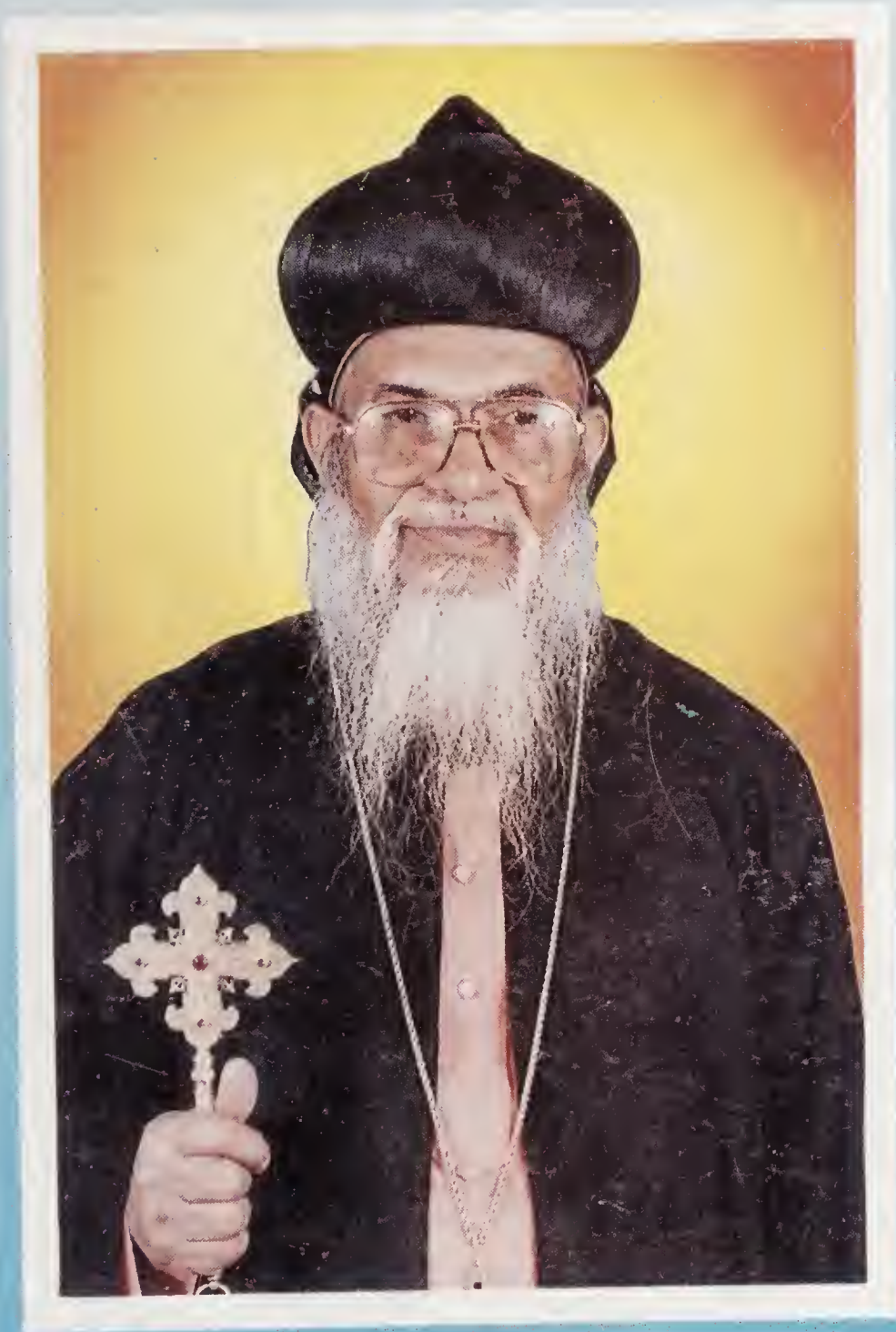


THE CROWN
AND THE GIFT



STEPHANOS MAR THEODOSIUS
SAPTATI PUBLICATION

ABRAHAM OOMMEN

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Anyone who asks for this volume, to read, collate, or copy from it, and who appropriates it to himself or herself, or cuts anything out of it, should realize that as he will have to give answer before God's awesome tribunal as if he had robbed a sanctuary. Let such a person be held anathema and receive no forgiveness until the book is returned. So be it, Amen! And anyone who removes these anathemas, digitally or otherwise, shall himself receive them in double.

THE CROWN AND THE GIFT
STEPHANOS MAR THEODOSIUS
SAPTATI PUBLICATION

ABRAHAM OOMMEN
Editor

Publications Department,
The Diocese of Calcutta,
The Orthodox Church Of India,
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India
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We wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to H.G. Dr. Stephanos Mar Theodosius for allowing us to use his private diary, for reading the proof and offering suggestions; to his brothers and family members for giving valuable informations about his life; to Mr. C. T. Titus for translating the Malayalam documents; to Mr. T. I. Philip for undertaking the printing; to Mr. Shibu and Miss Biji for designing the cover; to Fr. Geevarghese Baby and Fr. George Mathew for coordinating the project; to the Catholicos and the Bishops, eminent personalities and friends of Mar Theodosius for sending messages and articles and to each and every one who helped us in this publication

The Editorial Committee

ABOUT *THE CROWN AND THE GIFT*

It is difficult to write about a person who is alive. He may hear or read it. So one can neither praise nor criticize. But this book is born out of a genuine need. As Theodosius Thirumeni was turning seventy, some of his close associates felt that a Saptati Publication should be brought out to familiarise his life and witness not only to the outside world, but also to the inside, the Indian Orthodox Church. It seems that even his own Church has not understood him well. This was so because Thirumeni was not at all particular that people should know about him or his activities. Like the hero in the legend of Abou Ben Adam, he did not want his name to be written in the list of saints who love God, but only in the list of those who love man.

The paradox of his life is evident from his name. Stephanos, his first name means "crown". He was destined for a crown from God not the royal diadem - but a crown of thorns, a life of service. He was elevated to the high priesthood but in practice he was to lead the life of a servant. His life was to be spent as a "gift" for others. This is the meaning of his second name (Theos = God, Dosis = gift). As we go through his life - struggles, successes, failures - we are brought face to face with a humble human being chosen by God for his high purpose. He is a man distinguished by 'service'. We should be grateful to God for this unique 'gift'. We do not presume to give the honorific titles such as 'the crown of the orthodox Church outside Kerala'. It is left to God to assess the real value of a person.

But we feel that the history of the Orthodox Church in Northern India cannot be written without recalling the contribution of Mar Theodosius of Bhilai.

This book is an incomplete document. It is not intended to be a panegyric. We are only trying to see Mar Theodosius in the social and religious surroundings in which he lived both in Kerala and outside, to catch a glimpse of his vision and to collect some of the impressions he left on others.

The first part of this book, "A Time to Remember" portrays some biographical sketches and the second part "A Time to Celebrate" brings together the reflections of others on his Saptati.

ABRAHAM OOMMEN

NCCI, Nagpur

November 1994

THE MALANKARA ORTHODOX SYRIAN CHURCH
CATHOLICATE OF THE EAST

BASELIOS MARTHOMA
MATHEWS II
CATHOLICOS OF THE
APOSTOLIC THRONE
OF ST. THOMAS
AND MALANKARA
METROPOLITAN

CATHOLICATE
PALACE
KOTTAYAM-686 038
KERALA, INDIA

Message from His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews II, Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan, for publication in the book of felicitations presented to metropolitan H.G. Dr. Stephanos Mar Theodosius to mark his Saptathi.

We are very happy to know about the publication of "The Book of Felicitation to H.G. Dr. Stephanos Mar Theodosius to Mark his Saptathi". We send our best wishes and hearty felicitations on this occasion.

We do appreciate the publication of a book of this type, and do hope that this book will not only be able to provide information about the true faith and great traditions of our ancient Orthodox Church with an Apostolic foundation, but also be able to give necessary guidance and directions to the community to live in praise of God.

We have to continue our efforts to give necessary guidance and directions to our people to pray, confess, believe, bear witness and live a life of grace in Christ and to see that their spiritual experience fully corresponds to the experience of the past centuries of the history of our Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. We have to uphold the true faith and maintain the great traditions of our Church. In fact our believers are the main force of our Church.

The people are turning to the Church with hope, believing that she will regenerate spiritual and moral values and lead the society out of the present condition of crisis and fear.

Great commitment is needed to produce effective programmes. We also need competence of a high order to effectively consolidate and utilise the resources.

It is good that our activities are not limited to the walls of the churches now and we are able to convey the word of Christ's love to the poor and needy calling for love, kindness, benevolence, charity and social service.

May God grant us all the life of a true christian filled with good deeds to walk our life's path with honour and dignity.

We have to realise the meaning of our earthly life and understand that we are created and called by God to a more perfect way of life and activity than we usually imagine. We should regard life seriously to see and realise it as a big school of activity in which we learn to live soberly, righteously and godly in this world. We have to understand what we are living for and should have time to ponder the meaning of life. Our temporal life is a preparation for life eternal. We have to make efforts for a spiritual renewal of the society and take special care for the social sphere considerably shattered these days.

We have to make a positive impact on the education of the younger generation, raising the spiritual and moral standards of our society. The duty of spiritual enlightenment lies with us all. The deficiency of spirituality our society experiences now calls for some spiritual principles as well.

We have to take up Christian duties and become useful to all. Christianity is ever living and significant in experience and examples of sanctity. As leaven is to bread, so is Christianity to spiritual life of man, it carries a completely new image of life immortal and, blissful, after which we should yearn and strive especially preferring it to any mundane thing which soon passes away.

Today the whole world is seeking ways of making human personality morally sound. However the search is often moving not in the direction which should lead it to the desired goal. Is it due to the deficient system of education and upbringing of the growing generation ?

The beginning of spirituality is believed to be in virtuousness according to faith in Christ and in the fulfilment of his holy commandments. Where is the truth which is capable of regenerating man ? It is in God that human personality receives all that is needed and finds the only right path which is Christ who is " the Way, the Truth and the Life " (Jn 14:6).

Now-a-days we are confronted with very difficult problems, conflicts of all kinds' abuse of the divine creation and actions which lead the human being away from his God and Creator.

We should make efforts to inculcate sound a system of values, develop and maintain stable relationships and usher in a new era of human relations. Special attention has to be given to religious implications of contemporary issues and related problems, such as environment and quality of life for all people and the development of certain values in life.

His Grace Stephanous Mar Theodosius is indefatigably concerned for the order of life in the parishes and diocese. We do hope that under his able leadership you all will continue to demonstrate your active interest and sincere co - operation for the unity and all round progress of our Church.

May God Almighty grant him grace and strength for many more years of blessed service in this world.

We must act as our conscience tells us, as life itself dictates. To live and act is the duty of all the workers of the church. Many today need our help. There are many lonely, sick and helpless people, who in their life experience many difficulties. We in their life, in their difficulties. If we fulfill the tasks by given to us by our Lord, moved not by order but the call of conscience, they will bring us spiritual satisfaction and give us fresh strength.

With love and prayers.

BASELIUS MARTHOMA MATHEWS II.

National Council of Churches in India

Rt. Rev. Joseph Mar Iraeneus, President

It is a privilege for me to bring felicitations to Mar Theodosius, who is celebrating the Saptati in 1994.

Mar Theodosius, to my knowledge is leading the church to dimension of Christian vision of "being a church for others". At this point I need not have to enumerate the programmes and projects in the Diocese of Calcutta, Bhilai. I understand that he is completing two Decades of Episcopal ministry. I assure my prayers and wish every blessings on him and his diocese.

Now-a-days people are seeking for Images and Models for Human kind. So the question, what makes a human being ? And then look for models in one's own life. In all the variety of concepts of life which actually exist, that of living together challenges us to find a balance between autonomy and obligation to others. The task and duties at work and in family are being divided between man and women in a new way. Do we really need new freedoms and obligations ?

Human beings have models. They cannot live with out them. They undoubtedly help us to make sense of the world and to understand ourselves. They strengthen and comfort us. They can also frighten and horrify. We are being drowned in a flood of images, both secular and religious. Here we have to pause for thought "Who am I"? and to choose "what do I want to be ?"

It is not good for a human being to be alone. It is a sad reality that there is a growing number of people who live a lonely life in the midst of a crowd - often not out of necessity but of their own free will. But remember, human beings always had a need and a longing for being together. How can we live together these days ? We have to acknowledge family based on marriage, is now

no longer the only model for partnership and responsibility to each other; i.e. for old and young, for man and women. What we have to say about this ?

Human life is, for Christians, a holy possession. The constitution of the State protect the worth of a human being as unassailable. But is this so in reality ? It is not true that the scientific development and ethical and philosophical discussions are bringing them into renewed danger ? Apparently well meaning arguments are casting doubt on the right to life of the disabled or differently abled. The power of control over birth and death is growing all the time and is throwing up unpredicted conflicts. What are the standards that can provide guidelines for scientists, doctors, careers etc to act in a responsible way at the frontiers of life before birth and at the approach of death ?

May the leadership of Mar Theodosios lead the Church to be really a "Church for others". I wish every blessing at the celebration of Saptati.

Joseph Mar Iraeneus

MALAYALA MANORAMA

PB.NO.26, KK ROAD
KOTTAYAM-686001
KERALA STATE, INDIA

K.M.MATHEW

Chief Editor

The christian presence in ourn country is a mission through the soul and soil of India. The basic of this pilgrimage must be love, humility and sanctity. Our primary mission is to find out a common basis of humanity as a whole. When we think about this endeavour, we see His Grace Dr. Stephanos Mar Theodosius, Metropolitan, in the forefront. His contribution and leadership in the mission field of India should be held in high esteem. I am glad to offer my humble and respectful regards and prayers on this great occasion and I wish all success to his Sapthathi celebrations.

K.M. MATHEW

MALANKARA ORTHODOX SYRIAN CHURCH

PRIEST TRUSTEE
Fr. Mathai Nooranal
Res. Sultan's Battery
Kerala 673592

Catholicate Office
Devalokam, Kottayam,
Kerala, India

As Jesus has sent his disciples to different parts of the world, Mar Theodosius has been sent to Calcutta Diocese, a place where a Bishop of our Church had not been there earlier. Our people in that region were without a leader and when His Grace took charge of the Diocese, there started a new era for our people there.

The hallmark of His Grace is his humility and Christ's love compels His grace to take up God's work. His Grace has the fervour and spirit of Apostle Poulouse in this matter.

By establishing educational institutions, hospitals and social service centers in the diocese, His Grace has proved his commitment to the society. His Grace is bent upon bringing people to Jesus with a new vision. On the day of His Grace's saphthi, we pray to God to help His Grace to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

Fr. Mathai Nooranal

THE MALANKARA ORTHODOX SYRIAN CHURCH

A.K.THOMAS
Association Secretary
Catholicate office
Devalokam P.O. Kottayam

Res. Ampiyil
Parakode PO
PIN 691 554

I am happy to know about the publication of the book of felicitations to His Grace Dr. Stephanos Mar Theodosius, Metrpolitan of the Diocese of Calcutta, to mark his Saptathi.

On this occasion I send my hearty felicitations and sincere greetings to His Grace.

It is a matter of great satisfaction for all of us that the Diocese of Calcutta has made considerable progress under his able leadership. His Grace has been very successful in establishing and administering various institutions, especially in the fields of education and social service.

His special leadership in the diocese and the Church has been of great help in providing nessary guidance and directions to the people, not only to lead a good life but also to uphold the true faith and maintain the great traditions of our Orthodox Church.

Let us pray God Almighty for all His blessings on His Grace so that we will have the privilege of his continued services for the benefit of the community as a whole. With best wishes

A.K. THOMAS

Part I

A TIME TO REMEMBER

Chapter I

Punnai

Punnai was his pet name, and the baptismal name was Punnoose, a Malayalam word for Stephanos. Punnai was the darling of his father Kurian and mother Mariam. Though he was the fifth child, he was the centre of attraction among his brothers Chacko, Kurian, Skaria and sisters Annamma and Sosamma. Handsome, fair complexioned, slim and tall, Punnai was loved by all. Born on October 2nd, he was destined to be great as he shared his birthday with the great personalities like the father of India, Mahatma Gandhi. The year was 1924. The country was still under the British rule. Pathamuttam, the village where he was born belonged to the Travancore State, now a part of Kerala. Pathamuttam village is opposite to Vakathanam, the two being separated by a vast stretch of paddy fields and rivers. These villages were later known for their great agricultural output though in the early days they were mere jungle inhabited with wild animals. The place is still beautiful with small hills, coconut groves and rubber plantations.

The house into which Punnai was born was called 'Kayyalathu'. Punnai's father belonged to the well known Ambalakadavu family of Kurichy in Central Travancore and mother to Parayil family of Muttambalam Kottayam. Kurichy was an ancient Syrian Christian strong hold. The story behind their moving into Kayyalathu house is like this. One Kurian of Ambalakadvu family married Achamma of Kattil, another ancient family of Syrian Christians in Vakathanam. Achamma wanted to visit her parents always. Since they were in Kurichy this was not possible every day. Achamma's father called Kurian and told him that he was building a house for his son in Pattamuttam, situated in the middle of kurichy and Vakathanam. If Kurian can stay in that house, Achamma can come to Kattil house as often as she wanted. The father in law also promised his son in law some inheritance of land so that the family can live there. Kurian consulted his brothers in Kurichy and they had no objection. When Kayyalathu house was complete, Kurian

and his family members were invited for the house warming ceremony. Seeing all the in laws, Kurian's brother in law for whom the house was built was rather surprised. During the function, the father asked the son for the keys and declared that the house is given to his daughter Achamma and family. Achamma's brother who expected to live in the new house was not pleased with his father's generosity. That was how Punnai's great grand father come to live in Kayyalathu house.

In the third generation of Kayyalathu to which Punnai belonged, most of the glories of the ancient family had disappeared. Like most of the Syrian Christian families in Kerala in those days Kayyalattu brothers lived in luxury without thinking about the future. It is said that Punnai's grandfather, became so disgusted with measuring out the coins on a wooden tablet as the quota for each month that he began to take out the money from the family treasury by using the measures (para) for paddy and other grains. No wonder there was nothing left to measure after sometime. When Punnai was born the first large building was replaced by another smaller one.

Punnai lived like any other peasant boy. But there was some thing in him that separated him from his folks. Other people noticed in him some divine glory.

The first one to notice this was Kaithathra Pappi, a Christian astrologer of Kottayam. Punnai was taken ill seriously by diaheria when he was an infant. His elder brother and Mother took him to Kottayam, the town near by where some medical help could be given to the child. Local remedies proved ineffective. When the child was lying unconscious in the house of his uncle at Kottayam, Pappi, the astrologer saw him and uttered "this illness is not for death, but the boy is not for his family". his uncle got angry at his words and scolded Pappi. Pappi said "What I meant is that the child will not die, by this disease, but when he grows up he will give himself to the church and the family will be forsaken".

It was very Reverend M.C. Kuriakose Ramban of Pathamuttam, Who identified the spirital temparent of Punnai and

shaped his future. Well educated, strong willed and principled Kuriakose Ramban was the founder of the Parish church of which Punnai was a member. He was graduated from Madras university. He wrote in his diary which he had kept during his students days.

"Sunday : Attended church service at old seminary chapel, Koltayam, Vattasseril Thirumeni celebrated the Holy Liturgy. In his sermon he described the pathetic condition of our church and exhorted educated young men to come forward to serve the church'

The writing concluded with a self prayer

" O Lord what can I do for my church ?

I dedicate my life, guide me and use me in thy service".

He took a vow while studying at The C. M. S. College to serve the church as an unmarried priest. After teaching at Balikamadam and Nicholson Schools at Thiruvella for about 10 years, he studied Syriac under His Grace Kuriakose Mar Gregorios and Rev. Fr. Skaria Malpan, Cheriamadam. He became a priest at the age of 30 and a Ramban (fullmonk) at the age of 35. The Sleebe Church and the adjacent rooms were built specifically by him to lead a 'dayara' celibate life, out of his own savings. Though the church and the adjacent buildings were his own, the selfless man that he was, he made it a parish for the members of the Orthodox church belonging to that place. Thus the Kaiyalathu family became members of that Parish. Punnai was eleven years old when the church was started.

Very soon after studying the parts to be learned by an altar boy, young Punnai began to help the Ramban to conduct the Holy Qurbana. He was given the necessary training by the Ramban. From then on, he used to attend the evening prayer on Saturdays and Holy Qurbana on Sundays.

Ramban used to help the students in the neighbourhood by giving them some coaching in his parish- house. Punnai was

one of them. sometimes these youngsters slept in the house of Ramban. During the night when everyone would be fast asleep, Ramban would come out with a torch wrapped in a handkerchief and inspect the dormitory. The sight he saw impressed him. He saw Punnai sitting up in his bed in the midnight and praying. Ramban decided to lead Punnai nearer to God, fan his inner flame into a burning fire. Eventually Ramban become his mentor, his 'guru'.

Punnai was sentimental to some extent and easily hurt by other people's remarks. There was no paid sexton in the Sleeba church. One sexton used to come from Vakathanam. Sometimes he didnot turn up. So Punnai used to take his place. One day when Punnai was with the Ramban, a member of the Parish came to see him. After some talk, that man suggested to the Ramban, why not Punnoose be made the sexton. The Ramban did not respond. he rather remained slilent. Though Punnai did not feel angry at the man who could find only a sexton in him, it pained him much. He cried a lot and that gave him some mental relief.

Chapter 2

"TO BE" OR "NOT TO BE"

It was the summer, 1942. Punnai was eighteen years old. Schools were closed for mid summer holidays. Punnai had just finished his Teachers Training Certificate Examination and was waiting for the result.

One Saturday, after evening prayer, when he went to the Ramban to tell him that he was going home, Ramban asked him the question. "You have passed Malayalam Higher and TTC. What next?". Punnai did not give any reply. Then he said, "there should be an aim in life. Until now you have been a student. Now that student life is over, you take a decision as to what you should become." He continued, "if you cannot give a reply now, you may give it next Saturday when you come for the evening service" Punnai said, 'Yes' and left for home.

Next Saturday, after evening prayer, the Ramban, as was his usual practice, started walking up and down in the church yard. It was dusk. A cool breeze was gently blowing from the Vembanattu Lake. There was faint moon light also. There were no houses in the vicinity. The animals were also resting in the darkness, there was absolute silence in the church yard. The rubber plantation surrounding the church was the abode of thousands of birds that rest on the branches of the trees. When they arrived in the evening and perched on the trees, the neighbouring village could vibrate with their noise for about an hour. But now as the darkness spread they became silent. A divine silence covered the entire landscape as if the whole village was listening eagerly to Punnai's reply, was waiting to witness the turning point in his life.

The cook was busy preparing supper for the Ramban. In the church yard there were only two individuals, the Ramban and Punnai. The Ramban said, "come, let's walk". They walked upto the steps leading to the cemetery. " Let us sit here for sometime", said the Ramban. He sat on the topmost step and Punnai on the step just below that. The Ramban asked,

"Have you found out the answer to the question ? I wanted you to come up with that today." Punnoose remained silent. Then the Ramban observed", I have some definite expectation from you. I want you to become a priest. Like me, an unmarried priest. Do you like it ?". Punnai replied, "Of course I like it. I understood even last Saturday what you had in mind. I didn't need a week to find out an answer also. But I remained silent due to the practical difficulties that I am facing now".

"What are these difficulties ?" asked the Ramban. Punnai said, "It is nothing but my family situation. Because my family was poor my two elder brothers could not be sent out for higher education, they had to be satisfied with primary school. I am the first in my family who is qualified with the high school and T. T. C. Naturally my family members might expect me to take up a job and reduce their burden to some extent. Even if I forsake my family loyalties there are other problems." On being asked Punnai went on, "I am really troubled. I want to be a priest. But I don't want to become a priest of lesser value than you and other priests in the eyes of the people."

The priests who belonged to the nearby places and the Ramban were richer than Punnoose's father. So Punnoose had a fear, namely, if he become a priest, would he not be estimated by the people as a second rate priest ? The two priests of Pathamuttam were the Ramban and Rev. Fr. P.P. Philipose of Palladiyil. They were relatives and both were university degree holders. The fact was that he had no university education and that even if he wanted to, it would be difficult under the prevailing circumstances. All these made him think that he might be looked down upon as 'cheap', uneducated priest if he became one. He was also worried people might say that he become a priest just for his livelihood. Punnai struggled to tell him these fears.

The impossibility of overcoming these obstacles, prevented him from giving a positive reply. The Ramban smiled, sat beside him and holding his shoulder said, "You are young and hence you don't know the family history". Then he narrated the following :-

Punnai's great grand father was a member of the Ambalakadavu family. He married the sister of the Ramban's grandfather and stayed at Kaiyalathu plot which she inherited from her father. During those days marriage was conducted only between members of equal family and financial status. The Ramban used to hear from his father that during those days whenever people wanted to borrow money they used to approach Punnoose's great grand father and he always had enough money in stock. From that high status, the Kaiyalathu family had gone down within a span of two generations. Punnai was looking at the present family status only. Wealth would not remain for ever. Depending upon people who handle it and God's grace, it may increase or decrease. To become rich or poor, much time was not required. Financial position of the family should never be an impediment to becoming a priest. Wealth is not static. A wealthy man today may become a pauper tomorrow. The reverse also can happen.

A person who dedicates his life to God with absolute sincerity is the property of God, and he will take care of him. God will look after everything. "You don't have to worry at all. What is needed is trust, the whole hearted trust in the Almighty". The Ramban continued", English education is essential for a priest, you should get admission to St. Thomas School in Kakuzhi and study three years to obtain SSLC. whenever I am here ;you come to me both in the morning and evening for half an hour to learn syriac. In the summer holidays, following your SSLC examination, you have to be ordained as a deacon. The following year you have to continue an intensive study to finish the remaining theological portions necessary for priesthood., and then to be ordained a priest. Since I planned my futuer in advance, everything happened as I wanted. Let everything in your case also be the same." The convincing words of the Ramban wiped out all the flickering doubts from Punnai.

He advised Punnai to keep their discussion a secret Punnai gave silent assent to whatever the Ramban said and they left after

praying to God to help carry out their decision. He never discussed it with anyone, even though others could sense some thing had happened to Punnai. It was a moment of satisfaction and relief for Punnai. The objective in life become visible and clear. The emotions that troubled his mind vanished and in the silence of the darkness of the nature and in the presence of his mentor and 'Guru' Punnai took the bold and glorious step to surrender himself to the work of God as a celibate priest. He was lost to his family as the astrologer said and added to the glory of his church. It was a decision which he had never regretted, but it become the stepping stone for higher achievements that he might not have dreamt then.

AN ACTOR INCOGNITO

"How is it possible?", the brothers asked Punnai, "to raise five rupees every month to pay your fees?". Punnai became sad. He wanted to continue his studies. But he was helpless. From the age of five when he was enrolled at the village school where he learnt the Malayalam alphabets, to the time when he obtained Malayalam Teachers Training Certificate, Punnai was struggling. Fortunately the schools he attended—the elementary school, a 'gurukulam' run by an assan, the primary school at Pathatmuttam, The Malayalam Middle school at Pazamchira, St Thomas Malayalam High School, Thottakad and Chigavanam Teachers Training School did not charge him much. But he had to walk miles to the school. He had to wash his clothes every evening after his school as he could afford only two sets of clothes. He had now finished his Malayalam education.

He wanted to enter the English School. Kuriakore Ramban also encouraged him as he wanted Punnai to become a priest like him and Punnai had given his consent to Ramban's wish in the silent church yard.

The problems were many. The monthly fees at English school per month was Rs. 5 which was not an easy amount to get. Money was scarce. Farm products were sold at low prices. Punnai's family solely depended on farming. So how to pay a monthly fee of Rs. 5? Though Punnai had no solution in mind as to how to raise funds, he decided to discuss the issue with his parents and brothers. When all were at home, he presented the issue. Everybody was happy about Punnoose continuing his education. But nobody could guarantee raising enough money. Finally his elder brother assured that he would raise a part of the amount and his father assured that somehow he would raise the rest of the amount. On getting this assurance, Punnai joined the English School at Kakuzhi. Though it was difficult to learn all subjects in English, Punnoose passed the SSLC examination in the first attempt.

While at school Punnai was elected the Secretary of the Literary Association. That year on the anniversary day, a drama "Snapaka Yohannan," (John the Baptist) was to be staged. The senior Malayalam teacher S. K. Nair was both the director and one of the actors. He was a good orator and artist. He was to take the role of Herodias and he compelled Punnai to act as Salome. Though Punnai tried to avoid acting, S.K. Nair prevailed upon him to do so. Moreover, the secretariship of the Litterary Association rather made it compulsory on his part to act.

The main objection was his close association with the Ramban. The Ramban was highly conservative believer, and he, like the other old church leaders, believed that participating in drama was against the christain principles.

Punnai rememberd the incident when the youngsters of Pathamuttan decided to stage a drama some years before cinema become popular. The organisers were members of the same family. Then the Ramban was not staying at Pathamuttam permanently. It was the time when he was the church secretary. He used to come to Sleeba church once in a while. There was no bus service to Pathamuttam then. Bus facility was available only upto the junction at Kuruchi. While the Ramban was walking to Pathamuttam from Kurichi, he saw notices about the drama pasted on the walls on both sides of the road. He read, "drama will be staged in the temporary theatre near the Sleeba Church... the actors....". he got extremely angry. He went straight to the temporary theatre. The organisers were making the final arrangements. He confronted them and thundered, "Drama, near Sleeba Chruch ? Who are you all to stage a drama here ? " The organisers and the actors had to run away as he began to use his stick on them. He dismantled the temporary theatre and gave the ultimatum. "As long as I am alive, nobody should think about staging a drame near the Sleeba Church. You may do It elsewhere."

As Punnai was aware of the Ramban's attitude to cinema and drama he was worried, "what would be the Ramban's reaction if he knew that Punnai acted in a drama and palyed the

role of a girl ? He could have told S. K. Nair his decision to become a priest and request him to excuse him from acting. But he had not told even his parents about this decision as per the Ramban's wishes. It was impossible to tell him. He was between the devil and the deep sea. But in this difficult situation, he reasoned with himself that the Ramban was not likely to know about the programme. Even if he were to know, the Ramban, who happened to be a teacher for ten years, was unlikely to become angry about a programme held in the school. Satisfied with such reasonings, he acted in the drama. Among the main invitees was the Very Rev. Alexenthrinous Cor Episcopa. He was the father-in-law of the Ramban's brother and Punnai was worried whether he would tell the Ramban about his participation in the drama. Again his reasoning came to his help. It was that the Cor Episcopa being very old might not recognise him. The drama was a great success. After a few days when Punnai went to see the Ramban, there he found the Cor Episcopa. On seeing Punnai, the Cor Episcopa told the Ramban about the drama and that he (Punnai) acted the role of Salome very well. Punnai perspired profusely. His heart beat increased. He was very much worried about the response of the Ramban. Much to his relief. The Ramban only smiled. A pleasant smile and no word of reprimand.

After a few days S. K. Nair told Punnai that their drama was in great demand and that the Headmaster of a High School in Kumarakam wanted it to be staged there on the annual day. Punnai was again in trouble. But this time he told his teacher that he would participate in the drama only if he got permission from the Ramban. And getting permission from him was the most difficult thing. Again S. K. Nair made Punnai request the Ramban for permission. He rejected it outright. The Ramban said with a finality, "don't participate in any drama. It is not good for Christians." S. K. Nair found out a replacement for Punnoose, the drama was staged, and it was as in the first time, a great success.

The teacher and student met after thirty years. The teacher then was the head of the Malayalam department in the Madras

University. He had by then become a known figure in Malayalam literary circle. He was awarded a doctorate, become a professor and also a member of the Film Censor Board. He had reached the top ladder in his professional life. In thirty years time the student also became a deacon, then a priest and finally a Metropolitan, almost the top ladder in his chosen field. Vidwan S. K. Nair become Dr. S. K. Nair!. K. K. Punnoose, became His Grace Stephanos Mar Theodosius .

In 1979 Mar Theodosius was given the charge of Madras Diocese. The present Calcutta Diocese was also a part of it. When His Grace visited Madras, his desire to meet Dr. S. K. Nair was conveyed to Prof. Zacharia who had taught at Madras Christain College for a long time. An appointment was arranged. The way Dr. S. K. Nair welcomed his former student stunned him. The teacher bent down and touched the feet of his former student. While making a vain attempt to stop him from doing so, Mar Theodosius said, "Is it not the student who should touch the feet of the teacher to get his blessings ? What will happen if it is in the other way ?" Dr. Nair replied, "Then I was your teacher. Now you are Bishop. and people like you are gurus to all."

While they were talking Dr. S. K. Nair referred to the drama that they staged years ago at the school in Kakuzhi. The replacement that he found when Punnai backed out was Prem Nazir, who later became one of the great actors in the world of Malayalam films. Dr. S. K. Nair continued, " I was confident that Your Grace would shine as an actor. When I found a great actor in You, God found in You a great Priest. Everything is the wish of God."

A PRIEST FOR EVER

The SSLC Examination was over. The Ramban began to act. It was the Parish assembly who elected candidate who after the necessary studies would become a priest. As per the convention, a meeting of the parish general body was held. Before the election, the Ramban had consulted with the prominent members of the parish to find out who according to them was the most suited among the youngsters to become a priest. They all were unanimous in their opinion, about Punnai. So it was expected that the election also would be unanimous. But at the time of the general body, another name was also proposed and that lead to serious difference of opinion., However, since the people who proposed the name of that candidate knew that they were an insignificant minority, they left the meeting without causing a division and Punnoose was elected with a thumping majority.

During the high school days, both in the morning and evening Punnai had studied Syriac under the Ramban. In those days Syraic was the main language for all the service. The training that he got was comprehensive. After consulting with relatives and members of the Parish, it was decided to conduct Punnai's ordination as a deacon on a Sunday in the year 1946 (Malayalam calendar Meenam 25, 1122) by His Holiness Gheevarghese II, the Catholicos the supreme head of the Indian orthodox church. The ordination was to be held in the Sleeba Church. His Holiness the Catholicos, came for that purpose on Saturday evening. He was received by the parishoners and the general public of that place. After refreshment and rest, when the Catholicos came to the church for evening prayers, people were still there . Some people remained in the church even after the prayer.

After supper, His Holiness sat in an easy chair, in the rest room. It was at such a time that he used to advise the person going to be ordained about priesthood and priestly responsibilities. Those

people who remained in the church wanted to hear it. So they remained near the open window. The Ramban brought Punnai to the presence of His Holiness. Punnai kissed the hand of His Holiness and remained there in reverence. The Ramban told His Holiness that he (Punnai) was the one to be ordained. His Holiness looked at Punnai for some time and then asked him "What is your name ?" "Punnose". His Holiness responded, "that's good. Will you also become a Catholicos ?" (His Holiness's name also was Punnoose) He remained silent. Then came the next question, "Are you from Kunnamkulam ?" Punnoose remained silent without understanding the implication of the question. Then he gave a long talk on priesthood and the responsibilities. When Punnai come out, the Ramban told him that the Catholicos liked fair complexioned people. Most of the people of Kunnamkulam (northern part of Kerala) are fair complexioned. That was why he asked him whether he was from that place. It was then Punnoose understood the meaning of that question. Many of those people who remained at the open window and listened to His Holiness's talk were present at the Church in Niranam on February 16, 1975 to welcome the just consecrated bishop His Grace Stephanos Mar Theodosius and reminded him of the question that the Catholicos had asked him in 1946, a day before his ordination as a deacon, 'will you become Catholicos ?' They said, "We then told ourselves that you would become a bishop. We are extremely happy to see that it had materialised."

The Catholicos enquired about Punnai's family. He told that only one branch or family stayed at Pathamnttam. "Where are the others ?" asked the Catholicos " At Kurichi, we belong to the Ambalakkadavu family". "Very good" the catholicos added, "they are one of the ancient settlers in Kurichi." The catholicos also belonged to a family in kurichi called Kallacheril.

As decided earlier Dn. K. K. Punnoose was ordained as a priest, one year after he became a deacon, on Friday, just preceding Palm Sunday in 1947, the memorable year of India's

independence. This ordination also was conducted at Sreeba Church by His Holiness the Catholicos. The first Holy Qurbana was celebrated on the Palm Sunday. Kuriakose Ramban saw to it that all conventions and traditions of the church were followed from the time of election to the ordination of his disciple as a priest.

THE PROPHECY

The members of Thabor Church at Pachira requested the Ramban to send Fr. Punnoose as their Vicar. The appointment and transfer of vicars was not then generally done by the diocesan head. On an understanding between parisheners and a priest, the diocesan metropolitan would be approached to get the order. As the Ramban had accepted the request of the parishers of Thabor Church, they got the order from the Metropolitan.

The construction of the Church was going on. The responsibility of construction was entrusted with Kochukuttan of Ottathaickal family who was called by all, 'appachen'. His younger children and Fr. Punnoose were classmates at St. Thomas School, Chingavanam. Most of the Sunday's, after the Holy Mass, he used to eat food from that home. The respect and obedience which the children showed to their parents, the family prayer, the love and affection between the children, in fact everything was as in all other syrian Christain families.

The head of the house used to respect Fr. Punnoose, the young priest of only 23 years, in the same way one would respect an elderly priest. Once when his children cracked some jokes with Fr. Punnoose and laughed loudly, 'Appachen' reprimanded them by saying, "this young priest is to become a bishop. you don't interact with him so freely." Fr. Punnoose was awestruck. He wondered why such opinions were expressed about him. After 27 years when Fr. Punnoose was elevated to the post of Bishop, Prophecy of Ottathaickal 'appachen' became true. Fr. Punnoose remained at Pachira church only for an year. After that he was transferred to Jerusalem Church, Vakathanam. He served that parish also for one year. He visited the house of all members of the church. The head of a family told him, "in my memory it is the first time a priest is visiting my house. Priests used to visit only when there is a death or a celebration."

This is the reason why our people are joining other denomination. Fr. Punnoose was thus a shepherd in the real sense visiting his flock often. It is unfortunate that the church is losing quite a number of people due to the lack pastoral caring or limitations of it. From Jerusalem Church, Fr. Punnoose was transferred to St. Pauls Church, Pallam.

Chapter 6

THE LONG WAIT

The SSLC examination was over about a month and a half before Punnoose became a deacon. While the examination was going on, the Headmaster of the school Fr. Nadakuzhikkal was watching everyone. He came to where Punnoose was sitting, remained behind him for sometime and then told him in a low voice, "You should pass. When the school is reopened, you have a job here. The priest knew that Punnoose had already passed TTC. As soon as he passed the SSLC examination, the call came from the Headmaster to meet him. As he knew that it was for offering him a job as a teacher, he sought the permission of the Ramban. He was against it. He wanted Dn. Punnoose to complete his learning of Syriac and allowed him to accept any job only after that. The Ramban told him to convey these things to the Headmaster. He did accordingly. But the Headmaster insisted on and hence Dn. Punnoose requested him to make a personal appeal to the Ramban on his behalf.

Finally, the Headmaster persuaded the Ramban to allow Dn. Punnoose to become a teacher. The same year the Fr. C. V. George later Cor Episcopa, and many other members of the orthodox church also joined that school as teachers. Not long after, Nadakuzhikkal father fell ill, left the school and passed away. The new authorities of the school probably were not happy about too many new teachers on the staff. So both Fr. C.V. George and Dn. K.K. Punnoose were relieved at the end of the academic year. Later Fr. C.V. George became the headmaster of the school at Manniram and Dn. Punnoose also taught there for a few months.

The Ramban wanted Fr. Punnoose to take up the charge of Sleeba Church and St. Mary's chapel. both these were built with the Ramban's own savings. The Ramban wanted his disciple to have the necessary education and discipline to carry out the tasks. He never thought of Fr. Punnoose obtaining a university degree or working in any place other than Pathamuttam. It was not due to his

lack of love or desire to see that Fr. Punnoose should become great in life. In fact the Ramban loved him and considered him as a father would his son. Fr. Punnoose had, as in the view of the Ramban, the necessary qualification, ability and the life expected from a priest to succeed him. But there was a burning desire in Fr. Punnoose to become at least a graduate.

While serving at St. Paul's Church, Pallom, the thought of getting a university education became stronger, notwithstanding the difficulties. On Sundays Fr. Punnoose used to take food from Vadakkekutu Pappy's house. Pappy was a very old but extremely healthy and handsome man. Pappy's wife was Fr. Punnoose's grandmother's sister. When all members of this family were together Fr. Punnoose presented to them his desire to get a university education and sought their opinion as to how an admission would be obtained at CMS college.

Pappy said he would take their Vicar to Prof. P.C. Joseph, Principal of CMS College as he was sure that a request from him would not be turned down by him. So they went to see the Principal. While they were walking to CMS College from Thirunakkara, they met Prof. P. C. Joseph on the way and he was told they wanted to see him, and there itself the reason why they wanted to meet him was also conveyed. Prof. Joseph assured admission and instructed Fr. Punnoose to meet him the following day.

The next day Fr. Punnoose remained outside the Principal's office from 8.00 a.m. to 4.00 p. m. and he was never called in. At 4.00 P. M. the office peon told him that the Principal had gone home. The first attempt by Fr. Punnoose to obtain a university degree ended in failure. While leaving the college, he decided that whatever might happen, he would never study at the CMS College. The disappointment only made his resolve to study firmer. But he had to leave his place for fulfilling his ambition. This humiliating experience and the other struggles for obtaining good education made Fr. Punnoose to provide enough educational facilities in many places of North India later, including a full fledged college by his efforts.

Chapter 7

NORTH INDIA BECKONS

Fr. Punnoose happened to read an article in *The Malankara Sabha* written by the very Rev. Pathrose Ramban (later His Grace Pathrose Mar Osthathios) after his tour of North India. He wrote that many churches left by the British in North India remained unused. If young priests from Kerala were ready to go over to these places there was a possibility of getting some churches for the use of the orthodox people there. Moreover, for those who wanted further education, ample facilities were available. Fr. Punnoose met the Ramban and from him got a contact address in Jabalpur. That person was contacted and in his letter he wrote that there might be about 30 orthodox members in Jabalpur. But if Fr. Punnoose came and organised a parish, there was a possibility of getting the Anglican Garrison's Church in the cantonment area of Jabalpur.

The letter was shown to the very Rev. Kuriakose Ramban who citing some reasons said that he should not go. Since Fr. Punnoose could not act or think against the wishes of the Ramban., another letter was sent to the same person in Jabalpur. By this time Fr. Punnoose's desire to work in Jabalpur was known to many of our people there.

One Johnny from Chengannoor who knew Kuriakose Ramban wrote to him thus; "The Garrison Church in Jabalpur with its 5 acre compound is going to be given to the military by the authorities of Christ Church since there is nobody to look after it. If Fr. Punnoose comes we might get the church. If you don't send him we will lose a big church and compound of 5 acres of land. I am sure you don't like us losing it due to your decision not to send Fr. Punnoose to Jabalpur." Immediately after reading the letter, permission to go to Jabalpur was given by the Ramban though reluctantly. This was a major turn in Fr. Punnoose's life. His destiny was to be shaped outside his state. His love affair with North India began in Jabalpur.

When the orthodox people in Jabalpur heard about Fr. Punnoose's appointment they were all happy. The house prayer groups in the place become active. C.M. Thomas Nellimoottil of Adoor was the secretary of the prayer groups. Since there was no church or priest of our own, he used to attend the church service at Christ Church. He was very close to Cannon Metagonger, the vicar of the church. Garrison Church also was under him.

When the British Raj ended in India, as per an act passed by the British Parliament, all British government churches were placed under the jurisdiction of a committee called Indian Church Trustees. The Anglican Bishop of Calcutta was the Chairman of that committee. That committee had given the churches to the head of the denomination to which they belonged. The Garrison Church at Jabalpur belonged to the Anglican Bishop at Nagpur. C. M. Thomas, as per the decision of the prayer group, enquired from Cannon Metagonger whether there was a possibility of getting that church. By then the Anglican Denomination Council had taken a decision to deconsecrate the church and to hand it over to the military. But the handing over was not done. So the Anglican priest advised Mr. Thomas to write an application to the bishop at Nagpur which was immediately done. The bishop was only happy to give the church to Christians rather than deconsecrate it and hand it over to the Military. The permission to use the church was a welcome relief to our people who were looking for a place to worship and they were from then, waiting for the arrival of Fr. Punnoose.

In 1952 the Nineteen hundredth anniversary of the arrival of St. Thomas was celebrated at the national level. The meeting in Delhi was presided over by Dr. Rajendra Prasad and one of the speakers was Pandit Nehru. The prime Minister, in his speech, referred to the establishment of Malakara church and said it was as old as Christianity itself. Still, it was after 1900 years that a priest belonging to the same church was sent beyond the Vindhya range.

Fr. Punnoose bought all the necessary things for the Holy Qurbana and other church services and started his journey by train from Cochin to Jabalpur. Kuriakose Ramban also was with him

upto Madras as he had to conduct the annual retreat for the members of St. Thomas Orthodox Church there. The journey from Madras to Jabalpur was really tedious as the weight of solitude was rather unbearable. Fr. Punnoose arrived Jabalpur on Friday 1, April 1952. There was no direct train upto Jabalpur. So he got down at Itarsi and proceeded to Jabalpur, information about his arrival was already given, many people were at the railway station to receive him.

K. J. Peter, Secretary of the YMCA at Jabalpur was a member of the Orthodox church. Fr. Punnoose was given accommodation there due to his position. For accommodation and food Rs. 100 had to be paid for a month. As the monthly income of the parish was less than that, the arrangement was that the payment to the YMCA would be made as and when money was available. As pocket money Fr. Punnoose was given Rs. 20 monthly. He stayed there for two or three months. When K. J. Peter was transferred to Kottayam, Fr. Punnoose was compelled to leave the YMCA.

C. M. Thomas, who took an active interest in starting the parish, was then staying at Right town. He offered Fr. Punnoose a room and hence he shifted his stay to that place. One reason for going to Jabalpur was to have further education, So Fr. Punnoose decided to write the intermediate examination of the Ajmer Board. So for joint studies with people of the same age Fr. Punnoose shifted his stay to Khamaria. He stayed there for one year. On Sundays the church service was at Jabalpur cantonement church. The distance was about 20 Kms. And he used to go on cycle. After travelling on cycle a distance of 20 Km. in the morning, saying Mass was difficult. If he reached on Saturday evening somebody would have to be troubled for food. So it was decided to make the journey after supper on Saturday. The night was spent in the house of P. C. George. For the purpose of security all the essential things needed for the Qurbana were kept in George's house and the bread needed for the Qurbana also made there. Early in the morning, after tying the box containing all these things on the cycle he would start his cycle journey accompanied by George and his family on another

cycle. Before 8.0'clock all arrangements for the Qurbana would be made. On April 6th, the catholicate day, Fr. Punnoose offered the first Holy Qurbana at the Garrison church.

The massive church that was built to accommodate about 2000 military men had then less than hundred members to attend the service.

From 1947-52 the Garrison Church was not used. During the British rule, the church and compound were well maintained and beautifully kept. During the long five years the church was not being used, the garden became a small 'Jungle' and the church became a playground for cattle tending children. Before the first Qurbana Fr. Punnoose and some others worked for a few days to make the building somewhat clean. It became clear that unless the vicar stayed in the church, the church and compound could not be kept clean. Also since it was difficult to stay at Khamaria and go to the college in the town, it was decided that Fr. Punnoose would stay in the church.

There was no accommodation facility in the church. So a room adjacent to the 'Madbaha' was used as the bedroom. There was no furniture worth mentioning. An old table lamp with kerosine found out from the store, gave light. A bath room was made by covering a part of the Veranda with sack cloth. When a comode was placed there, it became a bath room cum toilet. About 200 feet away, there was a pipe point for water. So the basic necessities in their rudimentarey form were made available. Food was arranged from a hotel run by one Sankunny Nair. Even big bungalows at that time had no water closet. Scavengers used to come and do the cleaning up work. But unfortunately on many days they never bothered to come. So on such days, Fr. Punnoose had to do the work of the scavenger also. A Royal Enfield Ladies cycle, donated by the manager of a Tyre Retreading Company, made travel really easy.

Fr. Punnoose had stayed at Khamaria in order to prepare for the intermediate examination. He had told many people about his intention to move to the church after the examination. When

the preparation for that was going on, a member of another denomination told Fr. Punnoose not to move to Garrison church. The reason was that some members of the Anglican Church had objected to his stay. When C.M. Thomas met the Anglican Priest to find out whether they had any objection to Fr. Punnoose staying in the church, he was asked, "how did Fr. Punnoose find his stay in the church?" It revealed that some members of the sister churches were not too happy over the orthodox church getting a massive church building and five acres of land. The Anglicans had no objection; they were rather very happy. So without any further delay, Fr. Punnoose shifted his residence to the church.

On Sundays, after the Holy Qurbana and prayer meetings Fr. Punnoose returned to the church before dark. The large church compound had many big trees. And on these trees were resting different types of birds. Nobody was staying in neighbourhood. Electric Power supply was disconnected long ago. So there was total darkness. The absolute silence was sometimes broken by the song of the birds. The eerie darkness and silence increased the feeling of solitude in Fr. Punnoose.

The Chawkidar with his family was deep asleep in the one room apartment. The burning heat of May made it impossible to sleep inside. So Fr. Punnoose put his 'Charpai' (bed) in the open air and slept for sometime in the coolness of the night breeze. Suddenly he woke up. He felt excruciating stomach pain. There was vomiting sensation also. Without long, he started vomiting. On hearing the vomiting sound, the Chawkidar came to him. he went to call George but he could not meet him as he was stopped by police. So Fr. Punnoose had to suffer acute pain for the whole night. Early morning the Chawkidar was again sent to call George. George brought a doctor and after examination the doctor said that the pain was caused by Kidney stone., An injection was given and the pain subsided immediately. Thereafter the stone caused no pain. But it started growing in the upper kidney. On examination by different doctors from time to time, the opinion was that it was not dangerous. The stone detected in 1953 was allowed to stay

there and grow till 1989. By 1989, medical science had progressed a lot and hence doctors could remove Kidney stone without open surgery. The stone was removed in 1989 in a private hospital in Bombay. Though it was removed without any difficulty, after a few days, infection caused very serious bleeding and hence, through an emergency surgery, that kidney had to be removed. The stone gave no pain for 36 years. But when it was removed, out of annoyance or grief, it carried with it, a few days after its removal, its place of stay also. It was a sad experience for Fr. Punnoose (then Mar Theodosius) but he was strengthened by God's grace and the continuous prayers of the loved ones.

After Malayalam Higher and TTC when Fr. Punnoose joined English High School, he had to study with those two or three years his junior. Now seven years after his school he had to study with those ten years junior to him. To avoid that, he decided to study in the morning and evening class that was specifically for employed people. At D. N. Jain College where he studied, Guru Rejanish was one of his classmates. In 1956 Fr. Punnoose passed the B. A. examination. Immediately after, he started his theological studies at the Leonard Theological College Jabalpur run by the Methodist church, as an external student. Fr. M. V. George (later His Grace Mar Osthathios) and Fr. K. M. Alexander were students of this college. In 1956 about 6 members of the church were studying in different classes there. Some of them together created troubles both in the college and parish. They sent to the Diocesan Metropolitan some baseless charges against Fr. Punnoose. This was referred to the Holy Synod. The Synod appointed a committee and the committee in turn called both parties and discussed the issues. The committee gave its report to the Synod. The synod passed the judgement that the guilty were those who accused Fr. Punnoose and that those people exploited the soft nature of Fr. Punnoose. It was also decided by the Synod that after theological studies those six should not be ordained as priests without obtaining permission from the Synod. In addition to that, the Synod advised Fr. Punnoose to discontinue his theological studies in the protestant theological

college. so he stopped his studies there. His theological studies were to begin later in America. But he took admission in Mahakoshal Mahavidyalaya for post graduate studies. In 1958 Fr. Punnoose passed M. A. (History) with a second class.

Chapter 8

DEATH OF THE GURU

Two years after his stay in Jabalpur, Fr. Punnoose went home on leave in 1954. When he went home on leave again in 1956, the very Rev. Kuriakose Ramban was seriously sick. The treatment given by the local doctors had no effect. Though there was an opinion to take him to Velloore, due to financial constraints and travel difficulties, nobody seemed to be keen. But Fr. Punnoose agreed to take him to Velloore, get him admitted there and then go to Jabalpur. It was acceptable to all, so they travelled together upto Velloore. After getting the Ramban admitted at CMC Hospital, Fr. Punnoose proceeded to Jabalpur. Two months of treatment had not cured the Ramban. So he went home and started ayurvedic treatment.

After about two years he became fully cured and started doing his priestly duties. Fr. Punnoose got a letter from the Ramban. It was written, "after the examination you should come home. I am losing my eyesight. I am longing to see you." Though it was difficult to raise enough funds to meet the expenses of the journey in two years, Fr. Punnoose was determined to go as he was anxious to see the Ramban after his recovery. The outside Kerala Diocesan conference was also being held then. He could attend that also. So he left for Kerala and stayed with the Ramban for one month. The leave was going to be over and since the Metropolitan was staying at Coimbatore for treatment, the conference was going to be held there. Two days before his journey to Jabalpur en route Coimbatore, he read from news paper Malayala Manorama that His Grace Alexious Mar Theodosius the Metropolitan of Outside Kerala Diocese had been admitted in a nursing home. So the Ramban advised him to stay for some more days as the conference was not going to be held until the Metropolitan became all right. So Fr. Punnoose postponed his journey.

The following day Fr. Punnoose saw something that startled him. The Ramban was giving some instructions to a carpenter.

He had before him some wooden planks. When Fr. Punnoose asked the Ramban what was he getting made, he just replied, nothing big, but something to while away time. When he went to his room, the carpenter told Fr. Punnoose that the Ramban was giving him instructions as to how the frame should be made, the frame to place over the grave, over which the concrete slab had to be cast. The preparations for the final journey.

The next day the Ramban did not attend the morning prayer as he was not well. When Fr. Punnoose met him again after the prayer, he was still in bed. He had swelling on his face and feet. P.M. Zacharia, the doctor who used to treat him, was called. He gave him some medicines. They had no effect. when the Ramban's neice M. P. Mariamma came to attend to him, he asked her his father's date of death. When she said that it was the day after, he said his own day was the same. On that day Fr. Punnoose offered the Holy Qurbana. The Ramban received the Holy sacrament on his bed. He had kept 'saith' (blessed olive oil) some prayer books and a note book with instructions as to what all should be done after his death. He asked his disciple to apply 'saith' on his body and when it was over the Ramban said ' amen'. Then he instructed Fr. Punnoose to start the prayers to be recited at the time of death. Listening to the prayer, he lay in bed very calmly. some neighbours were also there. Choked with emotion. Fr. Punnoose could not complete the creed. "I believe in God the Father Almighty -----."

Somebody else carried it on. When he came to the last part, the Ramban opened his eyes and then closed them for ever. Fr. Punnoose witnessed for the first time in his life the departure of a Soul for eternal life. It was the first tragedy in Fr. Punnoose's life. He left so lonely as he lost his guru and companion for ever. But he felt a strong and vibrant spiritual presence of the Ramban in the days to come.

The Ramban's death prevented Fr. Punnoose from going back to Jabalpur. He was made to stay due to his belief that the Ramban wanted him to take charge of Sleebea Church after his

death. Sreeba Church and one acre land adjacent to it were bequeathed to the Catholicate by the Ramban in his will. This information was passed on to the Catholicos by Fr. Punnoose and His Holiness in turn appointed him (Fr. Punnoose) as vicar and Manager. In addition to that Fr. Punnoose was allowed to take the income from the land. This was not liked by some members of the Parish. So Fr. Punnoose sincerely wished and prayed to get away from that place. His prayers were answered when he was sent to st. Mary's Church at Dadar in Bombay as vicar.

CROSSING THE SEAS

In Bombay, One of the great cosmopolitan cities of India now the head quarters of one Diocese of the orthodox church, there was only one parish then, the St. Mary's Orthodox Parish at Dadar. Outside Kerala, it was only in Bombay that for the first time the orthodox had built a church of their own. The leadership given by Mrs. Achamma John Mathai, wife of Dr. John Mathai, the Union Finance Minister under Pandit Nehru in getting the church built was invaluable. She was the daughter of Elanjickal John Vakil (Advocate) who was the right hand of Vattasseril Gheevarghese Mar Dionysius, in his fight against Antiochian domination. She travelled to many places in Kerala for raising funds. It was also due to her influence that the Bombay corporation allotted a plot of land in Dadar. In 1951 the church was consecrated by His Holiness Moran Mar Baselios Gheevarghese II.

Fr. Punnoose had a fear in his mind whether he had the requisite ability to be the vicar of large urban congregation in the financial capital of India. At the same time he thought, "I didn't ask for it, I only obeyed the orders of the Diocesan Bishop." In the managing committee, though people used to engage in verbal bouts, everybody had some special consideration for Fr. Punnoose. So he had not to confront any problems. As the members of the parish were spread over the length and breadth of Bombay, however hard he tried, Fr. Punnoose felt that he was not effectively catering to the spiritual needs of all the people. Therefore, he requested the Diocesan Metropolitan to appoint another priest along with him. Thus Fr. M. T. Easo was appointed as the assistant vicar.

In 1960 His Grace Mathews Mar Athanasios became the Diocesan Metropolitan. In the middle of 1961, His Grace visited Bombay and after church service on Sunday, he told the people that their vicar Fr. K. K. Punnoose would soon be transferred to Malaya Singapore parish. Immediately, His Grace was approached

by the elders with the request that Fr. Punnoose should not be transferred as the parish had no problems. His Grace replied that usually vicars were transferred when there were problems. But since there were no problems in St. Mary's Church, it was the best time to transfer him. His Grace further said that he was very happy that he took such a decision when the church was facing no problem and he would not change his decision. His Grace also said that the transfer would come into effect within two or three months.

The first parish that the Malankara Orthodox Church had outside India was Malaya-Singapore. These two places, under British colonial rule, had many tea, coffee and rubber estates. Most of the labourers in those estates were Tamils and Chinese. A large number of Christians from Kerala were also employed as the overseers and office staff. Most of these people were from Central Travancore and majority of them were Marthomites. They had six or seven churches and one school there. The orthodox group had one church each in Malaya and Singapore. There was a joint council for these two churches which worked hard to see that the vicars could easily carry out their responsibilities.

Fr. Punnoose travelled by ship from Madras to Singapore. Air travel was not common and it was very costly also. When the ship reached Penang some members of the church were there to receive him to Kuala Lumpur. As per their request he did not proceed to Singapore immediately. Instead he went with them to Kuala Lumpur. If he went to Singapore first, and then to Kuala Lumpur, it would take quite a number of days, and before which, the outgoing vicar Fr. P. V. Joseph, would have left the place. The people wanted to give the farewell to Fr. P.V. Joseph and the welcome to Fr. Punnoose in the same meeting. As the senior vicar Fr. P. Joshua of Vazhamuttam was in Singapore, Fr. Punnoose went to Singapore only after serving in Kuala Lumpur for six months.

The usual practice was that church service was held once in a month in the church at Kuala Lumpur. On other Sundays, the service would be held in other centres in Malasia. As Singapore

was a small island state the parish work was done in the way it was generally done in Kerala. The priests who went there never went on leave but stayed on until their term ended. But after two years of his stay, Fr. Punnoose was compelled to go on leave as his father fell seriously sick. As the vicars were given passage once in their term of office, i.e., while coming and leaving for good, he had to spend his own money which he had carefully set apart for another purpose. It was for further studies in the United States. The desire to go to the States to study and the desire to go home to see his ailing father resulted in some tension in his mind. He finally went home on two weeks leave to be with his father.

During the short leave Fr. Punnoose had to go to Ernakulam to book his return flight. There he happened to hear some unsolicited remarks from an astrologer. He was going to take food from a home in the company of Fr. P. V. Joseph and Dr. M. P. Chacko. From the road they had to walk about hundred feet to reach that house. Pointing his finger to Fr. Joseph, an astrologer sitting on the Varanda said, "this priest would become a bishop." He was quite a stranger to Fr. Joseph. Both the priests looked at each other in wonder and thought that man could be out of his senses. Then looking at Fr. Punnoose he said, "this priest would become a bishop before the other priest." Dr. Chacko smiled and asked him to say more about Fr. Punnoose. The astrologer said, "shortly this priest will travel by plane. Within three months, his father or uncle will die. he will travel to foreign countries and get higher education there. He will get some money soon. he will buy a lot of land, He will buy a motorcar". Fr. Punnoose thought probably the astrologer was told certain things about him by Dr. Chacko and he was just repeating them with some additions of his own. He returned to Singapore by flight. Surprisingly, the parish reimbursed the money that he spent on buying return ticket. With that the prospect of going to the States become brighter. A few weeks after he returned to Singapore, his father passed away. Is Astrology just a myth, or a credible science?

In 1964 His Grace Mathews Mar Coorilos of Quilon Diocese visited Malaya and Singapore to raise funds for starting a college at Kottarakara. Before His Grace's departure, the members of the Singapore parish requested him to do a favour. His Grace was going to New York to study at the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church. The favour they wanted was that Mar Coorilos should get an admission for Fr. Punnoose in the same college where he was going to study. The favour was done and Fr. Punnoose reached New York in June 1965. On his way to New York, he visited Bahrain, Jerusalem, Damascus, Athens, Rome, Paris and London.

Chapter 10

A STUDENT AT FORTY

At last Fr. Punnoose's dreams were going to be true. He was going to be admitted in a theological seminary. Fr. Punnoose had to attend the orientation courses arranged in many centres before classes started in the Seminary. To become a serious student after a gap of eight years was difficult. But that initial problem was overcome soon. He tried his best to fulfil the requirements however hard he had to work. If admission to second year was not secured in the middle of the first year, at the end of the first year the student would have to return home. So Fr. Punnoose met the Dean and told him that he would like to obtain a degree and hence he should be treated as a regular and not a special student for which three years of stay was required. The Dean said that he would consider it after the first semester examination. After the examination the Dean asked Fr. Punnoose to give him an idea about the training that he had got at home. He gave him a clear picture of his training and also the 16 years of parish work that he had done. Then he told Fr. Punnoose "You have done very well in the first semester examination. We have our faculty meeting tomorrow. I am going to present your study history and your experience as parish priest for 16 years in the faculty meeting to think whether we can award you B.D. Degree after your final examination this year." Those were really unexpected words. Fr. Punnoose was more unhappy than happy. His desire was to study for three years and then take the degree. After the faculty meeting the Dean told Fr. Punnoose, "we consider your study at Leonard Theological Seminary, other places and your work as a parish priest for 16 years as equivalent to two years of study here. Therefore we consider this year as third year. If you get the same grade in the next semester examination or a better grade and pass a comprehensive examination based on the three year course, at the end of the year, you will be awarded the B. D. (Bachelor of Divinity) Degree." Fr. Punnoose told him that it was an impossible thing for him to achieve, and requested to allow him to continue his studies

for two more years. The Dean in turn tried to make Fr. Punnoose confident and also told him that funds were not available to offer him two more years of scholarship. Finally Fr. Punnoose took up the fortunate but difficult offer as a challenge. Sacrificing sleep and rest, he studied very hard for the rest of the year and passed the examination. He was awarded the B. D. Degree.

Fr. Punnoose was sure that he would not be allowed to continue his education at the General Theological Seminary. But he wanted to take master's degree in Divinity. When he was thinking about how it would become a reality, he got a telephone call from Dr. Pickens Jr. Dr. Pickens was the head of the foreign students scholarship department of the Episcopal Church. This chance telephone call and a meeting Fr. Punnoose had with him later led to his being admitted to STM course at Berckley Divinity School. Berckley Divinity School, owned by the Episcopal Church, is in the same campus of the world famous Yale University. Since Yale Divinity students could take a course in Berckley and vice versa, Fr. Punnoose attended a course in Yale also. After one year of study Fr. Punnoose got STM degree from Berckley. On his return journey he visited the east coast of the States, the island of Hawaii, Japan, Honkong, Brunei, Singapore and Malaya. Since he got the order posting him to the church in Bahrain, while in New York, Fr. Punnoose spent only a few days at home.

AN OASIS BLOOMS IN THE DESERT

Fr. Punnoose assumed the vicarship of the parish in Bahrain in December, 1967. Started in 1959 Bahrain Parish was the first orthodox church in the Gulf region. His impression that it was a parish with all the necessary facilities was found to be wrong. The membership was around 150, out of which two third were nurses. The church services were conducted in the Anglican church. A rented house with no ventilation on three sides but one in the front, facing the road, was the house for the vicar. The vicar's salary was 50 Dinar (Rs. 500). Rent for the church, and the parsonage and various other expenses were there. The only payment that could be delayed was the salary of the vicar. In the cold season, the accommodation posed no problems. But in summer, when the heat was so much staying indoors was unbelievably difficult. The A. C. that was kept in the bed room was a blessing. For the first time in his life, Fr. Punnoose started self cooking for his food. Thus the days went on in Bahrain.

When Fr. Punnoose was in Bahrain the only other orthodox parish in the Gulf region, was Kuwait. Abu Dabi, Dubai and Doha, were only establishing themselves. After reaching Bahrain, Fr. Punnoose learned that the Sheikh had promised the Diocesan Metropolitan a plot of land for the construction of a church. Since nobody had taken any initiative it was almost forgotten. With the help of one T. E. Joseph, the promised land near the hospital, was located and it was found to be ideal. Fr. Punnoose discussed the idea of constructing the church with the senior members. Nobody was found to be keen. They all said that Indians might be there for only about five years hence there was no point in going for a church construction. Still it was decided to discuss it in the General Body meeting. But on the day the general body was to meet, when Fr. Punnoose came out after the Holy Sacrament, only two or three people were present. That was the co-operation of the people. The next Sunday after the service Fr. Punnoose made an impassioned plea to the people for the construction of the church

and appealed to them to contribute half a month's salary. Nobody said anything against it. A two-storeyed building was constructed in due course.

The ground floor was used as the church and the first floor became the parsonage. This was the first church built by Asians in the Gulf region. The Bahrain parish is still an active one, and the membership has since only gone up.

From Bahrain, once in a month, Fr. Punnoose used to go to Doha, Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The congregations were organised in Dubai and Abu Dhabi during these visits. The members of the orthodox church in Dubai were first called for a meeting during one visit and the meeting was held on the terrace of a building. The Qurbana was conducted in the hall of women's welfare centre for a long time. In Abu Dhabi church service was held in the Anglican Church. It was difficult to get plane charge from these two places as the collection was low. A cargo plane of British Petroleum Company used to fly from Bahrain to Das Island via Abu Dhabi with provision two or three times a week. The plane had facility to accommodate three or four passengers. If the company was requested in advance and if there was room, considering the fact that the applicant was a priest, he would be allowed to fly in the cargo plane. Though the smell of fish and meat was there in the plane, free travel was really an incentive and Fr. Punnoose had availed of that facility many times to carry out his priestly responsibilities in Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

The construction of the church in Bahrain made our people in Abu Dhabi and Dubai to think about building a church in each of these places. When His Grace Mathews Mar Coorilos visited the Gulf, our people arranged a meeting with the rulers of these two places. During the meeting, His Grace requested the Sheikhs for land for the construction of a church in both Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The request was granted and in both places land was allotted immediately.

Though a plot of land was donated by the sheikh, there was no money to embark upon the construction of the church. There was also no easy way to raise funds. So it was decided to

seek the help of the Sheikh. since the Orthodox and Jacobite churches remained united, it was decided to invite the Antiochian Patriarch for the foundation stone laying ceremony and through His Holiness the request would be made for financial assistance.

Every year the coronation anniversary of the Sheikh was celebrated in a grand manner and a large number of important people from the Arab countries were invited. Through an Arab who was very close to the Sheikh, the Patriarch also was invited. His Holiness the Patriarch had a direct talk with the Sheikh a day before the anniversary day when the Sheikh hosted a dinner in honour of the important invitees. The Patriarch reminded the Sheikh about the foundation stone laying ceremony of the church for which he had already been invited, and on his own behalf, invited him again. The Sheikh accepted the invitation and agreed to attend the function.

The plot allotted for the church was about 200 metres away from the road. It was a sandy deserted place. A special dias was erected for the important invitees. The Patriarch and his entourage, the Consulate General of India in Kuwait and a large number of people came to the site at the appointed time. The Sheikh did not turn up. The people waited and waited and when it became dark many left. Then the patriarch sent the bishop who came along with him to the palace. As all functions in the palace were over, the Sheikh along with his friends, left for a nearby place where he used to go. The bishop met him there and told him about the function. The Sheikh said that he knew that there was such a function but could not come since he was not sure about the place. Moreover, none of the organisers was in the palace to accompany him to the site also. however, accompanied by the bishop, the Sheikh came to the site. The patriarch welcomed him in Arabic and sought his financial help for the construction of the church. The Sheikh in his reply offered help. Immediately a priest was posted to Abu Dhabi as the presence of a priest was needed while the construction of the church was being done. The construction of the church was completed in due course and Fr. Punnoose relinquished the charge of both Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

Chapter 12

THE RESURGENCE OF AN OLD DESIRE

Fr. Punnoose was completing 25 years of priesthood when he was serving in Bahrain. In the short span of one's life, completing 25 years in any chosen field of work is really important. Some members of the parish who understood this made it an agenda for discussion in the parish committee as well as in the general body. The parishners decided to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of Fr. Punnoose's priesthood in a grand and fitting manner. The information that the Diocesan Metropolitan would be visiting Bahrain around that time made the members happier. So it was decided to hold the celebration in the presence of the Metropolitan. Early in 1972 along with the visit of the Diocesan Metropolitan, the Silver Jubilee of Fr. Punnoose's priesthood was also celebrated. As a present the parishners gave their vicar a good gold chain and cross. The one who handed over the gift to the unmarried priest said ", this is given as the symbol of our expectation that in the near future the celebrant will be duty bound to wear it for ever." This remark was received with loud applause by the people present in the meeting and a meaningful smile lit the face of His Grace Mathews Mar Athanasios, the diocesan Metropolitan who was later elevated to the position of the Catholicos of the East and Metropolitan of Malankara.

The completion of twentyfive successful silver years of parish work saw another turning point in the life of Fr. Punnoose. This made Fr. Punnoose to reflect about his life. His original desire when he first came to Jabalpur suddenly came a live. When he came Jabalpur in 1952, in the near by village Sihora, the Marthoma Church had an ashram and a mission centre. It was started sometime in 1945. Three youngsters of that church who had their education in serampore, during their student days dedicated themselves for missionary work in North India. After their education at serampore, they become priests and started the mission centre and ashram at Sihora. The service rendered by

Rev. K. T. Thomas, Rev. John Varghese and Rev. M.P. Mathew for the Marthoma church in North India, by staying in Sihora, was invaluable. They used to go to all places where syrian christians were staying in order to conduct prayer meetings and the Holy Qurbana. The members of the orthodox church also attended these meetings. Until Fr. Punnoose reached Jabalpur, the orthodox church had no priest in North India and hence the members used to get their spiritual needs done by the priests of the Marthoma Church.

The anniversary of Sihora Ashram attracted people from many parts of North India. People used to go there from far and wide and gave liberal help also. Fr. Punnoose also had attended the anniversary on a few occasions. His mind then was really disturbed over the fact that the orthodox church had no ashram or mission centre in North India. He felt this situation would prevail as nobody was willing to take any step in that direction. So he decided, if God willing, he would like to be involved in mission work, to become a full time Missionary in North India.

While in Bahrain, Fr. Punnoose thought about the years he served as a parish priest in different parts of India, the Far East and the Gulf. Since he became a priest at the age of 23, he was only 48 when the Silver Jubilee of priesthood was celebrated. he was still active and healthy. He thought why not put an end to his work as a parish priest, establish an ashram in North India and start mission work. The desire that sprouted long ago while in Jabalpur was getting stronger and stronger.

It was then that he got a letter from Fr. M. V. George (Later Mar Osthathios) that he would be visiting Bahrain on his way to Geneva. Fr. M. V. George came to Bahrain. While he and Fr. Punnoose were alone, Fr. George told him that to mark the 1900th death anniversary of St. Thomas, a mission centre was started in Bhilai under the initiative of His Grace Mathews Mar Athanasios on 3rd July 1972. He said he would like Fr. Punnoose to take up the responsibility, of looking after the mission. Fr. Punnoose listened to it with rapt attention and thought that it was the call from God. Though Fr. George was speaking, was it

not God who was speaking through him ? He further thought, "God used to speak to the children of Israel through prophets". Without any hesitation or thinking, Fr. Punnoose said if the Diocesan Metropolitan asked him, he would definitely go to Bhilai and take up mission work.

The order came in due course and in October 1972 Fr. Punnoose assumed the charge of the Bhilai Mission. He was also given the charge of MGO Cathedral. He requested the Metropolitan to divest him of the responsibility of being the vicar, as he could then, concentrate on mission work. But it could not be done because it was difficult to get a replacement for him. So he carried on with the twin responsibilities as director of the mission and vicar of MGO Cathedral.

Chapter 13

THE FIRST FRUITS IN BHILAI

Bhilai, originally the land of 'Bhili's an adivasi tribe of Madhya Pradesh was to erect the first Industrial Temple of India, The Bhilai Steel Plant. People from all states of the Indian Union migrated to Bhilai as employees of the plant. A good member of them belonged the orthodox church. During his stay at Jabalpur as there was no other orthodox priest in the whole Northern States, Fr. Punnoose used to visit far away places like Bhopal, Rewa, Satna, Luknow, Kanpur, Delhi for fulfilling the spiritual needs of his people. The Bhilai Orthodox Parish came into being on August 15th 1957 when Fr. Punnoose conducted the Holy Qurbana for the first time in the industrial city. Now Fr. Punnoose was back in Bhilai as the vicar. Little did he knew at that time at Bhilai was to be his second home and the canvas for his future life's portrait. By this time, the parish had acquired some land and a beautiful church. The parish was also running an English Medium high School, M. G. M.

Mar Gregorios Parish, Bhilai was passing through bad weather. Groupism and the problems emanated from it were at their heights when Fr. Punnoose moved in. It was all concerning the management of MGM School owned by the Parish. Fr. P. M. Mathew was the vicar of the parish as well as vice president of the school managing committee and principal of the school. Though Fr. Mathew was inexperienced, he was a hard working, dedicated and effective administrator. As a result, within a short period, MGM became a leading school in Bhilai. But the office matters and finances of the school were not properly handled and these led to bitterness and infighting. So Fr. Mathew was relieved from the charge of the parish and he devoted himself as the principal of the school. Fr. Punnoose's position as vicar was not liked by a section of parishioners. The repercussions of it were heard in one general body meeting. The utterances made by some in the meeting were far too below the christian standards. Fr. Punnoose appealed to the Diocesan Metropolitan to solve the crisis by appointing another person as vicar.

But he solved the problem by transferring Fr. Mathew from Bhilai. So the initial months of Fr. Punnoose's stay in Bhilai were not rosy.

The Mission Centre was started in Bhilai due to the interest taken by His Grace Mathews Mar Athanasios. The desire to start it had been in his mind ever since he became the Metropolitan of outside Kerala diocese. To raise some funds for this purpose he started mission Sunday cover collection. When some amount was collected, an agreement was signed to buy a plot of land in Ranchi in Bihar and advance payment was also made. The idea of buying that plot was cancelled when it was found out that there was some dispute about its ownership. It was at this time that the conference of the Diocese was held in Kottayam and the representatives of MGO Church, Bhilai informed the Metropolitan that the unused building in the church compound could be used as the Mission Centre. This was how the mission centre was started in Bhilai.

The mission had not enough money, but Fr. Punnoose was thinking about buying some land in Bhilai as the permanent site of the Mission Centre. He wanted sufficient acres for farming so that the Mission could have permanent income.

The Balbhavan (boy's home) also faced some problems. Initially there were 12 children. Out of these, 8 had run away. Fr. P.T. Cherian who was in charge of balbhavan faced a very sad personal loss. He lost his second child after a short illness. but he and his wife, who had deep faith and commitment, submitting themselves to God, carried on the work of balbhavan, mainly collecting money from people to meet its daily needs.

It was then K.C. Abraham, a member of M. G. O. church told him that 16 acres of land near his home was available. It was actually a large plot of 32 acres owned by five people, out of which half was on sale. Fr. Punnoose liked the land as water was available and farming would be possible. Immediately the agreement was signed and advance was given. A sum of Rs. 50000 was needed for the purchase. He contacted the Diocesan Metropolitan. The Metropolitan asked, "Why do you go for 16 acres? Does the Mission need more than 3 or 4 acres?" The Bishop also wrote that

if the amount in the fixed deposit was taken before it became mature, a lot of interest would be lost. He asked Fr. Punnoose to adjust the amount and assured that the amount would be returned when the deposit became mature. So land as per agreement was bought.

Hectic work was done in the land under the guidance and supervision of Fr. Punnoose and K. C. Abraham. Labour was cheap and easily available. There were some volunteers from the parish also. By monsoon time the land was ready for cultivation. Fr. Punnoose wanted to buy the remaining part of the land also. He found the land ideal for Mission Centre and chapel as he experienced a sort of serenity and absolute peace while sitting there in the evening. Soon the other piece of land was also put for sale. As the owners demanded a very high price, the offer was not accepted. Somebody else agreed to buy and advance was given. But since that deal fell apart due to some legal complications and the owners again approached Fr. Punnoose. Finally that part was also bought. Fr. Punnoose's joy knew no bounds, as his prayers were answered. At last he could find a place of his liking, and work for a mission close to his heart. The Bhilai mission entered into his being and he became its 'Jeevatma'.

Owing to some personal and family problems Fr. P.T.Cherian rid himself of the responsibilities of Balbhavan. He hired a house near the church at Nandini and shifted his family there. So all the responsibilities looking after the spiritual needs of the members of MGO Cathedral, Balbhavan, Mission and farm work fell upon the shoulders of Fr. Punnoose.

THE MAKING OF A BISHOP

Fr. Punnoose had completed two years of hectic yet pleasant life in Bhilai. One day he read in the news paper *Malayala Manorama* that the Malankara church Association was going to elect five priests for the post of bishops. He never thought he would be a candidate, or get selected. The parishners who returned to Bhilai from Kerala after their leave spread the news that their vicar was one of the candidates for bishopric. Fr. Punnoose could not believe it. He told himself, "It's impossible. There are so many better qualified priests than me. I am not at all suitable." Meanwhile he got a letter from His Grace Mathews Mar Athanasios that the Association was going to be held on 2nd October and that in the final list the name of Fr. Punnoose was there and the list was going to be passed by the Managing Committee. When he read the letter as he recalled later, "My breathing became faster. My mind became more turbulent than happy. But I thought it happened without my knowledge or interest. If it's God's will, why should I get worried." When the list was finally approved, Fr. Punnoose was asked to be present for the Association meeting to be held at Niranam on October 2nd.

October 2nd 1974 was the 50th birthday of Fr. Punnoose. From different parts of the world representatives of various parishes were flowing to the specially arranged pandal at the church in Niranam, to the sand blessed by the Apostle's feet. (Niranam church is believed to be established along with six other churches in Kerala by St. Thomas, one of the Twelve). It was a time when the repercussions of Patriarch Yakub III's kalpana No.203 which dismembered the church into two parts, were at its worst. The people were highly agitated. The fear that the court might ask the Association not to be held was there in everybody's mind. One could notice a sense of betrayal, grief and anguish in the Nature over the Patriarch's unfortunate assertion that St. Thomas was not even a priest, the very same Nature that had been rapturous at the presence of the Apostle centuries ago.

As His Holiness Augen Mar Baselios, the Catholicos, was indisposed, the meeting was presided over by the senior Metropolitan His Grace Mathews Mar Ivanios. The items in the agenda were taken up one by one. Finally it came to the election of the five candidates who were unanimously nominated. The names were read out one by one - Fathers M. V. George, Paul Varghese, K. K. Punnoose, K. C. Thomas and P. V. Joseph. The declaration by the presiding Bishop that the candidates were elected was followed by fireworks and continuous applause and the ringing of church bells. It was the church's recognition of the outstanding and meritorious services of Fr. Punnoose in the development of mission. The elected members went to see His Holiness, the Catholicos, and from there, to their respective homes.

When Fr. Punnoose came back to Bhilai, he wanted to undertake a trip to the Gulf countries to raise funds for the Bhilai Mission. His immediate need was to find out a person to look after the children in the Balbhavan. He approached many bishops; but none was in a position to help him. However, God showed the way. His grace Thomas Mar Themotheos, Metropolitan of Malabar Diocese told him that a sister trained in Pune and England who was then staying at home, could be contacted. Rev. Sr. Sarah was contacted and she agreed to come Bhilai to look after the balbhavan. Fr. Punnoose immediately left for the Gulf countries.

He stayed for few weeks in Saudi Arabia and few days each in Bahrain, Kuwait, Dubai and Muscat. At that time, the Kuwait Parish was in charge of Fr. C. J. Punnoose who belonged to Thazhathangadi. In 1958, when Fr. Punnoose was the vicar of Mar Baselios church in Thazhathangadi, C. J. Punnoose, then student, used to be an altar boy. So they knew each other well. Fr. C. J. Punnoose prevailed upon his one time vicar to accept some cloth which he said could be useful at his consecration as bishop. The bishop designate was not eager to make any such preparation for his eventual elevation. Though elected, any thing could come in the way due to court injection against it, and also due to the confusion prevailing in the church.

When he came back from the gulf Fr. Punnoose went to Kottayam, to inform the Metroplitan about his visit to Gulf countries and the amount of money that he had collected from there. When he reached Kottayam, he went straight to M. D. Seminay chapel to meet the Diocesan head. But His Grace was at Devalokam attending some meeting. So Fr. Punnoose went there. When he entered the room, P.C. Abraham, the church trustee met him and said, "Father, It is good that you have come. I have come out from the meeting to send a telegram to you to come home immediately. Consecration date has been fixed. Its all a top secret. Don't go anywhere. After the meeting, the necessary information will be given by the bishops." After the meeting he got the required information. All candidates for consecration should stay at Devalokam that night. At 4.00 a.m. cars would come to take them to some place. Fr. Paul Varghese knew the destination. More information would be given at the place where they would be taking rest. All these preparations were made to surmount any possible court injenction.

The other candidates, as they were all at home, had already made the dress to be worn at the time of consecration. The cloth that Fr. C. J. Punnoose presented became useful, it was immediately given to a tailor for making the required dresses of a bishop.

The following day, early in the morning, the five candidates in two separate cars, left for their destination. The journey was towards south. On the way, Fr. Punnoose read some sign boards 'Sabarimala.' The places were not familiar to him, Around noon they reached their destination, A bunglow surrounded by forest ! The head quarters of Kallada irrigation project. It was beautiful place with tranquil atmosphere. An excellent place for prayer, meditation and preparation. The plan was to conduct the ordination as Rambans on Feb 15th at Puthemkavu and consecration as bishops on the 16th at Niranam. All the five candidates and the concerned others were extremely careful not to be served with any court injunction. There fore, no report was given in the newspapers about the impending consecration.

Early morning on the 15th , the five candidates accompanied by His Grace Daniel Mar Philexinos, reached St.Mary's Church, Puthenkavu at 6.00 am. It was Mar Philexinos who was to conduct the ordination service. After the ordination, the newly ordained Rambans left for Pathanapuram. Since they were not quite sure that thier stay at the Dayara in Pamanapurath could be kept a secret, they stayed in a bungalow owned by K.M. Verghese. The bungalow was far away from the township and hence thier presence there could not be noticed. Mr. and Mrs. Verghese and the children were extremely happy to accomodate the Rambans.

When they reached the church at Niranam, there was a sea of humanity there. His Holiness the Catholicos and all other bishops were present. The consecration service was mainly conducted by His Grace Mathews Mar Athanasios. Thus on 16th February 1975 Fr. K. K. Punnoose became His Grace Stephanos Mar Theodosius at the age of 50.

After the consecration His Grace Stephanos Mar Theodosius returned to Bhilai, where he was given a rousing reception by people belonging to different denominations and religions. As the Jacobite group had obtained a court injunction preventing the newly consercrated bishops from being given any Metropolitan responsibilities, His Grace stayed at the Vicarage at MGO Cathedral for one year and continued as the vicar of the parish and Director of the Mission.

As soon as the court injunction was vacated, the new bishops were given dioceses. His Grace Stephanos Mar Theodosius became the Metropolitan of Madras Diocese, which included the present Calcutta Diocese. In 1978 when five more bishops were consecrated, the dioceses were redivided. Madras and Calcutta become separate dioceses and Mar Theodosius was given the charge of Calcutta Diocese.

A HEINOUS ASSAULT

From MGO church vicarage Mar Theodosius moved to the new Mission centre in Kurud village. A temporary building was made for his stay. Cultivation of rice, wheat and vegetables brought a stable income for the mission. Mar Theodosius had the qualities of a good farmer and used to work hard in the fields. Under his care the desert bloomed into a lovely green garden with flower and fruit trees and various types of cultivation. He wanted the mission centre to be model for villagers. Moreover he wanted to emulate the idea of St. Paul, the great missionary who worked with his own hands for his livelihood with out being a burden on the believers. He was aware that it was the hard earned money that came as donation to the mission from the believers. He would not use a single piase from that for his own food.

His greatest enjoyment was the sight of green crops around him. He likened God to a great farmer who delighted to see every creation grow and produce worthy fruits. He was sometimes asked whether there was any connection between cultivation and mission. "yes" said Mar Theodosious, "if every citizen of India works with his hands and produces enough things for his survival from the land, then our nation will become self sufficient". He wanted to set an example by himself working in the fields.

Mar Theodosius had a holistic concept of mission. According to him the old colonial, triumphalistic ideas of mission as propogation of the church by preaching and converting people by force or bribes, had to be given up. He also considered the concept that mission meant works of charity like orphanages, was not fully true. He saw mission as the development of the whole man, city or village containing the physical, spiritual, economic and social development. So everything that helps man's, growth worship, farming, gardening, diary, fishing, vocational training centre, hospitals, schools, colleges come under the term 'mission', which was really the expression of God's love through the missionaries.

Bhilai

mission centre was envisaged by him as the beacon light of the new concept of mission.

The mission centre was also meant to be the home of a monastic community. He never believed that mission work should be done through paid workers. He thought that only the voluntary, dedicated monks and nuns who were free from the worldly cares could take the mission work forward. It was with this idea that he laid the foundation of St Thomas Ashram. His ideas found its first response in M. Varghese a fire brand seminary student. The first sacrament of holy ordination conducted by Mar Theodosius was for M. Varghese.

They moved in to a new building in the compound consisting of living rooms for the inmates an office and a small chapel. The balbhavan was shifted to the earlier building they had used. The mission was slowly taking off.

Then there occurred a tragic incident which is still an unsolved mystery. On February 28, 1982 St. Thomas Ashram was attacked by a group of bandits. Around 2.00 a. m. some people knocked at the door. On hearing the knocking sound, Fr. M. Varghese who was in the Ashram opened his room and came out to the Veranda and asked who was calling. The bandits said they were policemen and asked the door to be opened. He did not open the door as he was sure that they were not policemen. But they broke the door and entered the ashram. They wanted to know where the bishop was sleeping. Fortunately Mar Theodosius was in Kerala. Fr. M. Varghese and the inmates were brutally attacked. Fr. Varghese was chased out side and was left in a pit taking him for dead. They took his watch, the money certain things from the asharm.

When Fr. Varghese was taken to the hospital his condition was critical. Meanwhile the news of attack on ashram spread all over the town. The whole christian community in Bhilai was agitated. All christians, irrespective of denominations, marched to the collectorate and presented a memorandum to the Collector. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Chief Minister Arjun Singh and Prime Minister's Personal Secretary Dr. P. C. Alexander were all informed

of this ghastly incident. The Central Government requested Mr. Arjun Singh to provide the best medical attention available in Bhilai to Fr. Varghese and also to provide adequate security to the ashram. So Fr. Varghese was transferred from the Government Hospital to the Steel Plant Hospital where better medical facilities were available. Police protection was provided for the Mission Centre for six months on the orders of the Central Government.

Mar Theodosius got the information about the attack while he was in Devalokam, the catholicate palace. He immediately left for Bhilai. The journey was painful as he was worried about Fr. Varghese's condition. From Durg Railway Station he went straight to the hospital to find out the condition of the priest. He was much relieved when he found that the priest was responding to treatment and had passed the critical condition when he was admitted.

When the attack on the ashram and the lost properties were analysed, it was evident that theft was not the motive. Only a transistor radio, a torch light and a wrist watch being used by the priest were taken away. The attack no doubt was aimed at eliminating some people.

In spite of the thorough inquiry by top police officers, there was no clue about the attackers or their motive. Some rumours were there that the attack was the result of the troubles in an overseas parish under the bishop's care.

Later Fr. M. Varghese got a letter from the court in Durg. The Thana Police Station in Kalyan district of Bombay had sent to the police in Durg a wrist watch that resembled the one that the bandits had carried away. The court wanted the father to identify it as his lost watch. It was recovered from a gang of bandits in Thana. This gang used to extend its nefarious activities to other states also. There was no more progress in the case.

Mar Theodosius said, "I am grateful to the people who masterminded the attack. The reason being that the Bhilai Mission has started growing since the attack."

TWO MONUMENTS

Though Calcutta Diocese was started in 1979, the construction of the Diocesan centre was completed only in 1985. The Dioceses of Bombay, Delhi and Madras were created in 1976. It was when the Dioceses were redivided that Calcutta Diocese was formed. Out of these four Dioceses, a Diocesan centre was bought for Madras first. Bombay had a temporary centre in Chembur. A beautiful centre for Delhi was consecrated in 1974.

Attempts were made for two years to find a place in Calcutta, it could not be obtained due to a very high price. When it became evident that building a Diocesan Centre in Calcutta was impossible, it was decided to build it in the Bhilai Mission Centre. In 1982 when His Grace Mathews Mar Coorilos visited Bhilai, the foundation stone for the centre was laid. As funds were not available, the construction of the centre was started only in 1984. Mar Theodosius had to raise money from his parishes and from outside. Fr. K. M. Varghese and Fr. P. Philipose, the vicars of Muscat and Kuwait parishes raised substantial amount for the building from each of these places. It was really a great help. The consecration of the Diocesan centre and the chapel was done by the Cathohicos His Holiness Marthoma Mathew I. On 25th Jan. 1986. His Grace Zacharias Mar Dionisius was also present. On 26th His Excellency Prof. K. M. Chandy Governor of M. P. inaugurated the Diocesan office. The construction and inauguration of the centre will always remain as a great milestone in the development of the diocese.

It was the fulfillment of a dream of Mar Theodosius. Another important achievement was the establishment of St. Thomas College. The Chief Guest for an annual day celebration of MGM Sr. Secondary School was the Chief Town Administrator of Bhilai Township, Mishra. He was impressed by the atmosphere as well as the standard of the function. He asked Mar Theodosiaus who was presiding the function, why he could not start a college. The bishop replied that on seeing in the BSP News Letter that

private parties would be given help for starting a college, he had approached the management of BSP and that since their response was not encouraging the idea was dropped. Mishra advised him to apply again and promised all possible help. Motilal Vohra, the State Education Minister, also encouraged the bishop to go ahead with the plan and advised him to send an application to the UGC's state office before December.

Fr. John V. John had been the principal of MGM school for 3 years. His Grace said in the meeting that if Fr. John V. John agreed to work as the principal of the college for 5 years, he would apply. Fr. John agreed and then it was decided to submit the application. The application was submitted to the Secretary who wanted some clarifications. On getting the clarifications he told the bishop that he would do the needful. While leaving, Mar Theodosius apologetically told the Secretary, "sir, now we want to apply for a college. I cannot say whether we shall have the same desire later. If permission is given now, there are many months left for starting the college. So if it is possible, please consider our application now and sanction to start the college may be given immediately. If it is done so, our interest to start the college may be kept alive." The Secretary said, "O.K. Father, I shall consider it". He also said whatever else was to be done would be informed from the office.

After a few weeks a letter was received from the UGC office. It was written in the letter that a bank certificate stating that the applicant had 1.5 lakhs of rupees in the bank should be sent to the UGC office. Since the letter was in Hindi it was how the content of it was understood. So a certificate was sent. Then came a further instruction that Rs. 1.5 lakhs should be deposited in the joint account of the applicant and the secretary and that a bank certificate stating that the account would not be operated without the consent of the Secretary should be submitted. This new instruction put a temporary stop to the idea of starting the college as the money available in the bank was for the construction of the Diocesan Centre. There was no alternate source of money. Mar Theodosius spent three or four days thinking, 'let God's desire prevail'.

One day when Mar. Theodosius returned to his room after mid-day prayers, the village postman brought some registered letters. One of it contained a draft for Rs.1.5 lakhs from the Kuwait Orthodox Church. The amount was exactly the same that was to be kept in fix deposit for getting sanction for starting the college. That draft was a precious gift from God ! The same day the draft was deposited in the bank and the certificate as the UGC wanted was sent to its office in Bhopal. The sanction to start the college, the only English Medium college in the area, was granted on fulfilling the other formalities. The college functioned for three years at MGM Sr. Secondary School and then in 1988 it was shifted to its permanent site. St. Thomas College is the only college that the orthodox church owns in North India. This is another monument of Mar Theodius's untiring service to the people of North India.

A SATYAGRAHA

Mar Theodosius never tried to live in an ivory tower of spirituality shutting himself from the cries of the masses. As the only prelate living in Bhilai, he was every one's 'Thinumeni'. People from all religions and castes used to visit him for his blessings and he tried to solve some of their problems.

Quite a large number of Keralites have been staying in Durg, Bhilai, Raipur, Bilaspur and Korba. Of these, the maximum number has been in Bhilai. For them to go home and come back was an ordeal as there was no direct train service to Kerala from Bhilai. Even tickets for Kerala could not be booked from Bhilai. For that people had to go to Nagpur which was far away. During one of his visits to Delhi, Mar Theodosius met a senior official of the Railways, who was then the Finance Controller of the Railway Board. The Bishop appraised him of the problems being faced by the Keralites working in the places in and around Bhilai in their journey to Kerala. He was requested to solve these problems. He agreed to do whatever was possible. But he advised to send a mass petition from people belonging to Kerala in that region. He added that the interference of political leaders would facilitate a quick favourable decision.

Mar Theodosius informed the church members the details of his discussion with senior Railway officer and asked them to organise all people from Kerala residing in Bhilai. A meeting was held in the Malayala Grentha Sala to think about future course. Tactions of the people showed the bishop the memorandums that they had submitted to the Railway Minister and the subsequent correspondence with him. A programme of co-ordinated action was chalked out to solve the burning issue. An action council was formed and His Grace was made its patron. After a series of meetings, a memorandum signed by thousands of people was prepared and submitted to the Railway Minister. It was also decided to start a relay sathyagraha that would last for one month.

The relay hungerstrike was conducted in the pandal specially made for that purpose near the Bhilai Power house Railway Station. Initially only Malayalees participated in it. But as days went on the members of both South Indian and North Indian organisations lent their support. Every evening huge processions were conducted in the township and people gathered in good number in the pandal. In the presence of huge gathering meetings were held and speeches were made. Leaders of different political parties also spoke on these occasions. The presence of various religious leader lent the movement a festival atmosphere. While the aforesaid actions were going on, under the leadership of Arjun Singh, the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, His Grace and all members of the action council met the Railway Minister in his office in Delhi and spoke to him. As a result of all this, immediate decision was taken to start the Bhilaspur-Cochin train and also the facility for booking 75 berths in the Kerala Express in Durg.

The struggle of the Keralites and the leadership given to them by Mar Theodosius are still fondly remembered by the Bhilaians. This agitation and its successful end further endeared the soft spoken, unassuming Mar Theodosius to countless number of people belonging to different Christian denominations and other religions.

Chapter 18

THE IRREPARABLE LOSS

Mar Theodosius could not believe his ears! The phone call that reached him in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, brought the shocking news of the death of Fr. K. M. Varghese, who had joyfully seen him off from Bhilai. He met his angel of death in a gruesome accident in Dehu Road near Bombay.

Mar Theodosius' mind went down the memory lane. The young theological student Varghese from Mavelikkara visited Fr. Punnoose, the Vicar of Jabalpur Orthodox Church in 1954. Varghese, who was lean and short in stature, was never short of energy and laughter. He was always enthusiastic and cheerful. He had been studying in a theological centre in Yavatmal in Maharashtra. He wanted to do his higher studies in Leonard Theological College, Jabalpur. When he got admitted in Leonard Theological College, then began a lifelong friendship between the two. Fr. Punnoose considered Varghese as his younger brother. He used to take Varghese on the pinion of his bicycle when he made his rounds of the Parish. Varghese had the unique ability of making people happy through jokes and laughter. Varghese was ordained as a celibate priest. Fr. K. M. Varghese served for a short while in the Orthodox Theological Seminary at Kottayam at the insistence of Metropolitan Philipose Mar Theophilus, the Principal. Very soon he got a chance to proceed to USA to pursue theological studies.

When they met in 1976, Fr. K. M. Varghese was requested by his friend now ordained as the Bishop, Mar Theodosius, to come to his diocese. As he had already agreed to take charge of the Cathedral Church at Calicut Fr. k. M. Varghese asked for some time till he completed his new post. After one year Fr. K. M. Varghese came to Bhilai and was appointed by Mar Theodosius as the Vicar of Mar Gragorios Orthodox Cathedral. As Mar Theodosius had not built his new centre, both lived together in the vicarage of Mar Gregorios Orthodox Cathedral. In 1978 Mar Theodosius moved out to the Mission Centre. Fr. K. M. Varghese continued for two more years

in the vicarage. On completion of his term as the Vicar of Bhilai, Fr. K. M. Varghese moved to the Mission Centre to live with Mar Theodosius. He was appointed as the Vicar of the Nagpur Parish. Later he went to Muscat to take charge of the Orthodox Parish there. During his tenure there he collected a great deal of money for the building of the Diocesan Centre.

On his return from the Gulf, Fr. K. M. Varghese informed Mar Theodosius that he did not want to go out as a Parish Priest. Instead he wanted to devote the rest of his life to the mission. So he was appointed as the Chaplain of the Mission as well as its Treasurer. Two shining characteristics of Fr. K. M. Varghese were his sense of beauty and his love of nature. He beautified the Chapel and the Diocesan Centre. He spent many hours in the garden. The well grown trees around the Bhilai Vicarage and the Mission Centre will endure as testimonials of their benefactor till the end. As the Treasurer of the Mission he looked after the affairs of the St. Thomas College which was under the mission.

His death was the result of his zeal for the mission. He got the news that a huge quantity of new and old dresses had arrived in the Bombay port in the name of the Mission. The Parishes in foreign countries had collected and sent them to be distributed by the Mission to the poor people. The District Collector had to issue a NOC for clearing these clothes from the custom authorities. In spite of his repeated attempts he could not obtain this certificate. He finally decided to go to Bombay himself to clear the goods.

While he was in Bombay the Holy Week began. Mar Theophilus asked him to take Palm Sunday service in the church at Dehu Road. On March 26, 1988, after the evening prayers he was taken in a car for the supper to a parishoner's house. It was a parishoner who drove the car. His wife and two children were also in it. They had to cross a *maidan* (field) before they could take the main road. As they were climbing a raised ground the bottom of the car struck against a hidden rock and its brake failed. The car began to roll down. The driver lost his control. The car gathered speed and fell into a quarry. The people in the nearby huts rushed to the spot.

There was some water in the quarry. The driver, his wife and one child were rescued. One child died. For some time they could not find the priest. They thought he had escaped. They began to search. But it yielded no result. Again they went into the watery hole. There they found the lifeless body of the priest. He met his end while working for the mission, trying to help others.

Mar Theodosius wanted to rush back to India. But there were no flights immediately. Finally a Danish Airways took him to Bombay. With a broken heart he bid farewell to his close companion. The death of Fr. Varghese was a great blow to Mar Theodosius and the work of the mission. It was an irreparable loss. Laughter almost disappeared from the Mission Centre. If Fr. Varghese was alive, he would have been of great personal help to Mar Theodosius and an asset to the Mission Centre. But God had better plans for him. His mortal remains were transferred from Bombay cemetery to the Bhilai Mission Compound where he wanted to spend the remaining part of his life. He has indeed become a permanent resident there.

THE MAKKODIAN CALL

Like the man from Macedonia, appearing in the dream to St. Paul, William, an adivasi and his people from the remote village Makkodia, in the inner recess of North India were waiting for some Christian brethren to "come over and help them". Ever since the foreign missionaries had left, they were like sheep without shepherd. They had neither church nor sacraments. There was not a single Christian within ten square kilometres. As a result they began to fall back from the Christian ideals into illegal liquor trade, looting and gambling. They had to resort to these evils to sustain their lives. Clarke, a foreign missionary had come to Makkodia, about twentyfive kilometre north of Itarsi in Madhyapradesh state in 1904. The Sathpuda mountains surround it on the east and the north east. The rivulet Hathad flowing from Sathapuda to river Narmada passes through this village. It forms a part of the cluster of about seventyfive villages with an adivasi population of more than 100,000 living in abject poverty. Illiteracy and illhealth reigned over them. They thought that their sufferings were due to the wrath of gods. The Clarke couple was not blessed with any child of their own. So they adopted twenty four orphans and began to provide education for them. They built houses, school and a hospital for them. This was known as 'The Friends Mission' in 1912. Children from the far away villages came here to study. Dr Edison was one of the medical missionaries who served here. The foreign missionaries had to leave in the nineteen serventies.

Now we can find a country mansion nearly ninety years old which is known as the 'mission bungalow', still a great wonder in the eyes of the villagers. The village has only about eight hundred families of which about two hundred and fifty are Christians. On the bank of the river, banyan tree, which has spread over two acres of land.

The villagers still retain the memory of the great Indian saint Sadhu Sundar Sing, who sat down in the shadow of the banyan tree to teach them about the gospel.

The prayers of the believers in Makkodia were answered when Bhilai Orthox Mission decided to purchase the Makkodian Mission. In 1986 The "Macedonia" of the Malankara Orthodox Church was inaugurated after the holy liturgy in the Makkodia Mission Bunglow by Mar Theodosius, in the presence of the large crowd of Orthodox Christains who had come from Bhopal, Itarsi, Hoshangabad, and Jabalpur parishes. From that day onwards, dedicated priests and lay missionaries are doing great service to the spiritual, and social upliftment of the people. Makkodia became the centre for missionary work in the near by thirty villages.

Mar Theodosius's eyes were filled with tears of joy when he saw three young men of about eighteen years learning the "A,B,C,D," along wth small children in one of the 'Balavadis' near Makkodia. His heart melted at the sight of Garibi, a youth of twenty three who *crawled* to one of the mission schools every day as he was paralysed beneath his waist. Now the mission is are providing primary education for about five hundred children in ten villages. Full fledged schools in English and Hindi mediums are started in some villages. Men and women are being trained in vacations like tailoring and use of tractors for agriculture. A boys home (Balabhavan) and a clinic are part of the mission. Two tailoring centres and other jobs of the mission give employment for nearly twenty villagers each day.

H. G. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, the Metroplitan of Niranam and the President of The Orthodox Church Mission Board visited Makkodia in October 1993. He could prevail upon the government authorities to sanction a tarred road to the village. His coming into the village in a bullock cart in our modern India would have made him think about the progress of the nation. There was nothing to compare with what we call a 'road' to Makkodia. The monsoon would make any access to the village nearly impossible. Yet Mar

Theodosius and the leaders of the Orthodox Church were not discouraged from visiting the place several times. In 1994 H. H. Marthoma Mathews II, The Catholicos and the supreme head of the Church, visited Makkodia. His holiness really thanked God for this growing edge of the Church, its entry into the untouched fields of mission in Bharat. Mar Osthathios's visit had far reaching consequences. The Niranam Diocese and the Mission Board were motivated to start many centres of missionary work in North Inida. The balabhavan for the children of the lepers in Itarsy, near Makkodia was the immediate result. Other dioceses are also following the lead.

Fr. K. I Philip did not expect that he would have the shade of a tree for a chapel when was accompanying Mar Theodosius to Bagdona village. But that was the only place available for them when they visited the Mission centre there. There was a very small shed. As the brother in charge was out, they could not enter into it. The hot summer sun did not have any mercy on the travellers. It was the time of the Great Lent. So they said their prayers under the tree and did the forty prostrations. They were feeling the pangs of hunger. They managed to get some smoked, hard *rotis* for their hungry bellies.

Mar Theodosius was on a visit to his village mission centre at Bagdona, near Sarni in Betul district of Madhya Pradesh. It is some ten kilometres away from the Goradongri railway station on the way to Delhi. It is a tribal area, home of the tribe called Gonds, who has striking similarities with the people Kerala in language and customs. When the fifteen acres of land was purchased by the Calcutta Diocese a few years ago, there was no facilities like electric and water supply. The water from the borewell was not hygienic as it was mixed with some oily substance. However Mar Theodosius used to spend days together encouraging the workers of the mission and supervising the construction work. It was moment of joy and expectation when H. H. The Catholicos visited Bagdonna and laid the foundation of a school there in 1994. Within one year the student strength rose to three hundred which shows the need for

good educational facility in that place. The land is good for cultivation but scarcity of water is a problem. Natural irrigation is practised by building two dams for storing the rain water. The *mauha* is the wonder tree in this area. Its flowers are fabulously sweet and juicy. The adivasis use it like grapes to produce wine which is their favourite drink.

More centres for mission are planned in Itarsi, Bhopal, Calcutta and other places. Mar Theodosius feels that raising money is not the problem but finding good workers is really difficult. It was with the view to train mission workers that he decided to start the Bhilai Mission Training Institute, which was the first of its kind in North India for the Orthodox Church. The institute could not take off. After one year it had to be wound up due to the lack of proper students. This reminded Mar Theodosius about the Church's cold response to its missionary responsibility. But he is not discouraged. He says that he is building nests so that birds can come and settle in them whenever possible.

Part II

A TIME TO CELEBRATE

"AND MILES TO GO...."

Mar Theodosius does not think that his work is in any way complete. The diocese which he is shepherding, needs a lot of things more. Of course, the achievement within the two decades of its existence is remarkable. When Mar Theodosius took charge, there were only less than half a dozen permanent churches where worship was held on all four Sundays and some few congregations where service was conducted occasionally. Now there are about fifty centres of worship half of which have permanent Churches. It is the result of the untiring efforts of its shepherd who is always on travel mostly in crowded second class compartments, to visit his flocks scattered over the vast area from Nagpur to Nagaland. He travels alone without giving any attention to his failing health. It takes days for him to reach from one place to the other.

Many of the congregations are not able to support their priests out of their own income. So he is encouraging them to start schools to have some income to continue their activities. At least half of the parishes have schools of their own at various levels. He wants them to be networked at the diocesan level and make the diocese the educational agency catering for the development of the people. This is still in the germinating stage.

Mar Theodosius is conscious of the need to make the church fully alive to the situations in which it is living. Outwardly this means the work for the development of the neighbourhood of the church. Inwardly this means to make the worship meaningful to the people. The worship cannot be limited to the Malayalam language and expressions. It should be in other languages. As Hindi is the backbone language of India, he is very much enthusiastic about the use of Hindi as the language of liturgy. In spite of his motivation the parishes are still to make proper use of it. As a result they can only cater to the needs of the Keralites. He wonders when our church will learn to adapt to its circumstances.

In order to meet the pressing needs of the church, Mar Theodosius mooted the idea of starting a theological seminary for North India. The episcopal synod approved the proposal. This seminary will be the foundation for all the developments of the church in North India. Some are yet to see the writing on the wall or decipher the changes happening around us. Mar Theodosius thinks that he has 'miles to go' to equip the Orthodox Church in North India to face the twentyfirst century.

THE CHURCH HONOURS ITS SHEPHERD

It was September 1993. Mar Theodosius was on a visit to Kuwait parish. There he received the message that the Calcutta Diocesan Council had taken the decision to declare 1993-94 as the Saptati Year of its shepherd. He would reach his seventieth milestone on 2nd October 1993 and pass it over on 2nd October 1994. He gave his consent reluctantly with a condition that all pomp and extravagance should be avoided and that only creative projects, helpful for others would be undertaken. Thus on 1 October, 1993 at Kuwait, on 2nd at Indore, and on 3rd at Bhopal, celebrations were conducted in connection with the Saptati. On 6th the Saptati Year was formally inaugurated by H.G. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, the Metropolitan of Niranman Diocese at Bhilai under the auspices of M. G. O. Cathedral and M. G. M. Sr. Secondary School. Thereafter many programmes were conducted by the people in various parishes. He was showered with compliments by his beloved people. He said, "I was literally bathed in the fragrant waters of love by my people. . . When I hear the good words you have spoken about me and receive your generous offerings, I become more and more conscious about my unworthiness for such high complements. My shortcomings and failures parade before my eyes." The Nagpur meeting to felicitate Mar Theodosius on his Saptati is worth recalling. It was a grand function with the Governor of Maharashtra, Dr. P. C. Alexander as the chief guest and Bishop Rt. Rev. Vinod Peter, CNI Diocese of Nagpur, Mr. Krishore Dorle, the mayor of Nagpur, Dr. Shrikant Jichkar M.P., Mr. Raghunath Malikar Guruji, municipal corporator as speakers.

The valedictory function was held in Bhopal St. Thomas Church on 20th November, 1994. The Chief guest was Mr. Mohd Shafi Qureshi, the Governor of Madhya Pradesh. He said, "I would like to think the jubilarian as a true son of Madhyapradesh because of his long association with the state." Sri S. Krishnakumar, union minister

Who spoke on the occasion said, " I am happy to say that I also come from the state which produced this esteemed and popular prince of the church. He is a nation builder who pioneered the village education in North India. His valuable services are in the field of establishing great infrastructures like schools, colleges, ashrams. He is a karma yogi who motivates us for authentic existence by tranquilizing and inspiring us. He has really absorbed our cultural heritage." Arch Bishop Topno of the Catholic Church said, "I am deeply impressed by the simplicity of Mar Theodosius. He is a beautiful gift of God not only to the Orthodox Church but to the entire Christian community in North India." H. G. Geevarghese Mar Coorilos, the bishop of Bombay said, "I am really attracted by Mr Theodosius's stories of his work in the villages. He represents the kenotic aspect of Jesus Christ. He has dedicated his life to the most downtrodden persons. Through his dynamic presence and inspiring words he brings the poor and the needy into our attention. Such persons are very rare." His Holiness Marthoma Mathews II, the Catholicos said, "My heart is full, so my tongue is still. He is a true and great Indian. My respect for him is growing greater and greater because he is trying to be faithful to Jesus Christ who gave up his life for others. It is better to wear away than to 'rest' away."

THE MOTHER CHURCH'S DEEP DEBT OF GRATITUDE TO HIS GRACE STEPHANOS MAR THEODOSIUS

Metropolitan Geevarghese Mar Osthathios,
President, Mission Board

1972 A.D. was a watershed in the annals of the Malankara Orthodox Church. It was the Nineteenth centenary of the martyrdom of St. Thomas the Apostle, who is the founder of our church on the foundation of Christ and admittedly the Apostle of India. Among the various celebrations of the centenary in Kerala, was included the celebration of the Holy Qurbana on 19 altars at M.D. Seminary Campus (I was one of the priest celebrants), with the Catholicos and other dignitaries. A small beginning of St. Thomas Mission and Children's Home was started in Bhilai on July 3, 1972. Fr. P.T. Cherian was put in charge of the Mission Centre. Fr. C.M. Thomas, who later became a metropolitan of the Jacobite Church was also present with me in Bhilai then. His Grace Mathews Mar Athanasius (later, Catholicos Mar Thoma Mathews I) should be regarded as the founder of the Bhilai Mission. The Kerala Celebrations were from Dec 18-21, 1972, when foreign dignitaries were also present.

It was not a coincidence, but the providential work of God that I could spend a few days in Bahrain on my way to Europe, as the guest of the Vicar, Fr. K.K. Punnoose. I invited him to India to take up the charge of Bhilai Mission. His answer was that the silver jubilee of his ordination was that year and that he would be extremely grateful to God if he could be of service for the mission of the Church rather than just a vicar of a parish. I never knew that on Feb 16, 1975, he and I would be consecrated bishops at Niranam with His Graces, Gregorios, Makarios and the late Pachomius of blessed memory. Was it not a doing of God that finally Bhilai

became the headquarters of Calcutta Diocese with Mar Theodosius as its first chief Shepherd?. St. Thomas Mission Centre is at present the largest and only mission centre of the church outside Kerala, though the number of workers are inadequate.

I could never believe the tremendous achievements of my colleague Mar Theodosius until I visited some of His schools and centres in Oct 1993. The Calcutta Diocese inaugurated the one year long Saphthathy of their Sheperd at Kuwait and Bhopal on the first and second Oct. 1993 and these reminiscences are written during the Saphthathi year, which will culminate at Bhopal itself on oct 2. 1994. The official saptathi inauguration was held at Bhilai M.G.M. Junior College under the auspices of the Bhilai M.G.O Cathedral and that grand function attended by the different religious representatives was chaired by me.

In the conference of the Christian colleges of the region held at the Bhilai St. Thomas College, which he founded and is going from strength to strength, my humble suggestion that 70 Balavadis must be started during the Saphthathi year, was well received not only by the jubiliarian, but also by Dr. Mani Jacob, the director of AIACHE (All India Association of Christian Higher Education). The latter promised one lakh Rupees to start and run 20 Balavadis under the auspices of the St. Thomas College, Bhilai, which is of the Mission of Calcutta Diocese. I hope that the Principal will give the usual initiative to start as many Nurseries (balavadies) as possible in the villages around the College to Promote Education for All Kids (PEAK). As eighty two million children in India are illiterate, we have to help the Government to make them literate.

From Cities to Villages

His Grace told me that he has already twenty high Schools in his diocese, eighteen of which are under the management of either the Diocese or of the Mission. Two well-run high schools under the management of Bhilai Parish and Rourkela Parish also may be transferred to the jubiliarian in due course. If the General Bodies of these parishes act magnanimously and unanimously, it

will be good for the parishes as well as for the diocese as the income can be used for educational institutions in the villages of India, where the greatest need is for literacy and higher education. While the Assembly of NAMS (National Association for Mission Studies) took place in Bhilai Mission Centre five years ago (1986), the Villages Mission of the Diocese was inaugurated after the Holy Qurbana in Hindi at the Bhilai Mission Centre Chapel and I had the privilege to inaugurate it as the President of the Mission Board. The Makodia Mission Centre, started ten years ago is the headquarters of the same. Fr. M.Varghese, who was then authorised to be the secretary of the same has gone to USA for further studies; Fr. K.S. George was in charge for few years. A new life has come to Makodia and the village mission since Pappachen Alakot has come from USA and is in charge of Makodia and its increasing activities. Already a dozen Balavadis have come into being and more will be started soon. Sewing classes, Type-writing teaching centres etc. are also started. The Borkaro High School, which is the largest high school building our church has anywhere, is under the mission and the profit from it can be diverted to village mission after completion of the Saphathy block now under construction. I believe that the Madras, Bombay, New Delhi dioceses have also many educational institutions in various cities and they will also step up their village mission through literacy campaign soon.

Partnership in Mission by Niranam and Calcutta Dioceses.

The Holy Synod of July 1993 has decided and advocated partnership in mission between dioceses in Kerala and outside Kerala. As I happen to be the Bishop in charge of the Niranam Diocese, I took the freedom to inform His Grace Mar Stephanos to address a letter to me and the General Body of my diocese, welcoming us to Calcutta Diocese for partnership in Mission. Such a kalpana was readily and happily sent to me by Aboon, which I read in the Diocesan General Body. The response was unanimous and enthusiastic. I have recently sent a kalpana to

all the churches of Niranam diocese to budget an amount for this noble pioneering cause and I expect a good response for that also. Our desire is to buy a few acres of land in the name of the Catholicos for mission and to start St. Paul's Ashram and children's home in or near Itarsi. The poor children admitted will be children of lepracy patients as at Yacharam. Workers are available from Puthupady Ashram for this children's home of the church under the sponsorship of Puthupady and the Calcutta Diocese, receiving donations from all generous people all over the church. We will also start Balavadis in the villages as each donor is sponsoring one Balavadi by donating Rs. 5000/-. This is an experiment we hope will succeed and will be emulated by others also.

A Theological Training Centre in MP

Many priests who graduated from our Orthodox Theological Seminary in Kottayam are doing meritorius services in the parishes outside Kerala. But their handicap in communicating in Hindi is a real problem for which the only solution is a theological centre in Itarsi or Bhopal or a suitable centre near a railway junction. Three of the delegates who came for the Malankara Association in Parumala on May 26,94 have done a good spade work for it by communicating this concern to the Bishops and the Catholicos. The seminary faculty is also convinced of the need of it. The details have to be worked out concerning its location, connection with our Kottayam seminary, faculty finance etc. The advantage of having such a theological Traing Centre in Calcutta Diocese will be for all the North Indian Dioceses and it must be a co-operative venture. This idea had been in the air for many years and the time seems to be ripe for it. How can the priest who does not know Hindi hear the confession of Hindi speaking children, youth and the grown ups? How can we be witnesses of Christ in our Bharat without a good knowledge of our faith and liturgy and ability to communicate them in the *lingua franca* of our nation? We have a concentrated among the Malayalees for two millennium and now we must "Go unto all nations and preach the Gospel" (Mt.28:17-20).

Mar Stephanos Theodosius, A Dedicated Missionary:

According to my own evaluation, the Metropolitan of the Calcutta Diocese is more concerned about mission to non-Christians than all of us other fellow-metropolitans. Wherever he preaches, the call is for mission in the vast continent of India, where our sister churches are much ahead of us. He even started a Mission Training Centre in Bhilai, spending substantial amount, but the students' interest could not match his. The time will come when a Mission Training Centre will also succeed in N. India. His *modus operandi* is different from that of many other missionaries. He is already running a successful dairy, farm, fishery, printing press, children's home etc. of the Bhilai St. Thomas Mission Centre of over 30 acres. What he has done attracts the people of surrounding areas to him for vegetables, milk, grains, literature and Gospel. When our Lord commanded the disciples "you give them food", He meant primarily food for the hungry stomach, although we can include intellectual, cultural, and spiritual food also in it. Mission in the villages must not concentrate on the evangelization alone, but must start with the overflow of the love of Christ, which is actually mission, which should precede evangelization. That must be the motivation of Mar Theodosius to spend a lot of his time at Bhilai in the farm, dairy etc. His vision must penetrate to young missionaries who go to Bhilai for training. His motto is that of his master, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister". His simple life, interest in so called (menial labour) is truly inspiring. His Mission Centre has made the barren land in to a garden!

The Future Plan:

It was my privilege to accompany Mar Theodosius to Raj Bhavan in Bhopal last Oct. to see the Governor of M.P. His Grace used that opportunity to present a Project to His Excellency the Governor for sufficient land to start a hospital in or near the city, which is the capital of M.P. I am hoping and praying that the request will be granted by the state government as a good hospital is a great need of Bhopal. I remember my disciple and ashramite and colleague Fr. M.G. Paul, who died in a scooter accident in

Bhopal on Oct. 29, 1984, whose death, though an irreparable loss for the Malakara Church and St. Paul's society of the Missionaries of Christ, is a gain for the Church Expectant. Some in Bhopal think his life could have been preserved if there was a good mission hospital in the city, though I am grateful to the hospital that treated him for the sincere treatment extended to him. In any case, his soul must also be interceding behind the veil for a good, efficient mission hospital of the Orthodox Church in Bhopal. From my conversation with His Excellency the Governor at that time I gathered that he does appreciate the educational and medical work of the christian minority in India, as he also studied in a Christian institution. I do expect support from the Commissioner of Bhopal, the Collector, the Chief Minister, the Medical Minister and all the Governmental authorities for such noble projects. His Grace's diocese includes the rich and generous parishes of Kuwait, Muscat and Salalah, from where he has already got substantial aid for his school and the first grade college in Bhilai. As his institutions are non-profit registered ones, their profit can be used for village schools, hospitals, dispensaries etc. (All who are being benefited by the growing St. Thomas College at Bhilai should be grateful not only to the manager and founder Mar Theodosius, but also to the authorities of Bhilai Steel Plant for the land allotted for the same and the continuing support. The same gratitude must go to the authorities of Bokaro Steel Plant also for the land and financial support given for the superb high school there.)

In addition to my felicitations to my brother bishop Mar Theodosius while he completes 70 years of his sojourn in this world for which our common Lord and Saviour died and rose again, I pray God to give him faithful and dedicated co-workers in his vineyard to sow the seeds in the fertile field of M.P and outside , both in villages and cities and slums for a good harvest, a thirtyfold, sixty-fold and hundred-fold, and to receive the crown of glory when Christ comes again with angels and archangels and get the certificate from the Master saying, "Good and faithful servant, you have done well, inherit the Kingdom reserved for the greatest of my missionaries from time immemorial" Let all the glory be to the Holy Trinity, the Father Eternal who created us, the Son Eternal, who redeemed us and Holy Spirit eternal, who will consummate His plan for the salvation of all.

THE INDIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH-HERE AND ABROAD SOME RANDOM REFLECTIONS.

Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios
Principal, orthodox
Theological Seminary,
Metropolitan, Delhi Diocese

The Indian Orthodox Church, as old almost as any other church in the world except Jerusalem, is an Apostolic Church, i.e. established directly by one of the twelve Apostles of Christ, a privilege not shared by many other churches, not even Antioch, Rome, Constantinople or Alexandria.

The Church in Antioch was established by Christians (except the Apostles - see Acts 8:1) from Jerusalem fleeing the persecution following the martyrdom of Stephen. (Acts 11:19ff). The Church in Rome was there long before St. Peter and St. Paul got there. The Church of Alexandria was founded by St. Mark who was not one of the twelve. And the city of Constantinople was founded only in 330 AD. Thus the church India, established by St. Thomas, one of the twelve, has been indeed privileged, despite its being the farthest from Jerusalem at that time.

Tradition holds that the Apostle St. Thomas established at least seven churches and also appointed priests or hieres for them. The word hieres was never used for presbyters in the period before the Council of Nicea. Every local church was ruled by a bishop and a council of presbyters around him. Only the bishop was called priest - hieres in Greek or Sacerdos in Latin. This means that the original Indian Church had seven bishops, and was meant to be a fully autocephalous Church, as all the apostolic churches were. When a Church has four or more bishops, if one of them passes away, the other three can, with the help of the people, choose a bishop candidate and consecrate him without having to depend

on any one far away. Four bishops thus is the minimum for an autocephalous church. We had seven. We did not have to be under another church somewhere else.

How did we come to lose the great privilege we once had? How did we end up around the seventh century without any bishops of our own and depending on a Metropolitan of India consecrated by the Persian Church? We do not have any clue about the answer to that question. We may have quarrelled among ourselves and destroyed our patrimony by our wonted strife and rivalry.

It was only in 1912 that we were able to recover part of that autocephaly. The process is still incomplete, after eight decades. We need to have a constitution which clearly establishes that autocephaly. We need to have a Catholicos who can be consecrated without any reference to another church. We should have an Episcopal Synod over which there is no appeal to any fictitious "Universal Synod". But that Episcopal Synod must have its authority clearly defined in the Constitution, which is not the case now. There must be an office and secretary for the Synod. Too much power is now concentrated in the Malankara Metropolitan cum Catholicos, which should be properly balanced between the Synod and Catholicos. Only then will our church be fully autocephalous and fully Orthodox in its polity.

In 1912 our Church re-established the catholicate. When we wrote and approved the present constitution, our knowledge of Eastern Orthodox polity was extremely inadequate. I hope that the Supreme court will give its judgement early in 1995, and that we will be in a better position to suitably amend our constitution to remedy its present defects in this century itself. We need a new constitution which more adequately reflects the present reality of our church as a universal entity.

In the last five decades our church has been specially blessed by God, and we have now become a truly universal church, with dioceses and parishes covering four continents: USA, Canada, Europe, Asia and Australia. Only in Africa and Latin America do we

not have properly constituted parishes. As our century began we were practically ruled by one bishop, and we had no Synod, no Managing Committee, no Malankara Association, no Catholicos.

We were largely confined to the princely States of Travancore and Cochin. Today we have six dioceses outside Kerala, Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, Delhi, USA and Canada/Europe. The church outside Kerala has become both in terms of numbers and of financial support, the mainstay of the Malankara Orthodox Church.

This is an occasion to pay a modest tribute to one of the great pioneers outside Kerala, His Grace Dr. Stephanos Mar Theodosios, the distinguished Metropolitan of Calcutta, who is completing 70 years of age. I wish to add my humble felicitations to His Grace on his Saptathi. Mar Theodosios is one of the respected senior metropolitans of our church today. Learned but humble, of sterling character, true shepherd who loves and cares for his flock, a zealous missionary bishop, His Grace has earned the love and affection of his people.

May God grant to his Grace many more years of good health and strength of body, mind and spirit, in order that his people and the church as a whole might benefit from his spiritual wisdom, ability and character. May the Lord specially bless our Church. May the blessing of God be upon the whole of humanity.



1. The parents: Kayyalathu Chacko Kurian and Mariam



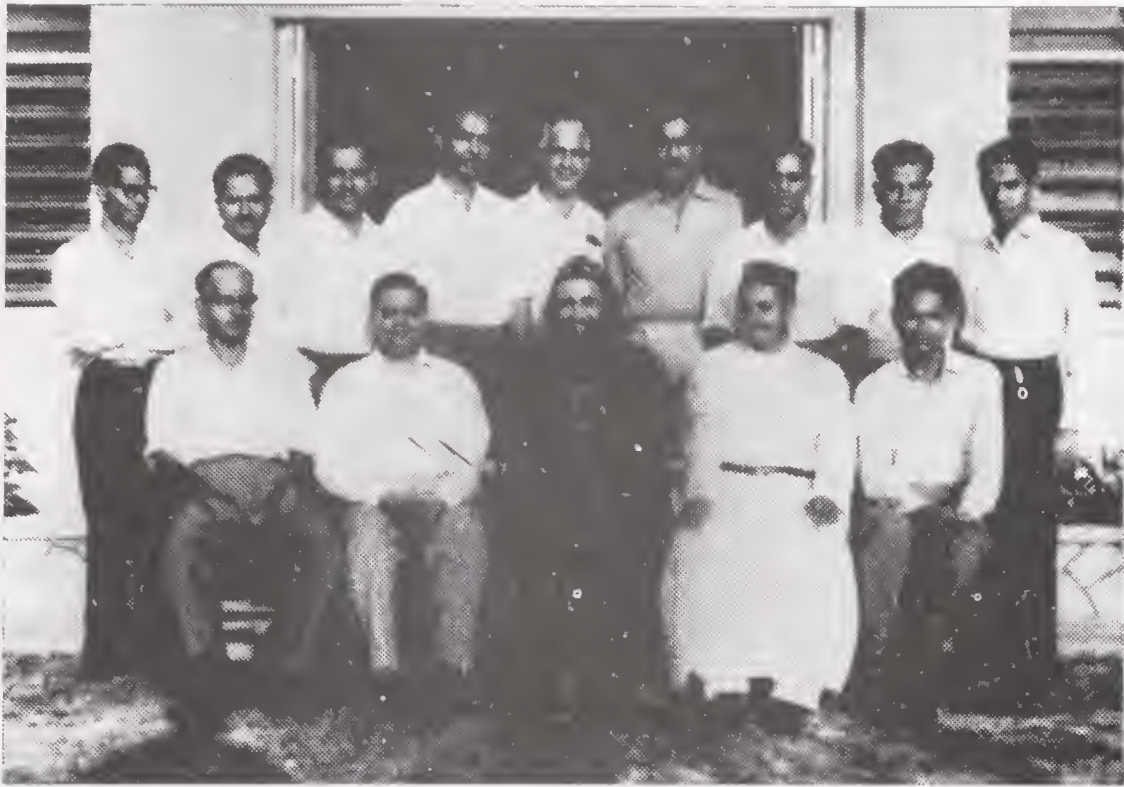
2. After the ordination as deacon with the Catholicos Baselius Geevarghese II and V. Rev. M. C. Kuriakose Ramban



3. at Madras on the way to Jabalpur in 1952 along with Kuriakose Ramban and Fr. Mathews Punnoosseril.



4. with Fr. Paul Varghese (Paulose Mar Gregorios) and the managing committee of Singapore Orthodox Church.



5. with Mathews Mar Coorilos (Catholicos Marthoma Mathews II) and the managing committee of Kuala Lumpur Orthodox Church



6. as the vicar of the Singapore and Malaysian Churches along with the senior vicar, Fr. P. Joshua Vazhamuttam.



7. the student community at General Theological Seminary



8. a boat race out of water-at General Theological Seminary with Rev. Dr. K. C. Abraham, Bishop Mar Aprem and others.



NATIONAL CAMPING SCHOOL
Schiff Scout Reservation
Jun. 17-18, 1966

9. as an adventurous scout while studying in U. S. A.



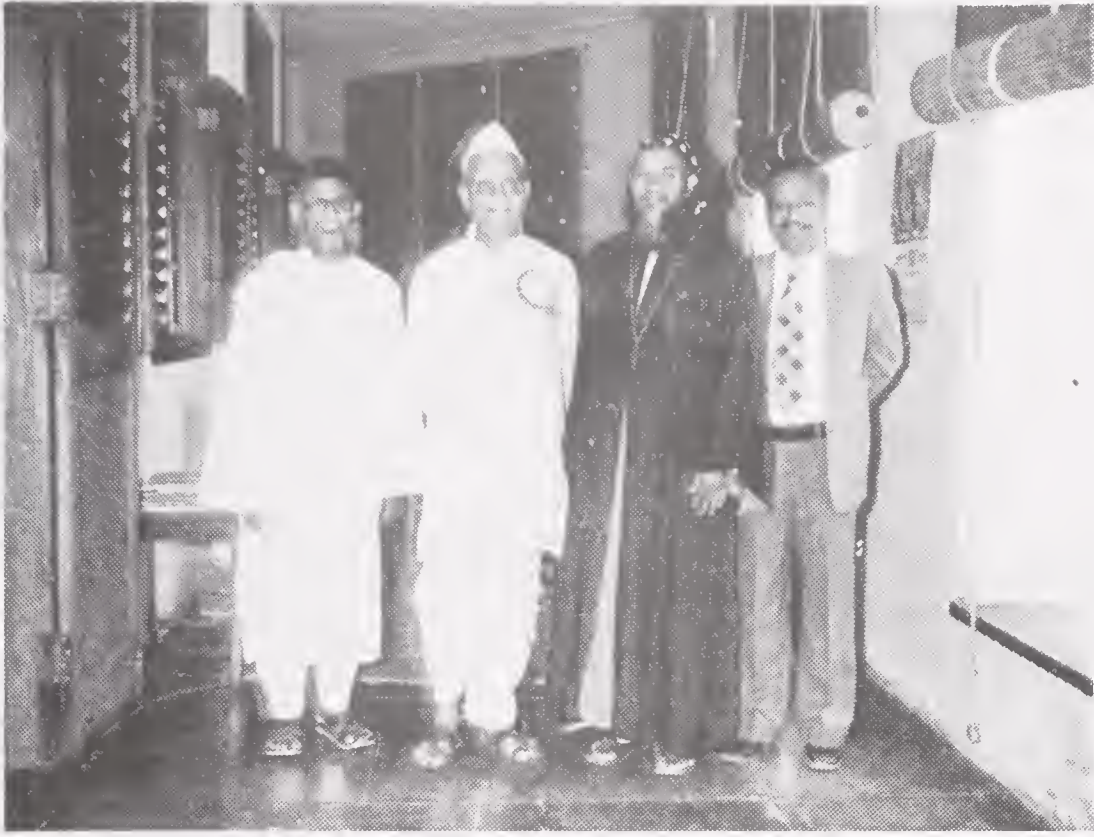
10. as the vicar of Bahrain Orthodox Church with Mathews Mar Athanasius (Catholicos Marthoma Mathews I) and Sheik Issa, the ruler of Bahrain.



11. with the mother after the ordination as bishop at Niranam.



12. with brothers and sisters-L to R: Annamma, Chacko, (sitting) Kurian, Sosamma, Skaria (standing)



13. with the Governor of Tamilnadu Mr. Prabhudas Patwari and
Fr. T.C. Mathai





14,15,16. with the President of India, Giani Sail Sing, the Catholicos Marthoma Mathews I and Bishop Zachariah Mar Dionysius in 1975 at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi





17. laying the foundation of Bhilai Mission Centre along with Mathews Mar Coorilos.



18. being felicitated by the Orthodox people at New York on the receipt of Ph.D. from General Theological Seminary, with the Russian Orthodox Bishop and Fr. T.M. Zachariah.



19. with Pope Shenuda, the Supreme Head of the Coptic Orthodox Church and Thomas Mar Makarios at a reception in Toronto.



20 with Prof. K. M. Chandy, the Governor of Madhya Pradesh on the occasion of the inauguration of the Diocesan Centre, Bhilai



21. with the Dean of General Theological Seminary, New York
after the award of Hon. Doctorate in a special convocation
ceremony



22. being welcomed to the inauguration of the Saptati Year at
Bhilai by Fr. Abraham Oommen



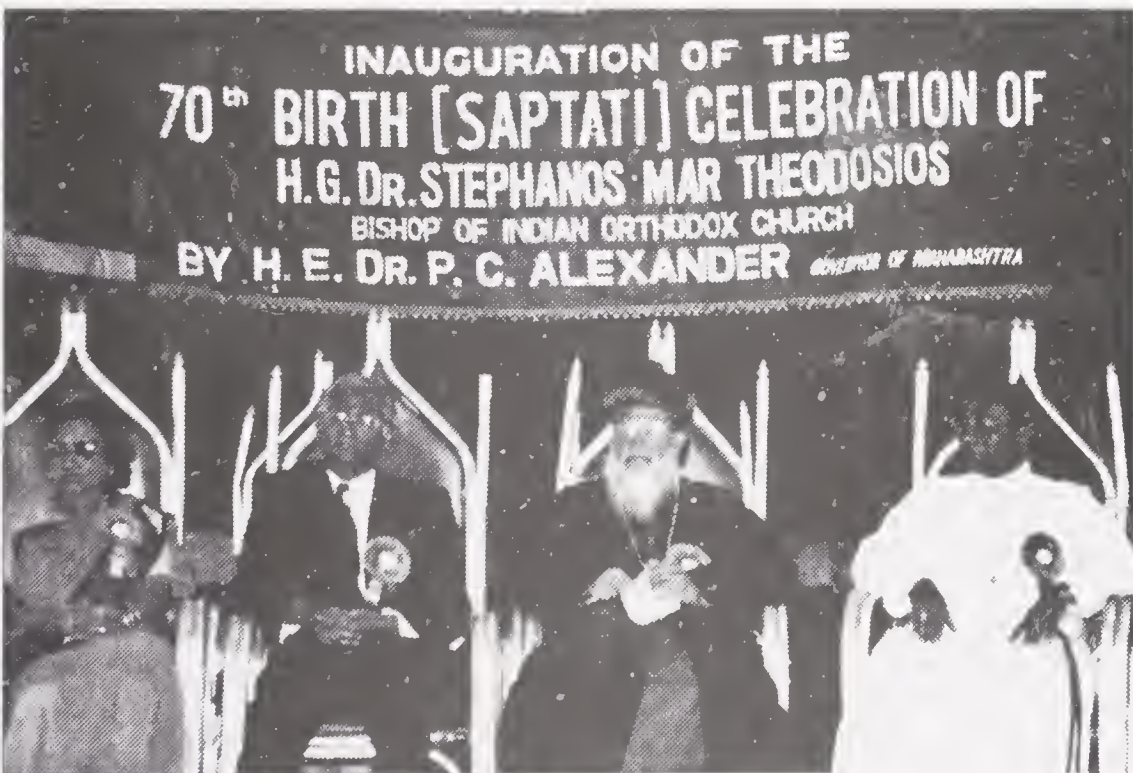
23. with Bishop Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, Fr. George Mathew, T. O. Zachariah, C.T. Titus and others on above at the function



24. being welcomed for the saptati celebrations at St. Thomas Orthodox Cathedral, Calcutta-the parishoners and the vicar Fr. G. Varghese



25. along with the Catholicos Marthoma Mathews II and Fr. Abraham Varghese at the celebrations in Jabalpur



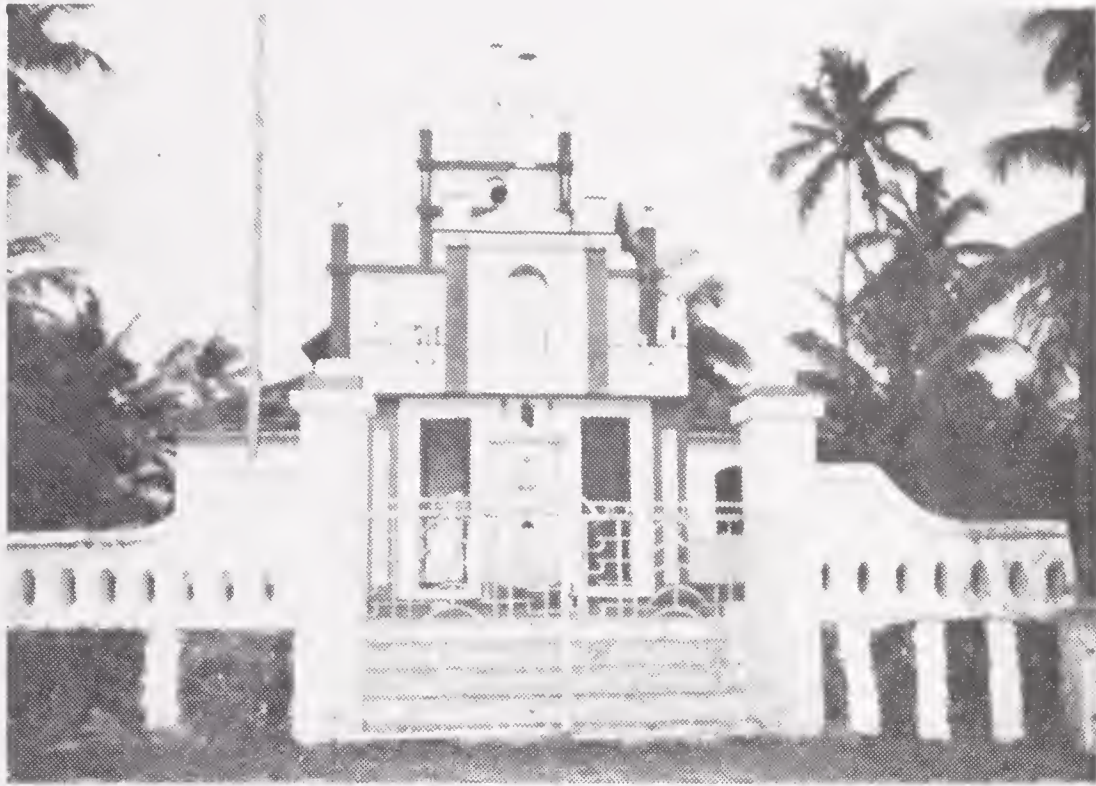
26. Saptati Celebrations at Nagpur with Dr. P. C. Alexander, Mrs Accamma Alexander and Bishop Vinod Peter



27. along with the Catholicos Mathews II being received by the Governor of Madhya Pradesh, Mr. Mohd. Shafi Qureshi.



28. with Chief Minister of Madhyapradesh, Mr. Digvijaya Singh



29. the Sleeba Church, Pathamuttam.

LIVING TO ENLIVEN

V. Rev. John. V. John Cor-Episcopa
Ex-Principal, St. Thomas, College ,Bhilai

When speech is silver, silence is golden. Probably this is what the Psalmist means when he remarks "Be still and know". Stillness and knowledge go together. In a world where activating knowledge through experimental investigation is the scientific method, can there be any place for being still and yet be knowing? Perhaps when knowledge is full speech becomes silent. It is this pattern that is at work in the greatness of a silent and yet knowledgeable educationalist, His Grace Dr. Stephanos Mar Theodosius.

Born in a Kerala village Pathamuttam, near Kottayam, the lion share of the seven decades of this great man has been spent in the north and north east parts of the once illiterate areas of India. The dark avenues of hilly areas were centres of attraction for this great genius with a farsighted outlook. "Mission in the service of the church and church in the service of the nation" briefly indicates the depth of the vision of this seer. Ordained a bishop of Malankara Orthodox Church in 1975, the steel city of Bhilai embraced him as the shepherd of the flock in the Calcutta Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Church. Since then his venture was to enlighten the dark villages through an educational network. Nothing can be nobler than opening the three "R"s to the illiterate. With this in view his Grace Stephanos Mar Theodosius as the servant of God opened channels of activity through small schools. Settling himself in the Kurud village bordering the steel city of Bhilai of Durg District in Madhya Pradesh, the bishop started small primary schools, far from the madding crowd. With barren land around him, an Ashram with a couple of inmates became the fulcrum of activity. Travelling on foot and by rail he traversed through the forest areas of the Bastar District of Madhya Pradesh, suitable

places were located to implant the shrine of knowledge. Taught by an ascetic, this great leader has his elegance in silence and finds luxury in asceticism. This writer remembers many an occasion when His Grace referred to his great guru of the blessed memory, M.C. Kuriakose Rambachen with veneration and reverence.

This writer had occasion to contact His Grace in 1981, when one of his offspring "The M.G.M Senior Secondary School" Bhilai was in need of a principal. The lot fell to me to shoulder the noble ideals of this great man. Suggestions combined with silence often provoked me to activity. Thus one of his life long ambitions to start a college in Bhilai took concrete shape in one of the now premier institutions in the township of Bhilai "St. Thomas College". Nevertheless not a single institution bears his name, nor keeps his paternity. Either a parish under his guidance or a committee nominated by him from the parish conducts all these institutions. (A list of such institutions is appended.)

The Calcutta Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Church stretching from Nagpur to Nagaland and cutting across most of the northern states of India, is the great farm in which, this sower has sown his seeds. He hopes that these seeds will grow a hundred fold to yield good results to achieve his aim, not to earn monetary benefits or to add a feather to his crown.

Education does not merely consist in hammering in the skills but in the approximation of one's own ideals to social activity and behaviour. This is the truth of this great idealist whose seven decades of eventful life beacon the seven virtues of christian enlightenment. The grace of God is with him wherever he is. Bhilai Malayalees can never forget his great leadership in "the direct train struggle" of the nineteen eighties for a cause which was a long felt necessity of the Keralites. He feels very much at home in one of the lower class compartments of the Cochin Bilaspur train whenever he wants to be in his home town near Kottayam in Kerala. What is left for us when Dr, Stephanos celebrates his saphthathi is to wish him well and pray God to give him good health to induce in us through creative activity. Through his noble ideals.

MAR THEODOSIUS, THE UPHOLDER OF ORTHODOX FAITH AND DISCIPLINE

M.T. THOMAS, KUWAIT

It was in the early nineteen sixties that the parishes of Singapore and Malaysia had a new young and dynamic Vicar, who, in his three years of service, captured the hearts of both the young and old. It did not take very long for Rev.Fr. Punnoose, with his mild manners, pleasing smile and innocent but firm approach to be accepted as a member of each family in the parish.

The spiritual organisations like Prayer Groups, Ladies League and Sunday School acquired a new life under Achen's dedicated leadership and the managing committee started functioning as a body assisting the Vicar in Church administration instead of being a surce of conflicts as we see in most of the parishes these days. However, the Singapore Parish had to be contented with sharing Achen's vauable service with Parish of Malaysia. Unlike Singapore, the congregations of Malaysian Peninsula were widely scattered throughout Malaysia, Punnoose Achen had to bear the heavier burden to travel throughout Malaysia, carrying personal and service related items to visit and attend to the spiritual needs of our members. The travel in Malaysia in those days was mostly through terrorist infected roads, near jungles and his life could have been in danger at any time

On completion of the three years service period, Achen left for U.S.A. for higher theological studies, which the members who knew him closely knew was the stepping stone for the higher order for which God had called him for. While returning home on completion of his studies in U.S.A., Achen did not forget to call on his flock in Singapore and renew his love and affections with his parishioners.

We missed him as the parish priest for a while, but only to get him back as our Diocesan Bishop Stephanos Mar Theodosius, on his election and consecration by the Church.

Restructuring of the Dioceses in the late nineteen seventy's brought Kuwait Parish under Calcutta Diocese, of which Stephanos Mar Theodosius was enthroned as its Bishop, By now, the writer had shifted his working place to Kuwait and had the privilege of being a humble participant in the functioning of the spiritual organisation of the Parish. In the early nineteen eighty's, while Kuwait Parish was undergoing one of the worst crises of the Parish history, the faithful members of the Church were able to witness divine interventions the erancedelivevary of of His Grace from a fiery experience, unscathed.

We the members of the Kuwait Parish thank Almighty God for the fast recovery that His Grace had from the series of illnesses that affected him lately and pray that the Lord bless him with many more years of healthy life to lead the Diocese in the healthy growth that it is experiencing now under Thirumeni's leadership.

Chapter - 26

REFLECTIONS ON THE 22nd ANNIVERSARY OF THE ST.THOMAS CONVENT MISSION BHILAI

Sr. Elizabeth, St Thomas Convent, Bhilai,

A common meal was arranged on July 3 1994, on St.Thomas Day, which was the 22nd anniversary of the St.Thomas Mission. We, the sisters of St.Thomas Convent also were invited to join the members of the Ashram for dinner in the evening. The food was simple, but a pleasant get-together, with our Holy Father Mar Theodosius Thirumeni at the head of the table. We felt very much honoured and previledged. Towards the end of the meal, Thirumeni stood up and gave a talk about the importance of the day. It seemed to me as if the whole history of Bhilai Mission was unrolled before my eyes!

The expressions he used were most beautiful. He started with the days when he was a parish priest in Bahrain. Thirumeni celebrated his Silver Jubilee of Pristhood there. Then came to his mind the thoughts of doing some Mission work. His Grace Mar Osthathio (Then Fr. M.V.George) visited Bahrain at that time and talked about the proposal from the Church, of starting a mission outside Kerala. This had some concidence with Punnoose Achen's thoughts of working for a mission. This was the turning point in his life.

Fr. K.K.Punnoose already had his studies in Jabalpur and saw what the Mar Thoma Church did in the way of mission work there through Sihora Ashram. Soon after Achen returned from Bahrain he was sent to Bhilai as the Director of the a fore said mission. He began to live in a small house near the present parish church. Later, the land near the present St.Thomas Ashram was bought. There was a small house in it, in which he started to live. Every evening he came and sat on a rock within the present location of the Ashram, in perfect calmness and tranquility. The

surrounding area was very vast and empty. Nothing was seen around except the lights of the Bhilai Steel Plant and industrial areas from a far distance. The simile he used to describe was beautiful. He felt as if he was sitting in the middle of a vast lake with blue waters. Years later, the St. Thomas Ashram came into being as the Bhilai Mission Centre, on the same spot where he used to sit.

When we look at the Mission on this 22nd anniversary, we can see that it is not grown as much as it ought to. There were so many longings and expectations behind the birth of the Mission. If it is not growing after 22 years of its birth, it is because of a lack of dedicated workers. We started our Convent in 1965, nearly 29 years ago, at Kadambanad. We are only 24 members including one of the two founder sisters now in Paradise.

As a community, our specific mission is to show forth God's love to those who come in contact with us in any field of work. Our sisters work in hospitals, schools and colleges run by the Church. We run a nursery school since 1991. Four of our sisters teach in that school too. From 1987 May till 1991 May, I did some work in Delhi Orthodox Centre, more or less the same work as I do here. It was while I was there that my health declined. So, I returned and spent a year in U.S.A. When I returned in 1992, Mar Theodosius invited us to do some work in Bhilai. We had already been invited as about 13-14 years ago. In no way we could come at that time.

This time, as I was spending a retirement period I thought I should go. The Chapter decided to send four of us and selected 3 more sisters to go with me. We had only heard about the Bhilai Mission and in St. Thomas Ashram. Now, we have come and seen it. We have been here for an year in June, 1994. What are we here for? We all have to find an answer those who were already here and those who have newly arrived in St. Matthew 9:36-38, we read thus :-

“Then Jesus went out all the cities and villages, teaching in their Synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he

saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without shepherded. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labours are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest'.

We are here for completing the work Jesus had begun.

We, the members of the Indian Orthodox Church, are proud of our tradition that we are the decendants of St.Thomas, the Apostle. We are not satisfied with the performance of rituals! St.Thomas came out to this far away country India. Are we willing to come out of Kerala to some other states of India, where the harvest is plentiful and labourer are few ? Still crowds of people are harassed and are helpless like sheep without a shepherded.

Are we aware of the fleeting nature of life and uncertainty of the time of death? What good work we do in self sacrifice, it will remain till the end of the earth. We all are tempted to remain safely within our own premises to safeguard our lives. In St.Mark 8:35 we read :-

“Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose the life for my sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it”.

When I was in my retirement stage, then only the time arrived for my coming out of Kerala. I am in my late sixties. May there be many youth to respond to Jesus' challenge and come forward to join the growing Ashram and Mission. I challenge the youth of Madhya Pradesh to wakeup. May the Mission spread far and wide by the time we celebrate the 25th Anniversary of St.Thomas Mission. On 3rd July, 1997, on St.Thomas Day. Then the following quotation will seem very real to us :-

“Life is the greatest adventure, for the world is a wonderful place, that reveals at each turn in the road unexpected new beauty and grace!”

Chapter - 27

STEPHANOS MAR THEODOSIOS Orthodox Evangelist and Humanist

K.C.ABRAHAM, BHILAI.

In April 1952, the shepherd who came in search of his sheep scattered in Madhya Pradesh and in North India found an unorganised group at Jabalpur very devoted to the Malankara Orthodox Church. The Orthodox community was very small, unorganised and dispersed in the city and its suburbs. The Jabalpur Military Sub-Area order notified the arrival of Rev.Fr. Kayyalathu Kurian Punnoose. 6th April, 1952 was a day of rejoicing for the orthodox community. It was on that day Rev.Fr. K.K.Punnoose, the first Vicar of St. George Orthodox Church, Jabalpur, appointed by Alexios Mar Theodosios, Metropolitan of Kollam and outside Kerala Dioceses of the Malankara Church, sanctified the Garrison Church and celebrated Holy Qurbana. The first Holy Qurbana was attended by about hundred believers and they came out of the Church with beaming and spiritually contended faces. The Jabalpur Parish had no Church building of their own, no funds, no materials needed for an Orthodox Church service and no Parish organisation to manage the affairs. Dynamic, young, cheerful and ever smiling, Fr. Punnoose was the source of strength to the persons engaged in organising the parish.

Rt.Rev. George Singer, the Anglican Bishop of Nagpur had gifted St.Michael's and All Angels Church, Ring Road,(Garrison Church) and its compound to the Orthodox Christians of Jabalpur. Fr. Punnoose shifted to the small room below the clock tower. From 1947, the Garrison Church remained unused, neglected and deserted. In 1952, it had a pathetic look though majestic in design and size. The small room a with wooden partition and a shaky door became his *Diara* with no civic amenities. From Pathamuttam *Diara* and the affectionate care of its superior the

very Rev.(Late) M.C.Kuriyakose Rambchen his mentor, philosopher and guide, Fr. Punnose made the Garrison Church compound his Ashram in the company of 3 youngsters. In the tradition of the Orthodox Monks, he led a simple and hard working life. The small room was his bedroom, Office room, visitors room dressing room, etc. For over six years of stay in Jabalpur, he never demanded a salary nor a rise in salary. Simple living and high thinking without complaints and grudging were the creeds of his life.

In the morning hours, Fr.Punnoose engaged himself in clearing the bushes, shrubs and wild grass growing in the church compound. In the evening he moved on his cycle in the Military Barracks, Military Hospital, Civil Lines, Railway Colony, Gun Carriage factory Estate, Ordnance factory Estate, to trace the members of the Church and Malayalees. Within a couple of months, he had cleared the vast Church and compound, organised the Orthodox community to march ahead in the years to come. Now at Jabalpur, there are two Parishes, two chapels and two Higher Secondary Schools. The untiring efforts, love, selfdenial, organising capacity, listening attitude by remaining silent and above all melodious and spiritually elevating sacraments, prayers and sermons of the young father during the period 1952 to 58 made in St.George Church in fact a pilgrimage centre for people in distress. The Jabalpur Church and its Vicar became the base camp for organising Orthodox worship centres at Bhilai, Bhopal, Itarsi, Allahabad, Katni, Satna, Rewa, Kanpur, Agra and Chirimiri, etc. For this he travelled in third class without reservation and sleeper facilities. The younger generation now working and studying outside Kerala and even the present day priests may not be aware of the agony of the Orthodox members placed at Northern India in forties and fifties as they had no chance to participate in the sacramental life of the Church for months and years. Fr.Punnoose realised this and travelled extensively to conduct Holy Qurbana on holidays, conduct baptisms, marriages, etc. and he also corresponded with the home Church for one more priest to take care of the growing needs of the community in Madhya Pradesh.

Rev.Fr. C.J.Oommen (now Cor Episcopa) had been appointed to assist him in organising parishes at Bhopal, Bhilai, Satna, Raipur, Chirimiri, etc.

Extensive travel from Pathamuttam to Bhilai which lasted two decades (1952-72) through the cities of North India like Jabalpur, Bombay, and intensive study of Theology and History made him aware of the religious, social and economical problems faced by Orthodox Christian community and the Indian population. To do his bit for solving these problems he decided to step down from Parish work after completing 25 years of fruitful service as a Parish Priest. In Oct., 1972 he came over to Bhilai as Director of the Bhilai Mission Project and Vicar of M.G.O.S Church. The Mission Project was still in the dreamland. The Mission had only a Bala Bhavan with handful of children, under the care of Rev.Fr. P.T.Cherian, housed in a shed owned by M.G.O.S. Church, Bhilai. Dynamic and active, Fr.Punnoose was the only asset of the Mission. It was Mar Mathews Athanasois his guide and philosopher for the outside Kerala Mission Project. In April, 1973, he purchased 16 acres of land in Kurud village for the St.Thomas Malankara Orthodox Church Mission Bhilai. He had succeeded in making the farm and acquiring an other 19 acres of the land. Now the Mission had about 35 acres of land in one compound at Kurud Village, Durg Dist. of Madhya Pradesh. His Grace is the first Bishop who made his permanent office outside Kerala. From 1/1/1979, he has been the Diocesan Bishop of Calcutta with office at Bhilai comprising parishes in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, North Eastern States, Madhya Pradesh, adjoining places of Maharashtra, Kuwait, Mascut, Salala, etc. Once again he had no place of his own for the Dioceses. He stayed in the MGO Cathedral Parsonage till the completion of the first building of the St.Thomas Mission. His sustained and dedicated work from 1972, enabled him to complete the two storied Aramana Chapel and Aramana Complex, Ashram building, Bhilai Mission Training Centre, Bala Bhavan & Convent, Press building, Cattle sheds for dairy, workers barracks, garage and store. Now the Bhilai Diocesan Centre at Kurud Village has every thing needed for a Bishopric and Mission Centre. The agricultural farm, dairy,

fishpond, press, schools owned by the Mission and Diocese can maintain a large number of workers of the Mission and the Diocese if properly managed and taken care of in the years to come. The enthusiasm of His Grace for Orthodox Evangelical Work is manifested in his founding of Makodia Rural Mission Project, Sarni Project, Itarsi Project, Bhopal project and Biladilla Project. He had also financed for the purchase of land and construction of churches at Indore, Katni, Bilaspur, Raigarh, Korba, Rajnandgaon, Bhandara and Chandrapur. By his frequent visit he encouraged the parishes to complete the construction of the churches and then consecrated there without delay.

His Grace enjoys the company of small children and children also like and enjoy his company. In spite of his very busy schedules he finds time to encourage children about their small and big achievements in sports, Annual Exams, Competitive Exams, Professional Exams, Sunday School Exams, etc. Educational activities are very dear to him as he believes evil can only be overcome by educating the young and old alike. He had established many schools in different parts of the dioceses and a first grade college at Bhilai. Many Balavadies had been started to provide education to the under privileged who could not get educated during their young days. His Grace is more interested in Balavadies providing education free of cost than formal schools charging fees. He had started an Old age Home with a single inmate and the Bala Bhavan that existed in 1972 and had not developed as needy inmates were not available. The humanist in him is sad when he finds old and young children seeking alms in the streets and on trains, etc. He is unhappy that people are not prepared to become useful citizens by availing the facilities provided by organised institutions. He is against beggary and started Oldage Homes and Bala Bhavans to protect human dignity.

His inspiration for starting a hospital and an outside Kerala Theological College for educating priests and workers for outside Kerala dioceses and had not yet taken concrete shape. His Grace had done preliminary programming for both institutions and

obtained the approval of the Holy Episcopal Synod of the Church to start the Theological Seminary as a unit of the Kottayam Theological Seminary. By the intercessional prayers of Thirumeni, both these projects will come up shortly. His Grace will be completing 7 decades of fruitful life on 2nd October 1994. For over 42 years he had lived for the Orthodox Christian community outside Kerala and for about 28 years in the extreme climate of Madhya Pradesh. We, the Orthodox Christian Community, has a moral duty to share with His Grace the responsibility of establishing the hospital and Seminary. Even at this age of seventy, he is highly concerned about the evangelism and spiritual life of the people. He laments that children born, brought up and educated outside Kerala are not able to understand the Syriac and Malayalam oriented languages of priests trained at our Kottayam Seminary. As they do not understand the meaning of the church service prayers, sermons and songs, they are disinterested to come to Church service. To overcome this menacing phenomena in our growing generation, he had taken initiatives to start a Theological Seminary in Bhilai even though it is very big financial strain to his already committed projects of the Mission. On his Saphthathi day let us pledge our support to His Grace and make the Hospital Project and Theological Seminary Project a reality. On this happy day let us all join together to wish our beloved Thirumeni with a long, active, healthy and fruitful life to guide the sheep he came in search of in 1952 to more greener pastures in the years to come.

Chapter 28
A SAGE'S TOUCH

Varghese George, Bhilai,

'Not a very long ago'
The villagers recollect
about a barren land
away from a crowded city
the land - once a barren land -
longed to bear a greenery scene
today became true
the vast uncared land
with a sage's touch
turned to be a fertile land
with dancing plants
and fragrant fruits
spread the pleasant smell around
by the chilled and gentle breeze
That evoked the land
to a majestic garden -
A new look of heavenly Eden...!

After a few decades
the history would mark;
'There lived a sage
A saintly life he lived
With sanctity in simplicity
And he was named after
Stephanos, the brave,
the spiritual father
of the centre seen
with charming looks
and elegant thoughts
- a professor of
elevated views
And a missionary
in his Master's field.....'

Came from a village in the south
career, he started as a priest
To console poor and sick
keeping the words of the Lord
in the core of his heart
Dedicated himself to eradicate
the ignorance of the mass
Holy mass, he performed
and served the uncared mass
Made them know
their legitimate rights
Educated them at the grass-root
Moulded their future
prosper and bright
And in return
they loved him most
To whom the Almighty pleased
And anointed him
as the Bishop of the land...!

One can see him
in the paddy-field
Sometimes with the tillers
And in the next
At the interior village
Amid the poor and illiterates
And wherever he goes
there he plans
suddenly; but silently
to uplift the down-trodden
And eradicate their ignorance past
with firm determination
and without rest,
starts village schools
and social service centres
That bring the waves of hope
of making the poor self-reliant.

They realised him
as the noblest of nobles,
making no noise
silently passes
As if a mid-night breeze
blossoming the flowers
And spreading the sweet
and pleasant smell
that earnestly fastens the links
between the night and the day
in the golden moment
as an obedient servant
to the Great Master
- The Living Lord
of the whole universe -
whose words echoes everywhere
upholding the divine message
of 'Universal Brotherhood'
-The essence of Love and Peace...!

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND OUR RESPONSE : SOME REFLECTIONS

- Dr. Satish C. Gyan

Rev. Dr. Satish C. Gyan, a minister of the Methodist Church of India, is at present the General Secretary of Raipur Churches Development & Relief Committee. He is a well known theologian, dialogist and writer.

Dr. Gyan, in the following article, written specially for this book presents the case for building bridges rather than walls around us. He is indeed sharing a concern of Mar Theodosius, for the people of other faiths and the necessary changes in the attitudes of the Christians towards our neighbours in North India.

Human beings are not only "Homo Sapiens" but also 'Homo Religious'. That is to say, humans are religious and express their religious feelings through songs, symbols, rites, rituals, art and crafts, and etc. These expressions are a product of a particular historical, social and cultural environment and geographical space. When seen together one may find in them the particularity and peculiarity of a historical time and geographical space. Hence one can point out to semitic-desert based religions such as Judaism and Islam and, river based religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Each one of these religious traditions has provided meaning, social cohesion and intergration. Humans do not only produce religious traditions but also create symbols, songs, rites, rituals and Sacred Books. With the passage of time these symbols, rites, customs and Sacred Writings became so powerful that it controlled and continues to control the life and destiny of human beings, society and culture. Religion and culture, therefore, form an intergral part of human life and society. Geographical spacing and historical settings have contributed in the formation of communities, religions, languages and cultures. That is, plurality of Creeds, cultus and cultures.

Pluralism is a fact of Life. It can neither be denied nor ignored. One has to learn to live with this reality. Pluralism

presupposes more than one : Multiplicity of choices. That is, freedom to choose. Without plurality life would be insipid and dull. That is why God created a world of diversity. Existence of religions, cultures and ideologies may hamper growth and development but they also act as instruments of challenge. Tensions and discord may arise but they are not ends in themselves for men and women crave for unity, peace and harmony.

The plurality of religions and cultures is not a new phenomenon, it is an age old social reality. What is new is the manner in which we perceive this plurality now. Evidently change in economic, political, social and theological climate has affected this perception. Changes are taking place at the level of ideas and structures which is causing this shift in the perception. Globalization of information, communication, technological revolutions, etc. has also played its role in this process. Thus the subject of pluralism has become more complex than it appears. Rise of religious fundamentalism and politicization of religion is compelling people to see the need for inter-religious relationships for peace and justice both locally and globally.

India is the only country which presents a unique opportunity to live with people of different religious traditions and cultures. There are seven living religions: Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism. This religious plurality makes life exciting, interesting, challenging and, of course difficult. However, one can anticipate a "living encounter of faith" that would help "in the emergence of a better community feeling in India" leading to the unity among different faith communities. Such a hope can not and should not be diminished even though we find that religions have become a "dark sport" of our society. And these "dark spots" make it difficult to live together in peace.

Creed, cultus and culture form the basic core of a religion. Faith is expressed through creeds, dogmas, injunctions and affirmations. Around the "creed" are cultic rites, rituals liturgical and worship forms. A way of life, a culture, surrounds them all. It is expressed through festivals, values, dress, music, art,

architecture, liturgy etc. There is an overlapping of these elements. It is reasonable to consider each religion as an integral whole in which creed, cultus and culture make a beautiful and useful blending. That is why religion has become a strong edifice and plays a powerful role in the lives of individuals. Wars, invasions religious suppression could not dethrone religion from the lives of the people. Despite the fact that religion has become a tool in the hands of the powerful for oppression, exploitation and for creating communal disturbances, we cannot wish religion away or pray for its disappearance because each person, each community, is God's creation. And each community expresses its faith and trust in God in the manner it understands and has "darshan" of God. It is against the backdrop of plurality of "darshanas" and understanding of God that the Christians have to live the gospel of peace and justice.

The Hindus form the largest community followed by the Muslims and Christians and others. All the above mentioned religious traditions, theologically speaking, have provided meaning to its adherents and spiritual basis for existence. These living faiths have also provided spiritual strength to fight against all forms of evil : social, religious and political. The Dalits in India have survived the spiritual and social oppression and exploitation. The poor, the marginalised and the outcast received spiritual support for their struggles against all forms of injustices. The socially alienated and the marginalized people received strength to fight both the structural and spiritual colonization in their own faiths. When a call was given to fight the colonial powers all united and worked together to attain freedom. Freedom came because people and the leaders recognised the value of inter- religious togetherness and realised that religious differences and cultural separateness have to be sacrificed to fight all forms of oppression, exploitation and injustices. However, post-independent India has experienced religious and communal tensions and thus questions are being raised about the reality of pluralism.

How to respond to the situation of religious pluralism ?
What could be the attitude of Christians to religious pluralism ?
Should Christians reject pluralism ? Is there any biblical or

theological basis for accepting the fact of pluralism and respond positively? These are not easy questions to answer. Depending on one's ideological and theological orientation responses are made. Christians live in a society dominated by Hindus who, after a long spiritual journey, concluded: *ekam satya vipra bahuda vadanti*. Sat, Being, Truth, is one and sages call it by different names. Such a conclusion is based on the fact that the experience of the Ultimate can not be expressed in homogenous terms. It entails varieties of experiences. This attitude of Hindus has allowed the emergence, growth and existence of various religious groups of sects in India.

In our concern for a response to the plurality of religions it is important to know that rejection of pluralism would mean denial of the right of experiencing the ultimate Reality differently and, therefore, deny the existence of the other, the neighbour, points out Dr. Stanley Samartha. The right to have one's own religious belief, view is a political one. It should not and cannot be denied.

Christians profess a God who allows freedom to people. Such a God cannot afford the luxury of sitting on the fences and allow injustice, oppression, domination to flourish. Christians are asked to speak for the weak. (Pro. 31 :8 ff). The Christian concern for his/her neighbour is a reflection of his/her understanding of and faith in a God who created women and men and children in God's image. This affirmation entails the responsibility of protecting the rights of one's neighbour. In protecting and preserving human rights and human dignity, justice and peace is achieved. In their effort to establish justice and peace, Christians have to transcend the boundaries of creed, cultus and culture. That is, Christians have to realise, recognise and practice the Gospel imperative : Love your neighbour as yourself. This neighbour may profess any faith belong to any community and culture.

How to place Jesus Christ in a multi-religious and multi-claim context specially in a changing political, social, cultural environment? Making an exclusive claim by any particular community of faith affects its relationship with people of other faiths, the neighbours. Besides, such claims do hamper growth and

development of the people. The question we need to seriously address is whether making exclusive claims in any way helps the well being of and in maintaining the harmonious relationship with people of other faiths. Would it not be prudence to be "wise like a serpent and simple like a dove"? Unfortunately, in our enthusiasm to proclaim the Gospel we have done more harm to the Gospel. We have built walls around Christ who broke the grave walls thus making himself available and accessible to every one.

God became human in Jesus Christ. The fact of incarnation establishes that God has "relativised himself in history". Becoming human in itself is a gesture of humility and humanness on the part of God who was the "Holy other" unapproachable and inaccessible. In the event of God taking the human form God in Jesus Christ relates itself to human beings. So an exclusive claim about Christ invariably destroys his relationship with people of other faiths. It, however, does not mean that by rejecting "exclusive claims", Christ loses his distinctiveness. Let us, have no fears of losing Christ. It is the fear of losing Christ that keeps Christians from opening themselves to others. We forget that the risen Christ has broken all the barriers and that he cannot be bound to any creed, cultus and culture. It is high time that Christians, for that matter, the church opens itself to its neighbours and learn to recognise and respect different responses to " Satya", the Being, the Truth. Acceptance of this fact in a multi-religious and multi-cultural situation is both "an existential demand and a theological necessity," so thoughtfully observes Dr. Stanley Samartha. The vedic seers were the first to recognise this fact and tried to resolve the tension between the one and the many. And they achieved it not by eliminating or conquering other gods but by relating them to the one, the Ultimate mystery of Truth. The many are held together within the structure of difference rather than similarity.

This vedic spirit of recognising and accepting the other 'gods' or 'realities' has continued to work on the psyche and consciousness of Indian people . It is worthwhile to note that in the constituent Assembly an amendment was introduced by Loknath Mishra to delete the words "to propagate" from the Article on

fundamental rights: "to profess, practice, and propogate one's religion (Article 25.1)". During the debate leaders like Pt. Lakshamikant Maitra, T. T. Krishnamachari, K. M. Munshi, and several others argued in favour of retaining the words "to propogate". Should we not be proud of such neighbours who took the question of fundamental rights of the minorities seriously? Should we not be grateful to God who allows and accepts the presence of different faith communities or "sampraday". Had the clause not been supported by the Hindu leader, it would have never been passed. Soli Sorabji rightly remarks, "one cannot but be struck by the broadmindedness and the spirit of tolerance and accommodation displayed by the founding fathers of the majority community towards their Christian brethren". Would it not be a stance of theological arrogance and a case of spiritual rudeness when the claim of the "uniqueness" is made by Christians?

Individuals in a community are bound by the thread of 'faith' and members of different communities are bound to each other by the thread of love. Love and respect for each other has encouraged the people in India to develop an ethos of accommodation and openness. That is why saint Rahim pleads:

Rahiman dhaga prem ka Todo na chatkaya

Jode Judu na, Fudi to ganth pari jay.

In an ethos of openness and 'udarta' typical of India making exclusive claims is not only rude but also dangerous. It isolated the Christian community from its neighbours who, in their own rights are also a community of faith. Exclusive claims disturbs relationship and creates unnecessary tensions. Could not a claim be made in all humility recognising, the "uniqueness" of the other.

The Bible talks about other faiths and cultures: Jews and Non-Jews. It recognises the presence of other gods and people. The Hebrews are asked to worship only Yaweh. The Bible also tells that Yaweh did not reject other gods and other people. Instead, we learn of God's concern and compassion for all people : Jews and non-Jews when it comes to sending rain, Sun, etc.

A careful reading of the Bible shows that it affirms and recognises plurality of religions, faiths, cultures and views. The principle on which biblical teaching stands is that there is one God. God created the whole world, the Cosmos. All human experiences and expressions are within the perview and providence of God. Psalms 24 and 104 tell us about the universal lordship of God. God gives victory and defeat to both the Jews and the non-Jews (Isa. 19).

Cyrus the Persain king is chosen to liberate Israel from Babylon. God listens to the prayers of non-Jews and the coming catastrophe is averted and Jonah is distrurbed. In Acts 10 we find that God is fond of Corenelius, a non-Jew, because he feared God and lead a righteous life and became the cause of Peter's conversion. Acts 15 tells that after much prayer and discussion Gentile converts were accepted on their own terms. Jesus says, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son and whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life" (Jn. 3: 16), and "give to Ceasar that belongs to Ceasar and to God that belongs to God". In the story of The Good Samaritan, the Samaritan a non-Jew is made a hero.

In conclusion, we may state that the Bible affirms and accepts the plurality of religions and cultures. The presence of various ethnic groups, faiths and practices are neither denied nor annihilated. Various political groups and kindgoms flourish. The Jews are only asked to be faithful to Yahweh and not to run after other gods. Jesus and apostles also accept the plurality of religious and cultural situations. The Christians are asked to be faithful and committed to Jesus christ. In a pluralistic situation christians are encouraged to be witnesses to Jesus Christ and to his message of the Kingdom of God. Needless to say, pluralism of any kind, religious or secular, offers to Christains an opportunity to remain honest and sicere witnesses to what God does in history and has done in Jesus Christ to redeem and liberate people from the bondage of *astat himsa, avidya*.

WHY MISSION -TODAY ?

Rev. D.S. Jeevan Babu

Rev. D. S. Jeevan Babu, a pastor in the C. S. I., is the secretary for Mission and Evangelism with the National Council of Churches in India. We include this article because it reflects some of Mar Theodosius' thoughts on Mission. It is written for this volume.

Is it because of the 'Great Commission of our Lord '? Or Is it because the Disciples of Jesus Christ assumed the missionary role ? Or is it because missionaries missionized us ? Or are there any other reasons we discover today ?

"Why missions today ?" is a very tough question to be answered equally along with other question "How to do the missions"?

Why, the "Why" question is so important and so difficult ?

Realities

A group of youth wanted to go to villages for evangelistic work. I asked them why do you want to go to villages ? "Because we want to preach Christ", was the answer. "Why do you want to preach Christ ?" I asked them. They said, "We have to reach Christ to people". "Why ?" I again asked them. "Is there somethings wrong with the rural people ? Have you ever experienced rural situations, their ethos, their oneness ? See those villagers. They are more united than your church people. They have more fear of God than your people. They worship God in their own way better than what you do. Their family life is far better than some of your families. They practise justice more than you practice. Some of you do not even know the pain and agony of poor people. The whole village feels that they all belong to "one family". Do your church member at anytime feel that they all belong to 'one family?. Is there anything that you experienced and practiced which we have to share with people of other faiths ?"

Conversion ?

If we are going to villages to convert them, to what we are converting them ? From "one family' concept to divided congregation ?

From practising justice to practise exclusion ? From practising good family ties to the concept of divorce ? From 'the centric life' to church-centric life ? From innocent rural life to the technocratic pseudo human life of the city ? From a scheduled caste origin to Dalit Christian life ? From community living to individualistic living ? From a religion to church politics ?

Origins

Yes, the disciples of Jesus Christ were asked to bear witness to the Resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ. So they began to proclaim that the crucified Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Again the 'Great Commission of Jesus Christ' asking disciples to 'go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy spirit' (Matt. 28 :19) has become a foundation for most of missionary enterprises of the yesteryears.

Mission Today

Now, living in the post-resurrection and post foreign missionary era, what should be the mission of Christians ?

To me, it is to represent Christ through our lives, wherever we are, whatever we are doing. Mother Teresa recently shared with me that we have to live and work in such a way that people should experience the presence of God.

Knowing the context in which we are living today, we Christians need to represent God's concern for humanity, as affirming life over death, justice over injustice, faith over doubt, fraternity over division, love over hatred, reconciliation over vengeance, oneness of humanity over parochialism.

Today, we believe and experience that Christlike life is the answer for all human anomalies. Therefore the need for proclaiming Jesus Christ arises.

Proclamation of God manifesting in Jesus Christ for the sake of humanity is the mission of the Church. What do we mean by that ? It is proclaiming that God has created humanity in his own image. It is proclaiming that God has concern for the total humanity. It is to make people join hands with God in serving the humanity. And Jesus Christ comes as a perfect example of how God is present in our life's struggles. Changing life-styles would be one way of reaching people.

These words on this sheet of paper are intended to provoke your thinking on "Missions today". We, Christians living in this century cannot simply be carried away by few traditional approaches which we have inherited. It is precisely because we have not thought about new paradigms of mission for this century we have not made any headway in our ministries.

It is time we evaluate our approaches on theology, our ecclesiastical structures, our commitment and our life styles in order to be more meaningful to the society and also to make Jesus Christ relevant to people.

Chapter - 31
LOVE IN ACTION

*EXTRACT OF THE SPEECH DELIVERED BY DR P.C. ALEXANDER,
THE GOVERNOR OF MAHARASHTRA ON SAPTHATI CELEBRATION
DAY AT NAGPUR*

His Grace Dr. Stephanos Mar Theodosius, Rt. Rev. Bishop Vinod Peter, Member of Parliament, Dr. Shrikant Jichkar, Honourable Mayor of Nagpur, Kishore Dorle, Municipal Corporator Shri Raghunath Malika Guruji, other Municipal Corporators and Distinguished Guests.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I consider it a great honour, a privilege, to have this opportunity, to rejoice with you in celebrating the Sapthati of our illustrious Bishop His Grace Dr. Stephanos Mar Theodosius. I had the privilege of knowing him for several years. In fact, all those who have come in contact with him accept him as the very embodiment of simplicity, un-ostentatiousness, life of dedication, service commitment to the poor. I understand that his daily meal at Bhilai where he stays is what the poor young boys in the Balbhavan eat everyday. From his childhood he had dedicated himself to the cause of the upliftment of the poor people. Highly motivated by the great Christian message of our Lord Jesus, of love and compassion, he had tried to translate the message of love into action. John, in his epistle, defines love in a most exquisite way which I will consider as beyond the description that had been given by anyone else and he says, "dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with acts and truth". Note the last two words. It is easy for anyone to say from a platform that you should love your neighbour, dedicate yourself for the cause of the poor, show compassion for the poor and all that. It may not be that easy, it would be still possible for many other to convert this wish of love into acts by starting institutions or by providing succour to the needy. But the most difficult thing is what John in his epistle emphasizes in the last two

words and that is "let us not love with words or tongue but with acts and truth". When you convert love into acts that is not enough, there has to be truth along with acts. In other words, what you do should not be in expectation of any reward. It should be the manifestation of total selflessness.

It should be the readiness to commit yourself to service even expecting curses on yourself, the honesty, selflessness, integrity, correctness of motive. All these are defined by that word truth. So acts of love not merely words of love but not merely acts and words of love, words and acts of love with truth and that is what is embodied in the life of our Bishop.

In a most un-ostentatious way, without at all wanting the world to know about himself and his work, he has been carrying on this great mission of love through acts and with commitment to truth and in that he really belongs to the rare category of the shepherds of the Christain church who tried to translate the history of the Indian Orthodox Church to which I have also the proud privilege to belong. Long before the West ever heard the name of Jesus, this ancient country of ours, this land of 5000 years of culture at that time 3000 years of culture had welcomed heartily the message of Lord Jesus brought to this land by no lesser a person than his own Apostle St. Thomas. But what is significant about the history of the Christain Church in India is not merely the 2000 years of history. There is something more which is significant in the entire history of the church. It has never faced persecution. This cannot be said about most of the Christain churches in the world as a whole. Not only was there no persecution, in the early stages of the history of this Church, our great ancestors were honoured by the members of the Hindu community and by the rulers of Kerala belonging to the Hindu community with royal Charters of Privileges which are even today maintained in our church headquarers with copper plates giving titles and honours to the early converts to this church. Remember this was at the time or in an age or in a decade or in century when Christains were being thrown in cireusarena before hungry lions to the amusement of the rulers of the Rome, that was

the time when the very acceptance of the word 'Christian' was considered good enough for his head to be chopped off, that was the time when the word Christainity was considered to be synonymous with irreligious behavior and paterens of life. At that decade and at that century, it goes to the pride, it goes to the heritage, it goes to the credit of our legacy that the great Hindu community of this country and the rulers of this country honored the early Christains.

Tolerance is not the word, tolerance is only passive acceptance of something but they went off their way and gave places for building churches. If today you go into the history of the several churches in Kerala you will find 50% of the old churches have been built on the land generously donated by the Hindu chieftains and rulers at that time that is the history of which we have to be proud of. If at all our churches ever faced persecution, I want to remind you, it was at the hands of the foreigners who came to our country. The Portugese who come to our country, people like Archbishop Menezes were the first who unleashed on the ancient Christain community what we today consider, or call persecution. The first time we tasted the anguish of prosecutions, isolation and contemptous treatment was at the hands of the fellow Christains from foreign countries. So on occasions like this, we remember our heritage with pride but also remember the treatment that the Christain churches received with gratitude and pleasure.

I have always felt that Christian community in India has to reach out on a much larger way than it has been able to do till now, to grasp the hand of friendship of the Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Jains, in this country. We often speak about ecumenism, as a very good idea, but we forget that the concept of ecumenism has to have a different meaning in a country like ours. In the West they speak about ecumenism or unity or brotherhood of all the Christain churches they also mean unity and brotherhood of entire nation because there is no other religion no other community there. So ecumenism has one meaning for the people in the West, it should have a different meaning for us living in this country. In this country

we are proud of the fact that we follow the Christian faith but are equally proud of the fact that we are the inheritors of the Indian culture. There is no such thing as a Christian culture. We share the one and only Indian Culture and that is why ecumenism for us Christians in this country should really have the substance, content and meaning by reaching out to Muslims, Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and all other religions. It is time that we understand the significance of ecumenism in the Indian context, we do not have necessarily to jump into every bandwagon that rises in our front starting from the west. We have to accept new ideas in the context in which we live and in the situation of the circumstances in which we have to live and that is why I say that the ecumenical movement in India should not stop by having unity and brotherhood about the 17-18 million people who profess the faith of Christianity, but should cover the wider meaning and the greater connotation of brotherhood of the humanity that occupies this part of the world. Our idea, our goal is not to be a pale imitation of the Western Churches, not to be just a zerox copy of the Syrian Church. We have gained the independence of the right to govern ourselves as a church. We are proud of the apostolic tradition that we have inherited but we are still to make an honest and determined effort to convert ourselves to an Indian National Church. I am always against the use of the word Syrian, along with our name. From many platforms in Kerala addressing Orthodox gatherings particularly, I have tried to exhort them to drop that word Syrian because that was the name that we had when we accepted the Syrian liturgy. We have to call ourselves and behave ourselves as the Indian Orthodox Church, acquire a national identity in tune with the culture and civilization of the ancient land and that is the destiny that I see for the Indian Orthodox Church. If you ask me what is the future of the church just two million people, of course, spread all over the India and now all over the world and fairly highly educated people, very intelligent people and I should say economically very advanced people.

All these are plus points, but if you ask me what is the destiny of this group of two million people or what should be the goal of this two million people, I have only very clear words of advice to give,

without any reservation, without any hesitation, we reassert our identity as an Indian community as an Indian church to proclaim ourselves unto the whole world that we are the original Indian Orthodox Church. And the legacy that we have to maintain along with the precious legacy of our Lord is the legacy of our ancient culture and civilisation. If we carry these two legacies forward that should be the goal before us that should be the legacy, we should hand over to the next generation.

I am very happy that I have this opportunity to convey this message to you, members of the Orthodox Church and members of other church denominations present here and also interpret to those non-Christain brothers who are present here as to what we consider to be destiny of the goal of the Indian Orthodox Church. Once again as a member of the Indian Orthodox Church and as the Governor of the State today where this function takes place may I offer my very loyal and sincere felicitation to our distinguished guest today His Grace Dr. Stephanos Mar Theodosius.

(Compiled by V C Nivan)

Chapter 32

A RARE PARIGATHAM

Prof. C.T. TITUS, Principal,
MGM Sr. S. School, Bhilai

Of all the flowers that are seen in our country, the one that has been immortalised most by the classical, romantic and modern writers of India is *PARIGATHAM*. No other flower has captured the attention of these writers as much as this one. It may not be as big as others flower; but the fragrance that emanates from it is simply enchanting and incomparable. The fragrance of it does not suffocate ;but it enlivens the inhaler in the flower's free dispensation of its godgiven characteristic. It permeates a vast radius and hence people far and near can enjoy it. There can also be people like this flower, who by virtue of their personality and what they do for the society in general, make people a happier lot. Such a one is the Septuagenarian Bishop of Calcutta Diocese, His Grace Dr. Stephanos Mar Theodosius.

His Grace Mar Theodosius is a rare *parigatham*, a *parigatham* of infinite grace, love, affection and faith. In short, he is the embodiment of all noble qualities that should be there in people of his calling. In this distressing, disturbing and ever-changing world, he does not give a cause for people to say, "The hungry sheep look up and are not fed." The shepherd with his staff is everywhere, in spite of the tedious and cumbersome journeys he has to undertake, to look after the flock and provide them with spiritual succour. The grateful flock does sing hymns of affection and extreme reverence. But the object of reverence does not crave for it, rather he is embarrassed, which he has expressed many a time . His only reaction in such situations is that, "I am only doing my duty ". He does not go about either deeply or superficially conscious of this general adulation. Is *parigatham* conscious of how it has been celebrated in immemorable lines? or, does it expect anything in return from the people for the enjoyment it provides for them?

Thirumeni's qualities are not the result of his totally ascetic life, but natural and inborn, they flow from him; continuously like pure water in a perennial stream. Hence, there is no artificiality in his words or deeds. I would like to write on some of these qualities in him that have impressed me most and sometimes left me awe-stricken.

The first and foremost is the gentle, radiant and benevolent smile that he has for all. This has a captivating effect which instantaneously makes people feel at home and gives them the unmistakable signal that they are welcome and free to discuss whatever they want. When problems that beset people are many, and varied in their intensity, and their solutions are difficult to find, when people feel that they are sort of groping in the dark, it is but natural for them to approach their Spiritual Father for help. The radiating smile, which in many ways, is really articulate, has a comforting effect on the visitors, and the oft-repeated words of welcome, 'Come' and 'Sit' act like a palliative. The visitors become transformed mentally. Is this transformation a sort of hallucination, or, an inability to cope with the reality in which the visitors are placed? It is neither. Many people who have rationalised it later, by very careful consideration, have come to the conclusion that it is the result of the warm welcome. The welcome has relieved the visitors of a lot of tension, or, has reduced the awe likely to have in mind while in the presence of such people. Eased of the tension, they narrate their problems. Thirumeni listens with studied silence. His response is slow; but mellow and measured. After a very careful consideration, when a solution is given, it is nearly always acceptable to all. Thirumeni has a phenomenal ability to convince people about the good and bad aspects of issues. No attempt, in my knowledge, is ever made to arrive at a compromise, as he knows compromises are likely to fall apart after sometime. But Christian ethics and values are given preponderance over other things, and gentle but firm appeal is made to safeguard principles and good sense. The decisions, thus taken, have been many and they have stood the test of time.

Thirumeni is blessed with extra-ordinary will power and deep-rooted faith that an honest commitment coupled with God's grace will see to the successful completion of any task, irrespective of its nature or size. This striking feature of his personality might have been further strengthened in him by his mentor and 'guru' the late Very Reverend Kuriakose Ramban, who had played a significant role in the turbulent forties and fifties of our church history. When Thirumeni was sent to Calcutta Diocese, probably the largest Diocese of the Church, it was nearly a 'desert'. A few thousand members of the Church lay scattered over a vast land mass, they were a part of the diaspora from Kerala in the early fifties. Apart from one school and eleven church buildings, this Diocese had nothing. But now, there are thirty-six church buildings, one degree college, six senior secondary schools, twelve other schools in various stages of development, twenty 'balwadis', three tailoring schools and one printing press with training facilities. In addition to that, attached to St. Thomas Ashram, where Thirumeni stays, there is also a large farm of 35 acres. The Ashram, to the best of my knowledge, is self sufficient in every respect. As a matter of fact, it must be mentioned in this context, that the Bhilai Mission owns approximately a total of 101 acres of land, that is spread over different cities, industrial centres and villages in many parts of the Diocese. This land, most of which is bought, and the rest, taken from the Central Government on a long term lease to establish educational institutions, hospitals, ashrams and mission centres, is being developed for the same purpose. If things move, as His Grace expects, which I am sure they will, we shall all become living witnesses to the tremendous growth of our ancient Church in this part of the country in the near future. However, from 1979 to 1994, the Calcutta Diocese has made a quantum leap forward, which to many, is a miracle. It is indeed a miracle; and the man behind this miracle is the unassuming and deeply pious, His Grace Mar Theodosius.

Thirumeni has an obsession, an obsession to involve the whole Church to carry out one of the tasks given by Christ, namely, to spread his gospel among all people. In St. Mathew Chapter 27

Verses 19 and 20, Christ gives the following instruction in unambiguous words: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost : Teaching them whatsoever I have commanded you....." This is a task that needs the full involvement and backing of the entire Church, and not those of one or two individuals. Thirumeni is sometimes angered and always pained and worried that practically little or nothing has been done in this field so far. The visionary in him laments about the lack of missionary zeal and the pathetic dearth of dedicated workers. He finds that these two causes are the main obstacles in the path for the development of our Church. According to him the Church is in a death trap of stagnation. And to get out of it, it has been concentrating its attention on charitable works alone. But His Grace thinks that the Church should not be contented with that alone, even though it is quite good and absolutely Christian in spirit. On the contrary, he firmly believes that the life of the Church is, and should be in spreading the gospel of Christ. This, His Grace maintains, can easily sustain, spread, and reinvigorate our Church. So wherever he goes, he exhorts the people to take up mission work in order to follow the final instruction of Christ. The response has not been encouraging; but he has been undeterred by the lethargic reaction from all quarters for a long time. He has instead spoken about the need for it time and again in different fora. The recent reports in the press that the Holy Synod is seriously thinking about the development of the North Indian Mission and that permission has been granted by it for starting the Theological Training and Language Institute in Bhilai Mission, indicate clearly that the vision of Thirumeni is going to become a reality. It is, in very simple terms, the beginning of a landmark achievement.

Thirumeni is an ardent lover of farming. He has, I believe, inherited this love for farming. While in Bhilai, he spends many hours everyday on the farm. Farming to him is an unfailing source of "Joy and purest passion". It appears to me that he has established a sort of communion with the plants in his garden and

also that he gets a sort of lyrical pleasure in seeing them grow. It may be that while on the farm, he enjoys the beauty of it as Wordsworth has enjoyed the beauty of Nature.

Thirumeni is a workaholic. His philosophy of life seems to be: work is worship. And hence whatever he does, he does with a religious fervour and expects the same from others. He has quite a lot of items in his agenda of activities still and sets about accomplishing them in a planned way. He does not seem to be perturbed by their sheer magnitude, or, the difficult terrain he has to traverse for fulfilling his goals. I think that only people with extra-ordinary will power and unshakable faith in God can ever think of undertaking such tasks. Though he has time and again spoken about the difficulties in implementing these projects, it is sort of discernable from his expression that these can be solved. What about the physical labour that is required from him? He does not like or appreciate even an oblique question about it. Though definitely he is not physically as strong as he used to be, but as Tennyson's Ulysses tells his companions :

“..... that which we are, we are,
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.”

With his followers, *the Rare Parigatham* goes on and on and on

Appendix I

List of Educational Institutions in Calcutta Diocese.

1. St. Thomas College, Bhilai
2. M. G. M. Senior Secondary School, Bhilai
3. M. G. M. Sr. Sec. School, Rourkela
4. St. Mary's Higher Secondary School, Jabalpur
5. M. G. M. Higher Secondary School, Hathithal, Jabalpur
6. M. G. M. Higher Secondary School, Bokaro
8. St. Mary's High School (Hindi Medium) Jabalpur
9. M. G. M. High School, Dimapur
10. Mar Baselios Middle School, Bhilai
11. M. G. M. Primary School, Bhopal
12. M. G. M. Primary School, Raipur
13. M. G. M. Primary School, Dewas
14. M. G. M. Primary School, Sarni
15. M. G. M. Primary School, Itarsi
16. St. Mary's Nursary School, Bokaro
17. St. Mary's primary School, Indore
18. M. G. M. Primary School, Nagpur
19. M. G. M. Primary School, Dhavakala

(B) Balawadis

(i) Bhilai-Durg Area

1. Kurd East
2. Kurd East
3. Khoka
4. Old Krishna Nagar
5. New Krishna Nagar
6. New Krishna Nagar (West)

7. Guru Gasidas Nagar (West)
8. Guru Ghasidas Nagar (North)
9. Guru Ghasidas Nagar (East)
10. Urindha Nagar
11. Riksha Colony
12. Arya Nagar
13. Camp-II Bhiali
14. Manaka - Bhilai
15. Mahaka - Kura
16. Selud East
17. Selud West
18. Modpar
19. Khamaria East
20. Khamaria West
21. Phoor

ii) Itarsi-Makodiya Area

22. Makodiya
23. Sathvasa
24. Parcha
25. Dhawakala
26. Kukudi
27. Nayapura
28. Mathapura
29. Bandri
30. Halador
31. Hiran Gheda
32. Dharam Kudi
- Jabalpur - 1
- Borakaro - 2

C) Tailoring Schools

1. Malohar - Makodiya
2. Kulvasa - Makodiya
3. Kurd
4. Guru Ghasidas Nagar - East
5. Guru Ghasidas Nagar
6. Sehusel - Bhilai
7. Ruabandha - 1
8. Rubanadha - 2

D) Adult Education Centres

1. Guru Ghasidas Nagar, Bhilai
2. New Krishna Nagar, Bhilai
3. Khoka Bhilai
4. Arya Nagar, Bhilai
5. Camp - II Bhilai



LEGEND

- CATHEDRAL
- CHURCH
- CONGREGATION
- MISSION CENTRE

PARISHES ABROAD

- KUWAIT
- AHMADI
- MUSCAT
- SALALAH

THE DIOCESE OF CALCUTTA

