

Foreword: Naheero His Grace Dr. Thomas Mor Themotheos Metropolitan

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When I think of Themotheos Thirumeni, the first thing that comes to my mind is "ignorance is bliss." I will explain why shortly.

The second fascinating thing about thirumeni is that he takes full advantage of his clocks and watches. In a country, where people routinely comes 3-4 hours late after a scheduled event and where politicians and musicians come late with the belief that it is the way to command respect, Themotheos thirumeni is a stickler for time. If you call thirumeni for a function and state that the program will start at 9:00 AM, thirumeni will be there at 8:57 AM and will be ready to start the program promptly at 9:00 AM, whether others are ready or not. He will leave immediately after the program is over.

The third and the most impressive aspect of Themotheos thirumeni is that, where the fighting between the two Christian factions are as common as pedestrians in the street and occasionally spills over into the streets, Themotheos thirumeni will have nothing to do with that. Don't misunderstand. Thirumeni knows exactly where he stands and no one is going to change it, other than perhaps God. But he also realizes that there is nothing to be gained by hurling abuses at each other. He respects everyone irrespective of their religion, caste or national origin or faith. I am not sure whether the many years HG had spent in North India, especially with Sikhs, had anything to do with that. I have a friend, Ratanjit Sondhi, who has dedicated a good chunk of the fortune he amassed in his company to teaching what he calls 'spirituality' and not 'religiosity.' He has written several books and has his own radio program which now goes all over the world through internet. He is a most sought after key note speaker. We had shared podium together in many occasions and have spent lot of time talking with each other on topics of interest. He is a fascinating man. I once asked him how can practice what he preaches when he says that he does not hate or have any ill will towards anyone. (Once a person in the audience asked him, "Can you say that about a person who has raped your sister or wife?") Ratanjit replied, "Jacob, we are all creations of God. As a Christian, you know that you are made in the image of God. We are all children of God. Each one of us has some divinity in us as we are created by God. Even if a person is the most evil person in the world, he/she still has that 'divinity' in him/her. (You may have to look hard to find it in some cases!) So, when I see a person, I respect the divinity in that person, not the evil. I respect the divine in him. How can I disrespect a person who has the "divinity" in him?

When you look at it this way, we can also see how Blessed Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi, etc. viewed people who disagreed with them. But they all learned this from Jesus Christ who preached in the sermon on the mount as reported in Matthew 5:44 and Luke 6:27,35, to "love your enemies." Jesus gave us the commandment to "love Each Other." It is generally agreed that "Loving your enemies" is one of the hardest commandments Jesus gave. But there is more to this commandment than what it implies literally.

I have selected the topic "Love -- Loving your neighbors" as the theme for this special issue of Malankara World Journal because that is something Themotheos Thirumeni practices and is best known for. We have provided a highly selected list of articles that explains what this commandment means. The best article on this, in my opinion (I have read about 35 articles before narrowing them down to 5 in this journal) is the sermon by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., entitled 'Loving Your Enemies.' It is a classic. You may have thought that his 'I have a dream' speech is his best. It is the most emotional. His best, in my opinion is 'Loving Your Enemies.' Like Ranjit Sondhe, Rev. King also believes that each person has dual natures, good and evil. Goodness is related to his divinity and the evil, perhaps, is related to Satan. The key is to respect the goodness or divinity. Other articles in this collection discuss topics such as, who is the enemy? Is enemy is always outside? etc. I recommend that you read this collection carefully and meditate on them. May you be inspired to follow Themotheos Thirumeni in learning to "disagree without being disagreeable" and find areas where we can agree on.

The third thing most agree about Themotheos Thirumeni is the fact that he is a well-respected scholar. His sermons are packed with wisdom, but to the point. Everyone I talked to told me about how much they respect thirumeni as a scholar in our church. Recognizing the importance of developing our young people into future leaders, Thirumeni has undertaken the task of promoting education, by starting schools and colleges wherever he went. His first school was at Bangalore, which has become a high school now. His latest college is in Puttady, near Kumily - Holly Cross College of Management and Technology. I had the fortune to visit this college two years ago. The first building that welcomes you as you enter the college campus is the guest house. Like at the Bishop's house where everyone who visits will not be sent away without offering coffee and snacks (emulating Jesus who told his disciples to feed the multitude who came to listen him speak), his college also has taken up this hospitality concept very well. The building is very modern. Computers are all over the place. A huge library has books as well as online resources. The back of the college offer a panoramic vista of the High Ranges, reminiscent of what Moses saw when he looked at the 'land of milk and honey' from far away before his death. It is the God's own country at its best, it reminded me of the mist covered peaks in the Smoky Mountains in Tennessee and North Carolinas in United States. I had one of the best fish curries while visiting Thirumeni's college. I wondered where they get such fresh fish way up in the Western Ghats. Thirumeni has some real big goals for his college.

Pope Benedict XVI is considered to be one of the foremost scholar in Catholic Church - equivalent to the position Themotheos thirumeni enjoys in our church. Pope Benedict has the knack of explaining complex theological subjects in simple to understand way. On his 60th anniversary of priesthood, Pope Benedict XVI reflected in front of a new class of bishops what priesthood really means - its responsibility as well as power. I have included this homily in this keepsake edition because both laity and clergy can benefit from reading it. After reading it, you will never look at John 15:15 without awe when Christ said, "I no longer call you servants, but friends." The disciples, and later clergy, are in a special, distinguished circle of people who are called "friends of Jesus", the son of God, the second person of trinity. The friends enjoy powers that servants don't have. They are given the power to absolve sins. Only God can forgive sins; that is why Pharisees and scribes got mad at Jesus when he said, "your sins are forgiven." Now,

like Jesus, our priests and bishops can absolve sins because Jesus gave them that authority. Think of the awesomeness of this. Read that article with a commentary by Fr. Mark, who further explains the imagery and mystery associated with what we do as Christians.

Themotheos thirumeni has a long list of charitable and mission activities all over India. Frankly, I was surprised by all things Thirumeni do. His Grace is also one of the very first to embrace pre-marital counseling in our church. It became a model for other dioceses to follow. The Tuesday retreats at St. Joseph's Cathedral is attended by people near and far. The vanitha samajam people do all kinds of creative ways to help people and are ranked one of the best in our church. The list goes on and on. Our Paitel achen says in the accompanying article that God has appointed "watchmen for Thirumeni's lips and mouth" as we pray in our common prayers. Thirumeni cannot be provoked to say anything bad about anyone. He listens intently though. He is a stern disciplinarian; but that is tempered with mercy. Theethose thirumeni describes the love and respect shown by other bishops in the church towards Themotheos Thirumeni. Our Holy Father has awarded the title "Naheero" in recognition of the many talents of Themotheos Thirumeni. Edathara achen, the diocesan secretary of the American diocese, talks about the leadership skills of Themotheos thirumeni. Hopefully, you will get an idea of the love, respect and affection the people of Malankara Archdiocese of North America has towards Themotheos Thirumeni by reading their reflections. Several other people were also planning to write for this issue, but could not complete them in time due to the extremely short timeframe we had to work on.

On a personal note, I have two bishops I call "my first cousin's first cousin; but not a first cousin". One is Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa, currently diocesan bishop of Marthoma Church in NA. The other is HG Dr. Naheero Thomas Mor Themotheos Metropolitan of Jacobite Church. When you look at these two bishops, you will be impressed that both are respected scholars in their church and well versed with computers too. Is that a coincidence?

This has already become too long a foreword; so I will defer talking about "Ignorance is Bliss" for some other occasion. If you are too curious, ask me or ask thirumeni. But after listening to His Grace, you may come to the conclusion that "Ignorance is Bliss."

We wish thirumeni all the best as he pass another milestone in his remarkable journey.

Barekmore

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PS: To learn more about Themotheos Thirumeni, please visit Malankara World's portal for Thirumeni at:

<http://www.malankaraworld.com/Library/ChurchFathers/MorThomasThemotheos/Default.htm>