

Love's Freedom: The Grand Mystery

A Spiritual Autobiography

**All-uniting Love
with Creative Freedom in the Spirit,
as the Grand Mystery at the Heart of Reality
- One Man's Vision**

Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios

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PREFACE

Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios began writing his “Spiritual Autobiography” on April 18, 1993 while staying at Oxford. He travelled from Oxford to Cologne on May 29 in order to attend the Symposium on the Foundations of Theoretical Physics at the Institute of High Energy Physics at the University of Cologne. He was carrying the unfinished story of his life in his laptop computer. When the flight arrived at the Cologne airport they had to take him out on a wheel chair. He had a stroke in midair and his left side was paralysed. His story remained unfinished. Yet he continued the dauntless struggle with his life overshadowed by a debilitating leukemia until he finished his earthly combat on November 24, 1996.

We are now publishing posthumously the unfinished autobiography of Metropolitan Gregorios together with some of his other writings that fit into his autobiographical reflections revealing new dimensions of his spiritual, theological and philosophical vision. We are reproducing here the total plan of the book as he conceived it. That means that some chapters have only the titles. The text in several places contain self-instructions for elaboration, insertions or further references. We felt it was important to publish them as they appeared in the original text since the titles and notes clearly indicate the areas of his life which he considered significant for retracing his spiritual and intellectual pilgrimage.

Mar Gregorios wrote the autobiography directly on his computer. The electronic gadget in its ever-improving versions had been his indispensable companion since the mid-80s. He really enjoyed working with it and made the computer a real play-mate. Even after he was partially paralysed he did not seek the help of a secretary, but worked with amazing agility using one hand, organizing meetings and doing

correspondence with the aid of his Notebook computer and a phone-fax machine on his desk. The furious pace of his work was only slowed down by the later stages of his illness. He, however, did not resume the writing of his autobiography apart from a short “journal” typed in from his sickbed in the hospital in Germany. He had wanted to refer to various documents in order to write substantially about his years with the World Council of Churches and his extensive involvement in other world organizations and movements. He put aside the writing of his story with the hope of doing it later at Kottayam. But he was never able to complete it.

It is perhaps symbolic that his autobiography remained unfinished. Mar Gregorios had a restless mind. His adventurous intellect constantly went out in search of the new in all fields of human knowledge. With his remarkable ability to synthesize the insights from various disciplines into a meaningful whole he sought to interpret afresh the reality of God, world and humanity. He had a deep sense of incompleteness in him that yearned for completion. Hence his “quest”, as he once wrote to the renowned philosopher Martin Heidegger, “for uncovering (or unveiling myself to) the ground of all existence.” His intellectual daring arose from his relentless search for a fuller and clearer picture of reality.

The life of Mar Gregorios was shaped by an intense sense of intense suffering and struggle. The experiences of his adolescence and early youth, as narrated by him in these pages, were decisive for his spiritual and intellectual development. The chapter on ‘Suffering - Key to the Mystery’ poignantly unveils the perceptions of a prodigiously intelligent and spiritually sensitive boy destined to struggle alone in an unkind world. This chapter and the following one on his Ethiopian experience provide clues to his sometimes miserably misunderstood mature personality.

We want to acknowledge our debt of gratitude to several friends and well-wishers who helped us in publishing this book. Mr Cherian Eapen (Los Angeles \ Moscow) a longtime friend of Mar Gregorios contributed substantially to this publication technically and financially. Mr Binoy Jacob (Kanam, Kerala), computer consultant to

Metropolitan Gregorios, helped to sort out the electronic muddle from diskettes kept in Delhi. Mr K.V.Thomas (Dubai) generously offered assistance for the work of Mar Gregorios Foundation. We remember with gratitude H.G. Job Mar Philoxenos, Acting Metropolitan of Delhi, the Delhi Diocesan Council, the members of the Faculty of the Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam and the members of the Executive Committee of the Paulos Mar Gregorios Foundation for their commitment to the publication of this book and the proposed series.

Fr. K. M.George

Kottayam

November 24, 1997

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CHAPTER 1

CREDENTIALS

APOLOGY FOR A

PERSONAL CONFESSION

This is my story. I wish I could tell it as it really happened to me, in me, and around me. That would take a better memory than I have. It calls for much more: for example, a nobler soul unafraid of exposing itself; a more secure personality structure, which can look at itself with more honesty; freedom from the need to brag and boast; better capacity to give credit where it is due and to acknowledge one's myriad debts to others; in speaking of achievements and failures, less selectivity in favor of the former; perhaps more willingness to perceive one's own ordinariness.

Even if my memory were prodigiously accurate, I know I would simply not be capable of separating interpretation from fact when it comes to telling my own story. Besides, I simply lack the guts to reveal the whole story even as I remember it. There is so much in my story of which I am, or at least ought to be, profoundly ashamed. Some things in my life I so loathe the memory of, that I would lack even the strength to dig them out of the sub-conscious and unconscious chambers of the memory and face them myself. Revealing other things about myself may do damage to others.

It seems inevitable therefore that whatsoever I write, the sub-conscious desire to create an impression would distort my testimony. I like applause, and like most others, experience pain at rebuke. I have not attained to that level of spiritual development where praise and blame would equally bounce off my skin like water off a duck's back. An adverse judgment by others still depresses me. A good review in turn pleases me no end.

In principle I know that this is not as it should be. My self-esteem should not, in theory, be dependent on other people's judgment of me. I should value myself and love myself for the simple reason that, despite all my failures, faults and foibles, God loves me. I know that

in theory. But to practice that equanimity fully I must grow deeper roots in to that love of God. The greater my sense of security in being enfolded in God's caring and dependable love, the higher would be my capacity to be unaffected by accolade or allegation, reproof or approbation. That sense of security measures up in me at present as fair, but by no means as full or near perfect.

What then is the purpose of this strange "spiritual autobiography" of mine? Why should anyone read it? Why should I write it?

First, one should mention a somewhat selfish reason. I want to see for myself what I have learned from life, even if I am as yet unable to practice most of what I approve. It is almost seventyone years since I came to this life as a new-born baby. There should be some things I have learned through these years of a rather full life, insights which may even benefit others if I share them. Those who know me through my public image may be disappointed in some cases with what they read here. That is perhaps as it should be. False images do not deserve to be perpetuated. But I want to see for myself what I can say about what I have learned from life. Saying it would in itself be an act of learning for me. On the other hand, what I have lived through constitute part of my credentials for saying what I am saying here. Elsewhere I try to give an account in bare outline of my not too pedestrian life.

Second, I want to give thanks to God for what He has done for me and for others. I want to laud and praise Him in the congregation of humanity. Very few human beings may actually hear my hymn of praise and thanksgiving. I want to acknowledge freely that whatever there has been of good in me and in my words and acts, has come entirely from Him, for He is the source of all good, and I recognize Him as such.

I suspect that some of my readers may not like such theistic language. To some any God-language, besides being philosophically questionable, sounds too pious or / and pretentious, and therefore unauthentic.

I would generally agree with them on both counts. I do not know of any logically consistent or conceptually faultless philosophical theism

in the history of human religion and philosophy. I am one who suffers unbearably from the philosophical naivete of most of my Christian theological colleagues. I know especially that within the world of modern critical rationality, God-language is philosophically problematic.

I am also aware of the fact that never before in human history did God-talk sound so inauthentic and ring so false. We have had, in our funny modern secular civilisation where God is fundamentally and methodologically eliminated from all that we regard as important - from our science-technology, from our literature, from our art and music, from our civic polity, from our social sciences, from our educational system and from our healing arts/sciences - precisely in that secular culture, we have had, an incredible surfeit of God-talk, as if we were frantically trying to convince ourselves that we had not so eliminated God from our life.

I could probably say much the same things without mentioning God. But an inner compulsion pushes me to violate the taboo against mentioning God in academic or respectable discourse. I do not want to take God's name in vain, nor do I wish to misuse it for gaining political mileage. But I do not want to be intimidated either, by that arrogant secular culture which seeks to impose on me the dogma that the human being is either self-existent or the result of an accident in natural evolution, and therefore owes nothing whatsoever to God. That dogma certainly has no evidence to support it. The evidence I have seen convinces me that LaPlace was talking like a very presumptuous adolescent when he claimed that science had no need of a God-hypothesis. I do not want to impose my God-concept on others, but then neither can I desist from praising the Source, Ground and Guide of all existence, just because science has been able to provide no incontrovertible evidence for God's Is-ness.

My third reason is also quite compelling, at least for myself. I have three or four books in my head, I think. But I do not think I have enough time left in my advanced life to complete those in any satisfactory way. I want to use this work also as an occasion for me to review some of the ideas and ideologies that I have come across in my long life in four continents and amidst many cultures. Several people have actually asked me to write the story of my life. So, with

the readers' leave, I will use my life-story as a framework for touching upon the many ideas that crowd my limited mind in the late evening of my life.

If I am not boring my reader, permit me to give the shell of my life in a few paragraphs. The over-all framework of my life will perhaps help the reader to put individual episodes in perspective. My life has been quite global, inter-continental as well as cross-cultural.

II. A BRIEF SKETCH OF MY LIFE

I have lived in Africa (mostly in Ethiopia, two stints in 1947-50 and 1956-59, but have also visited a dozen other countries in that continent) for some six years or more. I spent some seven years in the American continent (two fairly long stints in 1950-54 and 1959-60 and scores of extended visits to the USA; also visited Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Cuba, Jamaica and other Latin American and Carribean countries). I have also lived in Europe (mostly in Switzerland in 1962-67, England in 1960-61 and Germany in 1972, but also visiting several times nearly all the other countries of Eastern and Western Europe) for another seven or eight years. I visited the Soviet Union at least 45 times between 1962 and 1992.

The rest of my life I have spent in Asia, the first twentyfive exclusively in India. I have visited China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, the Soviet Far East, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, Burma, Sri Lanka and so on, some of them several times; also visited most countries in West Asia. I have not missed Australia and New Zealand either. All that gives me some knowledge of humanity and its many-hued culture.

LANGUAGES

I have read a lot and listened to a lot more. Languages help both to read and to listen to a wider variety of people. I cannot say that I have mastered any language. I seem to have a fair degree of control in using English (not my mother-tongue, but the language in which I happen to be most fluent). I must disclaim any capacity for genuine literary writing, though I admire and often envy such capacity in others. This despite the fact that I have written and published some 15 books in English.

I can still use Malayalam, my mother-tongue (a South Indian language of the so-called Dravidian family, a derivative of Tamil, spoken in Kerala) with some facility, though it has now become rusty with disuse. I can still do literary or journalistic writing as well as give public addresses in that language, as I often have to.

I was once (fortythree years ago) rather proficient in Amharic, the official Ethiopian language then, since I had to teach it (after learning it for about 18 months) at the 12th Grade level to Amharic-speaking Ethiopian students. I have not had occasion to use it very much these past thirty-four years or so since I left the Ethiopian Civil Service in 1959. It is also quite rusty. Once I wrote a grammar of Amharic for my own teaching purposes.

That adds up to one Euro-American language, one Asian language, and one African language. Some help in understanding diverse cultures.

Of course I have dabbled in a dozen or more other languages, but I cannot say that I know those languages. French I can read and understand, but can hardly write in it, and can speak with difficulty only. The same is true of German also, though my vocabulary is more limited than in French. I have a smattering of two other Indian languages - Hindi and Tamil. I have some reading knowledge of Biblical or *Koine* Greek, and have struggled also with Classical Greek, Patristic Greek, and even modern (*Demotiki*) Greek. I have some rudimentary knowledge of Sanskrit, the classical Indian language, as also of Latin, Europe's classical language. Spanish, Italian and Portuguese I can read with difficulty. Other languages like Russian and Arabic and *Ge'ez* (the classical language of Ethiopia) I have wrestled with, but the results have been conspicuously poor, in fact nonevident.

I have acquired a limited reading knowledge of a few other Semitic languages, like Biblical Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac. These have also given some insights into aspects of Semitic culture. Perhaps I may mention one other language I learned in six weeks at Oklahoma University in the summer of 1950, and forgot in just as many weeks - Kayawa, the unwritten language of a small Native American tribe in Oklahoma. I still remember the kind lady from that tribe who was

“informant” for my self-study of the language - Mrs. Helen Spottedhorse.

Well, that is all. I do not know how many languages all that totes up to. I wish I had the ability of my friend and benefactor, Dr. Eugene Nida of the American Bible Society who once told me he had analyzed the structure of a 120 or more languages!

I must confess that even my limited knowledge of languages (less than 1% of the more than 2000 tongues of the world) has been a considerable help in breaking through to other cultures and to mentalities of peoples. I have noted that in my sojourns abroad, the intensity of my immersion in other cultures has been proportional to the distance I have managed to maintain from the Indian community in that area. This has sometimes meant being looked upon as a snob by one's own fellow countrymen in such areas, for one gets to spend so little time with them in their many frivolous and amusing pursuits and in their fairly uninhibited and free exchange of gossip and slander.

MANY JOBS

Yes, I seem to have seen and heard much. Another advantage I had was perhaps the many different jobs I have held, only partly by personal choice. Let me recall here some of the main ones.

I finished my secondary education, all of it at the Government Boy's High School in my hometown, Tripunithura, near Cochin in Central Kerala, in March 1937, when I was not yet 15 years old. I think I was born on the 9th of August 1922. I am not quite sure. The records say the 25th of Karkatakam in 1097 Malayalam Era, if I remember right. I must check that up some time. The secondary school final examination was in March 1937, I remember. I came out with some distinction in the state-wide (it was the State of Cochin, ruled by a maharaja in those days) secondary school examination - first class, 6th rank in the state, first in the school, if my memory does not deceive me. That was not so bad, considering the circumstances in which I had to write that examination. On that later.

I even managed to secure a state merit scholarship (Rs. 4.50 a month for four years), sufficient for paying my College tuition fees at

the Madras University. But then the nearest affiliated College was 6 miles away, the Maharajah's College, Ernakulam. I would need another Rs. 5.00 (little more than one U S dollar in those days) per month for bus fare and lunch. My father, who as a primary school teacher, earned Rs. 28.00 per month, on which he had to bring up a family of a wife and five sons, simply told me that he could not afford that amount.

So I had to start working before I was quite fifteen, not so much to earn a living as just to keep out of trouble by keeping myself occupied. None of my uncles or other relatives would help me with that five rupees a month, which I needed to go for a college education. I worked for thirteen long years before I earned enough to go to college at the age of 28, and that too in the USA.

I worked as a teen-ager journalist, covering important events for our Roman Catholic daily *Malabar Mail*, and as a freelance writer in English for the weekly and monthly press in India, already at the age of 16. I also got elected as Secretary of the local Public Library and Reading Room in my hometown, Tripunithura. Then I got a job as a clerk in a transportation and shipping firm in Cochin. After a couple of years at that I entered a competitive examination and joined the clerical cadre of the Indian Posts and Telegraphs department. I served in several little towns in the Princely states of Cochin and Travancore as telegraphist and as Postmaster. Finally I was elected as Associate Secretary for Travancore-Cochin of the All India Posts and Telegraphs Union, and even helped organize a major nation-wide strike against the British Raj, in those pre-independence days of India.

From 1947 to 1950 I served as a teacher in the Government schools in Ethiopia, teaching all the way from primary to secondary and also at College level. The story of how I got to Ethiopia in the first place will have to be told later. Less than three years in Ethiopia taught me a great deal and the years were eventfilled, turbulent and productive. I had more than a fair share of opposition and adulation. That too is a long story, and will have to wait.

In 1950 I left Ethiopia, for I needed to get some more formal education before getting too old. I was already 28 and had not been

to College. On my way to joining Goshen College in the USA, I visited the Middle East and Europe as a tourist. So many new doors were thus opened to new cultures. For four years in America (1950-54) I worked hard as a student and secured both my BA degree from Goshen College, and also earned a Bachelor of Divinity (later changed to Master of Divinity) degree from Princeton Theological Seminary. America was a distinct cultural experience, very enriching. One of my richest experiences as an Eastern Orthodox layman was serving as Assistant Pastor in two Black Baptist churches in Elkhart, Indiana and Princeton, New Jersey during that first four-year sojourn.

I came back to India in 1954, and started working as a teacher of the Christian religion for university students and for educated lay people, at the Fellowship House connected with Union Christian College, Alwaye, in Central Kerala. I was also Honorary Associate Secretary of the Student Christian Movement of India, working mostly with Orthodox and Protestant University students and teachers all over India. At the same time I was elected General Secretary of the Orthodox Student Conference, and in that Capacity organized the Orthodox Christian Student Movement of India. These were invaluable experiences in shaping my thought and spirituality.

In 1956 I had to go to Ethiopia again, this time as Personal Assistant, Liaison Officer with India, and Special Advisor to Emperor Haile Sellassie of Ethiopia. In that position I received many insider's insights into how a government structure works, though the Ethiopian system was not the most developed. The details of that story will have to wait, since this is only a skeleton sketch of my life.

In 1959 I resigned my Ethiopian job with great difficulty (story later) and went to Yale University in America for further theological and philosophical study. I found the facilities for theological study at Yale Divinity School not quite up to the mark, because of colossal and I fear, somewhat cultivated, ignorance of vast areas of Christian history and thought and spirituality. On the other hand I found the Yale Graduate School excellent in modern western philosophy, especially in understanding German philosophers like Kant and Husserl. During this year I served also as a consultant to the

Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, which gave me some great insights into the inside workings of a large American Protestant denomination.

I decided to leave Yale and go to Oxford, anticipating better knowledge of Eastern Theology and Patristics there. I got admitted to a D. Phil (Doctor of Philosophy) program at Oxford, with membership in Keble College, but living at the House of St. Gregory and St. Macrina at 1 Canterbury Road in Oxford. In general Oxford disappointed me - too staid, too dogmatic, too insular, too pompously unauthentic for my taste. But I had great teachers there like Michael Polanyi, who initiated me into some of the problems of human knowing and intellectual certainty. My philosophical pilgrimage, which began with an introductory course at Goshen, and had substantially developed at Princeton and Yale, reached a new level of maturity at Oxford. My mind developed by reacting critically to teachers like Gilbert Ryle and Ian Ramsey, Henry Chadwick and R. C. Zahner.

While at Oxford I was invited to Geneva by Dr. Visser't Hooft, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. He asked me to join the WCC staff at Geneva. I had to say to him that I found the WCC too uncongenial, as being too western and too Protestant. He said that that was the very reason they wanted me - to reverse the trend and balance the one-sidedness. I turned the offer down, politely disclaiming my ability to do what was required, and insisting on my need to complete the studies at Oxford.

The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches was being held at New Delhi in 1961. I was invited to be one of the three main Bible Study leaders, along with Dr. Martin Niemoeller of Germany and Prof. Paul Minear of Yale. My own Orthodox Church in India, which was a founder - member of the WCC also asked me to be one of its delegates at the Assembly. I accepted both invitations, and the Assembly turned out to be a great occasion for my entry into the Ecumenical Movement, from which I had generally kept a respectful distance as a fairly friendly critic of the WCC.

The nearly one thousand participants of the Assembly were divided into three sections, and it was my privilege to lead five daily Bible

studies for one of the sections. Obviously the first Bible study was such a great success, that the next day several prominent people began leaving their sections and coming to my Bible studies. One such was Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, who eventually became a life-long friend and admirer.

Several Orthodox Churches were founder - members of the WCC as it was formed in 1948 in Amsterdam, at the first Assembly. That included the Orthodox churches of India and Egypt, Ethiopia and Greece. But the vast majority of the Orthodox churches, being under Communist rule, had not been permitted by their government or by the WCC authorities to join as members. In 1961, at the New Delhi Assembly, almost all of them came in: the large Russian Orthodox Church, the sizeable Romanian, the Georgian, the Armenian, the Bulgarian, the Serbian and others made a grand influx, and the WCC was now one-third Orthodox and two-third Protestant. But the staff in Geneva was almost exclusively Protestant, except for the layman Professor Nikos Nissiotis from the Church of Greece. The Orthodox were short of competent persons with proficiency in western languages to serve on the staff.

So, when the young Indian Priest Fr. Paul Verghese, as I was then known, from Oxford, made a great impression on the Assembly, the Orthodox delegates were exceptionally elated and proud. I was 39 and had just been ordained a priest a few months before the Assembly. The Orthodox delegates present in New Delhi decided to make the trip south to Kerala (a good 3000 kilometers) to request the head of my church to persuade me to go to Geneva and become the spokesman on the staff for all the Orthodox churches.

So in 1962 began a new chapter in my life, providing me with a vast global arena of service and experience, for which I am perpetually grateful. From 1962 to 1967 I served as Associate General Secretary and Director of the Division of Ecumenical Action. I was able to visit most of the Protestant and Orthodox churches of the World, to serve as an Observer at the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church and to get an inside knowledge of the Christian churches of the world. Living in the scenic city of Geneva in an apartment of my

own was also a new experience, cooking my own meals and doing my own chores like laundry and shopping. I will speak about my WCC experience later.

In 1967, declining a firm written invitation and considerable pressure to renew my contract for another five years, I left Geneva to serve my own Church in India, as Principal of the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Kottayam, Kerala, where all the priests of my Church are trained. I have continued in that position right up to now. Two things I cherished in that experience: the opportunity to teach more or less full time, and the possibility of shaping of the life and thought of young candidates for the priesthood. I have also been able, by the Grace of God, to build up the Seminary, with the help of my students and colleagues, to its present level of a high quality academic institution.

I had discontinued my doctoral research program at Oxford, in order to go to Geneva. Now it was time to take it up again, on my own at Kottayam. The demands on my time both from the Seminary and from my own Church as a whole, left me little time for independent study. Besides I kept up a hectic world-wide schedule in international conferences and seminars, in a continuing ministry of coordinating the work of the Oriental Orthodox churches of Egypt, Syria, Armenia, India and Ethiopia, and in a plethora of services to the Churches in Communist countries. I was very much in demand as a speaker also in the Western churches, as well as in Africa and Asia.

In fact my international work became even more extensive than when I was on the staff of the WCC in Geneva. Already in 1968 my Church had nominated me to serve as its man on the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. I had also been appointed as Secretary of my Church for Inter-Church Relations, a rather demanding assignment. I served also as a member of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC from 1968 to 1975, meeting and working with many outstanding theological minds. Another highly educative experience was serving for 12 years as a founding member of the Joint Working Group between the Vatican and the WCC (1963 to 1975). I was also privileged to serve, along with the late Prof. Nissiotis of the Greek Orthodox Church, as Joint Convenor of the

history-making informal conversations between theologians of the Oriental Orthodox and Eastern Orthodox churches which had broken communion with each other more than 13 centuries ago. Given these responsibilities, sustained scholarly research was practically impossible.

In 1972 I took 6 months' leave from the Seminary and went to Muenster, in Westphalia, West Germany for writing my doctoral dissertation on "God - World - Man Relationship in St. Gregory of Nyssa." Muenster had a special University Institute for the study of the writings of St. Gregory of Nyssa. I stayed in the Roman Catholic Priesterseminar, a house for post-seminary studies for Roman Catholic priests. The institute kindly gave me the best they could offer in terms of facilities. I finished my writing in time, and also got to know the German culture slightly better. My dissertation was later submitted to Serampore University, and after some abbreviation was accepted. I received the Doctor of Theology degree in 1975.

In 1975 I was consecrated as Bishop, and was given the responsibility for the newly created Delhi diocese, as a part-time job in addition to all my other duties in the Church. There was neither office nor residence for the Bishop in 1975. My diocese included besides the whole of Northwest India, also the Gulf States and Europe. Delhi was 3000 miles from Kottayam, and I had to commute. By the Grace of God it was possible not only to build an architecturally attractive diocesan centre, but also to build up some 20 new churches in the diocese. Needless to say, all that took effort and time.

In 1975 I was elected to the Executive Committee of the WCC. This meant going abroad at least three times a year for WCC meetings alone. In 1983 at Vancouver, Canada, I was elected a President of the World Council of Churches, a position I held till 1991. I had also rather early been elected as a Vice - President of the Christian Peace Conference with its headquarters in Prague, Czechoslovakia, which also meant frequent international meetings and travel.

At home meanwhile, besides being a speaker much in demand, I served as a member of the Senate of Kerala University (1972-76) and of the Senate of Serampore University (1970-74, and again

1984-93). I was elected Vice - President of the Kerala Philosophical Congress in 1968. In 1975, we were able to host the annual session of the Indian Philosophical Congress and to chair the Reception Committee. My association since 1974 with Indian philosophers in the Indian Philosophical Congress and in the Indian Council of Philosophical Research has been a major factor in the growth of my understanding and awareness of the great and rich Indian philosophical heritage. Later on, I was elected as General President of the Indian Philosophical Congress, founded by Rabindranath Tagore and S. Radhakrishnan some 80 years ago. It seems I was the first and only Indian Christian to adorn that post. The honor was hardly deserved, but some of my friends in the Indian Philosophical establishment thought that the General Presidency should not be given only to members of the majority community.

LECTURERSHIPS AND PUBLICATIONS

On the American continent too I had several pleasant and profitable associations. In 1968 the Lutherans invited me to deliver the Hein Memorial Lectures in three of their seminaries. That was when I began substantially extended writing, going beyond articles and papers. These lectures were subsequently incorporated in my *The Freedom of Man* published by the Westminster Press, Philadelphia in 1972, and later in my *Freedom and Authority*, published by the Christian Literature Society, Madras in 1974.

My first major published book dealt with some of the specifics of Eastern Christian worship. Association Press in New York and Lutterworth Press in London jointly published *Joy of Freedom, Eastern Worship and Modern Man*, in 1967. The book sold out fairly quickly, and a cheap Indian edition was published by the Christian Literature Society in Madras in 1986. That Society had already published some collections of my Bible Studies and meditations: *The Gospel of The Kingdom* in 1968, and *Be Still and Know* in 1974.

Dr. K. M. Tharakan, a well known literary critic and writer in Kerala, translated my *Joy of Freedom* into Malayalam as *Swathantrya deepthi*. He also wrote a laudatory biography in Malayalam entitled *Paulos Mar Gregorios: Man and thinker*. My

friends and well wishers have brought out two Festschrift volumes in my honor: one in 1982 for my sixtieth Birthday (*Freedom, Love, Community*) and another for my seventieth birthday in 1992 (*Towards a New Humanity*).

I wrote brief accounts of the life and teachings of some of the prominent Eastern Christian Fathers, mainly for the use of the Orthodox college students. That was published in Kottayam in 1969 as *The Faith of Our Fathers*. In 1975, in preparation for the Always session of the Indian Philosophical Congress, I published a brief introduction to modern European philosophy: *The Quest for Certainty*. Two philosophical lectures I gave at Sri Venkateswara University in Tirupati were published by that University in 1978 as *Truth Without Tradition?*

In 1978, as I was chairing the Preparatory Committee for the WCC's famous World Conference on *Faith, Science and the Future*, I was infuriated by a book by one of my Committee members giving the Christian theological basis for an approach to the Environment problem. It was much too Calvinistic and hardly Christian from my perspective. The best I could do to respond was to sit in the Gregorian Library in Rome for three weeks and produce *The Human Presence*, giving an Eastern Orthodox Christian approach to the same problem. The book was published in Geneva by the WCC in 1978, and as it quickly sold out, it was reprinted in 1979. CLS, Madras brought out a cheap edition of this book in 1980, and an American Edition was published by Amity House, New York in 1987. It has been one of my more successful books in terms of sales and reviews. The chapter on "*Mastery and Mystery*" has been widely quoted.

That World Conference on *Faith, Science and the Future*, held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1979, with some 500 physical scientists and the same number of social scientists and theologians attending, constituted, along with the five-year preparatory process under my chairmanship which preceded it, a major turning point in my own thought-life. I had occasion to work with many world thinkers on the issues relating to modern science as our chief way of knowing, and to modern technology as our principal tool for

transforming society and environment. Regarding the conference itself which lasted for several days and which I had the unique privilege to chair I shall have something to say later.

In preparation for it I edited and wrote in part a book called *Science and Our Future* (CLS Madras, 1978), with contributions from Indian scientists and thinkers. I myself wrote the part formulating the main issues confronting us. After the conference I put down in writing my own thoughts on it, which was published as *Science for Sane Societies* by CLS Madras in 1980, and republished by Paragon House, New York in 1987 and 1994.

I had been asked to put together two books on the Oriental Orthodox Churches for German readers. They were in part written by me and in part by others from the respective churches. We wrote in English, and after my editing, the material was translated into German. *Koptisches Christentum*, dealing with the Egyptian and the Ethiopian churches, appeared in 1973 (Stuttgart) as part of the *Kirchen Der Welt* Series. The second book which dealt with the various groups among the Thomas Christians of Kerala, and to which Roman Catholic, Marthoma, and other scholars had contributed, appeared in the same series next year under the title: *Die Syrischen Kirchen in Indien* (Stuttgart, 1974).

We had started a small Kerala Study Group in which many Kerala intellectuals of leftist and rightist convictions were members, including Padmashri K. M. Cherian, Chief Editor of Malayala Manorama (India's largest selling newspaper now), and Sri. C. Achutha Menon (former Chief Minister of Kerala). We used to meet to discuss national and international issues. I had to put together another little book for our study, dealing mostly with the role of Trans National Corporations in India and worldwide. I myself wrote the main part, but added some pieces from others, and we published it under my editorship as *Burning Issues* (Kottayam 1997). The little book was a great success. Even Marxists used it for their study programs on TNCs.

One of the most astounding aspects, for me at least, of my WCC experience was organizing the four unofficial conversations (Aarhus, 1964, Bristol, 1967, Geneva 1970, and Addis Ababa 1971) between

theologians of the Oriental Orthodox and Eastern Orthodox churches, jointly convened by Prof. Nissiotis and myself. Astounding because, after almost 1500 years of separation from and polemic against each other, we found ourselves holding the same faith, and jointly acknowledging that the Christological issue (whether the incarnate Christ's divine and human natures had actually become one, or should still be counted as two) which was supposed to have divided us in the fifth and sixth centuries was basically terminological and not substantial. The reports of these conversations, edited by Nissiotis and myself and others, appeared in the *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* published by the Hellenic College in Brookline, Massachusetts. The WCC asked us to edit a summary of these reports, and this was published in 1981 by the WCC Geneva under the title: *Does Chalcedon Divide or Unite?*

My doctoral dissertation submitted to Serampore University was published in 1980 by Sophia Publications, New Delhi, under the title *Cosmic Man*. It dealt with the relation between God, Humanity and World in the 4th century Eastern Christian Father St. Gregory of Nyssa. It was later republished under the same title in 1988 by Paragon, New York. It is a work that I had expected to be well received, but that has not been the case. I hope it will be studied more seriously by people in the future, for it deals with one of the fundamental problems of Christian Theism. People who believe in God often simply take it for granted that God, Humanity and World are three entities, while Gregory of Nyssa had already seen the philosophical problem of seeing the Creator and the Creation as two entities distinct from each other. The Hindu Advaita Vedantin's point was recognized as basically sound and legitimate, though formulated and explained differently, by this ancient Asian writer from Cappadocia in Asia Minor (present day Turkey). Gregory of Nyssa lived and wrote three or four centuries before Sankara in India.

St. Thomas, one of the Twelve Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, is believed to have come to India in 52 A D and established the Christian Church. According to tradition he was martyred in a place (now called San Thome) near Madras, speared to death by Hindus. The date of his martyrdom was reckoned as 82 A D. In 1982, the

Indian Orthodox Church, which with other Thomas Christians in India, that claims St. Thomas as its founder, celebrated the nineteenth centenary of that martyrdom in a big way. Many guests had come from far off places, including Gyani Zail Singh, the President of India and Patriarch Ilya of Georgia. I was practically in charge of the celebrations, assisted by a large team of people. We wanted a small book on the history of our Church to be given to the guests. There was none available, and in about a week I had to write one myself. This was published as *The Indian Orthodox Church: An Overview*. The C.M.S. Press, Kottayam printed the book in less than a week, though in binding it, they made some mistakes in putting the pages together.

By the 1980's I was getting quite restless about the wildly erratic theological formulations propagated by the World Council of Churches. I was elected a President in 1983, and I insisted that I should give a series of lectures to the staff in Geneva about these errors. Influential members of the staff, of course, resisted the proposal with all their strength. Finally the General Secretary, Dr. Emilio Castro of Uruguay, accepted the idea of my giving some lectures at the Headquarters in Geneva, where some 80 executives from all countries and some 200 supportive staff worked. The WCC is the largest non-governmental organization in Geneva, much bigger than the Red Cross, for example. I began preparing my lectures, when suddenly I was told that the lectures would have to be on the theme chosen by one of the three Units of the WCC, the theme being *Diakonia* or Service. I recognized this as sabotage by the staff, but I decided to play their game and accepted. The five or six meditations were then put together and published by the WCC as *The Meaning and Nature of Diakonia* (Geneva, 1988). The book got some good reviews, but made no impression on the staff. They still go on propagating the old errors, and nowadays even some worse ones. Most of the senior staff began looking upon me as an enemy and still seem to do so.

My more readable theological works, from my own point of view, are *The Joy of Freedom* and *The Human Presence*. In terms of substance, *Cosmic Man - The Divine Presence* is perhaps the richest. The Mar Gregorios Foundation (formed by my friends in Kerala in

honor of my seventieth birthday in 1992) has recently published a collection of my earlier writings under the title *A Human God*. It deals with some of the issues in our understanding of Christ, and carries on a polemic with some fundamental western positions. That Foundation has in its possession hundreds of my articles and papers, some of them hitherto unpublished. They have also published a collection of my Malayalam papers, entitled *Darsanathinte Pookal*. Translated, that title would read *Blossoms of Philosophy*. They have intentions, they say, of publishing several volumes of my collected papers in the future. But I have become tired of theological writing, especially polemical writing. If God grants me life and health, I still hope to write one other theological book which would summarize my faith-understanding unpolemically.

More recently I have done some significant non-theological writing. The Indian Institute of Advanced Study located in the former Viceregal Lodge (later Rashtrapati Nivas) in Shimla in the Himalayas gave me a study fellowship which enabled me to write my *Enlightenment: East and West*, published by that Institute and favorably reviewed in India. The State University of New York Press wanted to publish it jointly with the Institute, but the latter was not willing for some reason. It would be paranoid on my part to suspect jealousy on the part of the Institute authorities.

In any case, the Shimla book had been written with an Indian readership in mind, pointing out that the great Founding Father of our nation, Jawaharlal Nehru, was primarily a child of the European Enlightenment, and not a promoter of the Indian heritage. For SUNY Press I decided to write another book on the same theme, this time with the western readership in mind. That came out in 1992 under the title *A Light Too Bright: The Enlightenment Today*. Reviews so far have been favorable, though not raving.

Besides all these, I have written, as already stated, hundreds of periodical articles and contributions to symposia and encyclopaediae. I gave the Dudley Lecture at Harvard University in 1979, questioning the then prevailing thesis that secularization was an irreversible process. I saw then that religion had to come back into public life in

some new form, and would do so fairly soon. That was an unfashionable view for the establishment, and Harvard Theological Review, which had agreed in advance to publish my lecture, regretted their inability to abide by the agreement.

I have often taken such unpopular anti-establishment positions, but my worst offence was suggesting, in some theological writings and lectures, that the prevailing Christian idea of the centrality of mission was a creation of western imperialism rather than the teaching of the Christian Church through the centuries. Even the people of my own church, who have been deeply brainwashed by western propaganda, regard such views as simply part of my personal idiosyncrasy. I have also suggested that the way some western Christians speak about the Lordship of Christ over the Church and the World, as well as their obtuseness to other religions and cultures, came more from an unjustified confidence in the superiority of western culture than from the Christian faith itself.

In fairness to my American Christian friends, I must say that despite such unpopular views they have asked me to talk and teach. I served as Mary Louise Iliff Distinguished Visiting Lecturer at the Iliff School of Theology at Denver, Colorado for the summer session of 1978. I was Distinguished Visiting Professor at the College of Wooster, Wooster, Ohio for a term in 1981. I was a Visiting Fellow at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1986 and in 1988.

HONOURS, PRIZES AND AWARDS

Prizes and honours, I should know, are no reliable gauge for a person's true worth. Yet since we are dealing with credentials for saying what follows, I may be permitted to give a quick list of some I have received. Here are the main ones in three clusters: Indian, East European, and Western.

India

The Soviet Land Nehru Award, which was bestowed on me in 1988, carried some prestige in India. It was instituted by a distinguished group of Indians and Soviet citizens. It seeks to recognize extraordinary service to the cause of peace and justice. Mother Teresa of Calcutta received it a year after I did.

The Bhai Param Vir Singh International Award, which I received in 1990, was set up by the National Institute of Panjabi Studies and is controlled by the Sikh community in India. I presume it was a recognition of what little I had contributed to the promotion of inter-religious harmony in India as well as abroad.

I was the first, I believe, to receive the Acharya Award (1992), set up in Kerala, to honor great Indian teachers of humanity.

My name has appeared in India Who's Who, Kerala Who's Who, and other Indian biographical reference works.

Eastern Europe

During the thirty years or so when I struggled to serve the Christian people in the so-called Socialist countries of Eastern Europe and to promote dialogue between Communists and non-Communists in the world, I received many honors, which some may now regard as dishonors. But I cherish them.

I was the first outsider to receive an honorary doctorate in Theology from the Leningrad Theological Academy of the Russian Orthodox Church; Others like Cardinal Willebrands of the Vatican received it later. I was also nominated as an honorary lecturer in Theology at that Academy.

The Lutheran Theological Academy in Budapest, Hungary gave me another Doctor of Theology, honoris causa. A third honorary doctorate in theology was given to me by the Jan Hus Faculty in Prague, Czechoslovakia. The Orthodox Theological Faculty in Czechoslovakia invited me to receive an honorary doctorate, but I was unable to receive it in person.

Two prestigious further honors were bestowed on me by the Russian Orthodox Church: the Order of St. Vladimir, and later the most prestigious Order of St. Sergius, First Rank. The Polish Orthodox Church decorated me with the Order of St. Mary Magdalen, the First Witness (to the resurrection of Christ). The Old Catholic Church in Poland awarded me the Order of Bishop Fransiszek Hodur, First Class.

In the then East Germany, I was awarded in 1988 the Otto Nuschke Prize for Peace. I believe again that I was the first outsider to merit this honor established in the name of the Founder of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). I remember an amusing story in connection with this award. I had prepared, in German, a manuscript for the lecture associated with the award, to be delivered to the Executive Committee of the CDU. I had raised some fundamental questions about the reforms and revisions then being introduced by Michael Gorbachev in the Soviet Union. I thought the German Communists would be happy to hear my criticism. I had to give the text in advance, to be vetted by the President of the CDU, who was a friend of 25 years standing and also No. 2 in the DDR government. The day before the lecture, he sent an assistant to my hotel to tell me that I would have to skip all references to Gorbachev. I reluctantly agreed to cut four pages out of my text. The next morning, one hour before actually delivering the lecture, I was told that the whole text of the lecture would have to be abandoned, and that I should speak extemporaneously about peace in general. And that is what I had to do! If I can find the English version of my original text among my papers some day, I would like to publish it.

America and the West

The Americans have been quite generous to me. Especially the American Biographical Association, which publishes several global Biographical reference works, has done me many an honor. They have included me in the *National Register of Prominent Americans and International Notables*, and also in *Who's Who in America*. My name finds a place in several editions of the *Dictionary of International Biography*, of the *International Who's Who*, and of the *World Who's Who*. It appears also in *Who's Who in Religion*, in the *International Who's Who of Intellectuals*, *International Authors and Writers Who's Who*, and also in the *Dictionary of International Community Service*.

Perhaps a higher level of honor is meant by the inclusion of my name in *The International Book of Honour*, as also in *International Dictionary of Distinguished Scholarship*.

One is surprised to find one's name in *Men of Achievement*, in *Men and Women of Distinction*, and in *Five Thousand Personalities of the World*, as also in *Five Hundred Leaders of Influence*. Some of these honors also include awards like "The Distinguished Leadership: Award for Extraordinary Service to Peace and Human Unity", and "The International Biographical Roll of Honor for Distinguished Service to World Unity and Understanding among Religions", as well as "The Hall of Fame Award." In 1990 I was presented with the American Biographical Society's prestigious "Man of the Year Award" and in 1991 with the "Golden Academy Award for Lifetime Achievement."

Two of my American almae mater from which I took my first two degrees honored me, Goshen College with their "Culture for Service Award" and Princeton Theological Seminary with their prestigious "Distinguished Alumnus Award." The American Psychiatric Association gave me their "Oskar Pfister Award" in their national meeting in Washington DC in 1992, attended by some 20,000 psychiatrists. I also delivered the Oskar Pfister Lecture on Religion and Psychiatry.

My name appears also in *Who's Who in Switzerland* and in *Who's Who in the Far East*, both published in the west.

Well, you did not ask for my credentials, but I have thrown a whole heap of them at you. Pardon me for this impudence. Let me now desist for a while from beating my own drum, and speak about more serious matters which shaped my person and thought.

CHAPTER II

SUFFERING: KEY TO THE MYSTERY AGONIES OF AN ADOLESCENT

Suffering, whatever it may be, seems to be something people want to get rid of, escape from, or simply avoid. Very few people would be willing to regard suffering as an experience basically good or desirable. In fact our notions of heaven or paradise or *moksha* or *nirvana* seem tailored out of some notions opposite to the idea of suffering - such as happiness and enjoyment. The absence of either the actuality, or even the possibility, of suffering in any form seems an essential component of that blessed and desired state.

On the other hand, I know people who would use suffering, imagined, put on, or real, as a way of eliciting other people's sympathy and love. I myself often seem to be in danger of doing that. We shall say something later about the uses of suffering.

I have a medical doctor friend, an Internist, who tells me that a good 60% of the people who came to his clinic as patients, had no diagnoseable bodily illness. Especially in our Indian culture, where it does not cost much to go to a public clinic, if you claim to be sick enough to go to a clinic, the rest of the family has to treat you with special consideration, a privilege one does not always have. My physician friend told me that the worst he could do for such people was to tell them that there was nothing wrong with them. They would simply go to another physician who would take them more seriously. He usually prescribed some harmless pills or concoction or both. The placebo worked, as the body did its own healing of the symptoms.

In Buddhism, suffering or *dukkha*, comes to occupy the center-stage as the fundamental and pervasive problem of unredeemed human existence. *Dukkha* does not mean just what the English word 'suffering' communicates to us. It implies also unrest, sorrow, discomfort, distress, dissatisfaction, stress, tension, worry, anxiety, unhappiness, pain, anguish, grief, and misery in all its forms. For Buddhism, *dukkha* is the invariable and universal concomitant of all human existence, in the condition before *bodhi* or *satori*, i.e., before

enlightenment and liberation. The only way to get out of *dukkha* is to get to the root cause of it, to eradicate that root cause, and thereby to escape the bothersome and endless cycle of births and rebirths by attaining *nirvana* or true liberation. The root cause or *hetu* is always *trshna* or desire or craving, lust for experience, greed for a myriad things, desire to get and to possess, yearning to act and to talk, craving for money and pleasure, for power and domination, for fame and acclaim, for gratification, desire ever unsatiated; gratification only enhances the craving in the long run. Once desire is gone, suffering ceases. And the whole of Buddha's teaching is about how to get at desire, through the *dharma*, or the basic grasp of reality in its true nature, through the *sangha*, or the community which practices the *dharma*, and through the *vinaya* or the discipline that trains the *bhikku* to overcome desire.

When I was thirteen years old, I knew nothing about Buddhism, and experienced a lot of suffering. I have often wondered whether, if I had known Buddhism then, it would have shown me the way out of my suffering. But such wondering leads nowhere. I should simply try to give you some account of my suffering as a teenager. For me it was hell, and I could see no way out. Especially since my childhood had been reasonably tranquil, before it all started.

In a human person's life, suffering is the most personal and intimate experience. Descartes definitely took the wrong starting point when he began with his "I think, therefore I am." For most ordinary people, barring the academics, what they could say would be more like: "I think, therefore I am, I think...." They would lack that Cartesian certainty about their thinking activity, which is easier for thinkers far removed from every day life. Whereas, if he had started with "I suffer, therefore I am" he would probably have come to quite different conclusions; at least he would have made more sense to common people. Because my suffering is my own, in a particularly intimate way, and I can never doubt it, even if others do not quite see it. The universal I is much more a sufferer than a thinker. I think Milan Kundera, the Czech philosopher-novelist said that in his *Immortality*.

A Tranquil Childhood

There are very few childhood memories that stand out. Not too many adventures or exploits to narrate. Life was confined to very limited parameters. I cannot even remember the birth of my two younger brothers. Going to school, going to church, visiting some uncles and cousins living not more than six miles away - that was the extent of my experience. Sometimes my father would take me to some Hindu temple festival, late in the evening after supper, mainly to watch *Kathakali*, the traditional Kerala dance-narrative, done in open air at night, usually beginning at 9 pm and ending in the small hours of the morning. Or it may be to watch the fireworks connected with the temple festival. No movies, though silent movies had already come to Tripunithura, my home town.

Not that life was idyllic or something approaching that. Our family was poor though “respectable.” My paternal grandfather, I am told, was somewhat wealthy, with house and land and fields and all that. It seems he squandered and frittered most of that wealth away. He must have taken cash loans from our neighboring family, pledging the land. In my childhood I understood that most of our neighbor’s land once belonged to Thadikkal Kunhipaily, my father’s father. He died before I was born. All I have to go by are a teenager’s memories of what my father and others said about him. It seems he was profligate and slightly on the licentious side. But he was a leader in the community, all the same.

My paternal grandmother too died before I was born, and I have no way of making any judgments. Neither did I know my maternal grandfather, Ponodath Cherian of Mulanthuruthy. I have a vague memory of my maternal grandmother on her death-bed, since mother took me with her as a child when she went to the funeral.

In any case, unlike Sartre, I had no occasion to be spoiled by any grandparents. They all left the scene well before, or soon after, I arrived. I have often wondered whether a bit of spoiling by grandparents is not good for the growing child, a different and often more permissive, tolerant, affectionate relationship than one can have with one’s parents or siblings. Such spoiling seems to help out by

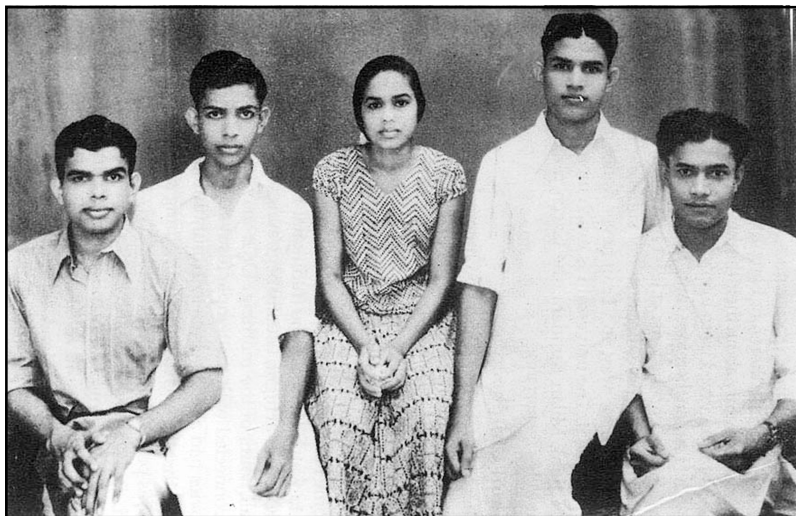
providing a way out from tensions with one's parents, and also supplying a more indulgent, playful senior, often with some wisdom gained from experience. In any case, my brothers and I were not fortunate that way.

In truth I did not even have paternal uncles or aunts. My father was an only child, brought up largely by his mother. That too is not so good when it comes to learning to deal with one's fellow human beings. My mother on the other hand was an only sister of four brothers, a little spoiled angel. She was an angel indeed, extremely intelligent, but with only a fourth grade education. That was not too bad for rural girls in nineteenth century India. She could read and write. One of her brothers was well educated by the standards of those days. He had graduated from high school, and became a revered teacher of all who went to school in the village of Mulanthuruthy. Respected by all as Ponodath Abraham Master, he was also my favorite uncle, learned and noble of character.

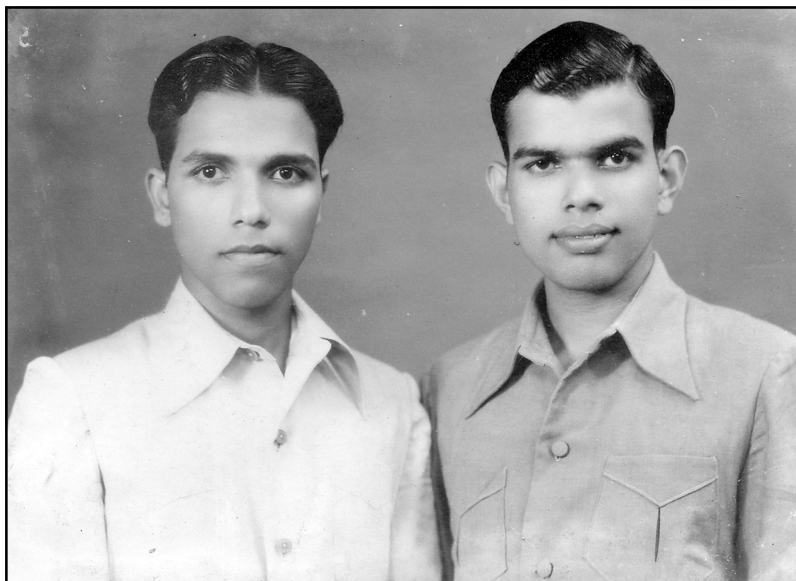
My father had discontinued his education with the eighth grade. He never told us the reason, and we never asked. Perhaps because his father was not alive. He was intelligent and could speak and write better English than many of today's university graduates of India can. He became an elementary school teacher, and was, by the standards of the day, fairly well read in both English and Malayalam literature. I remember that when I was away from home I corresponded with my father in English.

I think my father was thirteen and my mother ten when they were married. That was the custom those days, and there was nothing unusual about such arranged child marriages. What was unusual was the kind of nuclear family in which they had to bring up their five sons. Every other family seemed to have at least one grandparent living. It must have been quite a strain on my parents. Five boys, but no girls. I have heard that the first issue was a girl, but the birth was premature and the infant died soon.

I was the middle child, baptized as Geevarghese or George. Both names are versions of the Greek name Georges, meaning a farmer. In Kerala the version is "Varghese", which in turn is an abbreviation



With brothers and a cousin sister
Left to Right: T. P. Verghese (Mar Gregorios), T. P. Abraham,
Saramma, T. P. Jacob, T. P. Paulose



of the Syriac Geevorghese. I was as a child known as T. P. Varghese (Thadikkal Piely Varghese) and later as Paul Verghese until I formally became a monk in 1975. Then I by my own choice took the monastic name Paulos, partly to give some continuity with my former name, and partly to honor in one shot, the Apostle Paul, as well as my late father and eldest brother, both of whom had been baptized as Paulos and had passed away long before 1975.

My two elder brothers, Paulos, named after my father and grandfather, and Cherian (Malayalam equivalent of the Biblical name Zachariah), named according to custom after our maternal grandfather, found this world of *dukkha* a bit too much, and decided to quit early; on that later.

Of the two younger brothers, Jacob lives at home in Tripunithura, quiet, God-fearing, and unadventurous. He and his wife have two sons and two daughters and one grandson. My youngest brother, Abraham, of whom I am particularly fond, six years younger to me, now lives in Vancouver, Canada, with his Malayalee wife, a former Hindu. He is adorably good, with a keen sense of humor, very popular. Their son and daughter also, both Canadian educated, live and work in Canada, in Ottawa and Vancouver respectively. Both children were born in Ethiopia, where Abraham worked as a Commercial School teacher for some years, before they migrated to Canada.

My nephew Paul Abraham, working for Canada's Internal Revenue Service in Ottawa, and his wife Jena, a bright and well educated Indian girl, have a pair of adorable twin boys, Sasha and Roshin of whom also I am very fond.

I am glad to be a grand-uncle to at least three. But I get very little chance to spoil them. Both my brothers and their families are unpretentiously Christian.

Slightly Precocious?

I seem to have been slightly on the precocious side, and went to school early, just past four. I remember my father, then a teacher in the elementary grades in the local Boy's High School, taking me to the Headmaster, for exemption from the age limit of five needed to

be admitted to the first grade. The headmaster was some Iyengar (South Indian Brahmin), formidable and forbidding, in a black coat buttoned up to the neck, white turban on his head, mouthfull of betel-leaf chew. I remember my father also was clad in dhoti, button-up coat and white turban. The image is very vivid in my mind today, because it was quite intimidating to a four-year old. The headmaster thundered, it seemed to me: “What do you intend to do, Piely Master? Bring him to school every day in your coat pocket?” Well, I was admitted. I was glad to be out of the headmaster’s office. I was scared.

By the time I was in the fourth grade, my slight precociousness was being noticed in the school. My eldest brother’s classmates, six years my senior, would bring their English textbooks to me, to hear me reading them aloud, often without understanding the meaning.

Though I was among the best students in my class, some of my Hindu teachers would take delight in castigating me and making fun of me in class. That was the style those days. My Malayalam teacher, Mr. Sankara Menon was particularly offensive and often downright abusive. Sometimes he would say in class: “How can you shrimp-eating Christians ever learn a literary language like Malayalam?” It was all coming out of a crude affection, not out of communal hatred, but it was hard to take for a sensitive boy who did not want to be ashamed of his allegiance to the Christian faith. After all, a good third of our local community were Christians, and my family belonged to the ancient community of the Thomas Christians, pure Indians whose Indian ancestors had lived in Kerala as Christians for nearly as long as Christianity has existed in the world, tracing their origin to Thomas, one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ.

But being abused by teachers in class was part of the game of school education in that society, and one had to take it all in one’s stride. I was small, compared to my classmates, and also slightly pale and anemic. So one of the nicknames that stuck to me was yellow frog (*Manhathavala*). That too, one learned to live with. The other nickname was meant to be both complimentary and jeering at the same time with a tinge of playful envy, I presume: “Hammerhead”

(*Kottodithalayan*). It referred to my small body and rather longish head. I find it difficult even today to buy a hat that fits my long head. A 7 1/2 size does not quite fit. I do not think that the size of my head has anything to do with its content, except that at times I do seem to have a swollen head!

I had a few dramatic achievements to my credit; nothing whatever in sports or arts. The prizes were largely in elocution and essay competitions. One of these elocutions as a ninth-grader was pure showmanship on my part. I had managed to memorize a particularly bombastic passage from an Indian humor magazine and delivered it as my oration. Of course everybody knew I could not have written it myself. Neither did I claim that. In fact I did not know the meaning of half the words I pronounced. But it was rather smoothly delivered. It must have been the comic incongruity between my own size and the size of my words and sentences that fascinated my judges and hearers. I still remember parts of it, and with your kind permission, let me recall some of it here. It went somewhat as follows:

In promulgating your esoteric cogitations, or articulating your superficial sentimentalities and amicable philosophical or psychological observations, beware of platitudinous ponderosity. Let your extemporaneous descantings and unpremeditated expatiations have intelligibility and veracious vivacity, without rodomontade or parsimical bombast. Sedulously avoid all polysyllabic profundity, pompous prolixity, psittaceous vacuity, ostentatious vapidness and ventriloquy verbosity. Let your conversational communications possess a clarified conciseness, a compact comprehensibility, a coalescent consistency and a concatenated cogency. Eschew all conglomerations of flatulent garrulity, jejune babblement and asinine affectations.

It went on like that for a while and concluded with this smart peroration:

In other words, talk plainly, briefly, sensibly and naturally. Say what you mean; mean what you say; and do not use big words.

It seemed to go over well, better than I had expected. I even got the prize. My head became a little more swollen.

A Child's Religion

I must say a word about my religious or church life as a child, for that was a major formative influence in my personality formation. My parents were both regular church-goers, my mother particularly so. All of us children were also to go every Sunday without fail, as also for all important church festivals. We practiced group family prayer at home in the morning and evening and observed all the fasts prescribed by the church. This, I must say, was fairly normal for the Orthodox Christian families at that time.

In fact, in the Orthodox tradition to which my family belonged, religious personality formation depended more on the regular observances than on doctrinal instruction. The family prayers and Sunday worship were central. It mattered little how much of it one understood. The important thing was the participation, and the subtle and subconscious ways in which such participatory experience affected one's personality structure.

The body was just as important as the mind in these observances, and not merely only what the eyes saw and what the ear heard. Seeing and hearing were in some sense fundamental, even when there was no conscious comprehension. Equally important, however, were the other senses: the scent of incense in the church services, the taste of the Eucharistic bread and wine, the smearing of the oil from the church lamp on your forehead, the kissing of the cross and making the sign of the cross, the myriad genuflections and prostrations, the tasting of the bitter vinegar on Good Friday, the holding of the palm leaf on Palm Sunday, the kiss of peace given and received during the liturgy by all in the special Indian Christian way (offering both your hands to your neighbor to interleaf with the two hands of the other, who does the same to his or her neighbor in turn), the gorgeous vestments of the bishops and priests, the peals of church bells and systrums, exercising one's own vocal chords in loud and spiritfull, if not quite harmonious singing of the hymns and chants, the white-clad deacons, the colorful decorations of the altar. All five senses of the body were to be involved in worship: sight and hearing, smell and touch and taste. The body must pray just as much as the

soul and the spirit, with the hands and the feet, the tongue and the lips, the voice and the breathing, posture and movement.

That was the system in which we had been brought up. And I must affirm the basic validity of the system, though much in it could readily be improved upon. I have dwelt upon this point in my *Joy of Freedom*. Many of the attitudes and tastes that I have carried over from childhood to adulthood came from this system.

The British missionaries who came to us in the twenties and thirties of the nineteenth century on a "Mission of Help" tried to tell us that all this was worthless superstition, and that only pure reading of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer (Worship Manual of the Anglican Church) and the singing of 'spiritual hymns' would do. They were just as much missionaries of the European Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries as of the western Protestant gospel. We are still very much under their influence because that influence is so pervasive in our culture. Too many people still think that a child learns mainly what he or she is told in so many words.

I believe all ancient religious systems practised something like that. It is all very well to speak about "pure" spirituality without dogma or rite, and even to create fresh ones tailored to order. But if any religion has survived for more than two generations, it has developed some of its own rituals and dogmas. Even the Quakers are no exception to this. The dogmas may not be acknowledged as such; the rituals may be more cleverly concealed. Religion is always a community affair; the idea that it is a matter of individual choice is a peculiar and mistaken dogma of the unacknowledged religion of our secular culture. No religious system propagates itself without a community tradition which invariably includes a system of teachings and a set of ritual actions. That is in the very nature of the human being. Even the most godless person does not live by critical rationality and individual choice alone. More on this later.

Sunday School

Despite all that has been said above, instruction, it must be stated, can be helpful, especially when it is given in the context of a symbol-

system that carries subconscious meaning. I myself benefited immensely from Sunday School.

The Sunday School is an institution of 18th century origin in England. Though Christians started it, its original purpose was not specifically religious, but the general education of slum children. Robert Raikes, the publisher of *Gloucester Journal*, not only started the institution for educating neglected and illiterate slum children through volunteer teachers (hence on Sunday), but also wrote a very persuasive piece in his journal about it. The idea caught fire and spread, not only in England, but also on the European and American continents. In the nineteenth century, as general education became more widely available in western countries, the Sunday School began to specialize in religious education, and that too for all church-going children, from slum or suburb.

The institution came to the Christian churches of India also about a hundred years ago. My parish church, Nadamel St. Mary's, only half a mile from home, had started Sunday School with four grades only, and I finished the four years by the time I was nine years old. A neighboring parish, only two miles from home, St. George's in Karingachira, had seven grades, and I joined as a fifth grader. They had good teachers by the standards of those days, and I did well. Soon I was asked to teach Sunday School in my own parish, and I readily agreed to do so, even while I was a student at St. George's. This was possible since the two Sunday Schools functioned at two different times on Sunday. I would go to the liturgy at St. George's in the morning, and would stay on for the Sunday School there as student. I would come home for lunch, and go to teach in my parish in the afternoon. It worked very well, for teaching is a good way of learning.

I am very grateful for this experience. At St. George's, one of the teachers I remember very well was Punnachalil Chacko Master, learned and inspiring. There I deepened my commitment to God and to Jesus Christ. As an eleven year old teacher, I myself became popular; I think I managed to transmit some of my faith to a few of my own students, who were only a few years younger than their Boy Teacher.

In my later years I have often thought about it. These parishes were not what you would call “aglow with the Spirit.” There was so much intrigue and petty quarrels going on all the time. And yet, it was in these very ordinary parishes with very ordinary men and women that I acquired the rudiments of my present faith. I cannot therefore dismiss the churches as irrelevant or sub-Christian. Despite all that was wrong, and there was plenty wrong by my present standards, the transmission of the faith goes on in these churches. Children and adults come to know God. And is that not important enough? How can I then despise or dismiss the churches as ineffective and unspiritual?

Preaching or sermons as such in church were neither altogether inspiring nor particularly edifying. The preachers were too unlettered and often downright boring. But listening to the reading of the Scriptures in church must have made an impact. By the time I was twelve, I had a personal knowledge of God and a sort of commitment to Christ. In fact I was on talking (prattling?) terms with God, with Jesus Christ, whom I acknowledged as my living Lord and Master as also the true manifestation of God.

Deacon Petros

Deacon Petros, MA, BD, LT, a second cousin of my father's, was one of my childhood heroes. He later became a bishop in our church, as Mookencheryil Pathrose Mar Osthathos.

He was a prominent social worker of those days, working among the so-called Untouchables of Cochin and Travancore. He was a great speaker, always itinerant, self-sacrificing, and lived a very simple life, identifying himself with the living standards of the poor people among whom he worked.

One day when he visited his ancestral home which was very near to ours, I went to see him as a little lad. The first person I met as I entered the house was his eldest brother, Mr. M. P. Varkey, a well-known rationalist-atheist. He was also on a short visit to his ancestral home. “Whom have you come to see, youngster?” he asked me. “If you want to see God, he is in the next room; if you want to see the devil, he is right here.” I was slightly embarrassed by the question,

because he was my uncle and in his sixties. I could not start an argument with him. So I meekly replied that I had come to see Pathrose Semmasen, and moved to the next room.

Deacon Petros received me with affection, and gave me the advice that I should live simply and serve the poor. He also told me that my paternal grandfather had been his Godfather. Obviously his grandmother was my great grandfather's sister or something like that. Anyway it was an inspiring meeting. He must have transmitted some spark to me.

Later, when I came back from my first stint in America, I tried to work with him. Somehow, it did not quite work. My ideas of working with the poor, and of supporting the workers were different from his. His ways were so rigidly set, and he would not change. I sought other paths.

Story of a snakebite

Here is a vignette from memory. I must have been ten. The open drains on both sides of the road in front of our house had flooded, and little finger-sized fish, escaped from the river, darted about in the drains. The harvest from our paddy-field had come in, and Pulaya (one of the sub-castes once called Untouchables, but not untouchable for us Christians, even those days when Hindus practiced untouchability) women, who were tenants of our farmland, were threshing the grain on the house veranda.

I was under strict orders from my parents not to step into the flooded drains. When they were otherwise preoccupied, I stepped out and started trying to catch the little fish with my bare hands, a rather frustrating experience. My neighbour boy across the street, aged nine, was watching my activity with interest, himself forbidden by his parents to step into the water. "There is a big fish right there. I saw it", he told me, pointing to a spot in the drain. I saw the fish or what I thought was the fish, and put out both hands to catch it. I not only missed the "fish" but on taking my hands out of the water, found that my middle finger was bleeding profusely. I had no idea what had happened. I quietly tried to cover my wound with a finger of the other hand, and tried to slink back into the security of the home. One

of the threshing women, who happened to be very fond of me as a child, spotted my bleeding hand, and cried out to mother: "Something has happened to the little master." Mother came running and attended to the wound. My eldest brother went out of the house looking for the "biting fish", and to my surprise and awe, with the aid of a long big knife, began examining some of the cracks and crevices in the open gutter. Out came a big water snake, a full three feet or more long. I suddenly realized what had happened. The snake was drawn by my brother to dry ground. I was surprised that it did not run away or try to attack his attackers. I had the impression that he was saying sorry for having bitten me. He was lying quietly on the ground. Of course my big brother, with the help of others, killed that snake then and there. I was watching, with some sense of regret and confused sorrow, not only at my own plight, but feeling sorry also for the poor snake.

Neighbors began to gather, as the news spread that Varikipilla as I was affectionately known, had been bitten by a snake. I was promptly taken to the snake poison expert, Valappil Varghese Chettan, who lived not too far down the same street. I was carefully examined and the verdict was given by the expert. "It is a poisonous snake that has bitten him, and the two fang-marks are there on his right middle-finger, for everyone to see. But for some strange reason, the snake has bitten without emptying his poison sacs, as if biting a frog or something for food." The *Vishavaidyan* or poison-doctor told my parents that there was no danger of death, but gave us some unguents and medicines to apply to the wound.

We went home, and by that time all sorts of uncles and elders from the community had gathered there and were sitting in a circle, in the center of which I sat on the floor, being administered unguents. Some of the elders, with singular inappropriateness, kept on haranguing and castigating me: "What kind of a big catch were you after? a salmon or a cod? You got what you deserved" and so on. It was painful. I was trying to sort out what had happened, how I was in danger of death, what could have happened if I had died, how my parents would have been sorry if I died. On the one hand I still felt sorry for that snake, which in fact had been rather kind to me, in not

ejecting his venom into me, but had unfortunately been killed. On the other hand, I was trying to escape any blame for all that happened, by thinking that my neighbour boy (Baby was his name) was responsible for the whole thing, for he had pointed out the “fish” to me.

The important thing probably was that I as a very young lad had faced the possibility of death, which I did with some measure of equanimity, confused, but not scared. As a youngster I realized how close death always was, to all of us. Is that not the sort of stuff that philosophers are made of?

Tension Builds

Tension had been building for some time. My father, who taught elementary grades in the local High School, was now senior enough for promotion and transfer. He was posted as Headmaster in some rural Primary School in an outlying village fairly far from home. If the new station was within single-bus distance, father could still stay at home and go to work, though the bus fare had to be paid. The names of the places where my father worked in those days now escape my mind. One that I remember is Malayalam school, Thoosam. I have no idea where that place is today. But some of the places where he had to work took half a day to get to, and he had to cross highly irregular and unreliable ferries. This meant going off on foot very early on Monday and coming home very late on Friday, staying week-days in some thatched hut rented out. The ferry was dangerous in the monsoon season, and there was no way of letting us know that he had safely reached his station. This meant high tension for mother, and we the five sons shared her tension.

Our poverty was also a source of tension for the family. Most of the neighboring families regarded my parents as fortunate, and to some extent envied them. They had five sons, all fairly bright, all prospective earners, and no daughters. In that society, sons were assets and daughters were liabilities. Sons, besides earning money for the families, would bring in a dowry. Daughters, on the other hand, even if they earned money, would benefit only the husband's family, and they would have to be married off with a decent dowry

and would thus diminish the family wealth, which was always held collectively. Human worth was measured of course in economic categories even in those days.

But looking after the needs of a family of seven on my father's peak salary of Rs. 28.00 (about U S \$ 6.00) per month in the 1930's was quite a strain, even without having to worry about marrying off any daughters. The only extra income for our family was a little rice we could harvest twice a year from our half-acre rice paddy, plus a few coconuts every month. As the boys grew up, and the eldest was already in college, the strain became fairly intolerable. We knew what it meant not to have enough to eat, not to afford new clothes, not to splash on hospitality as our neighbors did.

My father had managed somehow to acquire the small house next door to us. Renting it out was supposed to supplement our income. But if I remember right, the rent actually was Rs. 2.50 (50 US cents) a month. And the tenant we landed was a semi-criminal from the Devadasi (temple-prostitute) community. He not only failed to pay the rent, but also mistreated his own wife and children, and abused all of us including mother for being extortionate. There was no way of evicting him, for he simply refused to leave. That added to the tension no end, especially when Father was away in his school during weekdays.

There must have been other sources of tension which our parents spared us from knowing. In the midst of all this, mother remained a paragon of charity and goodwill, always helping those in need to the maximum extent of her capacity. I remember her kindness to beggars, to the sick in the neighborhood, to wayfarers, and the destitute. She was particularly hospitable and kind to poor peasants who came to the market, carrying heavy burdens of hay or vegetables to sell.

The market was a few yards from our house, and the peasants would come to our house, after selling their wares, to cook a rice-brew for themselves. One memory is particularly fresh in my mind, of an unlettered Christian peasant by the name Ethapanos (Stephen). He was in his fifties. With the few rupees he had received by selling his bale of hay, which he had carried on his head five miles from

home, he had bought a new earthenware pot and had boiled a cupful of rice in it, with firewood and hearth lent by mother. When the rice-brew was cooked, in our backyard, before waiting for it to cool down, with the aid of a coconut-shell ladle loaned by mother, he was furiously ladling down the stemming hot brew. Obviously he was frantically hungry. I watched, as a little boy. I was surprised to find that he was consuming the rice straight, without any curry, side-dish or relish. At a suitable interval in the course of his furious gulping, I put him the question. "Brother Ethapanos, how can you eat that rice without any side-dish?" His reply I still remember. "There is enough Kanhi (rice-brew) here to fill my tummy. Why should I need any side-dish? Besides, I was very hungry." His bale of hay had probably brought him two rupees or less, and out of it he had spent quarter of a rupee on that earthenware pot, which he wanted to take home to his wife, and less than one-eighth of a rupee on the rice. The rest of the two rupees was what his family had to live on for many days. That was the plight of the poor in those days: hardworking, abstemious, dignified even when indigent. I admired my mother for helping them without damaging their dignity, despite her own tensions and troubles.

Catastrophe Strikes

The scene is not quite clear in my mind. It must have been 1935, and I should then be 13. My mother was in bed with a high fever. Suddenly she got up with a great surge of energy, went out of the house, opened the gate, and was talking away quite loudly to the passers by. What she was saying made no sense. I watched in consternation. I could not grasp what had happened. Only after people had forcibly brought her inside the house, did it dawn on me that my most beloved mother had gone out of her mind. She had become mentally ill, manic-depressive, schizophrenic, insane.

I shall spare myself the pain of describing all my mother's actions in detail. Nor do I want to dwell on the incapacity of my father and the five sons to cope with the situation. All kinds of quacks and physicians (mainly Ayurvedic) were consulted, but to no avail. In her manic phase, she was virtually impossible to control, and was often violent. Quite frequently she would disappear from the house, wander

over long distances, and after several days, would return home, distraught and worn out. We never found out how she managed for food on these long wanderings. We supposed that she visited her brothers and other relatives because stories were carried to us from them. Sometimes when she came back, her clothes would be so dirty, giving us the impression that she had slept on the road. Father sometimes beat her up, while we sons watched helplessly or pleaded or struggled to stop him.

All of us five sons loved her deeply, and this was hard for all of us to take. Home life was completely disrupted. We had no domestic servants, and quite often we boys did some minimal cooking, or went without food altogether. My father, a man noted for his integrity and independence, suddenly went sour and sullen, sulky and petulant. Joy had gone from the home and gloom had descended.

There were two things that irked me no end: one was the violence, and the other the social opprobrium.

Father was cruel when he lost his temper at mother's tantrums. He would beat her up, with the bare hand or with a stick. Mother just took the beatings in her stride, only becoming more and more abusive. And we sons, who loved them both, had to watch this, with mounting pain and frustration. One saw no way out of the suffering. Even today, when I think of it, shudders run up and down my body.

The social opprobrium was even worse for a sensitive teenager. Some days, especially if father were not at home, mother would go and stand on the road side verandah to the south of our house, and would stand there, doing all kinds of pranks and talking all kinds of nonsense particularly when the road on the south of our house was full of children going to school. They were my classmates and schoolmates, and I was filled with shame that they watched my mother in this condition.

One memory is particularly poignant. I was preparing for my secondary school public examinations in 1937. Mother had been ill for some two years now. She was in a particularly violent phase, the family decided to empty the kitchen and lock her up in the kitchen room. Mother was protesting loudly, and asking us to open the door

and let her out. I felt sorry for mother, but had to stay in solidarity with the family decision. I was weeping profusely. The public examinations had started, and I had to do my preparations sitting on the door sill of the kitchen where my mother had been locked up. I was weeping all the while, just getting up in time to be at the examination hall before the exam started. Often I had no breakfast, for there was no one to prepare it. We often starved, for no one was in a mood to cook.

My eldest brother, Paulos, who had managed to graduate with a BA degree from Madras university, decided to escape from it all by going and joining the British Indian Navy as a petty officer. My just elder brother, Cherian, who had only finished High School and some training in typing and shorthand, was working in a small firm called the Christian company, located in St. Mary's Church House, Ernakulam. His salary was a pittance, Rs. 10 per month if I remember right.

Cherian could stay in the Church House, and get his food from a nearby restaurant. So I was left at home as the eldest of the three remaining sons, looking after my two school-going younger brothers in my own clumsy way. The misery was intolerable. No one to comfort us. One suffered in abject loneliness. My journalistic sorties to official functions and public meetings provided only temporary escape.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

After leaving school, I read voraciously. First it was all detective fiction. When I could get hold of books, I read also serious English literature. One such book was R. L. Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. I was moved and fascinated by the book. It was about a scholar-scientist who was a split personality, a good man (Dr. Jekyll) who could occasionally and without warning turn into a monster (Mr. Hyde) and go out and do all sorts of wicked things like a sort of Frankenstein.

The book must have spoken subconsciously to a trait in my own character. There was quite a bit of goodness in me, but I knew that a lot of sheer wickedness was lurking underneath all the time. Ambition could not always be distinguished from love of domination and power,

from the desire for adulation and flattery. Yearning for love and affection often took the form of seeking glory and honour. I became addicted to praise and admiration, which was often forthcoming for a juvenile writer. I loved to see my name in print, in signed articles I wrote as a youngster. It delighted me to see my own reporting published in the newspaper and I often showed it to my friends. I loved to be praised, but I was afraid to be loved, mainly for fear that I could not take it when the love would be withdrawn. I was once the object of great love and affection from my mother, but its apparent withdrawal as a result of her illness was a trauma that I never got over. My personality was unmistakably dual and unintegrated.

Whether as a form of catharsis or not, I decided to translate *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* into Malayalam. I produced a hundred page manuscript, but did not seek a publisher. I kept it with me for a long time, with my published texts. One fine day, after having been absent from home for years on jobs outside, I discovered that my father had disposed it all off as waste paper. I was stricken with grief.

Exploits of an Under-age Reporter

My dramatic style of reporting once drew me into an imbroglio. It was a fairly sensational capture of a notorious con man called Vayalaran Shouri. Shouri was handsome, good looking, well dressed when necessary, and imposing in stature. He had many striking stories to his credit, especially in dodging the police. Once they found out that he was living by himself in a tiny islet in our Cochin backwaters, in a little hut that he had put up for himself. He was the sole resident of that islet, not more than 50 feet in diameter.

A posse of Cochin Police, five or six in number, got into a crude canoe and landed on his island one fine morning. They encircled the small hut, and shouted to Shouri, who was inside the hut but could not be seen: "Shouri, you are caught. Be good enough to come out and get arrested."

"Oh my masters!" responded Shouri from inside the hut. "Give me a minute. I am just having my morning Kanhi (rice-brew). I did not have a thing to eat yesterday. Let me just finish my breakfast, and I will come out."

“Take your time, Shourie,” the Police Officer shouted back into the hut. “But, don’t try any of your tricks. You haven’t got a chance. You are completely surrounded.”

“Okay, it won’t be a minute,” Shourie said from inside, in a plaintive tone.

Shourie did come out, in about a minute. But his defiance surprised the Police and took them aback, for they were getting ready for a meek surrender on the part of Shourie, and on their part a gentle operation of handcuffing him quietly. As Shourie came out of the hut, furious looking and menacing with a nine-inch blade sharp dagger in his hand. “I will chop off your heads like this”, said Shourie, chopping off a good one-inch segment of his own left middle finger.

The little piece of blood-dripping flesh flying off Shourie’s knife into the backwaters dazed and bewildered the policemen. In that half-minute when the police stood aghast, Shourie jumped into the waters and began swimming and diving at top speed. The policemen in their neat uniforms did not want to jump into the water, and so went and got into their little canoe, and began rowing furiously in the direction that Shourie seemed to have taken. Unexpectedly, Shourie came up from under the water behind them and overthrew the boat. The policemen, none of them great swimmers, were frantically trying to stay afloat and save their own lives, while Shourie quietly escaped.

The story was common knowledge in the Cochin area because the participating policemen themselves had narrated it to their friends. The press had published only a short account of Shourie’s escape, since they did not want to humiliate the police by telling the story of their ineptitude and incompetence. Shourie had become a legendary figure for the public.

So when Shourie was finally captured, and that too by a woman, it was top news. I got the story mostly from my Press colleagues and other friends. If it were today, I would have had to do much more investigation before reporting it as I did in the *Malabar Mail*. The prestigious and high-circulation daily *Malayala Manorama* picked it up from the *Malabar Mail* and splashed it on the front page with a double-column caption: *Penpillai Simham*. An equivalent in English

would be something like *A Lioness Springs*. The story I told, within the limits of my present memory, can be summarized as follows:

A rubber grower in our neighboring hill country in the state of Travancore had gone to Kottayam to sell his latex rubber, and was returning home, rather late in the day, with the money in his briefcase. As he was walking home, a considerable distance from the bus stop, an imposing and well-dressed pedestrian fell in with him and started walking in the same direction. They started a conversation and the rubber planter was soon charmed and impressed. Nearing his home, he asked the stranger his name and where he was from. And Shourie (that was who the stranger was) gave a convincing name and locality of origin. Shourie explained that he was on his way to visit a friend in a neighboring town, but had got delayed visiting all kinds of friends en route. He had missed the last bus to the town where he was going. The planter invited the stranger to stay at his home and resume his journey in the morning. Shourie accepted after the customary and polite initial "I don't want to bother you."

So they got to the planter's rather sumptuous home, and after a bath, was having supper. At that moment a messenger came with the information that a close relative had died. The planter was expected to go back with the messenger to the house of mourning. He fixed a bed for his guest on the outer verandah of his house, and leaving his wife more or less alone in the house with some housemaids, had to go on his way to the house of mourning, promising to return as early the next day as he could.

Shourie went to bed on the verandah, and the doors of the house were closed from inside. In the small hours of the morning, he got up and made quite a noise to the effect that he had been bitten by a snake. As the unsuspecting lady of the house opened the doors to see what had happened, Shourie jumped inside the house, and wielding his frightening dagger, told the lady, "Bring me the key to the cellar door where the money is kept, or I will kill you." The lady quietly went into her bedroom, followed by Shourie, and came out with the key to open the cellar or strong room of the house. Quietly, without saying a word, she unlocked the cellar door and let Shourie go in. As

soon as Shourie had entered, she locked the door and made him prisoner. Shourie kept shouting, but she quietly went out of the house at that unseemly hour to call for help. A Pulaya (once called Untouchable) who lived in a hut in their compound and was loyal to the family, agreed to overpower Shourie provided the Planter's family would undertake responsibility if something happened to the Pulaya. Meanwhile others had gathered to help the Pulaya, and the police had been sent for. There were no telephones those days. By the time the police arrived, the cellar had been unlocked; Shourie had been overpowered and bound with ropes.

So much for the story as I had reported it, based on fairly reliable testimony. It was sensational news for our region, for everyone had heard about Shourie and his exploits. I was not smart enough to wonder why other reporters did not pick up the story on their own. I had not reported the details of the earlier raid by the Police of my own state of Cochin and their failure. I had simply reported the story of the capture, not by Police, but by an ordinary poor peasant and a smart Christian woman. This capture had taken place in my neighboring state ruled by the Maharajah of Travancore, where the Police was notoriously corrupt. Travancore was ruled de facto by the Prime Minister or "Dewan" of the state, the scholarly Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer, who was bent on destroying the economic and political power of the Christian Community which formed 40% of the population of that state. To that end he had used some of the methods that Hitler was using against the Jews in Germany. The police was his main instrument.

After reporting the incident of Shourie's capture I should have followed it up. I did not, mostly because I did not have the resources to do the investigating job. It was too dangerous for a teenage reporter to meddle with the Travancore police. If I had investigated, I would have found out that the Police had made him produce all his previous stolen goods, sharing the booty among themselves (there was a lot of gold jewels, I heard) and let him go free without any record of his capture.

I found out soon that I was in trouble. First it was a Criminal

Intelligence Department inspector from Travancore who came to question me about the source of my information. He must have been amused by my boyish looks, and was rather kind in his questioning. I asked him about the source of his information that I was the reporter. When he told me that it was the editorial staff of my paper, I told him they had no business to tell him, but did not deny that I was the reporter. First he asked me for a written statement that I had no basis for my report. When I refused that, he told me I did not have to give him anything in writing, but merely tell him the source of my information in Travancore state, so that he could get a denial from that person. I told him that that was not journalistic ethics.

Up to that point he was polite and so was I. We were sitting in a friend's store and talking very privately. The inspector now changed his tone and asked me whether I understood that the Travancore government could take legal action against me. I told him that I was a citizen of Cochin state, and owed nothing to the Travancore state. He asked me, "How old are you?" He suspected that I was not old enough to be prosecuted as an adult. I did not tell him that I was only sixteen. Instead, I asked, with a smile on my lips, but rather rudely, "What! Do you want to negotiate a marriage arrangement for me?" In our society of arranged marriages, middle men did the negotiating. He said simply, "You will hear again from the Police on this matter." That concluded our conversation.

I did hear again, soon after. This time it was a big burly Police Officer from Travancore, Anayadi (elephant-footed) Padmanabhan Pillai, a notorious Assistant Superintendent of Police. He came through official channels. It was our local Police Sub Inspector of Tripunithura, N. R. Subrahmania Iyer, who sent a constable to my home to call me to the local Police Station. I promptly went. I had never been to a police station before. Though a bit anxious, I was determined within myself not to be intimidated.

Anayadi was sitting with our SI in the latter's office. "My goodness! So young! You must be the same age as my grandson. Just answer my questions, and there won't be any trouble." That was his greeting. "Who gave you this information about the capture of Shourie? We

have absolutely no record of any such arrest. We do not even know where Shourie is now. Just give me the name of your informant, and I shall save you from trouble.” He was friendly and very paternal.

“I am sorry Sir,” I replied, “I cannot give you that information.” He coaxed me in his grandfatherly way, and told me that he was giving me wise advice and that I should not hold back the information from the Police. I persisted in my refusal, and our local Sub-Inspector, who knew me well as a journalist, joined in; “Give him the information; that is best for you.” As I continued to refuse, the SI said to me, “Do you know that I can arrest you and pack you off to Travancore?”

Cochin was a much less corrupt Princely State than Travancore. Our police could of course beat me up, but that was a risk I was prepared to take, trusting in God. So I answered, fairly boldly but not without fear: “Mr. N. R. Subrahmania Iyer, the laws of our state do not give you the power to do so. There is no case against me, and you cannot arrest me.”

The two police officers looked at each other for a moment. It was Iyer who said to me, “You may go, Mr. Verghese.”

That was the end of the story. I never heard from the Police again, though I was afraid for quite some time that there would be a sequel. Nothing happened.

A Teenager’s Political Life

In 1937 and 38, India’s Freedom Movement was just gaining momentum. Generally speaking, Christians were not very enthusiastic about it. The majority among them thought that British imperial rule would be preferable to self-rule. After all, the Colonial Masters were also Christians! I was not persuaded about this point of view. Especially in the princely states of Cochin and Travancore, we were ruled by Maharajahs and not directly by the British. We saw very few Britishers. They were not part of our social life.

Our own Maharajahs of Cochin, usually in their eighties, were very benign and God-fearing. The throne was given always to the eldest male member of a royal family of some 600 members. So he was usually eighty by the time he inherited the throne, and did not live

very long after that. Our own home was on Hill Palace Road, leading to the Maharajah's Palace, about a mile away. We saw him passing in front of our house very often, without ostentation or fanfare, except on festival days. As school children, we would go to the palace once a year, and we would be treated to sweets. Younger members of the royal family were my classmates, though they were forbidden to mingle with us socially. Some of the Maharajahs were great scholars, especially in Sanskrit, while others were quite simple-minded and the butt of many jokes.

One of the jokes went like this. As a man of eighty he was the Chief Guest at a Football (Soccer) Match. That was his first exposure to the game. After watching 22 people fighting for the ball, he asked his minister: "Why all this scrambling and scuffling for one ball? Why don't you give them two dozen balls, so that each can have one?"

With such darling dodos ruling us, we did not feel the weight of British imperial rule. There was oppression and exploitation in society, many inequalities and injustices, but I was not very much worked up about these in those days.

Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru were great leaders for us, but we saw so little of them. I have heard Nehru once in my youth, and he impressed me with what he said and how he said it. Gandhi once came to our hometown and I was impressed with his simplicity and that toothless smile of his. But one of our people did him a dirty trick. Gandhi was in the habit of auctioning off everything that was given to him, and giving the proceeds to some charitable fund. In my hometown, he was auctioning off the gilt framed address of welcome presented to him. The one who bid highest was one Krishnankutty, who was a shady character. I think his bid was over Rs. 40, a considerable sum in those days. Only later I discovered that he was a dealer in forged currency notes, that he had offered Gandhi a forged hundred-rupee note and got a good 60 Rupees in change as well as the framed address!

But the local or state politics was more interesting to me as a teenager. I began to understand the need for removing untouchability, for which Gandhi also campaigned. I saw the need for removing

social and economic inequalities as time went on. The political meetings I covered as a reporter helped the process of my conscientisation.

One day I was covering a large public meeting addressed by Sahodaran Ayyappan, one of our great social reformers from the backward Eazhava community. I was impressed by his demands for social reform, and during discussion time, I asked him the question, rather unexpected from the press Gallery where I sat: “Why is it that you leaders do not let someone like me, who is only 16, join the political party?” His answer was picturesque and still rings in my ears: “We do not believe in plucking out the seedlings (of rice) from the field and throwing it to the cattle.” So I knew where I stood. I was only a seedling.

But I did become politically active, whenever they would let me. I took part in the election campaign for the Congress candidate from my constituency for the Cochin Legislative Council. My reporting was also often politically significant. But overall, my political sensitivities were hardly developed until much later. I was elected Honorary Secretary of the newly created Public Library and Reading Room in my hometown at the age of 17, if I remember right. That was a token of adult confidence in a youngster, to which I readily responded by doing my best to set it up, promote it and run it. I got a lot of my reading done in that library.

We started this chapter with a discussion on the meaning of suffering. With all my respect for Buddhism, I do not see the problem of suffering quite in the Buddhist way. I am more intrigued with the Greek and Christian ways of understanding and dealing with suffering.

Among the Greeks, the Stoics stand out in dealing with suffering. *Apatheia*, which certainly did not mean apathy, was their great virtue. Literally, *apatheia* should be translated as ‘non-suffering.’ For them, it was a synonym for happiness (*eudaimonia*) or freedom (*eleutheria*). *Apatheia*, somewhat more accurately translated as ‘impassibility’, was first applied by Aristotle to things as incapable of any experience or suffering. The Stoics applied it to God. *Apatheia* was an attribute of God. God cannot suffer. He is impassible, beyond suffering. The ideal for humanity was the same, to be beyond or

unaffected by suffering. The impassibility of God became the ethical norm for the Stoics.

The Stoics used *apatheia* to denote freedom from all feeling, being unaffected by all that happens, a divine impassiveness, or equanimity in the face of all external circumstances. The principle, more clearly enunciated by the last of the great Stoics, the ex-slave-philosopher Epictetus (ca 55-ca 135), already influenced by Christianity, was that in order to be truly happy, a human being should make oneself free from the vicissitudes of fate or fortune, from responsiveness to or affectability by, pain or pleasure. Our happiness should not depend on things we cannot control or have power over. It should depend entirely on one's own self and one's own will. Suffering would then have no power over us. That is freedom, that is happiness; that seems also, to some extent, to provide the basis for the post-modern notion of autonomy.

India's late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi expressed it once in this contemporary way, presenting equanimity with *nishkamakarma* (right action without desire for the fruit of the action) as the quintessence of Indian wisdom: "Unflappability is the better part of valor." That was indeed clever, whether it is the quintessence of Indian wisdom or not. We must come to that later.

Freud, in his *Civilization and Its Discontents*, gave us the rather simplistic classification of suffering into three kinds: a) that which is caused by the superior power of nature, e.g., floods, earthquakes, droughts, etc.; (b) that which is caused by the decay and eventual death of our bodies, e.g. disease; and (c) what is caused by the shortcomings of our social relations and institutions. The first two he thought were insurmountable, though we would say today that a great deal of it can be prevented or avoided. For the third, he offered the remedy of a more rational, non-neurotic approach to all questions, and the eventual elimination of the "illusion" of religion. To me this seems too simplistic and adolescent an approach, not even worth discussing.

We can indeed distinguish between suffering voluntarily chosen, such as in asceticism, and in a great deal of parental affection, and in

personal sacrifice for the sake of others; suffering imposed by other human beings either by mistake or by intention or even because of ignorance; suffering caused by what previous generations have done to make our inherited physical and social environment what it is; suffering due to lack and want, including lack of love and care; suffering induced by compassion for the suffering of others; suffering brought on by one's own folly and unwisdom; suffering caused by accidents, natural or otherwise; suffering that arises from one's station in life; suffering caused by the stress and strain of present living; suffering as anxiety, boredom and persistent sense of guilt; suffering due to the structures of present injustice, and so on.

What the Christian tradition has taught me is not to ask for the cause of individual suffering, or to resolve philosophically the problem of unmerited suffering. My task is to use suffering that comes my way, for the exercise of self-discipline and compassion. I do not know why we have to suffer, but I know that where there has been no suffering there is no development of character. I know that compassion is learned and taught by entering into the suffering of others and by letting others share one's own suffering, to a certain extent. Suffering seems to be Love's way, at least in this world.

Suffering does not open the door by itself. The key has to be turned; suffering has to be transmuted by love. Hate and despair can turn it into poison. I am grateful to God that however close I came to despair in my suffering-filled adolescence, I did not give up. My little faith helped me to cling on in hope.

Suffering is the key to the mystery of existence in this world. That is why God himself, supposedly free from all suffering, decided to come and partake of it Himself. Thereby lies the Grand Mystery. God suffers, in Christ, in us, even today.

CHAPTER III

FROM INDIA TO ETHIOPIA

THE UNMAPPABLE WAYS OF GOD

Two Heroes

During my teens, I had developed extra admiration for two heroic world figures. What was common to them was their determined resistance to insolent might. Signor Benito Mussolini and Herr Adolf Hitler personified that Fascist might they both resisted. The two heroic resisters were Emperor Haile Sellassie of Ethiopia and Pastor Martin Niemoeller of Germany. In fact I wrote feature articles about both the resisters during the days of my teen-age journalism. By a strange coincidence, I came to know both of them rather intimately and personally in later life.

Winston Churchill also resisted Hitler, but he was no hero for me. For me as a youngster, the British Prime Minister represented great pluck and courage, but more bluff and rhetoric, and not much concern for justice or equity. After all, Churchill did declare that he had not become Prime Minister of England to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire over which the sun never set. I was one among millions who sincerely and passionately desired the liquidation of that empire, so that my people could be free from the imperial yoke.

I will keep the Niemoeller story for a subsequent section. The Haile Sellassie story is a longer one, but let me narrate a few of the events leading up to my double Ethiopian sojourn, which began in 1947, the very year of our national independence in India.

Getting Away from Home

In 1940, when I was 18, someone kindly offered me a job, and I accepted, mostly to get away from the miseries of home. It was in Mattancheri, Cochin, some 12 Kilometers away from home. I became a clerk in a small Shipping and Transport firm, the Cochin Transport Company. There were two other office staff, besides the managing Director and me. The salary was about Rs. 15 a month. I could sleep in the office, and eat in a nearby restaurant. Two simple meals a day for a whole month cost only about Rs. 6.00 (US \$ 1.30) those days.

Two or three simple memories stand out from those days. Everybody in the office belonged to the same Syrian Christian community, and life was fairly congenial. But there were two of my neighbors who did not. One was a youngster, Balakrishna pillai, a Hindu, a couple of years senior to me. He worked (and lived) in the offices next to ours, in the same building. His philosophy of life was that youth was there to be enjoyed. He was so enthusiastic about it that he could not understand my home-bred reluctance to seek forbidden pleasures like wine and women, both easily accessible in the city. It was half courtesy and half curiosity that let me go out with him one night into some of the more lurid quarters of that city. That was enough. It left some painful memories, which have kept me from that kind of pleasure-seeking ever after.

The Man Who lived for Money

The other neighbor, who also lived and worked next door to us in the same building, was a *Satta* trader, one who bought and sold shares by telephone. I was told he was very rich, but he lived and worked in one room, with a chair, a narrow bed, a telephone, and a large safe in which he kept his documents and money. I never got to know him, because he was always at his telephone, morning till night. He could think and talk only about stocks and shares and about money. He seemed to have no family, no social life, no friends. He lived for money.

One morning we were in for a surprise. We were told that he had died during the night. It was a heart attack. He had gotten up from his bed, gone to his safe, and had collapsed with his hand still on the handle of the safe. The scene made a deep impression on me. We talked about it a lot in the office, but alone, I pondered about the meaning of the event. I suppose these small events do shape one's outlook on life. Perhaps not through conscious cogitations and rational conclusions, but through insights of an impressionable age, lingering long, hidden in the sub-conscious.

Appearing for a Competitive Examination

I worked in the Cochin Transport Company for about a year and a half or two. During this period, in 1941, when I was nineteen, I

decided to appear for a competitive examination for recruitment to the clerical cadre of the Indian posts and Telegraphs Department. There were some 300 candidates competing for a total of a dozen vacancies in the states of Cochin and Travancore. Eighty percent of the competing candidates, I understood, were university graduates, while I had only a high school education.

I had hardly hoped to be selected. I remember that I had answered some of the questions in the examination with an air of breeziness. Asked to write short notes on the Seven pagodas, I could not for the life of me remember anything I had heard or read about pagodas. Neither did I know what they were. Yet I gave the answer: "The Seven pagodas could hardly be in America, in Europe or in Australia. Nor do they sound African. So they must be in Asia."

Asked for similar short notes on the Atlantic Charter, which had been signed a few months before the competitive examination in 1941 (between Roosevelt and Churchill, before America had joined the war, signed during a conference aboard war-ships in the North Atlantic), I had insolently written: "The Atlantic Charter deserves to be submerged where it arose, i.e., in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean."

Not that I understood the Atlantic Charter and its purpose at that time. What I wrote was the result of intuition rather than insight. Today I know that it was a compromise on Churchill's part intended to draw the Americans into the War effort, which the Allies were on the brink of losing, Roosevelt was resisting, for he thought that the British and the French were simply waging war to protect their own empires against the Germans and the Japanese. Until Pearl Harbour in December 1941, Roosevelt still thought that America's economic interest was best served by profiting from the manufacture and sale of arms to the Allies while staying away from any direct participation in the war. The weapons industry in America had boomed and was boosting the American economy in an unprecedented manner.

Britain and the USA signed the Atlantic Charter on August 14, 1941, Roosevelt had made Churchill reluctantly acquiesce in the lofty but empty statements in the charter about the right of people to choose their own government and all that. In India, Mahatma Gandhi had

opposed the war as in principle wrong, and had been arrested by our British masters. We thought the weaker the British, the greater the chance of their letting us go free. With America joining up with the British, our chances would be fewer, we reckoned. Besides, the rhetoric of the Atlantic Charter was merely a revival of Woodrow Wilson's First World War ideology of justifying the war in the name of defending freedom and democracy. Self-determination for all peoples, yes, but not for the British Colonies. I saw only part of that hypocrisy at that time.

Postal Employee

Anyway, I qualified in the competitive examination despite my insolence. I joined the Post and Telegraph department of our colonial government. My salary suddenly rose from Rs. 15 to Rs. 39 (less than US \$ 9.00) per month! After an initial period of working at the Head Post Office in Cochin, I was sent to Madras for training in Morse telegraphic signalling. Our institute was in Kodambakkam, a district of Madras city, and I lived with other trainees in a nearby lodge. This was my first contact with Tamil and Telugu and Kannada friends, all rather bright youngsters. They were good company.

Besides learning Telegraphy, on my own I also acquired a reading and writing knowledge of Tamil, the local language of Madras with the help of some of my obliging friends. Tamil and Malayalam were kindred languages of the so called Dravidian family, except that Malayalam was more sanskritized than Tamil.

Many of the Tamil ways were interesting to me. I even learned to like Tamil food, without any difficulty, particularly since I had not been spoiled in my eating habits at home. I especially delighted in the idea of the milkman bringing his cow to our home, and milking it directly into our vessel, so that we could drink it with its natural, warmth. Madras was a much bigger city than Cochin, but beyond a few sightseeing trips with friends, I made no adventurous sorties into the city life.

The Quit India Movement

One lasting memory is of the Quit India Movement in 1942. The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour in December 1941, and there was

constant danger that India would be attacked too. Indian loyalty to the British, in the event of such Japanese invasion, could not be taken for granted. Churchill sent us his special envoy, Sir Stafford Cripps, a Socialist and a friend of Nehru and others, with the appeasing offer of "Full Dominion Status" for India within the British Empire. We in India, on the other hand, were pledged to "Poorna Swaraj" or total independence. Cripps was not authorized to negotiate, but only to make a pre-determined offer of promotion from colony to dominion. The offer was turned down.

One of the British arguments was that it would be perilous for India to seek to be independent so long as the Japanese threat was there, and that we should stay within the British umbrella of protection. Through Mahatma Gandhi, India replied in effect "You, John Bull, just quit India. We will deal with the Japanese as Independent India, using our own non-violent means. Your presence on our soil is a provocation to the Japanese." John Bull refused to quit, and went on to put some 60,000 Indians in prison. They even strafed some of our cities by using bombers to intimidate our people and suppress the revolt.

We were right about the Atlantic charter. The Americans, joining the Allied war effort in 1942, gave the British the breathing space in which to handle the revolt in India. And they handled it quite brutally and efficiently.

American warplanes were taking off from Bombay and Calcutta for strikes against the Japanese, while the British were shooting down rebel Indians.

As the Quit India Movement erupted, I was in Madras. My patriotism was properly kindled and I joined groups of protesting University students in Madras to shout with gusto: "John Bull, Quit India, Inquilab Sindabad" (Urdu for Long Live the Revolution). I even joined college students who were pulling down alarm chains on local trains in order to disrupt traffic. Of course, I did not myself pull the chains, but identifying oneself with those who did was enough. It was exhilarating, but doubly dangerous, because we were supposed to be "most obedient servants" of the British government.

I heard later that the Japanese did drop a token bomb near Madras, not in the city, but in the open countryside. Maybe their intention was only to show the British that they could bomb India if they chose to do so. Anyway I hazily remember reading in one of our newspapers that there was a bomb that fell and that it killed one chicken, but no humans! May be it was a trick of a British bomber; who knows?

Subhash Chandra Bose - Only a demi-Hero

This was the time when one of our heroic and gifted national leaders, Subhash Chandra Bose (President of the Indian National Congress in 1938), who had in 1940 broken with Gandhi and Nehru, started organizing the Indian National Army, with the support of the Japanese and the Germans, to invade India and to liberate it from the British. This volunteer army was composed of Indians caught by the war in Germany, British Indian prisoners of war released, precisely for this purpose, by the Japanese, Indian volunteers from Malaysia, Singapore and Burma and so on. It was an army of some 50,000, trained by Bose, equipped with Japanese and German help.

Bose proclaimed an Independent Indian Government in Exile in October 1943, and invaded India in the North- East (around Imphal), from Burma (Myanmar). Bereft of promised Japanese air support, the Indian National Army was quickly defeated and put to rout by the British Indian Army. Bose simply disappeared, and has not been seen since. They say he died after an air crash in a Japanese hospital in Taiwan.

That was fifty years ago. My own feelings towards this whole phenomenon were quite ambivalent. Mahatma Gandhi called Bose “a patriot of patriots”, and for me, he well deserved that title. He was self-denying, brave and forthright in defying the British might, and this I admired. He had qualified in Cambridge for the prestigious Indian Civil Service Examination, but he had torn up the certificate in public, to demonstrate his contempt for the Imperial system. This too thrilled me. But two things I could not approve - his compromise of principle in seeking the support of Nazi Germany for the liberation of India, and his foolhardiness in the invasion of India foredoomed to failure. Bose had the power, if only he were a better strategist, to

create a different kind of independent India, with a little more dignity and self-respect than we now seem to have.

On the other hand, Mahatma Gandhi was a spiritually much more attractive figure, truly Indian and truly universal, the best specimen of humanity our world has produced in the last couple of centuries. Bose, like Nehru, was a Cambridge trained Western Liberal, only more radical in his revolutionary methods. Gandhi embodied uncompromising integrity with genuine love and compassion for all. He was closer to the poor and suffering masses of India, identified with them in utter simplicity, deeply religious, and politically astute all the same.

The other Indian I admired was Rabindranath Tagore. His *Gitanjali*, *Post Office*, *Fruit-gathering* and other poems touched my heart deeply. Tagore had a feeling for the mystery of life; he was no Western Liberal; he was a poet of the Unseen, a bard of true Beauty and a hierophant of the Holy. My post office colleague and friend Varghese Mathew, whom we affectionately called *Chinthan* (Thinker), not only frequently read Tagore to me, but even recited long Tagore passages from memory. Tagore, though ardent in this own way for India's freedom, kept some distance from both Gandhi and Nehru, and did not occupy the center of India's freedom struggle. I have often thought that Gandhi, Tagore and Nehru together constituted the triptych icon of independent India as it emerged in 1947.

Trade Union Secretary

I was soon elected Associate Secretary of the Indian post and Telegraph Union for the states of Travancore and Cochin. It thus fell to me to help organize the first nation-wide post and Telegraph workers' strike against the British within the limits of our two states. Many of our more reasonable demands were met by the colonial authorities, and the strike was called off at the last moment to avoid inconvenience to the general public.

When I resigned my post office job in 1947 and left for Ethiopia, the Indian Trade Union Journal published my picture and an encomium.

Drifting Rudderless

In 1947, I was working in Ernakulam. I could even afford to rent a house and engage a servant. My youngest brother, Abraham, was staying with me and going to College, doing his B.com. My eldest brother, Paulose, was in the British Indian Navy, stationed in Bombay. His young and childless wife was also staying with us in Ernakulam, since the situation at our home in Tripunithura was still intolerably bad.

I was popular and moderately happy, but basically dissatisfied with the kind of life I was living. I went to church regularly and without fail. The conversation with God continued through these years. I was always making excuses to God for the way I was living, a life not outrageously evil or sinful, but nonetheless fairly pointless: trivial pursuits, trackless wandering, unpurposeful living. And no romance worth talking about. No one had come around to catch my fancy that much.

Death of a Friend - A Major Turning Point

One day I had the news about the sudden death of a middle aged neighbor and friend, Dr. Puthooran. He was a successful ophthalmologist, in apparently good health and a vigorous sports man. He had died of heart failure, at the entrance gate of his tennis club, with racket in hand. I was both sad and shocked, pensive about the fleeting character of life. I had a long conversation with God that night in the solitude of my bedroom.

“Yes, my Lord, I know that I can also die like that. I should change my life and make it bear better fruit. You know I want to. But you also know my friends. They will laugh at me if I become overly pious overnight. I cannot stand that. So long as I live in this society, I dare not repent or change. But I promise you, put me in a brand new environment, and I shall be a different person, totally committed to your obedience, totally dedicated. I promise.”

I knew deep down inside me that the promise was only half serious. And I was half sure that God would not take me up on my promise. There was an off chance though that He might, since I was half serious. He was soon to show me that He would.

The next day was Puthooran's funeral. It was a simple traditional Orthodox funeral ceremony, begun early in the day and finished by 10 a.m. I was on telegraph duty on the 2 pm to 9 pm shift. After the funeral I was sitting in the radio store of a common friend of Dr. Puthooran and myself, Mr. Mathew Choolakkal. We reminisced a lot about our late friend. Suddenly Mathew said, "I have a quick trip to make to Alwaye (a town 12 miles away). I am driving. Do you care to come along? I will bring you back in time for the afternoon shift." I was glad to have a diversion after the funeral, and readily agreed.

At that point a white man walked into the shop, accompanied by a white-uniformed staff person from the neighboring Indian Airlines Office. The latter introduced the foreigner to us, and said: "He wants to go to Alwaye. Can you help him find the right bus to get there?" "We were just at the point of driving there," my friend responded; "You can come along, if you do not mind the small car."

He had been introduced as Dr. Robert N. Thompson, a Canadian, coming from Ethiopia. I was keen to find out more about Ethiopia and about Emperor Haile Sellassie. We chatted for a while, and then started on the half-hour car journey. I continued to prod him with all kinds of questions about Ethiopia.

In ten minutes we had crossed the border between Cochin and Travancore. Alwaye was in Travancore. Suddenly we stopped. There had been a road accident. A Travancore military truck had nearly collided with a bullock cart at the entrance to a bridge. In dodging the bullock cart, the truck had fallen off the road into a field some twenty feet below. Several of the soldiers standing in the truck had been thrown off the vehicle and were lying scattered on the field. One was bleeding profusely from a head wound. A small crowd had gathered, but no one was helping them.

"Why is no one doing anything? That man will die if he does not get first aid," said Thompson.

"Nobody wants to get involved with the Travancore militia or police," replied Mathew.

"I am jumping down to see what I can do," Said Thompson.

“I am coming with you,” I responded, and we both jumped out. We got some of the bystanders to get some water and rags, and we washed and bound up the wounds. Only later, I found out that Thompson had been a Chiropractor. Meanwhile Mathew had gone ahead in his car and soon brought an ambulance from the nearest hospital. The whole thing took only fifteen or twenty minutes, but a bond had formed between Thompson and me.

We proceeded on our journey. Thompson told us that his real destination was Kottayam, and that he was going to Alwaye only to catch a bus to Kottayam, to see Bishop C. K. Jacob of the Anglican Church. We took Thompson to the Bus station in Alwaye. Mathew asked me to stay with Thompson to help him with the ticket and all that, while he went and did his business in Alwaye. He came back very shortly, and I got in to the car to get back to Ernakulam for my work in the Telegraph office. Thompson said good-bye to Mathew at the wheel, and came around to say good-bye to me.

I was already seated in the car. He held my hand and said, “I have been impressed by you. I have come to India to recruit teachers for Ethiopian schools. The advertisement will be in the papers this week, and if any of your friends apply with a recommendation from you, I shall give them special consideration.”

Many things must have gone through my mind in a flash, including my half-hearted promise to God, only the previous night, to begin a new life if given a new setting. There was not much time for slow reflection, but the words jumped out of my mouth: “I do not know about any friends I can commend to you, but I am willing to come myself and teach in Ethiopia.”

“Stop kidding and get back to your work without getting late,” said Thompson.

“I am not kidding,” I responded, “I mean what I said.”

“Prove it by coming out of the car,” said Thompson.

I promptly got out with a look at Mathew, asking him to wait. There was no place in the bus station where we could conveniently sit and talk. We sat together on a bench in the ticket office.

"I see that you speak good English. Can you also read and write?" he asked, taking out his newspaper and handing me his pen. "Write your name and address on it," he said to me. When I had done that, he asked me to write some other sentence in English on the same newspaper! I felt slightly humiliated, wondering why he did not give me a harder test.

"I will give you an application form. Fill it up and send it to this address in Madras. We may call you for an interview. I have an Ethiopian colleague, waiting for me in Madras. I cannot decide anything on my own."

So we parted. Everything went according to schedule. I did not consult anyone, but applied, went to Madras for the interview and got selected. I was told that I did not have the required qualifications to be a teacher, that I did not even have a university degree, and yet that I was being taken as a special case. We signed contracts, and only then I came and told father at home. He said I was crazy to leave a secure job in the government, venturing into unknown Africa. There was no need to argue with my father. I had asserted my independence ten years ago already, when he told me in 1937 that he had no money to send me to college. I just told him goodbye and told mother and brothers also goodbye.

Off to Ethiopia

It was a memorable journey. We were a group of 20 or so teachers, most of them experienced and all except me qualified, mostly from Kerala and Tamilnadu, a good majority of us Christians. The Ethiopian Ministry of Education had sent us a DC-3 Dakota, usually used for carrying freight. It had two metal benches along the side, with no cushions, but plenty of blankets. None of the comforts of air travel today, and not even the comforts of a normal passenger plane in 1947. We boarded the plane in Bombay and made several short and bumpy hops along the coast of India and Arabia, to Massirah Island, Aden, Dire Dawa, and finally to Addis Ababa. It took us some 18 hours, whereas today the direct flight, Bombay-Addis Ababa, takes only 3 ½ hours.



We were worn out by the time we got to Addis Ababa. Some of the teachers had brought young children along. An unpleasant surprise awaited us at the Airport. After a long wait before going through immigration, we were finally told that we could not land because our inoculation papers for Yellow Fever and Cholera were not in order. There had been an outbreak of cholera in India, and we were to go directly into quarantine, in an isolation ward in a hospital in town. We had to stay in the isolation ward for several days, if I remember right.

On about the third day, Emperor Haile Sellassie came to visit us in the hospital, to welcome us and to apologize for the inconvenience. We gathered together around the locked gate of the hospital, inside, while the Emperor stood outside the gate and talked to us through the gate by an interpreter. We should have been impressed, but we were all too worn out to feel anything but sheer fatigue and boredom. But we had seen the great man, and that was something.

Teaching in Nazareth

After a week or more of confinement in the isolation ward, we were released and taken to the Itegue Hotel, the only western style hotel in Addis Ababa those days. After a week in the hotel, we were given our various assignments. I was, along with two other Tamil Christians, to go to a new school, some 100 kilometers East of Addis Ababa, in the plains. The place, originally called Hadama, had been renamed Nazareth. We moved into a new house, with three bedrooms. One of my colleagues, Mr. Daniel, several years senior to me, was to be the headmaster. He, with his wife, occupied the master bedroom, while the two of us bachelors occupied the smaller bedrooms.

I was 25, and ready for all kinds of new experiences. But I had conveniently forgotten my promise to God about repenting and beginning a new life and all that. I taught during the week, and then played bridge incessantly with fellow teachers, sometimes starting Friday evening and stopping only late Sunday night. There was nothing else to do in Nazareth.

I taught in the third and fifth grades, teaching practically all subjects. The children were good, playful, but also highly respectful to teachers. I was quite surprised to find girls who would touch my feet as a mark

of respect. I thought that was a uniquely Indian practice. Ethiopia was Sub-Sahara Africa's only literate ancient culture, and the difference was clearly visible. I enjoyed teaching and I enjoyed the children, who were polite and refined. I soon came to identify myself with the culture, and felt irritated when some of my Indian or Sudanese colleagues kept on pouring contempt on the Ethiopians, in order to feel superior.

Amharic was the official language of Ethiopia, and our Amharic teacher in the school was a bright young man, only slightly older than I, Ato Telahun Damte (Ato is the Ethiopian equivalent of Mr.). I began taking Amharic lessons from him in private, and made some progress.

The only social contact outside the school circle for me was the local hospital run by Mennonite missionaries from America. I remember especially Dr. Paul and Nancy Conrad, Dorsa and Mary Mishler, Dan Sensenning with wife and daughter.

They were all very good to me. These were my first sustained social contacts with white westerners, and it took me a while to learn some of their ways. I went occasionally to their Sunday worship services, usually in one of the homes. I went to an Ethiopian Orthodox Church once, but found the liturgy totally beyond my comprehension, both in language and form. The American prayer meetings at the hospital were totally devoid of symbol or ritual, but at least I understood the language and felt the reality of prayer. And they seemed to like "Mr. George" as they called me, since I had told them that Verghese was the Indian equivalent of George.

A Divine Jolt Wakes me Up

One day one of my fifth grade boys came to me and complained that he was not feeling well. I felt his forehead with my fingers to see if he was running a temperature. He was. A blister had already formed on his forehead. I asked him what that was. He did not know. I advised him to go home and rest, and then go to the hospital and see the doctor. He was in bed with Chicken Pox and did not come to class for several days.

On the fifteenth day after I had felt his forehead, I was myself down with Chicken Pox. This is normally a child disease, and once you get a mild attack in childhood, you are supposed to be immune for life. I never had it in childhood and was therefore not immune.

The attack, in my 25th year, was far from mild. The blisters were cherry-sized, and I had them all over my body. They were excruciatingly painful; new ones kept coming up every day on my head, on my back, on my face, on my chest, on my seat. I could not sit or lie down because of the blisters. I was shut up in my room, and my fellow residents of the house, Mr. Daniel and Mr. Rathinaswami, asked me to lock my door and not go out of my room, for fear of giving it to others in the house. No one came to see me, and some food was occasionally slipped in under the door, like to a convict or to a prisoner.

The pain was sharp and intense; the loneliness was unbearable. Students wanted to visit me, but they were forbidden to do so, understandably. If I was thirsty there was no way of asking for a hot drink. I could not wash myself, or even clean my mouth and teeth. Unable to sit or lie down, I paced my room up and down. I felt this was not quite fair on the part of God to put me through all this pain. Like Job, I wanted to ask God for an explanation.

That is what I finally did. At the height of my pain, about the fourth day, I went and sat fiercely on my chair at my desk. The seat hurt, but I grit my teeth. Across the desk, on the wall, there was a color portrait of Christ (Salman's Head of Christ, a not too artistic American product) facing me. I started the dialogue or debate or whatever it was. I accused God of being cruel and unfair, devoid of compassion, and letting people suffer more than they deserved. I was talking quite aloud, in the anguish of my pain and the loneliness of my room, and threw a stream of abuse at the portrait of Christ. As the torrent of words rose in crescendo, I was carried away by the rhetoric of my own petulance.

Finally, and not without hesitation, I blurted out what I knew were insolent words: "Was your suffering on the cross anything comparable to what I am going through now?" That put a stopper to the flow of



my own sulky abuse. I felt I had said more than what I had a right to say. There was a calm. The experience that followed is so poignant that I have no words in which to describe it with some sense of adequacy.

A voice came, distinct and clear. I cannot be sure that any of our modern equipment could have registered the sound waves that reached my ears and the meaning that hit my heart. I heard those words. I do not know where they came from. I was speaking to God in English, and the reply was also in English. The tone was by no means rebuking or reproving; on the contrary, it was most compassionate and tenderly loving:

“Yes, my son, it was”

That was all it said. But it brought about a total transformation in my condition. My pain was gone, though the blisters were still there. I was wafted up to a higher plane of happiness where pain cannot penetrate. I felt an incredible lightness of body, as if I was being effortlessly lifted up on wings of joy.

I bowed my head in humble adoration. I surrendered myself without reservation, into the loving hands of God in Christ. And I said, with deep contrition: “To Thee, I bow my head, Lord, to Thee I surrender myself. I am Thine. Pardon me my folly, pardon me my insolence. Take me, do with me as it pleases Thee. Break me if need be, but give me grace and wisdom and strength to walk in Thy ways. I love Thee and I bless Thee with all my heart.”

The blisters were there, as before. No miraculous healing had taken place. The pain started slowly coming back, but I was a stronger person now and could easily and joyfully take it. The chicken pox took its normal time to heal, but I came out of that sickness radically transformed. I could not share my experience with too many people, but I renewed my commitment many a time those days. I may share with you some of the jottings in my diary from that time:

Nazareth to Jimma

I was in Nazareth only for a few months, from November 1947 to June 1948. By the time the next academic year came around, I was

on my way, in a government truck, to take charge of a new post in Jimma, in the wild coffee jungles of Kaffa, some 300 kilometers southwest of Addis Ababa.

Jimma had the UNRRA School of Practical Arts, established in 1947 with the assistance of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Association, with a view to giving both school education and arts and crafts training to young men who had become orphans during Mussolini's Italian Occupation (1935-41) and had grown up on the streets. It was part of the UN's post-war relief and rehabilitation operations in formerly Fascist-occupied territories. Nine Canadian families ran the project during the first year. The extensive campus with the school and family quarters for the teachers was well guarded with high walls and barbed wire fences. The sixty or so Ethiopian boys were sometimes prone to violence, and some had criminal tendencies.

Of the nine Canadian families, seven had quit during the first year itself because of student violence. A south Indian teacher, Mr. Sharma was in charge of the classroom work (five grades) while the Canadians had tried to look after the training in Agriculture and practical arts. I was posted to take over from Mr. Sharma. In overall charge was Mr. Howard Thompson, brother of the Dr. R. N. Thompson who had recruited me in India. Howard had formerly been in the Canadian Mounted Police, but had nevertheless dismally failed in trying to enforce discipline in the school.

The scene which encountered me when I entered the school compound after a wearying eight-hour journey from Addis Ababa on very rugged roads in a pick-up truck, was dramatic indeed. On the first floor balcony of the director's two-story house stood Mr. Thompson, with his wife by his side. The students, gathered together on the ground in front of his house, were addressing him through their leader: "If you have the guts, just come down from that balcony, and we will kill you." That was the gist of what they were saying to their Director. They were menacing in their looks, but I was wondering if they meant what they said.

A middle-aged Ethiopian gentleman, accompanied by half a dozen

others, came out of an office next door and approached the students, with a sense of authority. He was Ato Kirubel, an Ethiopian Roman Catholic who had once studied to be a Jesuit and had also served in the Army, well-dressed in European clothes, with a white shawl over his jacket. He sported a well-trimmed goatee. He was the Director of Provincial Education and had over-all responsibility for all the schools in Kaffa province. He lived on that campus, and also had his office there. In fact he had occupied one of the houses left by the Canadians.

“Go back to your hostel now, or I will call the police,” he ordered, in Amharic. They were arguing back with him, but I could not follow the argument. In any case they soon dispersed, grumbling, and went back to their hostel. I got off from my pick-up with my things and entered the house of Mr. Sharma, which I was to take over from him.

Sharma gave me some background. He was delighted to see me, a fellow Indian. “All this violence is directed against the White teachers. I have no problem with them,” said Sharma. “And you will have no problem with them, either,” he sought to reassure me. Sharma was Brahmin and a good cook, and he cooked some good vegetarian meals for us when we stayed together in that house for two days.

After Sharma left, I began to settle down in that roomy house left by the Canadians. I engaged a cook, which Mr. Sharma obviously had not needed. I went to the school and talked to my students. They were respectful, attentive and interested. No sign of violence or defiance. Some of them were older than me, for I was only 26. I invited them for tea in my house that day at 4 p.m. Most of them came, and we had a good afternoon together, sitting and drinking tea, chatting together. Around 6 p.m., they began to disperse, for their free time was over. After they had gone out, three of their spokesmen came back to my house.

“We have something to say to you, Sir”, their leader said, politely, and with almost diffidence. “What happened to us today has deeply touched us. This is the very first time that any of our teachers invited us into their home. And you treated us like human beings, not like as

if we were thieves and criminals. It makes all the difference to us. We feel like human beings again.”

I was moved to tears. It was all said with such simplicity and dignity. But it spoke volumes to my young and sensitive soul.

“Come every afternoon at four,” I blurted out, not thinking very much about what I was saying. “We will have tea everyday here in my home. Besides, we will also use the time to reflect about God and study the Bible together.”

So began a program of daily Bible studies, entirely voluntary, friendly and informal, in my home. More than half the students came regularly. And I put my whole energy into living and working with the youngsters. They were in the age range of about 16 to 27, not mere schoolboys. They had grown up on the streets and had taken to petty pilfering, mild drinking, and quick quarrelling. Both among my colleagues and in the town, they had a bad reputation. The authorities tried to use the police to restrain them, but the result was mainly that they had to share their booty and the alcohol with the police. They were not normally allowed to go into town unless accompanied by a teacher; they were virtual prisoners in our barbed wire enclosed compound, with guards at the gate.

Grappling with a Hyena

One day I took them out for a long walk into the countryside. They were about 50, walking double file, very docile and very disciplined. Suddenly I saw them breaking formation and running to a field on the side. I was quite confident by this time, that they would not run away like that without a good reason. They were fully loyal and devoted to me within a month of my being in Jimma. I had been ahead of the procession, and could not make out what was happening. I turned and ran after them, but could not keep up with them. As we got to that field, they had formed a circle, some of them with large stones in their hands, and there was a big wild hyena, standing in the middle, uncharacteristically furious and charging. Hyenas normally attack only sleeping people and domestic animals. When attacked they can be wild and snarling. I saw one of my boys charging the hyena with a sharp stone, and he had managed to break its lower

jaw. The boys soon became as wild as the hyena, and the poor hyena had no chance. They soon overpowered it, got a rope from somewhere and tied it up, and in fifteen minutes, four of the boys had it, still living, on a pole carried on their shoulders. They made a triumphal procession through the streets of Jimma, singing patriotic songs of triumph adapted to the occasion. There was a song which Ethiopian patriotic soldiers sang often in the fight with the Italians, which began: "The patriot is poison..." (in Amharic, *Arbanha Merzanha nov*), meaning poison to the Italian enemy). They changed it to: "The Student is poison..." (*Tamari Merzanha nov...*). We took the hyena home and tied it to the tree in my yard. We wanted to heal it and keep it. But someone came and without my permission, shot it dead. Only Ato Kirubel had a rifle there. The hide of the hyena was in my house till I left Jimma.

Conflict with Kirubel

Quite often in the previous year, my boys used to filch some of the high quality woolen blankets with which the UNRRA had liberally supplied them. The sale proceeds of two blankets were enough for a good drinking party for half a dozen. The process had gone on for some time, and where before the boys had two blankets each and some to spare, they had only one each in many cases, some none.

Soon after I came, the filching stopped altogether. The authorities were surprised. They knew that my influence had something to do with it. But Ato Kirubel would not acknowledge the fact. He called me into his office one day and gave me a lecture about discipline. He said he had been trained in the army, and he had learned that only the fear of strong punishment could enforce strict discipline in the school. He told me it was unwise on my part to be too friendly with the students, and hinted that I was ruining the discipline of the school by my lenience. "The stick", he said, "is the only language that they properly understood." I politely said that I should be allowed to try my own methods, and that I believed more in loving persuasion than in the power of the stick. We parted friends, disagreeing. At least so I thought.

Then one day it happened. Months after I came to Jimma, for the



first time, two blankets had been stolen. Ato Kirubel said he was going to catch the culprits and take strong action. But he could not identify the thieves by his methods. He wanted to punish the whole school. I told him that I would try to find out who the thieves were, and hand them to him. I begged to let me deal with the punishment, since I was in charge of the classes. He said he was the overall chief of the province and he would deal with the culprits in his own way. I pleaded with him to show mercy and not to be too harsh. He replied that he would know what to do with them.

The school had only 56 students, if I remember right. I called them together for an assembly, and talked to them about stealing and all that, in a moral as well as a religious context. They seemed to be moved.

“You know who amongst you has done this. I do not know. I request the two who did it to come forward and confess to the whole community what they have done.”

The students looked at each other, but no one said anything. I gave them time to think. They talked among each other, and I had a faint suspicion that many of them were furtively looking in one particular direction. Yet no one came forward to confess.

I produced a small box and 56 bits of paper. Giving each student a bit of paper, I asked them to write down the names of two people they suspected of having stolen and sold the blankets. They did not have to sign. They all promptly wrote two names and dropped the bits of paper inside the box. I took them out and classified them. Strangely enough, 54 of the 56 sheets had the same two names! Only two of them, obviously dropped by the two stealers themselves, had two different names. I quietly went to the two thus unanimously identified, and asked them to come and see me at home before lunch.

They came, very promptly. They were in tears.

“Why did you do it?”, I queried, with affection. I had no need to ask: “Did you do it?” They were trying to be honest in their reply:

“Why? Sir, we do not know. The compulsion to steal comes over us and we are helpless. We are driven to steal.”

I felt great pity for them. These habits acquired in childhood become soon compulsive when repeated often. I had no heart to punish them. I felt like embracing them. I stiffened myself with an effort, told them that what they had done was wrong, that they had not only wronged the school and their fellow students, but also themselves. I prayed with them, and asked for God's forgiveness.

"I have to punish you for the sake of the others. You decide what should be the punishment." I offered.

"Sir, you can punish us any way you want to. We will gladly take it. But, please, please, do not hand us over to Ato Kirubel."

"I have to. He has told me that it is his right to punish you, though I am your teacher. I do not understand, but I have to take you to him. I shall ask him for mercy, but I make no promise".

When I went to Kirubel, he was quite curt. "Just hand them to me, and I know what to do. It is none of your business."

He knew his business. When I saw what he did, I was chagrined and disconcerted, but there was nothing I could do.

There were two sentry boxes in the compound, each 6 feet high and 3 feet square, with a two-foot high gable roof. Each of the offending students was put inside one of these boxes and the door locked from outside. They were told that they would stand there until Ato Kirubel decided to release them. It was an inhuman kind of imprisonment by any standards. There was no facility for them even to fulfill their toilet needs, or to sit or lie down. I remember they stood there like that for two days. I was furiously angry, but there was nothing I could do. The student body was identified with me. The Canadian Director, Mr. Thompson, had quit long before, and had been replaced by a Norwegian gentleman, friendly and sympathetic.

The teachers in the school were also with me. The teatime Bible classes in my home went on as usual. I suspected something when Mrs. Kirubel asked permission one afternoon to sit in.

A few days after that, I received a memo from the Ministry of Education in Addis Ababa to the effect that students in our school

were not thenceforth to go to the homes of any of the teachers for any purpose. The memo also said that I had no right to have such meetings in my home or to teach religion to the students. Ato Kirubel also went to the student body without me, and told them that they were not to come to my house.

I did not know this until the students told me. The day he had spoken to them, a group of students came to my home as usual. We had our tea and our Bible study. Then they told me that they had been forbidden to come, but that they would go on disobeying the orders. I told them that they should not disobey orders, but that I would find out from the authorities what was going on. I went the next day to Ato Kirubel's office, and I was surprised to hear his clerical staff openly insulting me.

"You have come from India and grown fat at our expense" and words to that effect. These Ethiopian staff persons were previously quite friendly and respectful to me. I was surprised at the change. I wanted to talk to Ato Kirubel, but I was told that he had gone to Addis Ababa.

I came home and typed off a rather stiff reply to the memo from the Ministry of Education.

A Time of Testing and a Time of Prayer

Soon I found out that the whole atmosphere in the town of Jimma had changed. Everybody Ethiopian was hostile to me, even outside the compound. As I walked along the streets of Jimma, people would point their finger at me and say things to each other. I was being derided and mocked, I felt. Even among my own students, the old camaraderie was gone. A veil of gloom had fallen over the community; some students often seemed to avoid me. Some of the senior students, however, kept very close to me, and told me that someone had spread stories about me over the whole town. They would not tell me what the stories were. Only months later I was to find out.

Wherever I went out of my house, I had the feeling that I was being watched and followed, day or night. One day some of the senior boys said to me: "We are forbidden to come to your home. But there

is no prohibition against going out for a walk on campus. Let us go out to the bushes on that hill and sit there and pray.” It was a moonlit night, not too cold. We went out and sat in an open space among the trees. As we talked, I thought I saw some movement in one of the bushes. I looked more carefully, and I thought I saw parts of a white coat. I said to the half dozen students who had accompanied me: “I thought you Ethiopians were pretty smart. I did not think that one of you would wear a white coat if you wanted to spy on someone on a moonlit night.” I said it in Amharic, loud enough to be heard by whoever was in the bush. Suddenly the bush began moving furiously, and I saw a student in a white coat dashing away to escape being recognized by us. We laughed, but the feeling of being watched grew on me as time went on. I felt a battery of persecution had been turned on me. It hurts me when people refuse to talk to me, and I know that they hate me or have contempt for me.

Those few weeks before I left Jimma were again hell, like the hell I suffered at home in India when my mother went sick. But there was a difference. Spiritually, this was the most enriching experience of my life. For, in the midst of persecution, I could rejoice inwardly. The words of Jesus made fresh sense to me: “Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely, on account of me. Rejoice and exult, for great indeed is your reward in the heavenly realms” (Matt. 5:11-12).

I understood that Jesus was not talking about any future reward in life after death. The reward or wages can be enjoyed here and now. I was happy inside, and could pray for hours at a time, praising God for being counted worthy of thus experiencing the mystery of rejoicing in the midst of suffering. It was a spontaneous, exhilarating, life-giving joy. It was an experience as constitutive of my spiritual life as the episode in my room in Nazareth, only a few months before. But I wonder if the joy of Jimma would have been possible without the nightmare of Nazareth and the catharsis of encounter with Jesus. In any case, I can testify that during those weeks I experienced simultaneously the depth of suffering produced by mockery, persecution and ostracism on the one hand, and great gushes of

spiritual joy welling up within me right amidst all that suffering, especially when engaged in prayer.

The response to my rude letter of protest sent to the Ministry of Education in Addis Ababa was slow in coming. When it did come, it was in the form of a curt telegram which said simply: "PACK UP YOUR THINGS AND COME TO ADDIS ABABA." A week later, I was in Addis Ababa, with my things packed up, ready to go home to India.

In Addis Ababa I went to the Ministry of Education and reported to the office of the chief, Ato Akaleworq Habtewold, Director General. I showed the telegram I had received, to his private secretary, who was a Goan from India. The man said that he was surprised that he had no idea who sent this telegram, that he had not himself sent it, but that he would enquire.

For more than thirty days, I went daily to the Ministry of education and waited in the visitor's room. Every attempt to find out why I had been called to Addis Ababa came to nothing. One day, Ato Efraim Boru, the Deputy Director General, went through all my files and saw the injustice. He was already in tension with his chief, but one day, he dragged me into the Director General's office and asked: "Can you tell me why this man is called here? He has been hanging around for more than three weeks, and he still does not know." Ato Akaleworq, without so much as getting up from his chair, said to Ato Efrem. "I do not want to see the man's face. Take him away." That was meant as a personal insult to me. Ato Efrem took me back to his own office, tore his hair in disgust, and said: "I do not want to stay in this rotten place. I want to resign." And then more calmly. "Don't give up. Appeal to the Emperor."

Meanwhile the Indian Association of Ethiopia decided to take up my case with the authorities. They convened a special meeting for the purpose, and invited me to speak. I politely thanked my fellow countrymen for the interest they were taking in my case. I told them the bare facts of the case and told them that I was suffering on account of Christ, and did not want them to go to any trouble on my behalf.

Appeal to the Emperor was the only option left. I went to Dr. R. N. Thompson, the Canadian Advisor to the Ministry of Education, who was in full sympathy with me. He was very influential, and found out what the charges against me were; but he did not tell me. Only much later I was to find out that the charges were three: (1) I had insulted Ethiopia and its Emperor; (2) I was using my position as teacher to engage in religious propaganda and to proselytize the students, which was against my contract with the Ethiopian government; (3) the real reason for my inviting the students to my home was for homosexual purposes.

Thompson told me that I was to be expatriated to India as “an undesirable Alien”, and that the government of Ethiopia had already written to the government of India to that effect. My air ticket to Bombay had already been bought and I may be packed off any day now.

Thompson not only helped me prepare a memorandum of appeal to Emperor Haile Sellassie, and very kindly delivered it himself to the Emperor’s Minister of The Pen and Private Secretary, Ato Teferra Worq, a close friend of Ato Akale Worq, the Director General of Education. I was not sure that the appeal would get to the Emperor at all, and was getting ready to go back to India.

The next day there was a dramatic turn of events. Ato Akaleworq’s Goan secretary came and told me that the Director General wanted to see me immediately. I went into his office, ready to be fired. There was an interpreter present, since Akaleworq did not speak English.

“Who are you?” he asked rudely.

I was supposed to reply in English, but I decided to speak in my faulty Amharic.

“I am Paul Verghese, a humble Indian teacher employed by your ministry, working till now in Jimma. I have come to Addis Ababa, in response to this telegram which you sent me. I have been here for 35 days now, and I have not been able to find out why I have been called here and so badly mistreated. I have discharged my duties responsibly, and would like to know why you treat me with such contempt.”

I said all this in fairly fluent and literary Amharic, and he was quite surprised. The interpreter, who had no chance to translate, also registered signs of being impressed. The DG opened his desk drawer and took out a piece of paper, which I instantly recognized as the letter of protest I had sent him months ago.

"Would you write such an insolent letter to your government in your country?" he asked, waving the letter in front of me.

"Sir, in my country, if a government officer wrote to me the kind of insulting letter you wrote to me, to which this was my response, I would probably have taken him to court." Obviously I was bluffing. But I continued, in the same spirit of bluff and bravado: "Sir, I love the Ethiopian people. In the one year that I have been privileged to serve Ethiopia, I think I have served the people well. I will go back to my country as a friend of the Ethiopian people. Please do not worry about my being able to get another job in India. For many years I was a journalist. My livelihood is assured, if I just write a few stories in the newspapers about my experience in Ethiopia, and about this ministry of Education. Thank you, good bye."

The bluff seemed to work, more than I could expect.

I know now that it was the hand of God that worked. The DG smiled. I was still standing.

"Sit down, Mr. Verghese, we do not want you to go. I am impressed by your personality and by your mastery of my language. I must have been misinformed about you. That I will find out. We had decided to send you back to India, but now I must reverse my decision. I want you to work as a teacher, in some other school, in some other province. For that, I need a letter of apology from you. Just for the file."

"Sir, I do not know what to apologize for. My conscience is clear and I have nothing to confess. As for continuing to work in this country as a teacher, I will finish the present contract, which runs till 1950. I will not work a day longer in this country."

My faith in God and my dignity therefore, were fully intact. I was smiling, quite politely. He smiled too, in a friendly manner.

“Do not be in a hurry to decide how long you will work with us. We will decide that later. And it does not matter what you write in the letter of apology. I need a letter from you for my file. Write anything you like.”

“Well, Sir, would you mind if I stated in my letter that I was giving the apology at your request?”

“I don’t care. Give it to my secretary, today if possible.” He said it with a wave of his hand, and stood up. That was the end of the interview. The text of the letter of apology I gave is given below:

Addis Ababa,
March 1st 1949.

From,

T. P. Verghese,
C/o Mr. K. O. Philip,
Haile Sellassie Secondary School,
Addis Ababa.

To

Ato Akalework Habtewold,
Director General,
Ministry of Education,
Addis Ababa.

Ref: Yr letter 4820/2263 dated 17-5-41.

Respected Sir,

With reference to your above letter and in continuation of our personal interview at 10. A.M. today in your office, I wish to express my regret in understanding that you feel offended at my letter dated 21st Tahsas 1941 addressed to Ato Kirubel Basha, Director of Schools, Kaffa Province.

Though I feel perfectly justified in all my actions hitherto, since my letter referred to earlier seems improper to you, it is a pleasure for me to comply with your request to apologise.

I wish to make use of this opportunity to express my gratitude to you for having allowed me to explain things in person.

Awaiting your further orders, and wishing to remain,

Yours Respectfully,

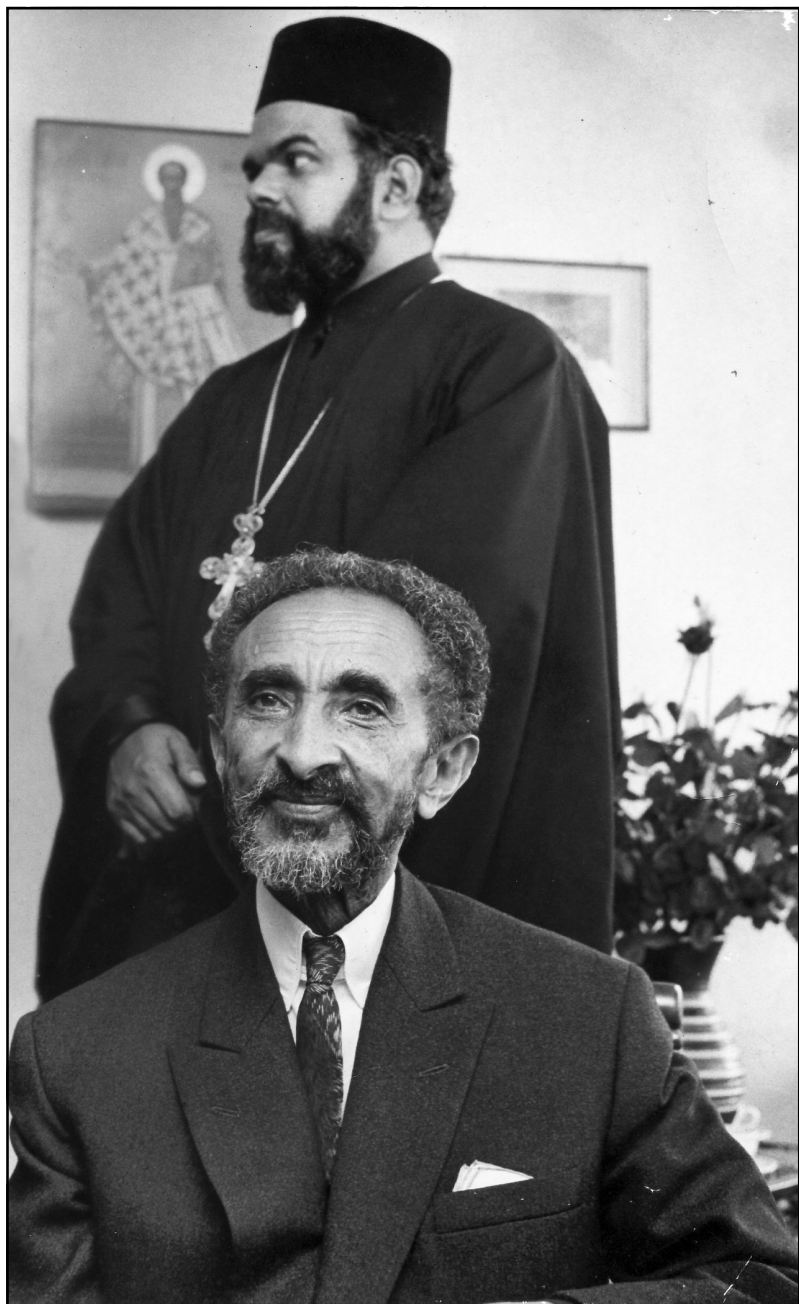
T. P. Verghese

In a few days I got a fresh order from the government, posting me as teacher of English and Mathematics, at the Agricultural College, Ambo, a prestigious institution less than a hundred kilometers from Addis Ababa.

Thus ended a period of tough testing for me. The Jimma experience and its postlude in Addis Ababa turned out to be also a school of prayer for me. I spent hours in prayer, with happiness in my heart and a clear and joyous sense of the presence of God. A little suffering for the sake of God had begun to cleanse me and purify me. I was aglow with the Spirit of God. The glow in my heart was a touch of heaven.

My suffering was beginning to turn the key to the mystery of life. The first important lesson I learned was that to suffer for the sake of truth was not the same as just going through any suffering, for example, the kind of suffering that fell to my lot in my earlier youth in India, or even in Nazareth. To suffer *unjustly* in the cause of truth, and to be mocked and reviled for the good things you had done, became a most sublimating experience. Of course, faith had to be there to undergird the experience. Equally important was a clear conscience, and not holding a trace of bitterness while one suffered.

And the experience of rejoicing in the midst of suffering puts the seal to one's faith in a loving Lord. All doubts vanish, and faith strikes new and deeper roots. To have tasted God's joy-creating love in the midst of pain-creating suffering makes one's faith strong and secure. One finds it easier then to take risks for the sake of obeying God, without anxiety. But one always has to move on.



CHAPTER IV

HAILE SELLESSIE I A BELOVED HERO TO THE END, BUT AT THE END, MISGUIDED?

The Agricultural College in Ambo, jointly run by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Education, was also run by a team of Canadian Christian teachers, and they gave me a hero's welcome, since they had all heard about the Jimma episode. At first I had to stay for a few weeks in a rather shabbily run hotel. I soon moved on campus, lodging with another Canadian teacher with his own family and children. They were under transfer orders and soon left, leaving the house to me.

The teaching assignment was a bit on the tough side for me. I was asked to teach English and Mathematics. English and Algebra were not difficult. They were after all my own favorite subjects as a high school student. I had not, however, counted with having to teach Trigonometry, which I had never studied in school.

In the Trigonometry class, I told the students, several of whom were older than I (I was just past 26), that it was their bad luck that they had a teacher who had never studied the subject before. I promised to keep ahead of them by learning at home. But where I did not know the solution to some problem, I did not try to bluff my way through. I told them plainly that I did not know. And they liked that kind of honesty. They cooperated most heartily. Sometimes one of the brighter boys would show me how to solve it, always politely and deferentially. No loss of face for me.

Ambo was a Spa, a town of hot springs. The soil was volcanic and in the underground was always very hot mineral water. Even from the taps at home came only hot mineral water. Many people came to Ambo from all parts of the country for a bath in the healing waters. The water from Ambo was bottled and sold all over Ethiopia.

The Emperor Haile Sellassie had also a palace right next to our

college, where he occasionally spent short holidays. His eldest granddaughter, Princess Aida, lived there with her husband, Prince Mangesha Seyoum, the Governor of the District of which Ambo was the headquarters. I got to know the prince and the princess, and they also seemed to like me. They occasionally invited me for a meal.

The atmosphere in the school was quite congenial; I got along with the students, who were all in their twenties. The teachers were also friendly and cooperative. All the students lived in hostels on campus. All were boys. Sometimes I would take a whole class out on weekend expeditions to the neighboring mountains.

We had been told of a crater lake some 20 kilometers away, with an island in the middle, on which “savage” people lived, with their own language and customs. There was no road, but only a beaten track leading to the brink of the crater. Some of the boys were interested in a trip to this island, despite the dangers involved. We decided to go.

We, a group of about 15, started early in the morning. I was given a mule to ride, since the boys thought I could not walk that far. I did walk part of the way. There was another mule carrying blankets and food. We were going to stay overnight, possibly in the open air. The adventure was quite promising.

We had walked all day, and still there was no sign of the crater. I began getting a little anxious, because there was no time to go back and dusk was falling. I was wondering whether the lake and the island existed, or whether we had lost our way.

Finally we arrived at the lip of the crater, but it was well past 8 p.m. We could see the lake way down below, and we could spot the island because of the dim light of oil lamps in huts on it. We started our descent into the crater. The water level was at least three kilometers below the edge of the crater, and the way down was steep and as far as we were concerned, pathless, but full of tall trees.

We had gone down a third of the way, when we stopped and reflected. It was fairly dark, and we could not see whether there were any boats down below that would take us across to the island,

if at all we managed our descent to the water level. And if the people were as savage as they were reputed to be, why take the risk of an encounter at nighttime? So we decided to strike camp, but there was no level ground anywhere. It was a steep 70 degree incline, and I had found it difficult even to walk down in the dark.

Each one covered himself in a blanket and slept on the slope, some using stones as pillows, with at least two trees next to each to stop us from rolling down. There was no moonlight. The skies were overcast, I remember. I think we slept well, despite our anxiety about the morrow; we were all quite tired and the night was cold.

As day was dawning, we could see that a boat from the island had landed on our side of the crater. A group of people with kerosene lamps in their hands were wending their way up. We walked down to meet them halfway. Their leader, a senior person, spoke good Amharic, and asked us: "What have you done to us? Why do you come at night and stay in this dangerous jungle, full of hyenas and other wild animals? If something had happened to you, would we not have been blamed for not looking after you?" It was all said with such friendliness and cordiality that I felt ashamed.

I apologized profusely on behalf of my party. But he continued in that same reproving but affectionate tone: "Did you think we were wild animals or demons? You could have come down and we would have found places for you to sleep in our humble homes. Come now, and have something to eat with us."

We went down with them and ferried to the island, where a big party had gathered to welcome us. We were ushered in to a fairly commodious round thatched hut with mud floor, which must have been their community center. We were all given seats on the floor, and some *Tella* or fermented barley beer to drink. We told them where we were from, and they told us all about themselves. They did not eat any meat, though they had cattle. They lived on grains and fish, if I remember right. All of them looked rustically healthy, cheerful and bright. Their women and children were full of curiosity to see these strange visitors from the outside world.

They were preparing a big feast for us. All of a sudden we were told that the governor of the district, Prince Mangesha Seyoum was going to join us soon. He had come by a different route and had arrived near the crater in a Jeep, doing the journey in less than three hours. This was the first visit of the Governor to this island, and the local people made a big event of it, with dancing and feasting, but without meat. The Prince told me that I could have come with him in his Jeep, if only he knew I wanted to come. Anyway we had a great and joyous feast, with barley pancakes and spicy side dishes, but no meat.

The important point is that these isolated island people, without any social contact with the Amhara people of the land, were far from savage or wild. They were dignified, refined and courteous as well as hospitable. I told my boys that they should not always believe stories they hear about other people. I began to shed some of my own inherited prejudices about the alleged “savagery” of “primitive” peoples. People may not know how to read or write, but still be civilized in the sense of being spontaneously and warmly human.

A New Turning Point

One fine day, we were told that the Emperor had arrived at the Ambo Palace for a few days’ holiday. He wanted to visit our College, and we decided to put up a special program for him. At very short notice, we produced a short Amharic play and rehearsed it. Under my guidance, the students also decided to enact in English, some scenes from Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar, centering on the murder of Caesar and on Mark Antony’s great funeral oration. Since none of the students were advanced enough in their English to memorize those long speeches, I took on the role of Mark Antony myself. I must have loved that kind of Shakespearian rhetoric, for I can still remember some of the lines, 48 years after I hurriedly memorized them:

“Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears:
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him;
The evil that men do lives after them,
The good is oft interred with their bones.

So let it be with Caesar.....The noble Brutus
 Hath told you Caesar was ambitious:
 If it were so, it was a grievous fault,
 And grievously hath Caesar answered it....
 When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept;
 Ambition should be made of sterner stuff:
 Yet Brutus says he was ambitious:
 And Brutus is an honorable man.
 You all did see that on the Lupercal
 I thrice presented him a kingly crown.
 Which he did thrice refuse: was this ambition?
 Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
 And sure, he is an honorable man.
 I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,
 But here I am to speak what I do know.
 You all did love him once, not without cause:
 What cause withholds you then, to mourn for him?
 O judgement! thou art fled to brutish beasts,
 And men have lost their reason.... Bear with me;
 My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,
 And I must pause till it come back to me” (he weeps).

The show went very well. Emperor Haile Sellassie appeared very pleased. I was, besides acting as Mark Antony, also directing both the Amharic and the English plays. At the end of the show, I made a little speech, in Amharic, thanking their majesties (the Empress was also there) for honoring us with their visit.

As soon as my speech was over, the Emperor beckoned me to his side and said, in English, “Where did you learn that Amharic?”

“Here, in this country, your Majesty,” I replied in fairly flawless Amharic.

“Here? How long have you been in this country?” this time in Amharic.

“One year and a few months, Your Majesty,” I replied, bowing politely.



“One year and a few months? Some of the Armenians who have lived in Ethiopia for forty years do not speak as well as you do.” The Emperor was laughing genially.

Naturally, I felt flattered and elated. He kept on talking to me in Amharic. “We (it was the imperial We) have never read Julius Caesar. Nor have we seen it enacted. Will you kindly get us a copy of the English text so that we can read it tonight?”

I readily agreed and got him a text. Only in later years I realized how the murder of a Caesar or Emperor was fascinating to him, since he was himself, like Julius Caesar, in constant danger of being killed by his internal enemies or by aspirants to his throne. Haile Sellassie’s spoken English was not quite up to the mark, but he followed the Mark Antony oration with avid interest. He had been trained by French and French Canadian Jesuits in his childhood, and spoke French more fluently than English. But he had learned to listen to and understand English during the time of his long exile in Britain. He had lived with his family, in Bath, England, for several years during Mussolini’s occupation of Ethiopia.

For me this encounter with one of my childhood heroes was a moving experience. I had seen so little of the world, and this recognition by the Emperor was a great thing for my natural vanity. I praised and thanked God for the radical change in my public image, from what it had come to be in Jimma. Strange indeed are the ways of God. But what soon followed was an even greater surprise.

Senior Amharic Teacher!

In the third week of December 1948 I received a strange order from the Ministry of Education. I was transferred from Ambo and posted to the Haile Sellassie I Secondary School in Addis Ababa, the then premier educational institution of the country. I was to be the Senior Amharic Teacher in the school, and this was in accordance with the wishes of His Imperial Majesty! I was flabbergasted. I could turn the offer down, but that would not be very wise. I decided to take the bull by both horns.

I could read and write, as well as speak Amharic, but I had no scientific knowledge of the language whatsoever.

All I had was the few lessons given to me in Nazareth by my fellow teacher Ato Telahun Damte. There were not many books available for me to read. I got hold of the only available Amharic Grammar book by CH Armbruster, and went through it once. It was a thick tome and I found the approach much too academic for young Ethiopian students. So I decided to write a new Amharic Grammar of my own, in a high school notebook. That took the whole of the Christmas holidays.

I went and joined the prestigious Haile Sellassie I Secondary School in Kotabe, on a beautiful hill, just outside of Addis Ababa. Most of the students were boarders, from the upper crust of society, the pick of Ethiopia's total student population. Special quarters were provided for me in one of the hostels. The Director of the School, by that time, was none other than Dr. Robert N Thompson, the man who had recruited me in India less than two years ago, and later helped me with the appeal to the Emperor in the Jimma case.

University education had not begun at that time in Ethiopia. The two other secondary schools, General Wingate School under British management, and Tafari Makonnen School under French Jesuit management were also prestigious. But our school, under largely Canadian management, was Number One. The other two schools had also an Englishman and a Frenchman respectively as Amharic teachers, but they were, unlike me, real scholars who had spent years on the study of Amharic and other cognate languages, and were quite proficient in them; though their spoken accents were far from perfect. Only at that point of correct (not Indian) accent and fluency I did probably excel them both.

I was to teach in the 11th and 12th grades. I had an assistant, a venerable traditional Ethiopian scholar-priest, Kanhgeta Hailegiorgis, a well-known literary writer in Ethiopia. He was most Friendly and helpful, and did not show any signs of resentment about a young foreigner being placed above him. I did not have a tenth of his Knowledge and command of Amharic. When I had a doubt in Amharic, I consulted him. If he could not help I could always go to the Minister of Justice, Ato Marsae Hazan, who had by that time written a book on Amharic grammar. He became a good friend.

The same policy worked as in Ambo. The very First day in class, I told my students that it was their language which they had learned from childhood, besides having ten or eleven years of schooling in it. I was a faltering learner, and I was likely to learn more from them than they from me. Again, they responded positively to honesty.

All the ministers of the Government for some time to come were graduates of our school, if they had a high school education at all. One of my own students was later to become Chief Justice of Ethiopia, after studying Law.

All the three secondary schools took their examinations from London University. I was very proud after my first year of teaching to notice that my students had not only outdone the other two schools, but actually surpassed our own previous record in the London University's Amharic examinations. It was of course not due to the superior quality of my teaching, but because of their enthusiastic interest in working with me.

Besides, it was the Emperor's favorite school. Almost every month he paid us a visit. The school was obviously the hope of the future for Ethiopia. Often he brought us a truckload of sweets and fruits for distribution among the students. Sometimes he would send for me from the Director's office, simply because he wanted to hear me speak his language, as he once told his wife in my presence.

It was at this time that I started regular private study classes in the Bible. Many students came, voluntarily. I was only a layman. So I got one of the monk-priests in town to help me, and to lead liturgical worship services. His name was Abba Habtemariam, a very intelligent and devoted priest. Later, during my second sojourn in Ethiopia, I was able to present him to the Emperor and he became famous as the Rector of the Emperor's Trinity Cathedral, then the largest church in Ethiopia.

Together with Abba Habtemariam, we ran religious programs, without contradicting or opposing the traditional practices of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The Jimma episode was by this time well behind us, and no one would stop me from taking these Bible study classes. It was during these private study classes that I realized

how abysmal my ignorance of the Bible and other religious matters were. I decided to correspond with some Protestant Christian institutions in America about going to College there and pursuing theological studies either simultaneously, or after graduating from College.

It was always the more conservative Fundamentalist Bible schools that offered me scholarships in America, and I was not very happy. Then one day again the way of God opened up.

The Way to Goshen

One day I was on a train to Debre Zeit (Beshoftu), a resort town with a crater lake, only some 40 kilometers to the East of Addis Ababa. To me it was a weekend vacation, but God had something in store for me. Sitting in the same compartment with me were some of the American Mennonite missionaries whom I had known in Nazareth. They were glad to see their old friend “Mr. George”, and soon introduced me to their companion whom I did not know. This was Ori O Miller, the Secretary of the Mennonite Central Committee in America, and chief of Old Mennonite relief operations all over the world. He was visiting the mission centers in Ethiopia, and had been told about my Jimma and language exploits. He was very much interested in my plans for the future, and I told him that I was planning to go to America for further studies. I explained that without a BA degree, I find it difficult to find admission to any respectable theological college. I asked for his advice.

“A degree is essential if you want to do further theological study. My brother Ernest Miller, who was formerly a missionary in India, is now President of Goshen College. I am sure he can find a place for you, and Goshen is a good college, located in Indiana, not far from Chicago. Give me all the details, and let me work it out for you.”

So he worked it out. I sent in the required forms. I was admitted and offered a scholarship, which would cover all but my travel expenses. I had put by enough from my savings to pay for the ticket.

Leaving Ethiopia - A Difficult Task

My three-year contract with the Ethiopian government was nearing its term, with the end of the school year in June 1950 (The actual time spent in Ethiopia would be two years and seven months, having arrived in November 1947). Around March, I received a letter from the Ministry of Education, requesting me to renew my contract for another three years. I very courteously replied that, as I had told the Director General during the Jimma episode, I would not extend my stay a day beyond my first contract. I turned down the offer of renewal of contract. I said in my letter that I was planning to go abroad for further studies.

I remember one day particularly, just before the close of the school year, when examinations were over. We were having the National Annual Sports Day in our school grounds. All sports teams in the country were coming to our school: the army, the air force, the Imperial Bodyguard, the police, and other schools. The Imperial Majesties were the Chief Guests. All the senior Government officials and the Diplomatic Corps were present.

I was asked to be the announcer, explaining to the crowds by microphone and loudspeaker, the main events and results. I did it in both languages, English and Amharic. I think people were impressed, because in those days it was a rare bird indeed who could handle sports matters in English and Amharic with such fluency. Rarely did a good speaker of English have the right Amharic accent; important people were talking about the announcer, making up legends in the process. It was again a day of triumph for me. I was becoming a legend and a celebrity.

Major Encounters with the Emperor and Family

After the sports event was over, the Emperor and Empress decided to give their family a conducted tour of the school of which they were very proud. It was a large family indeed: Crown prince Asfau Wossen, the eldest son; Princess Tenagneworq, the only surviving daughter; Prince Makonnen, regarded by people as his favorite son; the wives of the two princes; half a dozen or more grandchildren;

Prince Sahle Sellassie, the youngest son, a bachelor. The Emperor was walking in front. He called me to his side, and was talking to me in Amharic, still walking.

“We have heard that you are leaving our country”, said the Emperor to me. “Why?”

“Oh, I would like to study further, Your Majesty.”

“What are you going to study?” the Emperor asked me.

“I would like to study Theology, Your Majesty.”

“Where would you study theology?”

“In America, Your Majesty. I have a scholarship. Yes, Your Majesty. I have first to get a college degree.”

“You do not need to study any theology. You know enough now. You stay here and work with me. We need you in the Palace.”

“I have a scholarship and have already bought my ticket, Your Majesty”, I said, quite foolishly.

“That is not a big problem. You stay here. We want you on our personal staff.”

I was hesitating about what to say, but sensing that I was about to refuse, he soon added: “Don’t say anything now. We will talk to the Crown Prince, and you can discuss the matter with him.”

The Crown Prince was walking just behind, listening to the conversation. The Emperor called his son and said something to him. I withdrew, and did not listen.

The Crown Prince then came and said to me, “I want to talk to you. Can you come for breakfast at my palace tomorrow morning at eight?”

Next morning, I went to the Crown Prince’s Palace, which was just outside the Emperor’s heavily guarded Palace, near the six-road junction called Siddist Kilo. The reception was most cordial and the breakfast sumptuous. The Prince told me that his father had asked him to persuade me to stay. I could ask for whatever salary I wanted.

I would not be a teacher, but work on the Emperor's staff. The Emperor had taken a liking to me, he told me. The Emperor needed trustworthy people around him. He advised me to accept the offer without asking any further questions.

With some sense of embarrassment, but quite clearly I told the Prince that my vocation was essentially religious, and since I was already 28, and had no College education, this was the time to get some education. I affirmed my great love for the Ethiopian people and my very high respect and affection for the person of the Emperor. I was deeply touched by the Emperor's affection for me and his confidence in me, but I had to go, I told him, because this was a call from God.

Prince Asfau Wossen seemed to be deeply moved; he told me that he had never met anyone like me who would refuse such an offer from the Emperor. He said he respected my decision and would communicate the same to his father.

The Pressure Continues

That, however, was by no means the end of the pressure. I was called up first by Abuna Theophilos, the powerful Archbishop of Harrar, who resided in Addis Ababa. He was known to be very close to the Emperor. I had known him well, since he was also a great scholar of the Ethiopian tradition, previously famous as Liqe Liqawent Mahari. He was also the Chief of the Emperor's Holy Trinity Cathedral.

He called me to his residence, and used another tactic, that of scolding. "You are an Indian", he said to me, mockingly, but affectionately and without any taint of racism, "and Indians have a reputation for being ungrateful." He was trying to provoke me. He knew all about the Jimma episode as well as the rest of my Ethiopian career. He was in fact very fond of me, and I often visited him. So I narrated to him again some of what had happened to me in Jimma and the postlude, and asked him: "Who was ungrateful, Indians or Ethiopians?" "You are a cad", he said, "to be bringing up all that story. That was part of your getting to know us, and now you have become one of us."

Abuna Theophilos, still using the mocking and scolding technique, went on to tell me a parable. This was the story of a hen which had laid some eggs, and was hatching them. By some accident, a duck's egg had come into the batch she hatched. Only when the chicks came out, the mother hen noticed that one was a duckling. She brought it up with her chicks, but when the duckling grew wings, it left the brood of chicken and flew away. The moral of the story was that I was the ungrateful duckling which had been hatched by the Ethiopian mother hen, and was now flying away.

The Archbishop told me I was a fool and did not know how to make the right decisions. I politely countered that I was indeed a fool, and that was why I could not change my decision to leave Ethiopia for the time being. For me, this was a period when I prayed intensely and for long hours, and my conviction about the call from God was unshakable.

Even that was by no means the end. So many people, Ethiopians as well as Indians and Canadians, whether prompted by the Emperor or not, tried to dissuade me from the decision I had made. One of the last attempts had a touch of humor to it. I have already referred to Blatta Marsae Hazan, the Minister of Justice, the great expert on Amharic, who was also very fond of me. He invited me to his home one day. After the initial courtesies and embraces, we sat down on a couch, and he told me quite directly that the Emperor had asked him to talk to me. With paternal affection he told me that my decision to leave Ethiopia was immature and mistaken. He had two proposals to make. The first was official. As Minister of Justice, he was to confer upon me Ethiopian citizenship. The second was personal. I should marry an Ethiopian girl and settle down in Ethiopia for life. He then told me he had a grown up daughter, who was a secondary school student. She was not at home, but was in boarding school. He produced her photograph and showed it to me. "She is intelligent and good-looking, of fine character", he told me. He then went on to produce some of her notebooks from school and showed them to me.

Needless to say, I was embarrassed, even a bit confused. It was not polite to say a downright no to both proposals. I barely wiggled

out of the situation by saying something about my not wishing to marry until I had finished my education and so on. He still insisted on my accepting Ethiopian citizenship. I said could not consider it now, since I was leaving the country in a few days. That was the end of what was for me a very difficult conversation.

And I left Ethiopia in June 1950.

The Emperor Persists

I was a college student at Goshen Indiana, from 1950-52, working for a BA degree. In November 1950, I received a telegram. It was from His Royal Highness Prince Makonnen Haile Sellassie, the second son of the emperor. He was visiting America, and would be in Chicago for a few days. He would like to see me at the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago, where he was staying.

I went, Chicago was some 120 miles from Goshen. He had booked a room for me at the Hotel, which by my standards, was luxurious. The Prince was glad to see me. He said that his father had entrusted him with two important jobs. One was to find an oil-prospecting firm in America which would help with the exploration for oil in Ethiopia. The other was to take me back with him to Ethiopia.

He was a few years older than I, but we were on easy terms with each other. I explained to him that I had begun my studies only a few months before, and I had to finish my degree before doing anything else. He asked me how long it would take for me to finish my course. I told him that I was working overtime to complete in two years the 120 credit hours needed for a degree, which would normally take four years. He suggested that I make plans to go to Ethiopia at the end of that two-year program. I could give no such commitment.

“Anyway, I am glad you have come. I want you to help me with some shopping in Chicago. I went to some good stores, but my God, how racist these people are! They are positively rude, just because of my skin color. We won’t speak in English, and even pretend not to understand English at all. I will speak Amharic, and you translate for me. I hear they are more courteous to foreigners, even if the skin is black. Besides, you can make them understand that I am a prince and all that. It will be fun to see what happens.”

So we went shopping. He would ask for the price or quality of some goods in Amharic. I would translate into English: “His Royal Highness would like to know the price of this crystal vase, and whether it is genuine lead crystal.” The change in behaviour pattern of the sales staff was obvious. We had great fun together in many Chicago stores. And I got a good lesson in American race relations in 1950. My friendship for the prince also became more intimate. We had many conversations on American racism and its state then.

In Person Again

During my final year (1954) at Princeton Theological Seminary, we heard the announcement that Emperor Haile Sellassie was paying an official visit to the USA, and that one of the places he had chosen to visit was Princeton University. I could only entertain faint hopes of seeing him from a distance, since it was unlikely that he would address the multi-thousand student body or anything like that. So I was surprised to be called into the office by the distinguished President of our Seminary, Dr. John Mackay (whom we students fondly but with awe, called ‘Patriarch Mackay.’) He told me that there would be a reception for the Emperor to which only the heads of faculty departments were invited, because the whole distinguished Faculty of Princeton would run to many hundreds, and there was not time enough even to introduce all the faculty members. He told me that President of Princeton University was inviting me specially to the reception because the Emperor had personally expressed a desire to see me! He was himself moderately surprised.

At the reception there were about fifty heads of departments and heads of schools. I was the only student present. We lined up in a circle around a large reception room, and the President went around the line with the Emperor, presenting each professor to the Emperor. He heartily shook hands with each, but hardly stayed to mumble a greeting to each. As soon as he spotted me in the line, he began smiling, and to my embarrassment, was constantly looking at me, and not at the faces of the professors being presented to him.

As they came around to me the President of the University said: “This is the young man Your Majesty wanted to see, Mr. Paul

Verghese.” “Yes, I know him”, the Emperor responded beaming. And then to me in Amharic, “So this is your university. We have tracked you down. And we know that you have finished your studies and will be getting your degree in a few days. You are coming back with us to Ethiopia. No more excuses.”

I was positively embarrassed and pained. How can I have the guts to say no to the Emperor again? I prayed fervently in my heart, and said: “Your Majesty, I am profoundly touched. I am grateful for your Majesty’s affection and interest. And I do want to serve Ethiopia and you. But it is now seven years since I left India in 1947. I must go back to India and only there make my decisions.”

“There are no decisions to make. We are leaving this country in a few days, and we want to take you with us. We have a place cut out for you in Ethiopia. Do not go on stubbornly refusing.”

Other people in the room, including the President, were wondering what the Emperor was talking that long to an Indian seminary student. “I will talk to Your Majesty’s Secretary”, I said, if only to get out of my embarrassment. The Emperor moved on. I later explained to the Secretary that I was not in a position to come to Ethiopia at that time and that I had to go back to India.

A Visitor Asks for a Gift

1954 found me back in India, and for the time being at least, I forgot all about Ethiopia. There was much work to do in India, and life had become very full. I was still a layman, running a Meditation and Retreat Center for Christian lay people (The Always Fellowship House), teaching religion at the Union Christian College, Always, Kerala, working as Honorary General Secretary of the Orthodox Christian Student Movement of India, and serving as an Honorary Secretary of the Student Christian Movement of India. On all that later.

In 1956 the Emperor visited India. Jawaharlal Nehru was Prime Minister of India. After visiting the North, Haile Sellassie came south to Kerala where I was. I had hoped to catch a glimpse of him during the grand reception in Cochin, but I missed the possibility, since I was

nobody important. The Emperor was to stay in the island home in Bolghatty near Cochin, of the former British Resident. I could not get anywhere near the boat that took the Emperor across to the island. As I was waiting at the boat jetty, somewhat frustrated, a part of the Emperor's party who had fallen behind came up, to take another boat across, which was waiting. Someone who had actually gotten inside the boat suddenly came out to the land, shouting "There he is! This is the man I was talking about." It was Prince Makonnen, the Duke of Harrar, who came forward to embrace me. "We have finally found you. My father wants to see you. Our ambassador in Delhi, His Highness Ras Imru, will talk to you about it. I must now get to the island. Father will be looking for me. I will tell him that I have seen you." He went back into the boat. I was glad that I had at least established contact.

That evening the formal contacts began. First it was the Ethiopian Ambassador in Delhi, His Highness Ras Imru Haile Sellassie, a cousin of the Emperor, a poet, a venerable figure for all Ethiopians. He told me that the Emperor had talked to him about me, and that he had heard a great deal about me before coming to India. He said that the Emperor had asked him to persuade me to go to Ethiopia. I told him that I was deeply involved in religious work, and should stay in India a little longer. Ras Imru later came to be a close friend, and we met often in Addis Ababa or New Delhi in later years.

The next contact was the next morning. I had been asked officially by the Indian Government to come and see the Minister who was acting as Indian host to the imperial party. This was Colonel J K Bhonsle, whose claim to recognition was that he had fought in the volunteer army of Subhash Chandra Bose, the Indian National Army which invaded British India for its liberation in 1942. I saw him in the Government Guest House in Ernakulam. I was in a simple white Khadi *lungi* and *Jubba*.

He looked me over, casting his eyes up and down, ostensibly somewhat sardonic.

"So, you are the man. Let me explain things to you. The government of India always seeks to please its distinguished guests. This guest,

however, has asked for something which is not in the government's power to give. He is asking for one of our citizens. On behalf of Prime Minister Nehru and the government of India, I would request you to accept the offer of the Emperor that you work on his personal staff in Ethiopia. You can mention the salary and other terms you want. His Majesty is ready to give you anything you demand. Congratulations."

There was a tinge of unconcealed derision in his eyes and in his tone. Who but a foolish Emperor would want to make such a thoughtless offer to what appeared to be a very ordinary man? Such thoughts must have been going through his mind.

"Sir", I answered, "I am deeply honored by His Majesty's offer. And I thank the Government of India for communicating it to me. I regret I am not able to accept it. I am a simple worker of the Christian Church. I am getting a salary of Rs. 75 (about US \$ 16) per month. And I am quite happy with my salary and my work. I would like to continue in that work."

"What! Do you know what an unusual offer and opportunity you are turning down? Do you understand what is being offered to you?"

"I believe I do, Sir. My vocation from God, however, is not to work in palaces, but to serve ordinary people, as I am now doing."

"You are an extraordinary man!" said Bhonsle, "You are exactly the kind of person that Prime Minister Nehru is looking for, just now." He paused and I wondered what was now coming. Then he continued:

"Prime Minister Nehru has a scheme for bringing some discipline into our nation. He wants to start in the high schools of our country. It is called 'National Discipline Scheme'; the idea is that each high school student would be required to do a period of service in our villages before he completes school. The Prime Minister wants a person of character to be in charge of that national program. He has asked me to be on the lookout for someone like you. Come to Delhi. We will fix it up for you."

His original tone of derision had given place to unconcealed admiration. I myself had heard of Bhonsle as an unmitigated

opportunist, and quite apart from his INA past, which was at best ambiguous, I had no reason to be particularly favourably impressed with his personality as it emerged in the conversation. I was trusting entirely in the grace of God to guide me in these encounters, and the words came naturally to my lips:

“Thank you, Sir, for your confidence in me. And I thank the Government of India for its offer to me. But this is a job which requires organizational skill, which I lack. I am better at working directly with people.”

“You will have plenty of opportunity working directly with young people in high schools, and as far as organization is concerned the government has its own institutional structures and methods in that field. You would not have to worry about these. You only give inspiring leadership. I will be returning to Delhi in three or four days, and you can join me there.”

“Thank you, Sir, but I do not think that is God’s calling for me. I will continue with my present work, in which I am quite happy.”

Bhonsle became quite friendly and asked me many questions about myself. Then he called his wife, a fashionably dressed young coquette he had met and married in Singapore, who was in the adjoining room, and introduced me to her, saying: “Look, this man is turning down the Emperor’s offer, and he has also turned down my offer on behalf of the Prime Minister, of the National Discipline Scheme job. Remarkable man!” We chatted for a while longer, and I was glad to be done with the conversation. Bhonsle ended up by saying that I should call on him the next time I went to Delhi. I said I would do so. Mrs. Bhonsle engaged me in conversation on several subsequent occasions during the Emperor’s tour of India, but I was scared of her coquettishness. She invited me to visit them when I came to Delhi. I politely agreed, but discreetly refrained from visiting them.

The Final Move

I had not yet seen the Emperor personally. I made no move to ask for an audience. The next day there was a grand public reception for the Emperor at our Church’s Engineering College in Kothamangalam.

I was invited and was seated on the front row in a large audience. I tried to catch the eye of the Emperor several times, expecting a smile of recognition. He saw me from the stage, but, instead of smiling, was glaring at me in apparent anger. I was depressed, for I had great regard and affection for the man.

The next day the Emperor was visiting the head of my church in Kottayam. The Emperor's church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, (often wrongly called the Coptic Church), was in communion with our church, the Indian (also wrongly called Syrian) Orthodox Church. The five ancient Asian-African Orthodox churches, the Egyptian (the true Coptic), the Syrian, the Armenian, the Indian, and the Ethiopian, belonged to the family of "Oriental Orthodox Churches", as distinguished from the family of Byzantine or "Eastern Orthodox Churches", comprised some twenty churches of Greece, Russia, Constantinople, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, and so on. The two families had separated from each other in the fifth and sixth centuries, subsequent to the Christological controversies arising from the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD).

Baselios Geevarghese II, Catholicos of the East, the head of the Indian church, was already in his nineties. A dignified and saintly prelate, he was widely respected by all, and was visited once even by Prime Minister Nehru and other dignitaries. I had gotten to know him well, and I was one of his special favorites. I had been asked to act as interpreter, since my Catholicos spoke little English, and I could translate directly between Malayalam and Amharic.

The aged Catholicos had come to the front door of his modest residence in Devalokam ("the world of the gods"), Kottayam, accompanied by me and others, to welcome the Emperor. The formalities of welcome over, the Catholicos had to be held by two deacons and guided to the reception room, where he was to converse with the Emperor. I came behind, guiding the Emperor to the reception room. He had not even smiled to me. He now started speaking to me in Amharic:

"You are the most wicked man I have met in my life." The rancor in the tone was unmistakable. I certainly did not want to hurt the

feelings of the Emperor, for whom my great admiration was compounded with sincere affection. Without thinking much, I blurted out:

“It is not wickedness, Your Majesty. I am a servant of the Church. He (pointing to the Catholicos in front) is the head of my Church. I will do whatever he asks me to do.”

“I do not believe you”, the Emperor said. “Not he, not even God Himself can bend your stubborn will.” He was angry.

The formal conversation began soon between the Emperor and the Catholicos, and it was a delight to translate. The Catholicos began: “Your Majesty, my own feelings at this time are like those of the aged Simeon in the Temple in Jerusalem welcoming the Jesus child: I can now depart this life in peace, for mine eyes have beheld the face of the only Emperor our churches have.”

“Your Holiness, what greater happiness can a king worn out by the cares of state have than beholding the face of a saintly person like you?”

The conversation increased my respect for both personalities. Finally the Emperor said, and I had to translate:

“What about this stubborn young man? We need him in Ethiopia, and he refuses to come.”

“No one can persuade him against his will”, replied the Catholicos. “But he will do what is right and good, Your Majesty.” I was so pleased with the reply. The Catholicos had not tried to show off his authority over me or to ask me to do as the Emperor says. His reply was cautious and guarded. He had defended my freedom, but also left the matter open. The Emperor asked his staff to give me his address in New Delhi where he was proceeding the next day. He was expecting a communication from me.

After we had said good-bye to the Emperor, the Catholicos called me and said, in the presence of several prominent bishops and leaders in my church: “Everybody wants Paul Verghese. I need him in our church, the Emperor wants him in his country, and there is only one

Paul Verghese. It will be good for our Church if you go to Ethiopia and work with the Emperor; he is our Emperor; you will be able to help our church a lot from there; but it will be good also if you stay here and continue the work. I cannot tell you what to do. You must go home, pray devoutly, and make your decision in prayer again.”

I promised to do so and took his leave. I had gone a few yards from his residence, when he sent a deacon to call me back. As I came in, he dismissed all the others and asked me to sit down before him on the floor, on a grass mat which had been laid for me.

He talked to me affectionately for a long time, and said how difficult it was to make right decisions. He said he believed what he had said to the others, about my presence in India being very necessary for the Church, since my spiritual *labors* had been blessed by God in an unusual way. He then went on to say how equally good it would be for me as well as for our church if I would go and work with the Emperor on his private staff. It would be an honour to our church, and the Emperor himself would help our church through me.

He then said that I should pray and make the decision in the context of prayer. He said he would himself be praying that I make the right decision. He then cautioned me about trying to impose my own preferences on God in prayer, and then saying that it was God's answer to prayer. He told me the story of two pious Catechists, the son of one of whom was marrying the daughter of the other. Both were praying to God profusely, as catechists and evangelists are prone to do; the boy's father was praying God for a large dowry from the bride's family, while the bride's father was asking God that the dowry may be as low as possible. The Catholicos asked me again not to push God to get my own way from Him.

As I left his presence, I prayed fervently within myself, that I may be completely free from all self-seeking, genuinely and sincerely open to God's guidance. There was the possibility that the admiration and applause I received from people for refusing the Emperor had gone to my head. Who knows the ways of the heart?

God gave me an idea on how to proceed. I went back to my home in Alwaye Fellowship House, prayed some more, and called together

three of my friends, all from my church: the Revd. Dr. K. C. Joseph, lecturer in English, and Prof. T. C. Joseph, lecturer in Botany, both from the Union Christian College where I also taught part time, and Mr. M. Thommen, my senior colleague and Secretary of the Fellowship House. I told them in some detail what had transpired in the three or four days preceding; also said that I had decided that I could not trust my own will. I would abide by any unanimous decision that the three of them together would make in prayer, whether I should go to Ethiopia or not. I gave them full assurance that whatever their joint decision was, I would accept it without question as the will of God, and act in accordance with it.

We were used to praying together as a group. We prayed together now that the will of God may be done. My colleagues thought it was too important a decision to be made on the spot. We should wait in prayer for twentyfour hours, and the three others should meet again separately to decide.

The next day we four met again. The other three had met and come to a decision. I was now in my own mind open to either possibility. It was my colleague, Mr. Thommen, who announced their decision. He said, "Vareechan, we all know very well that it was because of you that God had blessed this institution (the Fellowship House). It has now become a center of light to many. Without you, it may go down. For me, it will be difficult to keep up the work without you. Besides, Christian institutions and people as well as others, not only in Kerala, but also in the whole of India, have been benefiting immensely from your unusual gifts. Your presence is needed by our Church.

But there is another side to the matter. It is now public knowledge that you have heroically sacrificed a great opportunity by refusing the Emperor. It was in the newspapers also. They say that you have refused him a dozen times. Everybody admires you for this great sacrifice. We all admire your sacrifice and faith. If, however, this thirteenth time also you refuse him, you will be so proud of your sacrifice, that it will be difficult to live with you. For the sake of your own spiritual welfare and humility, therefore, you should accept the

offer of the Emperor. You should go to Ethiopia. That is our unanimous decision.”

It was not for me to question the logic of their argument. I had given them and God an undertaking, and my job was only to abide by it. The rest is God's responsibility. So I humbly bowed and accepted their decision, and then we prayed together for some time.

The Emperor had left Kerala by that time and was back in Delhi. I sent him a telegram accepting his offer. A reply telegram came the next day, asking me to go and see the Emperor again in Calcutta three days later. I promptly went and saw him in Calcutta, a good 3000 kilometers from Alwaye, and he was glad to see me. I remember he gave me three thousand-rupee notes, which denomination of Indian currency I had never seen before, (or, for that matter, any time after), and asked me to get some clothes and other accessories. The air ticket would be sent to me in Kerala. That was that.

I remember also that the Emperor asked me to stay on with his party for a couple of days. The next day the Emperor went to the races; I accompanied Prince Makonnen. He was keen on betting on the horses. He insisted on my betting too. I remember doing it once, for his sake, staking five rupees and getting back twentytwo. I have never done any betting before or after that.

Ethiopia - The Second Sojourn, 1956-59

So, that is the story of my return to Ethiopia, for a second sojourn which was about as long or as brief, as the first one, i.e. less than three years.

Soon after I arrived, the Emperor gave me an idea of what he wanted me to do. The first was to supervise the new projects of Indo-Ethiopian co-operation. He told me how impressed he was by the developments in India, and how great a man Nehru was. He wanted to develop these Indian relations extensively. He told me that the Indian experiment was more important for Ethiopia than the western form of development. He wanted me to look after the three projects he had already initiated, namely the Military Academy in Harrar, to be run by officers of the Indian Armed Services, led by

Brigadier Rawley; the Textile Mill Project in collaboration with Birla; and a new Indo-Ethiopian trade agreement under negotiation. Some advisors were to come from India, Mr. Ramachandran (?) Nair, a senior Indian Civil Service (ICS) officer, for Community Development, and Mr. John Barnabas, a prominent social worker of Delhi, for Social Affairs. I was myself to recruit other officers later, he told me.

The relations with India was to be a major part of Ethiopian policy in the future, and I was to be the Liaison Officer for all these. I would work very closely with Mr. Niranjana Singh Gill, the Indian Ambassador to Ethiopia, and also with Ras Imru, the Ethiopian Ambassador in New Delhi. I will not go through any particular ministry of the Ethiopian Government, but will be working directly with the Emperor. Formally I would be attached to the Office of the Private Secretary to His Majesty, and to the Ministry of the Pen. "There are many things I want you to do for us personally from time to time", said the Emperor to me in that first conversation after my arrival. Actually, these things turned out to be of various kinds: buying cutlery and crockery for the Palace use from abroad; reading the Emperor's personal mail and answering some; studying aid projects like the US Government's proposal to build a highway in Ethiopia and commenting on them; preparing drafts for the Emperor's important public speeches; summarising long English documents for the Emperor briefly in Amharic; giving him advice on proposed educational and social reforms; and so on.

Sometimes when he comes back from a trip abroad, he would give me a few books in English and ask me to read and summarise them in Amharic. Once when he came back from one of his frequent trips to visit his friend Marshall Tito in Yugoslavia, he brought back a book banned in Yugoslavia, by the opponent of Tito, former Yugoslavian Vice-President Milovan Djilas, entitled *The New Class*. I wondered how he got hold of the book. It was an indictment, not only of Tito, but of the whole Communist system, rather precocious for that time, i.e., 1956-57. Djilas was arguing that Communism may have succeeded in eliminating the propertied class of Capitalism, but had in fact only replaced that class with the new Bureaucratic Upper Class of Communist systems, which were more ruthless, oppressive and undemocratic than Capitalist bosses.

Another book he brought with him on one occasion, I remember, was Anton Makarenko's *The Road to Life*, a remarkable work by a Russian Communist educationist about how to rehabilitate social renegades and criminals by giving them limited responsibilities within an accepting and non-threatening community. It was a deviation from Lenin's wife Anna Krupskaya's views on Socialist education, but I thought they had relevance for Ethiopia (remembering my own experience with the boys in Jimma). The Emperor was pleased with my summaries, and told me that even in Communism, if you could remove the poisonous elements, there were some very good things. The ideas were passed on to the Ministry of Education, but nothing came of it in the end, it seems.

There was also the important project of the Rajah of Faridkot, in which the Emperor told me that he was greatly interested, for a massive immigration of Indian people to a vassal kingdom to be set up in Ethiopia and ruled, under Haile Sellassie as Emperor and Sovereign, by the Raja of Faridkot. I must claim some credit for eventually sabotaging this project, since I had a very low opinion of the integrity and character of the Rajah, who was seeking to regain in Ethiopia the kingdom he had lost in India when Independent India decided to put an end to all former Princely States. I knew the Emperor badly aspired to have an Indian Rajah under him. If there were to be such, I reckoned, they should be rulers who would bring credit to Ethiopia and India, and not profligates and philanderers who mercilessly exploited their people. The Rajah had put a lot of pressure on me to promote his cause, but I could not do so in good conscience.

I had an office in a building inside the Palace Compound, called the Duke Beith, or Duke's House. It was not accessible to the general public, but very close to the Emperor's residence and office.

Princess Sybil, My Secretary

One day soon after, the Emperor's 26 year old granddaughter, Princess Seblewengel Desta, came to see me, and announced herself. She told me in perfect English that her grandfather had asked her to work with me as my secretary. She had spent 17 years in British educational institutions in England, taken a University degree, and

had only recently returned to Ethiopia. She could speak a little broken Amharic, but could neither read nor write her own mother tongue. We arranged an office set up for her, but there was not much work for her to do since she could not handle Amharic and my memos to the Emperor had all to be in Amharic. A few weeks later, the Emperor asked me, with a twinkle in his eyes: "How is your secretary doing?"

Tactfully I answered: "Oh, she is a wonderful girl, Your Majesty, very capable, and very good in English. She is unusually bright and intelligent. Only thing is, she does not know any Amharic."

"That is no problem", said the Emperor. "You can teach her Amharic in your free time." That twinkle was still in his eye. I was thirtyfour, an eligible bachelor; she was 26, bright and intelligent. The point was obvious. I was to be co-opted in to the Imperial family as a grandson-in-law.

I saw later that Sybil had understood the point too. I liked her, but marriage was far from my thoughts at that time. Her own religious convictions did not go very much beyond ordinary nominal membership in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and a little touch of personal faith received from her devout grandfather. But I could not for the life of me think of marrying a princess. I had to work with the poor, and I would not fit into an Imperial family. I decided internally to resist the pressure, trusting in God.

Sybil could feel the inner resistance I was putting up. I have no reason to think that she felt very much attracted to me; in any case I gave her no opportunity to express any personal feelings. I hope she did not feel rejected either; I have no way of knowing. She later married an Ethiopian aristocrat, who became the President of Haile Sellassie University, and was, alas, in one of the riots, killed by the rebels. She had children also. I myself remained single, puritan. She continued to work a little longer in the office of the Private Secretary, but soon gave up. I was given a new male secretary.

My own residence was outside the palace compound, so that I could receive private guests at home, which I could not have done if I lived in the palace. I had a car and a chauffeur, a guard, a housemaid, a cook and all that. My four bed-room house, not far from the Palace,

was not in the top class, but luxurious by the standards to which I had by then been accustomed.

One of the first things I did was to start a regular weekday Bible class in my home, which several Indians and western missionaries as well as a few Ethiopians attended. Before I knew it, there were six to eight Bible classes and lectures a week that I was running all over the city, in colleges and in homes. I was giving two evening lectures on religion every week in the University College of Addis Ababa. All these classes and lectures were well attended.

“St. Paul’s Hospital”

Just about the time I came to Addis Ababa, there had been a major bus accident in the northern part of Ethiopia. In which many Indian teachers and their families had either died or been seriously injured. One special case was that of Kunhoonhamma, a very young teacher’s wife from Kerala and her four month old baby. The husband, whom I never met, had died in the accident. The wife was in hospital, with 22 fractures, some of them compound. The bus had fallen off a hillside, in cool weather, at night. The baby, well bundled up, had rolled off the mother’s hold and rolled down the hill, stopped by a tree far below. Those who came to rescue the victims did not see the baby for at least 12 hours after the accident. When they finally found him, the baby was still alive, but totally unresponsive. He refused to take any food, or to respond to any cuddling or caressing. His stare was fixed. The doctors had great difficulty feeding him and keeping him alive.

The Emperor came to the hospital and saw all the survivors. When he came to the baby which had been separated from his mother who was unconscious, he tried his best to get a smile out of the infant, but failed. The doctors explained to him that he was shocked at the loss of his mother for twelve hours and had gone into a catatonic trauma, from which only maternal love could wake him up. The Emperor immediately ordered one of his household staff nurses to take over the infant.

It was a burly, affectionate fifty year old Tigre woman who gave her whole heart to the baby, and finally weaned it from the trauma,

after three days of continuous effort. Meanwhile the mother, in bandages and slings from head to toe, came out of her unconsciousness, but the baby would not respond to its own mother. It would respond only to the nurse. The Emperor often came to the hospital to see the baby, and sometimes talked to me about it.

When after months in the hospital, the mother was finally discharged, still plaster caste over her hip and legs, on crutches, with a baby who would not respond to her, there was no obvious place where she could go for convalescence, which would take several months. So came the mother, the baby and the nurse to my home and settled down. Meanwhile another teacher, also from Kerala, Mr. Nanoo, a Hindu in his late forties, had also been in the same accident, and been discharged from hospital, still on crutches. He also could not take care of himself, and so decided to move into my home. Thus my house became quite full. People used to call it St. Paul's Hospital. There were visitors all the time. It was open house, from morning till late at night, though I myself was seldom at home. The office and my evening classes kept me busy.

The baby grew up in my home, and became fairly normal. He went to school in Ethiopia. Later he went to India and finished high school, and was admitted to Madras Christian College. One day, when he was twentyfive, he swallowed a large quantity of sleeping pills and committed suicide. I went to the funeral. It was a heart breaking experience for me.

The Cocktail Circuit

I was a much sought after guest at Embassy cocktail receptions and dinner parties. The foreign diplomats must have thought that they could pump out palace information from me. The Indian Ambassador also frequently entertained me. The Russian Ambassador, Boris Karavaev, was particularly friendly; his main purpose must have been to squeeze out maximum information. There were times when I went to two and three cocktail parties in one evening, though I was careful not to let my evening classes suffer. Very soon I decided to give up whisky and hard liquors altogether, and to stick to wines and fruit juices. Ethiopian Government Ministers

also began inviting me home for dinners and parties. There were also the imperial dinners which were particularly sumptuous. I had become very fond of Ethiopian food, especially *injera* and *wat*. *Injera* was a large flat thin pancake, about two feet in diameter, made of fermented *teff* (a local grain) flour, folded in four or rolled up. *Wat* could be any spicy side dish with sauce, usually chicken (*doro-wat*) or meat (*sega-wat*) or split peas (*geq-wat*).

One of the most touching experiences was when a minister invited me to his house, and while at dinner, made quite a package of *injera* and choice dishes, kneading them together with his fingers, and then, asking me to open my mouth, put the whole lot in. It was a difficult experience for an Indian, but I had no option except to eat it. I was told later that this was a sign of great affection and warmth, though I found it slightly embarrassing at the time. But it was part of my acculturation process.

The same minister was once with me at the Race Course, when we had both accompanied the Emperor to watch the races. It was a Friday. The minister offered me a drink. I ordered tea with milk. He ordered a whiskey for himself. Ethiopians are very strict on their fasting laws, and do not eat any animal food on Wednesdays and Fridays as well as during Lent. Milk and milk products are also forbidden. He was surprised that I had ordered tea with milk on a Friday and asked me:

“Why do you drink tea with milk on a Friday?”

“Is it not better to drink tea with milk than to drink whiskey on a fasting day?” I asked.

He seemed baffled and said, “But, my friend, there is no milk in whiskey!”

Like all Semitic peoples, the Ethiopians do not eat pork; they also will not eat the flesh of any bird that flies, for they regard them as keeping company with the angels. I identified myself as much as I could with Ethiopian culture and behaviour patterns, including eating habits. But one thing I could never bring myself around to. That was eating raw meat. For the Amhara this was a great delicacy. At

practically all banquets and dinners, this item would come somewhere immediately after the main course. One is offered a leg of beef, a sharp knife, and some powdered chilly to go with it. The guest is expected to slice off a choice morsel from the chunk offered, dip in the chilly powder and consume it. Even at the Emperor's banquets, as one enters the huge banquet hall, one encounters hundreds of huge chunks of meat hooked to tall posts all along the banquet hall, covered with clean cloths, to keep away the flies. At the end of the main course waiters would move to the hundreds of posts, remove the cloth covers, and bring the huge chunks of raw meat to each table, with special knives and chilly powder. I managed consistently to keep away from this delicacy, for sentimental reasons rather than on account of principles. Since 1975 I do not eat meat at all. And I think I am all the more healthy for that. The Ethiopians, they say, invariably have tapeworms inside their body, because of their habit of eating raw meat.

Life with the Emperor

There was an endearing quality to Haile Sellassie. I felt drawn to him, and developed both affection and admiration for him. I discovered early that our ideas did not agree and settled for the fact that this would be a problem always.

He was a statesman and a strategist, but also a warm human being. He was quite abstemious, ate very little, and except for the occasional glass of champagne on a ceremonial occasion, did not drink very much alcohol.

He was very strict about his fasting and regular prayers and church worship. Especially during the Great Lent before Easter, when the Ethiopians fast for 56 days, he would not eat anything until three o'clock in the afternoon. He would be in his office, working. At three he would go to his private chapel, where there would be a special prayer service which lasted for an hour. Only after that he would break his fast.

Everyone stood in awe of him, including his own grown up sons and daughters, but not his wife, Empress Menen. She was the only

forthright critic he had, so long as she lived. Her death seems to have signaled the beginning of a period of decline in Haile Sellassie's life.

I always greeted him in the accepted Ethiopian way, even for his sons - to bow all the way down before him and to touch the ground every first time you greeted him in the day. The protocol for the eldest son, the Crown Prince was a little more strict. We only had to bow, bending double and touching the ground with our fingers. The Crown Prince had to fall down flat on the ground before the Emperor, touching the ground with his forehead, in a gesture of obeisance like the Indian *sashtangapranama*. This he had to do every first time in the day he saw his father. I felt sorry often for the Crown Prince who was several years senior to me. People said all kinds of things by way of explanation. One story was that the loyalty of the son to the father was always in doubt, and therefore that this was a stringent requirement laid down by the father to enforce submission and obedience.

Three members of his perpetual entourage were accredited to me. I could approach any of them any time with a message or memorandum for the Emperor, and they would immediately transmit it to him, in office or bedroom. They were also the ones whom the Emperor would send to call me into the presence. Of course you could access them only inside the Palace, or sometimes in our "Sunshine Club." This was a stretch of open tarmac between my office (Duke Beith) and the Emperor's Palace. Most of the ministers who came to see the Emperor on business practically every day, spent their time gossiping and waiting in this open court for the Emperor to call them. There was a waiting room inside the Palace. Apart from the Prime Minister, few of the other ministers would go into this room. They preferred to stand in the sunshine and wait. Since only the Emperor could make all the important decisions, most of the ministers wasted whole mornings in the "Sunshine Club." Sometimes the Emperor would not be able to call them at all, though he was quite businesslike and worked for long hours. It was the most inefficient way of running a government, but the Emperor would not readily hand over decision making authority to the ministers.

One day the Emperor was spending the week-end in one of his out of town palaces in Debre Zeit (Beshoftu), an hour's ride by car from Addis. He asked me to come along. During our stay there in that beautiful crater lake settlement, he asked me to come for a walk in his palace gardens. This was only a few months after I had started working in the Palace. As we walked back and forth, with no one within earshot, he enquired about how I was doing, and then said:

"I want your advice. I have a problem with one of my ministers. You know my Defence Minister, Ras Abebe Aregai. He is the richest person in the country. And yet, he is getting a kickback from the daily rations of every single soldier in the army. I have evidence for it now. What should I do?"

His Highness Ras Abebe Aregai was the leader of the Ethiopian Resistance to Mussolini's occupation of Ethiopia, a rough country soldier risen to prominence because of his skill in strategizing and taking risks. When the Emperor was in exile in Europe, Abebe was an outlaw in the jungles of Ethiopia, leader of the guerrilla resistance fighters, sought by the fascist troops of Mussolini, but protected and respected by his people for his courage and skill. When the Emperor regained his country with the help of his own emigre' troops and the Allied army, he honored Abebe Aregai with all kinds of land endowments and titles, until he rose to the highest possible title and rank in the country, Ras, equivalent to the Indian Rajah. He had been serving also as Defence Minister, at the head of one of the largest armies in Africa. I knew him, but did not think very highly of him, not because he was not very cultured, but since I was told by everyone that he was dishonest and corrupt. He was known to be fabulously rich, living in a palace of his own.

Without much hesitation, I gave the emperor my frank opinion:

"Your Majesty, Ras Abebe is known to the people as a very corrupt man. He is not very popular among them today, though he was the people's hero during the Resistance. On the other hand, Your Majesty's prestige among the people is very high, and they would admire you all the more if you punish a corrupt man for his misdeeds. Such exemplary punishment would be very good for the country, where

there is so much corruption and it is growing day by day, as I understand. Of course there should be an open trial, during which his crime and the evidence for it should be exposed.”

Haile Sellassie was silent for a few seconds, and then smiled at me, with a sad look in his eyes. “I was testing you. You are rather naive and politically inexperienced, as I expected. You know nothing about how a country is to be run. What would happen if I throw him down from his pinnacle? What I told you about him is true, and I have the evidence. But if I fire him, first, I would have a rich, cunning and very powerful enemy. Second, I will have to create another lord like him, for an Emperor needs these “buffers” between him and the people. I would have to endow such a lord with the wealth of the people. And when he gets sufficiently powerful, he will also become corrupt, like his predecessor. These things have to be handled differently, with skill and care. Statecraft is neither easy nor straightforward.”

Whatever was on the Emperor’s mind I never found out. I was not convinced by his argument. Of course I had failed his test in statecraft. I knew I was too naive and not wily enough for politics. Only much later I understood how much damage could be done by people regarding themselves as honest at the head of public affairs. I readily think of the experience of Jimmy Carter and Rajiv Gandhi who set out to do honest politics. I had failed the test, but I did not feel sorry. I did not want to pass such tests.

The Emperor went on to talk about other things. We talked about religion and international affairs and many other subjects. I kept the discussion about the Defense Minister in my heart and brooded over it. These were state secrets and I could not discuss them with anyone.

The Defense Minister Comes to Me

A few days later my private telephone in the office rang. I picked it up.

“Good morning, my lord; the Defense Minister would like to talk to you”, said a gruff military voice over the telephone.

“Right away!” I promptly responded. The voice of Ras Abebe



Aregai came over the phone, without delay. It was smooth and polite, difficult to translate into English, but it went something like this:

“I have a petition to present to my lord. I want to come and see my lord. Kindly give me an appointment at a time convenient to my lord.”

In Amharic, addressing someone as “my lord” (*getaye*) is not unusual. It is more or less like ‘Sir’, but a little more courteous. “I have a petition to present to my lord” (*getaye gar gudday allenh*), is a courteous way of saying: “there is something I want you to do for me.” Still it was overly polite language for a senior minister to use to a junior member of the Emperor’s staff. If the Defense Minister wanted something from the Emperor, he would go directly to him, not through me. That was protocol and that was practice.

So I wondered what this call meant. I suspected something fishy, especially in the light of the Emperor’s conversation with me in Debre Zeit only a few days before. The only way the Defense minister could have known about that conversation was for the Emperor to have told him. Of course the Palace Mafia had bugged all the Emperor’s rooms and telephones, and the Emperor always suspected it; but we had our conversation precisely for that reason in the garden in Debre Zeit, that too walking.

“Your Highness, I should come to you. You do not need to come to me. I will come to your office or home. Just tell me when.” I was both courteous and deferential.

“No, no, I will come to your office at your convenience. Please tell me when I should come.” Ras Abebe insisted.

“Come right away, then, Your Highness. I will wait for you.”

“That is most kind of you. Thank you. I will be there in a few minutes.”

I had allowed at least half an hour for him to arrive and was planning to go to the entrance of our building to welcome him. He surprised me. He must have been calling from the Palace, I later guessed. In a few minutes he arrived, accompanied by the usual

entourage of generals and bodyguards, dismissed them at the entrance of the Duke Beith, and had walked in, alone, to the door of my office. I went to the door to welcome him, bowed politely, and guided him to my own office chair and asked him to sit on it, because it was the best chair around.

“Please do sit down, Your Highness”, I said, in as courteous an Amharic idiom as I knew, pointing to my office chair.

“By no means! That is my lord’s chair, and I cannot sit on it. I will sit on one of these.” He moved to take hold of one of the chairs on the opposite side of my desk. That was quite all right. I invited him again to sit on the seat he had chosen, myself now standing between the desk and my seat.

“My Lord has to sit down first”, he said.

“No, Your Highness is far senior to me, and must sit first before I can sit.” I said, mostly for the fun of a little parrying in the fencing game of counterfeit courtesy. Whatever the Defense Minister’s game was, I made up my mind not to give in so easily to his charms.

“My lord is more honorable. You must sit first. How can I sit, without your sitting?”

I was determined not to give in, at least in the game of politeness. So we kept on parrying, until finally I had to say:

“Your Highness, if you will not honor me by sitting down, then we have no option except to stand and talk.”

I had expected him to give in at that point and sit down, for we had both been standing now for a while. But not Ras Abebe Aregai! He was pitting his will against mine, and would not give in so easily:

“If that is the will of my lord, then we will stand and talk.”

So that is what we did. I stood between my office chair and desk, while he stood on the opposite side of the desk. I am always glad to have a desk between me and such people. Even between me and a class room or lecture audience which I fear may be slightly hostile. The desk is my defense.

"I came to see my Lord, because I need a little help." He began quite cautiously: "It is a little personal help I need, nothing official."

"But how can I, a poor newcomer, help someone like you, Your Highness?"

"My lord can help me. In fact you alone can help me."

"Please tell me how I can help Your Highness."

"You know how difficult it is for a minister to balance his domestic budget and make both ends meet. He has to give endless dinner parties and entertain lavishly. He has to live in grand style and maintain a large domestic staff, several cars, special clothes and so on. You know how meager a minister's salary is. He gets only a little more than what you, my lord, gets."

I was not quite getting the drift of the conversation. I had no way of guessing where it was all leading up to. Today I am slightly wiser and able to guess. But I was totally simple and naive in such matters, while being rather quick in the uptake of abstract ideas and philosophical notions. So I could do nothing but listen without interrupting. So His Highness Ras Abebe, whom the Emperor had called the richest man in Ethiopia, continued:

"So I have been trying to supplement my income by trying to build a couple of houses which I could give out on rent."

This time even I could see the hoax. It was common knowledge that Ras Abebe had some 500 houses in the city, and was getting more than a million dollars every year in house rent alone. He had enormous tracts of land in his possession, and was one of the largest of the landlords in the country - one reason why the people hated him. And he was talking to me, with a straight face, about "*trying to build a couple of houses*" and that too to "balance the domestic budget"! But I was not about to let out my indignation. I cannot lie with the same facility with which he could, but I was determined to see through to the end of the game. So I kept a straight face, normally a difficult thing for me to do. He continued:

"You know how expensive housing construction has become these

days. I am running out of money and cannot finish these houses. I need a loan, desperately.” He paused.

Just look at the irony of it! The richest man in Ethiopia talking to a poor Indian who does not even have a whole thousand dollars to his credit in the bank, about a loan! I was in fact flabbergasted, and wanted to ask: “What is this game, Your Highness? Out with it.” Instead I politely responded:

“But what can I do about that, Your Highness?”

“Oh, you can indeed help me. In fact, you are the only one who can help me. That is why I came to you.”

My logical capacity, my understanding of sense and sequence, of reason and reasonableness, my ability to follow a conversation, was being unkindly stretched. Certainly he is not going to ask me to intercede with the Emperor to give him a loan! He should be smart enough to know what the Emperor thinks of him!

“But how can I help, Your Highness?”, I blurted out, not without a tinge of irritation. We were still standing.

“Let me tell you. The only source from which I can get a loan is the bank, the State Bank of Ethiopia. You know the manager of the Bank. He is your friend and fellow countryman, Mr. Menezes. If you put in a word for me, he will grant me a loan.”

Of course, there was only one bank in Ethiopia then, and that was the government bank. Mr. Menezes was a Goan, and we all knew that he was right at the center of all the corruption in the country. I knew him well, though I would have hardly called him a friend. He gave loans to all the corrupt landlords and profiteering traders in the country, and got a kick back from each of them. He was a close collaborator of the Defense Minister himself in the latter’s housing construction and other projects.

“Oh, Mr. Menezes”, I said: “He will do anything Your Highness asks him to do. It is better that Your Highness speaks to him directly, now. Shall I call him?” I made a move towards the telephone by my side.

“No, don’t. Don’t call him now. He has given me loans in the past,

but don't call him now. After I am gone, you can call him, and recommend a loan for me."

I had no idea where the trap was, but I knew it was some kind of a trap. I was not going to fall into it. So, I said, very gently and very firmly,

"No, Your Highness, I will not be able to help you. I will not ask Mr. Menezes to give you a loan. You can ask him directly and he will give you what you ask. I have no doubt about that. But I do not want to be involved."

It was firm and final. He saw it, and said, very modestly, "If you will not help me, I will have to go somewhere else for help. Thank you for your time. Pardon me for having bothered you." He bowed and put forth his hand to shake my hand and say goodbye. I saw him to the door, and was going to accompany him to the outer entrance, but he would not let me. His entourage was waiting outside.

I came back to my desk, sat down and prayed. I thanked God for not letting me fall into whatever trap there was. I did not know whether the Defense Minister was going to be my enemy from this time forth. I did not worry too much about that. I reflected, seeking to make sense of this call.

I could not see the point. I decided to seek some advice, very discreetly. There was only one man among the senior ministers whom I fully trusted. He was a Tigre from the North, Ato Abebe Retta, Minister of Health. He was known not to be corrupt. So I phoned him and said I wanted to see him. He asked me to come right away. He was several years my senior in age, very honest and forthright, and rather fond of me. I could not share with him my conversation with the Emperor about the Defense Minister, because that was a state secret. But I narrated to him in detail the visit of the Defense Minister to my office.

He listened very carefully, reflected for a minute and then said to me:

"What you did was absolutely right. I have no way of knowing what the Defense Minister's real intention was. I can only make a



guess. You probably know that there is a group of nine or so top people who have woven a closed circle around the Emperor. No information gets to the Emperor without their knowledge, and what they do not want the Emperor to know, does not get through. Now the Emperor has foxed them by bringing you. You have broken through their circle. They would like to co-opt you into their circle. You have the unusual freedom of bringing anything to the notice of the Emperor, a freedom which I do not have as a senior Minister. They resent that."

"But how do they co-opt me, by making me ask Menezes for a loan for Ras Abebe?" I asked.

"Again, I can only guess", said the Health Minister. "Suppose for a moment that you fell into the trap and asked Menezes to help Ras Abebe with a loan. Menezes has been giving loans to Ras Abebe ever since the bank started, and you will never know what transpires between them. But I can guess what Menezes will say to you, something like: 'Oh, Ras Abebe! I won't give him a loan. I have given him many loans in the past and he is very remiss about timely repayment. But since this is the first time that you ask me for a favor, let me see what I can do,' That is all he will say. You will never even know whether Ras Abebe got a fresh loan or whether he needed such a loan. But one day when Ras Abebe sees you in the Sunshine Club or somewhere else, he will invite you to lunch or dinner in his house. You will have a sumptuous dinner. The guests will be carefully chosen that they can be future witnesses to what goes on at the dinner. Probably there will be a secret movie camera (video cameras did not exist in those days) and a secret tape recorder operating all the time. Towards the end of the dinner, the Defense Minister will say to you something like: 'Oh, I cannot thank you enough for coming to my rescue in what was a difficult financial situation for me. If you had not helped me, I would not have known where to turn. I would like to express my gratitude by this little token.' He would hand you a little envelope with some money in it, and it will all be recorded, with eye-witnessess. You would then have received your own kick-back, and then you are part of their circle, because they can use the evidence against you any time."

Today I know that this sort of game is commonplace for political operators in India as well as elsewhere. But at that time I was totally inexperienced and unsophisticated in such matters. The explanation of Ato Abebe Retta completely convinced me about the power group around the Emperor, most of whom I could identify. For example, the Prime Minister (son-in-law of the Emperor), the Defense Minister, the Interior Minister, the Finance Minister, the Minister of the Pen, and the Holder of the Imperial Purse, who happened to be a priest were at the top of the ring of corruption.

I became aware that I was unsuited to power jobs in any government. I knew that I would not always succeed in resisting the blandishments of money and power. One thing the Defense Minister said was true. It was becoming difficult for me to balance my own budget, because of the frequent demands on outlays for clothing, cars, salaries of domestic servants, entertainment of guests, parties, donations and so on. It was easy to accept a little gift voluntarily offered by people who had benefited from one's services. That is the way it all begins. From then on it is all a downhill spiral.

I could probably learn the tricks of the power game fairly quickly. But in that process I would have lost something I regarded as very valuable in myself. Not that I am scrupulously honest or anything like that. Yet one has no desire to be like many government officials in India, both high and low, who seem today to have no compunction about accepting bribes large and small from all and sundry.

I went home, prayed reflected. I decided that this way of life was not for me. I carefully prepared a resignation letter and submitted it to the Emperor. I did not mention all my reasons. I simply stated that I would like to go back to India and start serving my people, ordinary people.

A few days later the Emperor called me to his office. He talked to me with great affection. He said he needed me and that it was difficult to find honest people to work for him. He talked to me about several new responsibilities he wanted me to take up. One was the Charitable Foundation (*Baggo Adragot*) which he had set up with his own personal money to serve the deserving poor people. The other was

to advise the Ministry of Education. A third was to be Executive Secretary to the Ethiopian Government Committee for Relief Aid given by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Aid for victims of the last war. Honestly I did not have the heart to refuse. I expected there would be some opportunity for real service to people in these new assignments. A few days later I got the orders appointing me as Advisor to the Ministry of Education, Advisor to the Haile Sellassie I Charitable Foundation, and Executive Secretary of the UNRRA Committee.

As time went on, I discovered that these jobs were largely decorative. I went to many committee meetings, studied many projects and proposals and gave advice on them. But very little of my advice was actually put into practice. I had no executive power in either the Ministry of Education or the Charitable Foundation. The Ethiopians in charge, Ato Kebede Michael and Ato Tafari Sharo, resented my meddling, and while being polite to me, held me at bay from any real authority. The UNRRA job was routine, and was slowly winding up as UN Funds gradually dried up. Vested interests were regnant everywhere, and I am not the kind that would fight for my own power, or try to overthrow other people from power in order to establish my own. I could have fought with some hope of success, since the Emperor was on my side. But I avoided any major power struggle, since my mind was set on getting out of the power game.

I was popular in Ethiopia, knew all the important people, and had genuine affection and respect for the Emperor. Still I was terribly lonely, unhappy and spiritually restless. There was no friend with whom I could share my feelings and who would understand. As a layman, I got to know the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Abuna Baselios, a pious monk of the old school, who was however very fond of me. With Abuna Theophilos, the powerful prelate who had scolded me and admonished me against leaving Ethiopia the first time, I was on very close and friendly terms. Though he spoke no English, he was very learned in the traditional lore of Ethiopia, and I learned much from him.

Among the Indians, I had few friends. I went to the home of Mr.



John Barnabas for an occasional game of bridge. I visited Mr. Balachandran Nair, the Community Development Advisor, who was in Ethiopia on a short one-year assignment. There was Mr. Varghese, the Legal Advisor in the Ministry of Law, whose wife was a distant cousin of mine. I visited the homes of the Indian teachers, but only rarely. The important thing in all these families was that they all had young children, and I was always immensely fond of children. Children were a green spot in my life. Their company made me forget my woes, at least for the time being.

But I was unhappy, and did not share my unhappiness with anyone. I prayed about it. One particular occasion, I remember the dialogue with God was particularly meaningful. I kept saying to God, in my usual petulant manner:

“What have you done to me, my God? I was so spiritually aglow, happy and useful, in India. You have to admit that several people came to know you better because of my work. I did not want to go away from India. Why did you drag me away from such a useful ministry, to this drab spiritual desert, where I am wasting my time?”

Quite often, God engages me in a long silence, when I ask a stupid question like that. He usually wants me to answer my own question. He wants me to struggle with myself in silent meditation and come out with an answer. If the answer is not good, He draws me into another silence, till I come out with a better answer. This time the right answer came the very first time, and it came from Him this time, in a very gentle, slightly mocking, but friendly word: “Well, my son, do you think I could have been trying to make you see that I could perhaps not be totally helpless without your help there in India?”

That hit me. I understood. In India I was in danger of thinking too highly of myself and my spiritual achievements and of my indispensability to God, that it could have led me into disastrous spiritual pride. Pride of every kind comes rather naturally to me, but spiritual pride is the worst, and most spiritually destructive. I have seen many of our Hindu and Christian holy men fall prey to spiritual pride, primarily because their spiritual attainments did not render them immune to addiction to praise and admiration for themselves. I thanked God for

having rescued me from a great spiritual danger in India, and agreed not to question His judgment about what was good for me. Ethiopia was where He had brought me, and in Ethiopia I must stay until I get my next marching orders.

CHAPTER V

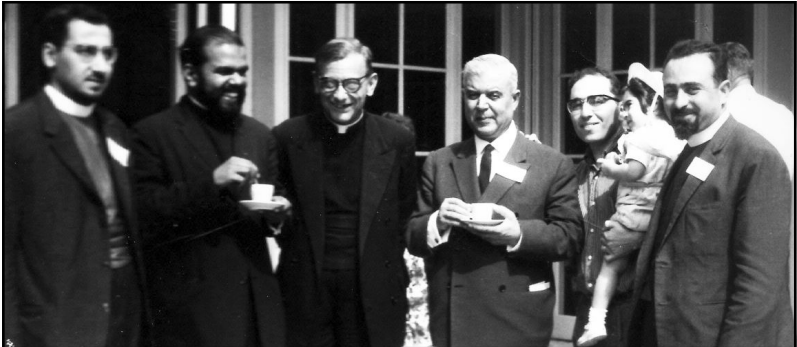
ETHIOPIA II

The Orthodox Student Association

If I could not leave Ethiopia, and if government work was not interesting to me, I could only increase the scope of my religious work. I was already teaching in several of the colleges in Addis Ababa. With the Emperor's permission, and the approval of my students, we began organising the *Haimanote Abew* Orthodox Student Organisation. Many people helped me in the task, but the students did not want to close association with the official church. I remember I took about 100 college students to a one day retreat in the private chapel of the palace of the former Prime Minister, Bitwoded (later Ras) Makonnen Endalkachew, a senior aristocrat for whom I had the highest regard. The Rev. Abba Habtemariam, the young Ethiopian monk who had several years before helped me at the Kotabe Secondary School, now joined hands with me.

In those days, Ethiopians took communion only when they were small children or after they became very old. The idea was that so long as one's sexual powers were operative, one was a sinner and should not take communion. It took me a great deal of persuasion and effort to make my students see that this was not a Christian assumption, that there was forgiveness available for every human being in Christ, and that frequent communion was the norm for a true practising Christian. Several students partook of Communion during that one day retreat at the palace of the former Prime Minister, beautifully situated on a wooded hill. A deep bond was formed among all of us, and that was the beginning of the *Haimanote Abew* (means The Faith of our Fathers). We then organized several study classes and conferences, and this work gave me a lot of satisfaction and occasion for praising God.

My weekly classes at the University College of Addis Ababa two evenings a week and at the Mahandis Engineering College once a week gave me a great deal of spiritual satisfaction, and seemed to be useful to the young university students. There was no obligation to



attend, but 50 to 100 students came regularly. We had also occasional retreats and conferences, which often meant much to the young people. But it was rather difficult for them to relate to the regular Ethiopian Orthodox clergy and worship, both of which belonged to an antiquated, uncritical, feudal framework from which the young university student had been significantly alienated.

When I finally left Ethiopia in 1959, this work with university students, which was entirely voluntary on my part and which formed no part of my official responsibilities, was the most painful for me to leave behind. The *Haimanote Abew* organisation itself became even more active after I left. But there was one significant change. The movement, without losing its religious foundations, became increasingly politically aware, which meant necessarily critical of the Haile Sellassie regime and policy.

On the one hand, the Communist ideology had already spread among the university student body, even though the Emperor had taken care to see that the university was run by anticommunist Jesuits from French Canadian universities. Some of the professors were East European refugees for whom fighting communism was virtually their creed: Communist ideas had been coming in from many sources, only one of which was the local Soviet Embassy. Several of the young Ethiopians who had gone abroad to study came back with a frame of mind that could not accept the corrupt social and economic structure that prevailed in a basically feudal Ethiopia.

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CHAPTER VI
AMERICA AND THE WEST

(Not Written)

CHAPTER VII
THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT
ROME, CONSTANTINOPLE, GENEVA,
AND THE REST OF US

(Not Written)

CHAPTER VIII

THE SOVIET UNION THAT WAS COMMUNISM, SOCIALISM, LIBERALISM AND OTHER ISMS

April 1993. I am here in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates for the Holy Week celebrations. On the Friday before Palm Sunday, I celebrated the Eucharistic liturgy in our St. George Orthodox Church, Abu Dhabi, and on Palm Sunday, at St. Thomas Orthodox Church, Dubai. In both these places it was my special privilege to oversee the construction, in the last few years, of two beautiful new churches. This is exceptional because the Emirs and Sheikhs do not normally allow the construction of any places of worship other than Islamic mosques. As a favour to the communities of Indian Orthodox Christians, the Sheikhs of Abu Dhabi and Dubai long ago permitted us to build churches of our own. In Islamic countries, unlike in socialist and liberal countries, religions other than Islam enjoy no equal privileges with Muslims or any full freedom of worship. So we are very grateful to the Emirs and Sheikhs for this special concession to us in Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

In Sharjah also we have sizeable Orthodox congregation; they have no place of worship of their own; they share a prayer hall with nine other denominations, and it is often difficult to maintain the atmosphere necessary for Eastern Orthodox worship in such common places, where other Christians have different attitudes about how a place of worship should look and be maintained. Our people want to construct a church of their own, but it is very difficult to get permission from the Sheikh and from the Waqaf or Islamic Affairs Board.

So I went to seek the advice of my long-time friend Sheikh Dr. Ibrahim Ezzeddin, Advisor on Religious Affairs to the President of the Emirates. Dr. Ibrahim Ezzeddin is a distinguished, scholarly, intelligent and devout Egyptian Muslim, for whom I have both great affection and high admiration.

We had met for the first time, years ago, in Moscow, at the first

major inter-religious conference held in the Soviet Union: "Religious Workers, to Save the Precious Gift of Life from Nuclear Catastrophe." Dr. Ezzeddin was the leader of the large Islamic delegation of more than 200 members from a dozen or more countries. There were more than a thousand people from all the religions of the world attending. I was the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, with the responsibility to bring out half a dozen documents acceptable to all religions and all political opinions to the left of centre. Sheikh Ibrahim Ezzeddin was the leader and spokesman for the whole Muslim delegation, since he spoke perfect English and was widely acceptable to Muslims who disagreed among themselves.

Chairing the Drafting Committee, I remember, was a difficult task for three reasons. First, the process of communication in the committee was so convoluted. Some Muslim Sheikh from, say, Afghanistan, would make a point in a session of the drafting committee, in his special kind of Arabic. An interpreter would render it from Arabic to Russian. From the Russian another interpreter would translate it into English. The chairman of the drafting committee could never be sure whether what the Afghan said, as it got through two interpreters, was rightly understood by him or by the committee, or whether the committee's response was properly conveyed to the Afghan.

Secondly, since the conference theme was averting nuclear catastrophe, quite often there were differences of opinion between not only Soviet and Western participants, but also among Nuclear and non-Nuclear nations. It was difficult to find an easily acceptable common formulation.

Thirdly, there was always somebody at the back of the Chairman, whispering in his ears what should be said, that is, some people wanting us to repeat in our document the official Soviet government line. That line was most of the time decidedly progressive (for example, for the total elimination of all nuclear weapons from the face of the earth), but in some particular cases politically unacceptable to certain nations.

We had produced a draft on Peace in the Middle East, more or less along the lines of UN resolutions on the subject. This did not

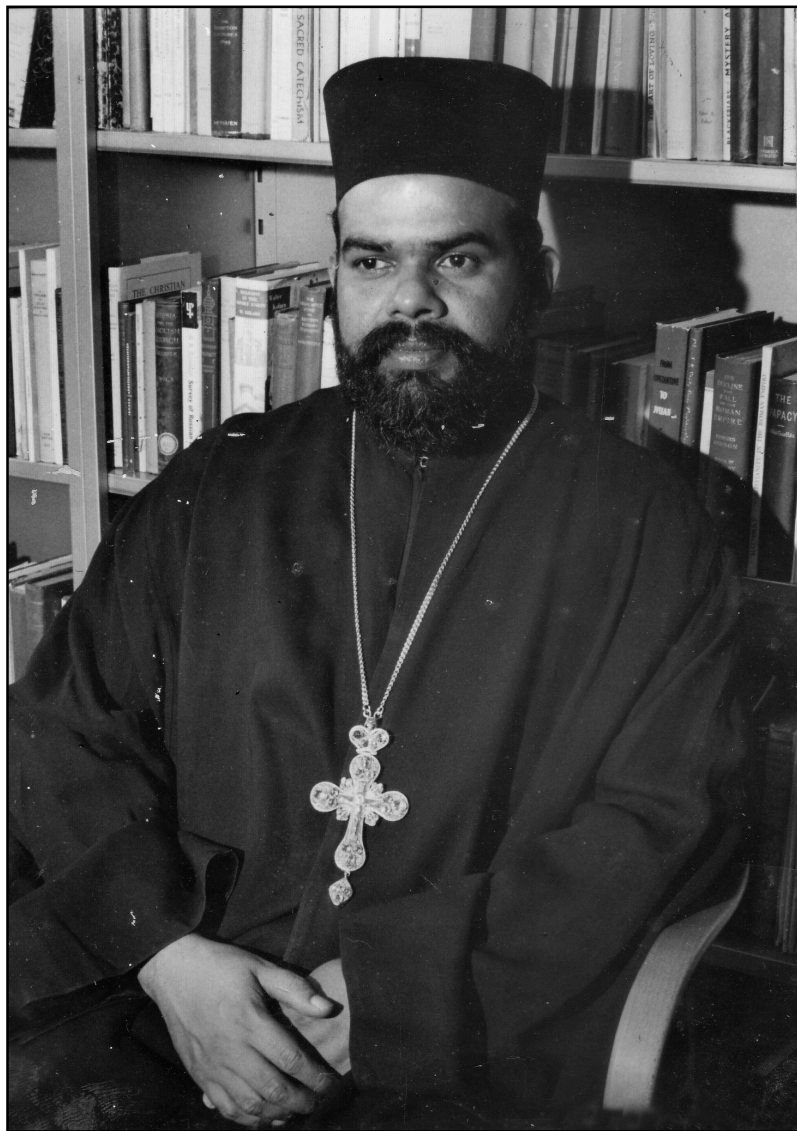
fully agree with some extreme Arab views, and some Muslims went to Metropolitan Juvenaly of the Russian Orthodox Church and protested. Juvenaly skillfully directed the dissenting Muslim leaders to the Chairman of the Drafting Committee. They came to me in a huff, showed me their draft, and said that if it was not accepted by the conference, the entire Muslim delegation was walking out of the conference. Sheikh Ibrahim was one of the people who came to see me to give the ultimatum. Mine was a difficult situation indeed. If I accepted their formulation, many of the western delegations would object and protest. I had tried to be fair and objective in producing our version, which had asked for the implementation of the relevant UN Resolutions on the subject. I prayed and said to the Muslim leaders, calmly:

“Gentlemen, I am not used to negotiating anything under a threat. If you will give me your reasons why you object to our draft, I am quite prepared to propose some suitable amendments to the drafting committee. But if you threaten me with a walkout, I have nothing to say.”

That calmed down the Muslim leaders. Dr. Ibrahim apologized for having threatened to walk out, and then we sat down and explained things to each other. I had to accept one or two verbal changes in our draft, but no substantial change. The amended draft was accepted by the conference, and from that time on Dr. Ibrahim became my friend.

I had paid several visits to Dr. Ibrahim Ezzeddin during my later visits to Abu Dhabi, which was part of Delhi Diocese. He was always Presidential Advisor to the Ruler of UAE. He also served as Vice-Chancellor of the newly established AI Ain University in UAE. He always received me with great honour and affection, and often introduced me to his friends as one who is fit to be the Prime Minister of India.

So this time (in 1993) when I phoned him, he readily agreed to see me; he even made it convenient for us to meet in his private apartment in town, so that I did not have to go through the security and protocol problems for seeing him at the Presidential Palace where he lived and worked.



Asked for advice on applying for a plot of land and permission to build a church in Sharjah, and another in Al-Ain, he said to me:

“You know Bishop, just this week, the British High Commissioner came to me with a similar request. The Anglicans want to build a church in Al-Ain. I will tell you exactly what I told him. We have, in the Arab countries, two different schools of thought. One group, more conservative, thinks that the whole Arabian peninsula is sacred land, and that it should not be polluted by the construction of any non-Muslim places of worship in the entire peninsula. They would not let any non-Muslim groups to practice collective worship in a country like Saudi Arabia. We have also people who think like the Saudis. Then there is another group, also faithful to Islam, but not so conservative, who think that a place of Christian worship in a Muslim land is not against the command of the Prophet - blessings be upon him - but such places would not be obtrusive and showy, causing affront to the sensitivities of Muslims. The Sheikhs in the Emirates have been of the latter point of view in the past, and that is why your community has now two churches in our country. But the trend today is in the direction of the first position. It is up to the individual Sheikh to make a decision about a Christian church in his territory; though he would normally consult other sheikhs before giving such permission. That is what I said to the British High Commissioner, and that is all that I can say to you, Bishop.”

We discussed the matter a little further, and then he asked me if he could put two questions to me in a very personal and private way, just for his own understanding. I readily agreed. His first question was about Muslim - Christian dialogue. We will deal with that question in the context of discussing inter-religious relations. His second question forms the theme of this chapter.

“Bishop, I hope you do not mind my asking a very personal question. I hope I am not being nosy. I have learned to respect you, and I thought it was best to put the question to you directly than to depend on hearsay. I have heard many people refer to you as ‘a pink bishop’, not quite ‘red’, but close to it. Mind you, I myself have socialist ideas, but I would like to hear you characterise your own ideas in respect of socialism.”

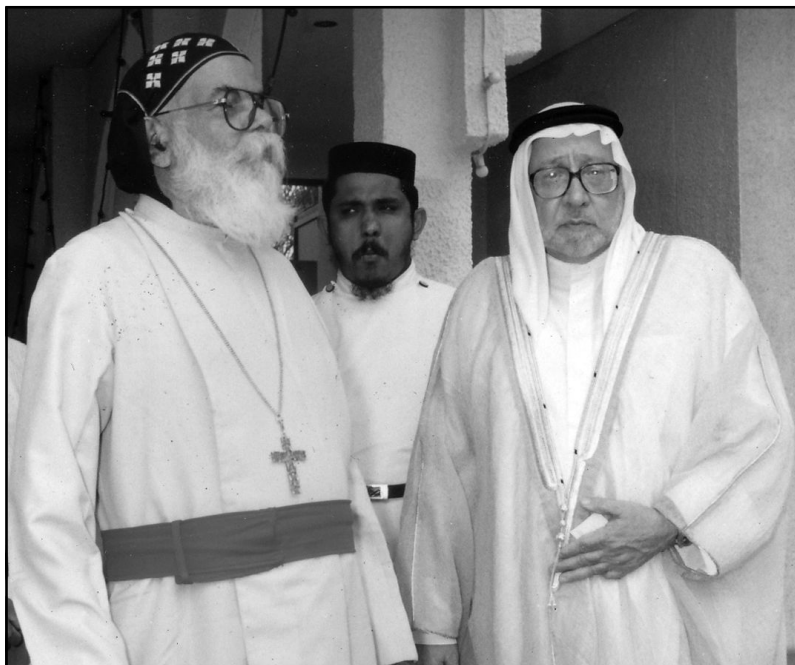
“Well, Sheikh saheb”, I began, using an Indian way of friendly accosting which is both respectful and affectionate, but which he may or may not have appreciated, “I have been called a “Red Bishop”, both in India and abroad, parallel to the somewhat pejorative appellation “Red Dean of Canterbury” often applied, more justifiably, to Dean Hewlett Johnson in an earlier generation, but this is the first time I hear the epithet ‘Pink Bishop.’ I have a qualified commitment to Socialism, if that is what people mean, even after the collapse, beginning in 1989, of one form of socialism in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. That is a commitment to ideals like social justice for all, the dignity of all human beings, the unity of the human race, peace among nations and peoples, and a healthy and life-promoting environment. It is not, however a commitment to any particular form of the socialist ideology which has arisen in post-Enlightenment western civilisation. I am not committed to particular doctrines like the Class Struggle as the single framework for understanding all social development, state ownership of the means of production, or the dictatorship of the proletariat. I do not subscribe to fundamental ideologies like dialectical materialism or historical materialism. Nor am I committed to any form of western idealism. I remain a committed Christian, and every other commitment is within that framework only.”

The Sheikh listened patiently and with nods of approval. He was by no means fanatically anti-Christian:

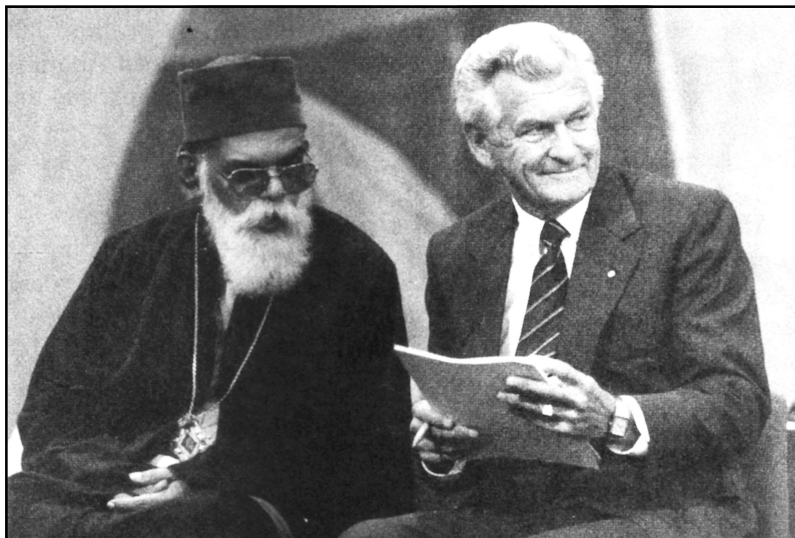
“I am very glad to hear your statement. I have often wondered how a religious person can also be a socialist in the ideological sense. I have always thought of you as a religious person and I have wanted to ask you how you reconcile your religious views with the views of the Communists. I would like to hear you at greater length on that subject on some other occasion.”

Well, that is what I shall try to do in this chapter, and to speak of my association with the Communists. I must go on to speak also of secularism and western liberalism in the same process. I am not seeking to justify myself, but only trying to clarify my own views as they now stand.

I come from the Indian state of Kerala, where the Communist



Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios with Dr. Ibrahim Ezzeddin



With Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke (1991)

parties have been very active since 1940's and have held the reins of state government several times. About 35% of Kerala votes usually go to the Communists, and if the remaining 65% is sufficiently divided, or if one of the major non-Communist parties ally themselves with the Communists, the latter can always win. They do not have to use undemocratic methods to come to power.

Until I left India for the first time in 1947, I had only the usual journalistic contacts with the Communists. Even my trade union activities were under organisations related to the Indian National Congress. In the years from 1954-56 when I was in India again, I generally kept out of active politics. It was only after I came back to India from Geneva in 1967 that I devoted myself to Indian politics as such and came in contact with Indian communists. On that later.

As far as international communism is concerned, my contacts with the Soviet Union began in 1962, when I led the second official delegation of the World Council of Churches to the member churches in the USSR. It was a distinguished delegation of 7 members of the WCC executive staff. As Associate General Secretary of the WCC, the mantle of leadership fell on me, though I was quite inexperienced compared to most of my fellow delegates. There was Prof. Z. K. Mathews, a senior and well known South African Black, the Africa Secretary of the WCC, Dr. Paul Abrecht of USA, Director of the Department of Church and Society who had been with the WCC since its inception in 1948, the Rev. Victor Hayward of England from the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, Mr. Dominique Michaeli of Switzerland from the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, Dr. John Taylor of USA from the Department of Information, and Dr. Mauricio Lopez of South America who later became President of a University in Argentina and died a cruel martyr's death in the heroic struggle against oppression and exploitation in his country.

As we set out from Geneva there was a lot of expectation and excitement. The Iron Curtain was just beginning to lift, and all of us, particularly westerners, were eager to have a peep behind. We had been fully briefed by knowledgeable western Kremlin-watchers whom



to trust and whom not to. They told us that our interpreters would always be KGB agents whose job would be to report our conversations, contacts, and activities to their bosses.

And we were given a 'sacred' secret mission by the Protestants - to smuggle in 24 Russian Bibles supplied by the United Bible Societies. I was given the name of one Prof. Alexander Mirkasimov, a Russian who had once migrated to America, but now given up his American citizenship after a dozen or more years of holding it, and become a Soviet citizen again. He was working at the Department of External Church Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church. I was to discretely hand over the 24 Bibles to Prof. Mirkasimov, without anyone else seeing me give it. I put 12 Bibles in my own suitcase, and the remaining twelve were distributed to my six colleagues, each one carrying two Russian Bibles in his bag.

We had been told that we would be received in Moscow airport as VIPs and that our baggage would not be examined by customs. Contrary to our expectations, our plane made an intermediate stop in Kiev on its route from Geneva to Moscow. This being our first stop in the Soviet Union, our baggage, we were told in Kiev, would have to go through customs. The customs officials were very polite. I was in my priest's garments - black cassock and flowing black gown over it, and a glittering Archimandrite's cross on my neck. My suitcase was not opened in Kiev or Moscow. But each of my colleagues' suitcases were gently opened, and they took out the two Bibles from each suitcase. They did not even examine the rest of the contents of the suitcase. They obviously knew exactly what they were looking for. Today I know that there was always an agent of the KGB in the WCC office and that the information would have been carried to the customs officials ahead of our arrival, that we were carrying 24 Bibles. I thought I was specially privileged that the 12 bibles in my bag were not taken. The customs men told my colleagues politely that it was forbidden to carry Bibles into the Soviet Union, and that their Bibles could be returned to them on their leaving the country.

When we got to Moscow we were given a very warm official welcome. On a suitable occasion I quietly and clandestinely handed

over 12 Bibles to Mr. Mirkasimov as I had been instructed. I had a great sense of one mission accomplished successfully.

The rest of the trip went along quite well. I had an exposure to many aspects of the Soviet system. We were always lavishly entertained. Our information from the West was that Soviet citizens did not get enough to eat, especially of meat and vegetables. At our own meals we experienced no shortages, except perhaps that we could not get milk for our tea. Wine flowed at every meal, and even at breakfast there was an abundant supply of cognac and vodka, meat, fish, vegetables, smoked ham, salads of different kinds, bread, butter, cheese and eggs, tea, coffee, and lemonades in many colours and flavours. It did not take us long to surmise that this was not the lot of the ordinary Soviet citizen in his own home. There were shortages, mainly of meat and milk goods, but the Soviet citizen was getting enough to eat.

I was impressed by certain positive features. As far as I could find out, there was full employment; no one with the ability to work was without a job. All had some place to live, not much space perhaps, but none were homeless or on the streets. And rents, subsidized by the state, were very very low. Health care and education were practically free for all. Clothing, though not classy or fashionable, was not expensive. Children and their needs received special attention. Transportation was cheap, whether by Metro or bus, by air or rail, for Soviet citizens. High quality entertainment, whether opera, symphony, ballet, circus or puppet theatre was always available in the large cities at moderate prices. Athletics and Sports were areas in which the Soviets excelled. There was very little crime, at least in those days. The streets, even in the large cities, were safe at night. Holidays, even in classy hotels, were cheap by any standards, though the domestic rates were not available to foreign tourists. Essentials of life, like goods in the shops when available, were always very reasonably priced - whether food items or domestic utensils, phonograph records, stationery, books, souvenirs and so on. I kept saying to myself: "Oh, when would my country and the whole Two-third World reach this level of development!"

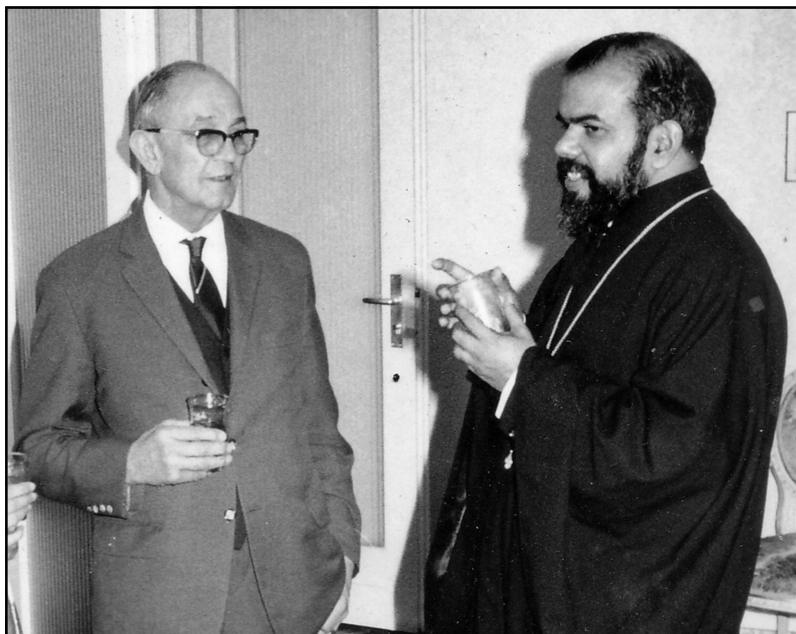
On the negative side, we saw that people lacked the individual freedoms so highly regarded in the West, like freedom of protest and dissent, freedom of the press, freedom of religious propagation, freedom of criticising the government, and freedom of association. There certainly was no freedom to accumulate wealth beyond a certain point, no freedom for one family to own several houses and lands; no freedom to travel abroad when you liked; no freedom to own several cars or sometimes even one; no freedom for much luxurious living and consumption, except an occasional party with a lot of alcohol. I remember the occasion when the Leningrad Theological Academy, where I had been nominated an honorary lecturer, first gave me an honorarium of 1200 rubles (in those days it was the equivalent of US \$ 1800), I could not find ways of spending that money usefully. Sometimes one bought a watch or a camera or a pair of opera glasses for someone back home, but the quality and variety of luxury goods always left a great deal to be desired. I have often wondered why the Soviets who have magnificent achievements to their credit in space technology and war technology, always remained so low grade in the quality of most of their consumer goods. Was it pure inefficiency and corruption, or was there an element of intentional asceticism which looked down upon quality goods? First I thought it was a case of social asceticism. If that were really the case, the system could hardly have caved in, as it later did, by the deadweight of consumerism.

There was little room for individual creativity or freedom in the arts. Thought itself, as well as literature and art, was entirely bound by conformism, enslaved by the establishment. There was too much spying on each other and punishment without trial. One heard about the inhuman methods of the KGB. The misuse of privilege by those in the upper reaches of the power scheme, the unforgivable ways in which the state handled intellectual dissent, and the violation of many basic human rights. Religion was persecuted, attacked and officially ridiculed, not only at great cost to the State, but also at the expense of truth and justice.

There was religious freedom within certain limits. State law technically allowed freedom of worship, but not of imparting religious instruction to children or adults (except the Sunday morning sermons



Visit of U Thant (UN general secretary) to the WCC, 1966. Left to right: Dr W. A. Visser't Hooft, U Thant, Dr. Elfan Rees, O. Frederich Nolde, Fr. Paul Varghese



or in the class rooms of the priest's training centres), or of propagating one's religious convictions to members of one's own family. The Russian Orthodox Church was allowed more freedom than other Christians, Muslims, Buddhists or Jews in the Soviet Union.

It was around 1942 that the privileged position of the Russian Orthodox Church became established, twenty five years after it had been banished from public life by the Bolsheviks. It is curious that this coming back of the Orthodox Church into the center of Soviet life should happen in the time of Josef Stalin, one of the most oppressive dictators history has seen.

In 1942, as Hitler's armies were already approaching Leningrad, Stalin saw that Soviet resistance to Hitler would take more than the simple admonitions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to the Soviet people.

COMPLETE THE STORY AFTER STALIN, KHRUSHCHEV, RELIGIOUS FREEDOM. DISCUSS ALSO RELATIONS WITH WORLD PEACE COUNCIL AND THE ACADEMIES OF SCIENCE IN EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. DEAL WITH CPC, BEGINNING WITH 1960 AND POST WCC ASSOCIATION AS VICE-PRESIDENT.

GO BACK TO DISCUSSION OF THE FUTURE OF SOCIALISM. USE NOTES IN DELHI. DESCRIBE HOW THE "END OF HISTORY" WAS ENGINEERED.

(Incomplete)

APPENDIX: 1

AT THE STROKE OF A STROKE...

(Journal - June 5, 1993)

Exactly a week ago, I set out for the Symposium on the Foundations of Theoretical Physics at the Institute of High Energy Physics in the University of Cologne, June 1 to 5, 1993. This was something I had very much looked forward to, but it was not to be, like on many previous occasions when I was about to play a significant role in an international event, the Lord willed that it was not to be. On my way from Oxford to Cologne, a mild stroke paralysed my left side. I did not realise until much later that it was a stroke. This is the eighth day after I was admitted in the emergency clinic of Krankenhaus Sankt Josef in Wuppertal Elberfeld, and was in the intensive care section for twentyfour hours, since the doctors suspected a coronary thrombosis. The doctors are sure, from examining my ECG, that I had a heart lesion quite some years ago. I have no memory of it, nor have any of the Indian cardiologists who had examined my ECG in the past ever told me of such a lesion. The doctor here, a very good, kind and obviously competent man, with very competent colleagues and quite sophisticated diagnostic equipment, tells me that the lesion in the heart wall may have caused some blood coagulation inside the heart, and some of the coagulated blood particles may have conveyed by the circulatory system into the blood vessels of the brain, causing capillary rupture or microembolism in the right hemisphere of the brain. They have looked for the scar of the heart lesion with their very sophisticated cardioscope, but evidently they could not spot anything. They will do some more tests. For the moment, I am able to sit up (with a lot of help - by myself I am still pretty helpless in one half of my body) and operate my Notebook computer with one hand.

God has been immensely good to me. Even in London's Heathrow airport, I found it difficult to carry my hand baggage from the Oxford-Heathrow bus to the check-in counter or away from it. If a kind lady, a total stranger, had not helped me with the luggage, I would have found it difficult to check in at all. I was getting very weary, dragging my left side which was already going limp, while leaning on and



pushing a luggage cart with my hand baggage - the computer, my walking stick I acquired the previous day, and a light briefcase with my money and valuables - along the vast tracts of passageways from check-in and immigration control to the boarding gate, at least a mile in this case. I had gone half the distance to the boarding gate when I saw an elderly airlines staff person taking a wheelchair. I told him that I need a wheelchair for myself if I were to get to the plane. I did not expect him to take me seriously. It was my fault that I was too diffident at the time of check in to ask for a wheelchair for myself. The man saw the rather pathetic look on my face and asked which gate I wanted to get to. My voice was very weak and I told him: "gate six." He had heard me wrong and asked me: "eighty six? Where is that?" I told him, "six." He said, "I am not going there, but I will take you there all the same." He was most kind. I got through the remaining half mile without much effort, and boarded the Lufthansa flight for Cologne.

I thanked God not only for all the help I had received, but also for the fact that ordinary people in the west were still so kind, considerate and helpful to the disabled.

My knowledge of the physical sciences, theoretical or practical, is deplorably low, never having studied physics, chemistry or biology beyond a very elementary level, such as was available in Indian schools sixty years ago. Even in my heroic efforts in the past thirty years or so, I have not managed to grasp the two great aspects of the advancement of modern science - namely the Theory of Relativity and Quantum Mechanics - which have in our century made classical Newtonian mechanics no longer acceptable as the foundation for seeing reality 'as it is.' It is true that even today many people, including a number of practising scientists take the naive realism view of reality, which holds that things are what they look like. Ever since Immanuel Kant established for the West the great insight that human reason can perceive reality only as shaped and imprinted by the given structure of the perceiving mind, naive realism should have gone out of fashion in the west. The whole struggle of modern scientific research is to unravel the hiddenness of things, for things certainly appear to be something else than what they appear to be on the

surface. The phenomena or *phainomena* which in Greek means “those things which appear or shine forth” are themselves hidden and have to be coaxed out into appearance. Who could have guessed even eighty years ago that there actually existed phenomena to be identified and baptized later on (in some cases baptized even before being experimentally identified!) as baryons and leptons, mesons and pions, nucleons and neutrinos, muons and finally, six quarks which constitute hadrons or mesons and baryons of different kinds? The Quantal Realm alone has brought forth so many new phenomena which help explain, at least in part, why matter-energy behaves the way it does. Similar giant strides have been made in astrophysics and biochemistry.

Our understanding of time has changed in so many respects: e.g. its irreversibility and unidirectionality, stochastic (trial and error) processes in biological morphogenesis pointing to purposive or teleological causation in physical and biological evolution, the theoretical possibility that the ‘cyclical’ and ‘linear’ views of time may both be phases, one at the giga or mega level and the other at the ordinary macro level, of the one reality of time and so on.

I had been hoping that the Cologne Symposium would consider its central theme, namely some conceptual formulation of the interface between Newtonian or Classical Mechanics and Quantum Mechanics, in the context of some larger philosophical considerations, like the very nature of time, space, causality and measurement.

I had also hoped that there would be room to consider some non-Western conceptualisations, particularly in the Buddhist thought of India's Nagarjuna and China's Hua Yen (*Avatamsakasutra*). I think the late renowned British theoretical physicist, David Bohm, got his ideas about ‘implicate order’ and ‘holographic universe in the rheomode with total mutual inter-connectedness’ from Hua Yen. David had been present at the last similar symposium I had attended some six years ago at the University of Joensuu in Finland. He was the one leading physicist who stood against the widely accepted ‘Copenhagen Interpretation’ of what happens when a quantal event is measured in classical terms. The latter interpretation was developed by physicists

like Niels Bohr at Copenhagen University. *Look up some reference to make sure that my interpretation of CI is basically accurate. Then go on to Hua Yen and then to Nagarjuna as interpreted by the Japanese and by David Kalupahana.*

* * * * *

Wuppertal, June 11, 1993

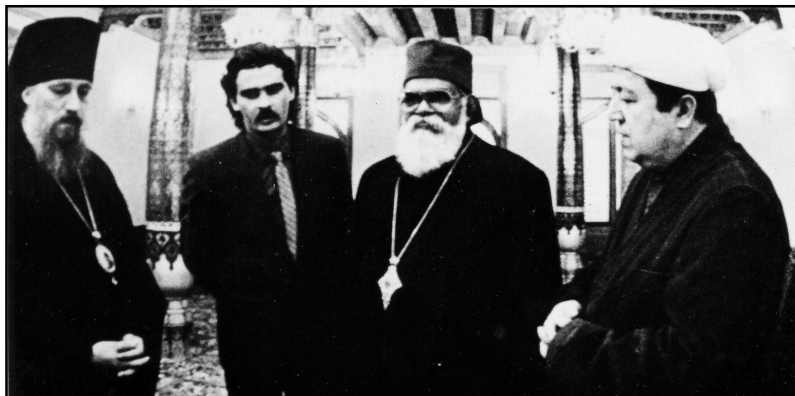
Today is the Day of the Lord.

I feel much better today. So much to praise God for. My blood sugar level must have started going down. I have some movement in three fingers of my left hand, and also in the left ankle. The left shoulder and left elbow had improved already yesterday. Today I look forward to more intensified physiotherapy and exercises.

The fundamental question I have always asked becomes a bit more complicated. How do I move my left hand, any time, including when I am well? I have been told that the basic framework for all animal movement is the bone-muscle-nerve collaboration, controlled by electric or electronic impulses generated in the brain and transmitted by the neural system. I have never been told how a thought in the mind/will (the separation of mind and will as two entities is a western philosophical malady), that is, how mind-induced and therefore supposedly non-physical and non-chemical impulse can generate that chemical change in some part of the brain tissue which is then supposed to transmit a message through neural tissue to the appropriate muscles. Psychic energy is a form of energy the laws of which modern science has not yet formulated with anywhere near the precision required. In my case the psychic energy itself seems to be fairly in tact; the brain is in good health. Is it the capacity of that psychic energy to induce chemical change that is inhibited, or is it only that the impulse generated cannot be transmitted because of neural incapacity? I must find out... That is, if somebody really knows!

Supplement, 4th of July Sunday three weeks later.

I must have been too optimistic, when I wrote that three weeks ago. The *pace* of progress has certainly slowed down, though there is still progress every day. The blood sugar had not come under control,



and is still somewhat unstable, with 28 units in the morning and 14 in the evening. I have been so weak and so without energy, that I have not been able to undergo the full programme of physio-therapy they have here. They have very generously deputed three people to do physiotherapy for me: Matina, Tanja and schaeffer. Matina in her thirties, seems quite competent, speaks fair English, stutters badly when excited. On the last day of treatment i.e., day before yesterday, she explained to me, when she came to say Good-bye, why we had clashed in our personalities earlier.

Matina says that in most cases of cerebral stroke, the brain itself cannot create any impulses to be passed on to the muscles. The muscles, she says have to be forced into action, and the brain will catch on and follow. This may well be true. Anyway she took me to be in the same situation and instead of asking me to do things with my left side, just tried to take over my body, and to make muscles do things by force, and I must admit she has great physical strength. I objected to that forcing of my body, and had to tell her that she was doing the wrong thing, and that I was a human being and not a thing to be manipulated by her. It was rather rough speaking on my part; she was doing what she thought was right. She wanted my muscles to act first, and then wanted the muscles to transmit information to the brain to say that that was what was required. But by the grace of God my brain was in perfect shape, as was shown in the CAT (Computer Analysed Tomography) some days later. My brain could make demands on the muscles, but the neural tissue that mediates between the brain and the muscles was not functioning properly. Matina slowly changed her ways and began giving me verbal instructions, but could not withhold herself from still trying to control my muscles and joints. Out of sheer habit, I should think.

Tomorrow I am supposed to go to the Kurklinik in Bad Laasphe. Last night I tried to do things which I had not been able to do before, for example going to bed without help. I was very tired yesterday, after all the mental effort to pack and get ready to leave. Kunhumon (Thomas) and Sunny were helping me, and there cropped up the problem of working with people whose minds are slower than mine. By 7 pm they were gone, packing 90% done, and I was totally

exhausted, just telling two wellmeaning people what to do. I went to bed with some minimal help, and rested for about two hours sleeping off and on. At 9.30 pm I wanted to get up, and rang for the night duty nurse, who turned out to be one of these maladroït German girls. The only help I need now to get up, is a little push on my top body as it rises from the bed. She handled it so badly that I almost fell. I was angry with her and told her to go away from before me. She said to me in German she only wanted to help, and I shouted again, rather unkindly: "just go away." I got off from the bed by myself as I have been doing these days, went to the bathroom, came back and settled in my chair for a game of SCRABBLE. The game went unusually well, and B scored 1490 points against A's 486 or so, which was pretty good. It was 11.15 when I started the second game, which did not go so well and I decided to try to get back to bed without calling the nurse. I had been given a foot-stool, rather a foot-bench (in German, *fuessbank*), because of the aedema and inflammation in my left leg. I managed to push the foot-bench near enough to my bed, put my feet on it, lifting the left leg with my right hand, and fell into bed. I was a bit anxious, but it worked.

Today is Sunday, and I have a few remarkable feats to my credit. I managed with slight help from the morning duty nurse, to get up. She is also rather maladroït, and careless, perhaps also uncaring. Again I asked her to leave the room, did my ablutions, took off my night clothes myself, went into the bathroom to give myself a good sponge - bath (I would have taken a shower if Thomas had been there to help a little with the towelling). After washing and drying I sat on the toilet seat and tried to put on my underpants myself. I was not sure I could do it; but I did it, though not without a lot of ingenious and strenuous effort. I was rather triumphant, and came back and sat on my chair, determined to put on my white pants myself. Again with some effort I managed both my pants and the new yellow Chinese silk cardigan. Only then I rang for the nurse, and fortunately it was the senior polish nurse whom I like and who is very gentle and thoughtful always. She helped me to get into my new shirt, after I had taken off the yellow cardigan. She teased me about what was the *feiertag* (dressing up for the special celebration) all about with new clothes and all that.

By 8 am Thomas came, gave me my insulin and breakfast, helped

me, though somewhat clumsily, to get into my white cassock, and wheeled me off to the hospital chapel on the ground floor, for the Catholic Mass which I find very congenial. It was that senior priest of the order of the Holy Cross (Dutch) who always bows his head before me and asks for a blessing and who is very devout, though he looks like a bulldog. After the mass he came again to my room and asked for another blessing. I made the sign of the cross three times with my thumb on his forehead and blessed him.

I feel very good now sitting here at the desk. The Lord has spoken to me today, with great love and compassion. The first thing he tells me is that God should not be taken too lightly as I am nowadays prone to do. He reminds me that “our God is a consuming fire”, and I should not forget all the instances in which people have been punished for approaching the presence of God without due reverence. I must take that word a bit seriously, because I often behave heedlessly towards Him whom my heart adores, but my mind forgets to fear and stand in awe of.

The second thing he has told me very clearly is that without holiness no one comes to the Lord, and a little root of evil springing up in the soul is sufficient to alienate me from God. The last few weeks have been difficult without any physical exercise whatsoever. The body becomes indolent and the mind unalert I have never had this many physical contacts with female bodies in my total life before as I am having in this hospital, from morning to evening. And so much variety. All of them handling my half inert body. I must learn to control my thoughts and desires, and root out all forms of evil from my heart. A pure heart too is a gift from God and I must pray more fervently for it.

The third thing, all three being from the last chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews, is that the Lord chastises those whom he loves. I must not complain about my slight suffering. It is very light punishment for some heavy sinfulness on my part. He is a loving Father, and He not only has the right to punish me, but He is doing it for my own good. His name be praised for ever!

In the German Mass this morning, I could follow the service itself, but not the homily. Since the Old priest's basic attitude is all right, the sermon did not grate on me as it often does. While he was preaching, I went on reflecting with a bowed head.

Is there a Crisis in the Christian Church? Is it confined to the Western Church, both Catholic and Protestant? Are the Orthodox churches basically better off, at least at the point where this crisis hits the Church?

Maybe there is a difference; maybe it is just a matter of degree. But let us look at the nature of the crisis itself, so that we can understand the difference if any.

I have a hunch. Maybe I am mistaken; but this is more of a crisis in Western civilisation than in the western civilisation than in the Western church as such. I think I hit the bull's eye, writing my book on Enlightenment - East and west, several years ago, sitting in that not too pleasant room at the Rashtrapati Nivas, Princes Extension in Shimla. This present western civilisation which passes for a global one, was created by Europe out of its own religious and secular cultural history and that strange 18th century process which has come to be called the European Enlightenment. It is basically a godless civilisation, in which western man, out of sheer *avarice* and greed, has presumptuously committed parricide, killed God the Father and have taken over the running of the world, co-opting a few from other races to run the show for the white Man and primarily for his (and her) benefit above every other consideration! western woman is a full participant in this parricide and in taking over the world. The feminist movement, which has some concerns which are compellingly legitimate, also helps to camouflage western woman's full participation in world domination and exploitation, by pretending that the whole problem of the world is that of men exploiting women.

The western church took its present shape in the culture created by the European Enlightenment, and it is that shape which is now in crisis.

Tuesday, 6th July 1993.

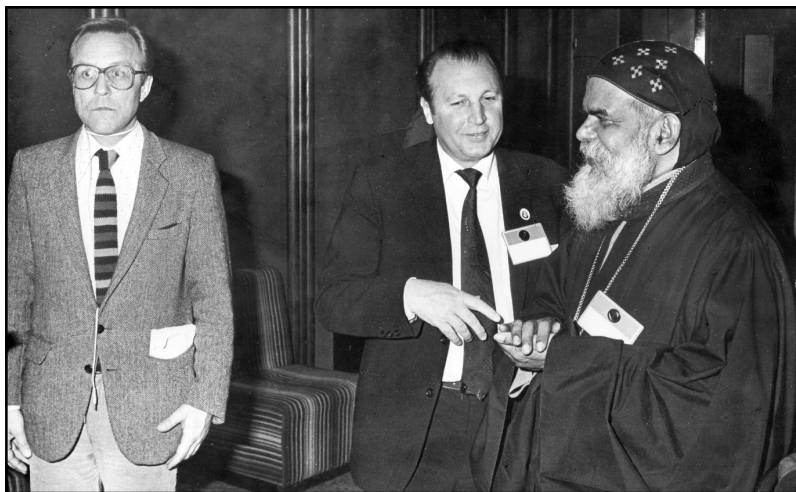
The two and a half hour (not one hour as I wrongly judged from the map) trip from wuppertal to Bad Laasphe went reasonably well. Korah Varghese Achen (he is a careful and experienced driver) was driving, and Thomas (Kunhumon) was accompanying. I decided to travel in the back seat since there was more room there for all the

pillows I needed. None of us, including my two fellow travellers, had even heard about a place called Bad Laasphe two weeks before. It certainly is not a well known Kurort, and by no means my first choice. But being choosy about a proper Rehaklinik is what delayed my discharge from hospital. So I had to accept what was first available, if only to get out of my imprisonment at the Krankenhaus Sankt Josef which had already lasted five weeks.

Well, the place is not so bad. it is not a luxury place like the others I had looked for, nor does it cost even one-third as much. The others were in the range of DM 600 to 1000 per day. This one, if I am not mistaken, is certainly economy class, and should be more like DM 200 per day. That is a lot of saving of the German churches' money, with which they have not been too ungenerous or very reluctant to part with. If I had known that this is all it costs, I would do not have bothered Konrad Reiser, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches with a request for financial help through the German churches.

The area is beautifully wooded, and the town is charming with most of the roofs in slanting blue-grey slate, except the big modern buildings (including Kurklinik Bad Laasphe, where I am lodged) which are characteristically ugly and an insult to the landscape as far as architecture goes. But the view out of my window and balcony is superb. Rolling green hills, flocks of birds showing off with all kinds of group aerobatics like the Indian Air Force on Republic Day, and when I say, "magnificent"! to myself, gladly obliging me with more than one repeat performance. The sky was clear blue when I arrived yesterday, but right now it has become grey and wet. Even under a grey sky, the blue-grey gables of the houses fit nicely with the myriad shades of luscious green.

The section of the building in which I am housed is brand new. In fact the scaffolding is not yet taken off, as there is still finishing work going on the outside of the building. Some construction noise (sawing, driving nails in) going on, but the noise is bearable. When it ceases in the evening, the place is astoundingly peaceful and silent. My room is 440, corner room on the top, normally a double room, given to me as a special case for single occupancy. I am told that I am the very first



occupant of not only my room, but of the whole fourth floor of the new section which is otherwise unoccupied and therefore very tranquil; of course it takes a long time for nursing assistance to arrive when summoned.

They are very friendly here to me, even more friendly than the Wuppertal people. They are all Germans, whereas in Wuppertal I had a more international crowd to look after me - Turks, poles, Bosnians and so on. The chief physician is Dr. Donau (Danube), a German (Jew?) born and brought up in Romania, near Russian border, an internist trained in Germany. He speaks no English, but good Romanian and a little French. But he speaks his German very clearly and distinctly, and I seem to understand more than 90% of what he says. To me he is exceptionally kind and considerate, and comes to see me in my room three times a day enquiring also about my personal needs and plans.

I was rash enough to order a small TV in my room, and that became my favourite distraction for the rest of the day. German TV is just about as boring as Doordarshan, at least in this hill tract of Germany, without cable TV. My German will improve very quickly, I console myself.

Wednesday, July 7th.

Dr. Donau has come twice today already. His colleague, the orthopaedist, also German from the Black forest area near Freiburg, speaks excellent English, having served in South Africa and Kenya in the Eighties. He came for a friendly visit and I know now that there is one person here who speaks good English. Dr. Donau sent him to me to reassure me.

Today I showed Bundespresident Richard Weizsaecker's letter to Dr. Donau, and he was impressed beyond words, and took the letter with him to show it to his colleagues. ...

Saturday, July 10, 1993

Bad Laasphe, Germany

This is the end of my first week in Bad Laasphe. My health is better. The last two days I did a considerable amount of walking. On Thursday I even went out shopping with Dr. Lore Rittmayer, my

collegemate in Goshen forty or more years ago. Yesterday and the day before the Krankengymnasium attendant took me out for walks in the corridors of this building, and yesterday I walked most of the distance without my stick, and even went out to the street in front, walking 20 or more steps down the sloping street and back.

This is the second time Lore is driving up from Konstanz (five hours or more) to see me, the first visit being in Wuppertal. She helped me buy some *Bermuda* shorts and T-Shirts for use while I am convalescing. She has just retired after thirty or more years as a Gymnasium teacher in Konstanz, and she showed me the full column encomium published by the Konstanz paper on her retirement. She wants desperately to nurse me and help me during this period of disability and convalescence for me; she wants to do it out of genuine love for me and also for the purpose of doing something useful for somebody.

I have known her for 43 years now, ever since we were at Goshen together in 1950. She is full of goodness and always willing to help those in need. But I must manage to do without too much of her help. In the first place she can be very insensitive even while trying to help. In the second place, though there are moments when our conversation can be scintillating (especially when she is at the listening end!), generally speaking, she bores me and distracts me from reading or writing. But she is really good and kind.

The main advantages of Bad Laasphe over Wuppertal are:

1. quieter, more beautiful, more healthy setting;
2. fewer international phone calls and fewer invasions of privacy by visitors;
3. fewer tests and prickings for blood test, fewer injections;
4. infinitely better food;
5. a better appointed room;
6. doctors and nurses who are less problematic; and
7. about one-third of the cost at Wuppertal.

And still only hopefully, better therapy. So far I have had only some carbon dioxide gas treatments and two shoulder packs which are very relaxing. The gas treatment consists in putting three quarters of one's body (not the arms) in a plastic sack about 4.5 ft long, tying it tight and then pumping carbon dioxide gas into it with a huge pump, inflating the sack to its full size, and then leaving you there (on your

bed) for 45 minutes. It warms up the legs and is supposed to promote circulation of blood and stimulate nerves and muscles. Dr. Donau things I am still not well enough to undertake heavy Krankengymnastics or Bewegungsbaden. He thinks there is plenty of time to do all those things in the next two or three weeks. On Monday more intensive therapy should begin.

I must find out whether these are the final amounts. I think that Mr. Maassen, the Director of St. Josef Hospital, who had told me that they were giving me the entire treatment free, is now trying to get some of that money from the Evangelicals.

Saturday and Sunday here must be totally inactive here, except for insulin and meals. I eat about 6 times a day; they want me to do so. Breakfast at 8.00; snack at 10.30; lunch at 12.00; afternoon "coffee" (in my case without coffee) at 2.30; dinner at 6.00 and bedtime snack at 10.00 pm. This is supposed to be necessary for insulin - treated diabetes. I hope not. I can not hope to maintain such a regime in conferences and while travelling. We will see."

* * * * *

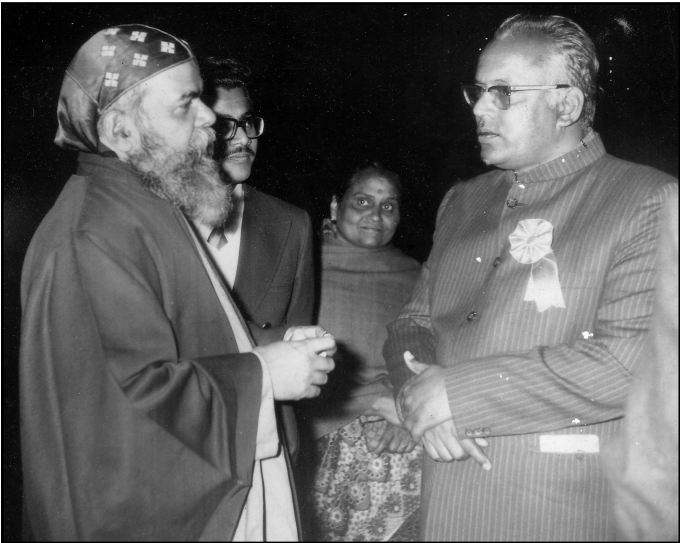
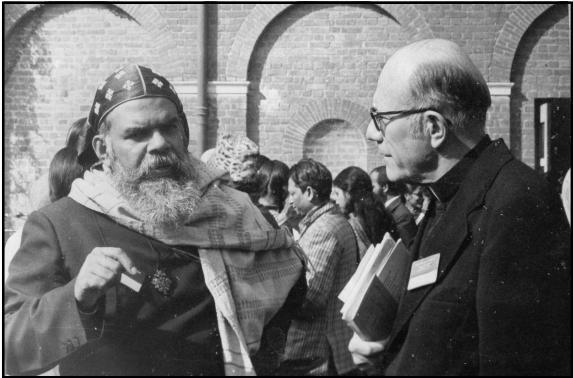
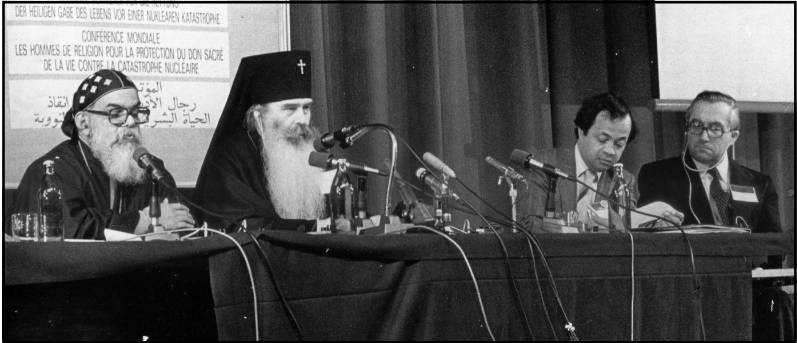
Letters to K. M. Mathew

My dear Mathukutty,

This is only to report to all concerned that by the grace of God, I am progressing remarkably well in this catholic hospital where everyone is most kind and takes good care of me. Our people, especially Mr. & Mrs. Thomas and Korah Varghese Achen looking after my needs.

As you know, I had a stroke while travelling from Oxford to Cologne on May Twentyninth for attending a very important five-day symposium with leading world physicists on the foundations of theoretical physics held June 1-5 at the high energy physics Institute of the University of Cologne, which I was very sorry to miss.

I was carried directly to this hospital by our people, from the cologne airport. I was actually supposed to stay in the Guestroom of this hospital. For Qurbana in cologne for our people on pentecost



Sunday instead I was admitted to the emergency clinic that was going on, Saturday evening at seven thirty P.M.

At first after observing ECG irregularity, the doctors suspected cardiac problem. I was in intensive care for twentyfour hours. Heart is still under observation and so far normal. There is total paralysis of the left half of the body, but, God be praised - no impairment of speech or any brain functions. I am typing this message with my one (right) hand which is normal. Paralysed left side already beginning to improve with slight motor function coming back to left knee and shoulder. Getting very good physiotherapy will probably have to stay in this friendly, well equipped and well run catholic hospital. For another week or more and then move to a rehabilitation centre in Germany for a few weeks. I am still hoping to get back to India by mid-July if the Lord permits.

It may interest you to know that the staff in this 300 bed hospital is very international. The lady who cleans my room every day is a bosnian muslim with three children of her own, the chief physician Dr. Georg, from Trier, Germany is kind, unusually friendly and competent. The assistant doctor Wieberova, from Poland, is very kind and caring. There are ten or so Malayalees working here including three Roman Catholic sisters from Kerala. One of the nurses attending me is a turkish muslim girl doing one year of voluntary service here. Invariably everyone is kind to me.

I am not yet well. Enough to receive many visitors or talk for a long time. Neither is it good for me to receive many telephone calls. The best way to contact me is by the above fax number. Kindly pass on a photocopy of this message to Bawa thirumeni and also to the seminary. I have no objection to your publishing the information. Please ask someone at the seminary to contact me by fax and give me all news. I had written to them shortly before I fell sick.”

* * * * *

My dear Mathukutty,

Blessings and greetings to you from this rehabilitation centre in a resort town in the high hills of Wittgensteiner Forest in central Germany. I moved here on July 5th, and have settled down comfortably in a fourth floor corner room overlooking the rolling green hills and

the charming town of Bad Laasphe, about one hour drive up the mountain from the university town of Marburg. They have all kinds of rehabilitation therapy here, including many kinds of massage, mudpacks herbal and mineral baths, physiotherapy of ten different kinds. I have already made some progress in the two days I have been here. I plan to be here till at least the end of July. The cost of my stay and treatment here is being met by the Evangelical Church in Germany, at the personal request of Dr. Konrad Reiser, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. As you know the Catholic Hospital in Wuppertal bore the enormous five weeks hospital cost with all doctors' fees, medicines and tests included. The Protestants will pay my four weeks bill here. I am grateful to the Christian churches of Germany for all their goodness to me.

My health has been improving very fast, by the grace of God. I can do most of my personal chores myself now, without much difficulty. I get up from bed without help, go to the bathroom, brush my teeth and take a shower, dry myself, and put on most of my clothes, all with one hand, without any help. That is tremendous progress over the last few days. The left knee is very weak, and I can only walk a few steps, and that too with great care and concentration. I can lift the left arm a few inches, but cannot pick up even a piece of paper with it. The half paralysis will still take several weeks to heal. There are no Malayalees or Syrian Christians anywhere near here, but the staff of the Rehabilitation clinic is taking excellent care of all my needs. There are several doctors here who are specialists. I am looked after by the Chief Physician Dr. Donau, a friendly and competent German from Romania. He comes to see me three times a day. I have to deal with all the staff here in German, since most of them do not speak English. They are giving me VIP treatment, and go out of their way to please me, and have already invited me to stay here beyond the four weeks if necessary, especially since they saw the following letter.

Three days ago I had this lovely letter from Dr. Richard von Weizsaecker, the President of the German Republic. He has been a good friend for more than thirty years. As you probably know, when he visited India last year, he invited me to lunch and I had a good long

conversation with him in Madras. I give below the English translation of his personal letter to me (in German) dated July st, 1993, from Bonn:

“Your Eminence, my beloved and honoured friend,

It is with a great sense of sorrow that I have read that you have to spend a considerable amount of time in the St. Joseph Hospital in Wuppertal. This disturbs me unusually, and I hope very much that your health has been improving steadily in the meantime.

As for the expenses for your treatment, the office of the Federal President had taken up contact with various institutions. I am glad that a solution has now been found, which will relieve you of all anxiety on that count.

Personally, With my whole heart, I wish that you make fast progress in recovering your health, and that you will soon be well enough to undertake the journey back home.

In heartfelt sympathy, I am, with my best wishes and greetings,

Your Richard Weizsaecker”

He is a man for whom I have the greatest respect and affection despite our differences in political and economic views. Alas, he may not stay very long as Bundespresident. He is one of the few good people in high office in the world.

Could you kindly ask your office to give one copy of this to Bawa Thirumeni and one to the Seminary. I get somany good letters and phone calls every day, including one from P C Alexander and Accamma. Would you also give my new address and phone number to the Governor’s PA in Bombay. Does he have a fax? Otherwise P J Koshy can pass it on.

Thank you indeed for sending me Manorama. It takes about a week to reach Wuppertal, and they are forwarding mail to me here. I could understand the Harshad Mehta - One crore scandal better

because of your excellent coverage. Did you know that Sat Pal Mittal is a man whom I knew very well and worked with in the organisation called "Global Forum for Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders" of which he was co-president? Of course I would not vouch for his integrity or that of his sons, who are all big money-makers, and who would not hesitate to use service organisations to advance their own personal interests.

Affectionately,

Paulos Mar Gregorios

* * * * *

May 10, 1995

My Dear Mathukkutty,

I am here in Florida USA, undergoing a two week treatment in Cranio Sacral Therapy at the Research Institute of Dr. John Upledger, a member of the US Government's special team for Alternative Therapy. It is one of the newly emerging therapies for people with chronic back problems. It seems the method has so far been successful in more than 80% of the cases. It is my last chance for a permanent cure, and since they had already tried everything possible in Delhi Hospitals, and they had covered up Allopathic ignorance by simply diagnosing it as Polymyalgia Arthritica, and putting me on steriods, which is now ruining my bladder control and diabetetic sugar control; life became rather impossible in Delhi since there was no one in the Diocese who could look after my treatment needs. I felt very much like an orphan and did not want to fall a victim to the Church's callous lack of care for its bishops - Pachomius Thirumeni was the last victim of that carelessness.

It was a great risk to undertake the long trip to Miami unaccompanied. And I did pay the price. In Rome after I had boarded the Alitalia plane for Miami and taken my seat in Business Class, the Captain of the Flight told me that I was physiologically unfit to travel. They offloaded me in Fiumicino Airport and took me to a hospital. I had been drenched with urine, resulting from my bladder incontinence, which had become quite bad with the Steriods. I could have

gotten through the transit in Rome all right if they had given me the facilities to change planes without making me stand very long, and also making me climb up the many steps to the big Miami plane no my own. Anyway all they did in the hospital was to take away my clothes and sterilise them, and also wash and sterilize my body also. They gave me a change of (horrible) clothes and whisked me to the NewYork plane that was leaving at 1230. What with a three hour wait in Kennedy Airport, after immigration and customs clearance, I got to Miami at 2130 hours. Our Achen was waiting for me and I got to my hotel room at 30 minutes past midnight, after having been on the road for more than 48 hours. I had not been able to take my insulin and other medicines all day Sunday; in Palm Beach Gardens, I slept for some 15 hours and woke up totally without energy and quite helpless. The Achen here, Fr. Joy Pyngolil and others have been taking good care of me. I began my treatment on Tuesday, and even after only one session, I already feel better. There is every possibility that I will be healed here in two weeks.

I have laid down all my church administrative duties as of May 1, 1995. I have not given charge to Mar Philoxenos, because I had no instruction to do so from the Synod. ... But my view does not count in our Church; it is easy to spoil a diocese, which has been built up with great self-sacrifice on the part of our people and priests. perhaps I have also contributed something to the building up of the diocese and its 30 churches. I plan to stay on at the Delhi Orthodox Centre, and continue to work with Sophia Society, Sarva Dharma Nilaya and Niti Santhi Kendra. I may also develop some new projects, in order to continue to use my limited talents and experience.

If I am well in the next few weeks, I have a major lecture to deliver at Vanderbilt University in Nashville Tennessee, and read a paper in a Toronto meeting in the first week of June. According to present plans I should be back in Kottayam by June 14th and stay for two weeks, to do some things for the Seminary. Whenever the authorities in the Church feel that somebody else can do the Principal's Job better, they would not have to dismiss me; just appoint another person, and I will readily hand over charge.

I think that some day ... should come here for treatment. So few doctors in this country or in ours have even heard about the Upledger Institute. But it is a proven success, and I will send you details if needed. I hope your own health is good.

If any part of this letter is of interest to others, you may publish the ...

All good wishes and blessings

Paulos Mar Gregorios

APPENDIX: 2

HOW MY MIND HAS CHANGED: A SACRAMENTAL HUMANISM

Regaining Control of Economic, Social and Political Structures is a key task for which we need more than Revolutionary Techniques and Global Strategies

CHANGE of the mind, like growth of the body, is generally imperceptible. As the body sloughs off cells and forms new ones, so the mind quietly casts aside thoughts and ideas and replaces them by others. Only occasionally - at pubescence and middle age, for instance - are there more dramatic changes.

Theologically, I seem during this past decade to have passed through pubescence and come into a cantankerous and boisterous adolescence. Not that I like too much to talk theology. My deliverance from childhood - that is, from Western tutelage - has taught me above all the wisdom of silence. That way, one's contribution to the cacophony of nonsense is at least drastically reduced.

I

A father-figure comes in handy for the adolescent's discovery of self-identity-especially if the figure is dominant and powerful enough to make one's revolt look all the more heroic. For me, Augustine of Hippo was such a figure. What a release it was to learn, in 1959-60, that he was the spring and fount of all creative Western theology, and then to make the gratifying discovery that this source was poisoned! I had already discovered that, as an Eastern Christian, I did not even need to call Augustine a saint. His name appears neither on our liturgical calendar nor in our manuals of theology. The Eastern tradition had wisely ignored him and felt none the poorer for it. What if my supervisor at Oxford insisted that only Western thinkers like Augustine could think problems through? It was this well known professor's incapacity to understand Eastern thought, together with his adoption of Augustinianism as a standard by which to measure the doctrines of others, that prompted my revolt (I refer to J. N. D. Kelly, whose *Early Christian Doctrines* summarizes his theological views).

Quite seriously, I believe today that Western theology cannot reorient itself until it takes a second look at some of Augustine's basic ideas. This is not the place to enter into a full criticism. Let me merely indicate five areas where re-examination could reveal basic flaws in Augustine's thought.

First, Augustine's low view of matter leads him to a low view of the incarnation of our Lord. Taking his cue from the early Athanasius, the bishop thought of the incarnate body primarily as a come-on drawing us to contemplation of loftier spiritual realities. The material body of our Lord was but an instrument of revelation.

Second, and probably because of the same vestigial Manicheanism which undervalued matter, Augustine had a low view of this world. The polarity in his thinking between the *civitas mundi* and the *civitas Dei* can only be termed alarming. Western theology is still learning to correct this basic error which has had so many consequences.

Third, because his view of the human element in the incarnation is so low, he holds a low view of man. By taking sin as almost constitutive of human nature, Augustine led the Western church astray-toward denial of the freedom and dignity of all men, Christian or non-Christian. He makes man so utterly dependent and slavish in relation to God that God is distorted in to an arbitrary dictator like the Caesars-a petty God whose glory has to be vindicated at the expense of the glory of man. But only a God who can be glorified in the glory of man is worth worshiping.

Fourth, Augustine's Soteriology went wrong because of his preoccupation with individual and personal sin, original and actual. Salvation is more than deliverance from sin. It is making man like God, bringing him in to the fullness of humanity. We today are caught in a negative and individual view of salvation.

Fifth, by his failure to understand the sacramental principle as integral to the human condition and to the incarnation (man is a citizen of two worlds), Augustine contributed to a substantial distortion of the sacraments as accommodations of spiritual realities to suit the grossness of man. His misconception of the ordained ministry is also a result of his misunderstanding of the true relation of word to sacrament.

These five points (I state them in shorthand) are crucial for the understanding of what Christianity is all about, and my change of mind in the past ten years can be said to focus on them. Any dialogue between East and West must begin on these points, and we may find that, Christianity being after all an Eastern religion, the ancient Eastern approach Augustine deviated from still has much to say to us.

“Augustine will survive your criticism,” another all-knowing professor told me some time ago, without making any attempt to understand what I was saying. Augustine probably will survive, for he deserves to. He was a great genius, a spiritual and intellectual giant. My purpose is not to destroy his reputation but to seek the renewal of theology in a truly ecumenical context, rather than in the shallow atmosphere and narrow confines of a secular urban-technological civilization in an Augustinian frame work. It is the survival of the Western interpretation of the Christian faith that I have grave doubts about.

My reaction against Augustinianism did not lead me to a superficial liberal theology (as it did to many in the West in the earlier decades of our century). I now subscribe to a sacramental and ecclesiological humanism.

II

A second major change in my mind has been a growing skepticism about the power of words. The printing press seems to have destroyed the power of the written word, and excesses in speech-making destroyed power of the spoken word long ago.

The theologian sometimes thinks that the problem of the church today is the lack of the right words—in short, of a relevant theology. But the world is not waiting for new words; it is waiting for Godot—a pattern of life, a type of personality, a way of living, being, doing, thinking. It is our professional bias that makes us think a new theology will solve our problems. Only God is going to solve our problems. Perhaps, however, a new pattern of living the Christian life may open the way.

This faulty reliance on words and forms of words is found not

only in the West. Here in India, too many people talk and talk and talk about an “indigenous” theology as the cure-all-but never produce one. For a fresh theology has to come out of a new way of living the Christian life in Indian conditions. Such a new way of life is both the matrix and the authentication of a new theology anywhere. Young people especially are looking for a person or a type that is authentic, not for new words.

What a misunderstanding it is to think that communication takes place mainly by words! Voice and ear and even the conscious mind form but a part of the communication system between human beings. Psychologists have been long at work on the role of “kinesic and paralinguistic information” in communication. Our actions, our gestures, the very lines on our faces, all communicate.

Thus I have come to believe that being and doing are more important than speaking in communication. And anyone can see how that belief in itself devalues theology considerably.

III

A third area in which my mind has changed in the past ten years is in regard to the dialectic between structural relations and personal relations. I had never quite seen how the larger framework of society substantially affected personality. But by observing the faces of people of various nationalities and religious groups, I began to see that structural values and national ethos can change a person's face and also that a facial change is always the result of change in personality. This conclusion was reinforced as I watched those of my own countrymen who had spent five or six years studying abroad. I discovered that each country sojourned in produced a different type of personality. Even the particular institution attended made a difference.

But more important for me was the “middle level”-that between large structural relationships, as in the nation, and intimate personal relationship, as in the family. The small group, in which intimacy and a degree of independence are combined and structural relations are consciously accepted, such now seems to me the milieu in which the new humanity can be most effectively shaped, both as a social

structure and as individual persons. Such a group must be a school for its members, a place where work, worship, study, play, property relations, recreation and repose are all suitably balanced in order to shape a new type of personality which will work actively for the transformation of society. More than any new theology, we need many such pioneering, committed, socially alert groups.

IV

A fourth area in which my mind has changed is closely related to the third. I have come to a new-or rather, a very old-understanding of freedom. Freedom in the positive sense means creativity that is spontaneous, not caused by external pressures; it is the capacity to conceive the good in new forms and then to create that good. To be free also means not to be directed by one's passions and ambitions or deterred from action by false inhibitions and complexes. Freedom is something given to man so that, while being part of creation, he can himself become a creator and alter the shape, the direction and the meaning of creation.

The fresh insight for me lay in understanding freedom in a structural context. Not that I had chosen sides in the argument between Claude Levi-Strauss and Jean-Paul Sartre, between structuralism and existentialism. On the contrary, I saw that individual freedom is inseparable from the freedom of the collective (the community) to choose its own goals as a society and to work to achieve them. Ultimately it is humanity that must be free. The measure of freedom that a Gandhi, a Sartre, a Jean Genet, a St. Francis able to acquire is but an incentive to society to seek its own freedom as part of the human community. Sartre and Genet go wrong simply because they have insisted on their individual freedom without in the same act choosing also the freedom of mankind. The individual quest for freedom takes place in an alienated framework. It can bring only misery so long as my intention is to establish my identity over against "the masses." No matter if I become one of the masses provided that thereby the masses would become free; for in their freedom-i.e., in their capacity to conceive, choose and attain the good-I shall find my own fulfillment. My fairly total abandonment of the two

extremes of existentialist and structuralist philosophy and theology may be understood in this context.

V

A fifth area of significant change is in my understanding of mission and missions. For a long time I had suspected that modern Catholic and Protestant missions were expressions of the cultural and economic aggressiveness of the West-though probably a certain aggressiveness has always characterized Christian mission. However, during the past ten years I have had occasion to watch "the show" from inside, and my negative reaction to the mission of the Western church has developed to a high pitch. The basic mistake of Western mission is not so much cultural aggression as missionary colonialism. Never before in church history has mission been as completely institutionalized as in the years since 1500 which saw the expansion of the West. In the previous centuries when a missionary went to another country to evangelize he preached the gospel, established the church and probably died there. There was no need for a second generation of missionaries, though occasionally a teacher or a bishop might visit the mission field.

But this idea that missionaries must go in every generation, that they should be organized, their finances looked after, life and medical insurance provided, cars, bungalows and compounds furnished-all that seems to me to kill mission. Today it is economic imperialism or neocolonialism that is the pattern in missions. Relief agencies and mission boards control the younger churches through the purse-strings. Foreign finances, ideas and personnel still dominate the younger churches and stifle their spontaneous growth.

My disgust with this pattern has made me suspect even the ecumenical movement. Catholic and Protestant seem to be collaborators in this neocolonialist domination and Western cultural imperialism in the ecclesiastical sphere. So now I say, "The mission of the church is the greatest enemy of the gospel." I began to say it 15 years ago, rather softly. Very rarely did I find any creative response. Therefore I have decided to be rude and rough about this matter. I still do not have much hope that the Western churches (or even the

dependent non-Western churches) will see the point, because to see it is to be pushed to most drastic changes in church life both in the West and in the rest.

VI

A sixth area in which my mind has changed in the past ten years is that of the relation between sacrament and society. Today I can accept only a sacramental-ecclesiological social ethics. The stuff that comes out of ecumenical conferences claiming to be Christian social ethics bores me no end. I can understand human society only on the analogy of the church. My notions of social justice come from my understanding of the communion of saints. And I can understand the ministry of the church in the world only in terms of a fresh understanding of the sacramental principle and the sacramental ministry. But how can I even indicate here the scope of my book-length thoughts in these areas?

Finally, my mind has changed in relation to the nature and destiny of man. I now firmly believe that the destiny of man is to be like God in every respect except that of being a noncreature; i.e., God is the source of his own being, but man's being will always be derived from God. Yet in love, wisdom and power, as well as in holiness-which is after all something more than the combination of these three-man must become like God. That alone gives me a new perspective for understanding the human vocation on earth and beyond. Again, a book-length idea.

Without being pedantic and academic, one could say that what God has done in Christ has consequences for all men. To use Roman Catholic terminology, all men, Christians and non-Christians, are in the realm of "supernatural grace" stemming from the incarnation. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ make a difference for the history of the world and the destiny of mankind. All the secular ideas and forces smacking of salvation that are in vogue today come from the Christ event and the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Man's attempt to build a tower of Babel was reprimanded and frustrated by God. Today, God allows man to build many towers of Babel-to go to the extremes of *hubris* and blasphemy, to defy the

divine and erect a secular city. That is, man always goes to the edge of catastrophe—"brinkism" is his delight. Yet God has lengthened man's rope, so that even in the misuse of freedom he can travel far. Will God finally let go? He well may. Catastrophe is quite conceivable, and even the resurrection of Christ (*pace* Moltmann and Pannenberg) does not provide insurance against it. For the same Lord predicted both his own resurrection and the apocalyptic denouement of creation. Nor does the fact of hope (a la Bloch) provide a sufficient basis for the notion that things will work out for mankind in history.

VII

In other words, there is no basis for the liberal hope of building the urban technological paradise. There was a time when I thought that the movement toward the Kingdom of God and the movement toward the urban technological society would merge somewhere. I now have second thoughts. Certainly neither the affluent society with its pressure for consumption and the resultant bloated egos, nor the regimented society with its repression of so much that is creative in man, shows us the way to paradise. Alienation and nuclear destruction are twin giants threatening mankind.

These days I think of disarmament and reconciliation as the proximate goals which would lead us in the direction of the Kingdom. Science and technology now have their own momentum and can go on without assistance from the church.

Disarmament and reconciliation are integrally related in my mind. Alienation should be tackled at all its four levels: the chasm that separates urban technical man from God should be bridged; man must regain control of the structures-economic, social and political-that now hold him prisoner; nations, groups and individuals must learn again to trust and have compassion for each other; man must find himself, not in a whirl of activity but in the depths of silence. These four elements together I call "disalienation."

A concrete place to begin is the third area-the disalienation of nations and groups. Here disarmament is to be seen as a positive program. Centralized and widely controlled power should eliminate

group conflicts, and resources now wasted in building up arms reserves should be diverted to science, education, the elimination of poverty and the enhancement of human creativity. Only in trying to build a united and unified humanity can we rediscover the way to God as well as our own being. Regaining control of economic, social and political structures is a key task for which we need more than revolutionary techniques and global strategies. Only a corps of men and women, distributed all over the world, ready to labor and die for the cause, can pioneer the movement for disalienation. And the spiritual dynamism for such a pioneering movement (such as the communist movement once was) can come today only out of a more profound understanding of Semitic Christianity.

I have made no attempt here to be systematic, thorough or detailed. The mind keeps changing, and changing still.

(*Christian Century*, Sept. 23, 1970, pp. 1116-1120)

APPENDIX: 3

A PERCEPTION ON MYSELF

Ten streams of social awareness which has shaped me as a person

Let me try here, to enumerate, without any attempt to be exhaustive, of at least ten streams which have merged into the stream of social awareness which has shaped me as a person.

(1) First I must identify in myself a strain of perceptionary habits which I can only call “the primal Vision” shared once by all so called primitive peoples of the world, and which I today associate with the tribal peoples of India - the Adivasis and the Girijans.

(2) At a second level, I find that I share in the Vedic consciousness - in my own feeble and imperfect way. I find the heart of the Vedic Consciousness in the concept of *Yajna* or *Yoga*, which to me is true *Yoga*. The concept of sacrifice is not to be moralistically or ritualistically misrepresented, though it has deep moral implications, and *Yajna* without ritual is to me inconceivable. The cosmic egg, the *brahmada* needs to be held together, by *Yajna* or by a deep moving social rite of abandoning self - abandoning it by offering it to the source of all, to all humanity, and to all that exists. I find this Vedic rite consciousness central to my own Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition.

3. At a third level, as an Indian living in the 20th century, I find in myself a layer that responds to cosmic *Sakti*. I have no objection if you want to relate it to the so called pre Aryan or Dravidian religion. Or you can associate it with Saivism. What matters for me is my own perception of myself as an energy configuration system, dependent upon and drawing from the whole complex of energy systems in the cosmos - the energy of sun and moon, of galaxies and planetary systems, of ocean tides and gravitational fields, of electromagnetic and other yet unidentified force fields. I do not claim that this layer is unrelated to the first and second layers. But *Sakti* is not a matter of the intellect. It is a question of being in tune - to be

charged constantly from the enormously complex force-field that our universe is. And if I try conceptualise the universe merely as a mechanical system which is the object of my knowledge, I am bound to go wrong in my philosophical reasoning.

4. At a fourth level, I must recognise the Buddhist heritage as an important layer in my own identity. Not Buddhism as an intellectual system of four noble truths and the eightfold path, but Buddhism as true enlightenment (as distinct from the rational Enlightenment of the West), as true freedom - freedom from *Kama* and *Trsna* from the myriad passions that unceasingly flail the self and drive it to and fro, from the innumerable false perceptions of the good in the external world towards which I am almost irresistibly drawn, only to find that, an attainment, all imagined good turns out to be but as or trash. I find something deep in me responding to the best in Madhyamika philosophy, especially to Nagarjuna who has convinced me that “it is neither this nor that”, that empirical reality is neither false nor true, that everything is caused by “conditioned co-origination”, though I would like to include the very concept of *pratitya-samutpada* as an imperfect conceptual hold on something which can never be held in the intellectual grasp. Of course I tend to assimilate this concept to my own Eastern Orthodox Christian maxim of holding the Kataphatic (affirmative) and the apophatic (negative) in dialectical tension. But the Buddha and philosophers like Nagarjuna have clarified my perception of freedom, including freedom from the desire for a final conceptual grasp of reality. The doctrines of *Sunyata* and the irrationality of the concept of causality are other great Buddhist contributions to my own perception.

May I be permitted to enter a caveat at this point, The contemporary Indian philosophical tradition suffers from its failure to take the unorthodox Indian systems seriously. And if the light shining from Gautama and Mahavira have nothing to contribute to my seeing my way. I will be so much the poorer as an Indian. Indian philosophy is largely in Orthodox Brahmin hands, and it is natural that they would have inherited a built-in prejudice against the unorthodox Indian ways of thought. But the liberation of Indian philosophy today demands emancipation from these prejudices and a willingness to learn from

Nagarjuna just as much as from Sankara, from Mahavira just as much as from Ramanuja or Madhva.

After all, what single religion in history has had such impact on all of Asia as Buddhism? It is the one system of thought which led to "the Indianisation of China" and to the transformation of Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Kampuchea, Vietnam, China, Japan and Korea.

The title of an address by Dr. Hu Shih at the Tercentenary Celebration of Harvard University in 1936. See his independence, Convergence and Borrowing Cambridge, Mass, 1937, cited by Kenneth Ch'en. The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism, Princeton, 1973, p. 3.

5. At the fifth level I find my own indebtedness to the Upanisadic - Vedantic perspective on reality. I find the quest for self-realisation by attaining to the one - in consciousness, beyond consciousness - as exhilarating and ennobling. And I mean more than a pedantic and dogmatic enslavement to the thought of one Lokacharya, be it Sankara, Ramanuja or Madhva, Ramakrishna or Pillai Lokacharya. It is a spiritual quest - not merely an intellectual enquiry. It is a discipline to become what one is.

But I want to pursue that quest in a manner not divorced from the compassion which the Buddha and the Christ have taught me. I do not want to separate my quest from my conviction that my fellow human beings should find food, shelter and clothing and be enabled to live a life worthy of human beings, in societies of peace and justice.

I will thus have to reinterpret the Upanisadic quest, in the light of my understanding of historical reality, which I cannot dismiss as mere *Vyavaharika* and therefore as unrelated to the *paramarthika*. I know that our colonial imperialist past, and our neo-colonial-imperialist present are very much a part of the reality, whether *Vyavaharika* or *paramarthika*, to which I must relate myself and within which I must find my Indian-human identity today.

Therefore my commitment to the Upanisadic quest for unity must ever remain in dialectical tension with my social concern. And in

relation to the latter point, none of the Lokacharyas, even Sri Aurobindo (is he formally a Lokacharya, not having written a *Brahma Sutra - bhasya*?), can be sufficient guide to understanding contemporary social reality and the way the quest for social justice impinges upon the quest for the One.

6. At the sixth level I perceive the early Greek impact on my Indian heritage. Already from the time of Ashoka, there seems to have been a free flow of ideas between the Greek and the Indian civilisations. The edicts of Asoka speak about his spiritual conquest of the “Greeks” in Bactria and Syria, Egypt and Macedonia. It is not idle to presume that the channels so opened for Buddhist monks and missionaries to travel to Central Asia, Europe and Africa were also used in reverse. The apocryphal Apollonius of Tyann reports the debate between Greek and Indian philosophers from a Greek rather than an Indian perspective. If Clement of Alexandria could speak of the Buddha. It is equally conceivable that Greek philosophy came to India through the Brahmins who are reported to be in Alexandria already in the first century, as well as by Greek travellers who visited the courts of Indian princes and conversed with Indian philosophers. I would even detect in this mutual intercourse which must have begun at least three or four centuries before our era, the beginnings of the common features we see in the Hellenic and the Indian traditions - common features like the disparagement of matter, the perception that the soul is a prisoner in the body, and the concept of the worlds that lie between our shadow world and the real world of the *muktas*, all these later developed in Greek Gnosticism.

I must recognise this early impact of Hellenic culture on the development of the Indian consciousness, for otherwise I would be in danger of presumptuously presuming that the Indian culture and philosophy developed in a total vacuum, untouched by so called foreign elements.

I shall not be diffident to recognise as the seventh element the impact of the semitic civilisation and religion on Indian culture throughout the centuries. And I am not speaking merely of Syrian Christianity in Kerala. I am speaking rather, of successive waves of

Jewish Christian and Muslim traders, immigrants, missionaries and conquerors, who had an impact on India already before the coming of the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British in modern times. And this Semitic impact was by no means confined to maritime India. The North-West was particularly inundated with these influences, and what is today Afghanistan, Baluchistan, Pakistan, Kashmir and Punjab, have been deeply influenced, first by numerically not large but a till powerful Jewish immigrants who fled the successive persecutions of the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Greeks and the Romans in Palestine, and later the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem around 70 AD. The whole area from the Tigris to the Indus, once comprised in the State of Parthia, was deeply influenced by these Jewish immigrants, in whose wake came also Christians, either fleeing persecution or as in the case of the Persian Christian missionaries, spreading the message of Christ. There were undoubtedly large Christian colonies in the whole of North West India as well as along the coast - right up to Madras. The lack of sufficient research leaves the field free for speculation, but both Ramanuja and Madhva give evidence of reacting to the Semitic impact - at least after the tenth century. Was the impact of Christianity and Islam on the Indian tradition purely negative? One would have to be very naive to think so. Even in the 18th and 19th centuries when the confrontation was between Hinduism and a militant Western Christian culture, the impact was never purely negative. And in the 8th to 15th centuries when Christian and Muslim cultures confronted India's Buddhist, Jain and Hindu cultures, the impact led to fruitful new constructions and insights in Indian philosophy. Our research on pre-moghul interactions between Islamic civilization and Indian religions still remains quite sketchy.

8. I must briefly mention the Persian element as the eighth. We were very conscious of our debt to Persia in the 19th century. In the 20th we have come to forget it. The great leaders of the Indian Renaissance like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and the cultural elite of his time had a thorough grounding in Persian civilisation and culture. Iranian mysticism and the dualism of light and darkness have deeply penetrated the Indian soil, and are today part of my heritage. I cannot out of any false pride, deny what I owe to the Persian.

9. The ninth element can only be briefly mentioned - precisely because it is so recent and so well recognized. This is modern western secular civilisation with its institutions, ideals, concepts, ways of thinking and gathering knowledge, its most decisive elements being critical rationality and the empirical philosophy. We have been so monumentally inundated with this strange way of thinking, so that we are not yet unable to sum on up enough critical objectivity to assess what has happened to us in this process, and how much we take the norms and standards of this civilization for granted. There are so many strands in this impact, and I shall not try to even to list them in the short space available here. I simply believe that we have a double task in relation to this most recent impact on our consciousness. On the one hand we have to master the techniques of critical rationality more adequately, in order to reassess all our old perceptions and received traditions. On the other hand, we have to develop sufficient critical distance and objectivity, in order to discern the respective strengths and weaknesses, possibilities and limitations, of critical rationality itself. Here we must learn from Dilthey and Heidegger, from Adorno and Horkheimer, from Gadamer and Habermas, but we must also bring our own non-western critique to bear upon critical rationality as a method.

10. The tenth element which I must recognise as part of my heritage as an Indian comes from the thought of Marx and Engels, Lenin and later Marxist theoreticians. Whether we recognise it or not, the impact of Marxism is there on the Indian Consciousness - in our aspirations for social justice, for the dignity of the worker, for a society without exploitation and oppression, and for socialism in general. Our conscious reactions to Marxism may have been largely conditioned by the media, as well as by the anti-Marxist predilections of most of our intelligentsia. The tragedy of the matter is that even professing members of the communist parties have only a nodding acquaintance with the basic contours of communist strategy, but no profound schooling in its ideological niceties. The marxist impact on our society needs to be recognised and reassessed; but perhaps a deeper initiation into the profound subtleties of Marxism both as a tool for socio-politico-economic analysis and as an ideological map

for human action can help the Indian philosopher deeply rooted in our own traditions, to be both creative and communicative with the modern world.

I have listed these ten elements which I regard as basic to Indian identity and culture, in a some what random fashion. There may be other strands that I have failed to recognize. What I have listed could perhaps be regrouped in a different and more cogent pattern. This list is submitted only as a basic for discussion.

The main point however is this: only an Indian philosophy that has overcome the three alienations and takes fully in to account the various strands that go to make up our Indian culture and identity bids fair to make an impact on world philosophy.

Such an endeavour can hardly be a personal or individual effort. I know of no one who has in himself/herself the necessary equipment to cope with the whole range. In the nature of the case endeavour has to take the form of a corporate or group effort, with intermittent mutual discussion, through several years of sustained toil.

(An extract taken from an article titled, "Evaluation of Indian Philosophy in the context of world philosophy")

APPENDIX: 4

ORTHODOX CHURCHES AND WCC: A LETTER TO FR. DR. K. M. GEORGE

My dear George and George Achen,

I have read your joint letter of March 1994 with some interest, and heartily reciprocate your kind Easter greetings.

I see that you want to hold another consultation on the participation of the Orthodox churches in the WCC. I have only a remote interest in the subject now, because I do not have reason to expect much creative leadership, i.e. Christian leadership with vision and imagination, from the WCC.

I do not have the time to set forth in sufficient detail my basic insights about the Ecumenical Movement in general and the WCC in particular. I will just jot down a few things, in the form of brief statements.

1. The unity of the One church, the one body of Jesus Christ, belongs to the very foundation of the Christian faith. By the very nature of the Church it has to be united and one. This we confess in the Creed, and this I believe.

2. But the unity of the Church does not mean simply the unity of all Christians living now. We have to be one with the Church of all ages and all places. This means continuity with the Apostolic Church and its Apostolic witness. Most churches at present are not fully faithful to that tradition and heritage. The orientation of the Ecumenical Movement should not be to go after the latest fad, but to rediscover and live in greater fullness the Apostolic heritage, which can truly unite us in Christ.

3. True unity is in the good, and the more we live in accordance with the total commitment to Christ and to His universal compassion, the more united we will be as churches. This is why renewal in the church and in personal lives is basic to the ecumenical movement. There can be no unity without renewal. It is the Spirit of God who

unites us in the good. There is so much evil in our churches and in the WCC, which hampers and hinders their work for unity. Some self-assessment of a deeper kind than what goes on now, is needed both in the churches and in the WCC.

4. The Protestant leadership of the WCC puts a higher priority on their hanging on to that leadership, than to the unity of the Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox churches on the basis of the Apostolic witness. So long as this distorted power hunger remains, there is little possibility of the WCC functioning as a privileged instrument of the ecumenical movement.

5. There are some important issues facing humanity which the WCC should take up on a priority basis. The most important is laying the foundations for a new and more humane civilisation to replace the present inhuman urban technological - industrial - consumerist - nuclear - development alist civilisation, of which the disrupted life environment and war are two major products. The WCC leadership lacks the will and the vision to make the churches pick this up as an ecumenical task - including an examination of the theoretical foundations of all our academic disciplines and of our science and technology. There are other issues - like moving towards some universally acknowledged principles, not moral laws, but some basic principles like love and compassion, integrity and truth, justice and peace, with middle axioms and civil and social laws derived from them - for humans (not just Christians) living together in Koinonia on this planet, a total restructuring of the visible structures of international coherence like the UN system, The TNCs, the emerging unjust global single economy and its institutions and structures, the initiation of new structures to make just international laws and to administer and adjudicate them, i.e. international legislative bodies, executive structures, peace - keeping bodies, and judiciary systems. Neither the churches nor the WCC seem equipped to handle these questions more than superficially.

6. The ecumenical movement needs a new kind of leadership - decentralised and distributed in different parts of the globe - not bureaucratic offices, but of praying ecumenical communities, living

and sharing in koinonia. The bureaucratic pattern does not fit, either for Church leadership, or for WCC operations. We have to make full use of our best lay leadership, both female and male, but not let loose some feverish activists furiously tearing each other and themselves apart. We need wise, loving and compassionate, knowledgeable and skilled people to lead us in this critical period of our history, people who fear God, who can pray together, who love each other, which is not the case now. The shift of leadership from bureaucracy to a global koinonia of local koinonias is an urgent need.

7. The question of culture must receive urgent and better informed attention. The present treatment does not take up the real issues: e.g. culture as identity for persons and groups, the cultural imperialism of certain cultures, the role of inter-religious co-operation and mutual understanding as a way to learn to live together in pluralistic societies and to pave the way for a united humanity, the relation of culture, not some abstract entity called “the Gospel”, but to the Kingdom of God and to ultimate reality.

8. Another important ecumenical issue is the growing alienation between the organized main line churches and their people. So many, especially among the young and the learned, are opting for a life with minimum association with the organized church. There is a new and dangerous quest for “spirituality without religion” which is replacing yesterday’s “Religionless Christianity.” A great “spiritual” egoism and an unjustifiable individualist quest for one’s own private peace and salvation lurk behind this anti-social, anti- communitarian movement. But there is some justification for people revolting against the life of the organized church. This should be a prime concern for the WCC.

9. As for the questions you have posed I have only few things to say. On relation to RCC, that is another power group with its own power game, but much more experienced in that game than the WCC. It will be good to make a study of why the WCC-RCC relationship, which started off with great hopes in 1962, became rather unproductive and formal by 1970. I believe that the power game played by one WCC official to bring down the RCC to the level of one of the Reformed churches backfired. I believe also that both Paul VI and John Paul II saw the Protestant churches as a bad

influence, undermining some of the cherished RC realities such as opposition to artificial birth control, clerical celibacy, the monastic vocation, and submission to the Magisterium. The RCC gently closed its doors to the Reformation churches around the mid-seventies or even earlier. The way the dominant Protestant leadership was treating the Orthodox churches gave some ideas to the RCC as to what would happen to them if they came inside despite their great and massive strength. Meanwhile the Reformation tradition began moving further and further away from the Apostolic heritage; this confirmed the RC desire to protect itself from such influences by keeping the doors closed as much as possible.

10. The WCC's present agenda is certainly not of the churches, but of some activists who pick up the latest fads. On important issues like the environment or the one single global market, the WCC does not do any serious research through competent and knowledgeable people, but becomes quite satisfied with a few slogans. The question of the persistence and growth of poverty and injustice in the world as well as the growth of militarism and the arms trade gets very little informed attention. The role of science and technology in shaping our world has now been pushed back to a back burner. The element of study and research in the ecumenical community as a whole does not seem to have too many advocates either on the staff or in the Committee structures. This applies across the board-Unity, Mission and Diakonia. Of course I do not quite understand the difference between Mission and Diakonia.

On the question of what alienates the Orthodox churches from the WCC, I would not put women's ordination issues at the top. It is the general lack of respect for the Apostolic Tradition, great differences in the attitudes towards the Church as a Divine - Human reality, towards the mysteries of the Church, the functional approach of the Reformation towards the Ministry, - these seem to me the basic factors, in addition to a lack of sensitivity in general to what the Orthodox regard as sacred, including the sanctification of time and of space.

These are just some ideas that come to my mind. The WCC was once a great force. It is not longer so, and the WCC better recognise

the reasons for that and do something radical about it. Otherwise not only History, but even our Lord Himself may leave it behind.

Christ is risen. God bless you both.

Yours in Christ,

APPENDIX: 5

MY OWN VISION OF THE ULTIMATE: WHY AM I AN EASTERN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN?

Why indeed am I an Orthodox Christian? Clearly, my own choice could only be part of the answer, since I come from a family whose Christian ancestry is traced, rightly or wrongly, to the Apostle St. Thomas. I belong to a church that is presumably as old as any other Christian Church in the world, except perhaps the Mother Church of Jerusalem. The Apostle Thomas, one of the Twelve, is believed to have come to India around the middle of the first century, two decades after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Thomas died in India a martyr, and was buried in Mylapore, near Madras. The eastern Orthodox Community in Kerala has come through many vicissitudes of history, mainly as a result of aggression from Western missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, but has survived to this day.

The choice was thus made for me, first by whoever was responsible for my being born in India to Christian parents and then by my parents, who decided that I should, like them and my four brothers, be baptized in the Malankara Orthodox Church as our Church is officially known. But subsequently I made that choice my own. I could have joined many other Churches, such as the Mennonite or the Presbyterian. I had the closest relations with the Mennonites when I was a college student (1950-52) at Goshen College, a Mennonite College in Indiana, USA. Or I could have joined the Presbyterian Church when I was a Bachelor of Divinity student (later converted to Master of Divinity) at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1952 to 1954. In fact most of my theological education has been in Protestant institutions (including Yale and Oxford), and my rather comprehensive exposure to Reformation thought has only helped to confirm my commitment to the apostolic tradition as maintained by the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

Later, during my five-year tenure as Associate General Secretary of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, I had occasion to visit

and get to know at first hand almost all the main Churches of the Reformation and Eastern Orthodoxy, as well as to lead Bible Studies and conferences and seminars for them. Since most of the Protestant church leaders were also members of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, I got to know them personally. Even after leaving the staff of the WCC in 1967, I continued to associate myself with that body, as a member of the Central Committee, a member of the Executive Committee, and as one of its presidents from 1983 to 1991.

During these years I came to see quite clearly that the Eastern Orthodox Church had been, in many things that matter, more faithful than others to the one apostolic tradition that we all profess. I also saw when that Eastern Orthodox tradition had been unfaithful-in its excessive and sometimes exclusive authority, in its basic failure to love humanity and serve it with everything at its disposal, and in its failure to come to terms with the cultural, spiritual and intellectual struggles and frustrations of the bourgeois capitalist industrial civilization that were sweeping over global humanity. I also saw the most unchristian power struggles going on among the Eastern Orthodox, to a certain degree more deplorably so than in the Churches of the West. Despite all these lapses in practice, my respect and love for the Eastern Orthodox tradition deepened during these years.

I have also exposed myself extensively to the Roman Catholic tradition, both through personal friendships with distinguished Roman Catholics and by fairly voluminous reading. During the sixties and seventies I had close relations with the Vatican, first as a Delegated Observer at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and later for twelve years as a founding member of the Joint Working Group of the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. I knew personally Popes Paul VI and John Paul I, and likewise know the present incumbent, John Paul II. I have also worked closely with some of the leading theologians of the Roman Catholic Church, in the course of half a dozen unofficial conversations organized by the Pro Oriente Foundation in Vienna in the seventies and eighties between Oriental Orthodox and Roman Catholic theologians.

Other Religions

I shall presently seek to put down briefly that in my own tradition I find most valuable, but let me add a word about other religions before I get to that point. You can very well ask me the question: being born an Indian, why are you not a Hindu in religion as well?

The answer first is that at no time in history have all Indians been Hindus. That label Hindu is a very late creation (eighteenth century?), and there never was a religion specifically labelled Hinduism until a couple of centuries ago. India has always been a multi-religious pluralistic society. Even before Jaina Mahavira and the Lord Buddha in the sixth century BC, not all Indians followed the same religion. There were the Sramanas, naked mendicant monks, the Ajivikas, the Adivasis with their own comprehensively *religious* approach to reality; there were also the predecessors of what later turned out to be Tantrics, Shaivites and Vaishnavites, and of the many *bhakti* cults that arose in India from time to time. Most of these did not accept the Authority of the Vedas. The Brahmans, who came to dominate the Sanatana Dharma later, were originally newcomers, a distinct minority of immigrants from Central Asia, who later climbed to the top niche of the caste structure they created and reinforced with a thousand-year process of further small group migrations from Central Asia. In this respect Brahmanism is as foreign to the Indian tradition as any other religion. But it too was accepted and domesticated here after many quite violent struggles.

In India today we acknowledge eight great religions, four largely of Indian origin (Buddhism, Jainism, the Sanatana Dharma or the religion of the Vedas and Upanishads, and Sikhism) and four introduced from outside (Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Islam), all of West Asian origin. All these eight religions are fully Indian. Even Islam, which came in last, has been here for twelve centuries. Attempts to brand the latter four as non-Indian or 'foreign' have found supporters only among the fanatic followers of a fascist Hindutva of the Sangha Parivar variety.

If there is one thing we can surely say about India's cultural heritage, it is that that heritage has never been uniform or non-religious.

I grew up as a Christian in the midst of that heritage; I went to a school where about a third were Christians, the others following Islam or different varieties of Sanatana Dharma. As a child I was not brainwashed by Western missionary thinking forcing me to regard and condemn non-Christians as unsaved.

In fact our community developed its own myths of religious co-existence, not just tolerance for other religions that some advocate, but genuine fraternal friendship with people of other faiths. For example, in my childhood I had my Sunday School lessons in a nearby church, St. George's Orthodox Church, Karingachira. During the feast of St. George huge church processions (with the cross and white banner of the resurrection) were taken out through the streets of our town. The Vishnu Temple in my town also had similar processions with the image of Vishnu in front. There was always danger of communal clashes as the Hindu procession entered predominantly Christian areas or vice versa, since both communities were equally prone to the evils of triumphalism.

So the myth our community developed, shocking perhaps to Western Christians, held that St. George and the Lord Vishnu were blood brothers. I may not have quite believed it as a child, but it helped create the right attitude towards my Hindu brothers and sisters. Muslims were also regarded as brothers and sisters of Christians, sharing together the once honorific title of *Mapilas* or *Mahapillais* or 'great scribes.' So I grew up as a child with fraternal feelings for people of other religions. I knew something about their practices, but little about their deeper faith and understanding.

That knowledge, such as it is today, had to be developed in the forty years since 1954 when I returned from Princeton, revolting against the cultural arrogance and intellectual parochialism of Western Christianity. I began engaging in dialogues between Christians and Hindus, mostly organized by Christians. I remember particularly one in Stanley Jones's Sat Tal Ashram up in the Himalayas. There were the usual polite papers, in which each religion tried to prove that it was more right than the other, and putting on false poses of universal charity and general benignness. But the best breakthroughs came during the coffee breaks. Two I remember vividly.

One was a question and comment from a Hindu university professor. He asked me rather bluntly, "You seem to have some measure of honesty about you. Can I ask you the question: why do you Christians want to have dialogue with Hindus? You have largely failed in your fire and thunder evangelism to convert us Hindus. Is not dialogue your new technique to get our ear, so that you can try to convert us in a devious way?" Unfortunately most of the Protestant and Roman Catholic literature on dialogue seems to give ground for the Hindu friend's suspicion of Christian motives in dialogue.

I decided that day that I would accept two principles for Christian dialogue with people of other faiths. The first was the principle of maximum transparency. Christians should have no hidden motives or dialogue with people of other faiths. They are all people whom Christ loves and for whom He gave His life. I decided that the love of Christ for all humanity must be the propelling motive for dialogue, though other motives such as the affirmation of, and concern for, the unity of humanity, and the need for pluralistic but harmonious local, national and global communities could be a subsidiary motive. But no hidden motive to convert the other. The second principle was that in inter-religious dialogue no religion should claim any superiority. In dialogue all are on the same plane, respectfully listening to and learning from each other. You may be convinced that your religion is the only true one. But do not make any claims of superiority over others on that ground. We are all equally contingent and dependent on God's grace and mercy, whether we be Hindus, Christians or Muslims, whether some of us acknowledge that grace and mercy or not.

I spoke above about Christ's love for all humanity. In that connection I must narrate another coffee-break experience in dialogue. Again it was a Hindu friend who engaged me in one-to-one dialogue. 'You seem to be tough enough to take this,' his preamble immediately put me on guard. "I want to tell you what images go through my Hindu mind, when you Christians talk to us about your "Christian love" for Hindus. I visualize a giant spider, oozing out from the pores of its skin quantities of goeey fluid, called Christian love, and skilfully weaving a glorious web in which it wants to catch me, an unsuspecting Hindu fly.' I was shocked, but kept my cool, for I

knew he had justification for the allegation. The Christian love, which came out in the form of charity or of useful social institutions such as hospitals, schools and orphanages, was still governed by the motives of ‘witnessing to Christ’ and of making Christianity attractive. It may be unfair to regard all Christian social work as an advertisement for the gospel, but non-Christians do see it that way much too frequently.

It was only in about 1967, when I left the staff of the WCC in Geneva and returned to my country and church, that I began taking up the issue of dialogue with people of other faiths more seriously. I saw the damage done to the image and reality of the Christian Church by the unchristian attitude towards other religions fostered by reformed thinkers such as Barth, Brunner and Kraemer. They were speaking out of their cultural parochialism rather than from any genuine Christian insight, it seemed to me.

One of the first achievements was the setting up of a sub-unit on Dialogue with People of Other Faiths in the WCC. We were able to secure the services of a first-rate Indian Christian, Dr. Stanley Samartha, to head that unit. He did a masterful job. Despite the strong inhibitions of a culturally narrow-minded European Church, we were able to organize several small significant interfaith consultations, which laid down some of the rules and principles for fair and honest interreligious dialogue. We also ventured into the experience of praying meaningfully with people of other religions in the course of these seminars and consultations. This caused a lot of furore in European Christian circles, and I remember how a friend of mine, a German professor, the late Dr. Margull, almost lost his chair in the university, on the charge that he, a Christian, had participated in the prayer services of Muslims. But we kept plugging away quietly, until it all came to a head in the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1975, in Nairobi, Kenya.

Some of us presumed, especially in the Dialogue Working Group of the WCC, that the time was ripe to test the claim of Dietrich Bonhoeffer that Christianity, especially European Christianity, had come of age. At the Nairobi Assembly of 1975, we invited a select number of observers from the great religions of the world and devoted

a whole section of the Assembly to interreligious dialogue, in the hope that along with the environmental issue being highlighted at Nairobi, the issue of cultural pluralism and interreligious dialogue would move from the margins of the WCC agenda to its centre. I was asked to chair that section on dialogue, with our distinguished non-Christian friends present.

Our hopes were soon to be dashed on the hard rocks of European cultural parochialism. In response to my presidential remarks, a friend of mine, a Norwegian Lutheran bishop, asked me, 'in what sense does the Chairman find the revelation in Jesus Christ so insufficient that he has to go to the non-Christians to learn the truth?'

I was offended, but being in the chair, could not retort in my usual rude manner. so I responded, 'In this sense that the Chairman is not as fortunate as his friend the bishop from Norway, who seems to have so mastered the revelation in Jesus Christ, that he is so totally self-satisfied and does not feel any need to learn from others.' I doubt that the barb got through. But my non-Christian friends saw for themselves the shameful narrow mindedness of European Christianity. They were hurt. But kept their cool and continued to be polite.

The Assembly decided that the WCC was not to engage in any more multi-religious dialogue, but to stick with bilateral dialogues in which Christians kept the control. The Nairobi Assembly disillusioned me, and I came to the conclusion that neither forms of Western Christianity, Roman Catholic or Protestant, were mature enough to engage in dialogue Christians could not control and manipulate. I am not claiming that Eastern Orthodox Christianity is more mature or more open in this regard. In fact it is only in contrast with the dry scholasticism and exclusivistic dogmaticism of Eastern Orthodoxy that we can see Western Christianity in a better light.

A Crisis of Confidence

Anyway, the process was begun by which I lost confidence in the leadership of the Western Church - Protestant, Roman Catholic or Sectarian. And my own Eastern Orthodoxy was lost on the margins of humanity, quixotically and uncomprehendingly struggling against

many hostile forces on all sides - Islam in the Middle East, aggressive Roman Catholic, Protestant and Sectarian proselytizing missions everywhere, atheist communism in Eastern and Central Europe, and liberal secularism reaching out globally with its bloodsucking tentacles. Eastern Orthodoxy developed a barricade psychology of self-defence by sheer negativity, smug in its pettiness, making tall claims about its monopoly on Christian truth, and yet unable to communicate with either the modern world or even with its own youth and laity (including the alienated Orthodox women).

In 1983 the Vancouver Assembly had chosen me to be one of its presidents, a desperate move on the part of the WCC establishment to keep me out of power in its policy making and running. A president of the WCC is always a decorative figure, supposed to represent the WCC on unimportant public occasions, a senior figure who generally keeps out of all controversy. I was the only legitimate candidate to be moderator of the Central Committee, since no one from the Orthodox tradition had been allowed to be general secretary or moderator up till that time, and only the general secretary's post is more powerful than that of the moderator.

I was aware of the antics of power brokering behind the scenes in Vancouver. Philip Potter had been general secretary for some time, and he wanted only a docile and malleable moderator. He chose a Scottish schoolmaster, with neither knowledge of the world church nor the basic theological competence needed, as his candidate for moderator. He told me, with a measure of defiance shining through his eyes, that that was his choice and that he was going to get him elected, in the teeth of all opposition. He also announced to me that my name was being proposed as one of the presidents. I tried to advise him that he was unlikely to get his candidate for moderator elected. He told me that he would 'show me.' He also wanted his confidant and adviser, Deputy general Secretary Professor Konrad Raiser of Germany, to be his own successor as general secretary when his term ended in a year or so.

It was one of those rare occasions in the WCC when I entered the fray of power brokering. I thought it would be disastrous for the

WCC to have the power combination of Potter, Raiser and the Scottish schoolmaster. The Orthodox would feel left out totally. So I acted. And it worked. The Central Committee rejected the general secretary's proposal, and by a muddled process chose the German Praeses Joachim Held as moderator. That dashed to the ground Konrad Raiser's chances for the succession, at least for the time being, since a German moderator and a German general secretary was an unacceptable combination.

With that I became cynical of the WCC as a 'privileged instrument' of the ecumenical movement. There seemed to be more dirty politics in that Christian body than in most nation-states. I served as president until the Canberra Assembly in 1991, but I was systematically kept out of all important decision making, and was seldom allowed to represent the WCC at any important public function. Whenever I announced that I was going to do something on my own, not as president, the establishment grew fearful and tried to stop or circumvent me. When I announced for example that I was going to Managua for the sixth anniversary of Nicaragua's liberation, they decided to send two more presidents and additional persons to hedge me. They were afraid I would say something inappropriate in favour of the Sandinistas.

I did in Managua what I thought was right. In the first place I went to the place where Foreign Minister d'Escotto was fasting in protest against the American threat of aggression and sanctions. I spent a day with him, fasting in sympathy. I saw President Daniel Ortega, and asked him very politely why the Sandinistas had been so racist and mean in their treatment of the Misquito Indians. I still remember Ortega standing up from his presidential chair, and with bowed head saying to me, 'I confess before God and before you that the Sandinistas did wrong. We are doing everything possible to recompense the Misquitos.'

I went to other Central American countries such as El Salvador and the Dominican Republic and visited the people who were being tortured and massacred by powerful pro-US fascist forces. I made a firsthand report on what I saw to the Central Committee meeting in Argentina, and the resolution on Central America was approved

without any discussion, partly because of the heavy emotional impact of my report.

I was very grieved that the progressive Latin American Christians, who deplored the oppression in Central America, were not aware of what they themselves had done to the original natives of that continent. Even the so-called liberation theologians are still today unable to establish rapport with the indigenous people whom they have uprooted and decultured.

The net result of my rather extensive ecumenical experience is that I have not been able to spot one Christian Church in the world that is even half faithful to the way of the cross and to the teaching of the Apostles. I have gradually begun to look outside the Christian Church, to see what God is doing.

I see the demand for full manifestation of the freedom and dignity of all human beings - men, women and children - as a major thrust still in the march of history. I see the interreligious movement and the women's movement as significant aspects of the advance of human history. I can conceive of the peace movement with a socialist commitment as bound to come back soon into the centre of things, as the contradictions in the single market global economy begin to reveal themselves more manifestly, quite possibly leading to a world-wide economic crash. Above all I am convinced that until humanity sees that the secular civilization, which denies the centrality of God, has been the greatest mistake in our history, it cannot find the way forward.

I see that I cannot put my trust either in Christian Church activities, or in the work of governments and intergovernmental agencies such as the UN, to begin to lead humanity in the way it has to go. That leadership has to come from groups of committed people of all religions and of no professed religion, in all countries and on all continents, working to enlighten the awareness of people and mobilize their power to act in the best interests of humanity.

My Vision - My Faith

Let me now conclude with a confession of my faith and a brief reference to the vision that impels me, even in my seventythird year.

I know that the created order is in the hands of God. He brought it into being out of nothingness. It is His will that still maintains it in existence. And that will is good. There is no trace of evil in it. So I shall not be daunted by evil, or be stymied by fear of evil. The good is true; it alone is true and everything else must find dissolution in its own time.

I belong to that created order, but am by no means the centre of it; everything else and everyone else shares in the destiny of creation, which is good. But the separation of good from evil causes not only both joy and peace, but also pain and suffering. That separation happens throughout history, but it will take place in a special way at the 'harvest' -the final consummation and summing up of all history, which happens beyond history.

The created order came into being through the Son; he became the Son of Humanity, part of our human destiny and the destiny of the created order, sharing our kind of peace and joy, and also our kind of pain and suffering. Him I adore; Him I love; He is neither male nor female, though I use the male personal pronoun, since we are yet to create a common personal pronoun in the English language. His I am, and that is my fulfilment. I trust in Him; He is my hope, my compass and my anchor. He is the destiny of the created order.

I need to learn from all, and have indeed learned from many. My major liberation in life has been from thinking that the Western way of thinking, with its specific categories and modalities, is the only way to think and to know. Now that I know a little bit about the Yin-Yang polarity-complementarity way of thinking and knowing in the Chinese Tao, I do not have to be a slave of the Western subject-object mode of thinking, and the logic of the excluded middle. From my own Indian tradition I have learned the principle of *Ekam advitiyam* or One without a Second; I know now that all diversity and difference ultimately find their unity in the One without a Second; that One is more ultimate than the many. My own Eastern Orthodox tradition has confirmed that there is no creation other than God or outside God, because the Infinite Ultimate has neither outside nor other.

I have learned from the Jains the great *Anekantavada*, which holds that all statements are conditional and qualified truth, which have to be supplemented and completed by other truths; that our Ahimsa or non-violence should extend to other ways of thinking, and not just to other beings.

I have learned from Buddhists that all epistemology is finally without basis; that our perceptions of all things, including the world, are but mental events that happen when our kind of mind-sense and whatever is out there come into contact with each other; that this world which the secular mindset takes to be some kind of ultimate reality is neither real nor unreal, and should be taken seriously, but not so absolutely.

And I have learned much from Jews and Arabs, from Sikhs and Zoroastrians, from Adivasis and Aborigines, from Africans and from the indigenous peoples of America. And I hope I am still learning and will continue to do so until the end.

I have also learned a lot from the communists-that most avowedly atheistic wing of the European Enlightenment; I have learned from their weaknesses and failures just as much as from their apparent successes. I cultivated them especially for two reasons: (a) their social goals were more compatible with the Christian idea of a just society than that of liberalism and its capitalist ideology; (b) my Christian brothers and sisters in the West, especially the Roman Catholic Church, but also Protestants, were vilifying everything the communists were doing. I found anticommunism anti-Christian, and therefore decided to associate and work with the communists so long as they were committed to just societies in which oppression and exploitation was reduced to a minimum and in which all human beings could live with freedom and dignity.

Alas, the communists became as dogmatic, corrupt and power hungry as the Roman Catholic Church and dug their own graves. But I still remain committed to socialism as the nearest alternative to the society I am envisaging as a Christian.

And I have learned much from the Eastern Orthodox heritage: that Eucharistic worship and adoration with thanks giving are the primary responses to what God has done in Christ-not preaching or

witnessing; that the Christian life in the community is more important than Christian talking and doing; that the Christian's personal life is not an individual matter, but the work of the Holy Spirit in the community of faith; that the Holy Spirit of God has been at work in the whole creation from its very inception, and is still at work, not just in the Church, but in the whole universe, bringing it to fulfilment according to God's plans; that I can trust the True God to fulfil the created order according to His plans, despite many apparent failures and regressions I am privileged to be initiated, by baptism-chrismation, into the great mystery of the universe as God guides it to its destiny.

The vision that beckons defies human word and concept. The mind cannot envision what God has set in store for creation. The destiny is good without mitigation, pure joy in love, peace in community with all, ecstasy without triumph sweeter than anything our mind and senses can now enjoy. The human mind can neither conceive of nor imagine what God has set in store for us and for all creation. Our fantasy and our imagination cannot soar so high. Even when we finally experience it, it will be beyond all language and concept.

It is the Spirit that assures me of this. And the Spirit leads me there. That Spirit, we have a foretaste. The reality will surpass all present hope and human expectation.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, one true God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(Martin Forward (ed.), *Ultimate Visions: Reflections on the Religions We Choose*, Oxford, One World Publications, 1995, pp. 111-120)

APPENDIX: 6

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

NEW DELHI, APRIL 1, 1993

Six years ago, when I last wrote a Testament of this kind sitting in my study at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study in Shimla. I did not expect to live for another six years. God has been good, and I must go on in this valley of tears as long as He wants me to. I must go when I am called, now or later. I am now in the seventyfirst year of my life.

I leave this humble testimony to the world at large, to those who may come across it in any manner, anywhere.

God is good. He alone is truly and fully good. He is good without mixture of evil; in Him all evils disappears. Evil has no place in Him, just as darkness has no place in the Light. He can do no evil. Evil does not come from Him. He did not make it. He gave freedom to His Creation; freedom to reject the good with which it is endowed, and thereby to choose evil. Evil is denial of created being itself, which cannot really be without being also good. In freedom is the root of evil. But evil by itself cannot be; it cannot exist, except when mixed with the good. Only the good can be. Being and the good are inseparable. When any being uses its freedom to deny and reject the good, it denies also being itself, for true created being is always good, like its creator.

If you ask me, “Who is this God, and where do we find Him?”, I can only say with all who have known God, that there is no way we can grasp Him with our concepts or express His being with our words. We can say many things about Him in a negative or metaphorical language. He is without form or body, without beginning or end, without limit or extension, neither in space nor in time, not needing to become or grow into something he is not, and therefore without change or movement, not dependent on or derived from anything else, everything else being derived from and dependent on Him. Who and where are not questions appropriate for the One who is Eternal and Infinite. Where He is not, there is only nothing.

I am unhappy about using the masculine personal pronoun to refer to Him; God is not male, but using the feminine personal pronoun solves no problem, for he is neither male nor female, nor is He a neuter It. The Creator has no gender, which is an attribute only of the created order. He is Who He is, Who will always be, the Great I am. My human language offers me no appropriate pronoun by which to refer to Him. I will continue to say 'He' without thereby meaning that He is male.

From Him comes all good. All that is good not only comes from Him, but is also His presence. Where the good is, there God is present. I bow before the good, Wherever it shows up-in people of different faiths and religions, in people Who claim to believe in no God, in birds and animals, in trees and flowers, in mountains and rivers, in air and sky, in sun and moon, in sculpture and painting, in music and art, in the smile of the infant and in the wisdom of the sage, in the blush of dawn and in the gorgeous sunset. Where the good is, there is the kingdom of God. There God is present and reigns even when that presence is not acknowledged or recognised, though the Kingdom belongs in a special sense to those Who have known Him and worship Him, dedicating their lives to total obedience.

If you ask me how is the good to be defined, I can only say that good, like God, is undefinable. But it can be discerned, recognised, praised and cherished, just as God can be. Good is what God is. He has been good to me. Out of nothing He has brought me forth. He keeps me From going back to the nothing that I have come from. He forgives me my sin and evil. The evil in me draws forth a sentence of death, but he annuls that sentence by His grace. The life that I live I regard as a double gift-the gift of existence and the gift of the new life that makes me a child of God. For He has come to us in His Son, and has become one of us, a human being in the created order, partaking of the earth, of flesh and blood, of matter in all its temporality and finitude. On that I have no doubt, even though many of the people whom I love and admire reject that faith of mine. I belong to Jesus Christ the incarnate Son of God, and therefore to His new humanity, without any reservation. I cannot compromise that faith even for the sake of good relations with people of other faiths.

In Him I put my trust. Christ is my all. Without him I am nothing at all. The life I live is Christ's. I share that life with all those in Christ's Body. I have no life of my own. I live in Him and He lives in me. Christ never forsakes me, even when I am rebellious, indifferent or thoughtless in my disobedience. His love stays steadfast even when my loyalty grows feeble and my ardor becomes tepid. He gives and He forgives, without stint or limit. Such love deserves nothing less than my all. Him I adore, Him I worship as God and Man, Him I hold as without peer, the only Begotten of God, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, One True God.

And Christ's love is for all huankind, not just for Christians. It is for the whole of humanity that he has died, not just for Christians alone. He lives for the human race, and he is the lover and Saviour, as well as Lord, of the whole race of humankind. How can I then draw any limits to my love and compassion, or deny it to any group of human beings? Even those who regard themselves as my enemies I am not to hate or exclude from Christ's love and compassion. That has been the basis for my approach to all sorts of groups, people of other religions, Communists, Moonies, and especially the white races against whom I can justly hold a thousand grudges.

Christ is for me much more than a great teacher of humanity, along with Gautama Buddha, Vardhamana Mahavira, Lao Tse, Mahatma Gandhi, Mohammed Rasool-Allah, Adi Sankara, Plato, Socrates, Moses, and Zoroaster. Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God who became son of Man, took on our sin and suffering upon himself, sacrificed himself on the Cross, died and rose again from the dead to live for ever and to reconcile the whole creation to God in himself. He is the victor over sin and death, over evil and disintegration. In him everything holds together, and in him shall the whole creation, purged of all evil, be finally harmonised. This I believe, and I have no reason to hide my faith, though I do not talk about it all the time. I live by this faith. This is the source-spring of my actions. This is the hope that keeps me from despair and despondency, even when everything looks so bleak and gloomy in God's world.

Krankenhaus St. Josef, Wuppertal, Germany, June 5, 1993.

I have just come through another test, as I continue the writing of this testimony, with my left side paralysed, here in room 341 of Krankenhaus Sankt Josef in Wupperta-Elberfeld, near Cologne, Germany. Today is the 5th of June 1993. I had the stroke exactly a week ago, on May 29th, on my way from Oxford to Cologne. I came here to the hospital directly from Cologne airport. Today I can type with one hand. God has been good to me and has begun to heal me miraculously. He could have done it all at once, if He wanted to. He tells me that my faith is not strong enough for such immediate recovery. But He is healing me miraculously fast.

During this test, which may last a long time, I have come to know afresh both how fragile one's hold upon ordinary biological life is, and also how unshakeable is the foundation of the new life which God bestows by His grace. Death is no terror. Even the prospect of being a permanent (that is, till the end of this biological life) invalid holds no terror for me, if that is what God wills. Whatever happens, He can turn it in to the good.

I leave this word to all who survive me: Love God with all your mind and all your will and all your feeling and all your strength. Live for the good of others. Pursue not perishable gold or wordly glory. Wish no one any evil. Bless God in your heart, and bless all his creation. Discipline yourself while still young, to love God and to love His creation, to serve others and not to seek one's own interest. Pray always that God's Kingdom may come and all evil be banished from this created order.

Finally I have a personal request to make to my church. Naked I came forth in to this world from my mother's womb, and naked I go forth from the womb of this world, to that world where my Loving Lord awaits me. All who love me please pray for me. I shall be grateful if my mortal remains are interred in the Orthodox Seminary Chapel, Kottayam where there will be perpetual prayer for the soul of this sinner. May God bless you all.

Completed as from the Delhi Orthodox Centre, 2 Tughlakabad Institutional Area, New Delhi 110 062, India, at the Kurklinik Bad

Laasphe, Am Bergchen 10, D-57324 Bad Laasphe, Germany, on this the Eleventh day of July Nineteen Hundred and Ninetythree by Paulos Mar Gregorios, by the grace of God Metropolitan of Delhi.

Signature

Witnesses