



# Celebration of Love

Mr. Chacko Thomas

"The greatest doctrine in the Bible is Love" George Verwer

"The God we are looking for is Loving, Pure, Just, Powerful, Eternal and above all Personal – INTERESTED IN US." Mike Hencher

**Valentine's Day:** The world celebrates "love" this month, on February 14th to be precise. It is easy for us to dismiss Valentine Day as a pagan practice. But for the people who receive a card, flower, a visit from people on this day, it is a welcome day, it is a very special day. And to the ones who give to bless someone in these ways must be even more special. As the Lord said, "it is more blessed to give ...". Our

world is starving for love. The love deficit is all around us.

I am not suggesting that we take on wholesale Valentine's Day, but if my spirituality only consists of not observing certain special days or things that I did not do, I am found lacking before God who weighs my life, as Daniel rebuked Belshazzar (Dan. 5:27).

Many good things, even if paganised in the process, have their roots in Christian love. Here are a few other examples I was surprised to learn: Football, Embassies, Red Cross, Hospices, Polytechnic Institutes, Colleges, Hospitals, Beer to improvise strong wine, Orphanages, Old Age Homes,

Disability privileges, to name a few. They exist due to Christian values and influences on our world. Christianity does more than save souls, it is more than a mere religion. It gives dignity to all. It puts smiles on people's faces, a spring in their heels. It elevates burdens and suffering, lifts people from oppression. We are not darkness, but light of the world.

**St. Valentine, the Real Story:**

"Flowers, candy, red hearts, and romance. That's what Valentine's Day is all about, right? Well, maybe not. The origin of this holiday for the expression of love really isn't romantic at all—at least not in the traditional sense.

"St. Valentine was a Priest at a time when there was an emperor called Claudias who persecuted the church at that particular time. He also had an edict that prohibited the marriage of young people. This was based on the hypothesis that unmarried soldiers fought better than married soldiers because married soldiers might be afraid of what might happen to them or their wives or families if they died."

"It was a very permissive society in which Valentine lived... Polygamy would have been much more popular than just one woman and one man living together. And yet, some of them seemed to be attracted to Christian faith. But obviously, the church thought that marriage was very sacred between one man and one woman for their life and that it was to be encouraged. And so, it immediately presented the problem to the Christian church of what to do about this."

"The idea of encouraging them to marry within the Christian church was what Valentine was about. And he secretly married them because of the edict. Valentine was eventually caught, imprisoned, and tortured for performing marriage ceremonies against the command of Emperor Claudius the Second. ..." He became a Christian martyr. (Wikipedia, adapted)

**God is Love:** Although the actual words "God is Love" come only towards the end of the Bible (1 John 4:8, for good reasons I believe), it is a prominent attribute of God described throughout the Bible. God is a balanced Being

and easy to live with. Grace and Truth are found in Him. So is Holiness and Love.

God's love is the most pure, unselfish, self-sacrificing, and eternal love. It is better than a mother's love. Or father's love, as our Lord pointed it out in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-24.)

In answer to Moses' request "Show me your glory" we see that the Lord passed in front of him. We are not told of what he saw of God, if anything. But we know what the Triune God, declared. "The Lord passed in front of Moses, calling out, "Yahweh! The Lord! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin. ... "(Exodus 34:5-7 NLT. Please compare this verse with Jeremiah 9:223-24.) God is Love.

Once I had the privilege of leading a Bible study on Genesis 1, on the Creation story, or better the Creator's story. I asked the class to pick up an attribute of God from the account Creation in Genesis 1. A first-generation

follower of the Lord from a Brahmin background, a medical student, raised her hand and said, "God is Love" because He made us in His own image". I was delighted.

We can see that "God is love" from the Ten Commandments. They were given at least 3500 years ago written by the finger of God and given to Moses on the mountain, Sinai. How many millions of lives would these commandments have saved, for time and eternity? I can only imagine!

One loving and lifesaving Commandment for India and South Asia, for example, is the Fourth Commandment. It is the longest of all the Ten Commandments. It looks back to Creation, it is based on God's example. It is for the good of humanity. This Commandment has been praised as the first ever labour law. You can see God's love for all creation in it. He loves the animals, female and male servants, girls and boys, men, and women, he loves the family. Below is the fourth Commandment from Exodus 20: 8-11:

'Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labour and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. "(Exodus 20:8-11 NLT).

**Christian leaders leading with Love:** If God is leading us in Love, what choice do we Christian leaders have, but to lead with Love? A couple with young children in Singapore found themselves more and more involved in pastoral work while holding down good jobs. Recently, the wife wrote and asked me to give five points of advice to aspiring pastors. The scene of our Lord asking Peter three times, "Do you love me ...?" came to mind. Shepherds need to be lovers, loving God and loving the sheep.

Dr J. N. Manokaran has provided

us with a review on Alexander Strauch's book, "A Christian Guide to Leading with Love" (available in India). Below are some extracts from it, pardon me for quoting almost half of the review. "There are many books on Christian Leadership focusing on vision, mission, knowledge, skills...etc. However, the author Alexander Strauch has brought to focus the core of Christian leadership that is love.

"Love produces joy, creativity, responsiveness, and energy. ... "Unlove is deadly. It is a cancer. It may kill slowly but it always kills in the end." (Page 22) It is deadlier than a cobra.

"Leaders with love have the mindset of humility that makes them more teachable, more receptive to constructive criticism, able to work in a team, willing to submit to others, quick to reconcile and qualified to deal with people's failures. C.S. Lewis was available to scholars and children. Met all kinds of people. Personally, wrote to thousands of people. He said: "It was through Pride that the devil became the devil. Pride leads to every other vice; it is completely anti-God state of mind." (Page 59)

"Loving people are full of gratitude, and they express it openly." (Page 92) God is verbal, hence leading with love means to be generous with our words of praise and thanks. People should not be guessing what the leader thinks, they should hear from leaders. "The church should be a place where people express love and appreciation, thank one another, and encourage one another." (Page 93)

"Hospitality is a ministry outflow of leaders who lead with love. Martin Luther used his table as a splendid pulpit. "Shepherding people cannot be done from a distance." (Page 101) John and Edith Haywards hosted Bakht Singh for three years in Winnipeg, Canada. They helped him to mature, learn important life lessons, making commitment, accepting the Bible as the Word of God, the importance of hospitality, prayer and doing God's will in all things. Bakht Singh led a great church planting movement that brought thousands to His fold. (Page 105)

Love is demonstrated in compassion. "Compassion is the empathy, the tender emotion a

person feels when confronted with another person's suffering, coupled with the desire to relieve the suffering." (Page 107) The Good Samaritan did all for a man he did not know, without any promise of reward. Love of Christ compels us to deny ourselves to meet the need of others.

"Loving leadership is incomplete without intercessory prayer." (Page 117) Leading with love means to pray for others. In prayer: we take their burdens upon ourselves; we intercede before God for them; we commit ourselves to their wellbeing. We demonstrate true care and compassion. Everything we do in the Christian life is easier than prayer. To improve our praying, it is essential to increase our loving. "Lack of intercessory prayer is not only a sign of lovelessness, it is an indication of our failure to see the dark spiritual realities surrounding us." (Page 120) Failure to pray is negligence of ministry.

"Good shepherds love their sheep and spare no effort when leading them to green pastures and clear water. For the lazy shepherd, however, any pasture

or water hole will do." (Page 125) People are moved emotionally when they see children are starving. Love cannot bear the spiritual poverty as people starve for Word of God. "Whether we are defending, proclaiming, instructing, or informally sharing divine truth with others, we must always wrap it in love." (Page 131)

"Like sheep, people are prone to go astray. Shepherds at every level are needed in the church to protect from the savage attack of wolves. Seeking those who go astray, speaking to them with gentleness and love, and being guided by the Holy Spirit will lead to healing and restoration. "Christian love demands action-even painful action-to save a sinning member and an entire church." (Page 152) We are our brother's keepers.

"Love of God in our life is evidenced by obedience. Obedience is a condition to have fellowship with God. "If we do not teach and model obedience, we will not teach and model Christian love. We cannot rightly talk about love without addressing obedience. Love can

grow only if it is rooted in the soil of true obedience." (Page 184)

"This is an excellent book for all Christian leaders to be reminded once again that the call and core of leadership is love."

May the Lord make Indian Christianity a loving fellowship. Let us celebrate love every day of our lives. 1 Corinthians 13 love. Love is our trademark.



### **Mr. Chacko Thomas**

*is presently a Minister-at-large with Operation Mobilisation. He served for 15 years on the OM Ships Logos, Doulos, and Logos II. His ministry has taken him to 107 countries in six continents. One of his few passions is to see the earth filled with the knowledge of the Lord and His values blessing the nations. He can be contacted on [chacko.thomas@om.org](mailto:chacko.thomas@om.org)*