

H. B. Paulos Mar Miletheos : My Friend, My Teacher

- and the newly elected supreme Head of my Church

By Fr.John Thomas Alummoottil

It is heart warming that a new glorious light is overtaking and exterminating the dark clouds that were enveloping our beloved Church recently. The Supreme Court Verdict of 1995 made it clear that even if the Antiochean Patriarchs had made some claims of supremacy over the church, it had vanished with the establishment of the Catholicate. But the authority of the Catholicose Mar Thoma Mathews II was questioned in the court. It was upheld by another Association of the Malankara Orthodox Church that he was the unquestionable Catholicose of the Malankara Orthodox Church. Still the dark clouds were over the Church. The authority of his successor H.H. Baselius Mar Thoma Didymus I was also questioned in the court. The court judgment reconfirming the authority of the Catholicose, Didymus I has once and for all put an end to the darkness. The unanimous decision of the Malankara Association to elect H.G.Paulose Mar Milithios as Catholicose Elect brings new rays of hope to our church.

I met the then Mr.Paul (the present Milithios Thirumeni) first time in 1972 at the M G O C S M Conference in Kolenchery. He was a seminary student and we shared the same room. In the first evening of the conference we were taking rest in the room. Mr. Paul sang a song which is sung in remembrance of our Holy Fathers in Kunnamkulam churches after the H.Qurbana. He gave me a printed copy and I could learn it from him. After a few years I knew that he was ordained and Dn.Paul had the charge of newly started M G O C S M Trivandrum Center. Then I met him as the asst. vicar of St.Mary's Orthodox Cathedral, Ernakulam.

Wherever he worked, he was trustworthy, enthusiastic, sincere and hardworking. In 1982, he was elected as one of the Metropolitans of the church, with 4 others. All the five of them stayed at Parumala Seminary as Rambans for two years under the guidance of the late blessed H.G.Yuhanon Mar Savarius. It was to learn the writings of our H.Fathers, administration, tradition, learn the hymns in 'ekkaras' etc. Since I was also staying in the Parumala seminary for about a year, I noticed how he was related to the 'Guru' (Mar Savarius). Whenever I wanted to study Thaksa and festival books, Thirumeni used to call Ramban Paul and ask him to give me the guidance . Thus my friend became my teacher.

Ramban Paul was consecrated Metropolitan with the other four on 15th May 1985. He took charge of the newly formed Kunnamkulam Diocese on 1st of August 1985. The new office and the Aramana of the new diocese started in a small house given from the ancient Arthat Church. Naturally the young bishop

wanted to make a diocesan center. An unanimous person, knowing his desire and trustworthiness, volunteered to give him lakhs of rupees without interest for a long term with a condition that his name should not be disclosed. So, Thirumeni could purchase a property and erect a beautiful diocesan center with chapel at the vicinity of Arthat church within two years. Thus, Thirumeni became the first from among the five. In due course, Thirumeni could pay off his debts with the 'kaimuthu' he received from in and out of the country and he proved his trustworthiness. The late Dr. Philipose Mar Theophilus Thirumeni used to tell me of his trustworthy character. Thirumeni had a great appreciation for this kochu thirumeni. All the members of the Episcopal Synod loved him and gave their support to the youngest of them. He was favorite to the then Catholicose H.H.Baselius Mar Thoma I, who consecrated him. He had to face problems, when he introduced the salary scheme and transfers for the achenes in his diocese. But he faced it and managed it very well. There were shortage of priests in his diocese in the beginning. Many a times I could help him, since I had not been assigned to a parish as the General Secretary of the MGOCSM. I enjoyed to stay with Miliatheos Thirumeni and conducted services in his parishes – which helped me to renew contacts with the students of that area. In India, the sextons make the Holy Bread in parishes. Once Thirumeni suggested to me that it is better that achenes take this responsibility. He used to do that and I had seen him visiting the sextons making the bread at the Parumala Seminary and asking them to recite the prayers. Now I enjoy to make the Holy Bread myself for Qurbanas in the States.

H.G.Dr.Philipose Mar Theophilus was the President of the M G O C S M for a long term, until his demise in the year 1997. Thirumeni wished to retire from his diocesan duties as well as M G O C S M at the age of 80. I was the General Secretary and I informed to the Executive Committee. The committee convinced Thirumeni that it was not wise to retire from the Ankamali Diocese as the court case was going on. Also they requested him to continue in M G O C S M as long as Thirumeni was in Ankamaly Diocese. Thirumeni then requested for a Metropolitan as his assistant or the Vice President of the Movement. The committee suggested H.G.Paulose Mar Miliatheos for vice president's post as he was humble and young among the bishops to deal with the students. The General Assembly of the Movement unanimously approved this decision. He was the bishop vice president for 3 years.

H.G.Mathews Mar Barnabas Metropolitan of Idukki Diocese was the president of the Madyavarjana samithy until he took charge of the American Diocese. Barnabas Thirumeni was very particular to visit at least 4 schools a day with samithy's secretaries, MGOCSM secretary and people who have been liberated from liquors – people like Joyan Kumarakam or P.C.Gorge Sir Puthuppally. When Thirumeni went to the States taking charge of the American Diocese, Milithios Thirumeni took this responsibility of taking us to schools in his car. He came all the way from Kunnamkulam as Barnabas Thirumeni used to come from Idukki. For the Movement activities Trivandrum or Quilon or Kottayam was not at all a distance for Thirumeni. I can not forget his determination and enthusiasm.

Paulose Mar Milithios Thirumeni has visited Malankara Orthodox Church members all over the world. But he has never prolonged his stay for collection or for his personal benefits. There is credibility and accountability. I do not think any one dislike Thirumeni. He has a good number of personal friends through his parish ministry and MGOCSM contacts. I hope these contacts and the grace of God will enable him to shoulder his new responsibilities with courage of conviction and moral strength and thus bring new rays of hope to our Church.

All the best wishes and prayers to my best friend, my teacher and the elected supreme head of my Church.