

# **Collected Writings on Orthodox Christianity**

## **Various Aspects of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches**

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**GEORGE ALEXANDER**



**OCP Publications**  
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**You can write to us**  
**[theorthodoxchurch.info@gmail.com](mailto:theorthodoxchurch.info@gmail.com)**  
**[info@theorthodoxchurch.info](mailto:info@theorthodoxchurch.info)**

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This book contains collected writings of different authors on the various aspects of Orthodox Christianity. Individual authors are only responsible for their contributions and not for the entire publication. The publisher is not responsible for websites or their content that does not belong to the publisher.

## **Preface & Acknowledgement**

I am happy to present the second edition of this book, which consists of selected reflections, articles, interviews and letters by various authors on different topics related to Orthodox Christianity. This material was prepared in connection to my work and experiences with Orthodoxy Cognate PAGE, a Pan-Orthodox organization, where I have been one of the founders. Most of them have been published in OCP Media Network as exclusive coverage.

I have written the majority of the articles while others have been contributed by independent authors or have been co-written. This book contains a collection of articles on different topics pertaining to Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches. The articles on Orthodox feasts have been written by giving equal importance to both Eastern and Oriental Orthodox families of Churches and were prepared as per the request of Ms Elisa Mode, CEO of Travelujiha, who wanted to learn more on Orthodox tradition and faith as well introduce the same to her readers through their website. There are articles on the situation of persecuted Christians in Eretria, another one on the social, religious and political situation of Serbia. There are also writings titled 'Letters from Syria' that explains the sad plight of Christians during the uprising. The book also contains details of Fr. Themis Adams and his Mission to fight Ebola, paper presentation on OCP Society and Pan-Orthodox Movement, articles on Leaning Cross Church, Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II, missionary works of late lamented Metropolitan Alvares Julius, on indigenous Orthodox communities of Brahmavar and Dindigul, personal journey's to Orthodoxy, briefing on the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as well as personal thoughts and reflections on church life. First edition of the book had thirty chapters and on the second edition there are five additional chapters and altogether we have thirty five chapters.

The book deals with a combination of topics pertaining to Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches, which provides the work with a pan-orthodox nature; which I consider being most important.

I extend my sincere gratitude to Michael for his dedication and support in editing the work. Am indebted and grateful to all those who have contributed to this book, namely Metropolitan Eusthathios Matta Roham, Chrobishop Kyriakose Thottupuram, Metropolitan Abba Seraphim, Dr Kurien Thomas, Joslyn Rane, Metropolitan Mor Selwanos Boutros Alnemeh, Metropolitan Mor Timotheos Matta Alkhouri, Subin Varghese, Ajesh Phillip Maria Sidiropoulou, Dina Blokland, Prakash Varghese Varghese, Vipin Varghese, Danijela Dorado Radojičić, William Doric, Fr Jossi Jacob, Fr Yohannes Bamg Bang, Fr Thomas Ninan, Fr Rick Aleria, Dina, Dima Jabbour, John Tsambazis, Wid Bastian, Sofia Katsareli, Peter Souleles Fr. Zakka Jalma, Fr. Joseph Bali, Emily Pez, Dr Ralf Lee. I also sincerely thank Fr Abraham Thomas, Fr Thomas P John, Fr Dr K M George, Christine Chaillot, Fr Varghese Lal, K C Jacob and Rajendran for their care and support. I thank all my beloved colleagues at OCP Society, all my loving friends, family and well-wishers for their kind support and encouragement.

George Alexander  
June 2016



## A Note on Orthodoxy Cognate PAGE Society

The Orthodoxy Cognate PAGE Society (OCP) is a Pan-Orthodox society for the promotion of Orthodox Christian unity and faith established in the year 2007. It is registered under the Travancore-Cochin Literary, Scientific and Charitable Societies Registration Act, 1955. The major objective of OCP Society is to promote Pan-Orthodox Conciliarity and engage in different activities that promote Orthodox Christian unity with ecumenical respect.

The Society provides equal importance to Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches and firmly believes the fact that both the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches are the true heirs to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ, which was the Church of the apostles and the Holy Fathers. The Society's motto is *“Seeking United Orthodox Christian Witness”*.

The OCP Society has made several achievements since its founding in 2007. It operates OCP Media Network, the world’s largest Pan-Orthodox Christian News Portal with a monthly outreach of more than two million people worldwide along with Orthodox news services, journalism. It also engages in various pan-orthodox research projects, pan-orthodox networking, publications and charity activities. The OCP delegations have been fortunate enough to meet several eminent Orthodox Christian leaders as well as represent the Society at several international Pan-Orthodox Conferences.

The Society has also been involved in a number of social welfare activities since 2007.

For more info visit – [www.theorthodoxchurch.info](http://www.theorthodoxchurch.info)



### **A Note from the Department of Publications**

On behalf of OCP publications, I am happy to present second edition of this book, *'Collected Writing on Orthodox Christianity: Various Aspects of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches*. It gives me immense pleasure to congratulate George Alexander for his efforts in producing a publication in pan-orthodox Christianity.

I hope that the book will be useful for orthodox and non-orthodox readers. I extend my warm greetings and sincere gratitude to all those who have contributed in the work. This is the second publication from Orthodoxy Cognate PAGE and we are planning to produce more pan-orthodox works. We request all your sincere cooperation in our future endeavors.

I thank each and every one of you for your sincere prayers and support.

Happy reading!

Varghese John Thottapuzha  
Director  
Dept. of Publications (OCP Publications)  
Orthodoxy Cognate PAGE Society  
Kerala, India

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## Introduction

### A Briefing on the Orthodox Church

*"Orthodoxy does not persuade or try to compel; it charms and attracts." – Fr. Sergius Bulgakov*

*"Speaking of Orthodoxy, we must not repeat the mistake of Pilate when he asked Christ "what is the truth? (John 18:38). The proper question is: "Whose is the truth?" For the truth is not an idea, a theory, a system, but a person, the Most Holy Person of the Incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ. Therefore we must ask the same about Orthodoxy, because it is identified with the Godman, Person of the Word of God. He as Godman is our Orthodoxy, our Complete Truth." - Protopresbyter George Metallinos Past Professor, School of Theology, University of Athens*

Many believe that Orthodoxy is one of the many "Churches" around. Namely one viewpoint of Christianity or others believe that Orthodoxy is a religion. Both these viewpoints are absolutely false. Orthodoxy basically means true glory or true faith. She is not one of the "Churches" because she is the ONLY true Church of Christ. This naturally is not pride but the TRUTH. Since the Lord instituted only one Church, how can we speak of many? Moreover, Orthodoxy cannot be called a religion because a religion is superstition; it (every religion) tries to cover the psychological needs of man. In contrast Orthodoxy heals the spiritually ailing man (meaning every man) and renders him holy, this being the tangible and obvious proof of her truth.

The Orthodox Church is the original Christian Church, the Church founded by the Lord Jesus Christ and described in the pages of the New Testament. Her history can be traced in the unbroken continuity all the way back to Christ and his Apostles.

*“Study widely, inquire minutely, Think carefully, Analyze clearly, and practice earnestly”- Confucius*

The Orthodox Church is the one true Catholic, Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Orthodox Church has maintained the right Apostolic succession without any breakage. Orthodox Church has the large number of Martyrs who have given their life for Jesus Christ.

Millions of Orthodox Christians lost their lives during the attack of the militant warriors in Middle East, Asia Minor and Syria. It was all Orthodox Christians who scarified lives for the Roman Crusade at different periods in history. In the modern century the terrorist and communist rulers have killed millions of Orthodox Christians. Hence the historians call Orthodox Church the "Church of Martyrs".

Orthodox Church is the Church of great writer and theologians, Koorilos of Alexandria, St Basil the Great, St Jerome, St Gregorious of Nessia, St Augustine, St Apreme. In the Modern age there are people like Deskeyovesky, Paulose Mar Gregorious and many others.

Orthodox Church is the only Church that upholds and strongly follows the teachings of the Holy Apostles and that of the Holy Church Fathers. It is the right New Testament Church founded by Jesus Christ and His Apostles. Priesthood, Apostolic Succession, Transubstantiation, Seven important Sacraments based Church life, real presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Communion; prayers for the departed, intercession of the Saints among many are the core elements of the Orthodox faith. The term Orthodox denotes right worship, or glory to the right worship. Jesus Christ is worshipped as God and One among the Holy trinity.

Orthodox Church uses the worship style prepared by the Apostles. The base has been prepared by St James who as the first Episcopa of Jerusalem and the brother of Jesus Christ. The Holy Bible is being reflected in the Orthodox worship. Orthodox Christians Sing and worship just like the early Jews and Christians. As mentioned in the Holy Bible

Orthodox Christians use the same style of worship that take place in Heaven. True Christian values have not gone out of the Orthodox Church.

Orthodox Church strongly condemns premarital and extra marital relationship. Orthodox Church has taken strong stand against same sex marriage, lesbianism and homosexuality—these elements are deemed sinful Orthodox Church does not recognize or accept divorce. But if a person gets divorce due to personal limitation, the Church urges him/her to remarry and it must be a ceremony of confession.

Didache, a book written in the first century states that abortion is equal to killing. It is the duty of the Church to protect and look after the poor and the down rodent. An Orthodox Christian may choose right or left in politics. But when it comes to values taught by the Holy Bible and the Early Church fathers, Orthodox Christians will strongly rely on God's desire and nothing else.

## **Chapter I**

### **The Detained Patriarch, Persecuted Christians and a Dying Church**

George Alexander

If you ask people, "Where is Eritrea?" most would have no idea. As a tiny Eastern African country the size of Pennsylvania, with a population a little over 5 million people, it doesn't attract much attention. But it should.

The Christian population of Eritrea is being persecuted — their recognized leaders have been removed and the communities are living under strict government regulations that restrict their freedoms. Eritrea is a country situated in the 'Horn of Africa', bordered by Sudan in the west, Ethiopia in the south, and Djibouti the southeast. The nation is dominated by two major religions, Christianity and Islam. Estimates indicate that 50% to 64% of the population is Christian.

#### **Christians of Eritrea**

The majority of the Christians belong to the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church, which is part of the Oriental Orthodox family. The remaining are Roman Catholics, Evangelical Lutherans and other protestant denominations. The government only recognizes the Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The rest of the religious groups need to register by providing detailed information to the government to gain freedom of worship.

#### **The Eritrean Orthodox Church**

Interestingly, the Eritrean Orthodox Church, one of the oldest Christian communities in world, traces their origins to the evangelical works of Apostle St. Phillip. It was established as a church through the efforts of St. Frumentius in the kingdom of Axumite under King Ezana. St. Phillip was sent to Alexandria where he was ordained as Bishop in the name Abune Salema by the Coptic Pope and Patriarch St. Athanasius. For several centuries afterward the Coptic Pope appointed a Copt to be the Metropolitan Bishop of Eritrean Church.

Eritrea was then annexed to Ethiopia after World War II. Since Eritrea was regarded as a province of Ethiopia, the Eritrean church was also considered to be a part of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Since its declaration of independence from Ethiopia in 1993, the Eritrean church began to appeal to the Coptic Patriarch for autocephaly. The Coptic Pope recognized the request and granted autocephaly in 1994 (The Ethiopian Church was granted Autocephaly in 1950's). Abune Phillipos was consecrated as the first Patriarch of Eritrean Orthodox Church only in the year 1998. Initially, the Ethiopian Church objected but later recognized the autocephaly of the Eritrean Orthodox Church. Abune Yacob was the second Patriarch of the Church and ruled for barely one year (2002-2003). After his demise the Holy Synod of the Eritrean Orthodox church elected Abune Antonios as the third Patriarch of Eritrea in the year 2004. The Eritrean Orthodox Church belongs to the ancient Oriental Orthodox family along with the Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Indian and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches.

The Eritrean Orthodox Biblical canon contains 81 books which are accepted by the Narrower Canon which include Enoch, Jubilees, and three books of the Meqabyan. It also has broader cannon which comprises of all books in narrow cannon and also two Books of the Covenant, four Books of Sinodos, a book of Clement, and Didascalia. Broader Canon has not been in print since the beginning of the Twentieth Century. The Haile Selassie Version of the Bible which was published in 1962, which contains the Narrower Canon. The Divine Liturgy of the Eritrean Church is served in Ge'ez language. The Septuagint version of the holy Bible was translated into Ge'ez and the Sermons are delivered in the local language.

### **The Detained Patriarch**

Abune Antonios was unanimously elected Patriarch by the Holy Synod on 5 March 2004 and he was enthroned as the third Patriarch of Eritrea on 24th April 2004 by the most holy hands of Pope Shenouda III, assisted by Eritrean and Coptic Orthodox Metropolitans and Bishops.



Patriarch Antonios is well known for his hard work, leadership and religious devotion. He has made tremendous contributions in reconstructing the all-around standards of the monasteries in Eritrea while serving as an Abbot. He has been much open to modern technology, medicine and education and he is always cherished by thousands of people for his love, generosity and theological scholarship.

As the Patriarch of Eretria, he was concerned and resisted the growing interference of government in religious affairs. His strong resistance to excommunicate three thousand members of the Medhane Alem, an Orthodox Sunday School movement as well as his demands that the government should release imprisoned Christians accused of treason are considered to be some reason for his rivalry with the Eritrean government. The Holy Synod sided with the government and during January 2005 a secret session was met and they removed all executive authority of the patriarch who was limited to just officiating church services. The Holy Synod sought the support of Pope Shenouda to excommunicate Abune Antonios, but the Pope refrained from such an act.

A secret session of the Holy Synod in January 2006 at Asmara formally removed Patriarch from his office and on 20<sup>th</sup> January. Two priests accompanied by security persons of the Government the Patriarch's residence and confiscated his personal pontifical insignia. Violating the church canons and constitution the government installed Bishop Dioscoros of Mendefera as the anti-patriarch on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2007. Abune Antonios was forced to move out of his office and has been detained at an undisclosed location somewhere in the capital city of Asmara. It is reported that the Patriarch is being held in a darkened room.

Abune Antonios was isolated and detained as a result of Governments master plan to tear out the uncompromising and courageous stand of the Patriarch against the unwanted involvement of government mechanisms in religious affairs. The government made this possible by arresting and defrocking large number of capable and leading clergy in the Orthodox Church as well as tactfully submitting Holy Synod members to the government plan. The Patriarch never acted a puppet of the government; rather he stood for peace and

justice. Hence he was detained and is believed to be still alive. The Patriarch is an example of the true living Martyr of our Lord God, Jesus Christ.

It should be noted that none of the Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian denominations have recognized the government installed Patriarch Abune Dioscoros. Abune Antonios is still recognized as the genuine and canonical patriarch of Eritrean Orthodox Church. The Eritrean government claims that Patriarch Abune Antoniso has voluntarily retired to one of the interior isolated monasteries and is very active in prayers. Despite their claim, the Eritrean government has failed to produce any update on the conditions of the patriarch.

There are Eritrean Orthodox communities outside Eritrea especially in USA and UK who are served by two Bishops namely Abune Markarios (Bishop of the Eritrean Church in USA) who is also a member of the Coptic Holy Synod. Abune Markos , Bishop of the Eritrean Church in the UK was condemned by Pope Shenouda for his pro-government attitude as well as supporting the government installed Patriarch. He is no more considered to be part of the canonical Eritrean Orthodox Church. Also there are Eritrean communities in different parts of the world especially in Jerusalem, the Holy Land.

It shall be noted that the Eritrean Orthodox Community in Diaspora is divided into two groups; one supporting the canonical Patriarch Abune Antonios and the one supporting the Patriarch installed by the Eritrean government.

### **Persecution of Christians**

Reports from several human rights organizations like In Chains for Christ, Persecution tells us that Christians and Christian churches are severely persecuted in Eritrea. Reports states that Christians who are trying to flee the persecutions are facing threat, torture, beating sexual assault and imprisonment. Many of the Christians are fleeing the land to neighboring countries. It is estimated that there are more between 2000 and 3000 Christians in Eritrean prisons. According to reports, Evangelical and Pentecostal

Christians are attacked in large numbers. Many people seeking refuges in Egypt get killed by human traffickers and many others are being held captive in Sinai desert. The refuges are heavily tortured both physically and mentally. Many people held in prison face death due to torture and lack of medical aid. The official sources of the Eritrean government deny any sort of assaults on Christians.

### **The Orthodox Christian Persecution in Eritrea**

Despite one of the official recognized and largest Christian community of Eritrea, the Orthodox Church is haunted by the government machineries. As per the ICFC report, Orthodox Churches in Eritrea is being shut down at an alarming rate. Since 2005 more 1500 Orthodox priest and deacons have been forced into serve in military. During past four years the Orthodox Church has been reduced as a mere arm of the department of the religious affairs. The historical and ancient artifacts of the Orthodox Church have been removed from churches and monasteries and have been confiscated by the government.

Even though many churches are available in city areas, large number of Orthodox Churches in rural Eritrea has closed their doors, especially due to the shortage of clergy. It is the purposeful plan of the government to create shortage of Orthodox priests and deacons by forcing them to serve in military as soldiers. The government is presently forcing all Orthodox deacons and priests below the age of fifty years to interminably serve in military, thus depriving the church completely without clergy.

It is estimated that more 1500 Orthodox Churches will be shut down in near future. Some examples for the closed churches are St. George Orthodox Church in Aligider, Gelila Mariam Orthodox Church in Shambuka, Medhane Alem Demas Orthodox Church near Ginda'E, St. Michael MeHrad Lam near Qnafna, and Orthodox Church in Adi-Itay in the area of Mendefera and St.Gabriel Egela Orthodox Church near Teseney.

### **Metropolitan Abba Seraphim: The Sole Fighter**

Abba Seraphim Metropolitan of Glastonbury, Primate of the British Orthodox Church within the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate has been toiling for past several years to gain the much needed international attention and help for the prosecuted Christians of Eritrea as well as to restore Abune Antoios back to his throne. The Metropolitan leads prayer vigil for prosecuted Christians of Eritrean every year especially at the Eritrean embassy in UK.

### **Plea for Help**

There has been continuous plea for help from the suffering Christian communities in Eritrea. Many countries in the west especially USA has been pressing the Eritrean government to protect human rights and restore religious freedom. But any kind of international pressure seems to fall on deaf ears. Some of the organizations working for the persecuted Christians of Eritrea and other countries are as follows: Church in Chains, Release Eritrea, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, In Chains for Christ, Human Rights Concern Eritrea, Persecution, Release International.

I pray for a great miracle in Eritrea and also request each one of you of to pray for the suffering Christians. Let us stand united to speak and act for our brothers and sisters in Eretria. May the Almighty have mercy on his children in Eritrea. In 2014 OCP Media Network ([www.theorthodoxchurch.info](http://www.theorthodoxchurch.info)) released a clandestinely taken snap of Abune Antonios from a cellphone, which showed His Holiness looking tranquil and at peace, although still under house arrest. Requests for him be moved to a monastery have fallen on deaf ears. In 2015 December the government appointed Patriarch Abune Dioskoros passed away. The detention of Patriarch Abune Antonios continues to puzzle the Orthodox world.

### **Facts about Eritrean Orthodox Church:**

Location: Eritrea, Horn of Africa, Head: H.H. Patriarch Antonios, Title: Patriarch of Eritrea, Residence: Asmara, Eritrea, Believers: 1,700,000 (of 3.5 million as of 1994), Churches: 1,500, Church's Age: 1,700 years, Monasteries: 22, Priests: 15,000.

## Chapter 2

### Orthodox Churches in the Indian Sub-Continent and South East Asia

George Alexander

The following article tries to discuss an account of the presence of Orthodox Churches in India and other Asian countries.

#### India

Indian Orthodox Church: Also known as Malankara Orthodox Church or Orthodox Syrian Church of the East, it is the largest Orthodox Church in India and is considered to be the national Church of India. This Church traces its origin to the apostolic mission of St Thomas. The imperial domination of the Roman Catholic Church and its devastating effects lead the Church to come in contact with the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch. It uses Syrian liturgy though translations have been made to the local Malayalam language. Catholicate of the Church was established in 1912.

The Primate of the Church is address by the title Catholicos of the East on the Apostolic Throne of St Thomas and Metropolitan of Malankara who resides at Develokam, Kottayam, Kerala, India. To this Church belong the world famous Orthodox theologians like Mor Pulose Gregorious, Fr V C Samuel, the first canonized Indian saint, St Gregory of Parumala and also the two church structures originally founded by the Apostole St Thomas Apostle (Niranam and Thiruvithamcode) among which the Tiruvithamcode is considered to be the one of the oldest church buildings in the world. The Indian Church has made commendable contributions in the field of education and social change. It manages large number of educational, spiritual and social institutions.

The Brahmavar Orthodox community – a reunited group from the Roman Catholic Church to the Indian Orthodox Church– is yet another specialty of this Church. The Latin community reunited with the Indian Orthodox Church under the auspicious leadership of two saintly personalities, Metropolitan Julius Alvaruz of Goa and Padre Rock Lopez Nuronoah. At present there are around 750 families and are organized into a Diocese.

Syriac Orthodox Church in India: Syriac Orthodox Church or the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church in India belongs to the Patriarchate of Antioch and All East. The local Primate of the Church in India is addressed by the title 'Catholicos of India and Metropolitan Trustee' who is responsible to the Patriarch of Antioch and All East. The Church Headquarters in India is located at Puthenkurishu Patriarchal Centre, Ernakulam, Kerala. The Syrian Orthodox Church is the second largest Orthodox Church in India. It operates several well established spiritual and educational institutions. Manjaniakkara monastery in Kerala holds the mortal remains of St. Ignatius Elias (Patriarch). Large numbers of people from different parts of the globe make annual pilgrimage to the monastery.

There are dioceses under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Antioch such as diocese of Middle East, Australia & New Zealand Malankara Archdiocese of Europe which includes Patriarchal Vicarate of Ireland & Patriarchal vicarate of Germany & Central Europe and the Malankara Archdiocese of North America. Simhasana Churches, Evangelical Association of the East and Knanaya Archdiocese also fall under the direct jurisdiction the Patriarch. The Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church in India is engaged in several missionary works through the St Paul's Mission of India. Large numbers of missionary and philanthropic activities are performed by this organization.

The schism between Indian Orthodox and the Syrian Orthodox Church in India is similar to that which existed between the Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches. Though the Coptic and Ethiopian Churches solved the issue, the Churches in India are yet to reach a consensus on the conflict, which is mainly of administration, power and recognition rather than theological.

Armenian Orthodox Church: The nation of Armenia has age old trade and cultural relations with India, since 2000 BC. At present a handful of Armenians remain in India, especially in Calcutta. They also run the Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy (ACPA) in Calcutta where a number of Armenian students from various parts of the

globe finish their secondary and higher secondary education with scholarships. The Armenian Parishes in India are namely Armenian Holy Church of Nazareth, Kolkata, Armenian St. Gregory's Church, Kolkata, Armenian Church at Chennai, St. Peter's Armenian Apostolic Church in Mumbai, Armenian Church at Chinsurah, Church at Saidabad (renovated), Surabaya St. George's Armenian Apostolic Church, The Holy Trinity Chapel (Church of Tangra). Also there have been many notable Armenian in India who has served with Mughal Kings and several others. The Armenian Community is striving in India despite many challenges.

**Greek Orthodox Church:** The Greek Orthodox Community in India is taken care by the Metropolitanate of Hong Kong and Southeast Asia of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The Greek Orthodox community has been active in Calcutta and nearby areas for the past several decades. The Greek Orthodox Church is active with her mission and social activities in Calcutta and some parts of Bangladesh. There are a number of Muslim converts to Orthodoxy in Bangladesh. With assistance of Orthodox Christian Mission Centre (OCMC) and several others the Greek Orthodox Church maintains hostels, job training centers, health clinics and also vibrantly engaged in food distribution for the poor and needy. The Saintly Eldress Gabriella the legendary Greek Orthodox nun was in India for almost three years from 1963 where she lived in Nani Tal.

**Russian Orthodox Church:** The largest Orthodox Church in the world has opened a parish in India, New Delhi in the year 2010 within the campus of the Russian Consulate. They also operate a parish in Nepal. They are presently working to establish a Parish Church in New Delhi the Capital City of India. The Primate of the Russian Church is 'Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia'. The Russian Church experience growth worldwide especially after the fall of Soviet Union and Church has become one of the most powerful institutions in modern Russia a key moral force for the common man. The Russian Orthodox Church has vibrant missions all over the world with large number of committed clergy and laymen. The Russian Church has brought the largest number of people to Orthodoxy.

Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia – Moscow Patriarchate: The ROCR has also established a number of missions in India and they are the first Eastern Orthodox Church establish a mission parish in Bangalore which is located in Karnataka the Southern State of India.

### **China**

The Chinese Autonomous Orthodox Church: It belongs to the Moscow Patriarchate. It is believed that St Thomas the Apostle founded the first roots of Christianity in 68 A.D. One of the largesse Churches in the world in the past, the Assyrian Church of East had its presence in China. Also there are evidences of Syrian Christian Mission in the Chinese mainland. The vibrant mission of the Russian Orthodox Church paved way for the opening of around 106 Orthodox Churches in 1949, but got disintegrated during the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

The Church had around 10,000 followers with schools and orphanages. More than 200 Orthodox members were martyred in the Boxer Rebellion. They are commemorated as remembered on the icon of the Holy Martyrs of China every year in June. At present there are around 15,000 Orthodox Christians in China. There are several active Orthodox congregations in Beijing, in northeast China (in Heilongjiang and elsewhere) and in there are also Orthodox parishes in Shanghai and elsewhere. Two former Orthodox Churches in Shanghai are in the process of being returned to Chinese Church. The Chinese Orthodox Church is yet to be granted formal recognition from the government. The Coptic Orthodox church has built a parish in Guangzhou.

### **Hong Kong**

The Orthodox Church operates freely without much trouble. Orthodox Metropolitanate of Hong Kong and Southeast Asia (OMHKSEA) is a diocese of the Ecumenical Patriarchate which began in the year 1997. The Metropolis of Hong Kong and Southeast Asia looks after the pastoral care of Orthodox Christians in Hong Kong, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar. The Coptic Orthodox Church of St Thomas is also situated in Hong Kong.



## **Taiwan**

The first Orthodox Church was established in 2003. The Orthodox Metropolitanate of Hong Kong and Southeast Asia oversee the Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in Taipei, Taiwan.

## **Japan**

The Japanese Autonomous Church was founded by St. Nikolay (Kasatkin) who came to Japan in 1861 on the decision of the Holy Synod of the Russian Church. He founded and headed the Russian Orthodox mission in Japan in 1870. He translated the Holy Scripture and liturgical books into Japanese and built the Resurrection Cathedral in Tokyo. The Russian Orthodox Church canonized Archbishop Nikolay in 1970. The Moscow Patriarchate granted autonomy to the Japanese Orthodox Church the same year. The Japanese Church is under the supervision of the Russian Orthodox Church. At present there are more than 30,000 Orthodox Christians in Japan. The Primate of the Church is Metropolitan of All Japan and Archbishop of Tokyo. It has three dioceses, a seminary and publishes books in Japanese language. The Coptic Orthodox Church has a Pariah in Kurayoshi City.

## **Pakistan**

There are Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches in Pakistan, mainly the Greek (Ecumenical Patriarch), Russian and Coptic Orthodox Churches. The first Eastern Orthodox priest Fr John Tanveer was ordained in November of the year 2009. There are 400 Greek Orthodox faithful in Pakistan who are converts from Muslim and other Christian denominations like Roman Catholicism and various Protestant groups. Due to the lack of Church building, the Divine Liturgy is served in one of the houses. The Coptic Orthodox started its first Mission church in Islamabad in 2006 under the Diocese of Melbourne, West & South Australia, New Zealand and All Oceania. At present there are two church one in Islamabad and the other in Rawalpindi.

With the Blessings of Metropolitan Hilarion (Primate of Russian Church Outside Russia - Moscow Patriarchate), the Russian Orthodox Church was opened in Sargodha, Pakistan

on 30th January, 2012. Rev. Father Adrian Augustus is a parish Priest in Sydney who serves in Pakistan. He preaches traditional Christian faith and creed of the Orthodox Church with its historical background. Fifty seven people were baptized and hundred and seventeen people got the sacrament of chrismation by Rev. Father Adrian. The Pakistan Mission is under the supervision of the Australian and New Zealand Diocese of the Russian Church.

### **Sri Lanka**

There are no sources about the presence of Orthodox Christians in Sri Lanka as such. However there had been a good number of Orthodox Christians and several churches under the Indian Orthodox Church. The missionary work of Saintly Metropolitan Alvares Julius created large number of faithful and congregations in Lanka. But later the entire community disbanded. The historic Cathedral of Alvares Julius is located in new Bazaar region of Colombo, the capital city which was transferred to the Roman Catholic Church.

### **Nepal**

The Indian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church has congregations in Nepal. A Parish for the Russian Orthodox Church was also established in Katmandu. Apart from them, the Coptic Orthodox Church has also established The Coptic Orthodox Church of Nepal – Evangelical Mission. Fr Seraphim of the Russian Orthodox Church is a vibrant missionary who is taking care of the Nepal Mission. He regularly writes his experience in the blog – Orthodox Nepal.

### **Indonesia**

There are Russian and Greek Orthodox (Ecumenical Patriarchate) presence in Indonesia. The Indonesian Orthodox communities are engaged in vibrant mission activities though the number of Orthodox Christians remains limited. There are some noted Orthodox priest like Archimandrite Daniel (Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia – Moscow Patriarchate) and Father Yohanes Bambang (Ecumenical Patriarchate). Archimandrite Daniel played an important role in establishing the foundations of Orthodoxy.

The Orthodox Christian Center Surabaya was opened on the 15th of October 2008 by Father Yohanes Bambang. The head Orthodox Church in Indonesia, St Nikolas is also based in Surabaya. Orthodox Center Surabaya Foundation is engaged in large number of educational and philanthropic activities among the local Indonesian communities. Its aims at establishing Play group, Kindergarten, Elementary School, Junior High School, High School, University and an Orthodox Seminary for religious education. Fr. Yohanes Bambang is constantly engaged in Orthodox mission and preaching Orthodoxy to various Protestants and other Christian denominations. The Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia (Moscow Patriarchate) has around 23 parishes and communities in Indonesia. The Orthodox Mission has also built hospital and schools and parishes for the need of the local communities in some of the islands.

### **Myanmar**

There are some reminisce of Orthodoxy left in the land of Burma. The Armenian Orthodox parish church, St. John the Baptist is located in the capital city of Yangon. This Church was built in the year 1862. The Church does not have much faithful, but there is new hope as the country has opened itself to the international arena. A large number of Orthodox faithful from different parts of the globe is now in Burma for tourism, business and work. Hence many have started to visit the historic Armenian Orthodox Church in Yangon.

Some of the recent sources suggest that the late lamented Metropolitan Alvares Julius the legendary missionary champion of the Indian orthodox Malankara Church had visited Myanmar and even founded Orthodox congregations there. We do not have further details on this historic mission.

### **Mongolia**

There was Orthodox presence in Mongolia from the very early times. The first Orthodox Church on Mongolian territory, the Church of St. Troitsky, was established at Khalkha in 1872. A Russian Orthodox Church was built in Ulaanbaatar in the year 2007. The Russian Orthodox Church in Magnolia is limited in numbers but several Protestants and

Roman Catholics are getting interested in Orthodoxy. The Orthodox Church mission is getting slowly active among the Mongols. A TV programme introducing the basics of Orthodoxy is also broadcasted.

### **South Korea and North Korea**

The first Orthodox Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the year 1900 by the Russian Orthodox Priest. In the year 1955 the Korean Orthodox Church unanimously decided to be under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical patriarchate. Today the Orthodox Metropolis of Korea comprises of ten parishes with several hundred members in South Korea, as well as one monastery. In 2006 the government of North Korea recognized the establishment of one Orthodox parish (Moscow Patriarchate) in the capital city of Pyongyang.

### **Singapore**

The Coptic Orthodox Church, Syrian Orthodox Church (Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church of India), and Indian Orthodox Churches has members in Singapore. There is a historical Armenian Orthodox Church 'Armenian Church of Saint Gregory the Illuminator' located at Hill Street in the Museum Planning Area, within the Central Area, Singapore's central business district, which does not have permanent clergy. Armenian and Eastern Orthodox services were held occasionally, on Christmas and Easter, for a number of years. But the Church is now regularly used by the Coptic and Syrian Orthodox communities to serve liturgy. The Armenian Church became a national monument in 1963.

A small, but growing number of Eastern Orthodox congregation made up of ethnic Greeks, and Russians also constitute the Orthodox population in Singapore. The Holy Metropolis of Singapore is an Eparchy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate established in 2008 to serve the pastoral needs of Orthodox Christians in Singapore, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Maldives Islands, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka.

## **Thailand**

The Orthodox Christian Church in Thailand (Russian Orthodox Church) serves both foreign and local Thai believers who are converts to Orthodoxy. In March 2011 the first Orthodox monastery was established in Thailand. The Orthodox Church of Thailand has the Orthodox parish of Saint Nicolas in Bangkok and other congregations in Phuket and Chonburi province. They have translated the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the Orthodox Book of prayer and a book about the history of Russian Orthodox Church into the Thai language. The Coptic Orthodox Church operates two parishes in Thailand.

## **Malaysia**

The Indian Orthodox Church has a cathedral in Malaysia with almost hundred and ninety families. The Indian Orthodox Church in Malaysia comes under Diocese of Madras, together with churches in South India outside Kerala, the Andaman Islands, Singapore and Australia. Fr K A George conducted the first Divine Liturgy in the month of August 1956. Metropolitan Mathews Mar Athanasius conducted the consecration service of the church on 6 April, 1958. This was the first ever Diaspora Church (outside India) of the Indian Orthodox Church. The Coptic Orthodox Church also operates a parish in Malaysia.

## **Vietnam**

The Russian Orthodox Parish of 'Our lady of Kazan' was opened in the year 2002 in Vung Tau where there are many Russian employees of the Russian-Vietnamese joint venture "Vietsoypetro". Regular Paschal liturgies are organized in the parish. There shall be more than 500 Orthodox members in Vietnam. The Ecumenical Patriarchate has plans to open mission in Vietnam but so far no activities have been reported.

## **Philippines**

The presence of Orthodoxy in Philippines was evident from 1600's Armenian, Greek and Macedonian Orthodox Christians. Later the Russian Orthodox Christians arrived. Also, St. John Maximovitch had established a church for the Russians, but did not preach Orthodoxy in the island. At present there are Greek, Antiochian and Russian Orthodox

Churches (ROCR) in the island. There are three Filipino Priests and four nuns within the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Orthodox Metropolitanate of Hong Kong and Southeast Asia.

The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Mission in the Philippines was established under the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia and New Zealand. In 2008, two Filipino denominations were received into the Antiochian church, including 32 communities with some 6,000 believers. Some of them later joined ROCOR as Western Rite parishes under St Petroc Monastery Mission Society. Adamson University presently owned by the Vincentian Fathers of the Roman Catholic Church was originally founded by two Greek Orthodox Christians. Alexandros Athos Adamopoulos (Alexander A. Adamson), who was one of the first Greek Orthodox to arrive in the island along with his brother, co-founded the university in 1932. The Mission here has experienced good growth. Many people are attracted to Orthodoxy. Several Orthodox jurisdictions are now serving in different parts of the country. As of 2014 Eastern Orthodoxy is present at 10 regions of this tropical country and numbers about 1,600 people. In the year 2015 and 2016 the Orthodox Mission, especially the Russian Orthodox Mission witnessed large number of converts from the Aglipayan church and other Christian communities. Mass baptisms have taken place in different part of the country.

### **Australia and New Zealand**

Australia has strong presence of Orthodoxy in the form of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches. The Greek Orthodox Church of Australia is very vibrant with several numbers of parishes, schools, colleges, theological seminaries, old age homes, orphanages, monasteries and other establishments. The Russian, Serbian, Antiochian, Romanian, Polish and Bulgarian Orthodox churches also have good number of followers and converts and also operate several educational and social institutions.

The Russian Orthodox mission has taken up a number of abandoned church buildings from Roman Catholics and various Protestant denominations. The Orthodox Church in America (OCA) has one or two parishes in Australia. The Coptic Orthodox Church is well established in Australia with Seminaries, and other institutions. Also there are

Indian, Armenian, Syrian and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches in Australia. New Zealand has Orthodox presence in the form of several Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches, especially Greek and Coptic Churches.

### **Fiji**

The Coptic Orthodox Church has two parish Churches in Fiji. The Church also purchased some acres of land for cultivation and other supportive activities for the local Fijian communities. Apart from the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Church also has a vibrant mission and is under the spiritual care of Metropolitanate of New Zealand of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The construction of the first ever Eastern Orthodox Church is under progress in this beautiful island. Fijian Orthodox mission along with missions in Tonga and other parts of Oceania has witnessed exceptional growth.

### **Timor**

As of June 2010 a new Orthodox Church is being built in West Timor, Indonesia part of the province of East Nusa Tenggara. This is the first Orthodox Church to be built in West Timor. The new church will be under the Orthodox Metropolitanate of Singapore of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Apart from the above mentioned Churches, there are many mainstream and traditional (old calendar) orthodox jurisdictions in different parts of Asia. The article includes the details of Diaspora and native Orthodox Christians of different Churches. The Orthodox communities are dynamically engaged in several spiritual, social, educational activities and have developed numerous institutions for the service of humanity.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Orthodox Christian Feasts and Celebrations**

George Alexander

#### **Unit I**

#### **The Holy Feast of Annunciation in Orthodox Church**

"Do not be afraid, Mary," the Angel Gabriel said, as he appeared before the young woman, "for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the House of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." (St. Luke 1:30-33)

The holy feast of Annunciation in Orthodox Church begins on March 25, (on the 24th for Latin Catholics) and is celebrated with great reverence and joy by Christians. The Annunciation is the pious occasion of the proclamation of the good news to the holy Theotokos (also known as Mary, Mother of God) and thereby to the whole universe. It is one of the greatest feasts in the Orthodox Church. It marks the beginning of the entrance of Jesus Christ to the human world. St Mary or the Holy Theotokos occupies preeminent position among all others saints in Orthodox Church. This title was affirmed by the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in A.D 431 and there by establishing it into daily life of the Church.

Eastern Orthodox Christians celebrate the feast of Annunciation on 25<sup>th</sup> of March. It is great celebration for people of Greece and around the world belonging to the Greek descent, since it also marks the national day of Greece (March 25 1821), when she declared independence ending 400 hundred years of the Ottoman rule. The Feast normally falls between the holy lent, yet still it is a day of joy, and the fast is a bit limited. Fish is allowed on this day. The Divine Liturgy of the Annunciation is the only celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom allowed on a weekday of



Great Lent. If anyhow the annunciation falls on the same day with Easter, then it is called 'Kyriopascha'. It is the rare occasion when annunciation and Pascha falls on one day (March 25), which is celebrated with special rubrics (liturgical directions). Presently this kind of celebration is only possible with Finnish and Estonian Churches, since these churches observe the old styled traditional Julian or Gregorian calendars.

The feast of Annunciation is celebrated with great joy with the Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom in every parish which is preceded by matin's service. A great vesper is also conducted on the evening before the day of the feast. In the feast of annunciation, Orthodox Christians celebrate the twin nature of Jesus Christ, the divine initiative as well as the human response.

According to the holy tradition Mary was visited by Gabriel at the age of fifteen while at home with her parents. It is also believed that Mary was allowed to enter the most holy place inside the church by the priest, where she was regularly visited by holy angels and provided her with all spiritual training to strengthen her mentally and physically and this enabled her to hold our savior in her womb.

The Holy Theotokos accepted the sanctified role of carrying our Lord within her and played a free and supportive role in the salvation of human beings. Unlike the extended Latin theology, the Orthodox Church totally rejects the immaculate conception of the Holy Theotokos. For Orthodox Christians, salvation is continuous process, whereas many versions of protestant and puritan theology call for immediate salvation and saving of the soul. Salvation is only through Jesus Christ which is beyond any question.

Among the Oriental Orthodox churches, the Coptic Church celebrates the feast of Annunciation on the 29<sup>th</sup> of Baramhat (also known as Paremhat). It is the seventh month of Coptic Calendar and comes between March 10 and April 8 of the Gregorian calendar. The Armenian Orthodox Church observes the feast of Annunciation on 7<sup>th</sup> of April every year. Though the Armenian Orthodox Church has adopted the Gregorian calendar, the special inherent mechanism in the Armenian calendar differ them from rest of the

churches in observing feasts and religious celebrations. But the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem and the Holy Land still follows the Julian calendar especially because of the status quo of the holy places.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church celebration of the Annunciation is known by the name 'Tsinsetor' or the Feast of Incarnation. It is celebrated on Megabit 29 of the Ethiopian Calendar (March to April). This day is considered to be the day forgiveness of mankind by the Ethiopian Church.

Annunciation is known by the term "Suboro" in Syrian Orthodox Church. It is to be noted that the feast of Annunciation is very important among Syrian and Indian Orthodox Churches. It is so important that, both Churches celebrate Divine Liturgy even if Annunciations happens to occur on holy or good Friday. Divine Liturgy or holy 'Qurbano' is otherwise not celebrated on Good Friday since the altar is stripped of all altar vessels and covered in black on Good Friday depicting sorrow on the death of Jesus Christ.

## Unit II

### Orthodox Christmas is Next

"Christ is born! Glorify Him!" is the great message delivered among Orthodox Christians worldwide during Christmas– the holiday which brings in the true flavor of the birth of our Lord. The fragrance of the nativity of Jesus Christ is celebrated with much grace in the Orthodox world.

Orthodox Christmas is truly the celebration of the great mystery of the Incarnation: The mystery in which God the Word became man in order to redeem human beings; God became one among us and the incarnation affirms the importance of both man and all of creation.

#### **Orthodox Christianity – Fasting**

Holy fasting is one of the most important parts of the Orthodox nativity celebrations. Eastern Orthodox Churches fast for forty days where many of the oriental orthodox churches hold a twenty five day fasting. The Coptic Orthodox Church observes an additional fast for three days before the beginning of the Nativity Fast, to commemorate the miraculous moving of the mountain of Mukattam (Cairo) at the hands of Saint Simon the Tanner in the year 975, during the rule of the Muslim Fatimid Caliph Al-Muizz Li-Deenillah.

The Armenian Church observes fasting one week prior to the nativity celebrations. Orthodox Church stresses the complete abstinence from non-vegetarian food and other pleasures during fasting periods. Special recipes of food will be cooked and served: Lenten bread and other food such as nuts and fresh dried fruits, vegetables and herbs such as potatoes, peas, and garlic, mushroom soup, slow-cooked kidney beans with potatoes, garlic and seasoning, Bobal'ki (small biscuits combined with sauerkraut or poppy seed with honey), bowl of hone and baked cod. The type of food and activity may vary depending on the particular country's culture and traditions.

### **Dates of Nativity**

Due to calendar differences Orthodox Churches celebrate nativity at different dates. Most of the Orthodox Churches such as the Greek Orthodox, Ethiopian, Russian Orthodox, Coptic and Syrian celebrate Christmas on January 7th which is according to the Gregorian calendar, and which is also known as Old Christmas Day. This is because eleven days were lost to account for the calendar differences once the Julian calendar was created). The Gregorian calendar predates the Julian calendar which identifies Christmas, as being the 25th of December, and is celebrated by Latin Catholics and some of the Orthodox Churches.

The Armenian Christmas is celebrated on January 6th, which coincides with Epiphany which represents the feast of the Manifestation of Christ. Its theme is the baptism of Jesus in the Eastern Church. Hence the Armenians celebrate Christmas and Epiphany together' on a single day which is called 'Theophany'. In Jerusalem, however the Armenians celebrate Christmas on 18th of January and travel to Qasr El Yahud, the baptismal site on the Jordan River. They are the last ones to celebrate Christmas among all Christian communities. The Armenian Church in the Holy land uses old calendar which has a difference of twelve days. Armenian families dine pilaf and fish and attend Nativity Liturgy at Saint James Church at the Saint James Convent in Jerusalem. The service so unique that the only light available is from the hanging oil lamps.

### **Several Traditions, One Faith**

Different Orthodox churches have customs, practices and traditions according to their land of origin, but at the same time all churches are united in one faith. It is the same expression of the undivided church at different places in the world. The practices and traditions observed in orthodox churches definitely have biblical reflections. For example let us consider the case of Christmas tree. Many people relate Christmas tree to pagan tradition. But Orthodoxy has a very different view on Christmas tree. The Christmas tree is derived, not from the pagan yule tree, but from the paradise tree adorned with apples on December 24/January 7 in honor of Adam and Eve. Hence the Orthodox Church considers the Christmas tree completely biblical in origin.

At many places Orthodox Christians walk to rivers and seas in procession as part of the nativity liturgy. Holy Christmas songs (canons) are sung from the Holy Day of "Vavedenje" on the 4th of December, until the 13th of January, which is the Day of the New Year and is often called Small Christmas.

Santa Claus for Western Christians is St. Nicholas for Orthodox Christians. He was also known as 'Nikolaos of Myra', a historic 4th-century saint and Greek Orthodox Bishop of Myra, now based in modern Turkey. For Orthodox Christians, Christmas is a day for inner thoughts, reflections, repentance and healing.

### Unit III

## Celebrating Holy Lent in Orthodox Christianity

A Comprehensive view of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Great Lenten Practices

*"As so I desire to fix three precepts in your mind so that you may accomplish them during the fast: (1) to speak ill of no one, (2) to hold no one for an enemy, and (3) to expel from your mouth altogether the evil habit of swearing." - Saint John Chrysostom.*

The Easter holiday season has officially begins with the onset of the forty day period of Lent.

The great lent in holy Orthodox Church is called 'Tesseradocaste' derived from the word forty, depicting the forty days of holy fasting prior to Pascal celebrations. Some of the Oriental Orthodox Churches observe fifty days of fasting, including the Syrian and Indian Orthodox Churches whereas the Coptic Orthodox Church observes forty days of fasting. The Ethiopian Orthodox Lenten days extend up to fifty six days. There are three major parts of the holy Paschal cycle namely: the pre-Lenten period, the holy Lenten days and the holy week; this cycle ends with the celebration of Pasha or Easter.

The great lent prepares the Orthodox faithful to feel and enter into the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The totality of Orthodox Christian life is centered on resurrection. It is the preparatory workshop for the true believers by spending more time with prayers, confession, forgiveness, kindness, humility, chastity along with holy traditions and scriptures of the church to help feel the ultimate grace of God.

The great and holy lent in Orthodoxy is a process of huge spiritual exercise. Though it has been mentioned that lent is observed for forty days or even fifty six days in various churches, on the whole the entire process of holy and the great lent extends to seventy days or even more. That is the rigorous uncompromising nature of holiness in Orthodox lent. Before the holy Lenten period, people ask forgiveness to each other, in fact, it is

now common to find many Orthodox Christians posting forgiveness and prayers to their friends and loved ones in Facebook and other social media sites. With the forgiveness granted they enter into the most holy festival of orthodoxy, a festival full of true spirituality and humility. The service of forgiveness or the "Ceremony of Mutual Forgiveness" is observed in Eastern Orthodox Churches on the night of Sunday, also known as Sunday of forgiveness, and the great lent begins on Monday.

### **Pre-Lenten Period**

Apart from the forty days of fasting, there is an additional seven days of Pre-Lenten Fast which is the preparatory week before the great Lent begins. This time is used effectively to prepare the faithful for the spiritual tasks that is to be accomplished during the holy lent. Church fathers have developed several liturgical themes that are to be observed each day during the holy lent. It includes Zacchaeus Sunday, Publican and Pharisee, Prodigal Son, Meatfare Week (day of the dead), Cheesefare Week where dairy products are allowed to be consumed even on Wednesday and Friday, which are normally observed as fast days throughout the year. It ends with Cheesefares Sunday or the Sunday of forgiveness. In Some Oriental Orthodox Churches, especially Indian and Syrian Orthodox Churches, a Sunday is dedicated to remember the souls of all departed priests and another Sunday to remember souls of all departed faithful.

### **The Lenten Days**

The Oriental Orthodox Churches consider Lenten cycle as the cycle of forgiveness; it consists of eight Sundays. The first six consecutive Sundays, beginning with the wedding of Cana, the church celebrates miracles of Jesus Christ. This ends with the healing of the blind man and Raising Lazarus from the Dead on the Saturday prior to Palm Sunday. The seventh Sunday is Palm Sunday and the eighth Sunday, of course, is Easter. The content theme of the celebrations of miracles by Jesus are in the following order: the wedding feast in Cana, the healing of the leper, healing the paralyzed man, healing the Canaanite's daughter, the parable of the Good Samaritan, healing the blind man, raising Lazarus from the dead, Palm Sunday and Easter.

The Eastern Orthodox Churches Lenten celebrations begin with clean Monday to the Friday of the sixth week. Each of the Sundays have special commemorations and are as follows, the first Sunday of great lent is celebrated as the Sunday of Orthodoxy, the second is the Sunday of St. Gregory of Palamas, then comes Sundays of Cross adorning, St. John the ladder, Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt which is the fifth Sunday and finally the Lazarus Saturday.

Several Orthodox monasteries, as part of their custom, fast from all food except water for the first three days of the great and holy lent. This is in order to commune during the first divine liturgy of pre-sanctified gifts. The fast for individuals is determined by their spiritual father and it is believed that deep spiritual fasting helps them to get closer to God Almighty.

### **Great Lent and Prostration**

Prostration is a vital part of the Great Lent and Holy Week but full prostration is traditionally discouraged on the Lord's Day (Sunday), during Paschaltide (Easter season) and on Great Feasts of the Lord. Prostration is also made by Orthodox Christians in front of their Bishop/Metropolitan, their spiritual fathers or even one another, asking forgiveness, without the sign of cross – since it is not an act of divine worship. Those who are physically unable to make full prostrations are allowed to bow at the waist. Prostration is practiced by Orthodox Christians at their home during the prayers.

Oriental Orthodox has prostrations as part of the great Lenten practices. Syrian and Indian Orthodox Christians prostrate during all daily prayers, except on days which the Holy Liturgy is celebrated. It shall be noted that similar pre-Lenten and Lenten liturgical and scriptural observances are made in all orthodox churches, whether eastern or oriental, in different forms and in different names according to their traditions, customs and calendar settings.



## **The Lenten Fast**

Fasting is defined as not eating at all or the abstinence from certain food for a designated period. The purpose of fasting in orthodoxy reminds the Holy Scripture that "Man does not live by bread alone." There are several benefits of fasting. It helps to pray with more ease, helps to create a pure and healthy diet, and also the faithful will empathetically feel with the poor and the hungry and this helps to save resources to feed the downtrodden. Fasting is more than just controlling food; rather it is considered a tedious exercise of forgiveness, compassion and controlling ones emotions.

The nature of Lenten fast in Orthodox Churches is very rigorous. For example, within the Ethiopian Church believers are advised to abstain from all types of food except bread, water and salt, meat and dairy products are also eliminated from the diet. On fasting days only one meal is allowed and it is to be taken in the afternoon at 3:00 p.m. or in the evening. The strict nature of the great lent fasting instructs orthodox believers to completely abstain from all worldly pleasures including physical and sexual intimacy, allowing them to spend more time praying. The correct observance of the great lent nullifies the sins for the rest of the year.

## **Recipes for Orthodox Lenten Days**

There is wide variety of Lenten foods offered in Orthodoxy. As mentioned earlier food items like meat, eggs and dairy, fish with backbones (other seafood allowed), wine and olive oil are completely avoided. Fish, wine and olive oil are permitted on celebration days within the fast period; wine & olive oil are always permitted on Saturdays & Sundays, and this is typical with the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Most of the Oriental Orthodox Churches do not allow wine nor do they allow seafood in any form. Orthodox Christians in India observed the tradition of replacing all cooking utensils with new ones to be used only to cook food during the great Lenten period.

It is the traditional practice of many Oriental Orthodox Churches to place a stand with a wooden cross, covered with black clothes, where the cross is placed between two candles. This stand is placed at the center of the church on the completion of the first half of the

great lent normally, on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of the holy Lent. This resembles crucified Jesus Christ as well as the snake and staff and snakes of Mosses which was paced by him in the middle of the earth. This practice is common among Syrian and Indian Orthodox Churches.

Normally the last week of Christ's life is called 'Passion Week' which is popularly known as 'Holy Week'. Each day of the holy week is called 'holy and great' and there are very special services and themes for every day. Monday is dedicated to the sterile fig tree which yields no fruit and is condemned. Tuesday is the day of the vigilance of the wise virgins. Wednesday is for the fallen woman who repents. The Friday before Palm Sunday is considered to be concluding Friday in Coptic Orthodox Church and on this very special day the ceremony of unction of the sick is conducted, and the last Saturday before the Holy Week is commemorated as Lazarus Saturday.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church uses unleavened bread for the Divine Liturgy on Maundy Thursday and it is considered to be a very special day. It is traditionally prohibited to make intercession prayers to the saints, or kiss the icons of saints and people do not greet each other or the priest during the holy week. The theme of sorrow and betrayal of Christ is first and foremost in the background.

The Holy Friday or the Good Friday ceremony is observed with great reverence and holiness and Orthodox believers spend the entire day at Church taking part in prayers and processions with cross marking the journey of Jesus Christ to Golgotha. There is a tradition of serving rice porridge or congee, peas, pickle and papad (rice flakes is also served at some places) to all believers after the Holy Friday ceremony as part of the common feast and this is found typically among the Indian and Syrian Orthodox Christians living in India. There is no Divine Liturgy celebrated on Holy Friday, but liturgy is celebrated if holy Friday and Annunciation occur on the same day, which has rarely occurred in Syrian and Indian Orthodox Churches. The paschal or Easter Divine Liturgy is observed in the early morning hours.

Due to calendar differences Pascha or Easter is celebrated at different dates, but in some years it is celebrated together. Since resurrection of Jesus Christ is the center of the Orthodox Christian faith, Easter is the most important celebration in Orthodoxy. On the Paschal day believers greet each other saying "Christ is truly risen" and the response is "He is indeed risen" also known as 'Christos Anesti' in Greek.

Easter Eggs, widely considered the symbol of resurrection, is another important part of the holy Pascha. These eggs are painted with a red color to represent the blood of Christ shed on the cross. The Easter eggs are blessed by the priest towards the end of the paschal vigil and thereafter distributed to the faithful.

An interesting legend connected to the origin of Easter eggs states that Mary Magdalene brought cooked eggs to share with the other women at the tomb of Jesus which turned to brilliant red when she saw the risen Christ. After the Ascension of Jesus, Mary went to the Emperor of Rome and greeted him saying "Christ has risen," but he replied pointing at the eggs, "Christ has no more risen than that egg is red." After making this statement it is said the egg immediately turned blood red. Modern day customs surrounding Easter eggs are abundant and special chocolates are made in the shape of Easter eggs.

### **Holy Fire, the great miracle of Orthodoxy**

The Orthodox Holy Fire ceremony is considered one of the greatest living examples of holy orthodoxy. It is the most renowned miracles of universal orthodoxy. The miracle has been recorded since 1106 A.D. The holy fire takes place inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem where Jesus Christ was crucified, entombed and rose from the dead. It takes place every Holy Saturday prior to the Orthodox paschal or Easter celebrations. It is very important to note that the miracle of the holy orthodox fire takes place at the same time, in the same manner, in the same place every single year for centuries. The ceremony of the holy fire is broadcasted live in countries like Greece, Ukraine, Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Cyprus, Lebanon, and Egypt. Also the holy fire is carried to most of these places in special flights with utmost care and they are

received at the airport by their national leaders in the most honorable manner. Believers carry holy fire in their hands because it will never burn their skin.

The Great and Holy Lent in Orthodoxy is the divine process of self-purification and repentance with humility, kindness and love, thereby moving closer and closer to God. Wishing you all a blessed and prayerful Lenten Season and May God bless you all in abundance with thy grace.

## Unit IV

### **Orthodox Easter - Holy Foot washing Ceremony**

The holy foot washing ceremony in the Orthodox Church is observed on Holy and Great Thursday (Maundy Thursday), which will occur on May 2nd every year. The holy service of foot washing is a pious ceremony normally performed by a Metropolitan Bishop or an Abbot in Eastern Orthodox Churches. During the service Bishop washes the feet of twelve priests and the abbot performs the ceremony with twelve members of his brotherhood in his monastery. This ceremony occurs towards the end of the Divine Liturgy.

Immediately following Holy Communion, the priest or the brotherhood member's will move in a procession to the spot where the ceremony will take place, usually in the center of the nave, in the narthex, or a location outside. Psalms, hymns, litany are recited and the prayer is read by the bishop or abbot. The deacon reads from St. Johns but stops where the dialogue between Jesus and Peter begins. Senior ranking clergy will speak the words of St Peter whereas then words of Jesus Christ will be spoken by the Bishop or Abbot. They will then conclude with reading prayers from the Gospels. Water used for the ceremony is sprinkled on all those who are present for the occasion. The procession then returns to the church for the final dismissal.

Similar to the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Oriental Orthodox Churches conduct foot washing ceremony on Holy Thursday. It shall be noted that in the Coptic Orthodox church the ceremony is performed by the parish Priest who blesses the foot washing water with a cross and washes the feet of the entire congregation.

On Holy Thursday the Armenian Church celebrates the Divine Liturgy. The washing of the feet, known by the name 'Vodunluvah' and the long vigil service known as Khavaroom is also conducted. Normally the ceremony is held in the late afternoon. The service was actually written by St. Ephrem the Syrian, who was one of the greatest Orthodox Church Fathers of all time and was later translated into Armenian. The

Armenian Church engages in the holy ceremony with much reverence and reminding the faithful of how Christ washed the feet of his apostles. The priest washes the feet of twelve church members, usually young men are chosen for this.

In Syrian and Indian Orthodox Churches the foot washing ceremony is performed only by Bishops. Twelve people, including laymen and priest are elected for the ceremony. The Bishop will wash and kiss their feet and it is performed in between reading of the scriptures followed by the washing of the Bishops feet by the eldest Priest. The ceremony concludes with prayers. The ceremony of foot washing is a very important tradition and not merely a reenactment of a biblical event; it holds much significance and spiritual meaning. Those participating in the ceremony will wash and clean themselves from their sins.

## Unit V

### Orthodox Easter - Pascha in Ukraine

Paschal or Easter feast is the season of hope, joy and happiness. It is the celebration of God's resurrection. Pascha is also a great holiday in Orthodox countries. The celebrations of Easter or Pascha are combined with local traditions and customs, and it differs from place to place.

*Christ is Risen! He is Indeed Risen!*

*Христос воскрес! Воистину воскрес!*

*Chrystos voskres! Voistynnu voskres!*

Ukraine has a rich Orthodox history and tradition and as a result, they observe certain Paschal practices that are quite interesting to note. There are three major Orthodox Churches namely Ukraine Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kiev Patriarchate) and Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC).

By traditions people do not sleep in the Easter night rather, in the evening people go to church for vespers service where they carry in beautiful baskets, a variety of foods to the Church - Paskha (sweet cream-cheese dish eaten at Easter), painted eggs, meat and food products, everything except vodka. They attend solemn Divine Liturgy and special Easter services and the priest bless all dishes. They take part in procession with choir. They also light candles and it is a beauty beyond words. After the serve faithful greet each other saying "Christ is Risen."

Back home they sit together to have food where it starts with Paskha which is placed at the center of the table and it resembles the body of Jesus Christ, and the eggs painted in red denotes the revival of life of the Slavs and other people. Painted Easter eggs are an integral part of the day and table decoration. These eggs are known by different names such as 'Krashanky' which is painted in one or several colors eggs, 'Pysanky' painted with ornament and 'Skrobanky' eggs, on which the pattern is applied with a sharp

instrument. The themes of painting will be always floral design and images of rooster sun, church etc.

It is amazing that paschal celebration in Ukraine continues for almost another forty days depicting the appearance of Christ to his disciples after resurrection. During these forty days Orthodox believers greet each other saying "Chrystos voskres" meaning Christ is Risen and in return they will respond by saying "Voistynu voskres" meaning, 'He is indeed risen.' In first week of Easter people visit each other at home, give painted eggs and cakes and play Easter games. On Easter Sunday, young girls and even boys perform hahilky (Ritual spring songs and dances) in front of the church or in the cemetery.

It is very interesting to note that there are several Easter games played in Ukraine. . The most famous game is called knocking– children and adults choose Easter eggs and knock them one on another. It is interesting that during the first week of Easter in all the churches is permitted to call bells to anyone who wishes.

The holy fire which is the greatest miracle of Orthodoxy is brought to Ukraine from Jerusalem. By traditions every year Ukrainian Orthodox Christians mark holy pilgrimage to Jerusalem during Paschal season and they take part in Divine Liturgy at the Holy Sepulcher and at Judgment Gate of Jerusalem. Ukrainians are regular visitors to the Holy Land.



## Unit VI

### **The Feast of Dormition of Holy Theotokos in the Orthodox Church**

The Dormition of the most holy Theotokos is one of the important feasts in Orthodox Christianity. It is indeed a great feast which depicts 'falling asleep' of the Mother of God and her bodily resurrection before being taken up into heaven. This feast is celebrated with much significance and importance among Eastern and Oriental Orthodox families.

Mother Mary or the holy Theotokos occupies the most important place in the Orthodox Church next to that of Jesus Christ.

The feast of Dormition is celebrated by two weeks of fasting, known as the Dormition fast from 1<sup>st</sup> of August to the 15<sup>th</sup>. The fasting is quite strict in nature. Believers abstain from red meat, poultry, meat products, dairy products (eggs and milk products), fish, oil, and wine.

In some places and Churches weekday services during the fast are similar to that of the Great Lent. The Russian Orthodox Church performs Lenten services on at least the first day of the Dormition Fast. The Great Paraklesis (Supplicatory Canon) or the Small Paraklesis are celebrated every evening except Saturday evening and on the eves of the Transfiguration and the Dormition.

The first day of the Dormition fast is called 'Procession of the Cross' and on this day crucection (Cross procession) and perform the Lesser Sanctification of Water is performed (holy water used by Priest for baptism and other blessings). In some places the rite of burial of Holy Theotokos is celebrated during Dormition all-night vigil.

In Eastern Orthodox Churches the Epitaphios (an icon made of large cloth, embroidered and richly adorned, and it is used for services of Good Friday and Holy Saturday) is placed on a bier, and carried in procession in the same way as the Epitaphios of Christ,

this is done during Holy Week. This practice began in Jerusalem and spread to Russia, though it is not considered standard service in all Russian parishes.

The Dormition of Holy Theotokos is known by the name 'Filsata' in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and is observed on August 16<sup>th</sup>. The Armenian Orthodox Churches does not celebrate the Dormition on a fixed date but on a Sunday nearest to August 15<sup>th</sup>.

'Shunooyo' is the name given to the Dormition of Holy Theotokos in the Syrian Orthodox Church and 'Daiva Mathavinte Vaangippu Perunnal' is the term used by the Indian Malankra Orthodox Church to denote the feast of Dormition.

Dormition and Assumption is two different term denoting the same feast. Assumption is used by the Roman Catholic Church which teaches that Mother Mary was 'assumed' into heaven in bodily form just as her beloved son Jesus Christ Ascended.

The Orthodox Church teaches that Holy Theotokos had natural death like any other human being and her soul was received by Christ upon her death. She was resurrected on the third day after her demise and was taken bodily into heaven.

There is traditional story about the Dormition of Holy Theotokos where Christ and all Apostles except St. Thomas were present for the holy occasion.

St. Thomas was in India at that time but he was informed of the falling asleep of the Theotokos. It is believed that he was carried on a cloud by an Angel from India to Jerusalem. Nearing Jerusalem, St Thomas saw the holy Theotokos taken up into the heaven by angels. He cried out in anguish and by seeing the apostle the Theotokos removed her belt and dropped it down which landed in the hands of Apostle St. Thomas. He also inspected the tomb of holy Theotokos and found it to be empty.

It is to be noted that the Orthodox Church teaches the bodily assumption of holy Prophet Elijah based on the holy gospel and the Dormition of the Mother of God is taught to be true based on the holy oral tradition.

May the Intercession of the Holy Theotokos bring abundance of blessings to all of you and your loved ones.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Ten Destinations to Celebrate Orthodox Christmas**

George Alexander

Over 1.5 billion Christians in the world celebrate Christmas– the holiday that commemorates the the birth of Jesus Christ– though they do not all celebrate it on the same day. Western Christians celebrate Christmas on December 25th while many of the Eastern Christians celebrate the holiday on January 6.

Bethlehem is generally considered the pinnacle destination for a holy Christmas celebration, however, if you can't make it the Holy Land and want to experience Christmas along the lines of Orthodox celebrations there are several other places in the world where Orthodox nativity is enjoyed with much reverence and charm. Below is our top 10 listing of travel destinations for an Orthodox Christmas.

#### **Holy Land**

Traveling to the Holy Land is the top interest of any Christian interested in experiencing an authentic spiritual pilgrimage and nativity liturgy. For most traveling to the Holy Land is a dream come true and does not need further explanation. A Holy Land pilgrimage offers a unique opportunity to celebrate Christmas on a day not celebrated anywhere else in the world. The 2,100 members of the Armenian community in Israel are the only community in the world that celebrates Christmas according to the Julian calendar and they, unlike their counterparts in Armenia, will celebrate Christmas on January 18. Most of the Orthodox Churches have liturgical services in Holy Land.

#### **Armenia**

Armenia is the first ever nation to declare Christianity as its state religion, and they celebrate Christmas on 6<sup>th</sup> of January. For Armenians, Nativity is the culmination of celebrations and events with regard to Christ's incarnation. Armenia is rich with Orthodox Christian traditions and heritage and Christmas celebrations are organized with much pomp, glory and reverence in Yerevan, the Armenian Capital city. It is important to

visit the Armenian genocide landmarks and monuments. There is much to be explored in other parts of Armenia as well; ancient monasteries, churches, and the Armenian architecture. Holiday foods include Armenian Christmas pudding, dried fruits, sweets and several other delicious cuisines. Tourists can also visit the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, headquarters of the Armenian Orthodox Church in Yerevan.

### **Bulgaria**

Bulgarians celebrate Christmas on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December. Visitors can enjoy the Sofia Christmas market (also known as Kolidariya, or Koledaria) held every year since 2009. It runs from the end of November to until January 7<sup>th</sup>. Tourists can also visit the historical Alexander Nevesky Orthodox Cathedral, and St. Rila Monastery, or explore local customs and other interesting events.

### **Ethiopia**

This is one of the oldest centers of Orthodox Christianity; the Ethiopian Orthodox believers are known for their committed and rigorous spiritual life. The Christmas celebration (7<sup>th</sup> January) is known by the name Ganna and it is followed by Timkat (19<sup>th</sup> January) the celebrations of baptism of Jesus Christ. All these events are celebrated with huge Orthodox processions and its joy to watch the crown, vestments worn by faithful as well as Priests. Visitors can enjoy seeing the Holy trinity Cathedral in Addis Ababa, St. Mary of Zion Chapel where the Ark of Covenant is preserved. Other worthwhile attractions include the Axum, Church forests, and several other ancient monasteries, not to be overlooked are the delicious Ethiopian cuisines. Visitors can purchase Ethiopian icons, crosses, prayer ropes and many other interesting gadgets.

### **Georgia**

Georgian Orthodox Church and her Patriarch have enormous influence on spiritual, social, political life of people. Georgia has a large number of ancient monasteries and churches. Huge processions take place on Christmas day as it is national holiday for Georgians. Divine liturgies are held in all Orthodox Churches throughout the country late night. Patriarchal sermons are attended by thousands of faithful. The Holy Trinity

Cathedral in Tbilisi is a great temple to visit and participate in Liturgy. Traditional processions are held to the Cathedral where people bring many gifts and they are used to feed the poor and homeless. 'Alilo' is the term used to denote Georgian Christmas songs. There are several churches and monasteries located in the mountains with unexplainable beauty.

### **Greece and the Monastic Republic of Mount Athos**

Greece is one of the important hubs of Eastern Orthodoxy and it is celebrated on 25th of December and the celebration continues up to epiphany on January 6th. The Monastic Republic of Mount Athos is not to be missed at all, which has one of the worlds the oldest surviving Christian monastic community. A Separate visa (permission) is required to travel and only men are allowed to enter the island. For Orthodox Christians, Santa Claus is St Nicholas (Orthodox Metropolitan) who appears to children and give them blessings and gifts. His feast is celebrated on 6th of December. It shall be noted that the word carol come from 'choraulein', a Greek dance.

### **Russia**

Home to world's largest Orthodox Church, Russia will provide an opportunity to experience nativity in a special way. Around 70 percent of Russian populations are Orthodox Christians. Russians get busy with family dinner, nativity liturgy and visiting friend and relatives. There are large number of Orthodox Churches, monuments, institutions and a wide variety of Orthodox cuisines. Many new churches are built and old ones are restored. Visitors can also check out Danilov Monastery, Christ the Savior Cathedral and, if lucky get a chance to attend the Patriarchal Divine Liturgy.

### **Romania**

In Romania eighty percent of the population belongs to Orthodox Christianity and hence Christmas is one of the most important celebrations in the country. Carols are an integral part of Romanian folklore so special carol series are held by different groups. Romanian Patriarch hosts special Christmas Carols at his palace every year. The Cathedral for the Salvation of the National is a multi-million Euro project of the Romanian Church and it

will be one of the biggest churches ever built. Visitors may get a chance to see the construction site and visit one of its chapels. Tour programmes are arranged by Roman Patriarchate Tourism department.

## **Serbia**

Serbia is filled with many traditions associated with Christmas celebration. Orthodox nativity is the holiest day for Serbian Orthodox Christians. The Christmas Eve supper include several delicious items. The Serbian Orthodox Christmas is more spiritual in nature unlike other faiths. January 6<sup>th</sup>, on the day before Christmas, Serbs celebrate Badnje Vece, which got its name from the badnjak tree – a beautiful young oak usually found in the woods. It is necessary to prepare badnjak (yule log) in advance. On the morning of January 6<sup>th</sup>, the habit is to go in search of badnjak. When the right one is found, it is necessary to cut it and bring it to the door of the home and to leave it there. The custom is also to put straw around the fireplace, to simulate the connection with the earth. Usually, Serbs put coins, walnuts, almonds and dry figs on the straw.

The traditional January 6<sup>th</sup>supper for Serbs is usually fish. Christmas Eve supper is always meatless and always related to the world of death – baked beans, fish, dried figs, dried plums and apples. On the feast day the remaining food from the Serbian feast meals is left on the table and covered with a tablecloth, until Christmas morning. The belief is that during the night the spirits of the dead come to eat the food left for them. This way Christmas Eve has the character of All Souls' Day. Before going to bed it is very important to cover the badnjak with hot ash so it will burn slowly until the following morning.

On Christmas morning, January 7<sup>th</sup>, the first person that enters the home is called "polozajnik". This person should stoke the fire in the fireplace and say the following: "How many sparks that much sheep. How many sparks that much money. How many sparks that much health!"

The Polozajnik is then offered the "zito" (boiled wheat Christmas specialty) and red wine. The guest makes the sign of the cross and eats a bit of the "zito" and drinks some wine. Before lunch, while the fire is burning, the tradition is to place the pork or lamb to roast slowly for Christmas dinner.

On Christmas day, lunch begins earlier than usual and lasts longer. In contrast to Christmas Eve that relates to All Souls' Day, Christmas relates to the cult of agriculture. Nowadays, in the cities, before lunch the family throws the straw under the table (man's relation to the earth).

Traditionally an essential part of the Christmas dinner is a type of flat, round Christmas bread called "cesnica". It is prepared using stalks of the last wheat harvest, filling them with kernels of different grains. Christmas bread is made of flaky dough in which a gold or silver coin is imbedded. In ancient times it was a ducat, nowadays a coin of great value. "Cesnica" is always very nicely decorated with braids, birds or roses made of dough. Visitors can also experience traditional Serbian vestments, dance, music and much more.

## **Ukraine**

Though the Ukrainian Orthodox Churches remain in schism, the faithful celebrate Christmas with much joy. Ukraine is famous for several traditional practices. One of the most festive occasions is Sviata Vecheria (Holy Supper) on Christmas Eve organized in each household on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January. Apart from the capital city of Kiev and to explore further, visitors can contact the department of pilgrimage of the Diocese of Simferopol and Crime of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church



## **Chapter 5**

### **Armenians in the Holy Land**

George Alexander

The Armenian Orthodox is one of the oldest Christian communities in the in Holy land, and date backs to the very early Christian period prior to the conversion of Armenian King Tirdard III (Trdat) in the year 301 A.D. In the year 254 A.D. Bishops of the Armenian Church, along with Prelates of Greek Orthodox Churches in Jerusalem, Alexandria, Egypt were actively involved in discovering and confirming the places related to the holy ministry of Jesus Christ and made all necessary arrangements to preserve these historic sites. The Armenians also showed great enthusiasm in discovering and restoring the relics of the true cross.

#### **The Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem**

The Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem is the second most venerable and important See within the Armenian Church after the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and the Great House of Cilicia. The Patriarchate is the custodian and oversees the Armenian holy sites in Jerusalem and, looks after the pastoral needs of Armenian faithful living in the Holy Land. Its jurisdiction extends to Jordan apart from the Holy land where there are several Armenian Communities with churches and schools. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem has full jurisdiction in itself and spiritually affiliated to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin as well as worldwide.

A Synod of seven clergymen elected by the St. James Brotherhood runs the Patriarchate. The Bishops of the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem are ordained by the Catholicos of All Armenians as rule and hence these bishops are members of both the Brotherhood of Holy Etchmiadzin and the Brotherhood of St. James. During its glory, there were more than 25000 Armenian in the Holy Land.

Archbishop Torkom Manoogian former Patriarch of Armenian Orthodox Church in Jerusalem, the 96th Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem on the Throne of St. James, entered

eternal rest. The Patriarch had authored 20 monographs including three books of poetry, study on Armenian Divine Liturgy, books dedicated to the Armenian Genocide and a detailed guide to the holy places of Jerusalem. The deceased Patriarch was a prominent expert on Komitas. Archbishop Nourhan Manougian was elected as the new Patriarch according to the Church canons and rules.

### **The Armenian Quarter**

In early times the Armenian Christians made several pilgrimages and many of them choose to live in the holy land within the jurisdiction of the Holy land places owned by the Armenian Patriarchate. The St James Cathedral became the centerpiece of their life and eventually these settlements along with the Armenian Convent, Cathedral, Patriarchate Building and areas near the Patriarchate (southwestern corner of the Old City of Jerusalem) came to be known as the Armenian Quarter. Today it extends up to one-sixth of the geographic area within the walls of the Old City. They also build Churches, houses and convents in other areas, where some of them no more exist. Some of the Christian historians state that the site of the Armenian Quarter is the original Mount Zion which is mentioned in Holy Bible.

### **Ownership of Holy Land Sites**

The Armenian Church is fortunate enough to co-own holy sites such as the Tomb of St. Mary, the Church of the Ascension, the Church of the Nativity, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre along with other Christian communities. It also owns several other important holy lands sites. The Elementary School of Saint Tarkmanchatz, or The Holy Translators, which was established in 1929 has over a hundred students.

The Armenian Church owns the monastery of St. James located in the Armenian quarter, the monastery of the Holy Archangels and the monastery of the Holy Savior, where the Armenian cemetery is located. It owns the monastery of the Dormition of the Holy Virgin, which was the residence of Holy Theotokos the Mother-of-God and her burial place, located in the garden of Gethsemane. The ancient subterranean church is co-owned by the Armenians and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The Armenian

Church also have several other Churches, monasteries and buildings like St James Monastery (headquarters of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem), Armenian retreat of Baron Der, medieval monastery in Jaffa named after St. Nicholas, the Church of St. Toros, the printing press, libraries and a museum. A Seminary is operated by the Patriarchate and several Bishops and Clergy of Armenian Church serving worldwide have been graduated from the Seminary of the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem.

### **Armenian Christians in the Modern Era**

It is estimated that there are about three thousand Armenians living in the Holy Land region and the Armenian Quarter in the Jerusalem's Old City. Many educated Armenians are leaving the Holy Land in search of jobs whereas others make their living through self-employment including retail stores and other businesses. Many have found that selling jewelry or ceramics is more lucrative than other paid employment. While there are numerous daily challenges the Armenian Community in the Holy Land continues to hold onto ancient Orthodox Christians faith and traditions and they are quite resolved and concerned with protecting and co-protecting the holy sites.

## **Chapter 6**

### **The Monastery Compound which held the Tree of Jesus Cross**

George Alexander

The Monastery of the Cross is a Georgian Orthodox Monastery situated in the Holy Land. This monastery is situated near the Nahlaot neighborhood of Jerusalem, and located at the Valley of the Cross, below the Israel Museum and the Knesset.

#### **History of the Georgian Greek Monastery**

The Monastery was built in the 11<sup>th</sup> century by Georgian Giorgi-Prokhore of Shavsheti during the rule of King Bagrat IV. The place where the monastery is situated was granted by Constantine the Great to king Mirian III of Kartli after the conversion of his kingdom to Christianity in 327 A.D. The place was originally consecrated in 4<sup>th</sup> century as per the instruction of Constantine the Great. It is believed that the monastery is constructed at the burial place of Adam's head even though two other places claim to be the location.

The tree for the cross for crucifixion of Christ was taken from this place. The Monastery was sold to Greece in 1885 due to heavy debt and it is presently under the ownership of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The Monastery has a library which holds several Georgian manuscripts. Some of the survived manuscripts are preserved in Mount Sinai, Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Saint Petersburg, Vienna, Paris, London and Washington.

#### **Tree for Jesus' Cross**

The monastery has small parts which are the remains of the Crusader period and this has undergone several restoration works. It includes a Church and a special window through which one can see the spot where the tree for the cross grew. The Tree is believed to be planted by Lot who came back to Abraham after recognizing his sins. Abraham gave him the branches of pine, fir and cypress tree. Lot planted them and it grew into one single tree. There is a painting behind the altar of the Church which depicts the story of this miraculous tree.

### **Georgian Cultural Center**

Georgians consider the monastery as their cultural center. The legendary national poet of Georgia, Shota Rustveli has resided in this monastery when he wrote his epic work “the Knight in the Panther's Skin”. After transfer of the monastery to Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, a Greek Theological Seminary was opened here in 1855 and was active until 1908. It has mosaic dating back to 4th century. Other facilities include living quarters and gift shop. It also has a small museum of ethnic costumes and church art. In the year 2004 some unknown persons defaced the fresco of the Legendary Georgian Poet Shota Rustaveli prior to the visit of the Georgian president Mikhail Saakashvili to Israel. Wikipedia reports that similar incidents have taken place during 1970's and 80's when some Georgian inscriptions were replaced by Greek ones. But later it was cleaned and the Georgian inscriptions were made visible again.

### **Attempts to Return Ownership**

The Georgian Government has been working continuously to return back the ownership this Monastery back to the Georgia and the Georgian Orthodox Church. In February 2012 it was announced by President Mikhail Saakashvili that a special teams will be set up to return the Georgian Holy Cross Monastery. The Israeli government and Georgian Embassy in Israel are cooperating with each other to return the monastery back to the Georgians.

### **Georgian Orthodox Church**

The Georgian Orthodox Church is one of the ancient autocephalous Eastern Orthodox Churches. It traces its origin to the Apostolic Work of St Andrew and St. Nino who is equal to the Apostles and enlightener of Georgia. It has 3,500,000 faithful worldwide and the headquarters is situated at Tbilisi, Georgia. Eighty three percentages of Georgians are members of the Orthodox Church. It enjoys special status in Georgia. Her Primate Catholicos- Patriarch Illya II is considered to me most influential and trusted personalities in Georgia.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Orthodox Christian Leadership**

George Alexander

An Orthodox Bishop, an Orthodox monk, an Orthodox Priest, an Orthodox Lay person must be a visionary. “Having sight and no vision” is the basic problem we face in the modern world.

Leadership is God given, it is guided by the Holy Spirit and it is our duty to polish it, develop it and maintain it properly for the goodness of the church and the society. It’s the responsibility of each Orthodox Christian to improve his or her leadership skills to effectively serve the Church of Jesus Christ, the son of God. We have the obligation to God Almighty to improve those skills he has given us. Each one of us is unique, some are good in singing, some are good in painting, some are good sportsmen, some write well, some study well, some are born leaders and some are good orators. Each one must use their God given talent to serve the Church.

In the modern world, as an Orthodox Christian, we must develop the ability to lead ourselves, only then will we be able to lead others. Leaders must have well defined and clear goals and they must develop steps and tactics to achieve them in a democratic manner guided by Orthodox Christian values. A person with good vision and leadership will be able to see and understand those things that the common man ignores. A good leader or a visionary will keep thinking, dreaming and doing.

Orthodox Christian leaders should have the ability to take initiative. As Napoleon Hill said “Initiative means doing of things without being told to do them. It means the selection of a definite aim and the building of plans for the achievement of that aim.” The leaders should take initiatives at Church dioceses and Parish level to plan and implement projects and programmes for the full benefit of the society. A true Christian leader is a servant leader; he or she simplifies and find solutions to solve any upset situation. Servant leadership has been practiced by Jesus Christ, serving his own disciples and

washing their feet. Orthodox Christian leaders are servants of the Church; they are true servants of Orthodoxy.

Shared leadership is very important to accomplish any goal, whether it is at the Church level, diocese level or at the parish level. Shared leadership is achieved through love, peace, sacrifice, humility, care, honesty, commitment, integrity, accountability and fear of God. Orthodox leadership is to be divine in nature and it is to be implemented at the human level to achieve more. Here individualism has less importance; the leaders need to work in a group and in a community. An efficient leadership will identify, enhance and promote human resources for the goodness of the Church. Identify the true potential in each individual and develop it for better results.

### **Spiritual Will**

An Orthodox Christian must develop a spiritual will, a will to commit for the true service of the Church. Each person should have dream about his/her Church, visualize the dream and share it with others; find people with the same vision and ideas and work together to popularize and implement the constructive ideas for the goodness of the Church and the society. This will only work out if we are honest, straightforward and loving person without hidden agenda. It is definite that people will follow us. There will be criticisms along the way. But a true leader will move ahead in spite of oppositions and criticisms, because this is God given talents and ideas to work for the glory of his kingdom. A good leader should develop and possess the capacity of making strong decisions, the mastery to overcome fears (we are ruled by the fear of failure), good persistence, optimism and enthusiasm. These qualities will help true Christian leaders to overcome difficulties and criticisms in their course of work and service.

Apart from Church leadership it's very important for Orthodox Bishops, Priests and laymen to have excellent social leadership. A leader must focus on the SELF, the God given potential. Define the Specific Goal you wish to achieve. A leader must clearly define the specific Goal he wishes to achieve. He should Create a plan that, when followed, will achieve those Goals. A written plan would give more clarity. Then develop

the attitude & motivation necessary to take action. It is very important to be vigilant the leader is in a team and it is always a team work that would achieve more. Build the belief and confidence for yourself and your team members so that everyone performs at optimum level. Instill determination so that team does not quit when confronted by problems or obstacles. Instilling determination and its success depend upon the strategies planned by the leader.

It is very important to gain self-knowledge, set personally meaningful goals, seek advice, but decide alone. Try to visualize the blue print to success. Be willing to work harder than before. It is to be noted that, everyone responds differently to change; leaders can neither prevent nor avoid change.

An Orthodox Christian leader should discover him or herself; discover the purpose and goal of his life on earth, since God has created everyone unique. Each person has been created with a clear purpose. A true leader must recognize this and use it for the glory of His Kingdom. Self-discovery is very important so as to lead oneself thereby leading others to success. An Orthodox Christian leader must have profound understanding of the faith and doctrines and values of the Church. They should know, practice, and articulate the Christian faith and ethics. Christian leader must broaden their depth of knowledge further. Orthodox Christian leaders should deepen their skills on a regular basis in order to deal with the changing socio-economic and political environment of the Church.

Leaders should treat people equally; they must respect the individuality of each person. They should not consider themselves above the Church members, because even a beggar can teach us something useful. They should thrive on building relationships. An Orthodox Christian leader must have high vision and smooth communications skills to reach out to the common man. Talk the language of the common man and not of a learned theologian. Simplify the concepts of theology and orthodoxy to the Church members. Leader of Orthodoxy must be critical thinking power and an analytical mind to have objective understanding of problems, issues and facts related to the holy Church. They need also to practice spiritual discipline and values of Orthodoxy.



## **Managing Criticism**

One of the vital capacity to be developed by the Church leaders is to manage criticisms. No person or organization will be able to grow without facing criticisms. The church is a democratic body; it is the fusion of episcopacy and democracy and hence should be open to suggestions and opinions of people. The Church and her leadership must be positive to criticisms which come from various corners of the society. Criticism is not to be treated only as an anti-establishment feeling or gesture of a rebellious mind, but as a God's send message for improvement. The leaders must be responsible to those who criticize. Those who feel to 'correct' the system criticize those who are positive criticize and those who have initiative criticize.

The question is how the leadership responds to criticism. Do they take serious note of such criticism? Or do they take it as a challenge to improve further? Often we find that the leadership is very much intolerant; in religion, in politics, in academics and in the corporate management sector. Be open to criticism and positive change. Jesus Christ was very open to criticism. He brought great changes to humanity.

Criticism is a great tool, an excellent platform for growth and development; it is the sister of leadership. Be your greatest critic. The people and organization that survive in this world have overcome harsh criticisms. If you get your head above the crowd, you will be criticized, get used to it. Find a remedy for the weakness. Criticism serves as tool for growth and change. The Church should not expect all critics to be genuine. The duty of the leadership is to make the Church strong by welcoming criticisms.

## **The Jesus Christ Model**

Jesus Christ is the best example of a true leader. Jesus Christ had purpose when he came to earth, to save the sinful. Likewise, the Orthodox Church has a purpose; that is to spread the true gospel of Jesus Christ and to protect the holy faith inherited from Jesus and his apostles. Jesus Christ selected his disciples to 'catch men'; Orthodox Church has the duty to catch men for Jesus Christ and his kingdom. Jesus Christ selected simple persons who stood outside the Church. The apostles of Jesus worked as his ambassadors

and as the living voice of Jesus even after his crucifixion. The Orthodox Church is the true bride of Jesus Christ and hence the true living voice of Jesus Christ in the world.

Jesus Christ had the right blend of team (apostles) to work for him. The members of Orthodox Church must create the right team to work for Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ sent his apostles to the nook and corner of the world for the mission. Orthodox Church must send its missionaries to the nook and corner of the world to preach His Kingdom. Jesus Christ was a teacher who taught right things in the society. Orthodox Church has the duty to teach the right theology and faith of Jesus Christ in the society. Adopt Jesus Christ's style of teaching, teach and reach out to the rich and the poor, to the prostitutes and the businessmen, to the sick and the old. He taught to individuals, to his disciples and to the crowd. Let the Church teach and treat all sections of the society with equality.

Jesus Christ had the guts and glory to act at the right time. He questioned the injustice spoke for the poor and needy, drove away the merchants and their cattle from the Temple of Jerusalem and overturned the tables of the money changers. Why did he do this, the same person who told show your left cheek to the person who slaps on your right cheek? This is because Jesus Christ knew that 'NO' is also an answer. He said 'no' to a group of people who tried to spoil the sanctity of the Jerusalem temple.

Likewise the Orthodox Church must question the injustice in the society, speak for the needy and strictly act against those forces which tries to destroy the holy faith. Think about the way that Christ had influenced the people, the society and the government officials. Jesus Christ as leader influenced the sick, the poor, the sinful, the common man, Pilate, the apostles, women and men alike. Is it possible for the Church and her leadership to influence the society as Jesus Christ? Are we able to influence those people who stand outside the true Church?

### **The Role of the Church in Developing Leadership**

The Church should

- Grow resources; grow leaders for the present and for the future.

- Look for more, never compromise for mediocre standards in proving and receiving services.
- Be flexible and adaptable to the changing situations.

The Church has a very critical and vital role in developing leadership. It must implement projects and programmes to develop lay leadership. The Church must give opportunities to priest, monks and lay person to exhibit their leadership skills. Additionally, its leaders and administrators must implement effective steps to find out the excellent human resource so as to use them effectively for the full benefit of the Church. This can be done at the parish, diocese and Church level. The Church should take effective steps to maintain a culture of human resource development. Touch the emotions of the people; give them opportunities, empower and strengthen them to face life with courage and to lead a true Orthodox Christian life in the society.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Orthodox Priests**

George Alexander

Here two major roles of the priest have to be considered; the Priest as a Church leader, the Priest as a leader reaching out from church to the community. They are to be exposed and trained at administration, people skills and soft skills, financial management, computer skills, media and public relations management, inspirational leadership styles, public speaking.

Priests should be given the freedom to innovate inspiring ideas to keep intact with the people of the Church and to organize appropriate programmes for different level and age groups. Programmes should be planned in such a way that it should be able to attract all sections in the Church and even benefit all. A priest must practice human resource development at the Church level leading towards human individual development. The idea is to form an inclusive church respecting each and every one. Each priest must be able to formulate an action plan for the parish after making a proper study. The action plan must contain those achievements he will be targeting in the particular parish during the term. The educational qualifications of the priest should be of due concern. It shall be checked whether our priests attain a post graduate level education apart from their seminary education.

The Priests must find time to engage with the needs of the people. The confession service must be individual centered, i.e. according to the needs of the people. Priests must take special interest to formulate programmes and policies suitable for the particular region or otherwise emphasis should be given to home grown or indigenous programmes and policies. Challenging the people of the church with particular goals, themes and mission and engaging and developing people's skills, people resources must be given priorities. In all activities church should be given prominence and His glory should be highlighted.

Priests are blood and veins of the Church. Growth of the Church both in numbers and in spirituality depends on the attitude of the Priest. A Priest must be complete enough to guide the Church. Priests are human beings and humans have their own limitations, but a Priest is called for a divine duty, the duty of upholding and preaching the faith of Jesus Christ. A Priest must be guided by values, only then he will be able to guide the people. The first and foremost duty of an Orthodox Priest is to preserve and safeguard the 'Orthodox Faith', they must act as protectors of 'holy Orthodoxy'.

Priests many a time find it difficult to meet their spiritual duty (Serving the Church) as well as meeting their family needs. There should be an attempt from the part of clergy to learn how to manage and positively use human resources. A Priest can maintain the balance between spiritual duties, Church administration and management and his family commitments through spiritual will, commitment and personal values.

An Orthodox Priest should develop a collaborative style of management i.e. bringing different aspects of the Church; man, money, material and other resources together for the wholesome development of the Church. Another important duty of an Orthodox Priest is recognizing the importance of the role of women at the parish, diocese and at Church level. A priest must learn to deal with people sensitively. There are several priests, who lack team approach and tend to be arrogant indifferent in their attitude, believing that they know much more than the faithful.

An Orthodox Priest should be a consistent learner. Learning is a continuing process and it will never be completed by the culmination of seminary education. Each day should be new experience for the priest and he must learn something new and useful each day. Priests must develop a culture of house visits. This will strengthen the parish members in faith and they feel a kind of security, care and support. An Orthodox priest must know his parish members personally, which is very important; he should be able to analyze the character of his community. He should also establish a network with the neighboring Orthodox and non-orthodox parishes. An Orthodox Priest should be kind and must listen and respectful to all.

An Orthodox priest shall be trained in the following aspects:

- Ability to run more than one parish at a time if required.
- Psychological development and social skills.
- Listening to and learning from the parishioners. Life experiences, especially if it relates to marriage and family issues.
- A Priest must also be present at the church, diocese or parish run institutions like schools, colleges, hospitals, and youth centers.
- Another important area of concern is children and youth. Priest should guide them in true Orthodox faith. Priest must take strong steps in nurturing and strengthening the church members in true orthodox faith and he must take strong steps against unwanted secularism and ecumenism.
- A Priest must also develop leadership at the parish, diocese and church level. This will help him to reduce his burden of administration and management.
- A Priest must have good values, honesty, integrity, humility, commitment to Church and the society.
- Excellent and positive relationship must be maintained with the bishops and fellow priests. The priest must have the openness to speak truth to authorities as well as colleagues.

An Orthodox Priest should be optimistic in each and every breath of his life. Above all, an Orthodox Priest must live a model spiritual life which can be imitated by lay persons. An Orthodox Priest should try to simplify the Church and not make it complex for people to digest, because Jesus Christ was simple in nature. He brought solutions to simplify complex situations and problems. An Orthodox Priest should give 'LIFE' to his service offered for the Church as well as to the priesthood. Priesthood must be lively enough to serve the Church and the community. An Orthodox Priest should perform for the Church in all possible manners, because he is very special person called for the duty of God almighty.

## Chapter 9

### Orthodox Sunday School

George Alexander

*“Let the children come to me and do not stop them...” (St.Mark 10:14)*

Sunday school education must focus on society and nation building. It must be molded into a platform where the younger the generation can learn and understand the true apostolic faiths and beliefs of the church. Sunday school must be 'Child Centered' focusing on the needs of present-day children, and understanding that each and every child is created by God for a unique purpose. It is the duty of the Sunday school to identify this uniqueness in children and encourage them to attain God's purpose. Instead of concentrating on a few brilliant students the duty of the Sunday school is to reach out to the needy and lacking.

In the backdrop of high level of alcoholism, mental illness and divorces rate we must give adequate importance to life skill development in children along with spiritual equipment. The most important challenge is the quality of Sunday school teachers and here we must give at most care in training them and equipping them with right tools, skills and attitude.

Sunday school can be used as a platform to identify especially talented children. Being a resource development center it is the duty of the Sunday school to identify, encourage and fulfill God's purpose through these gifts of God. A talent bank can be formulated at the Sunday School directorate level so that a periodical assessment of these children can be ensured and sustained.

#### **A Child Centered Sunday School is a Christ Centered Sunday School**

We stop children quite often. We stop children and reasons are many. We stop them because we do not take them seriously. We stop them as children are less reactive. We stop them because we want to safeguard our interest. We stop them to protect our ego. But the Gospel says Children are the most important. They have the privilege to enjoy

God's love and they must be freed. It is high time we introspect ourselves in the background of the Church as well as the Sunday school.

***Sunday School Timings-*** Is it Child centered? Is it the most convenient time for the kids to attend or is it the most convenient time for the elders to conduct it for the sake of doing it?

***Class Rooms*** - Is it interesting and attractive enough for the kids? Is it clean enough to stimulate the value of cleanliness?

***Syllabus of the Sunday School*** – Is it quite comprehensive enough to stimulate the value of the Bible more than mere knowledge of the Bible? Is it age specific and inspiring in nature?

***Festivals and Camps-*** Do you think the programmes, modules etc are planned keeping in mind the interest of the children or is it a mere exercise to satisfy our egos and conveniences?

***Communication*** – Is it simple enough for the kids to understand? Is it attractive enough to grab their attention? Does it give reasonable time to listen them?

***Teachers*** – Are teachers well equipped? Do they prepare well in advance for the classes? What is the 'model' they project for the children? Are they open, loving and caring enough and understanding in nature? Do they know the difference between the normal school and Sunday school?

***Competitions*** - Is it healthy in nature? Is it inclusive? Is it offering a level playing field? Do you discriminate between the smart kids and the rest?

Is the teaching methodology interesting, inspiring and interactive? If not the time has come for a change. The world is changing fast, our children too are changing. The



expectations, desires and understanding have all gone for a sea change. They need to be loved, listened to, cared for and understood. We have to show them that we are ready to change and are interested in their well-being. In this way we will be able to build a 'staying generation' and not a 'quitting generation'. "Nourish and cultivate child, so that as he grows up, he may fulfill potential of a complete human being within him and will make positive contributions to human world". We have lost some of the glue holding the society together. We have lost our respect for children. The example we are setting for our kids is terrible. Children learn more from what they see and experience than from mere advice. Lack of good examples or models to emulate is a serious threat. Children must experience adequate love, encouragement, support and inspiration to develop positive attitude and higher levels of motivation. Such people will feel like contributing to the society.

Whether at school or at home, children are under severe stress and competition. No one has time for children. In this materially oriented world, children are treated like just commodities and are viewed only in terms of productivity. No one is there to listen to them, understand them. They are often emotionally orphaned, mentally stressed and are subject to severe comparisons. They need to be eased. They need to be recognized and must be unconditionally loved. They should feel protected and secured. The Church should be able to offer them an emotional foundation; in return they will stay emotionally attached to the Church. We need to reach out in every form to the missing children and make Sunday school an 'inclusive' center. Change is not easy, but it is inevitable. What we are today is just the result of the great vision and mission of our forefathers. They have given us exactly what we required. We have to produce now what we require tomorrow. "If you want something you never had, then do something you never did." A Child Centered Sunday School is in fact a Christ Centered Sunday School.

### **Be Kind Enough to Honor the Child**

Every child is a unique creation of God. And behind every child there is a purpose of God too. There is no greater honor, no greater privilege and no greater joy than to allow the master to mold our children as He pleases. As guardians of children our job is to

facilitate in every child God's plan for humanity. We should be able to do our best to realize the child's hidden potential and in being careful never to hinder the process of God. It should be true to say that each child is Mr. Potential and that it is our responsibility to convert this Mr. Potential – as bestowed on them by God- into a Mr. Actual. To be a good parent, we need to recognize that the child has feelings and needs that are different than of us, hence child must be placed first. Today a large number of children find themselves in the grip of reactions such as rejection, guilt, shame, fear, embarrassment, confusion, frustration, humiliation, failure and feeling trapped, used, controlled, betrayed or misunderstood.

Parents should give their children the kind of training which will prepare his 'MIND' for what the world has in store for them. He must be made to see that if he is to live in this world, he has to face challenges, take risk and work hard and make the best of it. The difficulties and problems of life must be treated not as impossible hurdles, but as ladders of progress. Difficulties and problems are creation of God too. If he has created unfavorable sets of circumstances, He has also given us the strength to face them successfully.

*“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them and does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?”*  
(Luke 15:4)

*Plan Early – “It wasn't raining when Noah started to build the ark.”*

The truth is that we can neither force growth nor ensure success. Human nature is so complex that even with the best of your efforts our children may not grow as we want. Let them grow at their 'pace' and also enjoy their 'space'. There is always the need for patient acceptance and waiting. As Pramod Bathra, the renowned Management Expert said, some flowers at ten, some at twenty and some at thirty. Don't be impatient. Provide children with necessary paint and brushes; but let them find a canvas that fits his personality. Even if you provide them with a canvas, do not supply them with the idea of

what to draw! Children do better and do it with confidence when they know that they have the freedom to fail. Teach them the art of failing. To fail is normal; “Challenges are part of life- take it in stride knowing that you will win most time, lose some time, but become better person either way for having tried.”

God never takes time to build a nobody,  
Everybody He creates is created to be somebody

The well-known psychologist Alfred Adler writes that the strongest thing he has found in his lifelong study of human being is their power to turn a minus into a plus. Children should grow up as people who are warm, friendly, concerned with welfare of others, just, fair, honest, responsible, self-reliant and hard working. Academic achievement alone will not work to make a wholesome person. As Thomas Merton said if Man is to live, he must be all alive, body, mind, and spirit. Knowledge is important but good values are more important. ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His justice (that is, let your first concern be to become children of God) and all else will be added unto you’, Holy Bible says. History is full of sad examples of people who abused knowledge for selfish ends causing the destruction of millions. Be sensible enough to ensure that the generation that grows up must have healthy values as well as a whole some vision for life.

*“Behold, like the clay in the potters hand, so that you are in my hand.” (Jeremiah 18: 5-6)*

Here comes the spirituality aspect. The famous psychologists Dr. Abraham Maslow spend his life studying the highest potential of human nature. He came to the conclusion that spiritual life was the core of human life. Spirituality means the ability to find peace and happiness in an imperfect world. It is the true belief in the sufficiency of God and being hopeful ever. It is a refining process that makes us useful and responsible human beings. These are human affection, a sense of involvement, honesty, discipline, and human intelligence properly guided by good motivation. When we enhance these

qualities in ourselves, it becomes a daily spiritual practice; we become better people, for the betterment of ourselves and in our relationship to the world around us.

Mirror the beauty and positive attitude you see in children. Let them understand their value, uniqueness and importance. Don't stress too much into their negatives. Your son or daughter will grow into delightful, wonderful human being whom God created! Also give your child choices and help them set goals. Give responsibilities at home appropriate to their age and ability. Keep open all channels of communication with your children to have better understanding. Children learn more from what they see and experience than from mere advice, hence model responsible behavior.

### **Sundays School- From Exclusive to Inclusive**

The whole concept of the Sunday school must be reoriented towards a welcoming experience for children. From exclusive to inclusive; where by the work of Sunday school should reach each and every child. Children should be able to explore their uniqueness (interest, passions, capacity) through Sunday school education. Never teach children to compete, nor compare him with others, but teach them to love each other, to complete themselves. Avoid instructions and advices, but encourage listening as it is seldom found in the 'world of children's 'Sunday school should focus on religious education to inculcate values and culture rather than the injection of mere 'Biblical Knowledge'. Twenty First century has come out with a lot of confusions and challenges on gender equality, homosexuality, birth control etc. It is very important to orient properly the functions and duties of man and woman in the biblical context. As many cult figures are emerging in the field of spirituality, children must well equipped to be proud of their 'Orthodox Identity.' They must be able to withstand the test of time. Sunday school must be a center of integration, where a child must be able to relate him to his own self, to the God and to the society.

*Be not angry that you cannot make others as you wish them to be,*

*Since you cannot make yourself as you wish to be*

*“The anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God” (St James 1:20)*

## Chapter 10

### Efficient Administration and Management of the Church and her Institutions

George Alexander

*“Hold on to your dreams, do not let them die. We are lame without them, birds that cannot fly”- Ruskin Bond*

We believe that the Church is the bride of Jesus Christ. The Church is full of life. At the same time the Church has the characteristics of an organization or an institution. Hence the Church is to be managed very well, administered with efficiency and consistency. Jesus Christ can be considered to be an effective manager. Jesus Christ picked the right persons (Apostles) for his job. He managed them very well. Jesus Christ was indeed a team player. He called the apostles, took them along with him, and trained them through real life experiences. The holy team of twelve played the crucial role in spreading the holy gospel. He did not stop with twelve, but went on to seventy two and from them to the whole world. As an effective manager, Christ implemented effective and simple tactics to train his apostles as well preach to the common man. He taught them in individuals and in groups.

He used parables, stories and life instances to inculcate knowledge about the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ had the ability of outreach; to preach and practice among the common man. He gave immense importance to communication. Jesus fearlessly struck and drove out business men who sat inside the Jerusalem Temple. This shows that Jesus Christ was very strong in his stand. Christ as a true leader influenced all sections of the society: children, women, men, old aged, the sick, the sinful, the rich, and even the leaders of the Jewish community who were his born enemies. He even influenced Pilate. Jesus Christ faced crisis in his life with courage. He survived tests of Satan not once, but three times. He efficiently handled crisis situation at the wedding of Cana. Jesus Christ was a problem solver and an excellent decision maker. He had answers to all questions, and solutions to all problems, not only because he was God, but he understood the common man and he touched the lives of needy and the poor and he spoke for the downtrodden.

Orthodox Church is the true bride of Jesus Christ; hence she is to be well managed, in all aspects. She must shed light into the darkness; she must enlighten others, hence it is the duty of each and every Orthodox Christian to help manage the Church well, to defend and promote the Orthodox Faith. It is our duty to contribute to the Church in all positive ways.

### **Power, Individualism, Position, ‘Groupocracy’ and Money**

These are the most important focus of attention in the Church today. Members need power to rule others, to exercise authority over others and to build their own kingdom within the Church. Globalization has led to selfishness and individualism, where our Church members fail to neither grow resources nor promote them. Church members are now interested to ‘grow’ themselves as well as they are interested in ‘pulling’ others down. Position is another attractive element which members are very much interested. It has been felt many a time that people come to the Church just to get into some position so as to make them ‘attention seeking’. Forming groups and sub groups in parishes and dioceses have very much curtailed the growth of the Church. It seems that money is most attractive thing in the Church today. Less transparency of handling money and unwanted expenses in parishes, dioceses and institutions have led to the loss of goodwill within the Church.

The question is that as leaders and members of the Church are we more interested in Power, Individualism, Position, ‘Groupocracy’ and Money and do they determine our commitment towards the Church?

The Church needs visionaries in form of Bishops, Monks, Nuns, Priest and layman. We need a vision for the future. We need people who ‘do’ things rather than just speak countless words. We require visionary leadership to lead the Church.

*A Visionary Leadership = Vision+ Mission+ Values*

Anyone can become a leader with vision and mission, but it is very important for a visionary leader to have not only vision and mission but values.

### **Leaders would consider the following while leading the Church**

Do you have the right understanding of the Orthodox Church and faith? Do you have the right thought for the Church and the society? Do you make the right speech to defend the Church and the Orthodox faith? Do you lead a right livelihood?

Do you take the right effort for the integrated development of the Church? Do you associate with righteous and worthy and do we honor those who are worth of honor? Do you make the favorable environment for the growth of the Church?

The questions must be answered by all leaders of the Church, big or small, senior or junior at parish level, diocese level and at the Church level.

### **Success in Church Life**

It is very important to understand some of the most important factors contributing to success in Church life.

- The will to work for the Church or to fulfill ones duty as a true Orthodox Christian to the best of one's ability.
- To give full effort to complete one's task or duties and to fully involve in one's task to complete it effectively. Effort is very important.
- Applying active thoughts to the duties undertaken and becoming positive in thinking and firm in our goals and objectives is very important.
- Good planning and preparation is very important. Apply wisdom to one's work, use intelligence and common sense.

- Vast learning, highly trained stewards and pleasant speech are essential elements for success.

As human beings we have the capacity to understand what is right and what is not. Make wise decisions for a better future.

### **Ethics in the Church**

It is very important to practice ethics in Church. Orthodoxy teaches ethics, as members of the Church, do we practice ethics? Ethics is 'fair play' or 'fair game'. We must rethink the following

Are your choices ethical? Do you make the right choices? Do you ignore the poor and the downtrodden? Do you get things according to our personal needs? Do you consider the interest of the members at large; are you democratic? Are you empathetic? Do you practice fairness? What do you think about your actions and how does the society view your actions and words?

The Church as a whole becomes good or bad depending upon the attitude, ethics, and values of the leadership and their followers. Orthodoxy teaches ethics, but being the right person to practice, it is the most vital aspect.

### **Jesus Christ is the Customer**

It is very difficult to earn good will for an institution in the age of high competition. It is very important for us to understand that the 'customer is always right'. We need to find answers for the following question to ensure quality for any institution run by the Church.

Would a person ever return to your institution for a second time? Would they refer your institution to others? Does your service completely satisfy the customer? Is your organization customer friendly?



Do you attend the client property? Are you interested in serving the people and providing them with the best service? Do you have the right desire to serve the institution which you are part of? Do you produce the right action from your side to the institution and to the customer?

Believe that Jesus Christ is your customer. Institutions run by the Orthodox Church must try to identify Jesus Christ in each customer. Look for the Jesus element in each of your customer. Jesus Christ is the head of the Church. The head of the Church is eligible for the best so provide your clients with the best.

### **Serve your clients as you would serve Jesus**

We should treat our customer as our own God. Shed EGO- Edging God Out. Use cordial language for communication and use descent body language so that the clients feel at home. Get interested in people and don't forget to smile. People always returned back to Jesus Christ, again and again. Would your customers return back to you again and again?

### **Transparency, Consistency and Maintenance**

The Church must ensure transparency in each and every aspect of its work. The Church must be prepared to stop corruption at all levels. There must be clear transparency in any form of monitory transactions in the church. Persons who handle any amount of money in the church must be able to produce proper receipt, vouchers and accounting. This must be applicable right from the headquarters of the Church to each parish.

Consistency is another area of focus. Consistency is very important for a person or for an organization. The Church and its organization must deliver quality through consistency. Many a time we all start projects and programmes, whether it be central, diocesan level or parish level, we forge to maintain consistency and quality. It is always better to complete a small project rather than leaving a big project half done.

Consistency and quality determines credibility of any institution. Maintenance is another key area, were we forget to invest. We need to make proper maintenance of our

infrastructure, programmes and projects with adequate follow up. Only proper follow up can bring lasting success. Many a time we fail to find success because we compromise on transparency, consistency, adequate maintenance and follow up.

### **Church First**

Orthodox Church is the living body of Christ in this world. 'Church First' must be the guiding principle of each Orthodox Christian. Serve the Church in the best way, because in fact you serve the faith established by Jesus Christ. The Church is not a place to implement or express personal grudge and selfish opinion. The Church is for all men and not for a single person alone. Jesus Christ was crucified for the whole world. Hence his Church is not a body containing a single person, but it is an undivided body consisting of all men and women. Each and every one are equal in Church. Each individual must aim at the common good of all the Church members.

How many people have you inspired today? How many people have you lead to Jesus Christ? How many people have witnessed the Orthodox Church?

*Be Ambassadors of Orthodoxy, be ambassadors of Jesus Christ.*

## Chapter 11

### Orthodox Youth George Alexander

*“A Church without youth is a Church without future” His Holiness Pope Shenouda III*

There exist a number of challenges and problems pertaining to the youth of our Church. Lack of self-confidence; they are not aware of their strengths and weakness, they lack knowledge about the power of God- Mostly they are confined only to rituals as part of the faith, lack of high aims, not able to learn from the front. Lack of leadership qualities, not able to communicate effectively, poor adjustment levels and team building skills, poor reading and learning skills leading to mediocrity in educational status, not able to be innovative and creative, lack of understanding of the strength of Orthodox faith and hence they tend to leave our faith when they are tested or when facing difficulty, poor life skill among girls are some of them.

*Our youth are our present and future, we should listen to them” His Holiness Aram I*

Programmes to empower the youth shall include personality development, communication skill development programmes, leadership training programmes, value and adolescent education programmes, life skill programmes, training for teachers, guidance for Parents, Child Empowerment, career Guidance and Counseling.

The youth in the church must be given due importance, concern and opportunities. Utmost importance is to be given to the youth of our Church, as they are a highly talented group. We must able to provide them with adequate guidance in their life and profession as well as tap into their huge potential so they can use it for the development of our Church. The youth must feel important within the Church. If we are passive in our attitude towards the youth, they will look for other pastures that provide them with due importance, care and concern. If the youth should contribute to the Church, the Church

must first contribute to the youth. The Church must become a platform for them to learn and develop in faith, spirituality, career and their life as a whole.

We must guide our younger generation in the right path, care for them, and love them or there will be no future for the Church; only the physical structures will exist and there will be no human presence in them. The fight for some properties or physical establishment will never help us to justify ourselves in front of the next generation. Only if we care for them, they will care for Church in return.

*“Youth without the Church are youth without a future”- A Coptic Orthodox Youth*

### **Women and Girls**

*“We felt great need of the work of women and we wanted women to have a certain order and service in the Church, not only to have girls as Sunday School teachers who give a part of their time whenever they can, but we need want girls and women to give their whole life to God and service of the Church.”- His Holiness Pope Shenouda III*

In tune with the global human transition, there is a great need for acknowledging, empowering the much dedicated and selfless contributors among women and their future contributors, the girls. Discussions and debates should be encouraged in this line. Career guidance and life guidance to girl children to make them life ready and church – committed is also of great importance. The Church should impart education to girls keeping in mind what is expected of them in the future.

### **Let us open the doors**

Take the lead to open the door. Material advancement and development have paved the way for a qualitative development in human affairs. This may be due to a sudden spurt of technological and economic development without giving adequate time for a proper maturing. People started deviating focusing only on materials ignoring the ethical and moral aspects of life. Consumerism, alcoholism, divorce, increased crime rates, organized

prostitution, corruption, are signaling these facts. This is one area which the Church has failed to act in advance.

Noah did not build the Arc after the rain came, but well in advance. The focus of the Church should be to guide and educate its members effectively, how to handle the resource given by God almighty. There is fare use, misuse and abuse of resources possible. When you look at the society you will be surprised to find that all immoral training centers are open 24 hours a day, yet Churches are busy closing doors as early as possible. Immoral and unethical organizers keep close to the people and exploit them, while the Church has moved slowly and steadily away from the common man. How can we save the souls if we are closing the doors of the Church at a time when we have to work overtime for salvation?

## Chapter 12

### A Wake up Call for Serbia

George Alexander and Danijela Dorado Radojičić

*Our Beloved Serbian Orthodox Sisters, Brothers and Friends in Christ*

Many things are happening within the holy Orthodox Serbia. Olden times have changed; this is 21<sup>st</sup> century Serbia I thought of sharing some of my views on certain aspects of the country which is being discussed with much vigor in the modern age. These are our personal opinions.

#### **Serbianism**

By Serbianism we mean the inbuilt courage of each Serbian within, the great traditions, the Orthodox faith of Serbia, the true path shown to us by our forefathers, the great Patriarchs Priests and Metropolitans of our Church, the defenders of Orthodoxy, the great social and political leaders of Serbia. Serbianism include the very essence of Serbia: its flavor, its culture, its people, its beauty, nature, food, – everything that Serbia consists of. The great leaders of Serbia have protected the Serbianism for centuries and handed over the true essence of Serbia to generations.

It is the duty of each Serb to protect and defend Serbianism within them. We had wars, we were attacked and bombed by external forces for no crime we did. The nation got forcefully divided in a geographical manner. Western media pictured Serbs as terrorist but we never lost the Serbianism the Serbian pride in us. The great Nation of Serbia overcame the modern tools of pseudo democracy and technical warfare must not shed Serbianism.

#### **Gay, Lesbianism and Orgies**

The ultra-modern concepts of homosexuality, lesbianism and orgies are definitely a threat to the basic nucleus of any society, none other than the family. These modern elements will eventually lead to the disintegration of human family. The family is the basic unit of our society. Only a good family can produce good individuals which will result in

responsible citizens and peaceful brotherhood of nations. This brotherhood between nations can bring peace and prosperity in this world. Of course gays and lesbians are human beings. As the late Lamented Patriarch Alexis II of Moscow and All Russia once remarked homosexuals are human beings who deserve extra care. Society and Church must help these kinds of people to return to their normal life– or at least to cope with realities of the modern world and help them lead a decent life.

Homosexuals are part of our society and the country must have a decent mechanism to help them. The recent Pussy Riot event in Russia is another classic example of pseudo democratic movement to create political turmoil and internal crisis in Russia. This is not just a threat to Russia alone, but to the entire Orthodox East. The perfect tool they use is “human rights.” As professor Philip Jenkins stated, the story would have been different if such a Pussy Riot incident was held in a Mosque or a Jewish Synagogue. Holding public display of homosexuality by disrespecting Serbian Pride, allowing certain exhibitions of certain artists who picture Jesus Christ as a pervert and a homosexual are a great threat to the ancient traditions, Orthodox Christian values and the ‘Serbianism’ in each one of you.

### **The EU Dilemma**

To join the European Union or not to join, completely rests with the will of Serbs. The common people are to decide for their country’s future. It shall not be decided by some corporates or external power. Let Serbs decide the future of Serbia. Citizens of Serbia know their condition well; economic, social and religious. Nothing shall threaten the integrity, freedom, culture and faith of Serbia. Serbia must always be the Serbia who’s holding her head high.

### **Who wants Roman Pope in Holy Serbian Soil?**

Is this the most important things and center of discussion for Serbs? We have a lot of other things to discuss and decide. Can anyone ever forget the tragedies of the World War II smashed upon Serbia by the Vatican lobby? Can we ever forget the hundreds of thousands of our sisters, our mothers, father, children and brothers who were martyred to

save the holy Orthodox faith? Will the Roman Catholic Pope ever make genuine apologies to Serbs? Can we ever trust Rome? Many of our Orthodox Church fathers warned us “Never Trust Rome”.

The attitude of Vatican to Serbian Orthodox Christians clearly upholds warnings of our Church fathers. Earlier in history the Vatican tried to control Orthodoxy by creating Eastern Rite Roman Catholics, imperial power, force military strength and the worst of all the unforgettable crime to humanity, the ‘Holocaust’. Am not sure whether Serbs are aware of a person called Averro Manhattan (He was the world’s foremost authority on Roman Catholicism in politics) who has written several books especially a book titled ‘The Vatican Holocaust’ which features the unholy hands of Vatican in murdering torturing and converting Serbian Orthodox Christians to Roman Catholicism. Lately things are changing with Vatican. In the new age of globalization Vatican has a wish to swallow Orthodoxy through diplomatic Ecumenism. The new agenda is to get Pope to the Serbian and Russian Soil where a Roman Catholic Pope has never been allowed to step in.

Vatican is presently trying to pamper and deceive Orthodox hierarchy with the pomp and glory of diplomatic Ecumenism and human rights. On humanitarian grounds, will the Pope be allowed in Serbian Soil? Or shall it occur in order to please the European Union and others, and to finally make them accept a good image of Serbia? The Pope shall recommend the EU and the West to invest in Serbia? The growth of Orthodoxy worldwide has astonished Roman Catholic Church especially in the West where many Roman Catholics, Eastern Catholics and Protestants are returning back to Orthodoxy. So it’s time for Roman Church to attach ancient Orthodox hubs in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. The Vatican must always realize that we Orthodox are not blind puppets.

### **The Edict of Milan: Who is to be invited?**

If the Serbian Church is too concerned about guests that have to be invited for the Edict of Milan – 2013, there is a simple and logical solution: the Serbian Orthodox Church must invite representatives of respectful Oriental Orthodox Primate because the very first



schism occurred between the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox family. Later, in 1054, Rome separated from Orthodox communion. It is important to stress that no one of the Oriental orthodox nations or churches has ever sponsored any genocide or terrorist activities in Serbia.

Geographically, the Oriental Orthodox Churches might be separated but they are one family, one faith with the Byzantine Eastern Orthodox Churches. Hence along with respected primates of Eastern Orthodox hierarchy the full presence of Oriental Orthodox Churches must be the first priority, instead of debating about the Roman Catholic People, the Vatican high level delegation and the possibility of their presence for the great anniversary. Anyhow the celebrations of the Edict of Milan remained completely an Eastern Orthodox event, with no representation from any of the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

### **The Orthodox Christian Brotherhood**

We Orthodox Christians need to build a global brotherhood of all Orthodox Churches in order to get a common voice in the world, with the full respect for the nature of each Orthodox Church. We need to have a federation of Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Orthodox old Believers and all Orthodox together in conciliar nature. It is not good to overlook Oriental Orthodox Christians, saying that they are Non-Chalcedonians. What a good Orthodox theologian knows is that Oriental Orthodox Churches share the same faith and Christology. We need Orthodox military, political, social, economic alliance for good reasons, to defend ourselves and to block external threats. The Orthodox Christian brotherhood does not aim at extremist activities, but it should be an international Orthodox Christian alliance; a conciliar system of world orthodox synod, for unity and to defend the rights of Orthodox Christians and to create a common orthodox voice for peace, justice and equality.

If we had this alliance we could have avoided the separation of Kosovo, the fall of Serbian Krajina as well as sufferings of Orthodox Christians worldwide. If all Orthodox

Churches can be a part of WCC and participate in dialogue with Vatican, then what is the big problem in having a Global Orthodox brotherhood?

**Rise up Serbia**

Rise up Serbia, Rise up and defend your nation from all evil. Let us build the nation where our future generations can live without fear, free to decide their course of life by themselves.

## **Chapter 13**

### **Holy Brahmavar**

George Alexander and Subin Varghese

The little known Brahmavar Orthodox Community deserves a very special status in the history of the Malankara Orthodox Church. The Indian Church which for centuries had been confined within the boundaries of Kerala obtained a national outreach when the former Roman Catholic Priest, Antonio Francisco Xavier Alvarez (1836-1923) and his community united with the Mother Orthodox Church and he received episcopal consecration as Metropolitan of the Diocese of Ceylon, Goa and India (Malabar excluded).

#### **Historical Background**

Brahmavar is a small town located in the Uduppi Taluk in the State of Karnataka in India. The town is thirteen kilometers away from Uduppi and is surrounded by the Kalliyampur River. In the year 1678 a Roman Catholic Church (St Milagaris) was established in Brahmavar by the Padroado Missionaries who were under the authority of the Portuguese queen. The Church was destroyed by Tippu Sultan in 1784, but was reconstructed in 1806.

The power struggle between Portuguese Missionaries and Propaganda Communities had its effects on Brahmavar. The majority of the people supported the Portuguese Missionaries and the Padroado Community. They strongly opposed the Propaganda Community and the Roman Pope. Those who supported the Propaganda Community built Mount Rosary (1856) Church, which is only one kilometre away from St. Milagaris Church.

In 1886 a Concordat was signed between the Papacy and the Portuguese King by which St.Milagiris Church of Brahmavar became part of the Propaganda Community. Brahmavar Christians petitioned both the Pope and the Portuguese King to reconsider the decision, but Rome did not reply favorably. 'The peace pact cannot be altered for three or

four fishermen in Goa or for some drunkards and trouble makers in Kalliyampur'. The response from Rome was not at all satisfactory and it was an insult to the entire Brahmavar Christians. As a result the members of St. Milagiris Church, under the leadership of Father R. L. Nuronah, protested against the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

In December 1889 Fr. Alvarez travelled Mangalore. He understood the real situation in Brahmavar and organized the discontented believers. A new Church was built for them in Brahmavar. Fr. Nuronah was influenced by Fr. Alvarez and he was attracted towards the teachings of the Orthodox Church. Fr. Nuronah was given the leadership of the Brahmavar Orthodox Church, which had a membership of 4,000 families. In the year 1889 on Easter Day Fr. Nuronah celebrated Divine Liturgy (Latin Holy Mass) in the newly built Orthodox Church.

### **His Grace Mor Julius Alvarez 1836-1923**

A former Roman Catholic Priest who joined the Indian Orthodox Church, Fr. Alvarez was consecrated as Metropolitan by authority of the Patriarch of Antioch. Fr. Alvarez was the first person to reunite with the Orthodox Church from the Roman Catholic Latin Rite in India. Metropolitan Alvarez was very much persecuted by the Roman Catholics. He devoted most of his life serving leprosy patients and poor sections of society but he also fought a brave war to protect the Orthodox faith irrespective of the cruelty inflicted on him and his followers by the Roman Church.

Sadly he died in reduced circumstances and was buried in one of the Municipal Graveyards in Panaji (Goa) without receiving either an Orthodox Christian funeral or the traditional burial accorded to an Orthodox prelate, on account of Roman persecution. Today he is regarded as the Hero of the Reunion Movement in India. Later his relics were recovered and moved to St Mary's Orthodox Church in Panaji in 1979 under the direction of His Holiness Mar Thoma Matthews I, Catholicos of the East.

### **Saintly Padre Roche Lopez Nuronah**

Padre Nuronah was born in 1850. After completing basic education he joined the Rachol Royal Seminary in Goa, having been awarded a scholarship. After completing his seminary education he was ordained a Roman Catholic priest on 12 March 1881 by Bishop Thomas De Almeda. He served as the assistant vicar of Salvador De Monte Church. Later Father Nurorah became the Vicar of Panaji Ribandr Church and finally reached Brahmavar, where he was united with the Orthodox Church.

Padre Nuronah was a multi-functional personality. He was a great educator, a spiritual father, writer, and social reformer. Joining the Orthodox Church gave Padre Nuronah great trouble. He was always threatened by the Roman Catholic Church but he was very much loved by the Brahmavar residents. He was very particular and strict about the Orthodox faith, especially the prayers and sacraments. He encouraged many people to participate in prayers through house visits. On many occasions the Catholic Church tried to entice Brahmavar Orthodox Christians to join the Roman Church by offering rosaries, pictures of saints and other valuable gifts, but Padre Nuronah successfully blocked all Roman attempts and strengthened his faithful in the Orthodox faith.

He wrote a total of eight books of which five are still available: The Hidden Treasure, Mor Julius Alvarez (1929), Mutual Differences (1930), Syrian Catholics and Roman Catholics Compared (1934), A History of Rome (1934). In his books Padre Nuronah publicly challenged the Roman Catholics and biblically proved that St. Peter never reached Rome nor ever founded the Church in Rome and he emphatically denied that St. Peter established his throne (Eee) in Rome. He also challenged the Catholics to pay 500 rupees (which was a considerable amount then) or prove that he was wrong and declared that he would definitely return to the Roman Church if they could prove him wrong, but no one took up his challenge.

He showed great vision in establishing educational institutions, founding the Cosmopolitan School as the first basic educational institution in Brahmavar. The school attracted many students irrespective of caste, creed or sex. Padre Nuronah provided great

relief for many people who suffered from different kinds of diseases and treated many people, providing them with food and shelter. Hundreds found relief under his care.

Towards the end of his life he suffered from diabetes. He was persecuted by the Roman Catholic community which tried to force him back to the Roman Church. They even obtained an order from the local authorities to admit him to the nearest hospital, a suspicious admission which might have jeopardized his life. Providentially the timely intervention by Fr. P. G. Varghese saved him from the cruel hands of Roman Catholics, whilst the District Collector Humayun made an order in which he effectively blocked the Roman Catholics from entering the Brahmavar Church.

Two years before his death it is recorded that a cross appeared on his back and on 23 July 1936 Padre R. L. Nuronah gave his last breath. He was buried at St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral in Brahmavar. It is reported that a large number of people, especially non-Christians, have received blessings by his intercession after his death and even today thousands still seek favors at his tomb. He is regarded as the Unsung Hero of the Reunion Movement and for the Brahmavarians, he is a saint who intercedes to God for the wellbeing of their entire community.

### **Growth and decline**

Initially the missionary activities of Metropolitan Mor Julius Alvarez gained a large number of members for the Orthodox Church in places like Goa, Brahmavar, Mangalore, Tangavoor, Dindigal, Tiruchirappalli and Ceylon, but a lack of proper care from the Church hierarchy resulted in the gradual disintegration of these communities. Today there are around 850 Orthodox Christian families surviving in Brahmavar, largely due to the dynamic leadership of Padre Nuronah.

Alongside Padre Nuronah, the community was also faithfully served by priests such as Fr. P. G. Koshy (1890-1935), Fr. K. K. Kuriakos (1904-1986), Fr. K. T. Varghese (1912-1986), and Fr Damian. These priests completely devoted their skills, time and energy for the growth of Brahmavar Community and acted as strong bridges of communication

between the Malankara Orthodox Church and the Brahmavar Orthodox Christians. Their hard work helped Orthodoxy to survive in Brahmavar. The present Cathedral (St Mary's Syrian Cathedral) was rebuilt during the times of Fr P. G. Koshy.

### **Renewed growth**

In 1986 the Very Rev Archimandrite Dr. N. J. Thomas was installed as the Vicar General of the Brahmavar Orthodox community. The next two decades were considered to be the golden era of this community. He introduced the celebration of the East Syrian liturgy for all Sundays, whereas earlier it had been celebrated only once in a month. The liturgical services were held in the Latin Rite with its Konkini and Kannada translations. Though many were hesitant to accept this change in the beginning, later the entire community accepted the beauty of the Eastern Liturgy and prayers. Konkini is the local language and Kannada is the regional language. Hieromonk G. M. Scariah took over the administration of Brahmavar on the retirement of Archimandrite Dr. N J Thomas. He was succeeded as Vicar General by Fr. Lawrence David Crasta but in 2010 the Holy Synod of the Malankara Orthodox Church elevated the Brahmavar Vicariate to the status of a Diocese of the Indian Church with His Grace Mor Elias Yacob (formerly Father V.M. James, Superior of Mount Horeb Ashraman at Sasthamkotta) as its Metropolitan.

### **Statistics**

The Brahmavar Orthodox Church is centered on twenty five acre site and comprises some eight hundred and fifty families. St. Mary's Cathedral (pictured on page 106) is the mother church, on which depend five chapels (Sastan, Kurady, Kolalgiri, Kandloor, Hulikal) with congregations in Mumbai, Bangalore, Mandya, Kuwait and the UAE, served by the Metropolitan and five priests (Fr. David Crasta, Vicar General- Brahmavarian; Fr. Lawrence D' Souza, Brahmavarian; Fr. D. A. Johnson; Fr. V. M. Geevarghese and Fr. Abraham Kuriakos.

Under the auspices of the OSC Educational Society, which serves as the Apex Body to deal with the general administration and management of funds, there is a SMS Degree College; two Cosmopolitan Higher Primary Schools; a SMS Pre-University College; a

SMS English Medium School (State Syllabus) and a SMS English Medium School (CBSE). These institutions are well managed with high quality faculties and infrastructure facilities and are leading educational institutions in Brahmavar.

### **Unique Characteristics**

The Brahmavar Orthodox Christians have a number of peculiar characteristics with regard to their culture, tradition, life style and prayer habits. There is no monthly subscription for Parish members. Along with the orthodox feasts (Perunnal), they also celebrate the memorial feast of Metropolitan Julius Alvarez (September 23) and Fr Nuronah (July 23). All Orthodox prayers have been translated to Konkni and Kannada. There are two feasts which are celebrated as part of the Latin tradition, Memorial service of All Saints (November 1) and memorial service of All Souls (November 2). The person who sponsors a major feast is known by the name 'Sirginth'. He wore a special dress and carries an iron rod during the procession.

Following a visit by a delegation from the Orthodoxy Cognate PAGE Society delegation in November 2009 this report was submitted with a number of key resolutions and submitted to the Holy Episcopal Synod of the Indian Orthodox Malankara Church and was published online. It played a vital role in raising concerns about this neglected mission of the church and was instrumental in the re-establishment of a specific episcopal diocese for Brahmavar after a gap of eighty-seven years.



## **Chapter 14**

### **An Exclusive Interview with His Eminence Metropolitan Abba Seraphim of Glastonbury**

George Alexander

His Eminence Metropolitan Abba Seraphim of Glastonbury is the Head of the British Orthodox Church. He was interviewed on 18, 2010 at Cochin, Kerala, India. Meeting with the Metropolitan took place at Cochin, the most important centre of Christian concentration in the State of Kerala.

#### **British Orthodox Church**

The British Orthodox Church is a local church, anxious to bring the Orthodox faith to the people of our country. We work closely with the other Orthodox churches but our ministry is for the British people who desire to become Orthodox. Our particular mission is to bring Orthodoxy to our people.

#### **His Eminence Abba Seraphim**

I am entirely of English descent. I was brought up as a nominal Anglican but I converted to Orthodoxy when I was about sixteen. My mother's cousin was the previous Metropolitan of the British Orthodox Church who introduced me to Orthodoxy when I first met him in my teens. Eventually I was ordained by him and eventually succeeded him. Between us we have looked after the Church for the past sixty-six years. I was trained as a school master, in my early days teaching English in secondary schools.

#### **What Attracted Your Eminence to Orthodoxy?**

I wasn't happy with the Anglican Church; its reformed nature is not consistent with the Apostolic Tradition. I was looking for a church with an authentic apostolic witness. I was initially attracted to the Roman Catholic faith and sometimes attended mass with my friends, but I never wanted to join them, since to me they appeared 'foreign.' There was something alien in the Roman Catholic spirituality to me. When I came to Orthodoxy I discovered the richness of the apostolic tradition in its fullness and it didn't bother me that there would be services in different languages. Its catholicity seems to be expressed

in the fact that it encompasses people from the ice-bound northern Russian Steppes to the warm shores of Kerala. Orthodoxy certainly possesses true catholicity, although sometimes our mentality may appear to be narrow.

### **The BOC relationship with Sister Orthodox churches and other Non-orthodox Churches**

We work actively through the Council of Oriental Orthodox Churches in the United Kingdom. We also participate in a forum with the Roman Catholic and also with the Anglican Church, which each meet every six months. These Forums are there to reflect at local level, the main international dialogue. They are not the big theological debates at international level but work at the local level to find ways of cooperating and witnessing together.

### **On Eastern - Oriental Orthodox Dialogue**

This is the most promising of all dialogues because already we have reached an agreement that we share a common faith and tradition. Diversity is desirable. The Oriental Orthodox Churches each have wonderful local traditions and diversity. We also enjoy very good relations with our sister Eastern Orthodox Churches. In our ECL delegation we have our dear friend, Archimandrite Deiniol here, who is the director of the Wales Orthodox Mission of the Ukrainian Archdiocese within the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Even though we are not in formal communion we work as if we are one. We cooperate in many areas.

### **Relationship between the British Orthodox Church and the Indian Orthodox Church**

I am impressed by the high educational standards of the Indian Orthodox Church. Your seminaries promote Orthodox scholarship and education and this is reflected by the clergy I meet. In the United Kingdom we actively co-operate: our priests and people attend Indian Orthodox Church services in Britain and we have made available some of our church building for Indian Orthodox use. We are delighted to have among us Dr. Mathews Mor Timotheos as the Metropolitan of the UK Diocese of the Indian Church

who is also the Chairman of the Council of Oriental Orthodox Churches in the UK. I would like to have closer relation with the Orthodox Theological Seminary at Kottayam. A number of our clergy are good academics and it would be interesting to have some formal interchange. We would love to work with anyone who has a wide Orthodox vision. In some ways there is a common history between BOC and IOC since we both originate from the Syriac Orthodox tradition. Both churches are looking to present Orthodoxy to our people in our own culture and there is an inherent mission in that.

### **BOC Clergy Training**

Unfortunately we don't yet have our own seminary. Several of our clergy have studied at secular universities or part-time at Anglican Theological seminaries. We have priests with good educational standards, but we find it difficult in finding new priests. There are a number of good converts in BOC, but if their wives are not Orthodox they are not eligible. We can ordain them only if their wives are also Orthodox. We have the old-fashioned monitorial system where potential ordinands are attached to one of the senior priests or to me, as the bishop. In that way and through guided study, they are prepared for their roles as deacons and priests. I am the only bishop and was consecrated in 1977, succeeding my elderly cousin when he died in 1979.

### **Converts**

All our members are converts but it is not that easy to be an Orthodox Christian. People must have a full commitment to the Orthodox life in all its aspects. You can't become Orthodox just because you have a problem with the Anglican Church or you want to change your denominational affiliation. There must be a total commitment to the Orthodox faith and tradition, a commitment to serve and worship the Lord in the Orthodox way.

### **BOC Relations with Coptic Orthodox Church**

We are the same church and I am a member of the Coptic Holy Synod under His Holiness Pope Shenouda III (until October 2015). We have three Egyptian Coptic Bishops in the United Kingdom (Bishop Antony for the Coptic Orthodox diocese of

Scotland, Ireland & North-East England; Bishop Missael of the diocese of Birmingham, in the Midlands and General Bishop Angelos at the Coptic Centre in Stevenage, just outside London). We are very close. After their ordination several of our BOC clergy spend their “forty days” training with Coptic clergy. We also give our support for Coptic Christians suffering problems for their faith and visit the mother church frequently.

### **On Eastern Christian Links**

Eastern Christian Links (ECL) – “Reconnecting East and West” is an ecumenical Christian initiative founded in 2004 by Nicholas Crampton, a Norfolk lawyer to encourage local Churches to explore the history, liturgy and traditions of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches. He felt that many Christians in the west have limited knowledge of the Oriental Orthodox and Eastern Churches. I am a Patron of Eastern Christian links. He wanted to make people more aware, so he approached his local Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops and he approached me. We all gave our blessing to this ecumenical project and I helped lead our first trip abroad was to South-Eastern Turkey, where we encountered Greek, Armenian and Syrian Orthodox Christians. We found that we could share these spiritual experiences, even though we are from diverse backgrounds. That is valuable.

### **The Kerala Experience**

It has been wonderful. I’ve read about Kerala and the Indian Church in books and met clergy and faithful in England, so in that way I am familiar with the history of the Indian church, but it is not the same as experiencing the life of the church on its own soil. I am indeed fascinated to see and meet the Indian Church in all its richness and vitality. It had always been my desire to pray at the shrine of Saint Gregorios at Parumala and that was something precious and memorable. This has been a true pilgrimage.

### **On Orthodoxy Cognate PAGE Society**

I am always excited by anything that promotes Orthodoxy. The work of OCP crossing the boundaries and promoting unity between the two families is something very close to my heart. We had talks in Stockholm on how we could push forward the dialogue between

our two Orthodox families. It is sometimes frustrating that we are not moving as quickly as we might wish, but these things are in God's hand. It is good that the OCP work is coming from the ground level, from the bottom up. I think it is very important because the dialogue papers all talk about going back and telling our people. I see that is beginning to happen especially among the educated youth in the Church. I hope it will be one of several vehicles to that promotes Orthodox Unity.

*Additional Note:*

The British Orthodox Church is no more part of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate since October, 2015. It remains an independent Orthodox jurisdiction. On 4 October 2015 the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, in response to a request from the British Orthodox Church, "in the same spirit with which this union came into being", agreed to the British Orthodox Church returning to its pre-1994 status "in fulfilment to what it sees as its current mission in the light of the developments and changing dynamics of the Middle East and Britain."

\* The British Orthodox website spoke of it "amicably returning to its original status in order to fulfil its mission more effectively.

## Chapter 15

### **A British Journey to Ethiopian Orthodoxy**

George Alexander

*The amazing journey of Dr Ralph and his family to the indigenous Church of Africa*

Dr Ralph Lee was born in Cambridge, England and raised as an Anglican. After his schooling he joined Cambridge University for bachelors in engineering and graduated in the year 1987. He later obtained Masters in Engineering and started his job in BP. He visited Ethiopia on long leave from his job and taught in Addis Ababa University for two years at the faculty of Technology.

His life in Addis Ababa brought him close to Orthodox Christianity. He understood that Orthodoxy is the heartbeat of Ethiopia. The outlook and general worldview of the Ethiopians is in connection to the Orthodox tradition. He wanted to learn more on Orthodox Christianity. Dr Ralph and his family moved to Bahar Dhar a sea side in Ethiopia and applied for a teaching post in one of the universities. The place was a prominent centre of Ethiopian Orthodox Church which helped him to access a lot of Ethiopian Orthodox Monasteries. He began to learn Amharic to know more about Ethiopian Church and tradition. He also involved with a lot of youngsters and made spiritual discussions with them. One of his students once commented that if Dr Ralph was formally Orthodox it would be more helpful and this question made Dr Ralph think to be join the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. He got introduced to an Ethiopian Monk Abbayibbabe who is prominent figure and authority on Ethiopian spirituality. The Monk asked Ralf why he was there and what he was doing with the Ethiopian Church. Dr Ralph replied that he is there to help the Ethiopian children and the monk immediately replied that, it is God's will that brought Dr Ralph and his family to Ethiopia.

After some more years Dr Ralph and his wife formally joined the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. They were baptized at the Abbo Church at Bahar Dhar in the year 2001 by the names Abraham and Sarah. They remained in Bahar Dhar till 2005 and returned back to England for another eight years. He decided to learn more deep on Orthodox Christianity.

He joined SOAS for Masters in Eastern Christianity and also completed his doctorate under the supervision of Dr Erica hunter in 2007 on Comparison of Ethiopian and Syriac Early Christian Writing. After his studies at SOAS, he began to contact the Holy Trinity Theological College in Addis Ababa and applied for the post of faculty which was accepted by the authorities. Presently Dr Ralph teaches textual history of Ethiopian Old Testament, Ethiopian Christian Thought and he is also involved in a number of projects.

Joining Orthodoxy is not a rejection of his Anglican past, believes Dr Ralph. He has always struggled with how the Roman Catholic Church is run. The Roman Church is still bounded by structure and hierarchy. The roots of Orthodoxy are persuasive and the outlook is constructive. Theological values are clearly explained in Orthodoxy. Dr Ralph is of the opinion that the world Christian movement must learn a lot from Oriental Orthodox Christianity.

## **Chapter16**

### **A Briefing on the Ethiopian Orthodox Church**

Fr Dr Jossi Jacob

Fr Dr Jossi Jacob (Faculty at Holy Trinity Theological College in Ethiopia) was interviewed by Mr George Alexander (Secretary of OCP Society). Fr Dr Jossi briefs on Ethiopian Orthodox Church, its mission, theological education, monasteries, late Patriarch Abune Paulose and so on. Fr Dr Jossi is also the Indian Malankara Orthodox Church delegate to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

#### **The Ethiopian Orthodox Church**

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church claims its earliest origins to be Philip the Evangelist one of the seven deacons who appears several times in the Acts of the Apostles. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is one of the ancient Churches in the world with a current membership of 45 million within Ethiopia and in the diaspora. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church enjoys special status within Ethiopia. It is the largest of all Oriental Orthodox Churches, and the second largest Orthodox Church in the world just behind the Russian Orthodox.

#### **Late Patriarch Abuna Paulose**

Patriarch Abune Paulose was a person of great vision who revamped the administration of the Ethiopian church to higher professional levels. The Patriarch played an important role in restoring reconciliation with the Coptic Church, also in maintaining peace and prosperity in Ethiopia. The Patriarch maintained good ties with government and with sister Orthodox Churches. The Patriarch was a great scholar and man of immense love and wit.

#### **Theological Education**

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has three Theological Colleges namely Holy Trinity Theological College, St Paul's Theological College (Addis Ababa) and St. Frumentius Theological College (situated in Mek'ele 800 km away from Addis Ababa). Holy Trinity Theological College is the major institution which provides Diploma, Bachelor's degree



and Master's degree in Theology. Holy Trinity Theological College in Addis Ababa has day and evening batch of students. The evening batch is open to lay men and Priests. There has been a great motivation for the laymen to study theology and the Ethiopian Church encourages this attitude. There is a regular batch of 200 students (all together for four years) in Holy Trinity College and an evening batch of 240 students. Admissions are only open to members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church which includes men, women and Clergy. The Holy Trinity Theological College plans to expand itself to a University College and finally a full-fledged University. New building has been constructed within the College campus to accommodate the growing number of students. Seminaries are considered to be minor training centres and the Ethiopian Church still follows monastery and church oriented basic formation for Clergy. The Church and monasteries act as Clergy training centres.

### **Ethiopian Tradition, Icons, Churches and Monasteries**

The Ethiopian Church has a great Enthusiasm in presenting Church art, iconography and ancient artefacts in natural way. The Ethiopians are very proud and particular in preserving their traditions. The icons and other artefacts of the Church are preserved in a natural way. They are preserved in monasteries and churches themselves in their original form. Even though there are museums the Church has an active interest in preserving its antiquity without detaching them from the original context. The Ethiopian Orthodox monastic system is very strong and they also act as centres of iconography training. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is very committed to preserve the eco system. Each Church and monastery has small forest attached to them and the Late Patriarch Abuna Paulose was particular about maintaining the ecological balance.

### **Ethiopian Orthodox Mission**

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has its own missions and spreads the mission in the diaspora region. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has got a very strong mission in the Caribbean Islands. Around sixty Anglican congregations joined the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in South Africa. The end of colonial rule in Africa and the importance 'Africanism' made these people to think more about their cultural roots and reviving their

traditional Christian faith and they could easily find it in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church which has its own African indigenous nature, culture traditions and history. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church enjoys special privilege in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is the only two religious groups that are exempted from any kind of governmental registration. All other religious organizations must be registered as NGO with the Ethiopian government.

### **Inter-Orthodox Relations of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church**

Ethiopia has the presence of Coptic, Armenian and Greek Orthodox (Alexandrian Orthodox Patriarchate) communities. The Coptic Orthodox Church has maintained a permanent office in the capital city. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church enjoys fraternal relations with the Eastern Orthodox Churches. It had good ties with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The Metropolitan Petros of the Greek Orthodox community in Ethiopia share fraternal relations with the Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarchate. The Patriarch has also met Metropolitan Hilarion of the Russian Orthodox Church and discussed the possibility of sending Ethiopian Theological student to Russian Orthodox Universities for education and training. Abuna Pulose had begun to work for great council of Oriental Orthodox Churches. The last council was held under the Patronage of His Highness Haile Selassie in Addis Ababa in the year 1965.

### **Ecumenical Relations**

There exist working relations with the Ethiopian Catholic Rite and Latin Catholic Church. The Ethiopia Orthodox community does not have much interest in the Ethiopian Catholic Rite. There are several evangelical denominations and the Ethiopian Orthodox Churches does not enjoy good relations with these communities as they target Orthodox Christians and convert them giving money and other material benefits. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has maintained historical respect with the Anglican Church. The Anglican Church had signed a document with the late His Majesty Haile Selassie I the late Emperor of Ethiopia which prevents conversion of Ethiopian Orthodox Christians to Anglican Church. Though the document does not have any legal validity now, the Anglican Church still adheres to the same.

## Chapter 17

### Letters from Syria

Metropolitan Eusthathios Matta Roham

(Contributions from Metropolitan Mor Selwanos Boutros Alnemeh, Metropolitan Mor Timotheos Matta Alkhouri, Fr. Zakka Jalma and Fr. Joseph Bali)

These are collection of letters written by His Eminence Metropolitan Eusthathios Matta Roham on the conditions of the Christians during the Syrian Uprising. The letters were published in OCP Media Network.

#### Letter I

*Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,*

*I greet you in the Name of Christ our Lord and Savior. I am grateful to God that the Internet is still functioning in Hassake. I am delighted to update you about the latest news from Jazirah Archdiocese - 12/11/2012*

#### Ras Al-Ayn

This morning, it was arranged for Father Touma Qas Ibrahim, our priest of St. Thomas Church in Ras Al-Ayn, to go into the town in order to bring our prayer Books, especially the old hand written books. We are grateful to God that Father Touma went in and out the church peacefully. Father Touma told me that the town is now under the control of the opposition, and there was shooting heard in some places. He was able to bring with him one family (Hannawi Family), who could not flee on last Thursday when the town was occupied at about 2:00 a.m. in by the opposition. People left behind them their properties and valuable things, and now it is very risky for them to go into the town. It seems that the current fighting in the town will bring destruction to it. The destiny of our Christian community and churches as well as other communities in Ras Al-Ayn is not going to be better than the destiny of other towns, like Dair Al-Zor and Homs.

## **Derbasieh**

Yesterday afternoon, 9 November, Father Michael Yacoub of St. Osyo Church in Derbasieh left the town with his family and arrived in Hassake, where the headquarters of the Archdiocese is. On the road to Hassaka, He called me from his cell phone and said that he had to rush out with his family for their safety, without thinking to bring any valuable Church books. When he arrived in Hassake, I learnt from him that there was a call upon people to leave their homes, and it was said that the opposition is on the Turkish border, and is ready to occupy the town. He said that there was shooting in the air when he left Derbasieh. In the evening, Father Michael made contacts with his friends from the Kurdish community, and they told him that the town is in peace, and the opposition did not cross the border. He said that there was a deal made between the opposition and the Kurdish community in town. The opposition told the Kurdish people in Derbasieh, who count the majority in town, to ask the government officials to leave the town; otherwise the opposition will cross the border and move them out. The government officials accepted the offer to move out without fighting. When I asked Father Michael about the shouting, he said: it was a kind of a game to give people the impression that the situation is a very delicate one. Also, he said that they told him later the shooting was an expression of joy to reach a successful deal by saving the lives of many people. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of November, Father Michael went back to Derbasieh and he called me from there and conveyed that the town is in peace. I receive many calls from different churches, especially from Kamishly. They need to know what has happened and what could happen to large towns like Kamishly and Hassake in my Archdiocese.

There is a great fear among families of different communities about their future. People are so afraid of a real war, which might happen at any time between Turkey and Syria, because of the Turkish clear interference in the Syrian crises. This war could lead other counties into regional war. People are so worried about their children, women and properties. Many of them are getting themselves ready to immigrate to Europe and to other safe neighboring countries. It is very difficult to say what could happen tomorrow. *All we need now is your prayers for peace, and your support to end this evil fighting.*

## **Letter II**

*Archbishop Eustathius Matta Roham of Jazirah & Euphrates of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch and All East situation in Syria, particularly in Kamishly and Hassake - 23/11/2012*

The conterminous conflict in Syria has caused division among communities in many places, and destruction to many urban areas. On the other hand, it created solidarity among the majority of people to refuse the concept of fighting and take care of the suffering families. It is hard to believe that some images of destruction in our country are similar to those images of devastation in World WAR I & II. It will take us many years to rebuild both souls and stones in our country. I pray that justice and peace will prevail at the end of this chaos situation.

The current circumstances in my Archdiocese are very hazy. People have a lot of fears, especially in Kamishly and Hassake. There are more than 400,000 inhabitants living in each of these two large towns. The percentage of Christians in each one is about 20%. Thousands of families moved into Kamishly and Hassake after leaving their ruined homes in other parts of the country. These two towns have become a safe haven for thousands of displaced families. If one day, God forbid, these two towns are destroyed, there will be a real big disaster for thousands of families.

I kindly and urgently ask your efforts to convey our call to the international bodies and officials that this region may remain a safe haven for all, in order to save the lives of thousands of families, and our towns from a definite destruction.

I am full of trust that the Lord will bless your work, and our people will enjoy fruits of your peaceful efforts. We pray for God's wisdom to lead all parties towards a peaceful solution in Syria.

The Archbishop also thanked Orthodoxy Cognate PAGE for the continued support to Christians in Syria and nearby regions. In the email addressed to OCP Secretary George Alexander Archbishop wrote “Thank you very much for your supporting email. Your spiritual words bring to our hearts a great comfort, trust and hope. They echo the encouraging words of St. Paul to the Romans: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”.(Romans 15:13).”

### **Letter III**

*Archbishop Eustathius Matta Roham of the Syriac Orthodox Church explains the sad plight of Christians in different parts of Syria, destruction of Churches, schools, Mosques as well as the welfare activities run by the Syriac Orthodox Church to help people in distress - 28/12/2012*

*Peace and greetings to you in Christ our Lord and Redeemer. As Christendom in many parts of the world is celebrating the Nativity of our Lord and the New Year, I am hopeful that Christ will never forget the people of Syria and all humanity to bring them peace and justice. It is my pleasure to wish you on these two holy occasions, a Merry Christmas & a Happy New Year.*

### **Present Situation**

The present situation in our area is very difficult and our future is vague. People fear that the fighting in most parts of Syria might move one day to our area, and it will bring to us death and destruction. This feeling has become very close to reality, especially when fighters moved to the little town of Ras Al-Ayn on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2012. Ras al-Ayn is located on the Turkish border and is one hour drive from our Archdiocese Headquarters in Hassake. This town used to be a very peaceful town, but is now a town of death. On 10<sup>th</sup> December 2012, I arranged a visit for Father Touma Qas Ibrahim to Ras Al-Ayn to

make a check up on his Church of St. Thomas and other churches in town. The attached photos give you an idea about the empty damaged town.

People have lived in peace for many years in Jazirah, the Syrian part of historical Mesopotamia. The Church has put a great effort to create harmony among all communities, especially among Arabs and Kurds. On 5<sup>th</sup> December 2012, the Christian clergymen conducted ecumenical prayers for peace at Syrian Orthodox Cathedral of St. George in Hassake, and invited both Arabs and Kurds to attend the prayer service and delivered messages of peace to people. This was a very important event for us to achieve, because both Arabs and Kurds did not meet together since the trouble began in March 2011.

The region of Jazirah has received a large number of displaced families, who came to live in the towns of Hassake and Kamishly. These two towns have become now a safe haven for tens of thousands of families, who ran away from the areas of fighting. The population of people in both Hassake and Kamishly has almost doubled. We pray that these two towns stay away from the conflict in order to avoid a definite human catastrophe.

Indeed, it is a pity to see the war in Syria is still going on, and more prices for death, destruction, misery and pain are paid by the innocent people. The local and international absence of the spirit of reconciliation has brought the country to such a chaos situation. The Church in Syria, like all other communities, has suffered so much of this ungodly war.

In addition to all these difficulties, people endure many experience other problems like: inflation, poverty, growing of sectarian enmity, revenge, shortage of supplies in kind of food and fuel, very cold weather, kidnapping of children, men and elderly persons for big amount of ransom, refugee immigration, more than 12 hours electricity cut, risks of traveling, frequent internet cut off and many other difficulties in day to day life.

Syrian Orthodox church has initiated activities for peace, charity to the poor and the damages made to our churches in Dair Al-Zor, Ras Al-Ayne and Homs. The images of destruction bleed the heart of humanity.

Asking your prayers for peace in Syria, I wish you success and prosperity.

#### **Letter IV**

*Dear brother in Christ*

*Peace and greetings to you in the Name of Christ our Lord.*

*I hope this finds you well, and may God shower upon you all the blessings of Christmas throughout the New Year – 15/01/2013*

This morning I made a visit to The National Park in Hassake, which lately faced a very big disaster. The poor Bedouins from the suburbs of Hassake have cut off the old trees there. I chat with some people during my visit to find out why this is happening. Some of these people were staff persons, who were very disappointed with what is going on. They said: we cannot stop the poor and the policemen came once and they gave up now and they let the poor cut off all the trees. I asked those who were cutting and carrying the wood: why they do this? The answer came: “we are poor and we have nothing to live on. The weather is very cold and we need to warm our houses and make our living”.

I feel very sorry for what is going on in Syria. In addition to deaths, destruction, inflation, poverty, displacement, immigration, kidnapping, etc., now one more sin is committed against nature and environment, which is cutting off the trees. The cutting of trees has happened all over the country, because of lack of fuel for heating, long hours and days of electricity short cut, and poverty. People do not have money to buy oil. They bought this cold winter wood stoves to heat their houses, because it is cheaper for them to use wood.



### **Christian Homes Robbed in Ras Al-Ayn**

I heard this evening of painful news from Ras Al-Ayn. I was told that some people from Idleb area in Syria came to Ras Al-Ayn, which is on the Turkish border in my Archdiocese, and robbed all the houses of Christians in this little town. It was more than two months ago that Ras Al-Ayn was under fire by the clashes between the rebels and the regime. The Christians of Ras Al-Ayn left the town to seek a safe haven in Hassake and the neighboring countries. Every day, there are losses in Syria, and peace is far away from the hearts of the fighting parties.

God have mercy.

I thank you so much for creating awareness about us, wishing you peace and prosperity.

### **Letter V**

*His Eminence Eustathius Matta Roham*

*Metropolitan of Jazirah & Euphrates*

*Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and All East - 27/01/2013*

It was about six months ago that kidnapping of innocent people started to take place in the city of Hassake, which is located in north-east Syria. Today, kidnapping has become a daily phenomenon in the city streets. Kidnappers do not hesitate to commit their crimes even in the daylight. About three weeks ago, three men, without covering their faces, stopped a taxi by using heavy weapons and grabbed a 10 year old boy, Saeed Afram Aho, while he was on his way to Al-Nahda Primary School. The kidnappers treated this little boy very badly, as they do with all of their victims.

People believe there are two or three gangs in Hassake who are responsible for this kind of crime. The total number of victims in Hassake has reached 43 people. The victims are from all components of Hassake society: Christians, Muslims, Yazidy, Kurds and Arabs. They are also of different ages: children, men and elderly. They belong to all fields of life: students, doctors, engineers, merchants and ordinary people.

All the families of the kidnapped persons have gone through very difficult times during the period of kidnapping. Fear has become a common pain and concern to all inhabitants of Hassake. The kidnappers are using many forms of torture against their innocent victims, regardless of the victim's age or health condition. They violate all religious virtues and human morals to get a high ransom. The Aho family paid seven million Syrian Pounds, which is equivalent to 200,000 Euros before the Syrian crisis, in order to free their little boy Saeed. Another little boy, Bashar Georges, was kidnapped about four months ago. His very poor parents collected 200,000 Syrian Pounds from friends to pay the kidnappers. Bashar was left for two days without food and drink in an underground cell on a farm far away from the city. He was able to ascertain each new day from a beam of light that came through a very small hole in the roof. The barking of dogs and the crying of roosters and hens told him he was imprisoned on a farm.

The community feels that the kidnapping problem has not been taken seriously by government officials in Hassake, even though the crime falls under their area of responsibility. Many believe the kidnappings in Hassake have been carried out with an aim to purposely and systematically change the demography of the city. Most of the early victims were Christians. Today, many Christian families have fled Hassake to seek peace in neighboring countries in the West.

The three bishops in Hassake – Mor Yacoub Behnan Hendo of the Syrian Catholic Church, Mar Afrem Nathanael of the Assyrian Church and Mor Eustathius Matta Roham of the Syrian Orthodox Church meet regularly to discuss many issues of concern, including kidnapping. After the kidnapping of little Saeed Aho, the three bishops decided to hold a general meeting at the Syrian Orthodox Headquarters on Monday, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2013, for Christian and Muslim clergymen, highly influential and notable persons, and NGO activists from all components of Hassake society. The families of the kidnapped persons were also invited to tell their painful stories and to speak about the mental and physical suffering they experienced. In this meeting, a decision was taken to form “The Association of Solidarity with Kidnapped Persons’ Families” (ASKPF). Professionals were named as members of this association and given the trust to act on

behalf of all. ASKPF immediately held its first meeting and elected Mr. Aref Hamza, a human rights activist and a lawyer, to be its coordinator.

On Thursday, 24<sup>th</sup> January 2013, ASKPF organized a public march to raise awareness and present community concerns to the local government officials. Christian and Muslim clergymen, the leaders of both Arabs and Kurds, the families of victims and many NGOs activists marched together from the Syrian Orthodox Church Headquarters to the City Court House. More than three thousand people gathered in front of the City Court House. They held signs in both Arabic and English to express their suffering and demands. While different TV channels were interviewing people, members of ASKPF went into the City Court House and presented a memorandum to the Public Prosecutor demanding that he fulfill his duties by arresting the kidnappers. Afterwards, all people marched back to the starting point. ASKPF is now very seriously following the issue of kidnapping with the Public Prosecutor and will take further action if their demands are not met.

The people of Hassake blame the local government for failing to protect its citizens. They criticize the local officials who have surrounded themselves with high protection, while leaving innocent citizens as easy targets for kidnappers. All of the negotiations which the kidnappers have made with the victims' families have been done by mobile phones. The people of Hassake are now asking why more is not being done. "If we speak on a mobile phone against the regime, our conversations are overheard and the security police will immediately come to arrest us. Why do they not take action when they hear kidnappers negotiating the lives of our people? We know that security police have access to all communication data and can very easily identify and arrest the kidnappers, so why are they not doing it?" These questions and many similar questions are frequently asked by the people of Hassake. Community members were astonished to learn that on the same day of their march demanding action, there was yet another incident. A Muslim man from the Hallaq family was kidnapped – another name added to the list of victims in Hassake.

## Letter VI

*With Christ's love and blessings,*

*Yours in the service of Christ,*

*Archbishop Eustathius Matta Roham – 7/02/2013*

### **Syria: Damaging Christian Symbols in Ras Al-Ayn**

Seventy-five year old Constantine Junan, a native of Ras Al-Ayn, Syria, insisted he stay in his home even after ten weeks of intense fighting in the city. This week, he was finally forced out by rebels. The rebels came to him after midnight and threatened his life and the life of his son, Junan, who had stayed with his father as others fled the city. Constantine was convinced that the men were intending to kill him and his son unless he obeyed their orders. He asked them to allow him to stay until sunrise, promising to leave then. In the morning, Constantine and Junan went into the church to pray and to receive the blessings of St. Thomas from the icon there. They were very sad to see that many of the metal, wood and stone crosses inside the church were broken. Constantine knew that the rebels forced him to leave his hometown so that he would not be an eyewitness to what was to happen there in the coming period.

Constantine informed me personally about all this after he left Ras Al-Ayn on 27th Sunday morning. The photos of churches, which I later received, were taken after the Kurdish forces were able to free the Street of Churches in Ras Al-Ayn from rebel control. These thirty eight attached photos express the current situation in the little town, and show the extent of damage done to our Christian symbols at the hands of one group of rebels, namely the Suqoor Al-Sunna (which means “The Eagles of Al-Sunna”).

There have been many other incidents of insulting Christian symbols. Mr. Anwar, an Evangelist from Hassake, mentioned to me that his daughter recently travelled to Damascus in a bus owned by a Christian travel company. At one check point, a group of rebels stopped the bus and pulled off the cross present on the bus. They then forced Christians to shout the Muslim witnessing prayer: “There is no God but Allah and

Muhammad is his Prophet”. They also forced all the women to cover their heads like Muslim women.

When the Kurdish forces drove away the rebels from the Street of Churches in Ras Al-Ayn, they wrote their positive words over the negative words of Suqoor Al-Sunna. The intention of the Kurdish forces was to show their sympathy with Christians and with all other peaceful people of the town, though unfortunately this made it more difficult to read the negative words from the rebels that made clear their feelings toward the Christians.

However, we were still able to read what the Suqoor Al-Sunna had written on the walls and gate of St. Thomas Church. The following writings explain the mindset and plans of this group of rebels. Unfortunately, there are many such groups within the rebels.

There is a great threat to the lives of Christians. They literally said: “Allah is great upon you, O those who worship the cross”. This is a call in the name of Allah to fight Christians.

The people of Ras Al-Ayn have suffered a great deal since 9 November 2012, when their town was first attacked by rebels coming from other areas like Edlib.

In photo number 4, you can see a big bomb. This was first discovered one day before the Street of Churches was taken over by the Kurdish forces. Some courageous people from our church, who had returned to check on their properties in town, came to see the church. While they were searching the church, they saw a blanket covering something. They were curious to see what was beneath the blanket. They were astonished to see a very big bomb. Thankfully, one of them had knowledge of how to stop the bomb from functioning. He cut off the wire and released the three detonators of the bomb; he then put the blanket back on the bomb so that the rebels would not know what he had done. The rebels had planned to bomb the church building, the old school building, the church hall, and the parish house. We believe their intention was to do this once they saw the

Kurdish armed forces go inside the buildings. We give thanks to our God that our church people were there at the right time to stop the bomb.

There were big explosives planted in other churches and buildings as well, including the home of Mr. Constantine Junan. The Christian houses were also looted and robbed during the period in which the rebels were in control. Photos from the Syrian Catholic Church of St. Mary Magdalene and the Armenian Church of St. Hagob (Jacoub) tell a related story, though it seems that the group of rebels inside these two churches was not from Suqoor Al-Sunna, but a different group. Here we see less damage, except the breaking of the statue of St. Anthony. The intention of these acts was to destroy the Street of Churches and plant such a fear in Christians that they would never think to return to their hometown.

Now, Christians and all peaceful people of Ras Al-Ayn are grateful to God that the Kurdish forces are keeping an eye on their properties. On 2nd February, which is the Day of Presentation, one Christian faithful went into St. Thomas Church. He rang the church bell and said prayers. He told me that the Kurdish forces in the area also came into the church and rang the bell after him.

The Kurdish forces ring the bells of each church every day to send a message to the rebels that the Kurdish people are keen to maintain strong relations with the Christians. The Kurdish forces have expressed their good intentions towards Christians from the very beginning of the conflict. As they reclaimed the Street of Churches, they wrote meaningful messages of solidarity with their Christian neighbors.

The people of Ras Al-Ayn want the rebels to move out of their ruined town immediately. People who used to criticize the government for corruption are now criticizing the revolutionary rebels who have a much more dangerous form of corruption, plotting against the freedom of faith and the safety of individual and public properties. People ask: "What is the progress if we move from the corruption of government to the corruption of rebels?" Indeed, people are suffering from both parties.

## Letter VII

*His Eminence Archbishop Eustathius Matta Roham, Of Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese of Jazirah & Euphrates was informed the following by Fr. Zakka Jalma and Fr. Joseph Bali on the sad situation faced by a Syrian Christian Family who tried to escape to Greece from Turkey – 16/05/2013*

Greetings in the name of our resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, We hope that this email finds you well, and write to you about two unfortunate accidents which occurred recently:

### **Rush and lack of anticipation lead to tragic death**

1- A few days ago, all means of communication were lost with 33 Christian (Syrian Orthodox from the diocese of Jazeerah) when sailing from Turkey to Greece. Their smuggler had left them in a deserted and unoccupied island without food or potable water for a couple of days.

A relative of some of these immigrants had called Fr. Zakka and we made the necessary arrangements with the Ministry of Naval and Marine Affairs who called numerous islands. The relevant Greek authorities arrived and were able to save them; they are now in a safe place in Ikania. Of these immigrants, we spoke to and identified: Johnny Hanna, Romeo Boutros, Reem Boutros and Sana' George.

2- With great grief, we report the painful and outrageous incident which occurred with another group of immigrants.

A group of 21 people sailed from Izmir, Turkey heading for Greece; among them was one Christian family. They had dealt with an Algerian Muslim smuggler, best described as a blood thirsty monster. Due to quick decisions coupled with the lack of anticipation and not verifying the means of security (floating vest, etc...), they were nearly drowned in the sea. This happened after one Algerian criminal purposefully made a hole in the rubber boat (which normally hosts 9 people at most, but had this group in it irrespective of the safety measures) when he learned that they were discovered by the radar of the

Greek marine. This incidence led to the loss of the life of a very young girl (5 and a half years). She was lost in the sea and found dead after intensive research of the Greek relevant authorities.

Mr. George Mansourati (Belgium) contacted Fr. Zakka; in turn, we made the necessary calls. After thorough research and quests, we were able to locate them. They are: Noubar Mansourati (44 years), his wife Bouthayna Kan'o (32 years), his brother Elias Mansourati (Pharmacist, 40 years) and her brother Imad Kan'o, and two female children Sinella and Fimella Mansourati (one of them is the drowned girl). They are currently in the island of Lairos. Unfortunately, this family refuses to reveal the name of the smuggler fearing for their lives.

It is worth mentioning that, despite their plea for safety (floating) vests while drowning, the monster of a smuggler did not answer their request. We would like to thank the Archbishop of Kalymnou who offered his help and assistance presenting them with food, shelter and care. He also took care of the funeral on May 16, 2013 when the body was found after thorough research.

We are grateful to the high level of cooperation of the Greek authorities and their effective responses to this humanistic crisis.

This is what we wanted to share with you, in the hope to increase the awareness of the faithful of our church on such accidents and incite them to check for security measures before any endeavor with merciless monsters who have no respect for human lives and seek to exploit even the misery of others.



## **Letter VIII**

*Special Report by Mor Selwanos Boutros Alnemeh - Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan of Homs and Hama, special contribution by Mor Timotheos Matta Alkhouri -Metropolitan & Patriarchal Secretary and forwarded by Mor Eusthathios Matta Roham -Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan of Jazirah & Euphrates.*

*My brothers and sisters*

*The peace of the Lord be with you:*

*I present to you a glimpse of the events which have overtaken Sadad over the weeks since its occupation by armed men and terrorists - 31/10/13*

1-Sadad is a small Syriac town of fifteen thousand people located 160 km from Damascus

2- It has fourteen churches and a monastery with four priests and five halls for social activities and celebrations.

3- Most citizens are poor, because of the lack of natural resources.

4- They live in the middle of the desert, and it is a harsh, dry climate, where no rain falls.

5- The number of families which immigrated to Sadad from the different villages and provinces, owing to the Syrian crisis, is six hundred.

6- The terrorists entered Sadad on 21-10-2013 and occupied it for a week. On 28-10-2013 they were driven out and some of them were killed.

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7- Two thousand five hundred families fled Sadad because of this occupation by the terrorists. They spread out between Damascus, Homs, Fayrouza, Zaydal, Maskane, and al-Fhayle.

8- One thousand five hundred Families were held as hostages and human shields for a week, amongst them children, old men, young men, and women. Some of them fled, walking 8 km from Sadad to al-Hafer to find refuge.

9- Some were killed and some were threatened by the bullet, by strangulation, execution and with the destruction of their houses. 45 civilians were martyred including women, children and men.

10 – Ten persons have gone missing, and the number of injured is 30.

11-All the homes of Sadad have been robbed, their possessions looted, by all the forces which entered Sadad. The commercial premises shared the same fate.

12-They destroyed the churches and stole some of their possessions, money and ancient books, and graphitized insults against Christianity.

All government, school, and council buildings were destroyed, along with the post office, the hospital and clinic, as well as the Finance and the Agricultural Ministry branches.

14- The crisis in Sadad led to the forced migration of some 500 families of al-Hafer, and the looting and destruction of some of their houses.

15- The families of Sadad fled from their town only in the clothes they were wearing, and anyone who brought with him money, gold or documents was robbed of them.

16- Our children have lost their future because of the destruction of the schools, the nursery, and the youth centre.

Above mentioned is a summary of the situation in Sadad and al-Hafer. On 28-10-2013 the young men returned to Sadad to repair the damage. They suffered a loss which is estimated at fifty per cent destruction, including houses which can never be rebuilt because they were totally destroyed, and have lost electricity, water and telephone connection. The state has started to repair the damage, especially that of the government buildings.

They have not yet been able to open the schools yet, and so the families have preferred to stay in their places of refuge, in order to ensure the future of their children, and to guarantee better personal security.

These events which happened in Sadad are considered the greatest massacre of Christians in Syria, and is second in the whole Middle East region after the bombing of Our Lady of the Salvation Church in Iraq, in the same month, and almost the same day in 2010. We ask if the terrorists are gone permanently, or if there is the possibility of a return for a second massacre...

Three thousand people were held hostage, and we cried out to world, and no-one heard us, except for the minority which came to our aid, and stood in solidarity with us. Where is the Christian conscience? Where, the Syriac conscience? Where is the human conscience? Where are my brothers, the metropolitans, priests, and friends? Where... where? And no-one answers... except for a few. There is a lump in the throat and burning in the heart for all that's happened in my Metropolitanate and its poor suffering people which no sooner did it flee to a place of refuge, then left from there empty-handed, and after all this, to where, I don't know...

*Pray for us*

*Selwanos Boutros Alnemeh*

*Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan of Homs and Hama.*

## **Letter IX**

*Archbishop Mor Eustathius Matta Roham, Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan of Jazirah and Euphrates, addresses his Archdiocese from Vienna, Austria, in a letter. 06/06/2013*

*To our spiritual sons: the esteemed priests; the Church council and institutions; and the noble Syriac people of the Archdiocese of Jazirah and Euphrates, Syria. May God protect you. Blessings, love and prayers for you all, as we ask God for your wellbeing, safety and stability – 06/06/2013*

We had wished to write to you earlier, however, due to the long-term severance of the means of international communication in the Governorate of Hassake, and for want of anyone to bear this letter of ours to you; we were not able to send any written communication. Now we thank God for the presence of a few of our people in the city of Vienna, whom we have given this letter to carry to you on their return to the homeland.

However, in spite of the loss of communication with the Governorate of Hassake, we have spared no effort in reaching out to our people in the border areas who are partners with us in charitable work and human aid, by means of Turkish signal coverage, in order to ask of all of you, and especially the poor.

It is imperative in this letter that we make you aware of our ardent desire for upholding the historical relationship between us and all our neighbours in the Syrian Jazirah, and of our insistence on the avoidance of alignment to any party whatsoever and under any circumstances; and our incisive opposition to the enmity of the neighbors who have lived with us for many centuries in the lands of our fathers and grandfathers, and with whom we have united through the care of the poor and the displaced, both Christians and Muslims; and our defense of the rights of the people of the Jazirah to the benefits of the country and especially of the land on which they live; as well as our sincere stance with the victims of kidnapping and their families through the great protest of unity, which went out from the Archdiocesan headquarters in Hassake to the courthouse on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2013. This brought together for the first time in the history of the Governorate all sections of the community of the Jazirah in order take a clear stand against the evil of the kidnapers, and to demand of those in authority to fulfil their duties to protect the citizens, since it is within the capability of these authorities, through the monitoring of telephone conversations, to find out who is behind the systematic kidnapping, whose short-term aim is extortion, and whose long-term aim is to cause the people evacuate their homeland. All these positions we took did not please certain people because they wanted to embroil the Christians in the current struggle, as happened with certain members of the Armenian Church in Aleppo, the results of which were harmful to them everywhere and especially on the public highways.

Therefore the Church in the Jazirah has suffered greatly from action and aggression originating from a certain party, which has led some of our people astray; they do not know the nature of the Church, and thus how the Church in her mission differs from the now widespread parties, organisations and associations of various names.

The Church, by her fundamental nature, calls for peace and forgiveness and the rejection of violence. She also calls for the condemnation of the wickedness which we see widespread in the corruption of the structure of the state, and in society, and especially destructive practices like the effectual absence of functioning institutions, nepotism and

moral decline; matters which His Excellency President Bashar al-Assad referred to in one of his speeches regarding the crisis in Syria.

Just as the Church as a whole suffered, so did our councils because of the lack of alignment to whichever party, and we have suffered personally from many who misunderstood our spiritual address on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2011 in St Mary's Monastery in Tel Wardiat, when we offered up prayers for Syria, and spoke on the subject of the justice which leads to peace.

As for the evening of Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> November 2012, when a young Christian girl in Hassake went away by night of her own free will with a young male convert to Christianity in Lebanon, a certain party exploited this issue wanting to raise up sectarian strife, and incited some reckless young men to bring out weapons, blunt instruments and a cattle prod in St George's Cathedral Church in Hassake whilst we were explaining that the girl had not been kidnapped, but had made her own decision to go away with that young male Christian convert. The matter became clearer after a few days as that young girl got married to that young Christian convert in Istanbul according to Christian rites.

These severe crises have come upon us and we have kept our patience, asking God for relief for the country and the faithful. However, the last act alien to the moral comportment of the Syriac people came on the morning of Wednesday the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2013 when one of our people broke into our place of residence in Hassake, incited by a certain party, holding a gun to our face and a grenade in order that we should secure the release of his kidnapped brother and nephew. And in spite the fact that we condemn kidnapping and kidnappers and we did not know their identity, we tried to put to use our social relations with all our fellow citizens in case there would be found someone who could release the captives. We were held hostage for five hours until some good men of the Church and the community came forward in order to persuade him that they would be able to secure the release of his brother and nephew. Following this, granting him a request, we went personally to Qamishly, where we presented a written letter to the office of Suroyo TV appealing to all those of good-will to release the captives.

One by one after all these incidents which the people suffered, and we suffered with them, it became clear that a certain party wanted to foment strife between us and our neighbours, just as it wishes to foment internal strife amongst the Syriac people. It wants to embroil our people by putting them at odds with the Church and her leaders and workers; rather, it will stop short of no act to empty the Church in order to make her people leave our country of origin. So it embroils our people in acts alien to our Christianity and to our Syriac identity and then acts as if it is innocent, and it seems that no-one is aware what this party is doing in secret. The great trials which we have suffered have not and will not stop because of our non-alignment to any party; rather there is in place a plan to target us directly.

Therefore, and so that the poor especially, and the people in general, do not lose us, and in order to clear the Syriac people of internal strife, we esteemed that the situation required the guarantee of aid to our poor from abroad, just as we had been orchestrating from inside the country, as well as the defense of our historical presence as Syriac people. As the original inhabitants of the country they ought to receive their rights, as the international conventions dictate, in order that they should not one day become extinct, having been absorbed into the other nations.

The matter of the Syriac people, in regards to their historic rights, is the same as the other peoples who are struggling to realize nationalistic gains in the country. If Syria now lies partly in the Levant, and partly in Mesopotamia, then the Syriac people are the original inhabitants, who have lived in both parts over thousands of years, and their name and the name of Syria will be united over the generations.

The development of the assassination and the kidnapping of religious leaders has become widespread in these days; and there is no-one who hears the word of truth, which would prevent them from perpetrating grave wrong-doing. This is what has happened in the case of the kidnapping of their Graces our brother the Metropolitan Mor Gregorius Yohanna Ibrahim and our brother the Metropolitan Boulos Yaziji. These events have

caused us to consider deeply what is happening inside the country. For we have not one day been lacking in our defense of the rights of our people. The history of the Jazirah bears testimony to us that we have daily come to the defence of the oppressed, both Christian and non-Christian.

We mention here but examples of certain actions of ours, and so that the new generation should be aware of us. For which of you do not recall our defense of the murdered Suliman Ghazala, from the Syrian Catholic Church, when he was assassinated in Dirbasiyya at the beginning of the year 1993?

Rather have you forgotten the risk we took, exposing ourselves to open gunfire in Ras al-Ayn in order to broker peace between the Kurds and the Arab tribes there following the events of the Qamilshly stadium on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2004? Or have you forgotten our role in putting out the fire of strife in Malkiyyah when some of our people murdered the now deceased young man Jawan, when through the kind efforts of our friend Mr Abdul Hamid Darwish the charges were dropped from our people for the sake of the continual Kurdish-Christian relations of brotherhood in Malkiyyah and elsewhere in the cities of the Jazirah. We were never far from the pains of the people of the Jazirah, however the escalation of events and deterioration of circumstances has compelled us to live in neighbouring countries and to communicate with you from abroad in order to meet the needs of the poor, and to defend the dignity of the Syriac people and their rights everywhere. This has taken place with the blessing of His Holiness the Patriarch.

Now it is necessary for a word directed to you all, that you should take pride in your Christianity, and not forget that you are Syriac before every else, that you are the original inhabitants of Syria, and that you have special rights according to international law, which protect the indigenous peoples of the country in order that they should not become extinct.

If your neighbors in the region be they Kurds or Arabs, take pride in their national identity so you too should take pride in your language and your history and your Syriac

national identity, and work together with all parties as 'Syriac' people in order to safeguard your historic rights in the land. If you do not preserve your Syriac identity, you shall not be able to preserve even what you inherited from your Syriac Christian tradition either.

This is what was necessary for us to write to you now, and we ask God to take you by the hand and lead you into the realization of goodness and peace, and into a bright future for the Syriac people, and for all Syrians.

The grace of the Lord be with you all.



## **Chapter 18**

### **Miracle of Holy Theotokos in Saidnaya**

George Alexander

A miracle by the Holy Theotokos was reported at one of the monasteries of Saidnaya. This town is one of the most famous Christian inhabited and pilgrimage places in the war torn Syria. The incident was told by one of the Syrian Christian who visited her homeland recently. The ongoing civil war has destroyed several Christian institutions and displaced thousands of Christian families in Saidnaya.

The miraculous incident took place last month when a rebel group fired rockets at one of the monasteries. The nuns inside the monasteries experienced powerful sound and vibrations as part of the rocket launch. They were sure that the rocket would kill them and damage the monastery complex. Nothing happened and the nuns wondered on 'fate' of the rocket.

A few days later one of the military generals from the Syrian Army visited the monastery to convey Nativity and New Year greetings. During the conversation the Officer asked whether the monastery experienced anything unusual recently. The nuns told about the rocket which was fired by some rebels at the monastery but did not strike them. The officer was amazed to hear the same and he confirmed that even he saw the rockets fired towards the monastery, but he along with some others, saw something very strange and unusual. The rocket was about to hit the monastery but suddenly a woman dressed in blue vestment and amazing grace appeared in the sky and took the rockets by her hands and threw it away. This was great wonder to all of them. The General wondered who that lady would be. Finally they realized that it was none other than the Holy Theotokos the mother of Christ our God, Lord and Savior.

## Chapter 19

### Combined Oriental Orthodox Mission in the Slums of South Africa

Fr Thomas Ninan

This was my second visit to Addo, a township near Port Elizabeth, South Africa, which is known more for the Elephant National Park and the oranges. My first visit was in July 2012 when Abuna Yakob, the Archbishop of the Diocese of Africa, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church was visiting the indigenous Xhosa community in Addo for the first time. This Xhosa community in Addo is part a significant black community which broke away from the Anglican Church in South Africa in 1983 and joined the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in 1990 when the late Abuna Yesahaq ordained a few priests and deacons for the community. This community, initially known as the Order of Ethiopia when under the Anglican Church, went through several struggles in pursuing the apostolic faith during the apartheid times and finally got in touch with the EOTC through Abuna Yesahaq who was in charge of the EOTC diocese in Jamaica in the 1980s.

Subsequent visits and teaching efforts by the late Patriarch Abuna Paulose and then by Abuna Petros and Abuna Yakob were affirming factors for the growth of this indigenous community in South Africa. However, due to challenges in language and culture, it became a challenge for this community to learn and sustain the Orthodox faith among themselves. Being a poor community, having full time priests was always a challenge as they could not afford them. Hence the priests ordained would take up additional jobs, usually as a teacher in the schools and serve their parishes on Sundays.

It was in such a context that my stay in South Africa brought me in contact with this community in Port Elizabeth, particularly to learn their history of joining the EOTC. Amidst challenges, first during the apartheid times to break away from a dominant Anglican Church and then to find a fulfillment of their long search of the apostolic faith in the EOTC, this community known as the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in South Africa have courageously upheld the Orthodox faith since the early 1990s. I was inspired by my first visit to Addo when I saw the various challenges they were facing as a community in

learning and practicing the Orthodox faith. Joining them in worship inside a church structure which was valiantly put up by this poor community in 2004 after worshipping for a long time under a structure made of leaking old tin sheets was an experience in itself for me. Having spent with them a whole day, I found it hard to accept that they managed with very poor sanitary facilities in the church compound. Their joy of receiving the Archbishop in their poor set up and being part of the Eucharistic liturgy celebrated in Isixhosa with His Grace was indeed to be seen to be believed. They have indeed come a long way in having transformed themselves from their Anglican history towards following an Orthodox way of life and practicing a liturgy in Isixhosa today.

The Women's Manyano (Women's Fellowship) plays a crucial role in the community, particularly in a context where the priests are part-time. Visiting homes, particularly praying for the sick, fund raising and other spiritual activities keeps the Manyano active in the parish. It was a delight for me to be part of their regional meeting at Addo from October 6-7, 2012. About 50 women from the region came together for 3 days, spending much of their time in prayer, learning and fellowship. It was noteworthy to see the wives of the 5 clergy of the region playing leading roles in the meeting. I was joined by Kesis Kinfé Gabriel, Kesis Tesfey Mariam, Kesis Gabre Mariam, Kesis Tekle Mikhail, Kesis Haille Mariam and Brother Michael (Saife Mikhail). I was able to take a session on the Role of Women in the Church, with the encounter of the Canaanite woman with Jesus in Matthew's gospel as an example for the same. Brother Michael took a session on God and Creation. Teaching of faith, having proper church structure, community hall and sanitation, helping the youngsters with proper education and jobs and clergy training (both present and future) are some of the challenges they face for their distant future.

## Chapter 20

### An Open Letter to Pope Francis

William Dorich

His Holiness Pope Francis

Apostolic Palace

Vatican City 00120

Your Holiness:

As a double victim of Balkan genocide, I write this open letter to appeal to your humanitarian nature exhibited in recent public appearances.

In 1942, in the village of Vojnic, Croatia where my father was born, ninety nine Serbians were locked inside their church and burned to the ground by Nazi Croatians and their Catholic priests—seventeen of those victims were my relatives. In 1995, during “Operation Storm” in Croatia when 230,000 Serbs were ethnically cleansed, the last five relatives of my name were too old and too sick to flee, I was notified a month later by the Red Cross that they were found with their throats slit. I have spent a lifetime of sorrow inflicted on me by the Catholic priesthood— thousands of victims like me deserve justice, not 16 years of legal obstruction.

In 1995, President Franjo Tudjman of Croatia bulldozed that Serbian church site in Vojnic along with the Jasenovac Concentration Camp and adjoining museum to erase from this earth the evidence of the brutal killing of over 700,000 Serbs, 40,000 Jews, 60,000 Roma and 90,000 Serbian children under the age of ten. This makes today’s homosexual crimes of your priesthood pale in comparison.

In 1944 the word ‘Genocide’ was coined, the following chilling words were written by Antun Miletich, a Croatian historian:

“There is not a pen capable of describing the horror and terror of the atmosphere at Jasenovac. It surpasses any human fantasy. Imagine Hell, the Inquisition, a terror more

dreadful than any ever before existed anywhere, run by bloodthirsty wild animals whose most hidden and disgusting instincts had come to the surface in a way never before seen in human beings—and still you have not said enough.”

After WWII, Croatian President Ante Pavelic, fled through Fr. Krunoslav Draganovic’s “Vatican Ratline,” the escape route for 430 Catholic priests who fled to Argentina—priests whose hands were covered in the blood of their Serbian victims. Ante Pavelic became the “security advisor” to Juan Peron who issued 34,000 visas to Croatian war criminals. Your Holiness grew up in Argentina and you became a priest in the 1950s when these war criminals flooded Argentina and were embraced by Juan Peron, his wife Evita and others in elite Catholic Church circles who protected and defended these war criminals from the clutches of the Nuremberg Tribunal, or from any prosecutions.

“Hope lives when people remember,” are the powerful words of Nazi hunter, Simon Wiesenthal that are prominently displayed at the Holocaust Museum in Beverly Hills, California. Serbian Orthodox Christians will surely find it hopeless that the Vatican has managed to bury their war crimes along with their victims. For seventy years the Vatican has hid the evidence of your Genocide and forbade historians access to Vatican wartime archives. History will prove your deceptions a betrayal of Jesus Christ and his commandment, Thou Shalt Not Kill. (Exodus 20:13).

I remind your Holiness of the powerful words of Avro Manhattan, a fellow Catholic in his 1965 book, *Vatican Imperialism in the 20th Century*.

“The lessons we have learned from the emergence of the independent State of Croatia, where the religious and political totalitarianism of Catholicism was not only made to work, but put to death more than one million Serbian Orthodox Christians, should never be forgotten. For it happened in our times, when the Catholic church—then, as now, posing as a victim of religious intolerance—was clamoring for freedom, while at the same time suppressing that same freedom for which she was vociferating so loudly in a

tiny state where she had set up her kind of freedom, Catholic freedom: i.e. freedom for herself to eliminate whatever and whoever dared to resist her embrace.”

1941, Fr. Ivan Raguz yelled from a Croatian Catholic pulpit: “Kill all Serbs and Jews, including children, so that not even the seeds of the beasts are left.” Therein we clearly see the foundation, the pretext and the horror of Jasenovac.

As a double victim of genocide at the hands of Catholic priests and their Nazi minions, I realized by 1998 that I would never receive justice for the deaths of my family and relatives or justice for any of the tens of thousands of victims your priesthood created. I therefore became the first Plaintiff in a class action lawsuit against the Vatican Bank and Dr. Jon Levy, my attorney, has been in contact with Cardinal Pell, who, like other Vatican contacts has proven feckless.

Dr. Levy has uncovered a Vatican Bank connection to looted assets not only from Serbia, but also from Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and the Ukraine. Dr. Levy has numerous irrefutable documents that attest to the Vatican money laundering of the spoils of the Holocaust. The Vatican Bank was involved in the conspiracy in moving these highly secreted funds from the Vatican Bank to Swiss banks who moved the funds controlled by Ante Pavelic to banks in Argentina.

Today, those funds represent several billion dollars, not including the outrageous religious art theft during WWII in the Balkans. In the mid-1970s the Vatican returned to the Serbian Orthodox Patriarchate a number of priceless manuscripts and centuries-old icons stolen from destroyed Serbian churches in Croatia—clear evidence the Vatican was a partner in these crimes.

The Statute of Limitations never expires on murder. The Vatican has insultingly pretended that the statute does not apply to the priesthood, an unholy concept considering the murder of over one million victims in former Yugoslavia was perpetrated by ordained Roman Catholic priests.

After seventy years of Vatican secrecy I have been driven to resort to this Open Letter in order to gain your attention and to expose the contempt the Vatican has shown to my legal counsel. I am therefore again making public these crimes against humanity and demanding that the Vatican Bank finally make restitution.

Your Holiness, if your compassion is indeed sincere, then I ask that you go beyond your public commitment in resolving the problems of homosexuality in your priesthood and that you guarantee you will open Vatican archives from WWII and that you make every effort that Cardinal Pell and the Vatican Bank begin dealing with my attorney on an honest level. Compensate the thousands of victims and provided the survivors with a public apology and beg our forgiveness. The Vatican and its Bank are not above the laws of man or the laws of the church and your unholy silence is sinful.

It is time for criminal Catholics to confess and repent!

Considering the dissemination of this Open Letter is going to the general public who will have no historical context of the depth of these Vatican war crimes, I am including a brief example of the 430 Roman Catholic priests in Croatia who committed these hideous crimes with their own hands then fled through the ‘Vatican Ratline’ for Argentina where they escaped justice:

God have mercy.

I look forward to your response,

Very truly yours,

William Dorich, Publisher/Author

Beverly Hills, CA 90212

CC: Dr. Jon Levy, Esq.

Author of the 1991 book, Serbian Genocide 1941-45; Kosovo (1992); A Brief History of Serbian Music, (1997); Hilandar’s Octocentenary, (2003);Serbia: Faces & Places, (2011). His current book is: Memoirs of a Serbian American Dissident (2013). William Dorich is

the recipient of The Order of St. Sava, the highest recognition bestowed on a layperson by the Holy Synod of Serbian Orthodox Bishops; An Award of Merit from the Serbian Bar Association of America and a Humanitarian Award from RAS, the International Serbian Organization. He was a correspondent for The American Srbobran for 15 years and his articles appeared in the Washington Times, The International Herald Tribune, The Wall Street Journal and numerous Serbian websites such as Britic, The Serbian Magazine of Great Britain.

ENC: Jasenovac Then & Now: A Conspiracy of Silence

ARSAMOVIC, Dr. ANTUN

Roman Catholic bishop of Djakovo, decorated by Fascist Ante Pavelic used terror to force several thousand Orthodox Serbs to convert to Catholicism. Took over the Serbian Orthodox churches in his jurisdictional area and ordered them destroyed such as the Serbian churches in Bracevci, Poucje, Depsin, Tenje, Dalj, Kucanci, Budimci, Poganovci, Borovo Selo, Trpinje, Pacetin, Cepin, Trnjani, Klokocevik, and Topolje. He followed the directives in the testament "The Return to the Faith of our Fathers," written and published by St. Jeronimo in Zagreb, which was under the direct control of Archbishop Stepinac.

BLAZEVIC, GRGA

Roman Catholic priest in Bosanski Novi organized a concentration camp for Serbians and made himself the commander. Serbs were arrested and slaughtered in this camp on his orders. He insisted that he was doing what Archbishop Stepinac wanted and expected of him. For his work on behalf of the "Croatian cause," Fascist Ante Pavelic decorated him.

CULINA, Fra ANSELMO

Roman Catholic priest who personally killed inmates at Jasenovac; he committed all of his murders with a small knife attached to his wrist that he liked to show to his victims before killing them. He carried this knife with him at all times, even when holding mass for Croat soldiers. Fascist Ante Pavelic decorated him.



DJURIC, ANTE

Roman Catholic priest in Divusa; Organized bands of killers and sent them to various Serbian villages to slaughter the men, women, and children. He instructed them specifically not to spare women and children. After the killings, he absolved all of the murderers of their sins. He was an extreme sadist. He would arrest Serbs, locking them inside his stable where he tortured them for hours before killing them. He announced from the church pulpit that the Serbian question in Croatia could only be solved with the “steel broom” (the gun). In his journal, he noted that on April 14, 1941 (four days after the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia) he ask for instructions from Archbishop Stepinac and continued in his journal: “I met with the leaders of all the surrounding parishes, and we agreed what we needed to do.” The following day he arrested a number of Serbian women, forced them to undress and ride naked on horses through the Croatian villages in his area. He then slaughtered them.

GUDELJ, Don MARTIN

Roman Catholic priest in Opuzen called on all Croats in his church sermons to begin digging Serbian graves. He organized groups of killers that went with him through the Serbian villages in his jurisdiction, killing the Serbs they found there and pillaging their properties. He killed the children by beheading them with a bayonet. He personally slaughtered 450 men, women, and children. Together with Fra Dr. Bilobrck, he committed great massacres of Serbs on June 28, 1941, Vidovdan—a religious national Serbian holiday.

KAURINOVIC, Msgr. JOSIP

Roman Catholic priest in Prijedor; Special representative of His Holiness the Pope Personally participated in the mass killings of Serbs, including women and children. Preferred killing Serbs to expelling them, he insisted that they could, conceivably return some day to their homes. He personally arrested Serbian Orthodox priests in the area, tortured, dismembered, and murdered them. Fascist Ante Pavelic decorated him.

#### KRALIK, FRANJO

Roman Catholic priest, and chief-editor of the Catholic magazine, “Katolicki Tjednik” through which he promoted an unrelenting hatred toward the Serbs. In his writings, he insisted that Croatia could not be cleansed of Serbs in a “nice way” and added: “Pope Gregory VII didn’t clean up the Roman Catholic Church in some nice way, but with force.”

#### PALJUG, MATO

Roman Catholic priest and professor of Theology in Bjelovar, insisted that all Serbs in Croatia must be executed. Ruthlessly promoted hatred toward Serbs— especially toward Serbian Orthodox priests. He was later promoted to the position of instructor at the military school in Zagreb, where he worked more closely with Archbishop Stepinac and continued to promote hatred toward the Serbs.

#### PERIC, Dr. SRECKO

Roman Catholic priest from the Monastery of Gorica, near Livno –About twenty friars from this monastery participated with Peric in slaughtering about 5,000 Serbs from the Livno area. Dr. Peric first arrested the Serbian men from Livno and took them to the Koprivnica, between Bugojno and Rupres. He had them brutalized and executed. Some were tortured to death. He then arrested their mothers, wives, and children and ended their lives in the same way. The women were raped, their breasts were cut off—children were dismembered and their eyes were gouged. The killers then cut off the heads of the children and threw them into the laps of their distraught mothers who screamed for mercy—their anguished cries encouraged further violence until they were slaughtered.

#### SCHOLZ, Fra SIDONIJE

Franciscan priest who murdered Serbian Orthodox priest Djordje Bogic of Nasice after nailing him to a tree and pulled out his beard and ripped skin from his body torturing him to death. He cut off Bogic’s nose and tongue, then cut him open the full length of his stomach and wrapped his intestines around his neck. Fascist Ante Pavelic decorated him.

## Chapter 21

### **Leaning Cross Church – The Historic Monument of Orthodox Christian Revolt against Roman Catholic and Western Imperial Domination**

Prakash Varghese and Vipin Varghese

*“By the Father, Son and Holy Ghost that henceforth we would not adhere to the Franks, nor accept the faith of the Pope of Rome, nor any foreign rule.” – From the Event of Leaning Cross Oath of 1653.*

The St. George Church of Mattanchery, one of the oldest churches in India has played a significant role in the historic event that shaped the leadership of the Malankara Church, as it is today. The church was consecrated in 1751.

The history of Mattanchery Church is closely connected with Mar Baselios Sacrella Maphriyono, the Bishop of Aleppo Town in Bravua. The Koonankurishu Church is a revered pilgrim centre. It has paramount position among other Orthodox churches as it is home to holy remains of St. George. The land has become sacred with the foot prints of the Persian Prelates, first Catholicos Mar Thoma I and other forefathers of the Malankara Orthodox faith. It was built on the land where the historical Koonankurishu Oath took place.

#### **Leaning Cross Oath- Mass Revolt against Roman Catholic Imperial Domination**

The Koonankurish Oath (Leaning Cross Oath) of 1653 is the first recorded mass revolt against the Western colonialism in history. This heroic declaration of independence by the Malankara Christians (also known as Malankara Nazrani's) was to free itself from the imposition of Western Roman Catholic supremacy in matters concerning the Church and its practices. In 1652, the Persian Catholicos sent Metropolitan Mar Ahatallah from Syria to India. However he was arrested by the Jesuits at Mylapore and handed over to the Portuguese who then put him in a ship at Madras, bound to Goa. Enroute its journey the ship stopped by Cochin. Hearing this, 25000 strong Nazrani Christians marched to Cochin Harbour and demanded the release of Mar Ahatallah.

The Portuguese pushed the ship off to Goa and on the way drowned the Persian Bishop. Hearing this, thousands of St. Thomas Nazrani's assembled at Mattanchery church on the 3rd of January 1653 and took an oath under a big cross. Since all gathered could not touch the cross simultaneously, they all held onto ropes that were tied to the cross in all directions. They then took the historical oath to break free from the clutches of the Roman Catholic supremacy and follow the true Orthodox faith, Malankara Nazrani traditions as well as obey the Marthoma Arch Deacon Thomas I. The Koonankurish Oath was the first proclamation of independence of the Malankara Orthodox Church and it was the first revolt against the colonial rulers of India. The Koonankurishu Oath preserved the St. Thomas tradition helping to protect the Malankara Orthodox Church from losing its heritage and ancient history.

In later years Fort Cochin and Mattanchery Churches were amalgamated to form one Parish. The main reason for the downfall of Mattancherry Church was of the external interference from the local Muslim community.

Members of Mattancherry migrated to Fort Kochi Church due to close proximity and it was a major business hub during its glorious period. Hence it was converted to an independent church. As time passed by the local Muslim community of that area took control of the church property and almost destroyed the church structure.

### **Reclaiming the Church Property, rediscovery of the Relics of St George and Holy Myrrh**

Fr Santhosh who is designated by the Catholics of the East, took charge to reclaim the church property. It all started when the late lamented Baselios Marthoma Dydimos I (Catholicose of the East and Metropolitan of Malankara on the Apostolic Throne of St Thomas and Primate of the Indian Orthodox Malanakra Church) gave him the assignment to build the church and he took this as his mission. When he first saw the premises, he was shocked to see some Muslim families in the church compound, they dominated the area, and it was a huge challenge to rehabilitate them and one side of the premises was used as slaughtering area of cattle and poultry.

In order to ascertain the property to the Indian Orthodox Church, Fr Santhosh built a small hut inside the premises next to remains of the old church. This resulted in huge protest and threat to his life .But his strong belief in God gave him strength to survive all odds. He used to offer Divine Liturgy daily that resulted to bring God divine presence in the church. There was a sudden change among the protesters who gave up the fight and humbled themselves to the priest. They said that they were willing to give up the land as they started to suffer from mysterious and strange forces that started affecting their families which made their life difficult to stay within the church compound.

The Muslim families were properly rehabilitated thereafter. Fr Santhosh accepts this as a divine miracle from God that resulted in reclaiming the land. The divine miracles led Fr. Santhosh to rediscover the Holy relics of St George and the Holy Myrrh from the altar which is about 450 years old.

### **Eco-friendly Renovation**

Some of the well-wishers who saw the efforts of Fr. Santhosh provided financial help to rebuild the church. The church is being renovated in the 15th century architecture with eco-friendly construction process using compressed soil bricks with no steel and very less cement, reducing the CO2 emission. Importance is given to natural lighting and air circulation. This endeavor could be fulfilled only with the generosity and whole-hearted support of all those who pride themselves to be part of Malankara Orthodox Christian Tradition. Fr. Santhosh still remembers and appreciates the effort done by Fr Sunil (Vicar Fort Kochi) who initiated to build a shrine adjacent to the church of St George.

## Chapter 22

### **Fr Dr V C Samuel, Poetic Legend of Orthodoxy**

George Alexander

*“Thank God that He used Dr. V. C. Samuel more than any other for the agreed statement on Christology, bridging the gap that existed from 451 A.D. between the pre - Chalcedonian and Chalcedonian Christologies.” – Late Metropolitan Osthathios Geevarghese of India*

Fr V C Samuel was more than a name, a priest, or a person. His contributions to the world of Orthodoxy and Christianity in general are invaluable. His sound knowledge of Christian theology was beyond imagination. Though many call him a theologian of Oriental Orthodoxy, I see him as an international Orthodox Christian Theologian of both Eastern and Oriental Orthodox families.

The classic work of Fr. Samuel titled ‘The Council of Chalcedon Re-Examined’ is the best ever contribution made by an Indian Orthodox personality to the global Orthodox world. His brilliance and extreme knowledge of Christian east was priceless. He along with late lamented Metropolitan Gregorius Paulose initiated the strong presence of Indian Orthodoxy in the world of international Christian theological dialogue. He took the ultimate guts to re-exam the council that divided the Christian east. He explored the original minutes of the Synod. Though he has criticized various aspects of Chalcedonian Orthodoxy, it stands as a work par excellence.

His works were aimed at resolving theological disputes and uniting churches together. Strong Orthodox faith and perspective remained with him all his life especially while having dialogue with other Christian faiths. Proper and objective understanding of his work can play key role in resuming the Oriental Orthodox – Eastern Orthodox theological official dialogue. Sadly all unofficial or official dialogues have been halted for many years now. Many Eastern Orthodox Christians may be not ‘so comfortable’ in Fr V C Samuels perspective but his work can be used as a strong base to rebuild the dialogue. He has given us the base and our duty is to build the theological dialogue and

cooperation upon this strong foundation on a common exclusive platform. We need not forget that Fr Samuel made excellent contributions in all unofficial consultations and dialogues between Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches which were held in Arhus (1964), Bristol (1967) Geneva (1970) and Addis Ababa (1971). It is strongly believed that the papers presented by Fr V Samuel had helped the participants in these conferences to arrive at the conclusion that the difference in Christological Doctrine between the two families of Churches was only verbal and not substantial. He was also an authority on several Syriac Orthodox fathers and texts. Apart from that he was well versed in Sanskrit and Philosophy. His life in Ethiopia earned him a large number of adherents.

Moreover, he stressed on the need for an Indian Malankara Orthodox Church, he relied on the 'Indianess' of the Church. Indian Orthodox Church should be Indian in nature in its outlook, liturgy, language, art, music and all other aspects.

The manner in which Fr V C Samuel is being commemorated by the Indian Malankara Orthodox Church needs rethinking at many levels. There should be a serious effort to build foundations, lecture series, and theological chairs for this great Priest. It would be much appreciated if the Church is able bring out collected series of all his work as well as regain copy rights to his classic work Chalcedon Re-examined which is with the Serampur Senate at the moment. There is much more to be done to repay our unending gratitude to Fr Samuel.

He was indeed a great poet of Orthodox theology, a master craftsman who created perfect rhythm and structure which paved way to newer heights of inter-orthodox dialogue.

## Chapter 23

### **The Lost Orthodox Christians of St Gregorious of Parumala in Dindigul**

Ajesh T Phillip and George Alexander

Dindigul in the Tamil Nadu State of India is the one of the oldest centers of Orthodox Christians. Metropolitan Mor Julious Alvaris (Arch Bishop of Goa and Ceylon) started a center here as part of his reunion movement to the Orthodox Church in India. More than 5000 families from the Roman Catholic Church reunited with the Orthodox Church, but later on they disintegrated due to lack of proper care from the Indian Malankara Orthodox Church. Most of the families returned to the Roman Catholic Rites. In Brahmavar-Goa area there are more or less 850 families presently, taken care by the Brahmavar Orthodox Diocese of the Indian Malankara Orthodox Church.

#### **The Unknown Community of St Gregorious in Dindigul**

Ajesh T Phillip (OCP Delegate of the Indian Subcontinent and Chief Project Coordinator MARp) was able to locate a family near Dindigul which believe and practice the elements of Orthodox faith with the intercession of St Gregorious of Parumala (The First Canonized Indian Saint). This family and their faith in Orthodoxy can be considered as a reminiscence of the mission started by Mor Julious Alvaris in the early 1900s in south India. The lost faithful in Dindigul and other parts of Tamil Nadu might be part of the 5000 reunited families under the leadership of Metropolitan Mor Julius Alvariz and Saintly Padre Nuroaoh (Brahmavar).

#### **The Family**

The family consists of Paul Raj his brother Xavier and their family members. Paul Raj has five children and his brother Mr Xavier has three kids. Mr Xavier is the practitioner of traditional Siddha medicine. He also operates a clinic in Madhurai apart from his consultation works in Dindigul. He has resided in Kerala around ten years in Chengannur from where he acquired specialized training Siddha Medicine. He has received Siddha medicine skills as part of the family traditions. Mr Paul Raj also worked as mason at Chengannur, even at Chegannur Bethel Orthodox Church.



Paul Raj's and Xavier's parents (Susai and Anthony Ammal) hailed from Mamsapauram, Rajapalam near Thirunalveli. Their parents have worked at tea estates in and around Kumali area. The family is traditional Christians.

### **Mysterious Connections to St Gregorious of Parumala (Historical)**

The family is still unaware of their historical connection to St Gregorious. Mr Xavier described that his forefathers (Periyappa or great grandfather) had an intimate spiritual connection with St Gregorious of Parumala. He is unaware how the connection began. At that time their contemporary presence in Kerala in the form of Siddha Medicine studies and mason job should have helped them to pay frequent visits to the Parumala Church. It is interesting to note that Mr Xavier visited Kelara Parumala Church) for the first at the age of nine, but even before that he knew about Parumala Ayya from his parents and use to make intercession prayers.

Xavier strongly stated that they were not part of the Roman Catholic Church, but since their migration to Dindigul they were forced to practice Roman Catholicism since they were left out with any other options. Xavier also added that their spiritual relation with the great Saint of Parumala is hereditary passed on from generation to generation.

### **Strong Belief in the Intercession of 'Parumala Ayya'**

The Family has got great reverence for the Saint of Parumala and strongly believes in the intercession and blessings. Paul Raj's youngest daughter did not have children after three years of marriage. Their deep intercession prayers in the name of St Gregorious have gifted them with a baby boy. Their testimony reveals the deep rooted faith and relation with Parumala Ayya. Xavier confirms that he used to have miraculous vision of Parumlala Ayya while sleeping where the saint prompts him to make pilgrimage to the Parumala Church.

### **Birth of ‘Parumala’ inside Parumala Church**

Xavier’s first daughter was born inside the Parumala Church. He explains the incident as follows...

Twenty years back, Mr Xavier and his wife visited the Parumala Church on a bicycle but unfortunately it was a day of strike in Kerala. His wife was pregnant and it was the ninth month for her. Suddenly the pain began and she gave birth to a baby girl with the help of some nuns who were present inside the church. Hence they gave the name “Parumala” to their first born daughter as they consider her birth as a great blessing from the saint.

### **Siddha treatment in the name of St Gregorious of Parumala**

The Siddha treatments performed with the blessing of the great saint, especially for neurotic problems, impotency and serious fractures. The medicinal plants are collected from the nearby hills of Dindigul Chirumalai and Pandrimalai. Local belief is that these two hills had fallen from the hands Hanuman while carrying the hills with ‘Mrithasangivini’ in his hands. Xavier prints business card in Tamil with the photo of St Gregorious of Parumala and has distributed it to several places like Sri Lanka, South Africa.

### **Claim of a Community of St Gregorious in South Africa**

Once a South African family came for Siddha treatment and they were healed. They got very much inspired by the blessing of St Gregorious of Parumala. They took several cards of Parumala Ayya from Xavier. Xavier claims that an indigenous community in the name of St Gregorious has been formed in South Africa recently. This community practice intercession prayers in the name of St Gregorious.

### **Possibility of Metropolitan Julius Alvares Connection**

Some literature sources reveal that Dindigul was one of the Mission centers of the Saintly Archbishop Mor Julius Alvariz of the Indian Malankara Orthodox Church with the possibility of more than hundred families. Also Tirunelveli is one of the oldest Christian centers including the presence of Orthodox Christians. This is the place from

which Paul Raj's and Xaviers' father hails from. The OCP delegation showed the picture of Metropolitan Mor Julius Alvares to Mr Xavier but he could not recognize the Bishop. There can be a possible link between the origin of this community and the missionary toils of Saintly Mor Julius Alvares and his reunion movement to the Indian Malankara Orthodox Church.

### **Family Cemetery**

The family has a separate cemetery apart from the Roman Catholic Church Cemetery to which they belong at present. The family cemetery is located almost 100 meters away from the common cemetery. They light candles every evening at the family graveyard, a tradition from their forefathers which is Orthodox in nature. Their great grandfather was buried in Dindigul but somehow they lost the exact place. Later with the help of a map they located the exact position of the burial place and constructed their family cemetery.

### **Charity Activities**

Mr Xavier runs an unregistered trust in the name of St Gregorious of Parumlala. He spends a part of his earning to help local people in distress especially those who are suffering with various illnesses. The Ravi Varma painting of St Gregorious of Parumala gifted by the OCP delegation on 20<sup>th</sup> of October 2012 was taken to the their Church and was blessed by the local Priest.

### **Aftermath**

Along with historic visit to Dindigul, the Executive Council of Orthodoxy Cognate Society sanctioned a special Project- Metropolitan Alvares Julius Research Project – MARP which has been constituted under Dept. of Church Research and Studies. Apart from the St Gregorius Community in Dindigul, Ajesh also rediscovered the Independent Catholic Church – Latin Rite Church under the Indian Orthodox Malankara Church in Sempatty, Tamil Nadu which was founded by the late lamented Metropolitan Alvares Julius. St. Mary's Independent Catholic Church was the first Christian congregation in Chempatty area which is about thirteen Km away from Dindigul. The church was initiated in 1890 by the leaders of the Independent Catholic Church of Ceylon, Goa and

India under the Jurisdiction of the late glorified Saintly Archbishop Alvarez Mar Julius I. These developments were conveyed to the Chennai Diocese of Indian Orthodox Malankara Church and Metropolitan Yuhanon Diascoros made the field visit in Dindigul and Sempatty.

Orthodox Liturgy was served by the prelates of the Chennai Diocese of the Indian Orthodox Malankara Church on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2014 at the historic Mission field in Dindigul after a gap of 59 years. The historic event of 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary was celebrated on a joint initiative by the Madras diocese of Indian Malankara Orthodox Church (IMOC) and Orthodoxy Cognate Page (OCP) society in Dindigul, Tamil Nadu, India on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2014. As a result a special Mission has been constituted for the Dindigul region.

## Chapter 24

### **The Life of a Missionary**

By Sofia Katsareli, News 24-7, Greece

English Translation by Peter Souleles

Edited by Wid Bastian

The life of Father Themis Adamopoulos contains the lives of many people. In his youth he was a rock star who performed on the same stage as the Rolling Stones and the Beatles. He was an atheist, a Marxist, a young man with an enviable education and a promising career, as well as a champion of social justice who protested for the rights of the underdog. All of these lives however belong to the past because in recent years he has headed the Orthodox Mission in Sierra Leone.

With inexhaustible kindness and purity of love, his only goal is to provide for the have-nots. In Africa, where he is known as Father Themis, he is one of those rare human beings who give without expecting anything in return. He risks his life through a sense of love without fear. His tool is faith and his dream is for a better future for the children and heroic mothers of Africa.

The story of Father Themis has drawn the attention of Hollywood and a film depicting his life is in the works. In recent months Father Themis has lived through apocalyptic scenes after the Ebola outbreak, “the worst outbreak of the virus in the history of mankind” as he himself tells us.

They call him the “Saint of Africa” because in his face they see the monk, the man with the calm tone, the “father” who extends his hand to distribute food, medicine, water and love. Without advertising, without neon lights and without fanfare, this 70 year old mixes freely with the people of Freetown and lives their lives. Even a very bad phone line connection between Athens and Sierra Leone could not diminish his apparent kindness, courtesy, humor and Greek roots.

Father Themis and the screenwriter for the film, *Wid Bastian*, spoke with NEWS 24-7 about the band he once played in which sent the women wild, about the unknown enemy called Ebola and about Greece which despite the economic crisis stands as an ally and is sending money and invaluable assistance for the relief of the people in Sierra Leone.

Father Themis was born in 1945 in Alexandria Egypt to Greek parents whose ancestry was from Volos and Samos. He was raised in Australia where he spent most of his years. As a young man he led a band known as The Flies and as he says, "I thought to myself that if the Beatles could have so much success then why not The Flies as well?" And that is exactly what happened as he found himself on the same stage as the legendary Beatles and the Rolling Stones in their first tour in Australia in 1965 at the Palais Theatre in St Kilda.

After giving up the frantic life of a rock star, and some years as an atheist intellectual and Marxist, Father Themis eventually studied the scriptures in search of answers to his existential questions. Believing that "education is man's greatest tool", he studied theology and received his degree from the Catholic College Corpus Christi. He then studied at the Theological College of the Holy Cross in Boston. He also studied Hebrew and Classical Greek at Harvard University. Continuing on, he was awarded his doctorate in Theology by Princeton University and returned to Australia where, from 1988 to 1998, he taught at St Andrews Theological College and then at Sydney University where he lectured in Classical Greek and Coptic, the language of ancient Egypt.

His studies and knowledge awakened within him a desire to struggle alongside the poor in order that he might improve their lot in life. With Mother Teresa's mission as a guide, he left his promising academic career and a well-paying position. He threw out his ties and suits, put on a priest's robes and became a missionary thus beginning an entirely new life.

In 1999 he commenced his mission in Kenya following the instructions of Petros, the Patriarch of Alexandria, and was made a deacon, a priest and then an Archimandrite.

## **Standing by the side of women, children and the victims of the civil war, and the Ebola arrived**

In 2007 the new Patriarch Theodoros instructed Father Themis to go to Sierra Leone in Western Africa. It was there that he lived through shocking moments set against a backdrop of hair-raising images. The civil war left behind a host of disfigured amputees. His attention was drawn by these victims of war as well as by the women in prison in Freetown for whom he would buy sewing machines so that they might be able to support their children when released from prison.

Father Themis, as a truly noble man, joyfully responded to an invitation for an interview. Somewhere between dealing with Greece and Africa and managing the problems of the people of Sierra Leone, Father Themis arrived for our appointed telephone rendezvous. He began our telephone interview with the following words:

The situation in Sierra Leone is out of control. It is a country which has been suffering since 1992 as a result of the civil war. For approximately ten years, there was nothing but killing. The trademark actions of the guerrillas were to cut off hands and legs. When the war finished eight years ago the country was for many years the poorest nation in the world. It started slowly getting to its feet, it has a good president who is carrying out many projects, but Ebola has now struck, sending the country backwards once again.

The economy and tourism has died. Most of those who were serving with NGO's (Non-Government Organizations) have already departed. We have to avoid the danger, but we are not sure how we are going to avoid Ebola because the enemy could be a child at school or the perspiring hand of the man from whom you buy a bottle of milk. We are living in a strange and invisible prison without knowing when we will face the firing squad.

### **Greece is our ally in the fight against Ebola**

Greece is helping us in our battle against Ebola. Not on an official level through the government, but through its people. I recently received 10,000 Euros from Greece. Greece is just one of the European nations which are assisting. Australia, China, and England are also helping and have given us one million dollars. At the present moment they are preparing to send us a container of goods from Thessalonica. God willing it will arrive within a month if they do not prohibit ships as they have already done with airline flights. We have been stigmatized and no one wants to touch us.

Already, three nurses and four doctors have died and others have left through fear. Urban myths have captured the imaginations of many people. For example, there are some who believe that washing yourself with warm water and salt is a protection against Ebola. Now, they have even started to drink this mixture and in the process they are poisoning themselves to death.

### **I am paying for the sins I committed as a rock performer**

When the virus broke out, I kept telling them that it would come here. They did not believe me because they were under the impression that the government was simply trying to obtain funds from overseas. When Ebola did arrive, more myths circulated because they did not want to believe the truth and now the situation is out of control.

I am distributing masks which I have received in large quantities from Australia. I also distribute gloves to the poor. We do what we can. We have the Virgin Mary, the Saints, Holy Communion all of which are our spiritual weapons and our spiritual army.

I asked Father Themis if he ever fears for his life and he replied:

I am not afraid, but I feel uneasy. I have not become paralyzed. Fear brings panic. When you think with fear you do not think clearly. What Ebola has given us is a great deal of uneasiness. That I do have.



I am now paying for my sins that I committed as a young rock artist, he says with a laugh and the conversation turns to the film.

In the beginning I was not in agreement, because as a monk my life should not be visible. You must not seek fame and glory. You must ask for it to be given to others. But as time went on and I gave it some thought, I told myself that Orthodoxy is not as heard of in the West as Catholicism is. Things are heard about Mother Teresa and the Pope. When the Patriarch of Alexandria was killed in an airplane crash close to Aghion Oros (Mt Athos in Greece) nothing at all was heard. If it was the Pope it would have been the main news. They say nothing about Orthodoxy. Not only are we forgotten but we are also viewed with a suspicious eye. The West sees Orthodoxy as an out-dated system which follows the old road.

And so I said to myself, If Hollywood is interested, let's do it, so we can show the West what we are doing rather than what they think we are not doing.

### **Wid Bastin: Father Themis has a huge heart for the whole world**

Wid Bastian, the screenwriter for the film, was eager to speak about Father Themis and the upcoming feature. We did so by Skype. A few months ago Wid Bastian received a call from the producer, John Tsambazis, who asked him if he was interested in writing the screenplay.

I was very interested in doing it. From that moment on I started talking to Father Themis. We began work in the middle of May. The screenplay will be done in September and is being looked at by Peter Andrikidis who is a well-known producer in Australia.

The film covers all of his life to the present time. We are very pleased that the actor Jonathan Jackson, who won an Emmy Award for his role in the General Hospital daytime drama, wants to play the role of Father Themis in his younger years. We have many well-known actors under consideration to play the role of Father Themis in his later life.

### **Father is opposed to every form of violence**

Father Themis has a heart for the whole world. In Kenya where he was previously, and in Sierra Leone, he takes care of the have-nots as head of the Orthodox Mission.

I am not exaggerating when I say that he has had over fifty near death experiences. They have threatened him with a knife to the throat and by other means, but he managed to escape each time. Father Themis is opposed to every form of violence. He will literally turn the other cheek if struck on the cheek. If you steal from his one pocket he will also give you the contents of his other pocket. This is Father Themis.

### **A rare combination of kindness and ingenuity**

Father Themis is a man with a great sense of humour. He is unbelievably clever. Before Christianity won him over he was interested in social justice. Now that he is a priest he continues to be interested in social justice. He identifies himself with those that have less and to them he has dedicated his life.

Father Themis loves the whole world without discriminating between people. His love is genuine, it is authentic. I have never met anyone who cares less about himself and more about others.

As a man, apart from being a priest, Father Themis has unbelievable depth and an incredible knowledge of philosophy, politics and art. Despite never having studied screenwriting he came up with some ideas that even I had not thought of. But more than anything else, he is a noble man with a noble soul.

*Anyone wishing to assist Father Themis and the Holy Orthodox Mission in Sierra Leone can do so by going to the Paradise4Kids website. PK4Kids is the charity that directly supports Father Themis's work in West Africa.*

## Chapter – 25

### **OCP Society and Pan-Orthodox Movement**

Maria Sidiropoulou

An excerpt from the paper presentation titled 'Orthodoxy presence in Asia: Churches and NGO's' at Munster, W.W.U. Westphalian Wilhelm University of Munster.

An innovative unifying initiative for all the Orthodox Churches of the country is the work of a local NGO. This non-governmental organization, which began in June 2007, operates in India and especially around Kerala with jurisdiction all over the world. Inspired by the Chor-bishop Rt. Rev. Kyriakos Thottupuram of Chicago, it was initially founded as the "Orthodoxy Beyond Limits Forum" by George Alexander, Subin Varghese, and Boaz John. In 2010, the forum's name was changed to the "Orthodoxy Cognate PAGE Society" and was registered under the Societies Registration Act. K. C. Jacob became chairman and the governing board was formed, with ten members.

The Orthodoxy Cognate PAGE Society is an independent pan-orthodox organization focused on Eastern and Oriental Orthodox conciliar unity "creating a common platform for all Orthodox Christians to come together and exchange their views, to interact and to come to know each other." The OCP aims at promoting dialogue between the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches. The organization is purely pan-Orthodox in nature, but with an ecumenical respect. The goal is to restore full sacramental communion between the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches, which will change the face of the world, because it has greater dimensions than just a federation of churches, and will positively help other Christians and non-Christians as well. The Society also urges to open dialogue with non-canonical, traditional, old believers and new generation Orthodox Churches. It aims at creating a united, conciliar voice for Orthodoxy. The OCP Society is a very special and unique initiative, which brings the world closer to the true values of Orthodoxy and aims to promote Orthodox Christian unity and faith through dialogue and action.

For this purpose, the OCP Society has held conferences, visits, and meetings with several Orthodox Church delegations, most notably with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the British Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church in Lebanon, the Armenian Church – Mother See, the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Cypriot Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. In February 2008, the OCP delegation met with Metropolitan Abba Seraphim Primate of the British Orthodox Church and delegation from UK. It paved way for mutual cooperation particularly in the area of works related to Christian persecution in Eritria. In November of 2009, the society’s delegates visited the “Brahmavar Orthodox Community” in India. It played a vital role in raising concerns about this neglected mission of the Indian Orthodox church and was instrumental in the re-establishment of a specific episcopal diocese for Brahmavar after a gap of eighty-seven years.

Other historical visits, which resulted in discussion on the need for Eastern-Oriental Orthodox unity, was with the delegation of Armenian Orthodox Church, in Lebanon (2010) and the meeting with the Syrian Orthodox Delegation of Antioch and All East (2011), which for the first time ever the representatives of Syrian Orthodox Church and the Indian Malankara Orthodox Church met on the same platform. Such an event happened after a gap of almost forty five years. In 2013, the Executive Council of Orthodoxy's Cognate PAGE Society approved two new projects, the “Metropolitan Alvares Julius Research Project” (“MARP”) and the “Orthodox Christian Educational Institutions” (“OCEI”). The first is related to the missionary work of the famous Indian Orthodox and Syriac Orthodox Church Fathers, and the second is a publication of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox educational institutions worldwide, which is considered to be the largest list of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox educational institutions published online to date.

Apart from these, the OCP Society has made a campaign for the case of detained Patriarch Abune Antonios of Eritrea and the persecuted Christians in Eritrea. Updates on the status of the detained Primate of the Church Eritria and conditions of Christians in

the country are broadcasted through OCP Media Network to generate global awareness. In particular, the Society's Secretary, George Alexander, published an article entitled "Detained Patriarch, Persecuted Christians, and a Dying Church", which was published several global media and enlightened masses on the sad situation in Eritrea. Since 2007, the Society's department of "Charity and Social Welfare" has provided assistance for education and health care in India.

Today, in 2014, the work of the OCP Society includes supporting meetings and conferences for dialogue toward unity between the historic Eastern and Oriental churches. Some of these include the meeting on Mount Athos of representatives of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, as well as that of the Patriarch of Alexandria and the Archbishop of Finland in Helsinki. Finally, the OCP Society has a supporting role in the organization of the Addis Ababa Conference Portal, which in 2015 will mark 50 years since the historic conference of the Primates of the five ancient Oriental Orthodox Churches (1965).

## Chapter 26

### **Patriarch Ignatius Ephraim II - The new bright star in the Eastern Horizon**

Rt. Rev. Chorbishop Dr Kyriakose Thottupuram of Chicago

AXIOS, AXIOS, AXIOS,

MORAN MOR IGNATIOS APREM THRAYONO PATRIARCHO D'KURSYO SHLIHOYO  
D'ANTHIOKYA D'SURYOYE!!!

It was in 2004. In the month of March I was invited to deliver a speech at the World Peace Conference in Turkey organized by the Inter-cultural Dialog Platform for the Advancement of World Peace with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Religion. As soon as I accepted the invitation the news spread among my students through my Turkish students whom I had consulted about my trip, rumors also began to circulate that I was leaving for Turkey for proselytizing. In view of some past hostile incidents confronted by foreigners, particularly Americans, in Turkey, I called Istanbul and cancelled my trip. However, upon consulting two other professors who had also been invited to present their scholarly papers, I was encouraged to attend and present my speech. I notified Turkey that I was sticking with the original plan of attending the Conference and making the speech on “Patristic Contributions to the Quest for Peace”.

However I was still apprehensive about my safety in Turkey. I immediately called the Archbishop of the Syrian Orthodox Church for Eastern United States of America, Dr. Kyrillos Karim Ephraim, with whom I had established a very cordial relationship as a hierarch who possesses outgoing manners and unusually welcoming attitude with a broad and attractive smile. On a few occasions I had been with Archbishop Mor Kyrillos when he visited his parishes in the Chicago area, and enjoyed his very courteous hospitality and sincere graciousness. From our conversation I realized that he was reading the monographs and articles I had been writing and publishing. It was this pre-established confidence that led me to contact Mor Kyrillos to check if our Syrian Church in Turkey might be of some help to guarantee my safety.

Archbishop Mor Kyrillos was very delighted that I was going to make a speech at the World Peace Conference in Turkey, and he offered his help. He asked me if my telephone was equipped with the Conference Call system, which I did not have. The Archbishop immediately turned on his Conference Call device and connected me with Metropolitan Philexinos of Constantinople. Archbishop Mor Kyrillos introduced me to Metropolitan Philexinos of Constantinople, and asked me to give him my itinerary. Metropolitan Philexinos offered his assistance while I was in Turkey. When I reached Istanbul at midnight on May 11, 2004 a chorepiscopus representing Mor Philexinos was there at the airport with two other persons representing the Conference authorities to receive me. I was in Constantinople and Mardin and Midiat until May 18, 2004, and enjoyed the hospitality and motherly love our Syrian Church at many cities and returned home safely. The affection and welcome that I tasted from our Syrian Orthodox brethren on the streets of Midiat during a long rally organized by the Turkish authorities is memorable.

I now recall this episode with deep gratitude to Mor Kyrillos, who was instrumental to make me feel safe in Turkey. He did not have to extend such generosity to a Chor-Episcopus of the Malankara Syrian Church which has some issues of administration with the Syrian Church in the Middle East. Although the Syrian Church in Malankara and the Syrian Church in the Middle East are one Church in faith and priesthood, there exist some administrative concerns that tarnish their wholeness; this has been producing some serious scandals before the eyes of heterodox Christians and pagans. I projected this episode to highlight the greatness of a prelate who was chosen by the Holy Spirit to be at the helm of the most ancient Church of Christ on earth, the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, which alone presents the uninterrupted continuity of the faith, liturgy and priesthood of the ancient Aramaic Church of Jerusalem.

### **A Pure Aramaic from Turabdin, the Cradle of Aramaic Civilization**

Turabdin is at the northern tip of ancient Mesopotamia, where the ancient Aramaic civilization started and flourished; it is from here that this civilization spread all over the ancient empires of Babylon, Chaldea, and Assyria at different periods of time before Christ. The people of this region are generally called "Pure Syrians (Syriacs) or

Aramaics”. At present this region is within the Province of Mardin. I had the blessing of visiting this area during my visit of Turkey. It is with great pride that I reminisce about the fascinating dance of the Syriac girls on the grounds inside the airport of Mardin, who gave a warm and exciting welcome when the scholarly group of speakers and delegates of the Peace Conference landed at 9.00 AM. We were all without sufficient sleep in the previous night and deeply tired; however I still remember the arousal we all gathered from the heavenly and majestic choreography presented before us by those terrestrial angels.

### **The new Patriarch’s family is originally from this area**

During the early part of the 19th century Turkish Christians became the victims of one of the heinous brutalities in the history of the world. It is reported that millions of Armenian and Syrian Christians were butchered during this period; among them the Armenians outnumber the Syrians. There was a steady exodus of these ethnic groups to the countries south of this region to escape persecution. That is why we see a great number of Syriac and Armenian presence in many parts of the Middle East, such as Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, where they were welcomed by their own ethnic groups; and the Muslim regimes were also more accommodating.

It was during this period that the family of the new Patriarch moved from Ehwo, a small town in the Turabdin region within the Province of Mardin, and settled in Quamishli, which is in northeastern Syria. Turabdin literally means “the mountainous region of the servants of God” (mountains of the servants of God). In fact, the history of the Church testifies the fact that there had been a lot of servants of God from this mountainous region. Now we have one more illustrious servant of God originally hailing from this “mountainous region”, who is not only a servant, but a “servant of the servants of God” by his call to adorn the Petrine Throne of Antioch, one of the primordial Sees of ancient Christendom. Holy Father Moran Mor Ignatius Ephraim II: your genealogy from the cradle of the Aramaic civilization singles you out to be at the helm of our great Syrian Church. Axios, Axios, Axios!!!



The new Patriarch was born as Sa'id Karim on May 3, 1965 at Quamishli, as the youngest child of Issa and Khanema Karim. His father had passed away when he was very young, and he was raised by the rest of the family and the mother. He had his primary education at a local school in Quamishli.

### **Call to Religious Life and to the Service of the Church and Higher Education**

From a very young age Sa'id Karim was imbued with a great passion for the service of God. Hence he chose a religious secondary school to complete his High School education. In order to achieve this goal, he moved to Atchaneh in Lebanon to pursue his secondary education at St. Ephraim Theological Seminary, where he completed his High School education with a focus on religious studies in 1982. Immediately after graduating from this seminary-high school, at the very onset of his youth, he was exposed to the administrative process of the Church by becoming secretary to Metropolitan Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, Syria. He was with Mor Gregorios for two years equipping himself with initial skills in the management of affairs of the Church by assisting the Metropolitan he was serving.

In 1984 he started his post-secondary studies at the Coptic Orthodox Theological Seminary in Cairo, Egypt, and graduated in 1988 with a Bachelor's degree in Divinity. During the seminary studies he was tonsured as monk in 1985 and received the monastic name of Ephraim (Aprem) in honor of the great Syriac Doctor of the Church, St. Ephraim the Syrian, who remained a simple ascetic deacon all his life. In the same year he was ordained to the diaconate in Cairo, and subsequently received his priesthood in his hometown (Quamishli).

Upon graduation from the Seminary Hieromonk Ephraim moved back to the Patriarchal headquarters of his Church and became one of the personal secretaries of His Holiness Patriarch Zakka I, while keeping a faculty position at St. Ephraim's Theological Seminary near Damascus, Syria. While at the Patriarchal residence, the Holy Father identified the scholarly aptitude and thirst for higher learning in this young monk and sent him for graduate studies in theology at St. Patrick's College at Maynooth, Ireland in 1989. After two years of studies, Hieromonk Ephraim received the degree of Licentiate in

Theology, which would qualify him to be teacher in theology at the seminary and postsecondary levels.

As a monk, who possessed tremendous craving for higher learning and theological erudition, Hieromonk Ephraim did not stop his education just with a Licentiate. A young man deeply passionate in Syriac Patristics, he wanted to deepen and widen his knowledge base as a scholar. He conducted investigative studies on the Syriac roots of the theology of the Holy Cross, which no other Church in Christendom had developed like the Syriac Church. In fact, it is only in the Syriac Church that the veneration of the Holy Cross has become a predominant part of the worship both in regular liturgy and in the canonical hours of the Church. The climax of most of the feasts of the Church is with the exaltation and veneration of the Holy Cross, and with the blessing of all four quarters of the cosmos with the Holy Cross. For Hieromonk Ephraim, the Holy Cross was a mystery in itself which only the Syriac Church could expound so vividly, elegantly and elaborately, and his scholastic curiosity thrilled. For three more years he continued at St. Patrick's College to pursue his doctoral studies. His researches on the topic brought him to a dissertation on the "Symbolism of the Holy Cross in Early Syriac Christianity", and St. Patrick's College conferred on him the earned degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1994.

During his graduate studies in Ireland he was a diligent pastor of the Diaspora Syriac Orthodox faithful in the United Kingdom, which provided him direct experience dealing with the rank and file of Church. The pastoral skills acquired in his tenure as priest in U.K definitely helped him later as a bishop of the Church.

### **Call to the Rank of the Successors of the Apostles**

His Holiness Patriarch Zakka easily detected the apostolic zeal and episcopal potentialities in Hieromonk Ephraim to fill the vacuum created by the demise of the late Archbishop Mor Athanasios Yeshue Samuel of America. Hieromonk Ephraim was chosen to succeed Mor Athanasios. On January 26, 1996 Hieromonk Ephraim was ordained a bishop with the episcopal name Kyrillos by Patriarch Zakka with rank of a Metropolitan at St. Mary's Syrian Orthodox Church in Quamishli, Syria. By this time the Archdiocese of America had been already divided to create three separate eparchial

jurisdictions, one for Canada, and the other two were for Eastern United States and Western United States. Metropolitan Mor Kyrillos was appointed to the See of Eastern United States of America. On March 3, 1996 Metropolitan Mor Kyrillos was enthroned to be the new Metropolitan Archbishop of his new See at St. Mark's Orthodox Cathedral, Teaneck, NJ. Thus the new Archdiocese of Eastern United States was blessed with a new archpastor, well-qualified as a priest and erudite. It was the beginning of a new era for the Syriac communities in the Eastern United States. I have directly observed the magnificent growth of this Church which I gathered as a result of my close relationship with the Syriac communities.

### **A Tireless Worker in the Vineyard of Christ**

Under the spiritual leadership of Archbishop Kyrillos Ephraim Karim the growth of the archdiocese was phenomenal. Compared to other ethnic Orthodox communities, the Syriac community has a smaller number in the United States; however he managed to develop more than ten parishes and granted them canonical status and appointed their pastors to take care of their spiritual needs. He set up a Sunday School Committee comprising principals and teachers of local Sunday Schools to unify the curriculum and to oversee it and monitor the progress of local Sunday schools across the archdiocese. He became a champion and supporter of the American Foundation of Syriac Studies to promote Syriac theology, Culture, History and Literature. Being a scholar in Syriac who is well-versed in classical Syriac which carries all writings and literature in that language (kthobonoyo) and the colloquial Syriac which has been spoken for centuries and still being spoken in various Aramaic communities in Turkey and the Middle East (Thuroyo), Mor Kyrillos eventually became a patron for Syriac Studies.

One of the well-noticed accomplishments of the Archbishop was the establishment of Syrian Orthodox Archdiocesan Youth Organization (SOAYO) to cater to the social and spiritual needs of the young people under his jurisdiction. SOAYO does coordinate the activities of local Youth Organizations within the archdiocese. Under this organization many other programs work to support the youth, for example, Academic Scholarship Program, Youth Retreats, Monthly Youth Liturgy, Archdiocesan Choral Society to

promote Syriac Hymnology, Syriac Orthodox Scouts of America, Premarital Counseling Program, etc. Archbishop Kyrillos was not just an initiator of these programs from behind; he personally took active participation in these programs not only at the Archdiocesan level, but also at the parish level whenever possible to encourage the youth.

He was not only concerned about growing generation; he was indeed interested in the seniors of his Church. He organized Annual Elderly Liturgy Services which also have a social component. In these annual programs the seniors can bring up their concerns related to retirement, healthcare, housing and other relevant issues. These events also highlighted notable achievements and contributions of the elderly and special recognitions are awarded to worthy seniors.

Following the same path of his predecessor, Mor Athanasios of blessed memory, he took special interest in continuing the translation and publication of certain liturgical books, which were not previously published. They include “The Book of the Order of Burial of Clergy”, and “The Book of Scripture Readings of Sundays and Feast Days”.

The Syriac Church is definitely blessed to have such a talented and God-inspired hierarch to take the responsibilities of its Patriarch. We believe it is God’s choice; actually this was not an election by the fathers of the Holy Synod; it was a selection by God.

### **Challenges Ahead**

No leader is measured on the basis of his past achievements, not even on one’s acquired erudition; they are only his qualifications to become a leader. Every leader has to go through the test of time, the time ahead with multiple challenges which are often very difficult to deal with and very complex deterring him from making viable and long-lasting solutions. The greatness of a leader is established on his merit in setting policies and strategies to counter challenging situations and holding on the principles of propriety. If we observe the curriculum vitae of Patriarch Ephraim II, we are assured that he is quite equipped with the knowledge base and will power for meeting the challenges and complex surroundings of his patriarchate; which is indeed a blessing not only for all

Syrians both in the Middle East and India, and elsewhere the Syrians have migrated to.

#### The Syrian Unrest:

We do not ignore the tolerant and benevolent attitude of some Muslim rulers towards Christians during Caliphates in the 7th, 8th and 9th centuries. However some of them did not give freedom to Christians to freely practice their religion or equal citizenship rights. A good number of Christians left the Middle East during those days and settled in other parts of the world (this writer is a descendant of such an expatriate Syrian group). According to Time Magazine, a similar situation has been occurring these days in the Middle East (TIME; April 21, 2014). We have seen that after the Iraq war, which gave power to the present regime, Iraqi Christians have been leaving their motherland in great numbers; and it is said there are only 300,000 Christian left in Iraq now.

The same situation is happening to Christians in Syria in pockets where anti-regime militants have tightened their grips. In the northern town of Raqqa, for example, 20 Christian families have been asked to pay a tax equivalent to \$650.00 as a cost of protection. Christians in general face similar situation in many parts of the Middle East (Time). According to media reports the Middle East currently has only 3 per cent Christians left. The condition is getting worse every day. During the regime of Saddam Hussein the protection of Christians was basically guaranteed; but Christians do not feel secure anymore. The Azad regime in Syria is protecting minorities; no one knows how long Azad will last. Christians are panic-stricken; and when a chance is open they want to get out their own country for freedom and protection.

The Syrian Orthodox Christians are scattered all over the Middle East; realizing that they are not safe anymore many of them may leave when there is an opportunity. Their number is steadily decreasing. How would the new Patriarch deal with this hostile situation? Patriarch Ephraim does have good rapport with many leaders in that region. He is skillful to go through all possible diplomatic avenues for the protection of his faithful and to develop an atmosphere for peaceful coexistence with the majority population in the Middle East. If results are not produced, the theories of coexistence would be mere

academic jargon. At that point Patriarch Ephraim would go on his knees and intercede for his people so that the Almighty God may rescue them and make him stronger to defend his people. The world wants a strong Christian presence in the Middle East at least by maintaining the status quo, because they are children of that land. May the new Patriarch be a Moses to his people in the Middle East, not for expatriation, but for leading them to freedom in their own fatherland! We pray for him to have strength and divine guidance.

### **The Malankara Question:**

The new Patriarch will be confronted with the question about Syrian Church of Malankara, India. No one presenting an answer that the Church of Malankara is with the Patriarch can be justified in view of the history of the Syrian Church of Malankara and the current ecclesiological practices in Christendom. Thus Malankara is a very serious issue before the new Patriarch of Antioch. The fact that less than one third of the Church is directly under the Patriarch and that more than two third, although do recognize the Patriarchate of Antioch, seek a different path in recognizing the role of the Antiochian Patriarchate, gives ecclesiologists enough doctrinal points to argue for the will of the majority in light of the two criteria mentioned above, i.e. history of the Syrian Church in Malankara and current orthodox ecclesiological practices.

This writer does not believe in two Syrian Churches. There is only one Church, one set of doctrines of faith, and one priesthood. As we all know the Syrians in the Middle East are at a vanishing point, although they remain as immigrant communities elsewhere in many parts of the world; still their total number is behind the Syrians in India. The Patriarchate will be strengthened manifold times if the entire Syrian Church in India totally remain with Patriarchate of Antioch with its Catholicate of the East. The ideal is the corroboration of both national churches with mutual collaboration. The Catholicate and the Patriarchate should be in a position of respecting each other; both Sees have almost the same historical and canonical legitimacy.

An impartial observer can easily realize that the 1995 Indian Supreme Court verdict was the best document for forging a viable and long-lasting unity between the two groups, one recognizing the Patriarch alone as the head of the Church and the other recognizing

the Catholicos as the head of the Church of the East, and recognizing the Patriarch according to the provisions of the Constitution of Orthodox Syrian Church of the East. It was a right opportunity. But who short-circuited the union between them? Only some prelates who claimed to be subservient to the Patriarchate for their own ulterior motive of clinging to power they already had already possessed. In the event of a union they had to give up their power positions for the legitimate position of the Catholicos of the East recognized by the Supreme Court of India. The majority of the bishops in Synod obedient to the Antiochian Patriarchate wanted an immediate union with the Catholicate of East, but a few did not go for it to save their positions (some of them told this truth personally to this writer). But if the Catholicate of the East and Patriarchate of Antioch were united, keeping their national identities and autonomous and autocephalous individualities, our Church would have been the shining mystical body. One Church and two jurisdictions each having its own autonomy and autocephaly with *primus inter pares* status for the See of Antioch is the only solution for long-lasting peace between these churches. Keeping a smaller group under the Patriarchate and leaving the other larger group as a separate body is not canonically tenable (although there may exist such arrangements in other churches, again with selfish and imperial interests). The majority of Indian Syrians want their Church undivided, but in cordial relationship with the Patriarchate of Antioch.

We believe, the Holy Father Mor Ignatius Ephraim II, who is well-educated in oriental ecclesiology, will take the initiative to recognize the current ecclesiological practices in Orthodoxy.

The history of the Church in Malankara asserts that a formal relationship between Antioch and Malankara began to develop only by the 17th or 18th century. Historically the Church in India was attached to the Catholicate of the East headquartered in Seleucia-Ctesiphon. After the Catholicate fell into Nestorianism, the Orthodox succession of the same Catholicate was erected as a Mafrianate by Antioch, meaning, a dependent See under the Antiochian See. The Orthodox Catholicate lost its independent status as a See due to two main reasons: The majority of Syrians identified with the Nestorian Catholicate, which itself enjoyed the status of a Patriarchate (the titles Patriarch and Catholicos were interchangeable names then, such is the case with the Catholicos of

Armenia, Georgia, and Cilicia). Thus the number of the Orthodox Syrians in the East was reduced to a weak minority. Secondly, Muslim invasions considerably weakened both groups of Syrians, particularly the Orthodox Church which had suffered terribly due to Nestorian influence in those regions.

One basic truth that should be recognized is the apostolicity of the Indian Church, i.e. the Church of India (Malankara) was founded by the Apostle St. Thomas. In other words, the Church of Malankara is not the result of the evangelizing activities of any other Church which could claim parental rights over Malankara. This justifies its claim for self-determination.

Now let us come to current practices in Orthodoxy. The Church of Ethiopia was under the Coptic Church since Church history started in that region, and she had a filial relationship with Alexandria. It is modern history that when the Ethiopians demanded autocephaly and autonomy with their own Patriarchate, Alexandria had to give up all claims over Ethiopia, and subsequently gave all moral support for Ethiopia's freedom. In the very recent past, the Eritreans had a similar claim, and succeeded, although with resistance from Ethiopia; but other Churches have already recognized their Patriarchate.

Coming to the Armenians, there are two jurisdictions, one in Armenia and other in the Middle East; for some time the Armenian Catholicate considered the Catholicate of Cilicia a schismatic group. But now look what happened! They are one Church now, but with two jurisdictions and two Catholicoi.

The Church of Malankara is the most literate among all Oriental Orthodox churches, and the largest within the Syrian communion, and possesses the most educated clergy among all Orthodox churches, runs the highest number of university colleges and secondary schools; and two accredited major seminaries, one with doctoral degree offering accreditation, and a school of Sacred Music. Its spiritual activities, such as Sunday School, Youth League, and Women's apostolate vividly display the spiritual maturity of a fully developed Church.



With such a growth and maturity, does not the Church of Malankara deserve autonomy and autocephaly? Does she still have to be a dependency?

The new Holy Father Moran Mor Ephraim II, being a visionary, should extend his magnanimity to embrace this Church of Malankara in order to avoid a division in the Syrian Church in India.

His Holiness Moran Mor Ephraim personally knows me, and how I value and venerate the Patriarchate of Antioch. My ancestry is originally from the Middle East, a few centuries ago shooting from a Pure Syrian stock. Hence my Syrian heritage is of paramount significance to me; hence my unwavering support and adulation for the Antiochian Patriarchate. Personally speaking, I want the Syrian Church to restore its past glory prior to the period of Muslim expansion. I have highlighted in my past writing the need of supporting the Dayarul Safran (Monastery of Kurkuma) and the Monastery of Mor Gabriel near Mardin, the spiritual centers where Syriac spirituality and liturgy developed and were perfected. When I defend the autonomy and autocephaly of Malankara it is not to implicate any reduction of honor for Antioch; on the other hand it is to give witness to Christ as one team composed of two national jurisdictions with dignity and equality for each, never implying any form of subjugation of one by the other. I believe the historical significance of the Antiochian Patriarchate would be further enhanced with this kind of relationship. The Roman doctrine of universal jurisdiction by any See over other Sees has never been, nor is, a dogma within Orthodoxy. All the Byzantine Orthodox churches are autocephalous with their own Patriarchates, but a position of preeminence always goes for the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

I urge our new Patriarch Moran Mor Ignatius Ephraim II to invite the Catholicos of the East for a friendly meeting, and later move towards creative dialogs for complete union. There is a dictum in English, “Charity begins at home”. Most Holy Father, we are all ONE family, ONE home; we are all waiting for the light of love (charity) in our home lighted by Your Holiness. I understand that Malankara always wanted and does want a healthy sisterly relationship with Antioch.

Most Holy Father, this is the most important challenge of your Patriarchal ministry: to bring the Patriarchate of Antioch and the Catholicate of the East together as ONE team keeping both jurisdictions independent without one encroaching the other in autonomy of administration and autocephaly.

On the 29th of May 2014 the newly elected Patriarch of the Antiochian See was consecrated and enthroned the Patriarch of Antioch and all the East with the name Patriarch Ignatios Aprem II. We send our warmest greetings and prayers on this occasion not only to His Holiness, but also the faithful under his Patriarchal ministry.

We pray for Your Holiness' ministry from the Chair of St. Peter at Antioch, and for your health and longevity to serve the Lord and His people with apostolic zeal. May we also be blessed! May your prayers be a fortress for us!

*Amin.*

AXIOS, AXIOS, AXIOS,  
MORAN MOR IGNATIOS APREM THRAYONO PATRIARCHO D'KURSYO SHLIHOYO  
D'ANTHIOKYA D'SURYOYE!!!

*Additional Note:*

Finally; during the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Genocide held in Yerevan (April 2015), the two Primates made a historic brotherly encounter giving us immense hope for conciliar unity between the two ancient Churches. Apart from that the five Primates of the Oriental Orthodox Communion held a meeting. Such meetings happen once in a blue moon. Let us hope that there will be follow ups and continuations for the apostolic encounters and to benefit conciliar unity. Apart from this, both Churches have announced a committee to begin formal discussions to resolve schisms. Let us re-orient and refocus ourselves to heal the East- East schisms and misunderstandings. That is an important need of the time.

## Chapter 27

### Who Is A Catholic?

Chrobishop Dr Kyrikose Thottupuram of Chicago

About forty years ago I had the opportunity to visit the ordinary of the Orthodox (Russian) Diocese of Chicago, Archbishop John of blessed memory, a very saintly prelate whose sanctity was well known among his people. Although he was a bishop of the Byzantine tradition, he was extremely warm towards the Malankarese Church which is part of Oriental Orthodoxy, despite the historic division between both of them since Chalcedon. He was a keen observer of the Aarhus (Denmark) consultation (1964) between these churches and maintained that there is no dogmatic division between these churches and that both are equally orthodox.

During our conversation the Archbishop asked me where I was studying.

“At Loyola, a Catholic University”, I replied.

“No, don’t say that; we are the Catholic Church; that’s why they are qualifying themselves as ‘Roman Catholics’. . . . We are the Catholic Church”, Archbishop John said.

In almost all Roman Catholic official documents, such as dogmatic pronouncements and encyclicals, prior to Vatican II, the Roman Church itself regularly used “Roman Catholic” (Ecclesia Romana Catholica) to signify its name. It was after Vatican II, due to the insistence of the Uniates, the Roman Church began to use “Roman Catholic” to denote its Latin rite wing. Thus the uniates began to emphasize that they are not ‘Roman’, but Greek, or Syrian, in order to win acceptance among the Orthodox that they are THE local Church, not Roman. But in international media and religious circles the Latins and Uniates are generally called Roman Catholics, because they are all under Rome, and they profess the Roman faith.

Unfortunately, the Malankarese Churches (Indian Orthodox Malankara Church and the Syriac Orthodox Church in India) shows very unhealthy allergies when it comes to the

point of accepting that they are “Catholics”. The Byzantine Orthodox Churches, when they were being established in America as ethnic orthodox churches, called themselves the “Greek Orthodox Catholic, or Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic, or Antiochian Orthodox Catholic Church or Archdiocese”. It is a shame that the Malankarese Orthodox do not identify themselves as “Catholic” when they also profess, “We believe in the One, Holy, CATHOLIC, and Apostolic Church”. In the Service Book of the Holy Qurbana (1970) translated and published by Metropolitan Mathews Mar Athanasios, later Catholicos, the creed is translated with the word “Orthodox” in parenthesis after the word “Catholic”! I wonder if the framers of the Niceo-Constantinopolitan Symbol, were so ignorant that they missed “Orthodox” after “Catholic”! It is high time for us to teach our generation what the terms “Orthodox and Catholic” mean.

With this prefatory note let me get to the historical and theological significance of these terms.

In the beginning of the fourth century, the Church was divided on theological pronouncements made by a priest-monk called Arius. Arius began to teach that the second person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus, was not consubstantial with the Father. He insisted that Jesus was begotten by the Father, but was not co-eternal with the Father. In other words, Jesus’ Godhead was inferior to the Father, and His Godhead was not complete as the Father. To make it simpler, Jesus was not completely God, but a creation of God (Mar Thoma Dionysius, Aarhus Statement 1964). It was to resolve this major heresy that the Council of Nicea (325) was convened by Emperor Constantine, and it was finally settled.

The Council emphatically concluded that the second person of the Trinity, Jesus, was consubstantial with the Father in essence and existence, and every divine attributes; whatever attributes the Father possesses in His Godhead, the Son possesses equally, no less, no more, except the Fatherhood. The majority of Christianity accepted this symbol of faith.

During this period the Eastern part of the Church called themselves ‘Orthodox’ to distinguish themselves from the minority that followed the Arian teachings. The word ‘Orthodox’ does not mean ‘true or genuine faith’ as many have understood. ‘Orthos’ in Greek means ‘true or genuine’ but ‘doxa’ in Greek does not mean faith, it means ‘praise or glory’ or worship. According to the Creed accepted at Nicea, the adoration or praise given to the Godhead is never true or genuine if it is not also directed to the second person of the Holy Trinity as true God. The Father and Son (and the Holy Spirit) are different persons in the Trinity, but are one and the same God. It is this Triune God the people of God, redeemed by the second person of the Trinity, adore in the Church on earth, in the Eucharist and in their regular worship. If the Son was not worshipped equal to the Father, such worship was not true or genuine. In order to emphasize that they were the true worshippers, the majority that followed Nicea called themselves ‘Orthodox’ (worshippers of the Triune God with three distinct persons but in ONE substance of the Godhead).

In the western part of the Church, which was the Church under Rome, the term ‘Catholic’ became more popular during this period. Of course they did not undermine the significance of the word, ‘Orthodox’. ‘Catholic’ was a term more commonly used by the western and eastern fathers even before Nicea and it meant “universal applicability”. It was accepted at Nicea as one of the notes, or distinguishing marks, of the Church, to signify that the Church was for all the creations of the universe. During this period, the western Church was comparatively smaller than the Eastern Church; Christianity had not reached beyond the Alps (except Spain). Italy was the only predominantly Christian region in Europe (Greece belonged to the Eastern Church). Actually it was the churches of the East which were under several patriarchates that rendered meaning to the word ‘Catholic’, because of the vastness of the eastern churches within the Eastern portion of the Church. Therefore, the West accepted the term ‘Catholic’ in order to emphasize the fact that they were part of the universal faith of the larger Church that worshipped the true Godhead of Jesus. So, the words, ‘Catholic’ and ‘Orthodox’ meant the same as far the faith and practice of the post-Arian period was concerned, although etymologically both terms had different significances. Parenthetically, the East also used the word

‘Catholic’ commonly before and after Nicea to signify the true genuine Church, because one of the purposes of the Church was the universalization of Christ’s Gospel.

The Roman Church began to identify itself as ‘Catholic’ with the emphasis that it was the Church “universally” accepted as a global denomination of Christendom, or that it was the Church that reached all corners of the universe and that it was everywhere in the world. The Roman Catholic Church also taught that it was the meaning of the word ‘Catholic’, mentioned as one of the notes of the Church in the Nicene Creed. The codifiers of the Creed did not dream that meaning at all. In fact, the word ‘Catholic’ simply signifies that the Church is meant for all peoples of the earth, regardless of color, or ethnicity. The Roman Catholic Church became a global Church only after Spanish and Portuguese colonization in Asian and South American countries during the colonial period. It was the Spanish and Portuguese colonial missionaries who took the Roman faith to these countries, including our own State of Kerala.

During the Constantinian period, the Western Church did not have a practice of using the phrase ‘Roman Catholic’ in order to designate its church, because catholicity was never the note of one particular local church, although each church was and is part of the global universal/ catholic church; and in that sense every church is catholic. However, this trend changed in the West after the Great Schism between Rome and Byzantium (10th century). Rome began to assert that it was the true claimant and heir of catholicity, and that Rome was the seat and center of the true Church, and that the Church of Rome was the true successor of the Church established by Christ on the foundation of the apostles, particularly of Peter. Thereafter, the West began to use ‘Roman’, in order to claim that the note of catholicity was its sole possession, which the East never accepted. The West also continued to teach that no other Church but Rome was Catholic and that if a Church was not in communion with the Roman Pope it was not Catholic. The East always believed that it was Catholic despite Rome’s claim. Actually the East taught that Rome had separated itself from the true Catholic Church, and does not, in strict sense possess the notes of Christ’s Church!

Now we turn to the theological consideration of the word, 'Catholic'. 'Catholic' means 'universal', 'according to the totality', or 'in keeping with the whole'. The Church is catholic in more than one sense.

The Church is catholic because Christ is present in her, and Christ is a CATHOLIC ENTITY. St. Ignatius of Antioch says: "Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church" (Ad Smyrn. 8, 2). Christ is the head of the Church, and this body has Christ's total presence. This implies that she receives the fullness of salvation (Eph. 1, 22-23) from him. Christ's presence is carried primarily through the valid apostolic succession of the priesthood that comes from Christ Himself and from the sacraments administered by this priesthood. Neither any Roman Catholic theologians nor the Roman Church has ever questioned the validity of Orthodox priesthood or sacraments. In this sense, Christ is totally present in the Orthodox Church and she is CATHOLIC. The Orthodox Church was endowed with this note since the Pentecost, and it will continue to be catholic until the last judgment.

The Church is catholic because she was sent out by Christ on a mission to the entire human race all over the world (see the observation above). All men, all races all over the world (see the observation above). All men, all races are called to belong to the ONE People of God, to the Catholic unity of Christ's people. All men were given only one human nature, and God intends to gather them as one, as one redeemed race. This universal mission for the whole human race is carried out by the Church. The Church embraces all humanity, and she is intended for all human beings, past, present and future.

All local churches are also catholic when they participate in this universal mission, and when they share the faith of the apostolic church and the valid apostolic succession of the priesthood to administer the sacraments and preach the gospel of Christ for the salvation of their people and when their people are joined together under the ecclesiastical government run by a valid episcopate. In order to maintain the Catholic character, the local/ national churches are to be in communion with other churches that are Catholic. This communion is between the baptized people of the other churches who profess the same faith in its entirety and maintain the same priesthood and sacraments. In other

words, it is not a communion between two patriarchs; it is between the people of God in different regions of the world. The Roman Catholic Church also asserts the Catholic character of the Orthodox Churches based on this communion: “With the Orthodox Churches, this communion is so profound” (The Catechism of the Catholic Church, p. 242) Pope Paul VI, talking about this communion as a prerequisite for a local church’s catholicity, emphasizes that the Orthodox Churches “lack little to attain the fullness that would permit a common celebration of the Lord’s Eucharist” (Paul VI, Discourse, December 14, 1975). Although the Orthodox Churches do not require an approval from a Pope for their Catholic character, it is interesting to note that Rome does not hesitate to recognize their catholicity.

Often a bigger church, or a church, claiming direct apostolicity might deny the catholic character of a local church on the issue of legitimacy or canonicity. For example, Rome might demand its approval for the local church to be legitimately organized in order to emphasize its so called prerogative of legitimizing any church on the ground of its pre-eminent place in the old Roman Empire or of Peter’s primacy or universal jurisdiction which is attributed to the Pope. If the local churches do not accept its ground for such a prerogative, such claims do not bind them. Eastern theology does not entertain such claims of another local church, whether it is bigger or pre-eminent, or of direct apostolic origin. Such claims may render them a more honorable place among the churches, not a jurisdictional authority or canonical oversight.

It is the People of God of a national church that ultimately justify its regional status or legitimacy of canonicity. However, it has to abide by the apostolic faith of the fathers of the Church, and possess, without any doubt, a valid apostolic succession of the priesthood in order to proclaim Christ’s Gospel and to administer the sacraments for the salvation of its people. It is in these local churches, and in the global church formed out of them that the Catholic Church exists.

The Malankarese Church has been in struggle for about a century to establish its legitimacy or canonicity. The people of Malankara decided its fate as a national autocephalous Church, and their desire was blessed by the restoration of the Catholicate



of the East for the people of India in 1912. Although there were questions about her canonicity, the will of her people established her position as a canonical “catholic” church, and it was unquestionably ratified by the high courts of the country, and thus her catholicity is also recognized sine dubio everywhere in the orthodox world. When there was a concern about giving a reception for her Catholicos in the West as the legitimate head of a national Church, Pope Shenouda of the Alexandrian See emphatically declared her canonicity and catholicity, and observed that the questions pertaining to the administration of a church never comes within the perimeters of its canonical and “catholic” character, as it is the orthodox faith and a valid apostolic priestly succession that ultimately determines such notes. Yes, the Church of Malankara is part of the global “Catholic” Church, and she is a CATHOLIC Church.

To conclude: When someone asks you if you are a Catholic, do not hesitate, tell him proudly: “I am a Catholic, but not a Roman Catholic. I am an Orthodox Catholic, truly worshipping Jesus, the Son of God, with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity, and ethnically I am from Malankara”.

## Chapter 28

### Some Orthodox Mission Stories

Fr Yohanes Bambang & Fr Rick Lawrence Aleria

#### **The Philippines – Fr Rick**

The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Mission Team in the Philippines is headed by Clergymen of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian together with the lay partners in promoting the Orthodox faith in the Philippines. The Clergies are Fr. Rick Lawrence Aleria (Fr. Lawrence), Fr. Richard Lamsen (Fr. Luke), Fr. Eugene Melendez (Fr. Timothy), Fr. Dcn. Fidel Ruiz Jr. (Fr. Dcn. Joshua), Bro. John Jerome Taupan (Student) and with the lay-partners Mam Jeanneth D. Avenido (Teacher), Mam Maria (Teacher).

The clergy tirelessly guides the faithful by organizing group and house visits. The situation of each mission varies according to the areas of operation. Fr. Timothy's mission is in the mountains where people come from different places who are informal settlers. In the beginning, the Orthodox Priests were accused as a cultic group because of the Black Rasa or Sotana they wore. Fr. Timothy together with Fr. Deacon Joshua and Bro. John and lay worker Maria, has made amazing progress especially changing the mentality approach and attitude of the local people to Orthodox faith. At present the mission is growing with large numbers of faithful embracing Orthodox Faith.

Fr. Lawrence is a chaplain of at the National Children's Hospital, located in E. Rodriguez Sr. Avenue of Quezon City. The hospital caters infants up to the age of 19 years. He is serving the sick and needy kids on a voluntary basis without any pay. The Hospital is the best Government Hospital for kids and the only Public hospital for children in the Philippines; it was erected after World War II to cater the needs of abandoned and wounded children. Fr. Lawrence also leads another mission with informal settlers (squatters); serving them with organized house ministry.

Fr. Luke has the biggest mission area with a group of devotees to the holy Theotokos and a mission in mountain part of San Miguel Bulacan or DRT. These missions in the mountain have many faithful but there is a shortage of clergy too. This mission in the

DRT is a newly opened mission by Fr. Luke with the help of Fr. Lawrence and Fr. Deacon. Melchizedek (transferred to other mission area). The mission teams strongly believe that their team effort to preach Orthodox faith will flourish in the coming years.

At present the mission needs a church to be built for the faithful to have regular and organized liturgical worship. There is requirement for a place convenient to build a small parsonage for Priest to have his continued presence in the mission area. Orthodox liturgy and prayers are now held at the residence of the faithful or in open space and sometimes at temporary built sheds.

May God send good heart to help build a church for this mission, and the mission team requests your humble prayers for them, unworthy servants of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the Philippines.

#### **Indonesia – Fr Yohnes Banmbang**

This is my second journey as a missionary to Manado. Six persons have been baptized into Orthodox Church. They were very happy in receiving holy baptism. Manado has welcomed us to plant the seeds of Orthodoxy. Many Protestant churches have invited me to preach the Gospel of Christ, and by hearing the preaching, a numbers of people are awaiting to be baptized into the Orthodox Church, but they have to be taught the basics of orthodox faith before the holy baptism.

As part of my arrival the foundation of our Orthodox Kindergarten has been made in Kakenturen- Modounding- Manado, although our Orthodox Kindergarten is still in its process of completion, and more than fifty children have been listed to get admitted to the kindergarten.

Beside that the land for the Orthodox Church has been provided, and it has been donated by Rombot family in Touliang - Kakas- Manado. The office of our Orthodox Church in Manado has been borrowed from Lesilolo family in central of Manado namely in “Citra Land Area.

Basically, the foundation of our Orthodox Church in Manado has been laid out, and we are ready to develop our Orthodox Mission in Manado with the plans that we have.

Mission without financial assistance is impossible. I request each one of you to participate and help our Orthodox missionary work in Manado, especially to meet the cost of our Orthodox Kindergarten establishment and the needs for school operations, since we lack chairs, tables, cupboard, school uniforms, sports uniforms, inside and outside of children games and many other equipment.

I sincerely hope for your help and support for the rapid growth of this mission for the glory of God and goodness of humanity.

Finally, with your prayers and help, I take this opportunity to thank you all for your kindness and goodness, and God be with all of you, Amen.

### **The Indonesian Orthodox Mission Expands to Manado**

The Indonesian Orthodox Mission especially in North Sulawesi Island (Manado) is growing up.

The New Orthodox Kindergarten has been built, although this new Orthodox School that I have built is very simple, because this new school has been built from the wood, the people in that area is very happy with the existence of this new school.

This new school that we built has been legalized by the Education Department, even the head of the education department in Manado (North Sulawesi) has been asking us to open and to make: Packet A, Packet B and packet C Programs. Packet A is made for the people who has not finished their elementary school, by following this packet A, they will get certificate from the Education Department. Packet B is for Junior High School and packet C is or high school. I receive this offering and these packets will be begin this year.

Also we plan to make an Orthodox Elementary school and The Orthodox Theological School. We are planning of the opening the Orthodox Theological School and have got blessing from The Religious Department of Manado (North Sulawesi Island). The head

of Religious Department will help us to build The Orthodox Theological School if we have a piece of land as the place of buildup, whereas the price of land is \$ 5,000.00 with large of land: 400 m Square. This price is very cheap because the owner of that land wants to donate for the need of our Orthodox Theological School and hence the price is kept low.

Based on this fact, we are really waiting from other Orthodox brothers and sisters to participate, so that the development of our Greek Orthodox Mission in Manado can be realized. We believe that without participation and help from sister orthodox brothers and sisters, it is impossible for the Indonesian Orthodox Mission to develop. We request you to help and participate in my missions in Manado, because I am planning to build the Orthodox Theological School at the earliest, based on the request of the Religious Department near to the Orthodox Kindergarten.

To Develop the Orthodox Missionary work in Indonesia, we have to open our hand to welcome people who want to know the existence of Our Orthodox Church. Basically, the existence of the Orthodox Priests in Indonesia open their hand and heart and are willing to be invited to speak on the Orthodox faith in front of non-orthodox People, because this is the best way to convey Orthodox faith to other people.

Recently Father Yohanes in the month of January 2012 –despite his tight schedule – was invited by the Protestant brothers and Sisters to speak on The Holy Trinity, and the result was very interesting. They are going to organize a seminar. Fr. Yohanes will be invited by then to be the only speaker, so that they will be able to impart many things on the Orthodox faith.

This invitation was received by Fr. Yohanes and he will receive any time the invitation from protestant community who want to learn more about the Orthodox faith. Fr. Yohanes opened his heart to receive their invitation, because in the heart of Father Yohanes, how can the orthodox faith be known if we do not move and preach the Gospel of Christ to them, we have to have a spirit and say that “We will never stop to preach the

Gospel of Christ. By having this spirit, believe that the Orthodox faith will reach everyone in Indonesia.

Based on that, please pray and help, so that the Indonesian Orthodox Mission can be developed rapidly in Indonesia. For your prayers and financial help, we want to say: Thank you very much and God will see what you did for His Church, Amen.

### **New Mission for the Indonesian Orthodox Church in North Sulawesi Island**

To do the Indonesian Orthodox Missionary work is not so easy because most population of Indonesia is Muslim. We have to be clever in seeing the situation and look at how it is possible to open the new branch of Orthodoxy in the other place. Base on that, recently Father Yohanes went to North Sulawesi Island and tried to lay out the foundation of the Orthodox Church through teaching and preaching in protestant Churches. As a result, they wanted to learn about the faith of the Orthodox Church.

In North Sulawesi Island, there is no Orthodox Church. For them the name of Orthodox Church is very strange and has never been heard. When Father Yohanes preached on the Orthodox Church, they felt surprised and assumed that orthodox name is a conservative thing and they did not want to hear. By the Grace of God, when Father Yohanes taught and preached in their church (Protestant Church), they began to be aware on the true meaning of Orthodoxy.

Through the journey of Fr. Yohanes to north Sulawesi Island, after they heard the teaching of orthodoxy, some protestant ministers in that island wanted to join and enter in our Orthodox Church. The willingness of those protestant ministers to join, with us is not just in their lips but the proof of their willingness by approaching Father Yohanes's house on Tuesday 22, 2011 to learn the orthodox faith, and they will be back again to their own land, Manado, to begin their Mission by planting the seeds of Orthodoxy.

According to Father Yohanes, the seeds of orthodoxy must be planted to the heart of the Indonesian, therefore being a Missioner one has to think ahead and has a goal to lay out the foundation of orthodoxy everywhere.

Next month, Father Yohanes has plans to visit East Kalimantan with the same purpose namely to plant the seeds of orthodoxy in that island, hoping that the seeds of orthodoxy can be received as in Manado.

Planning to be invited to preach and to teach the orthodox faith to the protestant churches has been in his eyes Fr. Yohanes will be ready to receive that invitation, because Father Yohanes knew that by receiving their invitation, the seeds of orthodoxy can be planted and spread in the heart of the Indonesia. Based on that, Father Yohanes request your support and prayers, so that the apostolic faith can reach many people in Indonesia. Without your support and prayers it is impossible to develop the Indonesian Orthodox Mission.

Fr Bambang takes this opportunity to “Thank you all for the support and prayers” and God be with you all.

In the name God the Father, and The Son and The Holy Spirit, amen.

The Orthodox Missions in the Philippines and Indonesia are gowning rapidly despite of social and financial challenges.

## Chapter 29

### Emily's Way to Orthodoxy: A French Tale of Finding the True Church

Emile Pez

Emile Pez, in this exclusive article describes her journey from the Roman Catholic Church to Orthodoxy.

My name is Emilie and I was born in France. My father is a Roman Catholic but my mother is an atheist. At the age of eight, my father decided that I should be baptized as a Roman Catholic and sent me to the church school. I just loved it. I still remember that at this age, I really believed in God, I went to church every day. I had pictures of Jesus all around my room. I read and colored so many books about Jesus during my free time. I was just passing my time to pray. I totally loved Jesus and God at this age.

At the age of thirteen my father got sick and left my home. I stayed with my mother, I moved out of city, went to a new church. But, I did not like anymore to attend the church, since I did not like what the priest preached; I totally lost faith, I didn't believe in God at all.

At the age of twenty two, I was reading a book about angels, and the angels talked to me during my nights, during one month, every night almost. After this time, suddenly, in one minute, I was walking in the street and it just dawned on me, I believed in God again.

I went to the Roman Catholic Church again but I didn't feel it was for me anymore. I tried meditation, I felt nothing. I read books about Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism. I read a lot of different things, I found everything very interesting but not for me.

One day, a friend talked to me about Subud, an international spiritual organization. Here all religions worship God together. It's not a meditation, it's not a technique, it's just a receiving. During the latihan (it's an Indonesian word that we use to call what we practice) we receive the power of God directly in us. Immediately, I knew I have found my way. I started to feel God acting in myself, I was to be able to pray again, I started to change, to get rid of my bad habits and I just began to be happy. In Subud, we keep our



own religion. The latihan practice helped us, in a way, to deepen our understanding of our own religion. But for me, even if I was catholic, I didn't feel like a Roman Catholic. I really wanted to have a religion.

One day with my Subud friend called Philippe, we entered in a Russian library in France. I was studying Russian literature. My friend opened a book and he read the sentence "what were you doing Philippe, we were waiting for you". It was an Orthodox Christian book. My friend was looking for a religion too. So he went to an orthodox church and I followed him. I liked it a lot there. A few months after, he got baptized; he was not baptized at all before. I didn't convert because I didn't want to just follow him, I wanted to really feel for myself if it was right for me.

I sometimes accompanied him to the church and I started to pray as an Orthodox. Its four years now I'm praying as an Orthodox although I am not yet converted.

Last year I went to live in Kalimantan, working as a teacher in a Subud community in the jungle. In Kalimantan, I felt very happy; it's a very quiet place, with few people and few entertainments. It's a good place to be quiet and find your way. In Kalimantan, there is no Orthodox Church but it did not bother me, I continue to pray as an Orthodox and observe the holy lent.

This year when I observed the lent, I started to feel lonely in my practice, and just as the lent was starting, I met an Orthodox friend on Facebook living in Jakarta and I asked him if I could go to the church with him. At this time, I felt finally that I wanted to be converted to Orthodoxy. My soul was crying to become an Orthodox Christian; all the words of the prayers became so holy. So now, it's just obvious, I really want to become an Orthodox, but I Am waiting for the right time because I still live in the middle of the jungle, and it's not so easy for me to go to Jakarta and follow catechism. The priest said he will send me some material lesson. So now, I guess I'm on my way.

I ask your forgiveness if I have said anything wrong.

*Emilie Pez*

## Chapter 30

### **A Modern Apostle of True Orthodoxy – Katherine Valone** Chorbishop Dr Kyriakose Thottupuram of Chicago

A powerful voice of true Orthodoxy thus became no more vocal at 11.00 a.m. on November 27, 2012 after a long bout with cancer. An indefatigable fighter for genuine Orthodoxy, Katherine Valone finally succumbed to her final call to eternity. An untiring energy behind Orthodox conservatism, a relentless warrior against heretical ecumenism went to her Creator and Redeemer to receive her eternal reward of being united with Him in paradise. This writer could not control his tears at the end of her funeral when her mortal remains were laid to rest at Cypress Grove of Evergreen Cemetery in Chicago. The burial service was officiated by His Eminence Nikitas, former Metropolitan of Hong Kong – her longtime friend for whom she had reverential predilection as a priest and later as a bishop.

Katherine Valone's funeral and burial were modest events. She was the youngest of six children; all but one of her siblings had passed away many years ago. The only living brother is in a nursing home and could not attend the services due to his invalidism. Hence her nephews and nieces and their children were the only close relatives that attended a somber funeral and burial service, which included a great number of her close friends who were associates and beneficiaries of her ministry; the presence of Metropolitan Nikitas (formerly of Hong Kong) and this writer, who were dear to her hearts, was specially recognized.

She had enough time to properly prepare as an Orthodox Christian for this journey into eternity. Her illness was so long that she often expressed to this writer that it was time for her to leave and that she wanted to die. She did not seem to have any unbearable pain or agony; or at least she did not express it when asked about it. But we know she was going through the real pain of her fatal disease. Even during this period of uncomfortable days she was lamenting for her Church; she was complaining that genuine orthodoxy is at a vanishing point as our clergy, particularly the bishops, have become so liberal or in the camp of political correctness and heretical ecumenism; she would call them

'ecumaniacs'. She was worried about the Church losing her mission on earth due to inordinate affection for hedonism and materialism. WE have to specially remember Priest Mousa of the Antiochian Orthodox Church, who was gracious, to fill in and nourish her spiritually very often, particularly by serving Holy Communion to her when her own parish priest happened to be busy in his very large parish.

Why does this lady deserve special treatment in a periodical like this?

For the past thirty-two years she has been a coworker of this writer with activities of the Voice of Orthodoxy and of St. Mary's Orthodox Church, and of his intellectual ministry. She promoted and supported his ministry wherever and whenever she could, with financial and moral support. They had the same wave length in tuning the traditional patristic and scriptural messages of Orthodoxy. They would discuss on a regular basis every week on topics ranging from women's priesthood to married episcopate to the doctrines of Christian eschatology. Is there a woman like this in the Orthodox Church? Yes, now we see there is such a woman! She is Katherine Valone!

Kay Valone's activities were multifarious. There is no realm in the activities of the Orthodox Church that she has not been involved in. She was writing her weekly columns in two newspapers every week. She was active in the global missionary activities of the Orthodox Church. You could see her as the coordinator of the society that functions to protect the Orthodox shrines in the Holy Land. You could see her submerged in the various activities of her metropolis and archdiocese. On Sundays and some week days you could see her teaching Church school and other religious classes. Every week on Wednesdays she conducted bible classes at St. Mary's Orthodox Church, which was under my vicarate, and which was also acquired through her instrumentality; it was Kay Valone who located that property as soon as it had come on the market. On weekends you could see her lecturing at orthodox gatherings. You could see her raising funds for Mama Staverista, the missionary who was constructing church buildings (literally with her hands- how many laywoman would do this now?) in African missions. The week after that you could see her engaged in shipping bibles and liturgical books to orthodox Christians in Eastern Europe. Her activities went on and on. The litany of her

multifarious activities is too lengthy to enumerate. With all these she had to find time for raising funds for her own activities.

The suspense is greater when you realize that she was taking care of a 100 year old mother, who had been very ill and dependent on constant care for well over a decade unable to speak, move, or feed herself. During this period she also worked as a professional educator until her retirement. After her mother's death, the burden of taking care of her sick brother was also on her shoulders in addition to the enormous task she had undertaken as a choice of her vocation. Look at this hard reality: she sacrificed her beautiful womanhood (yes, she was a beautiful person not only spiritually but also physically) for her faith and her family. This deliberate sacrificial Christian living alone would suffice her to be justified before the throne of the Almighty and for her to be counted among the saints.

Along with all these heavy responsibilities she managed the PhosAdelphia Mission as its founder and president. The mission provided instructional materials, books and tracts, bibles and liturgical books financial assistance, and even vestments for foreign missions and home missions. Regardless of race and creed, she supported projects that would help the poor people anywhere in the world. She was also concerned about sanitary conditions and even drinking water in the remote corners of Africa; and that was the reason, it is reported, that she set aside a large portion of her Trust for such activities in Africa pioneered by the Patriarchate of Alexandria.

What a woman! No, she was not just a woman; she was an angel with a body, and a woman with the spirit and speed of an incorporeal! She had a melting heart, but her will was as strong as steel. No one could change her will once she has committed to certain positions. She would explode and snap at anyone whom she thought would be there to exploit her or to take advantage of her. Sometimes she becomes inclement by attacking and grilling bishops and priests who are responsible for improprieties and immorality. One day this writer confronted her by saying: "Miss Valone, please don't be judgmental... let God be the Judge; let us pray for these clergy". She replied: "Yes, I am

also human; I cannot stand this erosion of clerical indecency... If everyone is silent, who is going to correct them? The Church is hurting because these scandals..."

Bishops and priests were afraid of her pen, because it was as sharp as a surgeon's knife that penetrates deeper detecting clerical impropriety and surgical corrections. She does not worry who it is at fault, but worries what it is at fault. She attacked the issue at its root if it is contrary to traditional orthodox doctrines and morality. She does not want to please any hierarch or priest in order to receive his pleasure, or sympathy, or blessing. She even had the courage to criticize the Patriarch of Constantinople for being "flirtatious" with Rome in recent times! Sometimes this approach of her has created distance between her and the hierarchy. She rejected and vehemently attacked exotic embellishment of the modern episcopate; she has no hesitation to show displeasure when our new bishops appear wearing gold-filled encolpion and gold-stringed vestments. She told this writer:

"In our Church a monk is consecrated a bishop unlike the Roman and Anglican churches. Our bishops should be examples of simplicity like the Lord Himself; anything contrary to that is antithetical to the orthodox episcopate". In September 2001, she attended the consecration of St. Mary's Orthodox Church, which is under the Catholicate of the Orthodox Syrian Church of the East (Malankara). Metropolitan Barnabas of America was the chief consecrator, and Kay Valone was deeply impressed with the down-to-earth simplicity of this bishop. She later told this writer: "This is how a bishop should look like, very simple as a mendicant monk, eliciting profound piety. Look at his vestments, there was no glittering. His staff and hand-cross were true examples of deep simplicity..."

Her column, "Views from the Pews", in the *Greek Star* and *Greek Press*, discussed issues ranging from episcopal selection to autocephaly of the American Church to the sophisticated theology of redemption. They contain diagnostic analyses of the Church and her various problems and a set of well-informed prescriptions. To add, Kay Valone possessed a glowing tongue; her language was lucid, but very cogent and sharp. It could move the readers like a whirl-wind; the effect could be contagious; it could move the minds and hearts of readers one after the other, which ultimately would create a

momentum for further action on the basis of her writing. It was a thrill to read her columns. WE will miss those columns now.

How did she obtain enough information on the various theological and social issues affecting the Church? You should have gone to her home. You would find current periodicals and theological journals scattered on the floor, on the sofas, and on the beds. Her house contained a library comparable to that of a seminary, containing precious books and documents. She referred to the Rudder and the many volumes of Ante-Nicene, Nicene, and Post-Nicene Fathers to justify her positions. She also kept modern and most modern theological authors at hand to defend her writings. When did she have the time to read and write after being busy with her regular church -related duties and domestic chores? “I am a night person. I read and write in the night, often until 4.00a.m”. She told this writer.

Her ambitions? She never wanted to become a woman priest like many woman church activists in other churches. She was dogmatically opposed to woman’s priesthood, because Christ never taught it, nor practiced it, nor did tradition substantiate it with such a practice. She taught that even if one hundred bishops lay their hands together on a woman, she would never be ordained a priest, because she is not a proper vessel to contain the grace of ministerial priesthood. Such was her firm and deep faith as a traditional conservative of Orthodoxy. She had no personal ambition whatsoever. Her only desire before her death was to establish an Orthodox Retreat Center and Missionary Institute in order to maintain a theological, spiritual, and instructional base for global missionary activities, and to provide committed men and women for the missions abroad and at home. Funds were her major problem. She often said: “We Orthodox are not generous in our contributions to the right causes of the Church. Look at the Roman Catholics and Protestants; they are generous in their giving. Our people might build a large church, but we are behind in giving for worthwhile projects that support and build our base, i.e., spreading the faith”. She finally set apart her entire Trust for realizing her dream project. However, God did not permit her dream to be realized; she got very seriously ill, and could not work towards the realization of her dream. Having clearly

understood God's plan for her, she rewrote her Trust so that the bulk of her wealth could be utilized for the missionary projects of the Patriarchate of Alexandria (so it is told).

She was deeply humble in her heart. She never liked flattery. She did not particularly like gifts or compliments. When people brought flowers, she would ask, "Why did you buy these flowers and plants? This could be used for something useful, like helping the poor and the needy, or helping our missions; these plants and flowers are going to trash tomorrow..." When this writer sent her Christmas and Thanksgiving cards, she would call him and say: "Why did you spend this much money for nothing? You could call me and say the same greetings over the phone". She disliked pomp and glamour; it was just meaningless vanity for her. Kay Valone was frugal with money; she would never spend money unnecessarily; but was never miserly in treating people. She would treat you in a dignified manner when you visit her. It was her pleasure that this writer ate with her when he visited her, until the time she was totally disabled. She would even give you something to take with you for your journey back home.

She was a faithful keeper of public funds donated for missions; she would add more from her own funds to replenish it. She distributed funds to the beneficiaries only on verified needs; and later monitored how the funds were utilized; she would definitely ask for genuine records. Yes, this woman was tough. She was an honest custodian of the ministry.

A leading professional educator, a talented religious education curriculum developer, and an insightful missiologist, Valone held several lay positions within the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese. She also was the head of the Sunday School at Sts. Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church in Palos Hills, and also served as the President of its School Board for a long period. After receiving her bachelor's degree and two graduate degrees from the University of Chicago, she was with the Chicago Public School System for over thirty-five years. She was a regular contributor of articles and monographs to many social and religious publications. Listed in the 1982 edition of the World Who's Who of Women, the 1986 Who's Who in Religion, and the 1985 Biography International, Kay Valone received several recognitions and service awards, including the prestigious Order

of St. Paul from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese for Outstanding Orthodox, and the Distinguished Public Service Award from Greek American Community Services.

She was a conservative Orthodox who did not feel comfortable with the ethnocentric divisiveness of Orthodoxy in America. She believed in ONE autocephalous and autonomous Orthodox Church in America under ONE Patriarch for America, without the administrative control of mother churches in Europe. She was very unhappy that the powerful and resourceful Greek Orthodox Church in America did not give leadership to make it a reality. Kay Valone firmly believed that this was the only way Orthodoxy could effectively witness Christ in this hemisphere. However, she was a friend of all jurisdictions. Moreover, it was her ardent desire to see both factions of Orthodoxy, the Oriental Orthodox and the Byzantine Orthodox, come together in faith and worship discarding the hairsplitting semantics of Christological terminologies which were products of cultural diversity or political ambitions of the time some fifteen centuries ago, and recently reckoned as mutually acceptable orthodox positions; she considered this more important for Orthodox Christian witnessing than anything else in modern times.

Indeed, it was a blessing for this writer to have known this woman and to have been associated with this great woman as a friend, mentor and as a spiritual inspirer.

Katherine Valone, our sister, we will miss you; your wisdom, your wit and above all your presence until we meet again in paradise. May you rest in peace and may your memory be eternal!



## Chapter 31

### Our Ignorance Will Disintegrate Orthodoxy in Ukraine

George Alexander

*“By the rivers of Babylon,*

*There we sat and wept*

*When we remembered Zion”*

*(Psalm 136) The Orthodox Study Bible.*

*Types of Orthodox Churches in Ukraine:*

*Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Moscow Patriarchate – UOC-MP*

*Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kievyan Patriarchate-UOC-KP*

*Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church-UAOC*

*Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Canonical-UOC- Canonical*

*These are my Personal Reflections on the Situation of Orthodoxy in Ukraine.*

I was shocked to learn the recent developments in Ukraine between UAOC (Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church) and UGCC (Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church under Roman Catholic Church). Kharkiv-Poltava Eparchy of the UAOC will enter Union with UGCC! What kind of Union is this? How can UAOC stay as an Orthodox Church if they enter in false union with Rome? One thing is for sure, that Rome will fully swallow UAOC and ‘Latinize’ it within few years and they will be left without any sort of identity of their own. The False union will not protect and preserve the traditions or spiritual heritage of the Single Kievyan Church. The Christian tradition of Kiev and Ukraine is purely Orthodox and how will this tradition be preserved by entering union with an Eastern Catholic Rite under Rome? Rome is always tactful. Kievyan spiritual heritage and Orthodox tradition will be crushed under the Roman Papacy. The concept of UNIATISM or Eastern Catholicism is a false format of the union. Whether Kharkiv-Poltava Eparchy is a breakaway group of UAOC or not, I see the danger in such union. All Eastern Catholic Churches have lost many of their original spiritual traditions. They

have a mix of Orthodox and Latin practices and are struggling to gain more recognition along with their Latin counterparts.

The Assyrian Church of the East was invited for a union with Chaldean Catholic Church in 2015, which was refused by the Assyrian hierarchy.

Where are we moving? What is the recognition of Orthodoxy in Ukraine now? The Orthodox fight between each other and end up in false union with Rome? We need to be alert. We have political problems and ethnic tensions, but this doesn't mean that we have to live in ignorance. Our ignorance and political issues should not be allowed to disintegrate holy Orthodoxy in Ukraine. The focus is now on political conflicts with Russia and transferring of church buildings from one jurisdiction to another. Orthodox Church leaders in Ukraine should refocus on dialogue to achieve conciliar inter-orthodox unity. Inter-Orthodox problems should be resolved with priority. If church leaders ignore Inter-Orthodox unity and dialogue, it will result in the total mess for Orthodox faithful in Ukraine.

The Unification council of UOC- KP and UAOC has undergone further complexities. But what we need here is a dialogue between all Orthodox Churches in Ukraine and find a common solution. In September 2015, there was a meeting between the Primate of UGCC (Uniate Rite) and UAOC for cooperation. For me this is contradiction. Cooperation is required among all. Ecumenical cooperation and interfaith dialogues are very important. But for the Orthodox, the first cooperation should be among themselves. To create a single Ukrainian Orthodox Church or to create several canonical churches under one major Ukrainian Orthodox Council will only be possible through intense dialogue, prayer, faith and respect. There should not be any room for hierarchal ego or personal politics. The dialogue should not be halted between UOC- MP, UOC-KP and UAOC. It should be extended to the UOC- Canonical, which is the smallest independent Orthodox jurisdiction in Ukraine.

Let me take this, opportunity to present an article I had written few years back.

### **A Humble Call for Unity Among Ukrainian Orthodox Churches**

It is indeed sad that the Orthodox Churches in the Ukraine are split into different factions. We will not investigate the history of the conflicts, rather we will try to discuss some practical steps to find any solutions to end the schism within Ukrainian Orthodoxy.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is now divided into UOC- MP, UOC-KP, UAOC and UOC-Canonical, where UOC – MP is the only Canonical Church. Dialogues are being initiated between UOC-MP and UOC- KP which has generated some hope. UAOC have also taken steps by sending request to Ecumenical Patriarchate in order to become accepted into the canonical league which is extremely encouraging. As of 2016 all inter-orthodox dialogues and unity efforts have come to standstill.

### **Effects of Schism**

The politics and unhealthy competition between Orthodox Churches has resulted in the double advantage for other groups, like the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) and Protestant denominations. It has been reported that a large number of Protestant groups are emerging in the Ukraine, which is traditionally an Orthodox hub. Due to the schism, several families in the Ukraine are divided. People find themselves in serious trouble with worship, hence Protestants find it a good pasture to evangelize.

Even the UGCC is benefiting considerably from the schism. The UGCC finds this a good opportunity to pull ropes to gain recognition as one of the ‘National Churches’ in Ukraine. It is not the UGCC alone, but it is the dream of all Eastern Catholic Rites to get recognized as the ‘National’ Church in the respective country since all Eastern Catholics have a serious identity crisis, they are neither Roman, nor are they Orthodox. The recent move by UGCC to construct a Cathedral in Odessa is part of this hidden agenda.

The Orthodox Church in Ukraine is very much required to preserve the faith and to safeguard the loss of flocks from heretical teachings. But how far is this possible and

practical with such divisions within the Orthodox Church? The priority should be given to Orthodoxy, the one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Orthodoxy and its value should be preserved. Put Orthodoxy first and not personal agenda or political interests. It is the duty of the Church to preserve the conciliar unity of Orthodoxy in the Ukraine.

### **Practical Thinking**

Initially, a National Council for Orthodox Churches should be formed in the Ukraine, to exclusively deal with the issues within Orthodoxy. The council should have equal participation of all Orthodox Churches in Ukraine. A good office structure should be developed, with mutual co-operation. The council should be responsible for holding dialogues between Orthodox Churches in the Ukraine, and the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ecumenical Patriarchate should be represented there. The council is not to be dominated by a single Church, but it should be a stage for the equal participation and co-operation between all Orthodox Churches in the Ukraine. The National Orthodox Council should also involve Oriental Orthodox Churches in the Ukraine (The Armenian Orthodox Church in Ukraine).

### **The Canonical Issue**

As mentioned earlier the UOC-MP is the only canonical Church in the Ukraine. It would be highly recommended that the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate recognize the canonical status of the other two Orthodox Churches i.e., there shall be three canonical Orthodox Churches in Ukraine, UOC-MP, UOC-KP, UAOC, which shall be in full communion with Ecumenical Patriarchate, Moscow Patriarchate and rest of the Orthodox Churches. Internal autonomy for each Church should be encouraged. Ideally, none should interfere in the internal matter of the others Church. Common discussions and declarations should be made via the National Council.

Recognizing UOC-KP and UAOC will not be a compromise by the Moscow Patriarchate, but it will definitely strengthen the position and presence of Orthodoxy in the Ukraine. Hence the three canonical Orthodox Churches can also safeguard their own interest. All

existing positions of the hierarchy and clergy in each Church can be retained in the present manner, reducing the fear of compromise on both position and power.

A protocol should be signed between the EP, MP, UOC-MP, UOC-KP, and UAOC to ensure present and future aspects of Orthodox Churches in the Ukraine. The protocol should include all details regarding canonical status, defined areas of operation, manner to solve conflicts (present and future), encouraging inter-Orthodox collaborations, titles of each primate, jurisdiction etc. The National Orthodox Council of Ukraine should deal with common ecumenical matters pertaining to Orthodox Churches in Ukraine. The National council should also involve Oriental Orthodox Churches in Ukraine (Armenian Orthodox Church).

### **Experience the power of United Orthodox Witness**

If UOC-KP, UAOC are willing to enter EP as Metropolitan Churches they shall be permitted, to do so or they can enter canonical Orthodoxy in their present status i.e., UOC-KP as a separate Patriarchal Church and UAOC as a separate Metropolitan Church. It is an agreement within disagreement, a dialogue for unity with freedom and prosperity. Here unity does not mean amalgamation of one Church into another nor imposing force on any Church to conquer them. Extra care should be exercised not to hurt the feelings of your counterpart whilst engaging in dialogue.

Every Church has her own individual interest, which is well and good, but such interest should not hinder the unity of Orthodoxy. It should not challenge, it should not subjugate nor overrule Orthodoxy, which is the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ. It is not Pope of Rome nor the WCC that should decide for Orthodoxy, but we Orthodox should decide for ourselves, it is our future. We should not allow Ecumenism to swallow Orthodox unity and faith. Several attempts and discussions have been initiated by the Church, many discussions have been held by UOC-MP and UOC- KP as well as UOC-KP and UAOC to reconcile and to build one Ukrainian Church, but they could not yield a proper outcome. We saw the hierarchies of the Ukrainian Churches criticizing each other for the failure of dialogue.

It is not an easy task to build one national Ukrainian Orthodox Church, but is possible to build it with unified spiritual commitment, holiness of prayers and genuine hard work. This is not the time to criticize each other, but to think and act in humility, forgiveness and peace, for a hopeful future.

If we can have dialogues with WCC, Rome, cooperate with heterodox and drink coffee together; why can't we have dialogues with our Orthodox brethren?

As an Orthodox Christian, I know that people are well aware of what I have written, especially the Church hierarchy, and they are well informed and know more than I on such issues. I have not visited Russia or Ukraine, but it is out of my love for Orthodoxy that I have written this article. I belong to the Indian Orthodox Church, but I have seen and experienced the bitterness of schisms, administrative and power conflicts between the Syrian and Indian Orthodox Churches. Let us not repeat the mistake again. Orthodox Christian unity is the need of the hour, hence let us stand united. Also I wonder why we Orthodox are not trying to find solutions rather than making the situation more complex mixing it with ethnic issues and politics. This is where we need a change in our thinking process. It also requires compromise, love and respect for each other.

## Chapter 32

### **Honouring Mother Theresa of Calcutta is not enough for Orthodox Christians**

George Alexander

Mother of the poor, Teresa of Calcutta (1910 -1997) is well-known to all. There is no need for any introduction or explanation of her life and work. People from all walks of life revere Mother Teresa and her missionary works in India. Many Orthodox Christians love and admire her. At the same time, Orthodox Christians forget to talk about two legendary missionaries who lived and worked in India. They are Metropolitan Alvares Julius (Oriental Orthodox) and Mother Graveliea (Eastern Orthodox).

#### **The Missionary life of Metropolitan Alvares Julius (1836 –1923)**

Alvares Julius of Goa was a former Roman Catholic priest who reunited with the Indian Orthodox Malankara Church. He is known as the ‘Apostle of Charity’. He was a true missionary champion who established several Orthodox Missions in Goa, North East India, South India and Sri Lanka. He had a reach even to UK and Europe. He took care of poor and the sick. The Bishop was a great educator, social worker and philanthropist. He started a number of newspapers and magazines, published many books and generated awareness among the people of Goa on the bad effects of contagious diseases. In Panaji, Goa he ran a house for poor destitute as well as leprosy and tuberculosis patients. There is an interesting incident that happened in the life of Metropolitan Alvares. Once Metropolitan Alvares begged in front of a shopkeeper for contributions and the angry shopkeeper spat on his bowl. –Alvares said, “All right, I shall keep this for me. Now, give something for the poor.” This response made the shopkeeper contribute generously. He lived as a beggar, he lived for Christ, he lived for the poor and less privileged ones.

#### **The Missionary Life of Mother Graveliea (1897-1992)**

Born as Avrilia Papayanni in Constantinople 1897, her family moved to Thessaloniki in 1923. She got trained as chiropodist and physiotherapist in England. She also opened her own clinic in Athens. After her mum’s death, she moved to India to work for the poor

and sick. Elder Graviela lived a simple life and also served at Baba Amte's Anandwan (Caring institution for Leprosy Patients) several years taking care of leprosy patients. Graviela was among the first foreign workers to serve at the institution. A disciple of Swami Sivananda of Hrishikesh, she was known by the name Sister Leela to the inmates of Anandwan. She lived simple and devoted her life to serve the sick and poor. Sister Graviela was also a good friend of Fr Lazarus Moore, the great Orthodox Missionary Champion, who took care of the families of the sick and downtrodden in India and several other parts of the world.

### **Treating Indira Gandhi**

The then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi was suffering from shoulder and neck pain. She consulted several doctors and tried numerous medicines with no success. Finally, she consulted Sister Graviela. Sister Graviela applied her physiotherapy skills on the great leader of India. Indira felt much better. The Prime Minister was at peace from the long-time pain. At the same time, she was astonished by the treating skills of this simple Orthodox Christian nun. Indira thanked Mother and said, "You have fairy hands." Indira was pretty impressed with the psychotherapy skills of Mother Gabriella. Mother Gabriella used to visit the office of the iconic Indian leader. Their friendship was precious by all means. Their story is mentioned in the book 'Mother Graviela: The Ascetic of Love.' But their relationship remains unknown to many people.

### **Unknown Missionaries of Charity and Love**

Unfortunately, Metropolitan Alvares Julius and Mother Graviela remain unknown to many people in India and abroad. They have never received worldwide recognition like Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Some experts have even commented that many activities of Mother Teresa were modelled upon the charity and missionary works of Metropolitan Alvares Julius. I am not sure whether Mother Teresa was aware of Metropolitan Julius or Elder Graviela. Unlike Mother Teresa, Alvares Julius and Graviela did not have financial, material, religious or political back up. Their sacrifice for Christ and the poor remains buried deep inside somewhere. Mother Teresa did something others could not do, she was a person who lived for and with the poor. But neither Elder Graviela nor



Metropolitan Alvares did anything less than that of Mother Teresa. The world should know their pious act of love, charity and human service.

Orthodox Christians has a great responsibility to promote Metropolitan Alvares and Mother Graviela. Unfortunately due to the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox divisions, lack of a common platform for Orthodox churches and lack of unified promotions, these two great personalities remain unknown to most of the people. The Oriental Orthodox Christians have not shown that much of interest in Mother Graviela as she belonged to Eastern Orthodox Communion and Eastern Orthodox faithful seems to be less interested with Metropolitan Alvares as he belonged to Oriental Orthodox Communion. Above all these factors, the most important aspect is that both personalities were not given worldwide coverage by Orthodox Churches or the international media. The first step should come from Orthodox Church. The push should come from their respective Orthodox jurisdictions and should be circulated on global secular and non-secular platforms.

The legacy of Metropolitan Alvares was not taken care until recent times. In 2015, the Indian Orthodox Malankara Church declared him as a regional saint. Reports from Greece says that Mother Graviela shall be canonised. She remains well-known in Greece and some Eastern Orthodox circles but I doubt her fame beyond that. Metropolitan Alvares is not known beyond the Indian and Syriac Orthodox circles, not even among the entire Oriental Orthodox communion. This is the case with many of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox missionary champions and saints. St Francis Xavier, St Francis of Assisi and St. Therese of Lisieux (St. Little Teresa) are widely known among the Orthodox faithful and the public, thanks to the enormous financial, social and political influence of Vatican.

It is not about creating personality cults, but it is all about propagating the goodness and love of these two revered people. If Mother Teresa is known worldwide, then why aren't Metropolitan Alvares and Mother Graviela?

## Chapter 33

### The Vatican Connections

George Alexander & Kisha D Dorado

#### **Pope John Paul II and the Balkan Connection**

(Translated by Kisha D Dorado)

Pope John Paul II is the last person in the world to be decaled a saint. Why? We, the Orthodox from Balkans, know that well. 1990 was the year dedicated to Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Few people know that this nun was from Skopje, in the former federal republic of Macedonia, and belonged to the group of ethnic Albanians. That same year the peak of tensions between Albanian terrorists and Serbs was reached in the region of Kosmet (Kosovo and Metohija). When John Paul II, visited some Albanian villages of southern Italy where they celebrated Our Lady of Shkodra, Albania patron and protector, the Pope said: “Mother of Hope, see this lovely scenery on this day... may this generous people be united,” declaring explicit Vatican support to the cause of the Albanians and their aspirations in Kosovo and Metohija. The Pope’s visit to Albania (country – by the way – overwhelmingly atheistic or, at least, Muslim) and visited the widow of the Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha, with whom he attended a ceremony in front of a monument to the “Greater Albania.”

What was his role in the conflicts in the Balkans? What did Pope John Paul II do to reconcile Orthodox Slavs and Roman Catholic Slavs in the Balkans? He visited over 130 countries, but he never visited Orthodox Serbia, or Russia, the largest Orthodox country. Most importantly, the Pope never made a visit to Jasenovac, the largest concentration camp in the Balkans during World War II. The Pope prayed inside a mosque, visited Israel in 2000, went to Zagreb and Banja Luka, but never found the time to visit Jasenovac. Why?

Did the Pope only exacerbate religious tensions and animosity in the Balkans between the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Sunni Muslim communities? The Pope was greeted

warmly in only one Orthodox country, Romania. In Greece and the Ukraine, he received a cold and hostile reception. In Serbia and Russia, he was never even invited.

**Heretic Sermon of Archbishop Andrey Sheptytsky**  
(George Alexander & Kisha D Dorado)

During the month of October 2013, several e-media reported that Russian officials from the Meshchansky District Court in Moscow recently labelled a sermon preached in 1900 by Metropolitan Archbishop Andrey Sheptytsky (Ukrainian Greek Catholic Rite) as “extremist”.

He talks about his nations religious past, by saying that, “We Ukrainians are filled with love for the Catholic Church, we always saw her as our own mother,” and the importance of the Pope “Christ gave supreme authority to Peter and all his heirs. In other words, the Pope of Rome is recognized as the visible head of the Church”.

The above mentioned part of his sermon is truly heretical for several reasons. First of All Russia- Ukraine is traditional Orthodox Christian hub whereas Roman Catholicism is a foreign institution. ‘Petrian’ supremacy is totally rejected by Orthodox Churches and Pope is not recognized as the head of the Church of Christ. Pope has just primacy of honor among other Bishops. St. Peter and rest of the holy holy Apostles are considered to be equal. Roman Catholic Church cannot be the mother Church nor is Pope the head of visible Church. Jesus Christ is the head of Church, and Church is the living body of Christ in this world.

Kiev, Ukraine was for centuries, the center of the pure Orthodoxy. That person, ignoring the Orthodox majority, speaks as if they don’t exist (reminds us of the late Croatian president Franjo Tuđman, who used to speak in the same manner).

Eastern Catholicism or UNIATISM itself is heretic concept established by Vatican to force Orthodox Churches to have forceful union with Rome.

**Peter J writes:** “The unia was founded at the Laterano Synod of 1215 and in the Bull of Pope Innocent 4th. The unia was created in Poland by two Jesuits and the plan was to Latinize the Orthodox of Poland and south-west Russia (Ukraine). With the help of the Polish King the Synods of Brest was formed. Since then the forced conversion of Orthodox to the Papists began, churches were confiscated, Orthodox were murdered, tortured, or sent into exile.”

The shame of the Unia is on the Pope.

1914- Austro-Hungarian Empire-eradicates Orthodox believers. A great number sent to concentration camps, Talerhof and Terezin.

1917-and after- Catholic interventionists attacked the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, forming an anti-Orthodox uniat pact with the atheist and bolsheviks.

1943-1944- Hundreds of Ukrainian Orthodox priests eliminated and tortured by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, aided by uniate Metropolitan Josyf Slipyj.

1938- Volhynia, Western Ukraine, the Polish government oversees the destruction of more than 190 Orthodox Churches, and over 150 Churches turned over to the Latin Rite. This was occurring all over the Carpathian Mountain regions in Poland, Western Ukraine, and Czechoslovakia.

UNIATISM is a problem all over the world. It has proved to be a failed experiment by Vatican. Eastern Catholics are neither Orthodox nor Roman. They are in huge identity crisis. Vatican is still trying to use it as a tool to subjugate Orthodoxy worldwide by creating duplicate counterparts for Orthodox Churches.

We can see it where Vatican has created three Patriarchates of Antioch namely Syrian Catholic Patriarchate of Antioch, Melchite Greek Catholic Patriarchate and Maronite Patriarchate of Antioch, apart from the genuine Patriarchates of Syriac Orthodox Church

and Greek Orthodox Church. This is a purposeful attack on the canonical jurisdiction of Orthodoxy in Antioch.

We saw another blind attack when the local primate of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church proclaimed himself to be Catholicos on the throne of St Thomas and Malankara Metropolitan (His original title is nothing more than ‘Major Archbishop Baselios Cleemis Cardinal Thottunkal of Trivandrum of the Syro-Malankaras’) whereas these titles are exclusive privilege of the Primate of the Indian Malankara Orthodox Church.

HOLOCAUST and Vatican, are like hand and glove; Vatican supported some of the worst mass murderers who took part in genocide in their Fascistic NDH (Independent State of Croatia) during WW II. (ie. Aloisus Stepinac and Miroslav Filipović who were ‘baking’ Orthodox Christians alive).

The sermon is violently anti-Orthodox, written on behalf of Vatican, who has always been involved in some of the worst crimes against the Orthodox Christians.

### **Another Violation of Existing Practise between Vatican and Orthodox Churches**

In April 2016, as per the MCYM (Malankara Catholic Youth Movement) Fb group, twenty-five families from Indian Orthodox Malankara Church (Catholicate of the East), Syriac Orthodox Church in India (Patriarchate of Antioch & All East) the Independent Thozhiyoor Church (former Oriental Orthodox Church) ‘reunited’ with the Malankara Catholic Rite in India (One of the Eastern Catholic Rites under the Roman Pope which split from the Indian Orthodox Malankara Church in the 1930’s under Archbishop Ivanios). The so-called ‘reunion’ event took place on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2016, St. George Malankara Catholic Church in Kunnampulam area (Kerala). The event was presided by Most. Rev Abraham Mar Yulios (Malankara Catholic Bishop of Movathupuzha).

The news is a shocker to the two ancient Orthodox Churches in India who are still in administrative schism. The concept of ‘Uniatism or Eastern Catholicism’ is rejected by

Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches. It is a false way of union between Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. After the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church recognized that the unity with the Orthodox world should come through dialogue and not through conversion of people, communities from Orthodox to the Eastern Catholicism. This was clearly stated in the recent joint declaration between Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and Pope Francis of in Cuba.

The Joint declaration says that “It is today clear that the past method of ‘Uniatism,’ understood as the union of one community to the other, separating it from its Church, is not the way to re-establish unity.” But equally important to the Vatican and to Greek Catholics is the acknowledgement by the patriarch of the right of these churches “to exist and to undertake all that is necessary to meet the spiritual needs of their faithful.” ([www.ncronline.org](http://www.ncronline.org)).

Hence, the so-called ‘reunion’ of 25, Indian Orthodox and Syriac Orthodox families to the Malankara Catholic Uniate Rite is a total breach of the existing practice in the Roman Catholic Church, and disrespectful to the ecumenical relations between Vatican and the Oriental Orthodox world.

If anyone wants to join the Roman Catholic Church, he or she is free to do the same, but using Uniatism as a tool to absorb Orthodox faithful to Roman Catholicism is an absolute violation of the existing understanding and practises. Apart from these incidents, the Malankara Catholic Rite continues to provoke the Indian Orthodox Church in many ways. Their Primate Major Archbishop Baselios Cleemis claims himself the Catholicos, Malankara Metropolitan & successor to the Throne of St. Thomas, a title which is exclusive to the Primate of the Indian Orthodox Malankara Church.

Reunion through Uniatism (Sheep stealing) and ecumenism cannot go hand in hand. Apart from the Catholic annual Roman Catholic-Oriental Orthodox ecumenical consolations, the Roman Church organizes separate dialogues with Indian and Syriac Orthodox Churches in India. The same Roman church uses UNIATES /Eastern

Catholicism as a tool to steal Orthodox faithful in India. The Syriac and Indian Orthodox Churches should move out of the ecumenical dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church and should give prime importance in resolving all existing issues between them. Ecumenism is good and Christian unity is very important, but it should be practised with mutual respect and considering all existing agreements.

*Statement by Rt. Rev. Dr. Chorbishop Kyriakose Thottupuram of Chicago – Chancellor of Orthodoxy Cognate PAGE on the conversion of a group Oriental Orthodox faithful to Roman Catholicism through Uniate Movement in India.*

In common declarations in Rome or elsewhere, Rome would preach non-uniatism, but Rome in her heart is totally imperialistic. These smaller groups of UNIATES (Eastern Catholics) are rewarded by Rome for their efforts and achievements in bringing more of the “separated brethren” (The Orthodox & Protestants) under the universal jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome. There are agencies indirectly or directly controlled by the Congregation of Oriental Churches (in Rome) that financially support such efforts. We Orthodox are so naïve to believe what the Pope says in his common declaration and communique; we really do not read Rome’s mind or do not know how to read her mind. If what the Bishop of Rome says is sincere and honest in his declarations why doesn’t he revoke the recognition of these oriental rites and demand them to go back to their original Church? If this is not done, never trust Rome. All the ecumenism and “oneness” that Rome preaches is hogwash, and is intrinsically hoggish!

The Church that Jesus founded was never intended to be governed by ONE central authority from somewhere, particularly from Rome; if it was meant to be otherwise he would have clearly taught it in His gospels or the apostles must have clearly written in their epistles. The thread of unity between local churches was maintained in the early church through one faith, one priesthood, and the Eucharistic communion. For Rome, the theory that the Church should be governed by ONE central authority is a matter of faith and is required for one’s salvation! For us Orthodox, it is an Anathema. Every church should be locally governed by a Synod of Bishops with its elected Patriarch/ Archbishop/

metropolitan as the head of the national Church who runs the day-to-day affairs of his national Church at large while the bishops take care of their local dioceses. Until the second coming of Christ, Rome will continue her imperialistic policy and mislead her faithful; Rome has enough resources for it and immense wealth to financially power such activities.

All the good relationships, educational scholarships for Orthodox clergy in Rome and in their universities and all other good gestures are not totally with good intentions. Behind every so-called “good works”, Rome’s agenda is conversion to the Roman Church. If they can get one convert in a year they would celebrate it. In America EWTN (Eternal Word Television Network) is actively engaged in promoting conversions and highlighting her converts (this TV channel has become available via internet everywhere in the world).

The sad fact is that the Orthodox Church does not realize this hidden agenda and is even willing to go to any extent to cooperate with the Roman Catholic programs without really understanding the dangers inherent in such activities.



## **Chapter 34**

### **Some Notes on the Kenyan Orthodox Mission**

Father Mark Mwangi

Special Courtesy Anastasia Giannios-Poulos

#### **The Nativity 2016**

As we await the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, let us rejoice in all the miracles he has bestowed upon us. We have witnessed several goals being achieved through this mission.

The first goal being, as we have mentioned, that we are able to place all 28 orphans who passed their qualification exams into elementary school. We are able to afford, not only one uniform, but TWO uniforms per child. School uniforms are mandatory to attend. For an underprivileged orphan, that is a road block to education. Having two will make it easier, being able to wash one, while wearing the other. Children often wear their uniforms through school and all day at home as they work & play. Two will ensure that they are able to get through the entire school year. We have placed our deposit on the uniforms and will be finalizing our purchase when we arrive in January, at which time we will distribute. We are looking forward to sharing their smiles with you as they get ready to attend school mid-January.

We are waiting to hear back from Father Mark Mwangi to see how many of the high school children passed their qualification exams. Results of the exam will be released from the school early January. Our desire is to help them too. During our mission, we will look to gift school packets to help get their school year started. We also plan to feed the children and distribute food packages to each child. We are looking to bank food items, so the children will have food to eat even after we are gone.

Having raised enough money to achieve our first goal, we then continued to raise money to fulfill the goal of providing Father Mark Mwangi and Presbytera with a second hand vehicle, to enable them to continue their spiritual good works for the orphans through

their ministry. We are so delighted to announce that a single anonymous donor has generously stepped forward & donated this instrumental tool to Father Mark Mwangi's Orphanage! What joy! What a Christmas MIRACLE! I have a few words from Father Mark to share with ALL our supporters!

From Father Mark Mwangi:

Dear Madam Anastasia,

Peace be with you. Amen. Please allow me to send my heartfelt thanks to you, Mr Timothy and to the donor who donated money for me to buy a car. I don't think I have the proper words to express my thanks to you and him. It was beyond my imagination. IT IS A MIRACLE FROM GOD that a person who doesn't know me contributed a car WHICH I HAVE LONGED FOR, for 25 YEARS of my priesthood!!! This car will help me alot to carry on my Sacramental services to our local community and even go further with Evangelism in the future. This car will help me REACH ALL ORPHANS IN TIME, carrying food to them and taking the sick to the hospital, which is very far. I have decided the best vehicle to fulfill these needs, is a Toyota Probox car. This type of vehicle is strong and spare parts are not expensive. Its fuel consumption is low. I have found a good car in one of the firms in our city. My prayers is that God bless Saint Philothea Project, its leaders and ALL those who have donated to us. Your donations will save orphans lives. You have given them hope. By paying for their education, you've made them feel that even though they don't have parents, they have friends who care.

Please remember, that God will not ask us how many services we have attended or how much wealth we saved. God wants to know how many people we gave food, water, and clothes to. God will remember those people you comforted when they were in need. You are wonderful friends. Your support will help us alot.

God bless you all. Father Mark Mwangi welcomes you to Kenya.

Thank you sincerely,

Father Mark

So my dear supporters and friends of Saint Philothea Project! Together, we have made a HUGE difference in the lives of Father Mark & his orphans. We look forward to JANUARY 13th, when Timothy Farrell, President of Saint Philothea Project leaves for Kenya! Our philosophy is to personally deliver goods with our own hands, so that way we remain a symbol of hope to those we serve. We are also quite proud of the team we put together to help promote & organize this fundraiser. We have added several key members to our team! We look forward to collaborating together on future missions, sponsored by Saint Philothea Project.

I want to personally thank George Alexander for helping us promote our fundraiser on OCP Media Network, and the world's largest online Pan-Orthodox Christian Portal. I also want to thank Dionysia Petrakis who is helping us develop digital letterhead & helping us promote and advertise our fundraiser. We look forward to working more closely with "Nysia" on our next project and possibly making her a permanent part of the Saint Philothea Project team!

I also want to thank Elenie Gracos for coordinating another division of our Kenyan mission project, SEW FOR AFRICA! Elenie coordinated with the ladies and nuns from her home church and monastery to help sew 68 reusable feminine hygiene pads, desperately needed by the woman/girls in Kenya. A woman's menstrual cycle can cause her to fall behind in school, eventually failing a grade. We look forward to continuing and growing our SEW FOR AFRICA project! We are also looking for more volunteers! Please contact us if you are interested! I also want to thank our president, Timothy Farrell for his spiritual inspiration, his past experience with mission projects & his willingness to be the FACE of Saint Philothea Project. Timothy gifts his time of travel and pays all his own expenses to complete our mission. This includes airfare, accommodations, car rental & all other incurred travel expenses.

We look forward to future group missions to Kenya with hopes to grow our charity through various other projects, both spiritual and medical. All those involved in Saint

Philothea Project put in their own free time, skills and money. We do this servitude for the love of Christ, and love and compassion of our fellow orphans and widows. We focus on our Orthodox children to grow God's church. In doing so, we are doing what our Lord has asked of us.

I personally am doing this, because if Father Mark Mwangi and Presbyteria Alice Mwangi can labor this hard to achieve all that they have, with minimal resources, then it is only fitting that I do something to give them the support they deserve. I can honestly say that the BEST Christmas gift this year was the JOY I RECEIVED IN GIVING my attention to this project. I witnessed little miracles along the way. I've witnessed that God answers prayers. I've seen amazing successes come into being through prayer, hard work & dedication. My future dream is to attend in person the next mission trip to Kenya, where I can see the fruits of my labors with my own eyes. I want to see the joyous smiles of these children that I love and to embrace them with my arms. God willing, I will! As we continue to grow our relations with the people of Kenya, this dream will become possible. I leave you with some more joyous news of our success, through the words of Bishop Neophitos David, Kongai.

Anastasia, by God's grace I was elevated by the Holy Synod from Auxiliary Bishop to a Diocesan Bishop, meaning that I will be fully responsible and authoritatively free to discharge my pastoral duties directly from the throne of the Patriarch of Alexandria. I am welcoming Saint Philothea Project to my Diocese so that we can bring our minds and hearts together to help the needy and evangelize together through this expression of love to others in need. As soon as I am settled I will inform you because I am going to begin from nothing. This is a new Diocese which has never existed before, so there is no office, no residence, nothing! But the faithful are there and the church is alive... with God all things are possible!

What joyous news! Another miracle in itself! Saint Philothea Project has worked hard to gain recognition through the head of the Orthodox Church in Kenya. We seek to bridge the gap between the Kenyan, African Church and the (Greek) Orthodox Church of

America. We look forward to Bishop Neophitos visit to Texas in March 2016 & seek to use it as an opportunity to open the lines of communication between the two parts via the OCMC. We hope we can gain the support of our American Orthodox Churches to grow future missions for our African counterparts in Kenya, through the help of Saint Philothea Project; a big dream, but one that has begun with this critical step.

On this mission, Saint Philothea Project will be welcomed into Kenya through the Orthodox Church of Kenya! We look forward to this joint collaboration, as it will allow us to grow our future missions. Timothy Farrell arrives in Kenya Jan 14<sup>th</sup>. He will begin our mission with an overnight stay at the seminary. We have lots of work ahead as we prepare and seek to fulfill all the goals we set & the promises we made to our supporters. We look forward to posting an update following our mission trip and sharing lots of photos of our journey.

None of this could have been made possible without the generosity, love & support of our donors. You too, are a critical part of our team. Some gave a little, some gave alot, but you all gave what you could! It is BECAUSE you gave that ALL of this is possible. Please remember, that what you gave together, was HOPE, DREAMS, LOVE and so much more. Father Mark Mwangi, Presbyterera, the orphans and we at Saint Philothea Project THANK YOU from the bottom of our hearts.

Finally and foremost, we THANK God, for giving us the greatest gift of all, his only begotten son, the babe in the manger, Jesus Christ! Dear Lord, we thank you for making miracles come true every day. We thank you for your guidance and for bringing us together to do good works. Merry Christmas!

## Chapter 35

### From Baptist to Byzantium

Joslyn Renae

My conversion story to Holy Orthodoxy is in fact, not so much a story, but rather a pilgrimage of grace. It has been a long road and the more I travel, the more I realize what a long way I have left to go. It is my prayer that my journey may inspire your own.

I was raised in a Baptist family, and the church we attended was a member of the General Association of General Baptist Churches (GARBC). My parents had attended our little Baptist church with their parents and had grown up, fallen in love, married, and decided to raise their family in the same community. As a girl, my mother was my Sunday school teacher, my father a deacon of the church. I participated in church pageants and plays. The congregation was not merely a collection of people – they were truly my Church family.

I remember being a very deep and thoughtful little girl. When I was three years-old – and I actually remember this event – I asked my mother, one night just before bed, as I stared at the glow of the nightlight in my room, how we could know "for sure" there was a God. Perhaps it wasn't the best timing. My mother often quips that she ought to have said, "If you don't go to sleep now, you'll get to meet Him!" Whatever her answer was at the time, it didn't satisfy the inner longing in my soul. God remained an elusive mystery.

I asked "Jesus into my heart" when I was four and a half years-old. The date of my salvation is written in the first page of my first Bible, which I still have today. It is an old King James Version, now worn with age and falling apart. The things of God were always important to me, even from an early age, but even after I invited Christ into my life, I didn't have the 'assurance' of salvation that everyone in my family and in my Church said I should have.

Fast forward to my last two years of High School. After a lifetime of attending public schools, my parents sent my little brother and me to a private, non-denominational (with

Baptist leanings) school. I was absolutely elated! My fellow classmates and I were all professed Christians. Our teachers prayed before each class. We could talk openly about God, and could find connections with faith in subjects like English, Math, History, and Music as well as in Bible class.

After a while though, I started to wonder. If we all were Christians, why did we have different names above our church doors? Why were some of us Baptist, Evangelical, and Pentecostal while others were Methodists, Reformed, or even Lutheran? Why did we debate about the Armenian view of salvation vs. the Calvinistic one? Was alcohol okay for Christians to consume in moderation? Should women be preachers? What about the End Times? Who had the Early Christians been and what had they believed? Which one of our denominations was the "right" one?

Towards the middle of my senior year of High School, I was scanning the Christian section of Barnes and Noble when I came across the title of a book called, *Rome Sweet Home* co-authored by Dr. Scott Hahn and his wife. The name, a clever twist of the phrase "Home Sweet Home," amused me. I read the back of the book. The Hahns had dealt with subjects I was interested in and was questioning too. Their journey ultimately led them to become Roman Catholics. I remember covertly buying the book and hiding it until I could finally read it in private.

There was a reason I was terrified about reading a book concerning Catholicism. I was raised to believe that Roman Catholics worshiped Mary, didn't really know Jesus as their personal saviour and thus were not "saved." I did not want anyone knowing I was reading the conversion story of a couple— a former Protestant Minister and his wife —who had become Catholic!

That book changed my life. I devoured *Rome Sweet Home* in two days, reading it whenever I could between classes, homework, and babysitting my brother. Later, I was able to look up Catholic apologetics on the internet. I was introduced to an ancient,

liturgical tradition that claimed apostolic origins. I learned that my Baptist tradition was only a few hundred years old, at best.

By the time I graduated High School and was preparing for university, I was a Roman Catholic at heart. I found and embraced tradition, liturgy, the Eucharist, a liturgical calendar, the saints, Mary as the mother of God and as a model for my own life, etc. Roman Catholicism with its theology and legalistic approach to the spiritual life made sense to me as a Protestant.

I still had did not have the courage to tell my parents, out of fear for their reaction. I knew it would be cataclysmic. So I decided to go to a small, Independent Fundamentalist Baptist Bible College with the idea that I would study, grow in my newfound faith, and then at the end of one year be ready to share with my parents. One year became nearly two. Then, the dam burst.

When, at last my parents discovered my desire to become a Roman Catholic, they reacted just as badly as I had always feared. They placed me under virtual house arrest. I had to check in with them at certain times of the day. I could only drive to places that were pre-approved. My belongings were constantly searched for contraband.

I was also taken to several pastors. I spoke with both the senior pastor as well as the youth pastor at our family's Church. My last meeting was with the pastor of my grandparents' stricter, Fundamentalist Church. That talk will stay in my mind forever. The pastor and I talked together for an hour. I was surprised that we did not even so much as open up a Bible— I had pulled and all-nighter preparing my theological defence! He listened to me and seemed to honour my decision as a 19 year-old adult. Sadly, this soon proved to not be the case.

My parents were subsequently invited into the meeting. For the next 4-5 hours, that preacher denounced me, psychoanalyzed me, and shared many dire predictions for my life that would be sure to happen if I chose to leave the protection of my father's home



and became a Roman Catholic. My mother was crying. My father looked like he would explode at any moment. The pastor looked from them to me and asked "Is all of this worth it?"

The question was meant to be a blow. Clearly, his intent was to make me see my parents' reaction and to make me feel guilt. It nearly worked. Who wants to watch their family suffer? Nevertheless, I could not help but think of the early Christians who were faced with the dilemma of renouncing their faith. This was my defining moment. I looked at the pastor and said, quietly but firmly, "Yes"

Yes, indeed. Christ was worth it. Being true to where I thought He was leading me, despite the pain and uncertainty was infinitely worth it. Did I enjoy hurting my parents? No. Yet for the first time in my life, my faith was my own. Was that not what my parents had always wished for me?

My parents had given my ultimatum: stay Baptist and enjoy continuing to live in their home or become Roman Catholic and leave. I am sure they meant this threat to shock me into complying with their wishes. It was a difficult choice. I was a girl of nineteen, completely sheltered and ignorant of the ways of the world. Where would I go? Where would I live? How would I survive?

The days and weeks following the meeting with my grandparents' pastor became so tense and full of strife that I finally ran away. Though I now deeply regret how I left, at the time I did not feel as if I had any other choice. I moved to the American South, far enough away from my family that they could not coerce me back. Finally, I thought, I was free.

Yes, I was free in certain ways; in other ways, not so much. It was an absolute joy to be able to attend Mass on Sundays and walk right up to the Church building, bells ringing and parishioners entering, without fear that I might be discovered! On the other hand, the 'friend' from whom I had rented a small poolhouse at the back of his property in

exchange for cleaning his home and taking care of his purebred dogs, turned out to be a nightmare.

I was abused in many ways. With nowhere else to turn, and with his abuse being preferable to returning to my parents and seeing their triumph at my fall, and forever being branded with a sort-of "scarlet letter" of my own, I learned to endure it. I still suffer post-traumatic affects from these years, even now. Eventually, I was able to move on with my life. I was baptized and confirmed into the Roman Catholic Church. Years later, I met and courted my husband, Adam, who in many ways has been an icon of Christ to me.

This is where my story turns into an Orthodox pilgrimage of grace. Adam grew up in a Maronite Catholic family. His father is Lebanese, from a small village called Falougha in the beautiful mountains of Lebanon. He immigrated to the United States just before the Lebanese Civil War broke out. My father-in-law married my mother-in-law, a Latin-rite Roman Catholic woman of French-Canadian decent. They both settled in the Boston area of the United States and raised their family of three children.

My husband and I were married according to the Maronite Rite of Crowning on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 2006. It was the first time many in my family had even stepped inside of a Catholic Church, let alone an Eastern Catholic parish. I am grateful that, despite my father's words in the final pastor's office, he did indeed walk me down the aisle at my wedding.

I am also grateful that the ethnic identity and customs went a long way to smoothing things over in my family's eye. My side of the family still fondly joke about all of the anomalies of our wedding. And, my wedding was the very first one in which members of my family dared to dance at a reception.

Adam and I settled into married life. For the first four years of our marriage, he completed graduate school at the University of Rochester in Rochester, New York. After

graduating with his Ph.D. in Political Science, Adam took a job at Harvard Business School, and we moved back to Massachusetts.

We were faithful church-goers. One thing that drew Adam and me together was our faith. We were not just nominal Catholics, but Catholics who were deeply interested in the ancient liturgical traditions of our church. In Rochester, NY, we attended a Tridentine Latin Mass parish. Once in Massachusetts, Adam and I spent our Wednesday nights at our Latin-rite church-- Adam serving as an acolyte, assisting the priest at the weekly Traditional Latin Mass. I knelt quietly in a pew, my head covered with a lace mantilla. I even had a side business on Etsy, selling lace chapel veils.

One spring, I decided to go on a spiritual retreat. I had heard from a friend about a group of Roman Catholic nuns who were hermits. Even though they were a Latin-rite Order, they incorporated Byzantine liturgical practices into their Liturgy of the Hours. I made arrangements and, soon, I was off to visit the Monastic Sisters of Bethlehem in Livingston Manor, NY.

That retreat was the beginning of my journey to Orthodoxy.

Upon arriving at the retreat, I was given a little wooden cottage. The downstairs contained a single bed, a small kitchenette, an eating area, and a bathroom. A staircase ascended to the prayer room, a large area of space decorated in the Byzantine fashion. Two Eastern icons adored either side. A podium with the Holy Scriptures stood towards the front and a desk for study, in the back.

Each morning, I walked a mile to the chapel to pray the morning liturgy of the hours and to hear Holy Mass, every evening, the night prayers. The Byzantine worship of the sisters – as well as their grounded spiritual life– spoke to my soul. I began to fall in love with icons.

When I returned home, Adam and I began to spend more time with a friend of ours, a Melkite-rite Catholic postulant at a local monastery. It was he who taught me about the

Jesus Prayer, the significance of icons in worship, and Byzantine worship. Adam and I began to attend the Melkite Greek Catholic Divine Liturgy, and we loved it.

That summer, we moved to New York City. Adam had taken a job with New York University in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, but first we needed to complete an integration year in NYC while we waited for our visa paper work to be processed. Adam and I started attending a Russian Catholic parish a few blocks from us, it was there that we met and befriended a Melkite deacon who was friends with our monk friend back in Massachusetts. Between our Byzantine worship at St. Michael's and my conversations with my Eastern Catholic spiritual director, I began to find myself becoming more and more Orthodox in both practice and belief. Although I was Roman Catholic in name, I hoped I could be "Orthodox in Communion with Rome," Oh, how I tried. Adam and I moved to Abu Dhabi. During our first year, we attended an Orthodox parish instead of the Catholic Cathedral. My husband was actually studying, under the direction of the Melkite Patriarchate's seminary in Lebanon, to become a priest. It was with their knowledge and permission that we attended the Greek Orthodox parish. In the meantime, I realised that through my prayer life, continued studies, etc. that I was becoming more and more Orthodox.

I spent a fearful year and a half, worried that our desperate views on faith would tear my husband and me apart. In the end, God was good. Adam's studying Orthodox sources and, more importantly living out the Orthodox life, helped him to cultivate his own longing to become fully Orthodox.

Adam and I were chrismated into the Antiochian Orthodox Church on Christmas Eve of 2013. What a blessing this has been to us! Holy Orthodoxy has helped to heal our wounds, both individually and as a couple. Our marriage is stronger than it ever has been. What is more, Adam's family is open to Orthodoxy. When Adam and I are back in the States with his parents, we frequently bring our seven year-old niece to church with us whenever we are in town. Although she cannot receive Holy Communion, she loves to pick out a few pieces of the Holy Bread –and the older ladies of the parish always sneak

her a few extra pieces on their way back to their pews. Adam's mother and his sisters also enjoy visiting our parish for holiday Divine Liturgies. It is a real blessing to be able to worship together.

My family is also more open to Orthodoxy than they were to Roman Catholicism. In many ways, the Protestant movement was an attempt to get back to Orthodox roots, but the leaders of the Reformation lacked the tradition and historicity of Eastern Christianity. I continue to pray that, one day, my family, friends, and loved ones will come to the fullness of the faith. In my own life, I have discovered that I finally have – as I was taught to believe in during my youth– a dynamic relationship with God, I confess the Orthodox faith that was handed down from Christ to His Apostles, that was once delivered to the Saints (Jude 1:3). God willing, I will also continue to progress in theosis, a sharing of God's divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

I do still struggle with my past. I still battle in my soul over the Western, vengeful, Calvinist concept of God the Father. Sometimes I also wonder what would have happened if I had gone further in my research of the Early Church and had become Orthodox first, instead of Roman Catholic. Could I have avoided the years of abuse that followed my leaving home? And then, there is the more recent loss of my precious, pre-born triplets.

All I want, all I have ever wanted, is to become a saint. Yet I falter. I stumble. With God's grace, I am able to stand aright and continue on in my beautiful journey of faith. I do not have all of the answers. Yet I am confident that Holy Orthodoxy does. May God's will, in all things be done. Amen.

## Chapter 36

### Who Fears the Yoga?

Dr. Meledath Kurian Thomas

Every year, 21<sup>st</sup> of June is dedicated as the International Yoga day. There are a lot of arguments for and against its celebration, particularly on the grounds of religion. Before going for a debate let us consider the below details.

Metropolitan Paret Mathews Mar Ivanios of Kottayam (Indian Orthodox Malankara Church) entered into the eternal rest on 31 August 1980. He departed at the age of ninety one without any major ailment. Everyone knows that he was six feet plus in height and a person with well-disciplined food and life habits. But very few know that he was regularly practicing Yoga until one month prior to his demise. That too includes Shirshasan, the headstand pose!

Mar Ivanios himself disclosed that he was practicing Yoga since his ordination as an Orthodox deacon. He practiced it without interruption at until his last days. According to the records, he was elevated into the minor order of deaconate (Korooyo) on 7 June 1889 at Puthuppally, India. He was ordained as a full deacon (M'samsona) on 17 May 1908 at Jerusalem.

Even if the latter date is taken into the account, it is quite clear that he practiced Yoga for long seventy one years! In between, he was elevated as a priest, bishop and Metropolitan. In all those capacity, he went on practicing Yoga. He also advised at least one of his disciples to practise Yoga who was facing physical problems.

Metropolitan Paret Mar Ivanios, a conservative Orthodox Christian, was the son of Parat Kochumathu, a patriotic Nazrani from Puthuppally, India. He was a student of St. Vattasseril Mar Dionysius of Malankara and later become his close associate. None of these rigid Orthodox Christian backgrounds forbid Mar Ivanios from practicing Yoga. He never considered it as a practise against Orthodox Christianity. His superiors, the Malankara Metropolitan and the Catholicos of the East agreed the same. It is interesting

to note that, one among his superiors prohibited a young bishop from playing badminton for exercise! It is also worth to note that Yoga was not popular among ordinary people of India while Metropolitan Mar Ivanios started practicing it, (even at the time of his demise).

There are several Indian sciences like Ayurveda, Yoga, Kalari Payattu (a martial art) etc. Practicing any such will not harm one's Christianity. Its practice will make anyone as a member of any specific religion. Thousands around the world practicing Chinese science Acupuncture. But nobody claims them as the followers of Confucianism or Taoism. Nazranis of the Malankara Orthodox Church do not believe that the ingredients of Christianity are not alone those propagated by the Europeans, since the Indian Christianity is much older than that of the Europe.

There are priests in the Malankara Church who were trained in Kalari Payattu, Kerala's martial art and Marma Vidhya (the nerve science) for more than fourteen years before entering into Seminary for priestly training. They are not treated as persona non grata, but as professionals like engineers or medical practitioners. That is the Indian way of Christianity.

The chief opposition about Yoga nowadays is about the practice of Surya Namaskara which means Sun Salutation. Bot factions, those who are in favour of Surya Namaskara and those who are against it, claim it as Sun worship. I do not know whether this is a common sequence of exercise in Yoga, or can be done only facing east in the dawn and west in the dusk. However, I know that several people perform Surya Namaskara within closed rooms.

There is nothing religious in the names of certain elements in the Indian sciences. Agasthya Resyana, Brahma Resayana, Chavanya Prashem etc. are some of the popularly used Ayurvedic medicines. Nobody bothered about the person associated with its name while consuming the same irrespective of their religious orientation. Why not consider Surya Namaskara in the same manner? Naming a product is always the will of its

inventor/developer. It reflects his personal affiliation – personal, religious, political, patriotic, or whatever else – only. I believe that there is nothing wrong in practicing Yoga including Surya Namaskara if its religious element can be kept apart.

On the other hand, no religion can claim the patronage of any Indian sciences. It is the part or the offspring of the Indian culture. Religion is not the deriving factor of Indian culture but just an element of it. If speaks strictly in religious terms, Ayurveda, the Indian science of medicine, was developed and propagated by Buddhist monks. What will happen if somebody demands the users of Ayurveda must become Buddhist? People indeed treat him as insane. This logic is also applicable for Yoga.

But, at no point, nobody can insist Yoga to be practiced by all people if they do not wish for the same, or to make it mandatory. All individuals are free to choose it. Let people practice Surya Namaskara as an exercise like consuming Agasthya Resayana as a medicine, if they wish. Do not inject it with narrow minded religious fanaticism. We must refrain from associating the great Indian culture and its products to any particular religion alone.

Another point of disagreement is regarding the sounds like ‘Om’, which is being used in the practice of certain Yoga postures. Some argues it as the sacred sounds of a particular religion. Hence, some refrain to use it or the Yoga practices associated with it. On the other and, some others insist the use of such sounds as a tool of religious subjugation. There are certain sounds associated with the Chinese martial arts like Karate and Kung-Fu. Nobody bothers to analyse its linguistic or religious roots but just using it as a part of the training. Why not treat the sounds associated with Yoga in this manner? If anybody believes it as sacred, let them do it and leave others to use it as part of the training.

There are only two roads in front of us. Those who wish to promote the great Indian science, Yoga – keep it away from religion. Those who wish to see it – disintegrated will mix it with religion and propagate the same as a tool of subjugation. Let us keep in mind that such fanaticism will not do any good for Yoga or for the mankind.



## **Chapter 37**

### **Do you use Palm Oil?**

#### **Lighter Moments with Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II of Antioch**

George Alexander

The Orthodoxy Cognate PAGE (Society) delegation had fun-filled moments with His Holiness Ignatius Aphrem II – Patriarch of Antioch and All East on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2015 at Puthenkurizhu- headquarters of the Syriac Orthodox Church in India. The delegation met the Patriarch on the first day of his arrival to Malankara. The meeting was historic in all manners.

Abune, your picture is in the book

The Patriarch wholeheartedly welcomed OCP Delegation with a loving smile. The primate was so excited to receive the rare pan-orthodox book titled ‘Collected Writings on Orthodox Christianity’. Holding the book in his hands, he read out thirty chapter contents. The Patriarch called the OCP Secretary, George Alexander by his name and congratulated him for the publication as well. He invited the attention of Metropolitan Mor Thimotheos Matta Al Kohury who was sitting on a sofa nearby and showed his picture in the book (Metropolitan Matta Al Kohury has contributed in the book – Chapter titled ‘Letters from Syria’). The Patriarch said, “Abune your picture is in the book”.

The delegation also presented the Patriarch with the first Indian icon of St. Peter and St. Thomas and with a very special gift which depicts the anniversary of the three important events of 2015 (Seyfo- Addis Abba Conference-Eastern-Oriental Orthodox Joint Commission). The Patriarch read the details on the gift and enquired about the origin of the icon.

Do you use Palm Oil?

A couple of people approached the Patriarch for pictures in between. Before posing for the pics, the Patriarch told OCP Secretary, “George I am with you”. Later, a traditional Kerala Nilavilakku (cross mounted type) was presented to the Patriarch which he received with a broad smile. The Patriarch held the lamp in his hands and took a look at

the beautiful gift. His Holiness said, “Let the light spread everywhere”. Primate commented, “Where are the oil and light?” The OCP Chairman K C Jacob responded that the oil and light should come from the Church of Antioch. “So do you use Palm oil to light the lamp?” asked the Patriarch. Secretary George replied, “Your Holiness we use coconut oil.”

His Holiness posed for a group photo with the OCP Delegation. The Patriarch pointed at the OCP Photographer and said, “Shijo is their photographer, let him take beautiful pictures”. The brotherly encounter was full of with humour, love, smile and laughter.

## About the Author



George Alexander is a writer, orator, human resource trainer and Pan-orthodox Christian activist. He was instrumental in founding Orthodoxy Cognate PAGE Society, an organization dedicated to Pan-Orthodox unity activities. He holds Masters in Social Work from the University of Kerala and Masters by Research in Social Sciences from the Mahatma Gandhi University. He has penned several books and numerous articles. His areas of interests include human resources and community development, church management, Orthodox Christian journalism, contemporary Orthodoxy, Inter-Orthodox dialogue and Pan-Orthodox studies.

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