

A TRIBUTE TO MY ELDER BROTHER

— Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorius Metropolitan

Many people abroad have asked me: "Is Mar Theophilos your brother?". I usually reply: "Yes, he is my elder brother." Some people take me literally. Then I tell them that all orthodox bishops are my brothers. People are often surprised that Theophilos Thirumeni and I are not really blood brothers. They say that we look like brothers.

Theophilos Thirumeni is my elder brother in at least three ways. First of all as a bishop senior to me. We were both elected to the episcopate at the same Association meeting. Since, however, at that time I was working as Associate General Secretary of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, and since I did not feel that I was qualified to be a bishop, I made a formal request to eliminate my name from the list of episcopal candidates. I learned later that my name had already been vetoed by the authorities. In any case Theophilos Thirumeni was consecrated and I was not. So he became my senior as a bishop, by several years.

Secondly, when I first came back from my studies in America in 1954, more than thirty years ago, I was a layman, while Fr. K. Philipos was already a priest. Philipos Achen became a kind of spiritual mentor and pastor to Mr. Paul Verghese. Achen was at Cheriapally those days, and I was at the Always Fellowship House. We worked together on many projects of importance to our Church and to the ecumenical movement.

Achen's deep loyalty to our Church and his genuine ecumenical spirit made a great impression on me, and I developed

an affection and respect for Philipos Achen who became an elder brother for me from that time.

One of the finest memories of that time remains with me. It was Achen who introduced me to the late Moran Mar Baselius Geevarghese II. I was involved in giving Bible studies to the six people of the Peace League who had undertaken a fast unto death at Kurisupally, Kottayam. They wanted the former Patriarch's party and the Catholicos party reconciled. His Holiness the Catholicos was not very much pleased either with the Satyagrahis or with anyone who associated himself with them. That meant that when he heard of a layman called Paul Verghese who had just returned from America giving Bible studies to the fasting people as well as to those who came to see them, he was not very pleased. He said so during a sermon at Devalokam chapel and suggested that what this Paul Verghese was teaching was an "American Bible". So Philipos Achen came and advised me to go and see the Catholicos and clear all misunderstandings. I said I would go and see the Catholicos if Achen would take me to His Holiness and introduce me. So we went together, and the Catholicos subjected me to more than one hundred, different questions related to the Bible. I was deeply impressed by His Holiness, deep knowledge of the Bible and by his quick intelligence combined with great sanctity. At the end the Catholicos told Philipos Achen that this Paul Verghese was all right and that the teaching he was giving was genuinely Orthodox. If my elder brother had not taken me to the

Cathólicos at that time, I may have remained as a devoted Orthodox layman and not become a priest. In this sense my present life in the ministry of our Church became a reality by God working through Philipos Achen. I am grateful to him for this.

Thirdly, I am grateful to Theophilos Thirumeni as my elder brother in the building of our Church's relations with other Churches. He was particularly a pioneer in building up our relationships with the churches of Eastern Europe. With the Serbian Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, with the Romanian Orthodox Church and with the Bulgarian Orthodox Church he built up very good friendly relations. The old leaders of these Churches still speak with great appreciation of the person of Fr. Korah Philipos. It was on the foundation that he had built, that I was in turn able to develop relationships of a somewhat different kind. He was also my elder brother in the World Council of Churches;

he served on the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches during the period when I was working as Associate General Secretary in Geneva and right up to 1968 when I replaced him. I was never able to win as many friends for our Church as he was during his period on the Central Committee. His personality is so much more affable and friendly than mine can ever be. Besides I have often been outspoken to the point of rudeness, and instead of winning friends have probably alienated many people. So in this sense too Theophilos Thirumeni has done a great service to our Church by winning many friends.

On this occasion of Thirumeni's seventyfifth birthday it is a privilege and a pleasure for me to felicitate my elder brother and to wish him many more years of good health and wisdom to serve our church in many ways. May the grace and mercy of God be praised for giving Theophilos Thirumeni to our Church.

