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My Lord and My God

St. John 20:28

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The Apostles gather around the risen Christ in the Upper Room, as Saint Thomas the Apostle touches the side of the Savior and exclaims

'My Lord and My God!'



His Holiness Writes...



Dearly beloved,

A few days back children were celebrating 'Back to School Day'. Children all over the world typically go back to school after their summer vacations, which means that school starts anywhere between June to September in the Northern Hemisphere, and January or February in the Southern Hemisphere. But no matter when kids start school, year after year, the excitement surrounding the beginning of a new school year, of looking forward to new experiences and new friendships, new uniforms and new books, is unique and overwhelming! It is quite challenging not only for kids but for the parents also. However, we have to agree that this season always makes us feel nostalgic about our own childhood, bringing back fond memories of our own school days.

Considering the importance of this season, we would like to share a few thoughts on education from a Christian perspective. "Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand." (Chinese proverb). Education is an involvement in the subject and topic which is being taught and practised by a child. The

methods and systems in education are always subject to overhauling to upgrade as per the need of the developing times. The modern education system faces numerous challenges that affect students, parents, and teachers alike. These issues range from systemic problems to those influenced by societal changes and technological advancements.

Modern education systems sometimes fail to address the holistic development of students, focusing primarily on academic achievements while neglecting physical, emotional, and social growth. Despite advancements, there are significant disparities in access to quality education, especially among marginalized communities. This inequity perpetuates social and economic divides. While technology can enhance learning, it also introduces distractions and can contribute to reduced attention spans and a lack of deep, focused learning. Issues like drug addiction, addiction to gadgets, disrespect to women and girl children are a growing concern among students, exacerbated by various social, psychological, and environmental factors. Easy access to substances, over dependence on social media, peer pressure and stress contribute to these issues.

Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that incorporates Christian values such as compassion, integrity and community support. Christian education emphasizes the development of the whole person. Schools should integrate spiritual, moral and character education into their curricula, fostering not just intellectual growth but also emotional and spiritual well-being. Christian schools and communities should provide supportive environments that address the diverse needs of students, including issues related to drug addiction and social media addiction. Schools should educate students about the dangers of substance abuse and

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provide support systems for those struggling with addiction. While embracing technological advancements, Christian schools should teach students responsible and balanced use of technology. Encouraging periods of digital detox and promoting activities that foster face-to-face interactions can help mitigate the negative impacts of technology. Christian teachings emphasize the dignity and worth of every individual. Needless to say, teachers should also be good role models and witnesses of God's love and compassion.

"Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). The modern education system faces complex challenges that require thoughtful, compassionate, and comprehensive solutions. By incorporating Christian values and principles, educators, parents, and communities can work together to create a nurturing and effective educational environment that addresses the academic, emotional, and spiritual needs of students. Through holistic education, supportive relationships and a commitment to equity and inclusion, the education system can prepare students in a better way for the future while nurturing their overall well-being.

Baselios Marthoma Mathews III



Editorial

“Suffering is the key to the mystery of existence in this world,” writes H.G. Paulos Mar Gregorios in his auto-biography ‘Love’s Freedom: The Grand Mystery’ and frankly admits his difficulty to comprehend innocent sufferings fully. Great Gurus, thinkers and creative writers of all times have tried to analyze this mystery of suffering in their own way.

Stoic and Buddhist teachings try to inculcate in us a kind of indifference in the midst of suffering so that we will be immune to sufferings. Gnostic thinking blames the creator God who is different from the absolute good God for human sufferings. The concept of ‘fate’ which is popular in India, blames moral failures in the ‘previous births’ for the present sufferings. There are some Christians who still think of human sufferings in terms of Divine punishment for their moral failures.

Sufferings due to accidents, natural calamities, unexpected illnesses like cancer can be called accidental sufferings which are unintentional on the part of the victims and also other humans. However, the sufferings of the victims of war, communalism, poverty etc. are caused by the selfish agendas and unjust activities of certain individuals or communities and can therefore be categorized as ‘unjust’ sufferings. Perhaps the sufferings associated with the punishment given to the perpetrators of violence and injustice and the sufferings which come as a result of their own unethical acts, can be identified as ‘punitive’ sufferings. Another kind of suffering faced by some people as part of their commitment to the well-being and liberation of others can be termed as ‘altruistic’ suffering. Hopelessness is the ‘victim attitude’ whereas hopefulness is the positive

approach in the midst of all these sufferings.

Jesus is our ultimate hope in the midst of sufferings. As St. Justin Martyr rightly says, the Son of God who was beyond all sufferings “had become truly a suffering man”. H.G. Paulos Mar Gregorios has also taught on these lines in the twentieth century. Through his life and words Jesus enlightens us that our destiny is to enter the ultimate glory through sufferings in this world. Jesus clearly says, “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (St. John 16:33). Christ, who appeared to St. John while in exile in Patmos Island, and comforted and strengthened him, is with us in our sufferings today. The Christ who went through all kinds of sufferings and agony comes to be in solidarity with those who suffer. Christ also opens our eyes to see sufferings as opportunities to glorify God’s name. Without accusing the blind man brought to him or his parents, Jesus comments about his blindness as an opportunity to reveal the glory of God (St. John 9: 3). His primary concern is to encourage all to do the necessary for alleviating the sufferings of the sick and the afflicted.

The Divine wisdom enlightens us to see many benefits generated by sufferings: they can lead us to repentance and purification; encourage victims as well as those who are related to them in different ways to take active steps for loving services and to be involved in struggles of justice for removing the pain and sufferings of many; deepen faith and facilitate abundant experience of grace; contribute to character formation; and enlighten us to realize the transient nature of the glory of this world and the true glory of eternal life. But the divine voice in our comforts may be like a sparrow’s chirp whereas the life-giving voice we hear in our sufferings is like an Elephant’s trumpet. There is no intention here to glorify sufferings except to impart the light of the gospel of hope



in the midst of our struggles through suffering.

After celebrating the Feast of St. George in May, towards the end of June we remembered all the apostles and especially on 29 June, the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul was celebrated. Feast of St. Thomas is observed on July 3rd and that of St. Mary on August 15. All these remind and reveal the glorious end and victory of those who trod the path of sufferings. The Cross of our Lord Jesus is the true secret, sign and guide to this ultimate glory and the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross on September 14 proclaims this truth. With this hope and looking unto Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith and hope, we can use our sufferings as opportunities to shape our society and our life meaningfully. We can also say boldly with St. Paul who wrote in his letter to the Philippians while experiencing the hardships of the prison the following encouraging words: “I can do all things with Christ who strengthens me”.

Bijesh Philip Achen

Editor, Malankara Sabha English Quarterly



For Having a *Kenotic* Mind

Fr. M. K. Kuriakose

St. Paul's epistle to the Philippians is generally called the Epistle of Joy. According to biblical accounts Philippi is St. Paul's first European congregation. He had visited them three times during the missionary journey and was very happy to compliment them for their exemplary witness. It is suggested that this 'prison letter' was written either during his imprisonment at Rome or Caesarea, or Ephesus. St. John Chrysostom strongly believed that it is written from the Roman prison.

The idea of Kenotic Christology was expounded by theologians from Philippians chapter 2:1-11. The words "He emptied himself" from Philippians 2:7 is the source of this magnificent theological perspective on Christ. It is derived from the Greek word *Kenosis* which means 'the act of self-emptying'. Having a kenotic mind or the self emptying attitude

and humility as seen in Christ is integral to the vision of becoming like Christ. It was originally proposed by Evangelical theologians of 19th century. Though this Christological theory was not directly seen in the patristics, many Fathers of the Early Church used this concept, especially St. John Chrysostom in his homilies on epistle to the Philippians. The homilies 5,6, and 7 are on this theme. From a pastoral perspective this theory has both theological and pastoral implications.

Theological Perspective:

St. John Chrysostom in his extensive speech explains the miracle of God becoming man without losing his identity as God. He uses this argument while arguing against Arians, Eunomians, Marcionites, Sabellians, Docetists and other Early Church heretics who tried to explain the person of Christ as inferior to the

Father God. Verse 6 affirms that Jesus did not count his equality with God, which meant that he was equal with the Father, thus affirming the 'One Essence of the Holy Trinity which all the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers affirmed.

It was a struggle for the Early Church to affirm the divinity of Christ as God Himself than a man-made God. Traditionally it is known that the Fathers attending the Nicene Council showed their lost limbs and their wounds to witness that they suffered all these for the sake of God in Christ and not for a man. The Apostles, especially St. John through his Gospel and Epistles explained the divinity of Christ emphatically from Jesus' answer to Apostle Philip's question to show them the Father: Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? (John 14:10) Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me(14:11). Later on the question of Theotokos, the title given to St. Mary, became another struggle to affirm that St. Mary gave birth to God not a man and so she must be called Theotokos which means God-bearer.

The implication of affirming the divinity of Christ was that Jesus Christ is the true God revealed to the world through the incarnation. It was through Him that the Holy Trinity was revealed to the rest of the world. When Jesus revealed this truth, the Jewish leaders could not accept it. The Apostles held on to the Truth that they received from the Lord earnestly and spread the good news around. The Apostles could not compromise on this because they knew He is God. That is why they were willing to even give their life for the sake of that God in Christ. For the same reason it becomes extremely important to us that we have to obey that God without any doubt or question.

Sometimes Jesus sounded impractical in his teachings to many, but the Early Church never doubted that. We know how difficult it is to love the enemy, pray for the opponent,

share the wealth with others etc. But it was all possible to the Early Church. Just because some people are finding it difficult to follow Christ literally, Jesus will not become irrelevant. His words are unchanging or unchangeable. In modern times it is not very fashionable to proclaim Jesus as The God because we, the so-called Christians, are simply unable to obey what Jesus commanded and bear witness to his teachings. Thus, our witness and faith that demands action is severely compromised. Kenotic Christology demands that we should be grounded in Christ, Christ alone, the Living and True God. "I am The Way, The Truth and Life". What will happen to a building that has lost its foundation! No wonder the Church became weak, nominal and irrelevant in the developed countries. Without a true theological basis no institution or organization can exist. Therefore, Kenotic Christology is critical in our existence as a witnessing Church.

Pastoral Perspective:

Pondering on the pastoral aspect of Kenotic Christology, I must first confess my own incapability to 'empty myself' in pastoral life as much as Christ demanded but I do strive hard to be obedient to Christ. However, the challenge is not to be ignored. It is in practicing the truth (orthopraxis) that we become a kenotic Church and a witnessing community.

St. John Chrysostom in his highest socio-theological awareness, analyses Kenotic Christology as a practical matter than a theoretical matter. Theology/philosophy is born from human situations. Here the concept is learned from Christ himself. The example that Christ projected through his life, practising what he preached has become a challenge to His followers. It is in this context that we learn the incarnation which is the perfect revelation of the true mind of God in Christ. Jesus knew well that he is God but he was willing to condescend to become a human, renouncing all his powers and

privileges. His divinity or position, privilege or authority was not given to Jesus but he naturally owned it. That is why his emptying himself is more significant. He was willing to concede his omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence to be a normal man. That humility became the benchmark for all his followers as he instructed his disciples.



It is seen in the teachings of the Lord, The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). When the apostles had a discussion about who among them is the greatest, Jesus said, He who is greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matthew 20:26, 23:11, Mark 10:43, Luke 9:46, 22:26). Jesus fulfilled all the prophetic utterances about him as we see in Isaiah 53. And He became a true servant, without losing his divinity. In the Orthodox Church the bishops depict this truth to the public, through an annual ritual called the “feet-washing ceremony” on Maundy Thursday. In some other Orthodox Churches, the priests do the feet-washing ceremony. H.H. Pope Francis shocked the world by washing the feet of a homeless lady. How rich are our traditions and rituals! It would have been relevant if we tried to practice it in our life! That is a huge riddle today. Leaders of all systems, in businesses or organizations including that of

Christians, behave like kings and queens using their authority and power for self-boasting, showing authoritarianism and exultation, and never for ‘emptying’ themselves. To be humble is considered as a weakness. According to St. Paul there is no other greater virtue than humility as exemplified by the Lord. Even those big-mouth speakers are unable to come down from their ‘ivory towers’ to identify themselves with the common people. Priests/Pastors need to acquire this virtue to be effective in their ministry. Priests/Pastors should not only teach this to the church members but also practice it in their own life.

St. John Chrysostom uses some examples of boastfulness by people: those who are financially well off, those who acquire gold, silver or precious stones, those who have high authority, those who own splendid houses or mansions, those who wear costly apparel, those who have beautiful voice, the clear-sighted, those who have good health, the beautiful or handsome, those who have travelled world-wide and so on. He compares them with thieves who own all these and become self-elated. Jesus renounced all these as he said to the one who wanted to follow him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head. (Matthew 8:20). Looking at our present-day leaders one may wonder if they ever heard this! They have too much power, too many servants to help, flamboyant residences, a large gathering of goondas to help, luxury vehicles and so on. Often one would wonder where is Christ in our system?

St. Paul further explains how Jesus was able to avoid all the luxuries and accept the suffering unto himself for the sake of others. Here St. John Chrysostom’s socio-theological awareness reaches its culmination explaining how the suffering of Jesus becomes exemplary. The followers of Jesus should be ready to take



up suffering as a privilege. Suffering is the mode in which one can identify oneself with the needy. Our great social reformers like H.G. Pathrose Mar Osthathios or H.G. Geevarghese Mar Osthathios or H.G. Kuriakose Mar Gregorios, or H.G. Yulios Mar Alvaris and a few other of our own leaders stand out in history because they were all able to empty themselves for the sake of common people. I am not ignoring the goodwill of thousands of ordinary people who kept feeding the needy in their own situations. Unfortunately, the rich are generally unwilling to grasp the suffering of the needy. The richer a person, the lesser the kenotic mind.

St. Paul continues to explain the positive effects of all suffering through kenosis. God rewarded His Son with the highest honor (verses 9-11). The entire universe, the seen and unseen world are brought to his Son's feet. Kenosis has its reward. Kenosis mandates not only losing one's identity but also to face suffering, but it will always be rewarded. No matter how much one is willing to empty oneself, reward is definite. Jesus said, "Whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward. (Matthew 10:42, Mark

9:41). Jesus says again, "for the sake of the Kingdom of God if any is willing to renounce wife, brothers, parents etc. will receive manifold more in this time and in the age to come eternal life. (Luke 18:29-30). When we look back to the days of the Early Church, we can see the suffering the Christian community endured not only by facing persecution but also by sharing their wealth with the community. The Fathers said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church". God made the Church grow astronomically during the first few centuries just because of their kenotic mind. Today the Church is getting weakened only because it is no more a kenotic minded Church. A rethinking is highly essential to bring back the Church to its original faith and life witness.



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Image and Likeness of God in Human Beings

Fr. Dr. Jossi Jacob

In Genesis 1:26, God says, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.' According to St. Basil the Great, this enigmatic plurality signifies the Trinity deliberating on the creation of humanity. The Father confers with the Son and the Holy Spirit (Basil of Caesarea, On the Origin of Humanity, Discourse 1:4). Consequently, the image of the Trinity becomes ingrained within humans from their very creation. This linkage establishes a patristic groundwork for the notion of humankind as the image of the Trinity. Humanity is thus tasked with emulating the Holy Trinity to achieve perfect communion among themselves and with their Creator. St. Basil highlights the distinction in the manner of creation between other entities, brought forth by the Divine proclamation, 'Let there be,' and humanity, fashioned through 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.' Rather than merely summoning humans into existence, akin to the sun and the stars, 'God formed the human being with his own hands and breathed into them something of his own breath' (Gen. 2:7).

Humanity is created in the image and likeness of God. That image and likeness are to be understood as the resemblance of qualities of God and special characteristics in man in relationship with Him. God is Spirit (Jn. 4:24) so the image and likeness of God in man cannot be understood as anything totally in the physical form, but as their inherent qualities. Freedom, dominion, wisdom, communion (fellowship), love etc. are important features of the image and likeness of God in man. In short we can say the 'image and likeness' of God in man, is the potential in him to grow in ultimate goodness. Growing in the image and likeness of God is called the process of 'Divinisation' or 'Theosis'.

Are Image and Likeness the same or different?

The Book of Genesis asserts that human beings are created in the Image and Likeness of God. Naturally, this raises the question: are these terms synonymous or do they convey distinct meanings? Church Fathers such as St. Irenaeus, St. Basil the Great, and St. Gregory of Nyssa have offered interpretations that differentiate between image and likeness. According to them, image represents the potential bestowed by God upon human beings, while likeness of God signifies the goal that humanity should strive to attain in communion with God. If we liken image to a seed, then likeness can be compared to a fully-grown tree. A seed possesses the potential to become a tree, but it requires favourable conditions to realize the likeness of its parent tree.

The image of God in human beings encompasses divine-like characteristics such as rationality, free will, perception, love, and the capacity to develop virtuous character. Through the proper utilization of these God-given attributes, humanity can attain divine likeness, communion with Him, and eternal life. Although image and likeness are inseparable, one could view the former as static and the latter as dynamic, as it continually evolves towards

greater God-likeness over time. Life within the Church, the body of Christ, is perceived as an essential, progressive process and a dynamic journey towards achieving the likeness of God. All spiritual activities and communion with God contribute to this process of divinization, which entails the growth in acquisition of the likeness of God. Since God is infinite, our journey towards His likeness never reaches its culmination but perpetually continues.

Human Qualities Related to the Image and Likeness of God

St. Clement of Alexandria affirms that God's love for humanity stems from their status as His image. Attributes like freedom, dominion, wisdom, communion, and love originate from being God's likeness. However, freedom is not a license for wrongdoing but a tool aligned with God's will. Dominion over creation (Gen. 1:28) requires responsible stewardship, according to St. Ephrem, who emphasizes self-mastery as essential. Wisdom distinguishes humanity, enabling discernment between good and evil, echoing God's rationality. Communion mirrors the divine relationship within the Trinity and extends to human interactions.

Human dignity, often debated, is founded on the Orthodox belief that it stems from being created in God's image and likeness. While rationality is significant, it is not the sole basis for dignity. Instead, dignity emerges from growing in communion with God, as advocated by St. Gregory of Nazianzus and St. John Chrysostom. This perspective opposes discrimination and injustice, emphasizing every individual's intrinsic worth. Genesis 1:27 rejects gender discrimination in God's image and likeness. St. John Chrysostom underscores equality, linking the essence of both male and female to Divine unity. Although gender distinctions are real and originate from creation, they imply unity and equality among humans.

Fall and Disfiguration of the Image and Likeness

Generally, the Western Christian Churches base their teachings on Augustine of Hippo's doctrine, which holds that all humanity became inherently sinful through the sin of the first parents. According to Augustine, this original sin is transmitted through generations and is present in every human being. The eastern Fathers of the Church, such as St. Athanasius and St. Gregory of Nyssa, taught that humanity did not entirely lose the image and likeness of God due to the sin of Adam and Eve; rather, it became disfigured. They believed that the image of God in humanity was marred but not obliterated.

Restoration of the Divine Image and Likeness

Redemption through Christ provides the means for restoring the disfigured image of humanity's fallen condition. By uniting with Christ and participating in His body, the Church, humanity has the opportunity to transcend its fallen state and begin the process of Theosis, or deification. This central concept in Orthodox theology refers to the process by which humans become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). This transformative journey begins in this life through the sacraments, prayer, and virtuous living, reaching its fulfilment in the Eschaton. The ultimate effects of redemption, which began with the Incarnation of Christ, will be fully realized in the age to come, when God's Kingdom is fully manifested, and humanity is restored to its intended state of holiness and communion with God.



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CHURCH AND SUSTAINABILITY OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Fr. Dr. Shaji P. John

Nations have perished and people have lived without schools, churches, or factories, but never without marriage and family. In today's complex, fast-moving world, where the unexpected has become a part of everyday life, it is a relief to realise that the family lives on to provide for our needs and comforts as it has for centuries. It is the place where we will get the satisfaction of certain basic human needs. Therefore, even with all the possible shortcomings, we prefer to be in connection with our families. And even those people

whose home life has produced more misery than happiness often look forward to a happier marriage and family life for themselves as well as for their children. However, many marriages today are like the proverbial "houses built upon sand." Staying together in a house does not necessarily mean that they are happy. We must acknowledge the fact that today quite a few marriages fail, some form an uneasy compromise and others end in divorce or separation.

Modern families live in a greater state of tension precisely because they are the great burden carriers of the social order. In a society of rapid social change, problems outnumber solutions, and the resulting uncertainties are absorbed by the members of society, who are also members of families. Since family is the bottleneck through which all troubles pass, no other association so faithfully reflects the strains and stress of life. At the same time with an exceptional few rehearsing their daily frustrations within the family, majority hope to get the necessary understanding and resilience. Family does not mean a few persons put together under one roof, but it implies an environment of love, belongingness, security and bliss prevailing among them. The very concept of a family means a blissful atmosphere which guarantees them marital peace, fulfilment and growth and all these should come from within. In such an atmosphere of love and consideration, every member of the family comes to acquire the right to give and take, the right to love and to be loved and to respect and to be respected. Thus, a good family is the best source for resolving frustrations and releasing tensions. This underlines the fundamental family task of maintaining the population's mental health.

Families of today are facing unprecedented and varied challenges like urbanisation, drug abuse, breaking down of marriages, changing economic and social

conditions etc. that lead families to destruction. Disorganisation of the family is one of the important challenges to be tackled. Lack of family unity due to divergent objectives, ambitions, thoughts and ideas; decrease in family control due to competition; lack of control and unity; conflicts between parents and children due to undue expectations of authority and freedom, and all such precarious areas have become burning challenges of the modern family. On the other hand, laxity in marital bonds, availability of alternative satisfaction, misuse of economic freedom etc. really challenge the very foundation of the modern family.

Marriage in Indian society is more a religious institution than a legal one. It is understood as a relatively permanent union of two people implying many interlocking statuses and roles. Family is never merely a personal matter, because society is much affected by the quality of its families. Even the breaking up of a family is not a personal concern alone.

The vitality of the church also lies in the strength of the family. Stronger and healthier marriages and families will make a thriving church. The stability of marriage depends on many factors like adjustment, communication, expectation etc. Some well-known counsellors like Howard J. Clinebell believe that religious belief has a decisive role in minimising the possibility of dissolution of marriage. The church must play its mandate as the sole nurturer of Christian marriages and families rather than leaving this responsibility to the government and other non-church agencies. A Christian family is dependent on God's grace and providential care to see it through the difficulties that are an inevitable part of family life. No family is strong enough to manage its affairs apart from God's providence. There is no better agent and/or institution, other than the Church, to minister God's grace and providential care to Christian marriages and families.

In this context, it is the mandate of the Church to do the needful for the sustainability of Christian marriage and family. There is no better agent other than the church to minister God's grace to Christian marriages and families. It is absurd that as a church, we have largely absconded our role in the sustainability of marriage and family. We have been swift enough to mobilize young people to marry and organize very colourful weddings but have been too slow in ensuring that these marriages stand the test of time and make up strong families. If we are to combat the above crisis facing Christian marriage and family, we must begin by rediscovering the biblical teachings on marriage and the family. It is the role of the Church to earnestly teach her men and women the profound Christian values of marriage and the family. The Church should recognize the need of Christian men and women to rediscover the biblical teaching on marriage and the family on a profound, spiritual level, and to commit themselves to live by this teaching amid those other issues. Knowledge is power. The prophet Hosea said it all; "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). The Church should develop a detailed curriculum that her ministers can use to prepare men and women aspiring to enter into marriage and form a family. Such a curriculum must capture sound biblical teachings and Christian values on marriage and the family. A day or two for pre-marital counselling is insufficient. If the Church does not rise to teach her men and women the biblical foundations and values of marriage and the family, the world will teach them the worldly foundations of marriage and family.



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Transfiguration: Hope and Struggle by the Light from the Mountaintop

Fr. Dr. Bijesh Philip

Celebrations of the feasts of our Lord Jesus Christ adorn a prime place in the liturgical tradition of Orthodox churches. A Christian initiated into Christ's body by Holy Baptism, is called to grow stronger in fellowship with Christ in the pilgrimage of our transient life. Most of the feasts concerning Christ and the sacraments help us to enjoy this redemptive remembrance of the Lord. Celebration of the feast of Transfiguration on 6th August, every year, is a unique opportunity to experience the glory of our Lord and Redeemer.

There are four Biblical passages which depict the Transfiguration experience of our Lord on the top of the mountain, generally assumed to be Mount Tabor: Mathew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36 and II Peter 1:17,18. Jesus, while praying on the top of the mountain with his three disciples Peter, James and John, was transfigured and the apostles saw him in dazzling light in the company of Prophets Moses and Elijah. A saying of Christ is recorded in the synoptic Gospels, before this narration as, "Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom" (Matthew 16:28). This was fulfilled a week later

when the three apostles experienced the divine glory.

According to St. Mathew and St. Mark, Jesus led Peter, James and John to the mountaintop six days after he said these words and in St. Luke it is after eight days. Perhaps, St. Mathew and St. Mark were counting the days between the time he spoke these words and the transfiguration event; whereas St. Luke might have included both the days on which Jesus said about His coming in glory and the day on which the actual event of glorification took place. In both the cases, the reference is to one week. At the same time, the reference to the 'eighth day' which comes after the six days (of creation) and Sabbath (seventh) denotes a vision beyond this physical and historical realm. What we experience on the mount of transfiguration is a foretaste of the eschatological event or the glorious second advent of our Lord. Moses was able to have a glimpse of the Promised Land, from the mountain of Pisgah, (Deuteronomy 34:1). Likewise, through their experience of transfiguration on the mountaintop, the apostles and the believers, are able to have a glimpse of the glorious end and inheritance we are going to have at the second advent of our Lord.

Transfiguration reveals the glory of Jesus Christ. In the incarnated life, His glory was hidden. Christ was seen as any other human being because of His willful self emptying. Our hope and prayer is that Christ "will come again in His great glory." The whole life of Christ, particularly His glorification on the mount of Transfiguration and His resurrection, manifested His great glory in a glimpse of space and time in a special way. Three apostles, as representatives of the entire humankind were able to experience this. The bright light, in which the Son of God appeared as a sun, was uncreated light proceeding from His divinity. That light was not from sun, moon, or any stars or light from any kind of fire. It was pure Divine uncreated light that exists from eternity.

The Divine voice, the apostles heard from the overshadowing clouds, was from the Heavenly Father: 'This is my beloved Son. Hear Him.' The Father was honoring and glorifying Christ. St. Peter describes this unusual experience thus: He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory. 'This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain (2 Peter 1:17-18).

The Transfiguration experience also attests that the whole Scripture bears witness to Jesus Christ and glorifies him. Moses and Elijah represent law and prophecy of the Old Testament respectively. The presence of Apostles represents the New Testament. Thus, the whole Bible gives glory to Christ, the centre and fulfillment of it. They also represent the dead and the living. In short, the world was able to witness the glory of Christ through a few representatives, since Christ the true Light from true Light, was willing to reveal His glory for a short while for our enlightenment.

When we celebrate the feast of

Transfiguration on 6th August, the world refreshes the memory of 'a mega tragic event.' It was on August 6th, 1945, that the American-made Atomic Bomb was dropped in Hiroshima, Japan, annihilating more than hundred thousand people. The American President who gave the final green signal for this bombing was Truman. Immediately after this event, peace activists like Dorothy Day, hailing from American soil itself, criticized Truman and highlighted the need of following Christ, the True Man and True God. The destructive light of war, violence, communalism and consumerism is spreading darkness in the world. What we need today for the liberation, peace and justice of the world is the light of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, the light of the world!

Transfiguration of Christ also reveals the potential of Creation to manifest Divine Glory. Glory of the Son of God was revealed through His human body. The human nature He took from this world became a medium to manifest His glory. From its inception till today, this cosmos bears witness to the majesty of God the Creator (Romans 1:20). In addition to this general revelation, this creation becomes instrumental in the special revelation of the glory of God. This principle is further affirmed in our sacraments. The Creation is eagerly waiting for its ultimate transfiguration (Romans 8:18-22). The hope of the "new heaven and new earth" and resurrection at the end, point to the glorious future fulfillment of the whole creation. Transfiguration of Christ gives us a foretaste of that glorious eternity.

The Transfiguration experience on the mountaintop also refers to the glorious orientation of the Cross. The conversation of Moses and Elijah with Christ on the transfiguration mount was about Christ's crucifixion in Jerusalem (St. Luke 9:31). Sufferings and the Cross are not glorious in common human viewpoint. Hence, St. Peter

tried to discourage Christ from such a painful death for which Christ responded with the words "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offence to me" (St. Mathew 16:23). This is narrated in the synoptic Gospels just before the description of the glorification of Christ on the mountaintop. In continuation of this, Christ says If any one desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. Ancient Christian tradition as a whole, confesses that the Cross is the way to glory. After resurrection and ascension, Christ is on the throne with the Heavenly Father in glory (Hebrew 12:2, Revelations 3:21). A deeper understanding of these passages will help us to know that as Christ we will also be sharing the same glory. The wisdom of globalization and the popular consumerist culture seem to vehemently oppose the divine wisdom of the glory of the way of cross.

Glory is often misunderstood as an accumulation of possessions and positions. Prayers are misused to own this perishing 'glory'. Once, Jesus was on the top of another mountain not with Moses and Elijah, but with Satan. The temptation was to consent to a different worship to own the glory of the world, which Christ overcomes. On the mount of transfiguration, prayers and communion with the saints are for being strengthened to face sufferings and the cross boldly.

In the Orthodox tradition, martyrs have a unique place and tradition says that God will adorn them with special crowns at his second coming. It is essential for the living members of the Church to continually remember the self-sacrifice of martyrs. St. Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, who was martyred around AD 155, had written about the great martyrs like Ignatius of Antioch, Rufus and Zosimus who have entered into glory with Christ. In Polycarp's words, "they are now in their deserved place with the Lord, in whose sufferings they also shared"

(Letter to Philippians, 9:2). While describing the importance of the way of sacrifice, St. Polycarp says, "Whosoever does not confess the testimony of the cross is of the devil" (Letter to Philippians, 7:1)

Many members of the Church while facing their own death have witnessed the comforting presence of their relatives who had passed away years ago. Likewise, the saints comfort and strengthen us when we face painful experiences of the cross and death in our life. That is why we seek St. Mary's intercession every day as: "O Virgin Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and always, and in the hour of our death." The presence of Moses and Elijah at the time of Christ's glorification might have been such a comforting and strengthening experience to Christ in his human nature.

The vision of glory on the mountaintop, leads one to the ministry of transformation in the valley later. Though Peter and his companions wanted to continue on the top of glory, their Guru led them to face the harsh realities of life. As witnesses of the divine glory, our calling is to spread the light of Christ with a sacrificial commitment to transform our world to a better community of freedom from evil and a world of peace, justice and love. In a groaning world, the redemptive remembrance of the Light from Tabor enlightens us to dare to hope and to rejoice in taking up the cross for a better world. The Tabor experience also points to the coming Glory which will be revealed beyond this struggle in history.



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The Jesus Prayer

Fr. Anish K. Sam



The Jesus Prayer is a precise summarized form of the Prayer of the Heart. It was the culmination of a long monastic tradition that advocated using repeated scriptural phrases, by which means, the early monks in the desert tried to contain the tendency of their thoughts and distractions to run away with them. Bishop Timothy Ware, famous theologian and writer of the Eastern Orthodox Church, stated that the Jesus Prayer is a prayer of marvellous versatility. It is a prayer for beginners, but equally a prayer that leads to the deepest mysteries of the contemplative life.

Content of the Jesus Prayer

The Jesus Prayer also called the 'Prayer of a Single Thought' or simply 'The Prayer', is a short, simple prayer that has been widely used, taught and discussed throughout the history of Eastern Christianity. The exact words of the prayer have varied, from a simple form such as "Lord, have mercy" to an extended form: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner". The first phrase calls out to the Saviour, the second asks for mercy he came to bestow. This cry is appropriate for all Christians at the beginning of their Christian life and throughout the whole of their existence, no matter what their attainments in piety. Orthodox spiritual writers insist that those who use the Jesus Prayer systematically should, if possible, place themselves under the guidance of an experienced director and do nothing on their own initiative.

Jesus Prayer in the Holy Bible

The prayer is most reflective of the lesson taught by the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee, in which the Pharisee demonstrates the improper way to pray by exclaiming, "Thank you Lord that I am not like the Publican" While the Publican in humility prays correctly "Lord have mercy on me, a sinner" (St. Luke 18:10-14). And likewise in the Gospels, St. Peter crying

out as he sank into the sea, "Lord, save me" and the blind man also cried and called out saying "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me" (St. Luke 18:38; St. Mark 10:47).

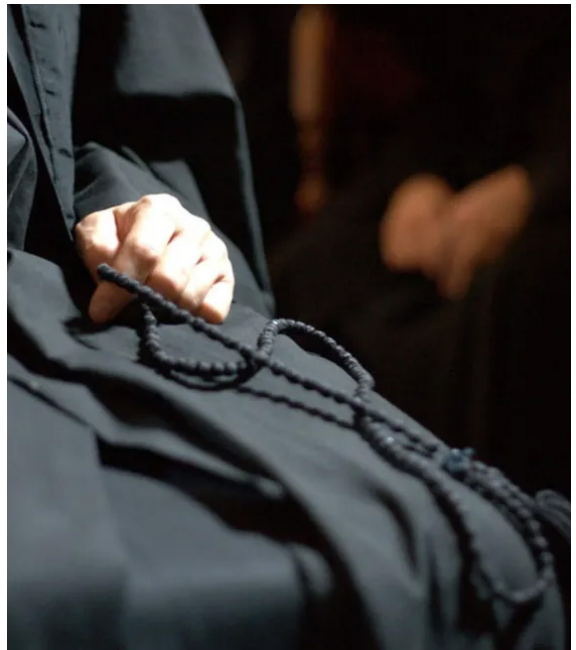
Monastics often have long sessions praying this prayer many hundreds of times each night as part of their discipline, and through the guidance of an elder. Its practitioner's ultimate goal is to "internalize" the prayer, so that one is praying unceasingly there-by accomplishing St. Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonians to "pray without ceasing" (I Thessalonians 5:17).

Jesus Prayer – Christo Centric Prayer

The most classic of all Orthodox prayers is essentially a Christo centric prayer, a prayer addressed to and concentrated on the Lord Jesus. Those brought up in the tradition of the Jesus Prayer are never allowed for one moment to forget the Incarnate Christ. Everything in the Christian life comes via divine mercy, from initial conversion through every moment that remains in this life - forgiveness of sins, provision of bodily necessities, wisdom for decisions, divine presence throughout the day, protection or whatever one requires for body or soul. As the Eastern Orthodox have often stressed, there is nothing one might need in any aspect of life that does not come by divine mercy. Thus, the Jesus Prayer covers the whole of life in a few words.

Jesus Prayer – Devotional Prayer

It is, for the Orthodox, one of the most profound and mystical prayers and is often repeated endlessly as part of a personal ascetic practice. It is a highly devoted prayer and creates a devotional mood for dedicated devotees. It is not merely a monastic prayer but also a simple prayer which anybody can practise. Some newer monasteries have introduced this practice of the recitation of the Jesus Prayer as one of the central acts of common monastic prayer, and it is now expanding as a communal Orthodox prayer service in many parts of the



world, though formerly it was exclusively used as a method of private prayer. The Orthodox often use a prayer rope or a rope rosary with a hundred large knots or more, to help them focus.

Jesus Prayer – A Prayer of the Heart

For some, there comes a time when the Jesus Prayer 'enters into the heart', so that it is no longer recited by a deliberate effort, but recites itself spontaneously, continuing even when a man talks or writes, is present in his dreams, waking him up in the morning. The prayer enters into the heart, producing a feeling of mental happiness and healing of a wounded heart. The Jesus Prayer indicates both man's problems and God's solution. Jesus is the Saviour, the anointed king, the one who has mercy. Alike to those who recite it continually and to those who only employ it occasionally, the Jesus Prayer proves a great source of reassurance and joy. The use of the Jesus Prayer in this way is the subject of the Russian classic 'The Way of a Pilgrim'. For many, after a time, the Jesus Prayer enters into the heart, so

that it is no longer recited by a deliberate effort, but recites itself spontaneously.

Jesus Prayer – The Breath of Life

The prayer recited continuously, every moment of life, gradually becomes the breath of life. This prayer gives rise to a new life and new visions. The intention of this prayer is twofold: in the first place, this enables one to appropriate the prayer in a rhythmical and natural fashion, in keeping with our psychosomatic wholeness. Secondly, through this practice the prayer becomes eventually, through repetition, as natural to us as breathing. The goal is that, in having joined the prayer with the act of breathing, and practicing this in multiplied thousands of repetitions, we will get to the point where the Jesus Prayer will come from deep within us as surely and certainly as we breathe.

Jesus Prayer and the Prayer Rope

In the Orthodox tradition the Jesus prayer is said or prayed repeatedly, often with the aid of a prayer rope. It may be accompanied by prostrations and the sign of the cross. As such, it is used as a means of finding contrition and as a means of bringing about humility in the individual; hence the words “the sinner” are sometimes added as if no other sinner existed but the person praying (though there is no indefinite article in Greek, thus leading to some debate about whether the translation in English should be “the sinner” or “a sinner”).

A prayer rope is a loop of knots, usually made of wool but sometimes of wood that is used during praying to keep track of the number of prayers which have been said. The rope is usually used with the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Historically it typically had 100 knots, although prayer ropes with 300, 50, or 33 knots or, less commonly, 250 or 12 can also be found in use today. There is typically a knotted cross at one end, and a few beads at certain intervals

between the knots. “The purpose is to help us concentrate, not necessarily to count.” Its invention is attributed to St. Pachomius in the fourth century as an aid for illiterate monks to accomplish a consistent number of prayers and prostrations.

Jesus Prayer keeps us in constant communion with God which is an expression of the divine potential in us. Jesus Prayer should become as incessant an action as breathing, that the Lord Jesus Christ is established in our heart as a deity. It enriches our prayer life and cultivates an interest of repentance. Jesus Prayer has filled up every breath of our life with beauty. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, be merciful to me a sinner. This must be our prayer.

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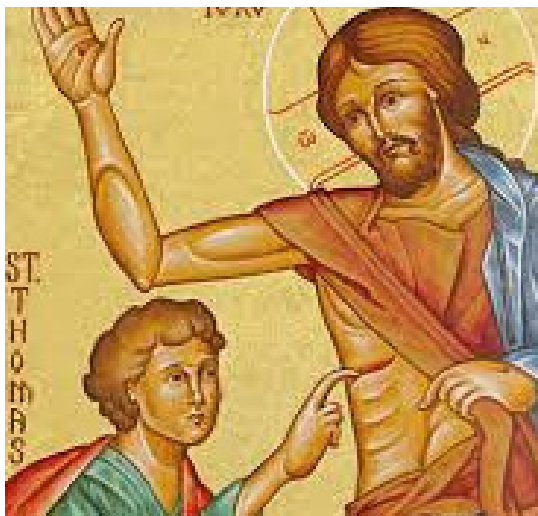
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St Thomas - Patron Saint and Apostle of India

Jacob P. Varghese

St. Thomas, one of the twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ, was born in Galilee, the northernmost region of ancient Palestine. St. Thomas, hailed as the Apostle of India, is known as the Twin; Doubting Thomas; and also, Didymus. In John 11: 16, he is identified and referred to as 'Thomas, surnamed Didymus, the twin' (Heb. Thomas, Gk. Didymus- twin). He is called Judas Thomas (Judas the Twin) by the Syrians. Tradition says that he had two fingers of the right hand joined from birth. That is why he was known as 'twin'. Nothing is said about and little is recorded of St. Thomas the Apostle, by the Synoptics, except for his name in the lists, Matt. 10:3; Mk. 3: 18; Lk. 6, cf. and Acts 1: 13. But The Fourth Gospel, clearly defines Thomas' vivid character, makes his personality clearer than that of some others of the twelve disciples, outlines his character and describes the distinctive role he plays.

In the Gospel according to St. John, St. Thomas emerges as a man of very definite characteristics. Thomas first appears in the Lazarus story (Jn. 11: 1-16). The disciples thought of abandoning Jesus, when He announced His intention of returning to Judea to visit Lazarus, in Bethany. But then there came a voice of the normally silent Thomas "Let us go, that we may die with Him" (Jn. 11: 16). Thomas was determined to faithfully die for Christ, as he could see nothing but disaster ahead. Also, when the other eleven faltered in their loyalty to Christ, Thomas held strong to that loyalty, a man of courage, genuinely committed to Jesus, his Master and Master's call. St. Thomas speaks the truth, that dying with Christ, in Baptism and sometimes in Martyrdom, will become the seal of Christian Discipleship.

Next, in the Upper Room, during the discourse of the Lord's Supper, Jesus was seeking to persuade the dull minds of the disciples to see the Cross and to see what lay beyond it. Jesus said "Whither I go you know and the way you know". Thomas broke in and raised an objection saying "Lord, we know not whither thou go; and how can we know the way?" (Jn. 14: 5). To this Thomas received the profound answer from Jesus, "I am the Way, the Truth and the life". Thomas was a bewildered man, who could not live with an unasked question. He was a beloved disciple of his master and enjoyed all freedom with his Master.

But more specifically St. Thomas is remembered for his incredulity when the other Apostles announced Christ's Resurrection to him. As Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared to the disciples, post resurrection, he utterly refused to believe the good news. He said that he would not believe, unless he actually saw and touched the nail scars in Jesus' hands and the gash of the spear in His side. "Except I shall see in His hands the mark

of the nails and put my finger into the place of the nails and put my hands into His side, I will not believe” (Jn. 20: 25).

Jesus came back eight days later. He invited Thomas to put his finger in the nail marks and his hands in His side. “Reach your finger here and look at My hands; and reach your hand here and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving but be believing” (Jn. 20: 27). Confronted with the Risen Lord, Thomas breathed out the Greatest confession of faith in the New Testament: “My Lord and My God” (Jn. 20: 28). He made his act of faith, drawing down the rebuke of Jesus “Because thou hast seen me, Thomas, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed” (Jn. 20: 29). His sudden realization of the truth made St. Thomas the first person to explicitly acknowledge Christ’s divinity.

When St. Thomas saw Jesus, he needed no more proof, that Jesus is living. The Holy Bible does not mention that St. Thomas had put his hand in our Lord’s side. But there is a strong traditional faith that St. Thomas had put his finger in the scars of the nails and in the wounded side of the Lord. Thus, when the Saint touched the blood and flesh of our Lord, all the other Apostles rushed to St. Thomas and kissed his hand which touched our Lord’s blood and flesh. This incident is considered as the basis of our “Kai Muthu” soon after the Holy Eucharist.

We get the last glimpse of Thomas, when he was found in the fellowship of believers, when Jesus meets them beside the Sea of Galilee. The New Testament tells, nothing more about Thomas, but legend and traditions have much to say. St. Thomas evangelized and preached the faith in Parthia. Later, St. Thomas extended his apostolate into India and another ancient and more prevalent tradition holds that he preached until Far East unto China. The Orthodox Christians of Malankara believe

that they have been converted by St. Thomas and they do cherish it as a special privilege and honor from generations to generations. St. Thomas is the Patron Saint of India. He is recognized as the founder of the Church of the Syrian Malabar Christians, also known as the St. Thomas Christians.

He set foot in India in AD 52. St. Thomas Christians of India claim St. Thomas as their founder. He established seven churches and one chapel in Kerala. The seven churches are located in the following areas: Niranam, Gokkamangalam, Kodungallur, Paravur, Nilackal (Chayal), Kollam (Quilon), and also Palur (Palayur). It is believed that he was martyred near Madras, on December 18 and breathed his last after shedding the last drop of his blood on Indian soil on December 21 A.D. 72. This day is celebrated as St. Thomas day. St. Thomas was lanced while praying on a hill in Mylapore, near Madras on the East Coast of India which is his traditional burial place.

Today, St. Thomas is well known all over the world, especially in India, because he was the one who brought Christianity to India. The Malankara Orthodox Church celebrates his feast on different occasions: 18 December, the Day he was lanced and 21 December, when he passed away. Traditionally, the faithful flock observes a three-day fast from 18th and seeks intercession of St Thomas, the Apostle of India. We also commemorate him on 3 July, in memory of the translation of his relics to Edessa and on the first Sunday after Resurrection. May God bless us all through the continued patronage and prayers of St. Thomas!



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Fill the Gap, the Huge Gap

Prof. Dr. John Varghese

There is a huge dearth in our world. Across the world, there's a famine and people are suffering. Even the so-called developed countries are facing this huge deficiency and interestingly, some of these countries are not even aware of that lack. I am not talking about the lack of food or water; I am talking about the huge lack of good leadership.

Look at our world and you will see fake leaders – leaders who loot, leaders who speak hate, leaders who create harm. They add to the existing problems of our world. War, disease and unbearable suffering are created or encouraged by these fake leaders. Instead, what we need are leaders who will care for people, provide opportunities for peace and growth. Create peace and harmony. But where are such leaders? This is the huge gap we see in our communities, in our country and in the world.

Leadership is what will define the good growth and all-round development of a nation. We need good leaders. Leaders whose lives are exemplary and who can therefore lead by example. Leaders who demonstrate the practice of good values and principles in both their private and public lives.

Humankind is not perfect. Human frailties are many. Some are relatively small faults that all of us are guilty of – a rush of anger in which we speak unkind and harsh words, lies and falsehood that we make use of to get what we want, sometimes sins of omission or sometimes those of commission. There are bigger lapses that we are capable and guilty of – when we say or do something that hurts or badly influences the community, company or country that we are associated with. All lapses are wrong and if we learn from these lapses and

determine not to repeat them again, then there is hope for us as we think of leadership roles.

A Christian community has, by default a set of given rules by which to govern our lives and conduct. It is there in the 10 commandments beautifully summarized by Christ our Lord in the two commandments that He gave: Love God and love your neighbour as yourself. The following paragraphs are intended for the Christian community so that we can go on to become good leaders for not only our community, but also for our larger communities defined as our workspaces, our nation and the world. Yes, that's where the dearth of good leadership is felt and that is where we and especially our young people can go and make a positive difference.

For a young member of a Christian community there are three significant places where good leaders are formed:

1. the family,
2. the school and higher educational institution (like a college or technical, medical, engineering, law or Diploma/Certificate issuing institution) and
3. most importantly, the inner self.

All three are equally important for one to become a good leader and here are some points for all of us to consider.

THE FAMILY

The family is where the foundations for good leadership are laid. The infant is more open to influence than we can imagine. What the child witnesses at home and in the family has a huge bearing on his/her later life. If a child witnesses a participative environment at home, then s/he will grow up in a manner where s/he will respect work, be democratic and emulate in the life outside the family what s/he has witnessed at home. A family that values and practices prayer, family and personal devotions including reading of the Bible and

attending Church is better equipped to deal with the challenges that the real world outside throws at them.

The real world today has some very serious challenges like unemployment, misuse of the internet, attractions and additions including addictions to social media, substances and bad company. A family that has a regular prayer habit is better equipped to face these challenges in a constructive manner, than a family where devotions, reading of the Bible and church-going is absent. Why so? Because when we pray, when we read the Bible and when we go to church to worship and pray as a community, we are acknowledging the fact that there is a God who is above us, who is our creator, who is omnipotent and best of all a God who loves and cares for us despite our flaws. A sense of humility before God and in the world is a great



way to know that we are loved and we, in turn, offer that love and concern to others at school, at the workplace and in the world. Through the Bible and through prayer we foster that quality of hope rather than despair, because God gave us hope through Christ.

Family is the first school and the lives of men and women who have gone on to become good leaders have always demonstrated a good learning from this first school that every child who is born, naturally, unconsciously attends. So, parents then have a great role that they are playing in the lives of their children – maybe even without knowing that. But if you are reading this, then I encourage you as a parent to spend some time by yourself thinking about how your words and your actions, and the words and actions of your spouse have influenced or can influence the lives of your children. Prayer, communication with each other and your child or children carry a lot more importance than you can dream of. Let what your children observe in you be the model on which they can structure their own lives outside the home.

A routine of daily prayer at home is important for leaders-in-the-making because it will eventually build into a good, life-long and healthy habit. Prayer at home should also involve the young people – so therefore, ask them to read a portion of the Bible, sing a song and say a prayer. It will not only make this into a daily understanding of our “humanness” before God but it will also build up self-confidence in the youngsters. One very good aspect of such building up of self-confidence is that it is built in an environment of humility before God. So, when the young person goes out into the world there is a sense of both self-confidence and humility. That balance is something good leaders must have. That is what our world needs right now, leaders who are aware of their weaknesses and who are willing, consciously, to do only what is right. People who know that

there is a possibility that they can slip-up or fail and therefore tread, speak and act cautiously make good leaders and will eventually win the trust of the people they work with, going on to becoming their leaders. The importance of prayer can never be overstressed. Abraham Lincoln was legendary for his prayer life seeping into his public life and I encourage as many of those who are reading this article to read the life of this great leader.

SCHOOLS, INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

A school is the next important building-block of good leadership. Parents, when you select a school, don't go by the fancy exteriors or the luxuries that the school has or promotes. That is not education; instead try to understand what the core values of the school are. Does the school promise to instill good values? Values that you want your child to inculcate? Are the teachers at the school qualified and good? You can check this out by talking to the parents of students who are already in the school or to those students who have passed out of the school. Take time off to go and spend a day or half-a-day in the school, talk to the headmaster, or Principal and if you can talk to some teachers as well. That will be a very good investment. Don't think of it as time that you have lost. It is probably one of the best things that you can do for the future of your child.

Once you have chosen a good school for your children, don't just stop there. Make it a point to be in the know of what your child is doing at school; who are your child's friends? How is s/he progressing with studies? Does s/he need help with a subject? Get your priorities right, first. Your work, your efforts at building up a secure financial future for your family and children are all of no use if you don't pay attention to your children. They grow up very fast and if you don't follow them (genially, don't intrude into every aspect of their lives)



then you'll find that a time will come when your role in their lives will be unnecessary. So be there; watch your children grow; help them grow but don't be too interfering either. Let the children have opportunities to learn by themselves, sometimes make mistakes and learn from those mistakes. When they are ready to leave school and go to an institution of higher learning, you must be prepared to let your children a little more freedom; but you can rest assured that you have given them the right Christian values. Schools, colleges and institutions of higher education are graded ways of giving the children their freedom and also opportunities for exercising that new-found freedom. So, choose those places of extended growth carefully.

THE INNER SELF

The third element which contributes to effective and good leadership is an internal "engine" which works efficiently. In your family, through your positive family life you have contributed your best towards the creation of a human personality. Schools and higher education institutions offer opportunities for your child/children to grow under your extended care and under the supervision of good teachers. The third and important element – that of a good inner self is the culmination of what you have contributed through stages one and two namely your family inputs and a

good education. This "inner self" is a crucial aspect in the making of a good leader. 'If you are true to yourself, then you cannot be false to anyone', so goes an old saying. Human life being unpredictable, the inner selves of our children need to be moored, founded on Christian values and principles that will outlast us, parents. Therefore, faith in God, humility, justice, peace, equality are among the most fundamental qualities that our children need to possess in abundance.

CONCLUSION

Why do I say that these qualities should be in abundance? Because that is where your child or you will be able to offer them to the world which does not have enough of the said qualities. A deep and sustained study of the Bible every day and daily prayer both as a family and individually, are very effective ways to develop the self. These two are sweeter than the honey or even the honeycomb making your life, our lives better and worthy in the sight of God and man.

Go on, keep the points discussed above in mind, practice these values and be the leader that the world needs so desperately. Go fill the gap, the huge gap.



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Fyodor Dostoyevsky: Bridging Sceptical Intellect and Orthodox Spirituality in the Nineteenth-Century

Fr. Dr. Renish Geevarghese Abraham

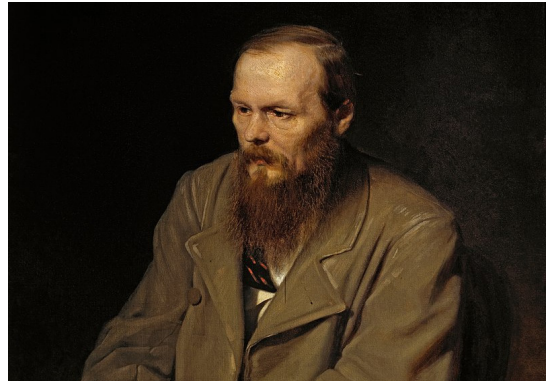
Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881) is not unfamiliar to the Orthodox world. While he is celebrated by many Russian Orthodox theologians of the twentieth-century, in the Malankara Church and in Kerala, his life is familiar through an autobiographical novel, titled, 'Oru Sangeerthanam Pole', [Like a Beautiful Hymn] written by the renowned Malayalam writer Perumbadavam Sreedharan, first published in 1993. The fact that this book surpassed its 100th edition, points to the impact that Dostoyevsky's life has made on the Malayalee readers. My first exposure to the Orthodox understanding of Dostoyevsky is through my reading of Fr. Dr. K. M. George's book, 'Aadhunikathayude Daarshanika Maanangal' [The Philosophical Dimensions of Modernity], published in 2007. Thereafter, I have been a careful reader of Dostoyevsky, and I undertook a detailed study of his three novels, Crime and Punishment (1866), The Idiot (1869,) and The Brothers Karamazov

(1880) during my theological studies at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, New York in 2022. I analysed the Christlike characters in these novels, and established that his writings represent the quintessence of Orthodox spirituality in the context of a radical decline of Christian faith in the West due to the post Enlightenment emphasis on rationality and scientific positivism, that later influenced the Orthodox world. The purpose of this article is to introduce some of the major scholarship on Dostoyevsky, which facilitates an Orthodox reading of his works, and present my own research findings based on my examination of his three aforementioned novels to open up Dostoyevsky's spiritual world for further exploration.

Scholars of literature and theology since the late nineteenth century have approached Dostoyevsky's writings from divided perspectives with respect to his representation of religion and religious experience of the Russians in

his era. Based on his critique of the ways the Church functioned in Russia, dramatized especially in the tale of the 'Grand Inquisitor' in *The Brothers Karamazov*, there has been a predominant tendency in the academia to project Dostoyevsky as a sceptic, a philosopher, and a great religious reformer who advocated for Christianity in a non-institutional form. On the other hand, prominent Orthodox theologians like Sergius Bulgakov, Georges Florovsky, and Nicholas Berdyaev are greatly fascinated with Dostoyevsky, and consider him as one of the greatest influences on twentieth century Orthodox theology. In fact, Berdyaev testifies that Dostoyevsky "stirred and lifted up [his] soul more than any other writer or philosopher has done..." when he "turned to Jesus Christ for the first time." In either case, it is impossible to read Dostoyevsky's work without reference to the role of the Church in the dissent and shaping of his philosophy of life. While I do not specifically represent Dostoyevsky's writings either as endorsing or rejecting the Church in the essential religious experience of a Christian, I argue that his representation of Christ and Christ-experience in the life of a Christian in his writings fully align with the theological teachings of the Orthodox Church. Dostoyevsky's writings delineate the human transformation to Christlikeness through kenosis (self-emptying) as a spiritual alternative to the overarching agnostic, anti-ecclesial, and sometimes nihilistic myth of individualism posited by Western modernity in nineteenth-century Russia.

There have been fascinating life sketches of Dostoyevsky ever since 1920, when his daughter Lyubov Fyodorovna Dostoyevsky (Aimee) published his biography. Despite many factual inaccuracies her book is the most significant primary source on Dostoyevsky's life in the nineteenth century Russian social and cultural context. Joseph Frank's five-volume



biography of Dostoyevsky (*Dostoyevsky: The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849*; *Dostoyevsky: The Years of Ordeal, 1850-1859*; *Dostoyevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 1860-1865*; *Dostoyevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1865-1871* and *Dostoyevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet, 1871-1881*), a detailed and remarkable work which enables one to place the writer in his time, has also been widely explored. Richard Peace's *Dostoyevsky*, Bruce K Ward's *Dostoyevsky's Critique of the West*, and Malcolm Jones' *Dostoyevsky and the Dynamics of Religious Experience* are some important secondary sources on themes like Dostoyevsky's religious and philosophical ideas, his impact on world literature, his realistic representation of Russian life, the tragic and comic vision in his novels, and his representation of the essential human condition.

There have been various scholarly works on Dostoyevsky, and his relationship with Russian culture and its rich spiritual tradition. Caryl Emerson's *Introduction to Russian Literature* (2008) presents the development of literature in Russia from the late eighteenth century dealing with the central theme of the nation emerging into literary and political consciousness. Russian literature in the nineteenth century is presented as addressing the paradox of Russian life which forms the core of Russian social and political identity—a dynamic encounter with the West in terms of acceptance and denial. In the chapter on Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, and Chekov

in her book, Emerson depicts Dostoevsky as positively responding to Western influence despite his strong Slavophile tendencies. However, he never compromises on the spiritual foundations on which Russia as an Orthodox nation stands. This is a remarkable resource which helps contextualize Dostoyevsky's writings in their literary and cultural context.

In his book, *The Russian Religious Mind* (1946), George Fedotov elaborates on the impact of kenosis Christology on the lives of early Russian saints like Boris, Gleb, and Theodosius. He develops a theology of kenoticism with respect to the different ways these saints sought to imitate the 'humiliated' Christ. Margaret Ziolkowski's essay "Dostoyevsky and the Kenotic Tradition," following the line of Fedotov, explores the concept of kenosis in the lives of Russian monastics and saints of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries like Tikhon of Zadonsk, and the three great elders of the monastery of Optina Pustyn to understand the kenotic model used by Dostoyevsky in the construction of his characters especially the starets Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*. While Fedotov's book is a fascinating resource to understand the origin and practice of kenoticism as an ascetic model in Russian culture, Ziolkovski provides the immediate inspiration behind Dostoyevsky's employment of kenoticism pertaining to characterization in his novels. Henry M. W. Russel's essay on *Crime and Punishment* titled, "Beyond the Will: Humiliation as Christian Necessity in *Crime and Punishment*" emphasizes humiliation as the necessary precondition for Christian life. He extends the scope of kenoticism in Dostoyevsky's novels to accommodate humiliation as a powerful force that allows his characters to experience the virtue of humility. While Russel's analysis of this theme deals with characters as different as Marmeladov, Marmeladov's daughter Sonya, Raskolnikov

and Svidrigailov in *Crime and Punishment*, I find this aspect going beyond this novel and permeating Dostoyevsky's religious imagination in the other two novels.

T. Steven Cassedy's *Dostoyevsky's Religion* (2005) addresses the question, "What did Dostoyevsky believe?" His thesis shows that it is difficult to derive a set of religious doctrines or theological concepts from Dostoyevsky's novels. Moreover, Cassedy identifies various contradictions in Dostoyevsky's writings with respect to his approach to Russian Orthodoxy. Rather than imposing Orthodoxy on Dostoyevsky, Cassedy focuses on the intellectual context of Dostoyevsky and what Russian Orthodoxy meant to Dostoyevsky and his contemporaries. I find this a helpful approach to analyse the religious imagination in the three select novels. Cassedy's book also has a chapter on the use of kenoticism by Dostoyevsky and its relation to Russian Orthodoxy. Although he introduces the theory of kenoticism and briefly discusses the three select novels (mentioned before) and their Christ figures, I do not find a detailed analysis of the texts to flesh out Dostoyevsky's larger vision. My own work on Dostoyevsky draws upon Cassedy's book, and develops his arguments by bringing out the trajectory of Dostoyevsky's kenotic imagination through analyses of the Christ figures in his three select novels.

Crime and Punishment is primarily a murder mystery, which employs the genre of detective fiction but has intrigued readers ever since its publication especially in terms of its articulation of the essential human condition leaning towards sin and suffering. While much has been said about the complexity of the character of Raskolnikov, the protagonist who commits the murders for hardly any convincing reason, his redemption brought about by the Christlike self-sacrifice of Sonya, reflects the theological subtext of the theme of the fall and redemption

of humanity. Similarly, *The Idiot* portrays another Christlike protagonist, Prince Myshkin who appears to be a quixotic holy fool. The paradox of human existence—the inadequacy and the potential for ascending to holiness is the significant theological theme that *The Idiot* presents. *The Brothers Karamazov*, which is considered as the most philosophical/theological of Dostoyevsky's novels, depicts the young novice Alyosha, an embodiment of Christlike innocence, caught up in the chaos of human existence represented in his father Fyodor Pavlovich and Alyosha's three brothers, the passionate Dimitri, the intellectually oriented Ivan and the morally ambiguous, Iago-like Smedyakov. I contend that the converging point of the three Christ figures, Sonya, Myshkin, and Alyosha is kenosis, the quintessential characteristic of Christ delineated by Apostle Paul (eg. Philippians 2:5-9). These three characters seek to identify the trajectory of the development of Dostoyevsky's vision about the human possibility for ascension towards the likeness of God via kenosis amid the chaotic experiences of human existence in this world. *Crime and Punishment* is Dostoyevsky's first attempt to create a developed Christ figure whose self-less love contributes to the transformation of a murderer into experiencing the possibility of redemption that Christ offered through His Crucifixion and Resurrection. For Raskolnikov, the kenotic, agapeic love of Sonya becomes the Christ experience that transforms him, and offers him the possibility of a new life. Sonya becomes the embodiment of the Gospel for him. In *The Idiot*, Dostoyevsky's underlying vision was to create a seemingly failed Christ figure in the character of Prince Myshkin. Based on textual details, my study infers that Myshkin is not a failure. On the contrary, the failure of the society that could not apprehend his Christlikeness is projected on Myshkin. Despite his apparent failure to offer redemption

to anyone, Myshkin is undoubtedly a symbol of Christ who in turn represents the quintessential Russian identity that Dostoyevsky envisages. Dostoyevsky's masterpiece (arguably), *The Brothers Karamazov* presents the character of Alyosha, with respect to the spiritual vision of his mentor, the elder Zosima who embodies the theology of responsibility: "We are responsible for everyone and everything." The kenotic actions of Alyosha (although not radically different from those of Sonya and Myshkin), with its foundations on the Russian Orthodox monastic tradition, place him on top of the ladder of Christ figures in Dostoyevsky's fictional universe.

These Christ figures demonstrate that kenotic spirituality is at the heart of Dostoyevsky's religious imagination for Russia, and for a world which was captured by the impact of 'Enlightenment Rationality' and 'Scientific Positivism'. Dostoyevsky's construction of these Christ figures in his novels is not merely a reflection of the general trend in Russian literature from the medieval period to assert the dominance of Orthodox spirituality on Russian cultural identity. The Christ figures in Dostoyevsky's novels are rather a product of his critical engagement with the rising secularism of the Russian intelligentsia of the nineteenth century who dreamt of a utopia based on reason, science, and egalitarian thought, the guiding principles of the European enlightenment. In this sense, these characters also reflect Dostoyevsky's rejection of certain aspects of the West which he considered detrimental to the formation of the modern Russian identity.



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Embracing Rational Innocence: A Guide to Authentic Living

Dr. Helen K Joy

Navigating the complexities of life can often feel like traversing a labyrinth, where moral ambiguities blur the lines between right and wrong. In such a world, the concept of “rational innocence” emerges as a beacon of clarity and integrity, guiding us towards authentic living. Rational innocence, as a commitment to moral integrity and clarity, aligns with the understanding that God’s justice is rooted in His essential goodness and love. Just as God acts with righteous intentions, we are called to navigate our lives with honesty, transparency, and moral discernment.

Abraham’s faith in God’s goodness, demonstrated through his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, exemplifies the kind of trust and integrity that rational innocence encourages. Despite the challenging circumstances, Abraham’s belief that God intended it for good reflects a deep commitment to moral clarity and trust in divine justice.

Furthermore, Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross as the highest revelation of God’s character aligns with the transformative power of rational innocence. Jesus’ embodiment of love, compassion, and sacrifice serves as a guiding light for understanding and embracing rational innocence in our lives. His example inspires us to live authentically, cultivate resilience, and contribute positively to society, mirroring the positive impact of rational innocence on personal growth and societal well-being. Addressing the complexities of justice and morality in the biblical narratives, the author highlights the importance of understanding

God’s actions within the broader context of His love and righteousness. This nuanced perspective encourages us to approach moral dilemmas with discernment, wisdom, and a commitment to rational innocence, striving to make ethical choices that reflect integrity, compassion, and justice. Let’s explore this transformative concept and discover how to integrate it into our daily lives.

What is Rational Innocence?

Rational innocence is not about ignorance or naivety; it is an intentional pursuit of blamelessness through rational thought and action. It involves aligning our beliefs, values, and behaviors in a harmonious manner, choosing moral integrity even when faced with challenges or temptations. Unlike passive innocence, which may arise from lack of awareness, rational innocence is a conscious commitment to uphold ethical standards and principles.

Why Embrace Rational Innocence?

In a world rife with moral dilemmas and ethical gray areas, rational innocence serves as a moral compass, guiding us towards ethical decisions and actions. It fosters trust, transparency, and mutual respect in our relationships, enhances personal well-being, and contributes to creating a more harmonious and just society. Embracing rational innocence cultivates inner peace, authenticity, and purpose, empowering us to navigate life’s complexities with grace and conviction.

Overcoming Challenges to Rational Innocence

Embracing rational innocence is a

noble pursuit, yet it comes with its own set of challenges that we must navigate. One of the most pervasive challenges we face is the allure of temptations and peer pressure. The temptation of instant gratification and the pressure to conform to societal norms can easily divert us from our moral compass, leading us astray from our path of ethical living. To counteract these influences, it is crucial to cultivate self-awareness, fortify our convictions, and surround ourselves with supportive and like-minded individuals who encourage and uphold ethical behaviour. Additionally, life often presents us with moral gray areas, situations where the right course of action may not be immediately clear. These moments of moral ambiguity require discernment and wisdom to navigate effectively. Seeking guidance from trusted mentors, engaging in reflective practices, and grounding ourselves in ethical principles can help us navigate these complexities with clarity and confidence, ensuring that we remain steadfast in our commitment to rational innocence and moral integrity.

The Positive Impact of Rational Innocence

Living with rational innocence offers numerous benefits that positively influence both our personal growth and our relationships with others. A key advantage lies in the strengthening of our relationships. Rational innocence cultivates trust, transparency, and mutual respect, laying a solid foundation for deeper connections and understanding with those around us. This genuine approach to life also fosters personal growth by building resilience, enhancing self-confidence, and providing a clear sense of purpose. By consistently prioritizing integrity and moral clarity, we are propelled towards ongoing growth and fulfilment. Additionally, adopting a lifestyle of rational innocence contributes to creating a more compassionate and just society. Our ethical choices serve as



inspirations, sparking positive change and fostering a culture characterized by empathy, justice, and mutual respect. In essence, living with rational innocence enriches our individual lives while also making a meaningful, positive impact on the broader community.

Practical Steps to Cultivate Rational Innocence

Integrating rational innocence into your daily life is a transformative journey that requires intentional effort and commitment.

- A crucial first step is to allocate time for regular introspection and self-reflection. Utilizing practices such as journaling, meditation, and prayer can be invaluable tools for cultivating self-awareness and moral discernment, helping you align your actions with your values.

- Additionally, engage in lifelong learning and seek wisdom from reputable sources, including mentors, literature, and sacred Scriptures, to inform and guide your decisions and actions.

- Building a supportive community of like-minded individuals who share your commitment to rational innocence and ethical living can also be instrumental in your journey. This supportive network can bolster your resolve, provide encouragement during challenging times, and reinforce your commitment to living authentically.

• Lastly, embrace the transformative power of forgiveness, both towards yourself and others. Recognize that imperfection is inherent to the human experience, and view mistakes and setbacks as opportunities for growth, learning, and renewal.

By implementing these actionable steps, you can cultivate a life characterized by integrity, moral clarity and meaningful connections, embracing the transformative power of rational innocence.

In conclusion, embracing rational innocence offers a transformative pathway to authentic living, characterized by integrity, moral clarity and meaningful relationships. By understanding its profound significance, courageously confronting challenges, and harnessing its myriad benefits, we can cultivate a life imbued with purpose, meaning, and

harmonious connections. As we navigate the intricate tapestry of life's joys and challenges, let's heed the timeless call to live blamelessly, guided by the illuminating wisdom of rational innocence. In doing so, we not only enrich our own lives but also contribute to creating a legacy characterized by love, justice, compassion and enduring impact, inspiring and uplifting those around us in the process.



(Dr. Helen K. Joy, Assistant Professor in Computer Science at Christ University, Bangalore, belongs to St. Mary's Orthodox Church, Begur)

"What saves and makes for good children is the life of the parents in the home. The parents need to devote themselves to the love of God. They need to become saints in their relation to their children through their mildness , patience and love.

Love, harmony and understanding between the parents are what are required for the children. This provides a great sense of security and certainty.

Pray, and when you have to , speak to your children with love. Lots of prayer and few words.....Pray and then speak. That is what to do with your children. If you are constantly lecturing them , you will become tiresome and when they grow up they will feel a kind of oppression. Prefer prayer and speak to them through prayer. Speak to God and God will speak to their hearts.The secret is to be good and saintly and to inspire and radiate."

From 'Wounded By Love' written by St. Prophyrios



60th Birthday Greetings to

**H. G. Dr. YUHANON MAR
DIASCOROS METROPOLITAN**

President of Malankara Sabha Magazine English Quarterly and

Metropolitan of the Diocese of Kottayam

A TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY: COLT 2024 AT THE OLD SEMINARY, KOTTAYAM

Jini Job, Merlin Moncy, Sanjay Biju

From May 19-26, 2024, the Old Seminary in Kottayam hosted 41 youngsters for the Camp for Orthodox Leadership Training (COLT). What began as a brief escape quickly turned into a profound, soul-rejuvenating experience that reignited our faith.

Rediscovering Faith

In the corporate world, we often feel disconnected from our families, friends, ourselves, and even God. Life becomes an endless cycle of numbers and screens. For Orthodox youth outside Kerala, faith is often confined to Sunday School books, leaving us yearning for deeper knowledge. COLT was the remedy, helping us reconnect with our roots and replenish our spirits.

Immersed in History and Spirituality

COLT 2024 brought young Orthodox Christians from across India together to explore Kerala's historic churches and monasteries. Each place told a unique story, immersing us in the rich tapestry of Orthodox history and spirituality. More than sightseeing, this journey was an inspiring connection to our enduring legacy, bringing the past to life in ways we never experienced before.

Engaging Sessions

What set the camp apart were the comprehensive sessions led by passionate speakers like H.G. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Meletius, Rev. Fr. K.M. George, Rev. Fr. Reji Mathew, Rev. Fr. Bijesh Philip and Rev. Fr. Rijo Geevarghese. These in-depth lessons, full of engaging discussions and interactive activities, made complex topics accessible and relatable. Under the mentorship of Rev. Fr. Philip Kuruvilla and Bibi Kochamma, we spent seven days not just learning, but seeking to transform ourselves. Our interaction with His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III at Devalokam was a highlight that left a lasting impression.

Building Fellowship

A cherished aspect of the camp was the space it created for open debate and discussions. The environment fostered fellowship that grew quickly through shared experiences, stories and laughter. Friendships were forged in an atmosphere that was both intellectually stimulating and fun.

Spiritual Solace

The tranquil mornings and evenings at the Sophia Center Chapel were the pinnacle of COLT 2024. Meditating, praying, and singing hymns together, surrounded by the sound of falling rain and lush nature, provided a serene backdrop for our soul-searching endeavours.

Beyond a Getaway

COLT 2024 was more than just a getaway; it was a journey of discovery and connection. It left each of us with stories to tell and a deep sense of belonging that extends far beyond our days at the camp. The time spent wasn't just about camping; it was an investment in our souls, leaving us enriched and transformed.



NEWS



St. Thomas Orthodox Vaidika Sanghom (St. Thomas Orthodox Clergy Association)



1. Zonal Meetings

St. Thomas Orthodox Vaidika Sanghom or the St. Thomas Orthodox Clergy Association, recently conducted a series of zonal meetings to facilitate better communication, fellowship, and planning among its members. The meetings were held as follows:

- **South Zone:** The meeting was successfully held at Mount Horeb, Sasthamkotta, providing an opportunity for clergy in the southern region to discuss the challenges faced by priests in their ministry along with local issues and initiatives.

- **North Zone:** This meeting took place at Thrikkunnathu Seminary, where participants engaged in meaningful discussions on the growth and challenges faced by the priests in northern areas.

- **Central Zone:** Held at Parumala during the season of Pentecost, or awaiting the Holy Spirit (Kathirippu), this meeting was a significant gathering for the clergy of the central region, focusing on enhancing pastoral care and community involvement. H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III inaugurated the meeting, and all the bishops of this region blessed the occasion.

- **Malabar Zone:** The meeting for

this zone is proposed to be held in August. Preparations are underway to ensure a fruitful gathering.

- **Outside Kerala Region:** A special zonal meeting is scheduled to be held in Pune on the 9th, 10th, and 11th of September. This will cater to the clergy serving outside Kerala, providing them a platform to share their experiences and strengthen their bonds.

St. Thomas Orthodox Vaidika Sanghom remains committed to fostering fellowship, providing support, and enhancing the spiritual and pastoral lives among the clergy. These achievements and upcoming events are a testament to the dedicated leadership of the President, H.G. (Dr.) Mathews Mar Thimothios, the General Secretary Fr. Dr. Ninan V. George and the executive body.

2. Annual Conferences and Fellowships

Several important events were organized to support and encourage the clergy and their families:

- **Annual Conference of the Malankara Orthodox Baskiyoma Association (MOBA)**

This significant event was held at St. Peters and St. Pauls Church, Parumala on the 15th and 16th of May. It brought together Kochammas/spouses of the clergy from various regions to discuss their challenges in supporting priests in their ministries.

- **Retired Clergy Fellowship:** Held at St. George Orthodox Church, Puthuppally, this fellowship aimed at honoring and supporting our retired clergy members, providing them with an opportunity to share their wisdom and experiences.

- **Special Fellowship for Widowed Priests' Families - 'SNEHAKOODU':** This compassionate

initiative was conducted at Parumala, offering support and solidarity to the families of priests who have passed away. It was a time of prayer, reflection, and mutual encouragement.

Akhila Malankara Orthodox Shusrushaka Sangham (AMOSS) Training Camp at Parumala



H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, inaugurated the All Malankara Altar Servers' Association Training Camp which began on 16 April 2024 evening, at Parumala Seminary. H.H. exhorted the participants to try to lead and encourage people towards coming closer to God through worship and a spiritual life. He reminded everyone that they have a responsibility to help and love those who need help due to various life situations, through a life of service. A total of 350 Altar Servers from within and outside Kerala attended the training camp.

The President, Metropolitan Yuhanon Mar Theodoros, chaired the meeting. Metropolitan Yuhanon Mar Chrysostomos gave an introduction on the main theme. The Very Reverend Fr. K.V. Paul Ramban, Rev. Fr. Thomas Varghese Amayil, Mr. Rony Varghese, Adv. Biju Oommen, Rev. Fr. Jose Thomas, Mr. Roy Mathew Muthoot and Mr. Biju V. Panthaplav spoke on the occasion.

Metropolitan Dr. Yuhanon Mar Dioscoros narrated that a disciplined liturgical life is what inspires one to grow in goodness. He encouraged everyone to recognize God's presence in daily situations through daily worship. His Grace was the chief guest at the

closing ceremony.

Fr. Joji K. Joji, Fr. Dr. Varghese Varghese, Fr. Laiju Mathew and Mr. Binu K. Sam led classes during the camp. H.G. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Demetrios, Fr. John Samuel, and Mr. Francis Moothedan also gave leadership to the various sessions at the camp.

Fr. Dr. Johns Abraham Konattu elevated as Malankara Malpan and Reesh Cor-Episcopa



H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, recently elevated Fr. John Abraham Konattu, former priest trustee of the Church and former Principal of the Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam, to the distinguished and honored position of Malankara Malpan and Reesh Cor-Episcopus. The new Malankara Malpan is currently serving as the Principal Secretary to His Holiness and as the official spokesperson of the Malankara Orthodox Church. The investiture ceremony was conducted during Holy Qurbana at St. John's Ephesus Orthodox Valiapally, Pampakuda on 30 April 2024.

A Sthathikon (ecclesiastical document of official authorization) conferring certain privileges and special insignia was presented to the new incumbent by H.H. the Catholicos. This permits the Reesh Cor-Episcopus to use the Rod and the Cross for blessing the congregation and cyclic prayers during the Holy Qurbana and canonical prayers, in the absence of Metropolitans. The new incumbent is also permitted to conduct the

'Feet Washing ceremony' with the permission of the Metropolitan concerned.

'Malankara Malpan' means "Guru of entire Malankara". Very Scholarly priests were designated with this special title which was in fact a recognition of their erudition and competence to teach priest aspirants. The twin honours of Malankara Malpan and Reesh Cor-Episcopos eminently suit the new incumbent who is the illustrious descendent of the notable and ancient Konnattu family and is a great scholar in our ecclesiastical domain.

ICON Excellence Award 2023

The Icon Excellence Award, a joint initiative of the Ministry of Human Empowerment of the Church and Icon Charities, which aims to recognize bright and financially weak students every year, was presented by the Catholicos H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III. This year 616 students from various parts of India had qualified for the Award. They received the prestigious Award at The Award Distribution function at the Catholicate Aramana, Devalokam, on 16 March 2024.

The first Oommen Chandy Excellence Award, instituted by Icon Charities this year to honor the memory of Shri Oommen Chandy, was presented to Dr. Akash Raju who brilliantly completed his MBBS with flying colors. His brilliance is evident from the fact that he won the Icon Excellence Award every year of his entire course. The meeting was presided over by Rev. Fr. Dr. K. M. George. Rev. Fr. P.A. Philip and Mr. George Abraham felicitated the Award winners.

Church to launch Helpline/ Guidance Cell

The Ministry of Human Empowerment (MOHE) of the Church has decided to start a Helpline/ Guidance Cell. This helpline/guidance Cell will impart important information regarding Scholarships, Grants and Privileges available to minorities from the Centre / State governments.

Career Guidance, Counseling and Prayer support to patients, Anti-Drug Awareness Programs will be the other areas of service. This is in addition to the services rendered by Vipassana Emotional Support Center under the MOHE at present. The activities of the Orthodox Medical Forum (OMF) also will be revamped and co-ordinated under the guidance of Dr. Varghese Punnoose.

The Executive Committee of the MOHE congratulated Dr. Varghese Punnoose on his being appointed as the Principal of the Medical College, Kottayam. H.G. Geevarghese Mar Coorilos, the President, honored Dr. Varghese with a Ponnada.

Helpline & Guidance cell contact persons and numbers.

- a. Very. Rev. Mathai Remban - 9447008431
- b. Rev. Fr. Benyamin Sankarathil - 9446043247
- c. Dr. Thomas Kuruvilla - 9847877290
- d. Vipassana Emotional Support Centre - 0481 - 2584533, 8078752574

Book release conducted by the Bar Council of Kerala

"Golden Stories," a new book written by Shri Varghese P. Thomas, Senior Advocate of the High Court of Kerala and member of the Governing Board of Malankara Orthodox Church Publications, was released by Honorable Shri Jithendra Desai, Chief Justice of the Kerala High Court. Advocate Varghese P. Thomas was also a recipient of this year's Malayalam Literary Award.

26th Annual Conference of the Akhila Malankara Sanyasa Samooham

The 26th Annual Conference of the Akhila Malankara Sanyasi Samooham was held from April 16 to 19 April 2024, the first part of which was organized at St. Thomas Orthodox Theological Seminary (STOTS), Nagpur and the second at St. Thomas Ashram,



Bhilai, Chattisgarh. Senior Rambans, Priests and Nuns representing about 10 Monasteries and 9 Convents of the Malankara Sabha from all over India, attended this Annual Conference.

They first went to Nagpur which is not only the centre of India, but also takes pride as the centre of Orthodox Theological studies outside Kerala. They were equally impressed by PRERNA, a school for special children functioning under the aegis of STOTS Nagpur.

The Conference at Nagpur was declared open by H.G. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Coorilos in the presence of H.G. Dr. Yakob Mar Irenaeus, President of Sanyasa Samooham and member of the Mount Tabor Dayara, Pathanapuram. Fr. Joshi P. Jacob, from the Gregorian Community, welcomed the participants. Rev Fr. Jossi Jacob, Principal of Nagpur Seminary spoke on the theme, "Above all, clothe yourselves with love which binds everything" (Colossians 3:14). He said, "God has made himself available to us. Love is self-availability. Love is when we make ourselves available. Freedom in Christ is freedom for others". Sister Rachel, a member of St. Paul's Convent Puthupadi and recipient of the St. Stephen's Award instituted by the Kudassanad Church, was honoured. Meditation by the very Rev Philipose Ramban, and Bible study by Rev Fr. Dr. Jogy C. George were part of the program. Reports of the various group discussions were presented in the plenary session, moderated by H.G. Dr. Geevarghese

Mar Coorilos. The topics that were discussed were 'Relevance of the monastic community in today's political and social environment'; 'Importance of monasticism in the reformation of liturgies'; 'The role of monasticism in formulating mission strategies'; and 'Need for Monasticism in ensuring Orthodox Spirituality among the Laity.'

The second phase of the conference was held on 18-19 April at St. Thomas Ashram, Bhilai, the first Diocese outside Kerala, hallowed and made famous as the centre of excellence for Education and other Mission Activities by the visionary Bishop of Calcutta Diocese, the late lamented HG Stephanos Mar Theodosios. After a rousing and heartwarming welcome by the Orthodox community and members of the clergy, H.G. Zacharias Mar Severios, member of the Baselios Dayara Njaliakuzhi, spoke on the same theme. (Colossians 3:14). Reports of the Group Discussions were presented in the plenary session chaired by H.G. Alexios Mar Eusebios of Calcutta Diocese. The topics discussed were 'How to maintain quality community life'; 'How to improve interpersonal relationships among community members'; 'How are mission and Monastic Movement related' and 'How to attract the youth towards monastic life'. 19th April, the second and final day of the Conference began with Holy Qurbana. H.G. Alexios Mar Eusebios spoke about the mission and the activities of the Calcutta

diocese. Future activities were discussed in the business meeting. The suggestions and views strongly expressed by the participants are as follows

1. Efforts to be made by the Church to recognize and acknowledge the Monastic Movement as an Important Movement of the Church and to make the Monastic communities an integral part of the life and activities of the Church.

2. Resuming Mission and other Activities that had formerly been a part of the monastery activities. Interaction with the local Orthodox Community; Counselling and Vocational education institutes; involvement in work related to liturgical books, translations of research work, helping in publishing were some of the activities that were outlined.

3. Edification of the Monastic Community through higher education, exposure and travel to participate in conferences and enhance inter-denominational and Inter-faith interactions. This will go a long way in creating elite and erudite Monastic communities

4. Effective leadership in Monastic Communities and Resolving Issues within the Monastic community like general and personal problems (financial, social and Spiritual)

5. Spiritual Formation of the New Generation by encouraging and inspiring them to join the monastery. To help the Orthodox Diaspora who go abroad for study or for employment, to stay rooted and connected with the mother church.

6. Acknowledging and recognizing the Sisters/Nuns of various Convents and assisting them in the area of the mission that they have chosen. Mainstreaming Nuns and Monks into the local congregations by the Vicars and other office bearers.

The participants were assured that their sentiments would be presented to the Holy

Synod.

The conference closed with a Valedictory function presided by H.G. Alexios Mar Eusebios. Sister Elizabeth, Superior of St. Paul's Convent, Pudupadi, extended greetings. H.G. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Coorilos spoke at the function and the President, H.G. Dr. Yakub Mar Irenaios delivered the closing address. Fr. Mathai, the Vice President of Akhila Malankara Sanyasa Samooham proposed the vote of thanks.

Visit of Doctors delegation from Parumala Mar Gregorios hospital to Russia



A delegation of doctors from Parumala Mar Gregorios Hospital visited Russia from June 24-29, 2024. They exchanged experiences in hospital ministry and held talks on cooperation with the Central Clinical Hospital of St. Alexii. Led by Fr. Ashwin Fernandez (Secretary, Ecumenical Department MOSC) and Fr. M.C. Paulose (CEO, Parumala Mar Gregorios Hospital), this visit was part of a doctors' exchange programme organised by the Ecumenical Departments of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and the Russian Orthodox Church. The objective was to explore the medical potential on both sides and to look into what can be done to make things more productive and effective. (Note: Doctors from Russia had visited MOSC hospitals in March 2024 during which the first joint multidisciplinary conference was held.)



IN EVER LOVING MEMORY OF
THE VERY REVEREND
THAYYIL M. ZACHARIAH COR EPISCOPOS

1936-2024



A pioneer and one of the founding priests of the North American Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Church in America, Achen faithfully served as the Vicar of Saint Mary's Orthodox Church of Jackson Heights, New York; Saint Mary's Orthodox Church of West Sayville and also as the Vicar of Saint Baselios Orthodox church of Brooklyn, New York. After 54 long years of commendable and dedicated service in America, the Very Reverend T. M. Zachariah Cor Episcopus was taken to the Lord's abode on 13 May 2024. We pray that God grant our beloved brother eternal rest.

Go in peace dear brother

Varghese K. Joseph
Kaippanchalil Family
New York, U.S.A

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FEAST OF TRANSFIGURATION

August 6