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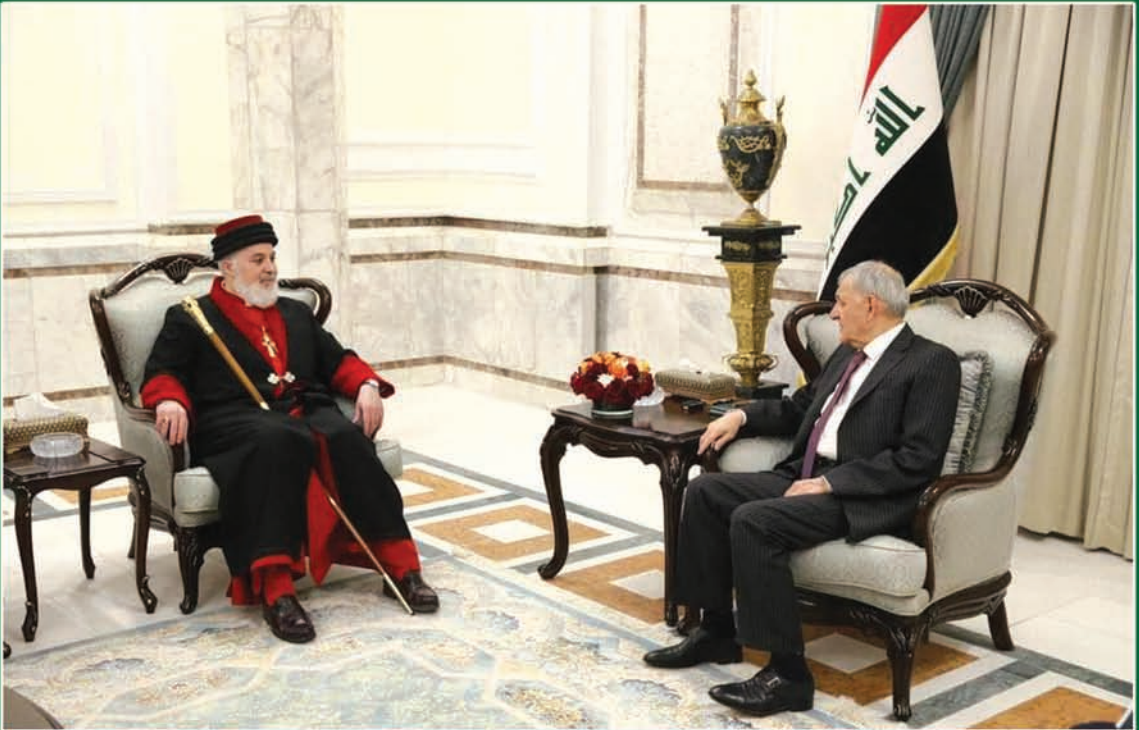
March - April 2023

Nos 3 - 4



The Palm Sunday procession enters the Marth Mariam Cathedral, Thrissur led by Metropolitan HB Mar Awgin Kuriakose

## VOICE OF THE EAST



His Holiness Mar Awa III, Catholicos-Patriarch, meet with His Excellency Abdullatif Jamal Rashid, the President of the Republic of Iraq, at the Presidential Palace in Baghdad on Thursday, March 30, 2023.



His Holiness Mar Awa III, Catholicos Patriarch with the participants in the Third Annual 'Syriac Heritage Festival' in Ankawa on Tuesday, April 11, 2023.

**VOICE OF THE EAST**

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# Voice of the East

Vol. 70

March -April 2023

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## *Editorial*

Religious ceremonies have long been revered as sacred rituals that connect individuals to their faith, foster a sense of community, and offer a spiritual experience. However, in recent times, there has been a growing concern that these once profound and meaningful ceremonies have lost their spiritual essence. In the past, religious ceremonies held great significance, embodying the core beliefs, traditions, and values of a community. However, in today's fast-paced and increasingly secular world, these ceremonies are witnessing a decline in their spiritual essence.

The Holy Qurbana, a sacred liturgical celebration in many Christian traditions, is a prime example of a religious ceremony losing its spiritual essence. While it was once a deeply meaningful experience characterized by solemnity, reverence, and introspection, it has now become more of a routine practice for some. The true essence of the Holy Qurbana, centered around the Eucharist and the profound act of communion, is often overshadowed by mechanical rituals and a lack of genuine spiritual engagement.

Similarly, Baptism, a significant sacrament symbolizing rebirth and initiation into the Christian faith, has also suffering from the loss of spirituality. Many view it as a mere social obligation or a way to follow tradition rather than a transformative spiritual journey.

Furthermore, the marriage, a sacred celebration in various religious traditions, is being experiencing the same loss of spirituality. The spiritual union of two individuals and the sanctity of the commitment have taken a backseat to lavish ceremonies, societal expectations, and materialistic displays. The true essence of marriage, centered around love, commitment, and spiritual growth, is often overshadowed by superficial elements, leaving the ceremony devoid of its intended spiritual depth.

Several factors contribute to the erosion of spirituality in religious ceremonies. The fast pace of modern life, the influence of consumerism, and the spread of secularism all play a role in shifting priorities away from the spiritual aspects of these ceremonies. Additionally, a lack of proper education and understanding about the significance of these rituals further contributes to the decline of spirituality.

The consequences of this loss of spirituality in religious ceremonies are profound. To counter this worrisome trend, it is essential for religious institutions, clergy, and communities to take proactive steps towards reviving the spiritual essence of religious ceremonies. Religious leaders, religious institutions, clergy, and communities must also strive to create environments conducive to spiritual growth and reflection. By organizing retreats, spiritual seminars, and small group discussions, individuals can deepen their understanding of their faith and reignite the spiritual flame within themselves.

The marginalization of religious ceremonies, such as the Holy Qurbana, Baptism, and marriage, is indicative of a broader trend where spirituality is losing its central place.

Mar Aprem Metropolitan





unspeakable, with which God first loved us through His Son. We behold the great sacrifice which the Son of God paid on our behalf in order to purchase humanity from the mortality and corruptibility of this limited life. And we further behold the unspeakable power of God, by which the Father raised Jesus up again from among the dead on the third day and accounted him immortal, by the putting on of the spiritual body of the resurrection. Thus, these three divine virtues are seen and demonstrated in the Cross of our Lord: love, self-sacrifice and the great dominion of God. This understanding of the Cross can come to us only by the Holy Spirit—we who are given life (that is, who are being saved by the grace of God). It is only the Spirit of the Lord who can illuminate our mind and understanding that when we encounter the holy Cross we may behold these three divine merits. It is for this reason that we as the Church of the East do not place the corpus of our Lord upon the Cross, for it is not merely the instrument of the suffering and death, but it is also the sign of the glorious resurrection of our Lord from among the dead. Thus, contained in the worshipful Cross is the mystery of the passion, death and glorious resurrection of the Son of God. Again, it is for this same reason that the sign of the living and worshipful Cross is counted one of the seven sacraments of the Church, and all of the holy mysteries are sealed by it. For, in every sacrament there is an invisible and mystical change of the elements by the operation and power of the very same Holy Spirit. Thus, we see that God had changed the sign of the Cross from being a symbol of death and suffering, to being the means of life and salvation to all who would believe in the Only-Begotten Son of God, Christ Jesus. It is for the same reason that we sign our persons with the holy Cross, not only that we might be blessed by it and receive blessing and grace through this sign, but that we might also be continually reminded that we are made partakers in the mystery of the suffering and death of the Son of God, and of his holy and glorious resurrection, which we receive in the sacrament of holy Baptism. In this fashion, the power and dominion of God is made manifest in the worshipful and dominical sign of the holy Cross.

Beloved in the Lord: we as baptized Christians are invited to become a believing people who gazes upon and continually carries the Cross in this world. That is to say, that we have accounted the delights and good of this world as nothing), and to be alive in Jesus Christ who dwells in us. We only know and worship the Christ "...who was handed over on account of our sins, and who rose for our justification" (Romans 4:25). Therefore, let us live at every season as a 'People of the Resurrection' by the works of our faith and by our Christian virtue.

The world in which we live today grows increasingly distant from the Lord God, and even Christians across the globe are undergoing various changes in the circumstances of life and varying challenges. Although these challenges may be different in the East when compared with those of the West, but nonetheless wherever we may be living we ought to remain genuine believers in Jesus Christ. In the context of the Christian family (i.e., a husband and wife, with their children), in our society, in our Nation, and even in our Church, let us be bearers and proclaimers of the good news of the peace of the Resurrection of Christ to all those whom we encounter around us. In this way we shall demonstrate that we possess the true understanding of the meaning of the Cross of Christ, Whom we know and understand spiritually. In this fashion, we can bring about a change in our world marked by rampant sin and error, for our world truly has grown ever in need of the peace of the Resurrection of Christ.



In conclusion: we extend our greetings for the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ from among the dead to all the faithful of the holy Church, and to all of the sons and daughters of our Assyrian Nation wherever they might be living in the world. At the same time, we extend our felicitations for a blessed Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord to all of our brethren in Christ, and to all of our sister Christian Churches without distinction. *The Resurrection of Christ! Resurrection, Life and Renewal to you all!*

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all forever and ever; Amen.

*Given at our Patriarchal Cell in Erbil, Iraq, on the Feast of the Resurrection, 2023 A.D.*



✠ AWA III

By Grace: Catholicos-Patriarch  
of the Assyrian Church of the East.

## **His Excellency Abdullatif Jamal Rashid, the President of the Republic of Iraq Meets with Catholicos-Patriarch**

On Thursday, March 30, 2023, His Holiness Mar Awa III, Catholicos-Patriarch, met with His Excellency Abdullatif Jamal Rashid, the President of the Republic of Iraq, at the Presidential Palace in Baghdad. His Holiness was accompanied by His Grace Mar Elia Isaac, Bishop of Baghdad, and His Grace Mar Abris Youkhanan, Bishop of Kirkuk, Diana, and Patriarchal Auxiliary. The discussions covered a broad range of topics, including the current conditions of security and peace in Iraq, as well as the situation of Christians and other minorities.

During his address, His Holiness spoke about the return of the Patriarchal See of the Assyrian Church of the East to Iraq after being exiled for some 82 years. The patriarch also emphasized his role in encouraging the sons and daughters of the Church in the diaspora to visit their homeland, and to be connected to their ancestral land, which has been one of the major missions of the Patriarchate of the Assyrian Church of the East.

## **The Third Annual ‘Syriac Heritage Festival’**

On Tuesday, April 11, 2023, His Holiness Mar Awa III, Catholicos- Patriarch, attended the third annual ‘Syriac Heritage Festival’ opening ceremony in Ankawa, organized by the General Directorate of Syriac Culture and Arts - Ministry of Culture and Youth in the KRG.

Also attending the ceremony were ministers of the Kurdistan Regional Government, local government officials, diplomats, representatives of political parties, and local organizations.

His Holiness was accompanied by the clergy of the Patriarchal Diocese of Erbil and several members of the council of the Patriarchal Cathedral of St. John the Baptist.

It is worth noting that the Patriarchate of the Assyrian Church of the East was one of the sponsors for this year’s festival. Additionally, there were two Assyrian ensemble dance groups, who came from Russia and Armenia, who were invited to participate in the activities of the festival.

### **Assyrian Youth from USA, Canada, Europe, and Australia**

On Friday, April 7, 2023, His Holiness Mar Awa III, Catholicos-Patriarch, received in audience a group of Assyrian youth coming from the USA, Canada, Europe, and Australia to visit their homeland in a two-week program which is organized by Gishru Organization.

During the audience, His Holiness commended the initiative to connect Assyrians living in the diaspora with those living in their ancestral homeland. He took the time to answer the questions raised by the youth regarding life in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq, and the condition of Assyrians living in the Kurdistan Region. His Holiness responses provided the youth with a deeper understanding of the current state of affairs in the region.

### **Iftar (Fast-Breaking banquet) held at the Assyrian Patriarchate in Erbil**

On Wednesday, April 19, 2023, at the invitation of His Holiness Mar Awa III, Catholicos-Patriarch, an Iftar (Fast-Breaking banquet) was held at the Assyrian Patriarchate in Erbil. Among the invitees were His Excellency Dr. Pshtewan Sadiq, Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs in the KRG; Mr. Nawzad Hadi, Representative of the Presidency of the Kurdistan Region; Mulla Dr. Abdullah Waisi, the Head of Kurdistan Islamic Scholars Union, and other Muslim clerics and governmental officials of the KRG.

Also attending the banquet were His Eminence Mor Nicodemus Dawood Matti Sharaf, Archbishop of Mosul, Kirkuk, and Kurdistan Region of the Syriac Orthodox Church; His Excellency Mar Mikhael Najeeb, Archbishop of Mosul and Aqra for the Chaldean Catholic Church, and His Grace Mar Shimun Daniel, Bishop of Iraq and the Middle East for the Ancient Church of the East.





His Holiness Mar Awa III with the Assyrian Youth from USA, Canada, Europe, and Australia



His Holiness Mar Awa III with guests at the Iftar (Fast-Breaking banquet) at the Assyrian Patriarchate in Erbil on Wednesday, April 19, 2023.



His Holiness Mar Awa III, Catholicos-Patriarch visiting the Digital Center of Oriental Manuscripts on Thursday 20 April 2023.



### To be Recognized and Honoured

**Rev'd Fr. Michael P. Vallavantra**  
received Doctorate in Psychology  
from Bharatiyar University

**Mr. Anoop Lazar**  
won the 2nd prize in literary competition  
conducted by the 'Paurastyanam' team



His Holiness Mar Awa III, Catholicos-Patriarch receives at the Kurdistan Islamic Scholars Union in Erbil, and was warmly welcomed by Mullah Dr. Abdullah Said Waisi, the head of the Union, and body members of the Union and other Muslim clerics on Wednesday, April 26, 2023.



His Holiness Mar Awa III, Catholicos-Patriarch, receives in audience His Excellency Mr. Nasrullah Rashnudi, the Consul General of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Erbil on Thursday, May 4, 2023.



Metropolitan HB Mar Awgin Kuriakose inaugurates and speak at the Chaldean Convention held at Mar Yohannan Mamdana Church, East Fort, Thrissur on 29 March 2023.



Revenue Minister Mr. K Rajan (3rd from Left) releases the new Malayalam autobiographical book "*Athmiya Sanchari*" (Spiritual Traveler) of H G Dr. Mar Aprem Metropolitan.

## ***Voice of the East***

During his welcome remarks, His Holiness the Patriarch stressed the importance of working together as religious leaders to share the ethos of brotherhood, to bring peace among the believers of different religions, and to be active and genuine teachers of peace. He also commended the Kurdistan Region for being a noticeable example in the whole Middle East region by promoting the spirit of coexistence among the various religions and ethnicities that live in the Region.

### **Digital Center of Oriental Manuscripts (CNMO)**

On Thursday, April 20, 2023, His Holiness Mar Awa III, Catholicos-Patriarch, paid a visit to the Digital Center of Oriental Manuscripts (CNMO) in Ankawa. He was received with warm hospitality by His Excellency Mar Mikhail Najeeb, Archbishop of Mosul and Aqra for the Chaldean Catholic Church and the founder of CNMO, as well as the staff of the center.

During his visit, His Holiness the Patriarch was given a tour of the center and shown some of the manuscripts and archives that have been digitized and preserved by CNMO, and He praised the important work that CNMO is doing to preserve the Syriac manuscripts most of which are dated to the beginning of the second millennium.

### **Kurdistan Islamic Scholars Union, Erbil**

On Wednesday, April 26, 2023, His Holiness Mar Awa III, Catholicos-Patriarch, was formally received at the Kurdistan Islamic Scholars Union in Erbil, and was warmly welcomed by Mullah Dr. Abdullah Said Waisi, the head of the Union, and body members of the Union and other Muslim clerics.

During the meeting, greetings on the feasts of Christians and Muslims were exchanged, as well as thoughts on the role of religious leaders in promoting the spirit of coexistence in the KRI were shared. His Holiness emphasized that Christians and other religions, including Muslims, are close and share a common humanity because they all have one Creator. His Holiness further mentioned that it is important to preserve and build upon the relationships that already exist between Muslims and Christians, moreover between Assyrians and Kurds. The Patriarch also stressed that religious leaders have a moral responsibility to be ‘Servants of the peace of God’, and to work towards fostering harmony and unity in the Region. His Holiness was attended by the clergy and personnel of the patriarchate and the cathedral.

### ***International Youth Conference in Erbil***

*The official registration form for the Inaugural International Youth Conference in Erbil of the Assyrian Church of the East is now available!*

*Conference dates: 5-12 August 2023*

*To find out more and register for the conference, please visit:*

*<https://forms.gle/WBXye4pGqfUE6gd7A>*

*We look forward to welcoming you to Erbil!*

## **His Excellency Mr. Nasrullah Rashnudi, the Consul General of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Erbil**

On Thursday, May 4, 2023, His Holiness Mar Awa III, Catholicos-Patriarch, received in audience His Excellency Mr. Nasrullah Rashnudi, the Consul General of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Erbil, and the accompanying delegation, at the Patriarchate.

During the audience, preparations for the upcoming Patriarchal visit to Iran, which will take place from May 11 to May 21, 2023, were discussed. His Holiness emphasized the historicity of the existence of the Assyrians in Iran, and the importance of strengthening the relations between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

## **Monthly Thoughts of H.G. Dr. Mar Aprem Metropolitan**

(Translated from Malayalam Magazine - March-April 2023)

### **Church Conventions**

This year's Church Convention is from March 29 to April 2. It is my wish that this convention will become an important one not only for our church members but also for the Thrissur region. Members of our congregation can sing together from one and same hymn book. I pray that this will become a convention where more of God's people sing and pray together.

I wish that there are conventions in many of our parishes and that their purpose should be to get to know the Lord. As there is lack of members, holding of big conventions are difficult in our Church. Therefore, we must cooperate and work together to make our Annual Church Convention a success. Let us think that, has this convention improved after 32 years? We must continue to strive to ensure our participation. Only then we will succeed. Among the conventions in Kerala, the Chaldean Convention should be known as "Little Maramon". Let us be more diligent in our prayers and actions. If we act in this way the Chaldean Convention will surely become one of the best known conventions in India. I think all the readers should also work for it.

### **Bible Quest**

Congratulations to the Consolation Prize Winners of All India Bible Quiz Competition 2022. Likewise, those who receive 75 marks and above will be rewarded by me on Palm Sunday, the closing day of the Chaldean Convention. On that day the certificates will be distributed to all those who appeared for the exam.

### **Memorial Day and the Festival Day of Late Prelates & Saint Mar Abimalek Timotheus**

For many years, we have been celebrating the memorial day of our Late Prelates on every 1st of May who served in India. Likewise, the commemoration of Saint Mar Abimalek Timotheus is celebrated on the same day. As usual, this year on May 1st at 7:00 a.m., there will be a Holy Qurbana in Cathedral Church, memorial

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service at the Tomb, public meeting and thereafter a communal lunch at Marth Mariam Cathedral Church compound. This time the Board of Central Trust will lead all the functions. The Board of Central Trustees Chairman Mr. A M Anthony is acting as its convener. I desire the cooperation and presence of all of you.

### **‘Spiritual Traveler’**

My English biographical books “Strange But True” & “Not so Strange” have been translated into Malayalam by Rev. Fr. Prasad Kuzhiyath in the name of “Spiritual Traveler”, and are available from the book depot in Marth Mariam Valiya Pally as well as from my Palace. The price of the book is Rs.300/-. This book has been published by my brother-in-law in Ernakulam and my sister’s son in America.

All the money received from this book will be transferred to the Mar Timotheus Charitable Hospital in Kunthumkara.

### **General Transfer of Clergy**

Every three years there is a general transfer for priests from one parish to another. Hope all of you had already read the transfer list of priests. On Friday, April 28th, after Holy Qurbana in their respective Parishes, they will take charge in the new Parishes. The priests will receive their salaries for the month of April from the new parishes.

Mar Aprem Metropolitan, Patriarchal Delegate in India

### *News from the Indian Archdiocese*

### **‘The Spiritual Traveler’**

Dr. Mar Aprem Metropolitan’s autobiographical book ‘ആത്മീയ സഞ്ചാരി’ (The Spiritual Traveler) was released by Revenue Minister K Rajan at the Metropolitan Palace in Thrissur. This is the 78th book of Dr. Mar Aprem Metropolitan.

Metropolitan H B Mar Awgin Kuriakose delivered the speech of blessing. Board of Central Trustees Chairman A M Antony and School Manager Dr. Sister Jincy Othottil extended their greetings. Dr. A V Alex thanked and Mr. Cherian Puthukod welcomed the audience.

### **Chaldean Convention**

The thirty-second ‘Chaldean Convention’ of the Chaldean Syrian Church of the East was held at the Mar Yohannan Mamdana Church, East Fort courtyard. On the 29th at 6.30 p.m. Metropolitan H B Mar Awgin Kuriakose inaugurated the Convention. Dr. Mar Aprem gave the closing address on April 2. Rev. Fr. Jacks Chandy, General Convener of the convention expressed his thanks to one and all who worked behind this for its success.

### **Inauguration of the Office**

The office was opened as part of the commemoration of Saint Mar Abimalek Timotheus and the day of remembrance of Late Prelates of the Assyrian Church of the East who served in India. It was inaugurated by Metropolitan H B Mar Awgin Kuriakose at the Marth Mariam Valiyapalli building. Fr. K R Inashu, Fr. Jose Jacob Vengassery, Fr. Cyril Antony and the Board of Central Trustees Chairman Mr. A M Antony spoke at the inauguration ceremony.

## **'Porusthyanadam' Literary Symposium**

'Porusthyanadam' Literary Symposium was organized on Sunday 26th March at 3 pm at Chaldean School Auditorium. The Symposium was inaugurated by the Secretary of the Clergy Council, Rev. Fr. KR Inashu, and was presided over by the President of the 'Porusthyanadam', Mr. Abi Ponmanishery. Mr. N. Rajan, Chief Editor of Desabhimani Weekly, delivered the keynote address on the topic of Creative Literary Writing.

Magazine Editor Fr. Jose Jacob Vengassery, Sub-Editors Fr. Sijo Johny, Mr. Abhi Thattil, Board of Central Trustees Chairman Mr. A M. Antony and Secretary Mr. Jimreves Solomon addressed the occasion. H G Dr. Mar Aprem Metropolitan congratulated the winners of the Essay Competition and Vocabulary or Word-related question organized by Pourasthya Nadam Committee. Priests, Central Artisans and magazine writers participated in the Symposium.

## **Chaldean Sports Academy**

Metropolitan HB Mar Awgin Kuriakose inaugurated the Chaldean Sports Academy at the school ground as part of the objective of training selected students from all schools under the Corporate Management of Chaldean Syrian Church in athletics, football, cricket, basketball and kabaddi from their young age.

District Sports Council Vice President Mr. Binny Immati, former Indian Football Team Goalkeeper Mr. Victor Manjila, former Santosh Trophy players Mr. Itti Mathew Nadakavu Karan, Mr. Babu K Anto, Mr. K F Benny and Mr. Romeo Francis were also present. The program also includes the distinguished guests of the inaugural function. The academy started with 75 selected students from Girls and boys. The training will be given at the school grounds with the services of expert trainers. The academy will provide all the necessary facilities for the students.

Vice Chairman of the Board of Central Trustees, Mr. Jacob Baby and Corporate Manager, Dr. Sister Jincy Othottil spoke at the inauguration ceremony. Members of the Board of Central Trustees, PTA office bearers, School Management Committee members and teachers of the school participated in the function.

## **Festival of Anneetha (Service for the Departed)**

*Anneetha Thirunnaal* (Service for the Departed), the day of remembrance for the departed from the Chaldean Syrian Church of the East, was observed on Friday, February 17. At 7 O'clock in the morning, the Holy Qurbana was lead by H B Mar Awgin Kuriakose Metropolitan held at Mar Yohannan Mamdana Church, East Fort. After the Holy Qurbana a public memorial service was held at the cemetery and the graves were sprinkled with holy water. Metropolitan H B Mar Awgin Kuriakose presided over the services. Fr. Jacks Chandy, Fr. AC Antony, Fr. Franklin Varghese, Fr. Lazar Madathumpadi and Fr. Jinu Jose assisted.



## **To be Recognized and Honoured**

Rev'd Fr. Michael P. Vallavantra, a priest of the Chaldean Syrian Church of the East, received his Doctorate in Psychology from Bharatiyar University. The doctorate was awarded for the study of adolescent personality development.

Fr. Michael is now the Vicar of St. Thomas Church, Ernakulam. He is also the Director of Mar Timotheus Memorial Orphanage of the Chaldean Syrian Church of the East, Kalathod, Thrissur. He is the son of Mr. Philip and Mrs. Pennama, Vllavanthra. His is staying in the quarter of the Orphanage with his wife Mrs. Sincy Michael and children Philip Michael and Mercy Michael.

## **CHALLENGES FACED BY CHRISTIAN FAITH IN TODAY'S WORLD**

**(The article won the second prize in the literary competition conducted by the 'Paurastyanam Literary Symposium' Team)**

### **Introduction:**

In this article, I would like to point out and elaborate on six threatening challenges faced by Christian faith today. Some of these challenges are significant from individual perspectives of believers and some are alarming from the perspective of Christianity as a religion. As churches are composed of individuals their well being and existence are inextricably intertwined. Therefore, it would make sense to treat all of these together as "Challenges faced by Christian faith in today's world".

### **1. Consumerism, Materialism and Expressive Individualism**

Globalization, liberalization, and advancements in information & communication technologies have been instrumental in promoting consumerism across the world. Every day we are bombarded by advertisements through various media thus programming our minds in a way conducive for consumerism. Acquisition of consumer goods has become the priority of the society and Christians are no exception.

This has obviously led us to materialism. It is a natural consequence of consumerism. Material possessions are considered to be more important than spiritual values. Millions spent on building churches and luxuries associated to them are examples of materialism challenging Christian faith. It is paradoxical that all this is done in the name of our savior who was born in a manger, died on the cross and lived the simplest of lives in between.

Expressive individualism induces one to pursue his immediate desires at the expense of family, church, friends etc. The mental conditioning that happens because of consumerism and materialism makes this negative transition easy. Christians fall prey to this if they are not focused and therefore it is a huge challenge to their faith.

The remedy is not to discard technology or products that make our lives easy or comfortable. Neither does one have to lead an ascetic life. The key is to strike the right balance, and this applies for individual believers as well as for Churches.

### **2. Divisive forces causing schism**

This has plagued Christianity and Christian faith right from the beginning of their history. Otherwise, we would not have had so many different churches, sects, divisions, groups, and further splits among each of these. Disputes between churches

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getting filed as litigations in judicial courts, members moving the courts against their own churches - we have seen it all during recent times. St. Paul lists “LOVE” ahead of “Faith” and “Hope” but Christians have failed miserably in manifesting this to the world.

### **3. Namesake Christians**

Many are namesake Christians who are following only because of social obligations like solemnizing of marriages, baptism, funeral, etc. There are no spiritual moorings to their faith. Biblical illiteracy is a pathetic state in which these namesake Christians are in. I’m not talking here about memorizing bible verses and being able to articulate about it for long hours. It is about capturing the essence of scriptures and making it the guiding force of one’s life. Even a rude awakening like the Covid-19 pandemic has failed to remind us about the temporal nature of our lives. We went back to our old ways soon after. Our memories are short in this aspect.

### **4. Boredom**

This one is a killer challenge. It plays in the believers’ psyche. Worship becomes monotonous and therefore boring. The same liturgy, same rituals repeated week after week. These bored souls want the worship to be more verbose, awakening (lest they sleep in the church) and if possible, with some “miracles” as topping on the pizza or icing on the cake. Their curiosity is being exploited by “faith healers” and “miracle workers”. What kind of a generation seeks “Miracles” is clearly mentioned by Jesus in Mathew 16:4. Our lives and this world - or rather this cosmos as a whole - are full of miracles if you care to observe closely, from microcosm to macrocosm.

### **5. Science vs Faith**

This one influences the free thinking and rationale seeking youth, leading many of them to atheism or agnosticism. Especially the book of “Genesis” being at loggerheads with the “Evolution theory” of Charles Darwin is a hotly debated topic in the realm of science vs faith. Science deals with things that can be seen (physical matter) and concludes only those things that can be substantiated or corroborated by proof emerging from scientific study or experiments. On the other hand, religions including Christianity is primarily dealing with the abstract concept of spirit or spirituality where there is no physical matter to examine or study.

### **6. Lack of good leadership**

The role of good leadership in encountering and addressing these challenges is crucial. But unfortunately, the spiritual leadership of various churches are not up to this task yet. They are preoccupied by other aspects including the material growth of churches and cementing their positions of power. A combination of the first two challenges listed here (materialism & schism) comes in to play here, distracting the spiritual leadership from the more important aspects like the dwindling number of believers in their respective churches. They fail to see their true calling and the responsibilities attached to it and instead are only able to see the power and position that comes along.

### **Conclusion:**

Therefore, it is the responsibility of each Christian to be vigilant about these challenges so that we can pre-empt the disintegration of our faith and thus of our respective churches. We must set the example by leading truly Christian lives. More than preaching the word of God, we must set the example by “Living” the word of God.

Anoop Lazar



H B Mar Awgin Kuriakose Metropolitan led the service of Anneedhe (Prayer for the Departed) at the cemetery of Mar Yohannan Mamdhana Church, East Fort, Thrissur on 17.02.2023.



HB Mar Awgin Kuriakose Metropolitan inaugurates the Chaldean Sports Academy at the Chaldean Syrian Church School, Thrissur.



Catholicos-Patriarch HH Mar Awa III celebrating Feast of Epiphany at Marth Mariam Cathedral - Big Church, Thrissur



HB Mar Awgin Kuriakose Metropolitan celebrating the Feet Washing Ceremony in connection with the Maundy Thursday at Marth Mariam Cathedral with parish vicar Fr. Cyril Antony.