.
Ajit Singh, Trustee.



Hounslow Friends of Faith

May we take this opportunity to express our deeply felt condolences on the passing away of Metropolitan and Mar Thoma XXI, Supreme Head of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, His Grace the Most Rev Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan on 18th October 2020.

We may have met His Grace in the mid- 1980s at the World Council of Churches (WCC) meeting in Delhi but because of the 1984 Sikhs' related tragedies affecting communities there and elsewhere in India, the recall is not that easy. However, we fondly remember His Grace's presence at the WCC's Seventh and Eighth Assemblies in Canberra, Australia in 1991 and in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1998 in which he participated as a special invitee.

At one of the events at the University in Canberra, the Prime Minister of Australia, Robert Hawke, addressed the thousands of assembly delegates welcoming them and offering Australian hospitality and

talked about the make -up of the country as a multi-racial, multi-cultural and ecumenical community and the work the government was doing for equal opportunities for all communities resident there. His Grace, who had known Robert Hawke since his study programme in India, was requested by the organisers to respond to the Prime Minister's speech. Quoting what Robert Hawke as a young man had promised, he would do when he would be a leader, to improve the conditions of the diverse groups that had settled in Australia, he gave quite a strong response to the Prime Minister. He referred to the divisions in the Australian population, the unequal chances and the poverty, faced by many including the Aborigines. He also referred to poverty and inequalities in many parts of the world and Australia's lack of response in addressing them. His Grace spoke for about half an hour and was applauded a number of times by the audience. Furthermore, he had also witnessed, an evening



procession of the delegates in all their diversity, which had been planned to be led by the Aboriginal Community Elders. It was changed at the last minute to have it replaced by the white children carrying a big plastic globe instead. That made the Aborigine Elders and their community, feel deeply hurt by the racism displayed by the Australian organisers. That night, Mr Ajit Singh also addressed a meeting in the Aborigines' camp motivating them by standing in solidarity with them.

As a leading church leader in India and abroad, His Grace was at the forefront of the struggle against social evils, and he had devoted much of his life to the marginalised,

including the homeless, the sick, the poor, the needy, the disabled, and transgender and in the field of charity and in church unity movements. From his personal experience, he challenged the Australian Prime Minister and others to take heed of the issues confronting their people and take appropriate action to ameliorate the suffering of the poor and the dispossessed. Such a challenge could only come from a deeply spiritual person!

The World Council of Churches, currently made up of 350 churches in 110 countries

represents 550 million Christians celebrated its 50th anniversary year of its existence in Africa in its Eighth Assembly (Harare, 1998). Its message was:- *Truth, justice and peace together represent values basic to granting of human rights, inclusion and reconciliation. When these values are ignored, trust is replaced by fear and human power no longer serves the gift of life and the sanctity and dignity of all in creation*'.

The issue of intolerance had concerned His Grace over the years and with his persuasive skills, it has been a linking thread in the WCC communications that religious, ethnic and national discrimination, intolerance and violence have been a major contributor to repression and violation of human rights. There is a need to acknowledge, guarantee and protect rights of religious minorities; to determine the degree to which religious freedom can be considered an absolute right in plural society; and the role of religion in conflict and in inter-religious dialogue.

No wonder, Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, said in a video address to the HARARE Assembly,

'In every time and in every place, the struggle for the recognition of the universal rights of the human person has been a struggle against all forms of

tyranny and injustice; against slavery, against colonialism, against apartheid. Today, this struggle is the same as yesterday, nothing less. For the role you have played in this combat to apply, to defend, and to promote human rights, I offer you, in the name of the United Nations Organization, my sincere admiration and gratitude.

In those two WCC assemblies, we were the only Sikhs who attended with less than a dozen people of other faiths amongst thousands of Christians of different denominations in an ecumenical setting. We felt really privileged to be there.

We share the belief that advocacy for peace, justice and human rights are founded on work on the ground. His Grace established many institutions to ensure that work continues. We saw that when we attended the International Association of Religious Freedom 33rd World Congress' Beyond Conflict to Reconciliation' in Kochi, Kerala in September 2010.

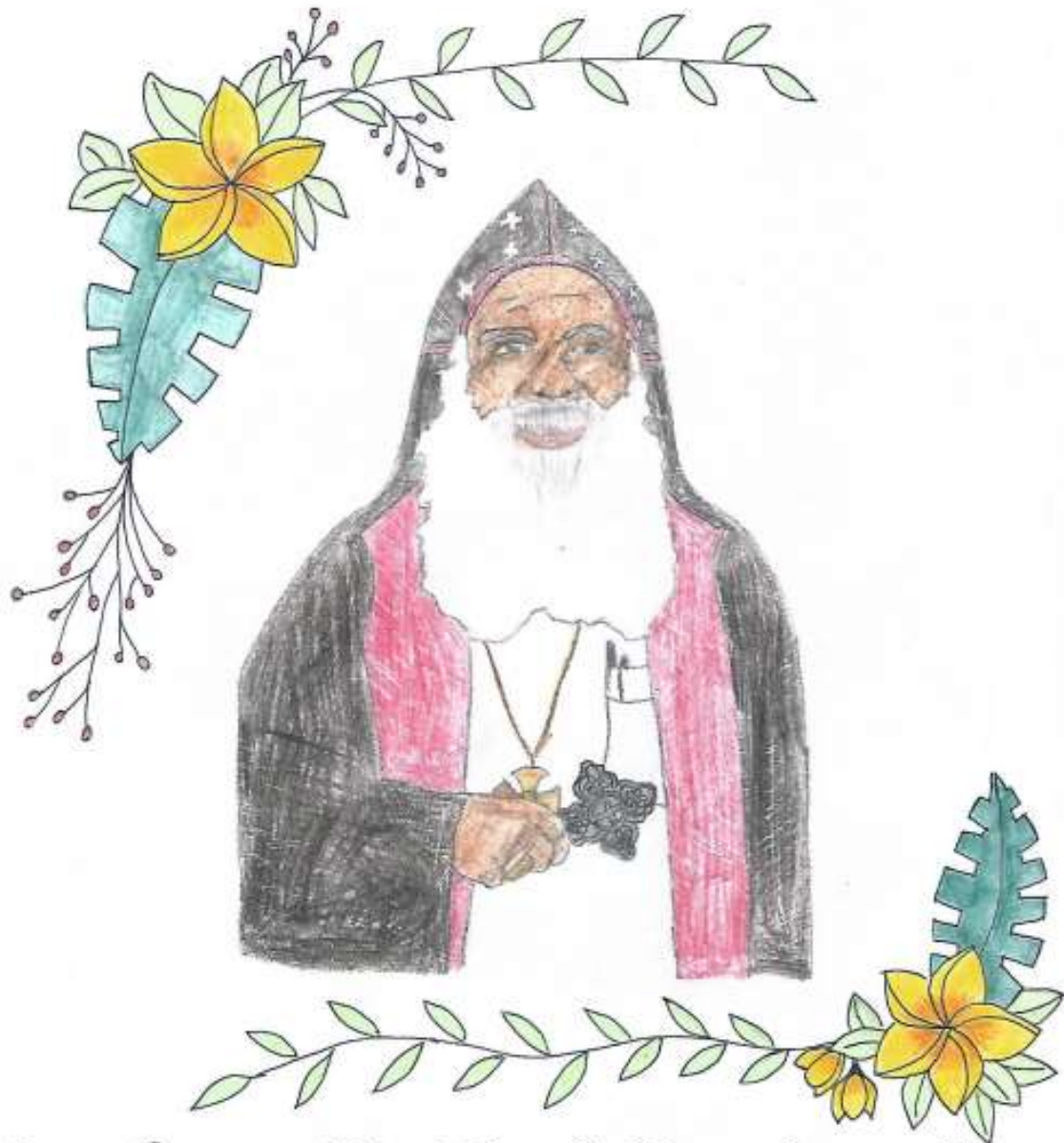
Whenever we met, we felt blessed by His Grace's presence and our long conversations with him. We pray that his legacy of inspirational leadership and fellowship continue to be a beacon of hope for future generations for unity, justice and peace.



A little sketch of Thirumeni



Feba Annie Joseph
St. Johns MTC



His Grace Rt Revd Dr Joseph
Mar Thoma Metropolitan
1931 ~ 2020

Friend of Diaspora Communities His Grace the Metropolitan Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Remembered



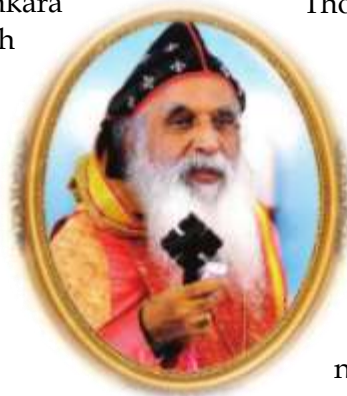
Revd Dr. P. G. George
Vicar Sinai MTC

Sinai Mar Thoma Church joins in expressing our deepfelt sorrow and condolences of the UK & Europe Zone of the Mar Thoma

Church at the passing away of our Beloved Metropolitan, His Grace Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma. His Grace's memories will inspire us to be at our best in our ministry to the Kingdom and service to the humanity.

The Mar Thoma Church is one of the ancient churches in India, believed to have been founded by the Apostle Thomas is blessed with leaders of very high stature. As the reformed wing of the Apostolic Church of Malankara, we have celebrated the tenets of Malankara Reformation initiated by Palakunnath Abraham Malpan, Kaithayil Geevarghese Malpan and like-minded people of the time. The following list gives us a glance of the Metropolitans who ruled the Malankara Church these years.

- Mar Thoma XIII - Mathews Athanasius Metropolitan (1852-1877)
- Mar Thoma XIV - Thomas Athanasius Metropolitan (1877-1893)
- Mar Thoma XV - Titus I Mar Thoma Metropolitan (1894-1909)
- Mar Thoma XVI - Titus II Mar Thoma Metropolitan (1909-1944)
- Mar Thoma XVII - Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan (1944-1949)



- Mar Thoma XVIII - Juhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan (1949-1976)
- Mar Thoma XIX - Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan (1977-1999)
- Mar Thoma XX - Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Metropolitan (1999-2007) - Resigned on 90th anniversary for ill health Starting 28 August 2007-presently, Valiya Metropolitan (Metropolitan Emeritus)
- Mar Thoma XXI - Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan (2007-2020)

From Mathews Mar Athanasius to we had four Metropolitans from the Palakunnath family, Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma was the fifth in the great line of leadership over the Apostolic See of Malankara. The Metropolitan Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma succeeded the Metropolitan Padma Bhushan Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom.

Metropolitan was Born on 27th June 1932, ordained on 18th October 1957. His Grace was consecrated as Bishop Joseph Mar Irenaeus Episcopa on 8th February 1975 and was elevated as the supreme head of the Mar Thoma church on 2nd October 2007 as Joseph Mar Thoma.

His Grace celebrated his 90th Birthday on 27th June 2020 and called to eternity on the 63rd anniversary of ordination on 18th October 2020.

Metropolitan Joseph Mar Thoma served as a strong and vibrant leader of the Christian community in India. His grace served the national and international forums with great vitality and sagacity. His leadership acumen has captured the imagination of ecumenical bodies to elect His Grace as their President. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma during his long tenure has successfully guided the Mar Thoma Church to its present growth, spread, and development. We are very happy and proud that His Grace was blessed with sixty-three precious years of pastoral leadership to his people and his community.

When His Grace was consecrated as a Bishop a few lines given by then Metropolitan Dr. Juhanon Mar Thoma was a 'charter' for the rest of his ministry:

*Off the maddening range of things,
Tossed by storm and flood
To one fixed point my heart cling
I know, God is good.*

Metropolitan used to recite these words to communicate to people around His Grace that he had to face very trying and challenging situations, but there was God's grace to carry him through each experience.

In the words of Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan, "Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan is noble in ancestry, rich in self-acquired

abilities, well versed in relations, able and talented in construction work and blessed in leadership." This captures the best of all the



Joseph Mar Thoma was to the Mar Thoma church community and all His Grace have touched in one way or the other.

Champion and Friend of Diaspora Communities

We are a diaspora community and under Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma's leadership we have gained strength in our organizational set up. Thirumeni supported all noble ventures that would impact the life of the migrant community. His Grace used to involve the words of the Late Abraham Mar Thoma regarding the dispersion of the Syrian Christian community. His Grace Abraham Mar Thoma used to pray, "Lord, scatter my people." Yes, God has answered our people far and wide. His Grace Joseph Mar Thoma travelled the length and breadth of the

whole *Oikoumene* (inhabited world) and met with our people in different countries of Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe, North America and South America. We do not have any congregations in South America. Thirumeni had a dream to carve a new Diocese for Europe. The Zonal structure was a prelude to this idea of Thirumeni. We can testify to the foresight of His Grace as we are growing as a faith community in Europe.

As His Grace visited the diaspora parish communities and took time to listen to their hopes and aspirations. He has taken ardent interest in resolving some of the local issues in the development of parish communities, especially in the building of new churches. He listened to their grievances and settled the issues for the good of the community.

It was during the last visit that His Grace dedicated the new church in Manchester. He was waiting for the next visit to dedicate the St James Church in London and the church in Liverpool. I was told that twice His Grace gave small contributions for the construction of the St James church in London, which was an encouragement and support for the parish community. I was told that His Grace did the same for the parish in Perth, Australia during the dedication on 17th August 2019.

His Grace guided the Diocese of North America and Europe to acquire the Carmel Mar Thoma Centre in Atlanta. Thirumeni dedicated the campus for the glory of God on 29th December 2018. The innovative initiatives and supported and promoted by His Grace in the diaspora context, whereas the leaders in India would not understand the gravity of the situation here or support the needs which are critical for the

growth and survival of the diaspora community in the Western hemisphere.

Thirumeni used these platforms in the West to promote the Mar Thoma Church and enter into deeper relationship with the local episcopal church communities. In some cases, the best speakers were met personally and invited them to be speakers at the Maramon Convention.

Ecumenical World

Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma added an ecumenical flavour to the Episcopal ministry in the church. His Grace has occupied seats of leadership to several national and international ecumenical bodies. His engagement at the World Council of Churches, Christian Conference of Asia, National Council of Churches in India and many more.

His Grace has connections from different countries and denominational backgrounds. His vast influence helps the church to get suitable speakers for the Maramon Convention every year.

Social Intervention

Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma believes in the healing of the nations and communities regardless of caste and color. His Grace's dream to develop a fund to help the weak and vulnerable sections of the society for their hospital expenses is a beautiful expression of his vision for mission. The project called *Sneha karam* (Loving Hands) is extended to patients who are affected by life threatening diseases like, cancer. Free dialysis is offered to patients with kidney ailments.

Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma's leadership in the rescue and rehabilitation during the recent

Kerala flood is greatly appreciated. His Grace reached out to the affected peoples in remote areas.

Angel of Peace and Reconciliation

His Grace acted as an agent of peace to different areas of conflict. While His Grace was serving in CCA, there was a taskforce to do 'Peace Mission' and His Grace was the co-chairman. They have reached out to conflicts in East Timor, Nagaland and Manipur. There were times, when they were not given escorts or security. His Grace was ready to risk his life to bring peace and amity to those areas.

Personal Note

Metropolitan was very loving a caring in his disposition. He was mostly misunderstood as a tough person and unreasonable at times. I worked closely with His Grace during the past few years after the end of tenure with the Serampore University. He always dreamed of the Mar Thoma Church and its greatness. He did everything to strengthen 'each fibre' of the church structure. Let us thank God for giving us such a great personality to lead our church in the early decades of the Twenty First Century.

Finale

Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma left us with a great legacy to treasure. His Grace's memory is not found in monuments, but in acts of love like '*Sneha Karam*'. It will continue speak volumes of a person who stood for the values of the Kingdom and promoted life in all its fullness. May the Lord of the church continue to bless the Mar Thoma Church with great servants of God who will carry the rich traditions and tested values with much zeal for the glory of God.



Tribute to Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma



**Revd Viji Varghese
Eapen**
*Vicar, CSI Congregations
in Belfast, Dublin and
Manchester &
Research Scholar,
Dublin City University*

It is about a month since the late lamented Most Reverend Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan, the 21st Mar Thoma of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church left us, leaving a palpable vacuum in our lives. We have memories of him as a Metropolitan, an Episcopa, a Kasseessa, a friend or a family member. As a member and minister of the Church of South India (CSI), I remember him for his relation with the CSI and his theological outlook about discipleship and ministry.

The Church of South India cherishes her communion with the Mar Thoma Church. The beginnings of this continuing fellowship go back to the days before the formation of the CSI. Those were the days when the leaders and members of the Churches (Anglican, Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian) that later joined to form the CSI had a cordial relationship with the Metropolitans, Episcopas, Priests and the faithful of the Mar Thoma Church. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma also cherished the relationship between both these Churches. Even as his age advanced and health deteriorated, he ensured his ecumenical presence during the CSI Synod Meetings and other significant events organised by the Church of South India.



The first Moderator of the CSI was Bishop Michael Hollis, who after his retirement, joined the United Theological College, Bangalore, and served there as a faculty member during 1955-1960. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma (P. T. Joseph), who had joined for his Bachelor of Divinity at the UTC in 1954, often used to recollect his association with Bishop Hollis, his Church History professor. When Bishop Thomas K. Oommen became the Moderator of the Church of South India, Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma presided the public felicitation meeting organised at Kottayam. He was also present during the valedictory of the Bicentenary Celebration marking the arrival of the first Anglican missionary, Revd Thomas Norton, to Kerala in 1816, and also during the ecumenical gathering organised in honour of Archbishop Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury. During all these occasions, I remember him passionately detailing the kind of affinity and bond he had with Bishop Hollis.

Drawing insights from Eastern Theology and the Latin American Liberation Theology, especially its emphasis on “the preferential option to the poor”, Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma had an evident and balanced theological outlook about ministry. He was passionate about his Church and compassionate to the poor. I have heard him several times emphasising upon the “theology of the Cross”. He considered suffering as central to the understanding of Christian discipleship. One of his favourite theologians was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor, theologian and anti-Nazi dissident, whose book, *The Cost of*

Discipleship seems to have had a long-lasting influence upon the Metropolitan. Often in his sermons, quoting Bonhoeffer's famous words, 'When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.', the Metropolitan used to encapsulate the Biblical teaching on what it means to follow Christ.

God says, 'I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.' (Jeremiah 3:15) God had blessed the Mar Thoma Church, and the Church at large, with a shepherd who was after God's own heart, and who had tended his flock with knowledge and understanding. As the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church continues to mourn at the death of their beloved Metropolitan Dr. Joseph Mar Irenaeus, and as she prepares to install Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius as the 22nd Mar Thoma Metropolitan on 14 November 2020, may I, a member and minister of the Church of South India, assure my ardent prayers. May we all continue to live in communion with Christ and with each other.



In Loving Memory and Gratitude to Irenaeus Thirumeni



Dr. Zac Varghese

Sinai MTC

I am very grateful to Revd Binu J. Varghese for asking me to write a tribute to the late Most Revd Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan with a particular emphasis on his contributions to the Mar Thoma diaspora communities.

The 18th of October 2020 was a very sad day in the annals of history of the Mar Thoma Church; it was a sad day for all of us: critics, admirers, loyal members of the Mar Thoma Church, people other faiths and the wider ecumenical community. Our late Metropolitan was admired and respected by people inside and outside our church for his spirituality, compassion, charitable work, amazingly outstanding administrative abilities and the total person that he was. It is with great sadness we say farewell to this good and faithful servant of God.

Thirumeni reached out to all sections of the community, the poor, the rich, the left and the right of the political spectrum and also to the wider ecumenical community. This was acknowledged by the Prime Minister of India, Mr. Narendra Modi, on Thirumeni's 90th Birthday on 27th June of this year. As we mourn the death of this beloved servant of God, let us thank God for his 90 years on this earth to share our burdens and our joy.

Members of Thirumeni's illustrious family played important roles during the reformation of the Mar Thoma Church in 18th Century. Abraham Malpan, known as the 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 was very conscious of his historical ancestral linkage, traditions and responsibility. Thirumeni's ordination as Revd P. T. Joseph was on 18th October 1957. When some people argue vehemently against the traditions of the Mar Thoma Church, let us remember how Jaroslav Pelikan¹ defined tradition: **"Tradition is the living faith of the dead and traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."** It is traditionalism

which gives a bad name to tradition. Thirumeni unashamedly valued tradition.

It was also in 1957 that the Mar Thoma Christians established a congregation in London. Revd P. T. Joseph served this congregation in London from 1966-67. His studies at the

Wycliffe Hall in the University Oxford during that period gave him many lasting friendships, which he valued very much. Thirumeni had a very special relationship with the UK and Thirumeni together with Philoxenos Thirumeni blessed us by making us an independent Zone in January 2018, and had he lived he would have created a new diocese here also. Therefore, let us remember him for helping us in many various ways including sending handpicked, talented, clergy for developing our parishes; this includes two retired vicar generals and two aichens with credentials to become future



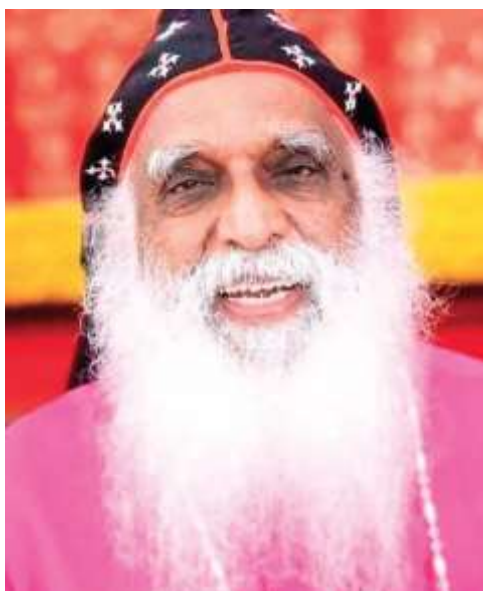
¹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), page 65.

bishops of our church also. His last visit to Liverpool, Manchester, London and Canterbury was on 18th to 23rd October, 2019. I last met him on 21st October when he was taken round to show the progress of the construction of St. James church at New Eltham in south London. He was looking forward very enthusiastically to consecrating this first purpose-built Mar Thoma Church in the UK.

Let us thank God for giving Thirumeni, the divine delegation to be a messenger of the Gospels, determination and courage to do God's mission over the last 63 years, of which 18 years was as a minister, 45 years as a bishop, and the last 13 years as our beloved Metropolitan. It is an amazing coincidence and miracle that he passed away on the same date on October 18th that he was ordained as a priest in 1957.

Metropolitan's administrative abilities were outstanding; everyone turned to him for advice and solution to the tricky problems that our people continuously created. There was an increasing trend in dumping everything on Thirumeni's shoulders. The old dictum of President Truman, '**the buck stops here**' was true with Thirumeni; this meant that he accepted personal responsibility for the administration. Thirumeni transformed problems into opportunities to live out the Gospel in everyday realities of life. Although people carelessly talked about Metropolitan's retirement, God allowed him to make all the necessary preparations for his departure from this world on a heavenward journey; the date and the time was in accordance with God's plan. Therefore, he left on a script that he composed with his maker. The occasion of Thirumeni's death is **not** what Kottooreth

Achen saw and felt in 1893 at the death of Thomas Mar Athanasius Metropolitan, and went on to express through a voice choking and tears flowing Achen prayed: " Lord, when Moses died you had provided Joshua to lead the people, but now we have no body. . ." Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan had made arrangements for his succession in appointing Theodosius Thirumeni as a Suffragan and handed over some responsibilities to other bishops. Therefore, it was a most carefully planned succession and not as demanded and wished by some thoughtless and uncaring attention seeking activists.



Let us pray for Theodosius Thirumeni and our other bishops. May they have the willingness to combine the lessons of the past with the needs of today and the dreams for tomorrow at all levels. The dynamic of Church leadership is collective and continuing; not by fits and starts or long absence, selective presence or rash display of disruptive tendencies. We are richly benefitted by our Metropolitan Thirumeni's presence at the

helm all these years. Let us carry beautiful memories of him and pray for the future of our church.

Thirumeni spared no time and pain in maintaining relationships with people from all sections of the society. He made it a point of visiting people in their times of need and illness. Even in September this year, during his illness, he attended a few funeral services and visited terminally ill people. His crystal clear memory helped him to keep up friendships gained by continuing the contacts with them across the

world. Thirumeni also had an amazing sense of history. He was a master craftsman, when dealing with current issues he always found suitable biblical reference points and narratives; this is indeed a very effective way of tackling issues, including both political and religious, with a historical, modern and hermeneutic perspective. Thirumeni's monthly letters in the Tharaka were prime examples of this ability; Thirumeni was always in touch with all aspects of life in India and elsewhere. This is why the Prime Minister of India paid glorious tribute to him on his 90th birthday.

Thirumeni's ecumenical record was 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 a very significant role for the relief of tsunami, victims of floods in Kerala and also for the earthquake victims in Maharashtra and other places. He has built many educational institutions, nursing schools, caring homes for old people and hospitals. Therefore, his ministry reached all areas of life also and he was recently involved in transgender awareness and rehabilitation programmes. M. J. Joseph achen described him as a 'karma yogi'.

Metropolitan reminded us in 2017 at our Diamond Jubilee celebration that the **"Sun never settles on the Mar Thoma Diaspora communities across the world."** Thirumeni had an important part to play in the development of our diaspora communities around the globe. Thirumeni had a special relationship with the UK and the Church of England. He always enjoyed having an

Anglican bishop or Archbishop at the Maramon Convention. He also attended a number of Anglican Consultative Council meetings with the Primates of the world-wide Anglican Communion and the Lambeth conferences. This helped him to develop and maintain lasting friendships with church leaders across the world. He was looking forward to attending the Lambeth Conference again in 2021 as a special guest.

Thirumeni's contributions to the diaspora were enormous and prophetic. Thirumeni encouraged and helped us to bring together lay leaders, almost ninety of them, from all parts of the world for three FOCUS seminars in 1999, 2001 and 2003 at Santhigiri Ashram, Alwaye. He



and all our other bishops stayed with the delegates during these five-day seminars to workout policies for the growth of the Mar Thoma diaspora communities. We also had the blessings from Alexander Metropolitan

Thirumeni and Chrysostom Thirumeni. This was a great and unforgettable experience for those who were there. The annual Diaspora Sunday Celebration began with the blessings of the late Zacharias Thirumeni in the Diocese of North America and Europe in 2001 as a result of the deliberations of these seminars. We were also hoping to repeat this experience at the 'Global Mar Thoma Meet' at Atlanta under the guidance of our Metropolitan and Philoxenos Thirumeni in July this year, but this was not to be because of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions.

In September, 2011, Thirumeni in his letter in the Tharaka had described how our people reached Malaysia 100 years ago and how they established a worshipping community there 25 years after their arrival. They are the old world

pioneers who left their mark in evolving a traditional, parochial church from the Malabar Coast to a world-wide church; it was indeed the beginning of an amazing story of a journeying people. This story is repeated again and again in other countries of the world. Thirumeni knew this story well; he was a great story teller, he was a part of our diaspora story and the experiences of a journeying people.

Marthomites became a diaspora community for reasons other than that of a Jewish diaspora. They were not forced out, but they voluntarily left their villages, homesteads and towns. They believe that they have been sent for a God-directed purpose. This 'sent-ness' is very important to establish a spiritual dimension to their lives in places where they live. Therefore, their election as a diaspora community is clear and unequivocal, which is to proclaim the gospel by their live experiences in communities where they lived and to pass on their rich traditions and heritage to future generations. The basic thought guiding them in various diaspora regions is that they are not just economic migrants in these countries, but they are sent there for a divine purpose and they are an integral part of every aspect of witnessing including koinonia (fellowship), kerygma (preaching) and diakonia (service). They are not observers or bystanders; they are pioneers in a mission with a Christian lifestyle for serving their adopted countries and communities with Bible-centred work ethics.

Future historians of the Mar Thoma Church will undoubtedly look back on the twentieth century and the first two decades of the 21st century as a great period in the transformation of the Mar Thoma Church into a global Church.

Irenaeus Thirumeni's contributions to this transformation were enormous. However, I do not think that many members of the Mar Thoma Church in Kerala appreciate or understand this new status endowed on the Mar Thoma Church by God's amazing grace and our responsibilities emerging from it for world mission. Bringing people to God and bringing people to brotherhood with one another through witnessing is our mission, the mission of God (*Missio Dei*). This dispersion and scattering to the various parts of the world may indeed be providential; this may help us to answer the question, why are we placed in different regions of the world? Thirumeni continually asked us to remember this question and answer this question with fidelity to the purpose with which we are called and sent. Chrysostom Thirumeni



was also concerned about this question and he asked at the FOCUS seminar in 2001 the question: "Will the diaspora community ever become a local community?" This is a task now left to our

younger generations in our diaspora regions to answer.

However, how should we answer this question about our integration with local communities and what guidance can we give? Whoever or wherever we are, our spiritual journey can only start at the foot of the cross and this is the mother of all our common beginnings. Therefore, the remembrance of our common beginnings would help us to become 'outward signs of an inward grace' and this will certainly help us to transform the societies in which we live. This is indeed the global witnessing potential of the Mar Thoma diaspora communities. Hopefully, this is the guidance that Thirumeni's left for us and that is indeed

the legacy of Thirumeni for the diaspora communities.

Although we have grown individually and can be very proud of our individual diasporic experiences and achievements, we do not have any real collective feeling for Mar Thoma diaspora communities in various regions of the world for an authentic witness. Arundathi Roy in 'God of Small Things' wrote: "Though you couldn't see the river from the house any more, like a seashell always has a sea-sense, the Ayemenm house still had a river-sense, a rushing, rolling, fish swimming sense." In a similar vein, Thirumeni's sense of history and the stories that he told us relating to reformation, migration, and settlement would help us, our diaspora communities around the world, to maintain that important 'Mar Thoma-sense' which we should pass on to subsequent generations. This 'Mar Thoma -sense' is what Thirumeni taught us relentlessly.

Thirumeni was the custodian of traditions, customs and mores, without which he thought that we would become rootless and superfluous. Thirumeni had a sense of history and did not forget the small and large events that shaped the Church. He had an amazing '**presence**', which is difficult to describe, but we experienced it on various memorable occasions such as Jubilee celebrations or at Maramon Convention or in the presence of various dignitaries such as, politicians, ecumenists, sociologist and heads of churches. Thirumeni was the embodiment of the Mar Thoma Church; he had an indefinable '**Mar Thomas-sense and Presence**'. Thirumeni also had a sense of ownership of the Church which he zealously safeguarded. He was indeed the



21st Mar Thoma Metropolitan in every sense of the word. He knew and felt the struggles of the post reformation Marthomites, to preserve their faith and the compulsion to be with the Church and also in dignity, serenity and style. Yes, indeed, he had a God-given '**Presence**'.

In conclusion: I have many personal memories of sixty years which I shall treasure and keep strictly in a private chamber of my memory bank. I feel painfully that that I have lost something most valuable and irreplaceable. This feeling is no way special to me alone; I would not feel surprised if all of us were to feel the

same way. However, Thirumeni in his generosity and love left us with an amazing treasure, an unforgettable '**Experience**' like no other. Our sense of loss eventually will be replaced with an enduring '**Experience**'. I believe that recalling this '**Experience**' is a fitting

memorial to a man of God - a servant of God - who listened, prayed, moved and walked with Jesus, for doing God's mission and for establishing God's kingdom values. Thirumeni followed Jesus as a faithful disciple to make sure that this earth is indeed a place of justice, spirituality, relationship and beauty. He wanted us not only to enjoy dreaming of it as such, but also to work at it to transform it into a reality as a new earth as it is in heaven. That was indeed the God-given purpose of his life, he did his mission and ministry faithfully. Thirumeni left to us to finish the unfinished part of his blessed dream under the grace of God.

Let us thank God for all the blessings that we received through Irenaeus Thirumeni. May Thirumeni's soul rest in peace and rise in glory.

Late Joseph Mar Thoma: A Bishop who was Loyal to the Royal



Joji Abraham P. Jacob

*Zonal Council Member
Nazareth Mar Thoma
Church, Ireland.*

David Harkins, the English poet, wrote:

*You can shed tears that he is gone
Or you can smile because he has lived
You can close your eyes and pray that he will
come back
Or you can open your eyes and see all that he
has left
Your heart can be empty because you can't
see him
Or you can be full of the love that you shared
You can turn your back on tomorrow and
live yesterday
Or you can be happy for tomorrow because of
yesterday
You can remember him and only that he is
gone
Or you can cherish his memory and let it live
on
You can cry and close your mind, be empty
and turn your back
Or you can do what he would want: smile,
open your eyes, love and go on.*

I write this tribute to Joseph Mar Thoma with the same dilemma whether to shed tears that he is gone, or to smile because he lived. I can close my eyes and pray that he would come back, or I can open my eyes and see all that he has left. My heart can be empty because I cannot see him, or I can be full of the love that he had shared. I can turn my back on tomorrow and live yesterday, or I can be happy for tomorrow because of

yesterday. I can remember him and only that he is gone, or I can cherish his memory and let it live on. I can cry and close my mind, be empty and turn my back, or I can do what he would want: smile, open my eyes, love and go on.

My association with Joseph Mar Thoma records back to my days as a youth, active in the *Yuvajana Sakhyam*. Those were the days when I used to admire and adore him (as Joseph Mar Irenaeus Episcopa) only from a distance. His thoughts, words and actions had a profound impact upon me, especially in shaping my outlook about ministry. Gradually, as we began to interact with each other, we formed a personal intimacy, both emotional and spiritual, causing lasting memories that I can never forget. I was exceedingly privileged that I could experience his care and love even as he was in his death bed. I consider it as one of the greatest blessings in my life that I received a call from the Metropolitan on the day after his *Holy Unction*. He called me to say, "Good-bye". All that I could respond was to burst into tears. A few days after this last call, I got another call from Tiruvalla. This time, it was to say that our beloved Metropolitan was no more.

For me, he was more than a Bishop. He was like my father; had complete liberty to advise and admonish me. In my joyous as well as sorrowful moments, I had the chance to experience Thirumeni's physical and virtual presence. I have known Thirumeni as a man who was committed and compassionate. Because he was committed to the cause of Christ, he was uncompromising and unwavering, when it came to many crucial decisions, for which, he was often criticized by many. However, I have seen him from very close, and I can vouch for his compassionate heart. Yes, Thirumeni was genuinely loving and caring, and his heart would melt at the pain of others. If there was

one thing that would "defeat" him, that was our tearful eyes.

The UK-Europe Zone of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church was Thirumeni's dream, and hence this Zone always had a special place in his heart. Despite several odds, under his visionary leadership, COMPE (Council of Mar Thoma Parishes in Europe) was formed and established as UK & Europe Zone, later. Today, there are 11 parishes and 5 congregations across the zone; thanks to the great determination of Thirumeni. As the Secretary of the Nazareth Mar Thoma Church, Dublin, I cherish his Episcopal visit to our Church. Thirumeni's passing is an irredeemable loss to the Mar Thoma Church and to the UK-Europe Zone, in particular. Further, he was truly ecumenical, who furthered the relationship between the Mar Thoma Church with sister Churches, both Eastern and Western.

Born on 27 June 1931, as the son of Palakunnath T. Lukose of Maramon Palakunnath Kadon House and Mariamma, also of Maramon Puthoor House, P. T. Joseph (later, Joseph Mar Thoma) was ordained as Shemmashan of the Mar Thoma Church on 29 June 1957, kasseessa on 18 October 1957, and Ramban on 11 January 1975, and consecrated as Joseph Mar Irenaeus Episcopa on 8 February 1975, installed as Suffragan Metropolitan on 15 March 1999 and enthroned as Mar Thoma XXI Metropolitan on 2 October 2007. During his tenure as a shepherd (in various vocation and offices), he proved to be of the qualities mentioned in Titus 1: 7-9.

For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or

quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.



To conclude, with the passing of Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma, the Church has lost a dedicated shepherd who loved and served the Church with all his heart, mind, and soul. And, for me, I have lost a father and mentor, a personification of selfless love. First and foremost, he was a disciple, and then, a Bishop who was

"loyal to the Royal".



Theological contributions of His Grace Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma



Revd Sam Koshy

*PhD Student
Department of
Theology
University of Bern*

An Introduction

As a church father, Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan² has done significant theological contributions spanning over 63 years of ministry.³ Paying respect and regard to the blessed memory of His Grace, this short note tries to introduce few areas of His Grace's theological contributions. Indeed, to summarize 63 years of theological leadership need much research, documenting and reflection and that is beyond the scope of the present essay. Hence, four areas of the theological contributions will be introduced: 1) Doctrinal 2) Sacramental 3) Ecumenical, and 4) Pedagogical. By introducing these four areas of the theological contributions of the Metropolitan, the aim is that more detailed studies will be conducted. To limit the scope of the paper, biographical details or personal reminiscences will not be included as part of the paper, though biographical accounts are referred to, wherever it is unavoidable.

² Hereafter Metropolitan

³ Previously a book title as *The Mar Thoma Church. Tradition and Modernity: A Festschrift in honour of His Grace the Most. Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan* (Published, 2000 in Kerala, India) has surveyed his life, vision and philosophy in a substantial way.

1. Doctrinal

The architecture of faith, the edifice of spirituality, and the practices of mission are to be grounded in the coherent biblical exposition of the doctrines. The biblical exposition of Christian doctrines by the Metropolitan is spread through the sermons⁴, deeply involved chanting of the liturgical prayers, the letters of Metropolitan in *Sabha Tharaka*, numerous introductions written for liturgical books and the circulars of Metropolitan. It can be studied that the key doctrine of Metropolitan is Christology. Specifically speaking, The Incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ and therefore redemption of the heirs of Adam and creation through



Incarnation, is the locus of the doctrinal position of Metropolitan. It can be observed that to explain the Incarnation the Metropolitan used two sources: Patristics and Indian Christian Theology. In the patristic

sources, early Syriac theology (pre-Chalcedonian era) and in the Indian Christian theology, the influence of Kesub Chandra Sen was summarized in the theology of His Grace. Sometimes it can be observed that there is a syncretic mixture of both in the theology of Thirumeni. But Metropolitan was never pedantic or wanted to be scholastic, rather used these Christological sources for the edification of people. Because of the numerous repetitions of the core theme, sometimes people find the value of the point less important, but for the Metropolitan every time, it was theological exposition of faith even more. In the relation to Christology, the Metropolitan was also

⁴ Fortunately, few of them are available in the social media.

clear that we call St. Mary neither as *Christotokos* (in Nestorian Way), or *Theotokos* (in Cyrilian Way), rather venerate and respect as the Mother of the Lord (*Kuriotokos* -in the major tradition of church of the East) as saluted by Elizabeth.⁵ As Mary received and presented Christ, the church is invited and called to be the extension of Incarnation through personal, institutional, and ecclesial mission. This inseparable and delicate link between Christology and Mariology is evident, especially, in the letters of the Metropolitan. In 25 days lent during Christmas times, the Syriac theological word 'Yeldo' was very dear to the Metropolitan in the writings. Of course, other doctrinal theological like Ecclesiology, Pneumatology, and Trinity, have been spread through the writings of Thirumeni and it needs much space to elaborate on those themes. The doctrinal theological exposition transformed the leadership in the Sacramental led by Metropolitan to a celestial note, which we turn now to.

2. Sacramental

Irenaeus of Lyons said that "Our Christian Way of Thinking is attuned to the Eucharist and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking."⁶

In the Eastern theology, Human beings are formed and transformed through the



Sacraments. It is true that, theology is sacramentally anchored, and sacraments are theologically enveloped. Metropolitan enacted and exemplified both axioms in its fullness. In every sacramental occasion, the theological conviction of Metropolitan was well evident. Participants were astounded by the weeping face of Metropolitan in the sacrament of Holy Ordination. During the reading of special prayers, Metropolitan used to be poised like an abbot in a monastic discourse. The blessed moment of Eucharist and its distribution and its thanksgiving prayers, were a heavenly experience for Metropolitan and hence for the participants. Even at the age of 90, Metropolitan used to recite John 6, and the Syriac liturgical songs with rich and deep mentioning of healing through the body of Christ. It has been noted that bereaving homes were extremely near to his heart. But one can see that in every funeral

occasion Metropolitan used to render a blessed sermon on the resurrection. The resurrection of the Lord and the Incarnation of the Lord were the theological markers in which the Metropolitan interpreted all the sacraments and its effect and effect on the people of God. Metropolitan through his writings exhorted the faithful about the purpose of each sacrament which was the transformation of individual and society. This transformative aspect of sacramental celebrations was imbibed by Metropolitan from the writings of Patristic fathers and passed on to generations by always saying, "Do not be the creatures of circumstances, but be creators of circumstances with the creator Lord". This Sacramental attitude and its mystical theology, of the Metropolitan, shows an embracing of other persons and

⁵ As in the case of church of the East, Indian churches of Syriac heritage, also, were not part of Caledonian and related debates. But Indeed, Christology, Ecclesiology and Mariology is interlinked in any candid articulation of the doctrine and play a decisive role in ecumenical conversations. Metropolitan was grounding in the text of St. Luke and the salutation by Elizabeth to Mary (Luke.1:41-44).

⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, 4.18(180)

traditions in ecumenical spirit and regard. Such a sacramentally grounded openness has paved way for the ecumenical theology of Metropolitan to which we turn now.

3. Ecumenical

To the question if there is a sign by which one can know if a person has achieved purity of heart, St. Isaac the Syrian replies "When he see all personas as pure and no one appears to him to be unclean or pure."

Mar Thoma Syrian church is a rare blend of Syriac patristics and ecumenical theological thinking. Metropolitan was a perfect example of blending of both the trajectories. Despite being controversial, Metropolitan's personal friendship ranged from the Mar Aprem of Chaldean church of the East to the Metropolitan

Athanasius Yohan 1 of Believers Eastern church. Not only in friendship, but also personally leading the CASA, CCA and NCCI and the delegation to the WCC assembly in more than five decades Metropolitan exemplified the ecumenical spirit.

Moreover, Metropolitan was instrumental in the official formation the Communion of Churches in India. Balancing the traditional and the reformation roots of the Mar Thoma Syrian church, Metropolitan was keen in relating to the church of England and refreshed the relation between the Church of Antioch. It is important to note that during the tenure of Holy See of Metropolitan, an official ecumenical dialogue was started with the Old Catholic church of the Union of Utrecht and with the Jacobite Syrian church. It is inspiring to see that at the age of 89, in the year 2018, the Metropolitan visited Rome at the Pontifical Council for promoting Christian Unity, and the Taizé community in France and



expressed deep regard and desire to seek the possibility of ecumenical relationship. It adds on to the fact that, whenever an ordained priest of other churches is present in the sacraments of marriage or baptism, Metropolitan was mindful to affirm their participation in the liturgical leadership. But all through the ecumenical encounters, Metropolitan has provided a famous dictum, "accept what you can accept in others and respect what you cannot." This dictum by the Metropolitan has been taken up in many ecumenical conversations as a paradigm. Hence it can be observed that, ecumenical theology and sacramental theology was so intact in the theology of Metropolitan. Hence to continue the double-sided route of blending and bridging the sacramental and ecumenical theology, Metropolitan inspired many to do the higher studies.

4) Pedagogical.

Hans Von Balthassar has noted that "The greatest tragedy in the history of Christianity was neither the crusades nor the Reformation nor the Inquisition, but the split that opened up between

theology and spirituality in the Middle Ages." The Metropolitan was attempting to heal the, above mentioned, split between academic theology and practical theology, throughout his ministry. Metropolitan himself exemplified the range of pedagogical brilliance, by teaching theology of liturgical songs and action song for Sunday school children with equal vitality.⁷ Keeping the full spirit of pedagogical concern, Metropolitan promoted theological studies in an incredibly significant way. During the Holy See of the Metropolitan (2007 -2020), more than 30 clergy were sent for doctoral studies, more than

⁷ The pedagogical practise of Metropolitan and its versatile aspects can be professionally researched further.

60 for master's course and a handful were given the opportunity for post- doctoral research. Extra ordinary permission was given for few to be visiting fellows at International Universities. Metropolitan renewed the Syriac language teaching in the Seminary and encouraged many to be part SEERI, Kottayam. The breadth of the theological vision is so open that Metropolitan permitted clergy of the church pursue film studies at Pune Film institute and at the Musical colleges. Not only the Metropolitan encouraged many clergy for theological higher studies, but also inspired many lay persons to complete their higher degrees. This contribution of sending or encouraging the clergy and laity for higher studies, becomes more meaningful to understand and meditate when one recognizes the personal story of the Metropolitan which is totally the other way round. The Metropolitan after completing his master's from the USA got chance to pursue Ph.D in the UK, but in those days church had called him back and asked him to join the ministry. Though Metropolitan was not able to complete the research due to the decision of the church⁸, he motivated others to go for higher studies and made sure that they were well supported. Theological contribution of the Metropolitan ranges from what he wrote and said to what he helped others to study, write and contribute.



Conclusion.

Metropolitan Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma, of blessed memory, was a versatile monk, theologian, and a leader. His theological contributions are

⁸ But later three doctorates were adorned the elegance of the Metropolitan.

evident in the areas of doctrines, ecumenical relations, administration of sacraments and helping others to do the study and research. The doctrinal axis provided the fuel for his sacramental spirituality. The sacramental spirituality instilled a mystical openness to other human beings and traditions. The transformative sympathy of Metropolitan was a living liturgy of the risen Christ. The ecumenical and pedagogical spirit of Metropolitan seems to be construed in the way in which, the higher studies in theological and other disciplines were promoted for, both, the clergy and laity.

Summarizing the versatile personality, theological contribution, and the constant focus

on Christ by the Metropolitan, one can well resonate to conclude with a quotation from an ancient author:

“The perfect mystic is not an ecstatic devotee lost in contemplative Oneness, nor a saintly recluse shunning all commerce with humankind, but a true saint goes in and out among the people and eats

and lives with them and buys and sells in the market and takes part in the social interactions and never forgets God for a single moment.” Yes, Metropolitan was a perfect mystic. His life and contribution will continue to encourage many to emulate and thereby follow Christ meaningfully.

Delineating the Dynamism of the Late Lamented Metropolitan with Special Reference to Ministry to the Marginalised



Revd Sijo John

*Research Scholar
University of Kent,
Vicar Canterbury Mar
Thoma Church*

Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma, the late lamented Metropolitan of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, is generally portrayed as a traditionalist in the apostolic lineage, but in the participation of God's mission, Thirumeni had dynamic energy in engaging with modernity. Thirumeni eagerly held the directive of the Jerusalem trio (Peter, Jacob, and John) to Paul, "remember the poor" (Cf. Gal 2:10). Amidst the rat race modernist culture of capitalism, Thirumeni dared to follow the necessity to embrace people at the margins and make constructive decisions for the sustainable development for the people at the margins of society. This article discusses Metropolitan's pastoral care on three areas of his ecclesial life.

Indeed, caring for the needy, poor, oppressed, marginalised, widows and destitute were highlighted within the ancient Judeo-Christian communities (See Mk 7:11; Acts 6). Thirumeni held that ethos, yet maintained a different approach to it. Therefore, on various occasions, it is to be highlighted that the ministry should not be limited to ethnic and credal categories. Instead, the horizon of care should be enlarged even to the credal exteriority. This concept



appreciates the proclamation of the Gospel by the entire congregation to everyone aiming a holistic development of the life. Dynamic engagements in creating institutions and new movements for treating them as the mission launchpad for-inviting the informed members of the church to contribute their talents and proficiency as a result of a call resulting in a vocation.

Pedagogy of the Oppressed

The schools under Mar Thoma management were looked after by the Metropolitan for more than a decade. The historical progression of church-aided schools was part of Christian witness and service to the essential need of broader communities. It served various job opportunities to the members of the community; in return, individuals and parishes have either donated land or built classrooms partially or fully. Teachers got recruited locally and trained the children of the locality, including theirs. However, changing the economic landscape of the Syrian Christian communities in Kerala made their generations to migrate to unaided English medium schools. The young generation did not opt for teaching profession when the globalisation opened avenues of opportunities. It adversely reflected in the educational ministry of the church and consequently, the quality of education, significantly in the aided schools in Kerala.

Thirumeni accepted the above reality; therefore, never overprotected the schools for the sake of preserving government job opportunities. Moreover, sometimes took harsh disciplinary actions against staff and even recommended for

the closure of the 'non-profitable' (in governmental term) to the local communities (as far as Thirumeni was concerned). Nevertheless, a handful of educational institutions gained special consideration, namely, in Kattanam, Ayur, Trivandrum, Nannammukku, Kasaragod, Perumbavoor, Hoskote, Satna. It has always been ensured that everything possible should be done to improve the infrastructural facilities and staff capacity. The driving force behind such eagerness had various triggering factors – the care for people in underprivileged regions, and Christian witness to the children of other faiths were some of them.

When it comes to educational care, people belong to the underprivileged sections of Indian society are mostly protected through various means. However, particularly the children of the diaspora were never left out in the dazzling care of the unprivileged. It was during the Gulf war engendered by reverse migration, changed the traditional trajectory of the education sector. The continuing education of the Gulf-returned children was a concern of the church. As we are aware, it resulted in the development of schools with an international educational system ensuring a bright future to the younger generation. It invited and promoted all novel ideas suggested by the locally appointed advisory bodies. During Metropolitan's tenure, Thirumeni permitted to experiment with many innovative and advanced pedagogical methods, diverging from the colonial 'clerical-formative' patterns.

The primary target was to facilitate affordable education and equal opportunity to all,

particularly to girls in north Indian villages. It touched upon the children of migrant workers in Kerala too. It incorporated every resource available, including the exceptionally qualified scholars from other faiths. It gained the support to pioneer exceptional ventures to 'move beyond' the normal standards. Developing advanced study centres was one of Thirumeni's prime concerns. It was grounded on the firm belief that education brings drastic and permanent changes to the life of the poor masses than any short-term charity that serves only momentary satisfaction. More importantly, Thirumeni envisioned that our higher educational institutions should be the thresholds to the villages of India as well as the

runway to the alien world of opportunities.

Surgical Strike in Hospitality

As we know, Mar Thoma Church does not own super speciality hospitals or medical colleges. Albeit, we have had effective medical service provisions, particularly in various parts of Kerala and in remote places

outside Kerala namely, Ankola, Hoskote, and Sihora. A dedicated team of Mar Thoma doctors and some of our clergymen who obtained basic midwifery training or non-allopathic medical practices or their medically trained spouses opted to serve the people in the border places, including the heights of Tibetan mountains.

As a responsible Christian community, Mar Thoma Church preferred not to misappropriate the minority concessions and to gain economic advantages converting them to business opportunities of the medical sector. We have established various projects wherever medical



care was a concern and opted for closure without hesitation whenever the economic circumstances of the locality changed and fell short of laity's participation. Moreover, for a certain period, we have neither upgraded institutions nor administered them for economic benefits instead, started new ventures and shifted to new places.

Metropolitan's impact on such a medical mission took a slight deviation in the above-said trajectory. Thirumeni insisted not to windup the mission instead used it as an antigen against the wrong medical practices for two reasons. First, Thirumeni was keen on the people at the margins living among the rich. Therefore, Thirumeni fought not to stop the mission in "unwanted" spaces instead to preserve it for the "underprivileged." Specifically, medical care became an industry in Kerala, particularly among the Syrian Christians, as they established access to foreign currency through extensive migration. The second reason was to challenge the capitalistic tendency to industrialise medical care. The charity was never confined to the rebate column of the medical bill. Thirumeni desired to stabilise the medical expenses by gathering and utilising donations from the Mar Thoma diaspora and philanthropic friends of Mar Thoma Church, including the Marafi foundations in Kuwait, particularly for the chronically sick patients. The "*Sneha Karam*" project initiated in association with the 80th birthday was an affirmative sign to the needy. It assured the well-being of families who could not afford expensive and prolonged treatments. We need to read it in the context of the struggling state administration of Kerala to provide free medicine for acutely sick patients.



Expensive medical education, which only immensely rich, can afford always have been challenged and discouraged. Instead, allied medical disciplines, which are affordable for everyone, always have been promoted. This again was for two reasons. Firstly, and most importantly, this strategy is helping people to find a vocation in their life to win their bread and secure the future of their family. It also supplies essential medical workers to the world. Secondly, it establishes and sustains the self-sufficiency of institutions. It creates an opportunity to utilise fully the human resources attached to the institution and, in effect, uses it as a cost-cutter tool. Therefore, the vision of Metropolitan was to effectively support the poor and the needy in providing adequate health care and a brighter medical career future.

Transgender Discourse

Concern to the vulnerable communities, particularly the gender minorities, have been considered as a top priority in the life of the late Metropolitan. It instilled him to investigate appropriate rehabilitation possibilities, albeit the civil juridical legislation preserves for their civil rights. Therefore, waiting for the right opportunity to bring this nuance to the forefront, it seems Thirumeni persisted until the episcopal Jubilee project of the brother bishops. Meanwhile, various pieces of information have been gathered regarding the transgender population across the country. Thirumeni summoned many transgender communities, met them in different occasions inside and outside Kerala on various occasions and initiated informal conversations. Thirumeni's bold and robust convictions led him to finally reach out a transgender person who is a Mar Thomite once discarded by the

family. The Maramon convention platform offered transgender people the opportunity to tell their stories to the faithful gathered.

One family came to the forefront and offered a piece of land for the mission works; a rehabilitation project was proposed, and it convinced them. Thirumeni began to acknowledge the progress of the proposal and encouraged the epistemological move, organising various seminars and programmes initiated by Dr. Theodosius Mar Thoma Metropolitan. Metropolitan supported such initiatives and provided theological and moral shielding and functional consent to complete the procedural protocols of the Church administration.

The late Metropolitan looked at these issues as the new dimensions in the ministry of the Mar Thoma Church. He even sought to explore the possibility of inviting transgender human resources to the expansion of the Kingdom. The church was informed of the socio-political-economical-psychological issues faced by the transgender communities in India. Thirumeni taught himself to tackle such problems systematically with the heart of Nazarine. The platform offered to the transgender community at the Maramon Convention was a small step to debunk such irony of 'orthodox' hesitation of 'reforming' the community. Moreover, it tamed the members of the Mar Thoma Church to appreciate that when we care for our own children, hospitality has to be extended to others as well.

Thirumeni was not a blind liberal; instead, went beyond the borders of liberalism and occupied the position of a revolutionary. For Thirumeni, the concept of freedom was not to unleash everything for the sake of secularism and

modernity. Instead, Thirumeni acknowledged the vacuum amid the liberal secular world and attended to them in a meaningful and coherent manner. The church cannot shut her eyes to social issues, and maintaining indifference is never a Christian attitude. A compassionate approach is the minimum demand of the Gospel. This compassion is not sheer mercy; instead, it is acknowledging the reality and the vulnerability as well. Undoubtedly, the desired outcome of the mission of God is 'life in abundance.' Thirumeni ensured the participation of the church in such a radical mission of God, shouldering every ministerial responsibility of the Metropolitan of Malankara at all demanding times.



Conclusion

The twenty-first Metropolitan of Malankara dynamically participated in the mission of God, exploding the obstacles that stood in the path of kingdom values. The dynamism was never confined to the ethnic and creedal sentimentalities of a minority community to whom Thirumeni was shepherding. However, it was to a comprehensive wider community with which His Grace's people are engaging. Thirumeni's life challenges us to trust and gather the local human and material resources and utilise it predominantly locally for the needy. It encourages us to move on to the unreached places wherever and whenever it is necessary. Most importantly, Thirumeni asserts us to "become self-sufficient and make others as well in every given circumstance and ensure our kenotic presence as the check and balance in an affluent capitalist world."



IN LOVING MEMORY