

Themi: Apostle To The Hungry

An Authorized Biography

By Eli Bear

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Acknowledgments

This biography could not have been written without the unwavering support and assistance of Bishop Themí. For this gift, I am forever grateful.

I have done my best to accurately describe the events of Bishop Themí's life. That said, surely some of the accounts I've shared in this biography are incomplete or contain language that could be misconstrued. Any shortcomings or errors in this text are mine, not Bishop Themí's.

It is also important to note that I sometimes express my opinions in the book. My views are my own and are not necessarily shared by Bishop Themí.

Most of all, I thank Jesus Christ for His mercy on a sinner. Given my troubled past, it is a miracle that I'm alive and able to tell Bishop Themí's story. Any good fortune I enjoy in this life is due only to one thing, God's undeserved Grace.

Eli Bear

December 2022

Author's Foreword

I'm one of "those" Christians – a sinner who did not convert until later in life. I slipped quietly into the vineyard in the early evening, hoping that none of the good people who had been toiling there all their lives would notice me and rightfully object to my presence.

To say that I struggle to live a Christian life would be a colossal understatement. Daily I ask God for forgiveness and strength. I approach the Holy Cross in humility, knowing that, to quote the words of a popular Christian rock song, "I am the sweat from His brow" and "I am the nails in His wrist."

One of the first books I read as a new Christian was *Confessions* by St. Augustine. *City of God* followed shortly after that, as did books by C.S. Lewis, Thomas Merton, and Dorothy Day. I learned the Gospel through studying the lives of holy men and women as much as I understood it through reading the Bible. I think that was a good approach. If we seek Christ, we can find Him in the faces of those who serve Him most perfectly, whose spirituality has developed far beyond what most of us can imagine, much less comprehend.

I remember reading about how Dorothy Day, the extraordinary woman who founded the American Catholic Worker movement, labored tirelessly to feed the poor, clothe the naked and give drink to the thirsty in America during the height of the Great Depression. I wondered how someone could do that, be so selfless. Before her conversion, Dorothy Day, like me, led a robust secular life and did her share of drinking and carrying on. She had an abortion and gave birth to a daughter out of wedlock. She chained smoked cigarettes. Not exactly classic icon material.

What about the Twelve, our Blessed Apostles? Matthew was a tax collector who extorted money from his countrymen in the name of the Roman state. Peter, the "Rock," denied Him three times as the Lord was beaten by the Pharisee's guards. Judas sold

out Jesus for a few pieces of silver, and the other eleven ran away and abandoned the Lord when He was arrested.

Not every saint was once a noted sinner. St. Basil of Caesarea is one example, as is St. Nektarios of Aegina, a 20th Century icon of piety. Mother Teresa was a devout Christian all her life, seemingly groomed from birth for a religious vocation. While she was by no means perfect, Mother did not have a past she needed to repent for, only the constant struggle to stay in union with Christ.

St. John Chrysostom, who lived in the 4th century, was an eloquent preacher and the epitome of the Gospel. He said, "It is foolishness and a public madness to fill the cupboards with clothing and allow men who are created in God's image and likeness to stand naked and trembling with the cold so that they can hardly hold themselves upright." St. John lived his words as well as preached them and for that he was exiled and died a thousand miles from home.

When I read about exceptionally holy men and women – Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant – I am struck most by their diversity. Each is an individual expression of the Light, Christ reflected through their unique and beautiful soul. They share an ineffable quality that's hard to describe in words. What they have most in common is this – a deep, unshakable belief that Christ was talking specifically to them when He commanded, "Love one another as I have loved you."

It's the whole "Love one another as I have loved you" thing that the saints get right and the rest of us so often get wrong. A saint literally radiates God's love.

I will never forget the first time I spoke with Bishop Themis. He was in Africa; I was in Utah. His manner, tone, thought process, and ethics were marvelously different, humble, and righteous. Bishop Themis explained that his agenda was simple – serve the poor and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

My heart was gladdened and my spirit uplifted, when he told me how he overcame his atheist past and early secular life to become a humble monk, a priest, and a hero of the Church. Our mutual friend Louie Toumbas says, "Bishop Themis is the

most honest guy I know." Not only do I agree with Louie, but Bishop Themis is also the best human being I know. I've never met a more intelligent, strong, yet gentle man who truly lives the Gospel every minute of every day.

I was blessed to spend a couple of weeks with Father Themis (he was not yet a Bishop) in March of 2015. I drove him to appointments in Manhattan, accompanied him to fundraising events at New York area churches, and went with him to visit fellow clergy at the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in New York City. Themis is very engaging – he's funny, self-deprecating, tireless, and focused on others, not himself. Watching him talk with people, listening to their concerns, engaging with them... well, one story tells it all.

Father Themis and I were in a Greek Orthodox Church in Northern New Jersey for a charity fundraising event. Dinner was served potluck style. Before his presentation, the parishioners filed in and took seats around tables. I told Father that I wanted to sit apart from him to observe anonymously from a short distance away.

I took a seat at a table and introduced myself as a friend of the charity but gave no details. Behind me, a group of ten or so folks had sat down at another table. I listened to their conversation. It went something like this: "Father is a great man, but those Africans really need to get it together. I mean, how much more can we give them? How long will it be before they can take care of themselves? etc." You get the picture.

Father Themis then began speaking, sharing who he was and how God calls all of us to help the poorest of the poor. Father's transparent Christ-like nature captured his audience. He spoke against the evil of economic inequality in the world. He reminded everyone that we were blessed to live in such a prosperous country. Then Father played a video showing what he does daily – taking care of the disabled, feeding the poor, ministering to the sick, offering Christ's love to the most unwanted.

When the lights came on after the video ended, I looked back at the table behind me. Most of the people were wiping away tears. Everyone's head was bowed. There was no more bluster, no judgmental banter, only empathy. Oh, and all of them had their

checkbooks out. One of them wrote a check to the charity for \$25,000. The West African Orthodox Mission was well supported that night.

That's the power of a holy person. No hype, no spin, no nonsense, just the truth. People respond to the truth by sharing their treasure and, more importantly, with their prayers and heartfelt support.

I hope Bishop Themis's story inspires you and reminds you that there are genuine heroes in this all too often phony world, that there is goodness amidst all the greed and violence and evil. Bishop Themis is a gift to all of us from Christ, and it is my undeserved and incredible honor that I can call him my friend.

Foreword

“Therefore, Your Beatitude, I will only accept to be ordained to the Episcopacy by you if I am to be the bishop for the poor, to the poor, and of the poor. I need to be their voice because no one is listening.”

My wife Xanthi and I and our son Michael traveled to Alexandria, Egypt, to the Sacred See of Saint Mark, to be present on February 6, 2022, for the episcopal ordination of His Grace Bishop Themis, by His Beatitude Theodore II, Pope, and Patriarch of All Africa. When we heard the words written above, we were not disappointed, and neither were we shocked. This is why we traveled to see this simple, lowly, holy man elevated to the high office of bishop.

Father Themis never wanted any reward or recognition from anyone on this earth for simply doing what the Lord commanded: “What you do for the least of my brothers and sisters, you do unto me.” He may have decided to serve Christ in one of the so-called “hell holes” in the world, but he was determined to bring them a paradise of faith, hope, and love, with love being the greatest of the three. His only reward and concern was, and is, dutiful service to our Lord Jesus Christ through humble ministry to the downtrodden and forgotten.

When I was asked to write a few words about my revered and most respected friend Bishop Themis, I reflected on the morning my wife said to me, “Alex, is this guy for real?”

Apparently, Xanthi read his story online and wanted me to learn about the “Mother Teresa-like” Greek Orthodox Priest from Australia. I can assure you that Bishop Themis is indeed the real deal!

When I contacted Fr Themis in 2015 to lead the Order of Saint Andrew’s Archon Lenten Retreat, he immediately accepted. His apostolic message of “feeding the hungry

and clothing the naked” moved all present to want to be supporters of his extraordinary ministry of love. I remember saying to the brothers and sisters that I was even “jealous” of Father Themis’ almost divine love for the poor because I could not serve Christ as he was doing and still does. There is something divine in this man, this apostle of the hungry.

Bishop Themis’ life is a testimony to the truth that no matter your past, no matter how bad, or sinful, with faith and repentance the doors of Heaven open and the impossible becomes possible. Anyone who mistakenly believes they are beyond redemption because of something they have done can take comfort from Bishop Themis’ life story that God’s mercy is far greater than anyone’s sin.

As a young student at Holy Cross Seminary, I was introduced to the “Confessions of Saint Augustine.” I learned a lot about myself and others as I read about Augustine. I believe the reader will benefit in like manner as they read about Bishop Themis’ life and story. It’s the human story touched by the divine hand of God. It’s a story worth reading, and it’s a life and ministry worthy of our attention and support.

Father Alexander Karloutsos
Protopresbyter of the Ecumenical Patriarchate
November 2022

Chapter One

Hell on Earth

August 2014 - Freetown, Sierra Leone

This is a time without pity,
This time the enemy is silent, invisible, deadlier.
This time there can be no truce, no treaties.
It's a zero-sum situation.
This time the enemy is not a child soldier,
This time the enemy is a virus, a killer virus.
This is a time of constant wailing -
Ambulances shrieking under the hot tropical sun,
Striking macabre fear into the heart.
This time the enemy is called Ebola.

Father Themistocles Adamopoulos

Meliandou is a tiny village in a sparsely populated area of the Gueckedou District of Guinea, Sierra Leone's northern neighbor. In December 2013, an 18-month-old boy living in this village contracted the Ebola virus. Before getting sick, the boy was seen playing near a hollow tree heavily infested with bats. The toddler was probably bitten by an infected bat, most likely part of a migratory flock of bats from the Congo.

In 1976, nearly three hundred people were killed during the outbreak of a deadly virus near the Ebola River in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire). It was successfully contained since the virus arose in a relatively remote area.

From 1976 to 2014, there were sporadic Ebola outbreaks elsewhere in Central Africa, especially in Uganda, but they were suppressed before spreading to large

population centers. Health authorities worldwide knew that the Ebola virus was still active in animal hosts, suspected to be fruit bats and primates. These potential animal hosts could not be confined to a specific geographic region.

The youngster developed a sudden illness characterized by high fever, vomiting, and black stools. Since Ebola, also known as Ebola Hemorrhagic Fever, had never been seen in West Africa, the boy's family had no idea their son had contracted one of the world's deadliest diseases.

By early January 2014, several members of the boy's immediate family were displaying similar symptoms and sought the assistance of traditional healers. The staff at the rural clinic in nearby Gueckedou who treated the boy's family and the traditional healers fell ill, as did members of the boy's extended family. Most of these people died.

Sadly, this tragedy was the genesis of a horrific pattern of cross-border Ebola transmission – close contact with the infected corpse at mortuaries and funerals is the ideal method for the virus to move from person to person.

By February 2014, Ebola infections were seen in Conakry, the capital of Guinea, and in several surrounding prefectures. The Guinea Ministry of Health issued its first alert about this unidentified disease on March 13th, but everyone assumed it was cholera or perhaps Lassa Fever.

On March 14th, The World Health Organization's (WHO) Africa Office began an extensive investigation of the disease outbreak. Later that March, WHO confirmed that the causative agent of the epidemic was the Zaire strain of the Ebola virus, the most lethal virus in the Ebola family.

By April 1st, 2014, authorities in Guinea had widely broadcast the warning that the Ebola virus reaches its contagious peak shortly after its human host dies. Despite this well-publicized admonition, people continued to practice their traditional burial customs, which involved washing and dressing the corpse. The result was predictable but also tragic. The Ebola virus spread like an all-consuming fire raging through a dry field.

Father Themis (Themistocles Adamopoulos) came to Sierra Leone in 2007 from Kenya, just a few years after the brutal civil war had ended. His vision was to establish an Orthodox Christian Mission with the facilities and infrastructure required to care for the neediest in the world's poorest nation.

With nothing but his faith in Jesus and the support of his benefactors in America, Greece and Australia, Father Themis immersed himself in the daunting challenge of establishing a Christian philanthropic mission.

First, he built the Waterloo Compound, which cared for many disabled (war and polio victims) and their families.

During the Sierra Leone civil war, the Revolutionary United Front, or RUF, was keen on hacking off the limbs of those who dared oppose their reign of terror. The result is that Sierra Leone now boasts thousands of people missing an arm, a hand, a leg, a foot, or some combination of the above.

In parts of West Africa, children born with or who acquire polio after birth are thought to be cursed and are often abandoned in the streets to protect the rest of the family.

Next, the Mission acquired a large Freetown Council school of over 1,600 primary school pupils in the center of Freetown. The school had struggled to operate under appalling conditions since the end of the civil war.

Youth gangs and other criminals roamed within the unfenced schoolyard harassing girls and anyone else who crossed their path. Furniture was smashed, blackboards badly damaged. Teachers were terrified to step outside during school breaks. It was a depressing environment that was not conducive to learning.

Father Themis intervened. He built a wall around the school and a new office for the administration. He supplied educational materials and created a brand new, double-story, sixteen classroom complex. Father constructed an Orthodox Church on the compound where students, faculty, and the public could worship.

Then Father transformed an uninhabited hill in the center of Freetown populated only with bats, rats, and mosquitos into the thriving headquarters of the Orthodox Mission in Sierra Leone.

The hill was sliced into two levels. The Mission's residence house (Paradise4Kids House) occupies the higher level. Adjacent to the Mission residence house Father built a Teacher's College, a post-secondary institution specializing in training young men and women in early childhood education. On this same level, Father also built the Mission's administrative offices. A Byzantine-style church and a guest house were constructed on the lower level (Sts. Constantine and Helen).

After all this hard-won progress, a new enemy threatened to destroy everything Father Themis and his dedicated clergy, staff, and philanthropic volunteers worked diligently to build.

In July of 2014, the first confirmed case of Ebola was reported in Freetown, a city with over 1 million souls. The deadly plague was now entrenched in a perfect viral breeding ground where hundreds of thousands lived in primitive, squalid conditions.

In August, Father wrote to his supporters about his nightmare.

"I find myself situated in a quasi-apocalyptic End Time scenario I would never have imagined possible.

"Freetown, the bustling capital of Sierra Leone and the location of three of our Mission's philanthropic, ecclesiastical, and educational compounds, is starting to look like a page out of the New Testament's End Times prophecies, '...and there shall be pestilences in various places.' (Matthew 24.7).

"The impact and fear of Ebola is starting to make Freetown, a usually vibrant though poor urban center, resemble a ghost town (especially at night) with much of its infrastructure and economy in damage control mode.

"Many nurses and doctors have unfortunately been killed by the virus. Most hospitals, pharmacies, and clinics have shut down and remain empty. Members of the

medical profession are not reporting for duty, preferring to stay home out of fear of being contaminated by the virus.

"People are afraid to receive medical attention if they have a fever or a sore throat out of an irrational though popular fear that doctors will kill them with a 'poisoned big needle.' This is not a time for even a minor symptom of malaria or typhoid due to anxiety that their ailment could be misinterpreted as Ebola.

"Ebola victims run away from clinics or hospitals when diagnosed with Ebola. Some Ebola centers are attacked by violent crowds who want the centers removed from their neighborhood.

"The official statistics of the infection rate appear to be far below the actual number. It seems that international assistance and expertise are slow in coming. Indeed, the international community seems more interested and obsessed with canceling all flights to and from the region and isolating us rather than helping us. In a real sense, this plague is now out of control here.

"Corpses of victims may be burnt, left unburied for a time, or buried in designated Ebola burial sites. Public gatherings of people are now forbidden. Cinemas, bars, nightclubs, and football venues have all shut down. Schools and universities are on vacation and will most likely remain so until the danger has passed. The only places people may now gather in large numbers are churches and mosques.

"The majority of 'ex-pats' and international NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) personnel have flown out already. The popular elite resorts they frequent in Freetown – restaurants, cafes, and Lumley Beach, are now almost deserted.

"Street vendors have to stop selling by six pm. Banks must close by one pm. Motorbikes are not permitted on the streets after seven pm, and cars should not be on the road after ten pm. People are advised to stay indoors at night.

"The sight of people wearing gloves and the placement of buckets containing chlorinated water outside those shops or venues still open is common. A whiff of chlorine is in the air.

"People no longer shake hands or hug for fear of contamination, and there is a suspicion about everyone – because the deadly enemy is invisible, so anyone you meet or talk to – beggar or rich man, street person or professor - could be a carrier.

"Entire regional districts of Sierra Leone are now under quarantine with military checkpoints – you cannot go in or out - and there is talk that this type of lock-down will also happen here in Freetown.

"This is a nation that has fairly recently emerged from a brutal and catastrophic civil war. The people are resilient and stoic. However, besides the Ebola plague, there may be another calamity coming. My concern is that ships may also stop coming to Freetown. In that case, we will be almost completely isolated from the rest of the world. Our food supplies will begin to run dry. Rice, the staple food of Sierra Leone, is imported. So, if the crisis continues and we become a pariah state, an untouchable region, we may face a worse mass killer than Ebola – famine! 'And there shall be famine and plagues ...in various places (Matthew 24.7)."

From July 2014 onwards, Father Themis was urged by his ecclesiastical superiors, friends, and supporters in America, Australia, and Greece to leave Sierra Leone for his own safety. Their argument was simple, "What good are you to anyone if you're dead, Father?" According to the American Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the 2014 West African Ebola outbreak was up to 70% lethal; therefore, an Ebola diagnosis spelled a cruel death sentence for most people.

The world had simply not experienced this before. The only thing akin to the scope of what was happening in West Africa in mid-2014 was what the Europeans experienced in the Middle Ages with the Black Death (1347-1350). The Ebola virus is transmitted only by direct human contact – skin to skin, or through bodily fluids (blood, saliva, vomit, etc.), or by touching infected clothing or other items, such as mattresses or syringes. Touching the wrong person could mean losing your life.

When the Ebola virus first hit Freetown, there was no sizeable international relief presence in Sierra Leone. The international aid group Doctors Without Borders were the only exception – they were in the West Africa Ebola fight in force from the beginning.

From the standpoint of self-protection and self-preservation, it seemed evident to Father Themis that the world had a vested interest in stamping out this plague before it

reached non-African shores. Yet, from April 2014 through September 2014, no large-scale international effort was organized to come to the aid of the West African people.

Due to a lack of international support and intervention, the plague spread exponentially. The CDC first reported Ebola cases in Sierra Leone in late May 2014. Those few cases were all reported near the border with Guinea. By August 1st, Sierra Leone reported 442 cases and over 200 deaths.

Father Themis knew to some degree why the Ebola outbreak was not getting the attention and resources it required from the world community.

The inescapable reality was that if an Ebola outbreak had occurred in the Western world, armed forces and thousands of civilian medical personnel would have been deployed within days to set up treatment centers, enforce quarantines, and handle the immense logistics required to stamp out a virulent pestilence.

The worldwide health community, in particular the pharmaceutical industry, had more than thirty-five years since the initial outbreak in Zaire in 1976 to work on developing a means of attacking the Ebola virus through a vaccine and/or effective treatment. If this initial 1970s outbreak had occurred in London, Paris, or Moscow, Father Themis believed that it was sure that a vaccine and effective treatment would have been developed by 2014.

As July ended, Father Themis was facing a Garden of Gethsemane situation. Should he stay or go? Death was all around him. His personal escape window was rapidly closing. Most air travel in or out of Sierra Leone would be suspended within days. Father had an airline ticket from Sierra Leone to Australia, all he had to do was get on the flight, and he would be safe. A quick decision was required.

After much prayer, Father Themis sent this letter to his supporters in early August:

"Our Lord Jesus has taught that the shepherd of the flock does not run away when danger or an enemy approach but remains to protect the sheep. The hireling runs away. 'But he that is a hireling and not the shepherd ... seeing the wolf coming leaves

the sheep and flees... the hireling flees because he cares not for the sheep.' (John 10 - 12-13). I am not a hireling!

"Consequently, since the next 30 to 60 days are the most crucial in this current Ebola crisis, my natural place for the next few months, or as long as the emergency period remains, is here in Sierra Leone."

Not long after Father decided to stay, one morning, he woke up and noticed that his hands and feet were covered in red spots. Bright red spots, like he had been burned. This was the first time he'd ever seen anything like this. He remembered that one of the symptoms of Ebola was hemorrhagic wounds. He was shocked. He was concerned that he might have become infected with the virus.

He thought, what do I do now? Who do I tell? Do I call a doctor? Do I call the Ebola center? Father Themis pondered all the possibilities but knew he had to take action to prevent others from being contaminated.

Thinking more on the issue, he recalled that the typical pattern of Ebola symptoms was a combination of fever, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, and hemorrhagic sores. He had none of the other symptoms, so he pondered why he only had odd burn-like marks that could be hemorrhagic sores. He considered the possibility that he might be a medical exception. Then it hit him.

Father had been washing with heavily chlorinated water. It was the chlorine that caused the burns. His relief was as intense as the fear of being tossed into a mass grave. He saw Ebola victims' bodies left in the street to rot or corpses burned around him. He knew that even if help could reach him from nearby Greece, it would probably not arrive in time to save his life. Being unceremoniously dumped into a hastily dug sandy hole in an open field on the outskirts of Freetown was not how he wanted to leave this world.

There is a perception among Sierra Leonians, unfortunately based on experience, that when real trouble comes in Africa, the white men usually run away, even if they belong to a charity organization or a church. By and large, this is what

happened during the Sierra Leone civil war. Father was determined to show his African brothers and sisters that not every white man would run away in their hour of greatest need.

As the spiritual leader and Chancellor of the Holy Orthodox Archdiocesan District of Sierra Leone, Father Themis also felt a profound obligation to minister to the parishioners daily. Now more than ever, the Orthodox community in Freetown needed to draw strength from the Divine Liturgy, sermon, and Eucharist. Father Themis was the embodiment of Christianity to many in Sierra Leone. Jesus Christ does not abandon his faithful; if required, He goes to the cross and sacrifices all for them as their servant.

Due to the outpouring of generosity of the Mission's many supporters in America, Australia, and Greece, Father Themis also knew that if the ships continued to visit Freetown, there would be relief supplies to off-load and manage. His presence in the country could be the difference between those supplies being stolen and sold on the black market or properly handled and distributed to those in need.

Even though they were given ample rice supplies, medical services, accommodations, and a free water supply, many of the disabled at Waterloo were still in their old habit of leaving the compound for several days to go into Freetown to beg. They would return on Sundays to be with their family and friends.

However, begging was a high-risk activity due to the current Ebola outbreak. If just one of the men were infected, that could potentially doom the other residents and all the Mission workers. Strict measures had to be implemented to safeguard the Mission from this potential danger. Father Themis knew it would be a full-time job to keep the men on the compound.

Given that the Orthodox Mission was filled with the poorest of the poor and, therefore, the most vulnerable members of Sierra Leone society, it was indeed an answer to prayer and a miracle that so far, not one of Father's flock had contracted Ebola. Father knew that his constant, personal attention was required to minimize the number of Ebola deaths among those under his care.

By October 2014, credible international health authorities finally woke up to the grim reality. They predicted tens of thousands of people would die from the virus or perhaps hundreds of thousands. Like its neighbors, Guinea and Liberia, Sierra Leone was staring into the abyss.

The entire country was at tremendous risk and not just from Ebola – children were not going to school, crops were not being planted, and the national economy was paralyzed. Vast districts were quarantined. Everyday life had ground to a halt. The entire nation was in shutdown mode.

After the long, hard days in September and October ended, Father retired to his residence at Tower Hill. I called him many of those nights. We talked into the wee hours of the morning about his past.

These conversations reminded Father of who he once was, a person very different than the man he was now. Reanimating his past was bittersweet for Father. In many ways, his pre-Christian past, some four-plus decades behind him, was still a weight that was never entirely off his soul. For him, Christ was the first and the last, the world simply made no sense to him without Jesus in the center of everything.

But for the first twenty-plus years of his life Themistocles Adamopoulo, or Themis Adams as he was then known, wanted nothing to do with Jesus Christ. This valiant Christian priest who was bravely risking his life for his flock was once a long-haired hippie, atheist intellectual who thought the world was all about The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Hendrix, and Neo-Marxism and being a learned, secular academic.

As was true of many of the servants of Christ who came before him, Father Themis had a past that God used to create the new man he eventually became.

Chapter Two

Alexandria to Australia

Not many cities can boast that they were founded by an iconic historical figure. The city of Alexandria, Egypt, has that distinction. Alexander the Great, whose name the city bears, personally supervised the planning for the founding of Alexandria in 331 B.C. Themistocles Adamopoulo was born in this ancient and illustrious city in December 1945.

At the close of the 18th century, Alexandria had been reduced to a shell of its former Hellenistic and Christian glory. It was little more than a small, sleepy Arab fishing village. In the early 1800s, an ambitious Ottoman Pasha from Macedonia, Muhammad Ali, rose to power and became the Governor of Egypt. His goal was to modernize Egypt and create a European-type state, at least in terms of military and economic power. Alexandria was a focal point for Ali's economic and social reforms.

By the mid-1800s, Alexandria had transformed into a large, vibrant, cosmopolitan city. It was a hub of business activity and the nation's largest port. In the latter half of the 19th century, foreign nationals from Britain, France, and Greece arrived in large numbers, bringing the capital and business expertise required to help Egypt modernize.

In 1882, the British invaded Egypt and turned it into a protectorate. From 1882 to 1952, the British nominally controlled Egypt, although the Egyptian monarchy established by Muhammad Ali remained intact.

The city was spared significant destruction during the Second World War when Montgomery defeated the vaunted German Africa Corps under General Rommel near Alexandria at the Battle of El Alamein.

After the war ended, things were never better for the Europeans in Alexandria for a short time. The city was vibrant and prosperous and much more Mediterranean than Arabic in culture.

Writers and poets flourished in Alexandria from the 1920s to the 1960s. Constantine Cavafy (1863-1933) was a Greek Alexandrian. While his brilliance was not recognized internationally (not even in Greece) during his lifetime, after his death, Cavafy was widely translated and is now considered to be one of the finest poets of the 20th century. The British novelist and poet Lawrence Durrell (1912-1990) wrote the famous *The Alexandria Quartet* about events in the city of Alexandria during the Second World War.

Themis's father, Eleftherios, and his mother, Helen, were part of a large Greek community that thrived in Alexandria from the mid-19th century until the 1960s. Themis's grandfather Themistocles immigrated from Volos in Greece to Alexandria in the early 20th century, part of a large emigre wave.

Grandfather Themistocles went into the cotton industry and became quite prosperous. When the Great Depression hit, most of his wealth was lost. While the money was gone, the family retained their dignity and temperament; they were an aristocratic Greek family without their former riches.

Eleftherios served as an officer in the British Army during World War II. Themis's Uncle Charles (whose Greek name was Harilaos Scordidis), his mother's brother, was also a serviceman and was involved in the fighting that eventually drove the Nazi army out of North Africa.

In 1943, Charles was injured in battle and buried alive in the desert sand. He was missing in action. Eleftherios and Helen were an engaged couple at that time. They were strolling through the city one morning when Charles suddenly appeared on the street out of nowhere, battered and torn and covered in sand but alive. He had managed to make his way home to Alexandria from the battlefield, which was 100 kilometers away.

Helen Adamopoulo was a Francophile. Her great passion was the French language. Before Themis was born, she founded a French school in Alexandria called Ecole Franco-Egyptien. Eleftherios was more Greek in identity. He was an accountant

at the Land Bank of Egypt. According to his family and peers, Eleftherios was a shy person, a scholarly type, and not a businessman.

Eleftherios and Helen were intellectuals in the best sense of that word, so Alexandria was the ideal home for them in many ways. They were cosmopolitan, able to experience Greek, British, French, and Arabic cultures in the same city. Alexandria rivaled Tripoli, the so-called "Paris of the Mediterranean," in its culture and sophistication. Themis's parents regularly took him on outings to the Greek section of the city. He loved to sample cakes and sweets offered by the bakeries and delis.

The Alexandrian Greek community was insular, tied together in a closed system of economic, social, and ecclesiastical relationships through the Greek Patriarchate of Alexandria. The Greeks were highly dependent upon a small number of industrialists and businessmen who directly employed them and were therefore primarily responsible for the financial welfare of the community. This is not to say that the Greeks did not interact with the Egyptians or other foreign nationals in Alexandria, but they were closely integrated within their own Greek enclave.

Eleftherios had two sisters, Jeanne and Nitsa. They both spoke multiple languages and were "proper ladies" in the genteel Victorian era definition. Jeanne was a strikingly beautiful woman. Although Jeanne never married, she was pursued.

Jeanne regularly took Themis to the cinema. Alexandria's cinemas received the latest Hollywood releases in the mid-1950s. Themis remembers seeing films like *The Robe*, *Ivanhoe*, *The Crimson Pirate*, and *Prince Valiant* with his aunt. Sometimes Themis went with Jeanne on dates with her wealthy suitor. If Jeanne's suitor wished to impress her, he took Themis to the toy store and told him that he could purchase anything he desired.

Helen was one of six children. Her brother Taki (in Greek Eustathios Scordidis) became the Counsel General to Panama for Egypt. This was a significant post since Greek commercial ships flew the Panamanian flag widely.

Helen's brother Charles was a soccer player, a goalkeeper who trained with Egypt's national football club. His nickname was Bebi - in English, babyface. Charles and his wife had two daughters, Anna and Mary, who eventually moved to Australia. Taki and his family moved to Greece. Taki's son Alex, who is about Themis's age, followed in his father's footsteps and entered the shipping industry.

Although he has no memory of it, according to Helen as a youngster Themis played marbles with Demis Roussos. When life in Alexandria became problematic for the Greeks after the Suez Canal crisis, Demis' family moved back to Athens. An accomplished singer, Demis sold over 60 million albums worldwide in the 1970s and 80s and had international hits like *My Friend the Wind* and *Someday Somewhere*.

The Adamopoulos rented an apartment in the city (in Cleopatra Les Bains) that overlooked the Mediterranean. Themis enjoyed solitude as a child and often sat in his room and watched ships as they made their way through the harbor. He liked to draw pictures of them and imagined what it would be like to travel across the world on an ocean liner. The family rented a summerhouse in El-Mandarah, just outside Alexandria, on the beach. Themis has fond memories of spending holidays with his parents and sister there.

Themis went to several schools before the age of ten. He was enrolled in the St. Gabriel primary school run by Roman Catholic brothers. This was his first real introduction to Christianity, although he does not recall being interested in learning about the faith.

His parents then took him for a time to the Lycées Francais school. He went to the Dixon Preparatory School for a while before moving on to the Scotch School. The main reason for sending Themis to the Scotch School was so that he could learn to speak English. Themis shared his parent's polyglot orientation; he could talk and write in Arabic, Greek, French, and English before his eighth birthday.

Both Themis and Mary had personal Egyptian domestics who saw to their needs. They went to the best European schools and were given additional lessons in Arabic and other subjects by private tutors. Themis's family was not unusual in the Alexandrian

Greek community in the sense that they lived well. Most of the Greeks in the city were prosperous enough to employ household help - it was the style of the times.

The Orthodox Church was a central part of the community. The Alexandrian Church, which had an unbroken history of almost two millennia, produced a series of illustrious luminaries such as St. Athanasius (A.D. 296-373), who in the fourth century was instrumental in the formation of the canon of the New Testament as we know it today, St. Cyril (A.D.376-444), a definitive theologian of the fifth century, and St. Nektarios (A.D.1846-1920), the great miracle worker of modern times.

Formal religious instruction and regular church attendance were not part of Themis's childhood. Eleftherios and Helen were not atheists, but they did not attend Orthodox services other than on Easter and Christmas. Themis showed little interest in religion or faith growing up in Egypt; he recalls praying only a few times to Jesus.

A successful political revolution in Egypt was carried out on July 23, 1952, by "The Free Officers Movement." The Free Officers, who soon became known as The Revolution Command Council (RCC), were led by Muhammad Naguib and Abdel Nasser. The new government adopted an anti-imperialist agenda expressed in Arab nationalism. The Royalist elements in the Egyptian armed forces were quickly neutralized. King Farouk was deposed and sent into exile.

By 1954, Nasser had cemented his control over the Egyptian government. In 1956, all the British troops left. The Western powers were increasingly becoming hostile to Nasser's nationalization program and his perceived coziness with the Soviet Union. When the United States announced that it would no longer financially support the Aswan Dam, a massive hydroelectric dam built on the Nile, Nasser retaliated by nationalizing the Suez Canal.

Several things happened that told Eleftherios and Helen it was time to leave Alexandria. Greece was not a modern colonial power – the last Greek army left Alexandria before Christ. The Greeks were caught up in Egyptian nationalist sentiments and a general wave of resentment directed primarily against the British and the French. Even though the Greeks were not a primary target or focus, the writing was on the wall.

Eleftherios, Helen, and many in the Greek community in Alexandria felt an ever-tightening noose around their necks. While they had not yet been physically threatened or had their property seized, the Adamopoulos' way of life was seriously jeopardized. They believed that it was only a matter of time before they would be impoverished, deported, or perhaps worse.

A frightening incident with Themis proved to be the tipping point in their decision to stay or go.

One day, Themis was playing hide and seek with his friends when an older Egyptian boy joined the group. He told Themis to follow him into the basement. The older boy exposed himself to Themis. Frightened and confused, Themis did not know what to do.

Thankfully, the other children knew where the Egyptian boy had taken Themis, and they burst into the room. The Egyptian boy was prosecuted by the authorities and went to jail for four years. Eleftherios and Helen were mortified. In their minds, such a horrible thing would never have happened before the anti-European winds began to blow. It was time to go. But where?

Eleftherios applied to immigrate to Brazil and Australia, two popular relocation destinations for Greeks leaving Alexandria. Having relatives in Rio de Janeiro and Melbourne, Helen's sister Artemis in Brazil, and her sister Ketty in Australia, the Adamopoulos had options. Because the Australian embassy responded first and completed their immigration paperwork in short order, Eleftherios thought Australia was the better choice.

Before they left Egypt, the Adamopoulos were required to get health checks by the Australian embassy. When the examining physician asked Themis if he could read a particular line on the chart without his glasses, Themis honestly answered that he could not do so. The doctor took Themis's parents aside and clarified that he must read the line to pass the exam. If Themis failed the health exam, the Adamopoulos might have been denied entry into Australia.

Desiring to help the young family, the Egyptian physician told Themis the letters and asked him to confirm the answer. At first, Themis refused – a lie was a lie, and regardless of the circumstances telling a lie was something he would not do. After some prodding, Themis relented and told the doctor what he needed to hear.

Before taking the ocean voyage to Australia, the Adamopoulos had to go to Cairo and wait for a few days. While they were in Cairo, Eleftherios and Helen took Themis and Mary to visit the Monastery of St. George. The monastery site was originally a Roman fortress that marked the southernmost limits of the Roman Empire in Egypt. In the First Century, Christians built the Hanging Church and a monastery within the fortress. Over the centuries, it became a shrine sacred to both Christians and Moslems.

When the Adamopoulos left the shrine, they took a taxi back to their hotel. Themis was sitting in the front seat of the taxi. Suddenly, a young boy ran into the street right in front of the car out of nowhere. The youngster was tossed into the air and seriously injured.

In the Arab world, crowds witnessing such an accident would often take revenge not only upon the driver but also on the car's occupants, especially if the driver or the occupants were Europeans. Thankfully, there were police nearby to handle the situation. Eleftherios, Helen, Themis, and Mary were quickly whisked away to a police station, where they were safe. They were released after being retained long enough to get the required information.

With a bare minimum of their possessions, the Adamopoulos left for Cairo and then to Port Said to board the HMS Himalayas for the thirty-day journey to Australia. Their voyage would take them through the Indian Ocean, the Pacific, and eventually Melbourne.

Themis was excited to be on board a huge ship. The stewards gave him and Mary drinks for free. The liner had a swimming pool and games to play. There was nightly entertainment. For Themis, the journey, by and large, was an adventure, not a hardship.

The HMS Himalayas stopped at many ports of call on the way to Melbourne – Aden, Bombay, Sri Lanka, Freemantle, Adelaide, and Melbourne. At most of these stops, Themis and his family disembarked and explored the area around the port. One of these stops was in the Indian city of Bombay, now called Mumbai.

Themis had seen poverty in Egypt but nothing on the scale of what he witnessed in Bombay. When the Adamopoulos disembarked to tour the city, they were set upon by a crowd of beggars, many children Themis's age or younger. They shouted and pleaded for alms from the ship's passengers.

Much to Themis's horror, some of the Himalayas' passengers stood on the deck and tossed English pennies into the oil-soaked water around the ship. As soon as a penny hit the water, the children would dive in after it as if they were chasing a gold bar. When they came back up for air, they were covered in greasy slime and usually none the richer.

This diving for pennies show amused the passengers tossing the coins and others watching the sad spectacle from the ship's deck. It made young Themis sick to his stomach. He had no idea that many people lived like this, happily humiliating themselves for the chance to recover a trivial amount of money. Worse, Themis had not seen such callous cruelty before by what he thought were decent adults like his parents and relatives. The suffering of the children was a game to these passengers.

Years later, when Themis was Brother Themis living in Sydney, Australia, and teaching Biblical studies at the St. Andrews Greek Orthodox Theological Seminary, he became very interested in what Mother Teresa was doing in Calcutta. As he learned more about Mother Teresa and her ministry, his brief encounter with the poor in India gave him a personal frame of reference to consider what serving the poor in the developing world might be like.

By his own description, Themis led a very comfortable and privileged life in Alexandria. This changed from when the Adamopoulos arrived in Melbourne in the pre-dawn blackness of a midwinter night.

Chapter Three

The Land Down Under

Before 1900, most Australian immigrants came from Britain, Ireland, or Northern European nations. Influenced by 19th-century British Imperialist racial prejudices, upon its Federation in 1901 as the Commonwealth of Australia, the government adopted the Immigration Restriction Act, commonly known as the "White Australia" policy, promoting immigration from Northern European countries, and banning or severely limiting it from everywhere else.

Although Southern and Eastern Europeans are Caucasians, Greeks, Italians, and Serbians were excluded under this nonsensical policy. On December 16, 1941, responding to Japanese attacks on British and American territories in the Pacific, Australian Prime Minister John Curtin said, "This country shall remain forever the home of the descendants of those people who came here in peace in order to establish in the South Seas an outpost of the British race."

In the years immediately following World War II, most of Anglo-Australian society still viewed non-Whites, a term they used that broadly encompassed anyone not of Northern European descent, as inferior, at least regarding social status. It was not yet inappropriate to use racial slurs in common conversation or openly discriminate against people based on their race or national origin in virtually all aspects of Australian daily life.

Racism, of course, was not a uniquely Australian affliction. The idea that a person's race determined his value, or lack thereof, as a human being was an all-too-common point of view in many countries, including America and Britain. With the rising acceptance of social Darwinism during the early and mid-20th century, delusions of racial superiority dominated nationalist and fascist regimes such as those in Japan and Germany, resulting in brutal ethnic cleansings.

After 1950, the social, political, and economic climate changed, motivating the Australian government to gradually dismantle its "White's Only" immigration policy. Economic necessity was a factor in this policy shift.

Australia suffered from a tremendous labor shortage. Agriculture, public works programs, and heavy industry had tens of thousands of "dirty jobs" to be filled. Since Anglo-Australians, as a group, were pursuing other forms of employment, industry had to turn to the more recent immigrants to get things done.

Unlike Australia, Europe was in chaos after the war. Every country on the Continent was decimated to one degree or another – their cities in ruin, their industrial base destroyed – so millions were trying to leave to find a better home overseas.

This period also marked the height of the cold war. A possible nuclear confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union was a real threat. Many Europeans saw Australia as a safe place to live - a haven from possible nuclear holocaust and a land of freedom and opportunity.

In the 1950s, Australia, like the United Kingdom and America, enjoyed the prosperity of the post-World War II global economic boom. The Aussies bought plenty of household appliances, television sets, and automobiles. Family homeownership rose to record levels. Unemployment rates were the lowest of the century.

Women, who had joined the Australian workforce in record numbers during the war, were encouraged to stay home with the children. Gone were the dark days of the 1930s economic depression and the 1940s Japanese military aggression - times were generally very good for most people.

From its foundation as a British colony in the 18th century to the early 1950s, Australia looked primarily to the United Kingdom for its cultural and societal values. While Australia remained part of the British Commonwealth, by 1955 America had become a more significant influence through cinema, radio, and television programming. "Rock and Roll" became a craze with Aussie kids.

When they reached Australia in June 1956, Eleftherios and Helen Adamopoulo were by no means "typical" Greek immigrants. Most Greeks who arrived in Melbourne were uneducated and spoke little English. Eleftherios, Helen, Themis, and Mary spoke multiple languages fluently, including English. The bulk of the recently arrived immigrants saw Eleftherios and Helen as too educated and too sophisticated, so they did not quickly assimilate into the Greek community in Melbourne.

Over 90% of the 250,000 Greeks who immigrated to Australia between 1945 and 1987 chose to settle in Melbourne, making it the third-largest Greek city in the world. Most immigrants came from rural Greece, particularly Peloponnesus and Northern Greece (Macedonia). However, like the Adamopoulos, many ex-pat Greeks also made their way to Australia.

Life under the Egyptian nationalists wasn't that bad, at least not yet. Themis's parents were relatively affluent and happy-go-lucky people in Alexandria. Now they were temporarily stuck in a nasty type of purgatory – much of the Greek community did not accept them because they considered them too cosmopolitan. The Australians would not immediately recognize their education and talents because they were Greek.

The Adamopoulos planned to move in with Helen's sister Ketty and her husband Zveto, but the house they were building in Williamstown wasn't ready yet. The only option immediately available to them was to move into one bedroom of a Serbian family's home in St. Albans, a suburb of Melbourne.

The living conditions at the St. Albans home were miserable, barely adequate. The Adamopoulos were all crammed into a tiny room. While there was indoor plumbing in the house, they were not allowed to use it. They had to use an outdoor toilet.

Themis recalls taking baths in a large metal trough filled with hot water boiled on a small stove. He also remembers wearing "gumboots," galoshes, or rubber boots in America, because of the mud he had to trample through every day.

Both Themis and his sister Mary remember that their mother cried every night. The 19th-century living conditions she was forced to endure were almost more than she

could bear. Eleftherios and Helen went from being respected and comfortable in Alexandria to the bottom of the social rung in Australia. The money they brought with them from Egypt was barely enough for them to start over.

Helen's first employment was in the Rosella Jam factory in Richmond, Victoria. Because she was educated and refined in social behavior, the other immigrant women employed at the factory asked her accusingly, "What are you doing here? Why are you taking our jobs?" In harsh tones, they said, "You don't belong here." Helen also frequently had to rebut uncouth and improper innuendoes from her supervisor. Eleftherios was obliged to accept a labor job in the rail yards for a couple of months to support his family.

An incident on a train highlighted this problem. Themis and his mother took the train to Melbourne one day to shop. As was their habit, they conversed in a mixture of French and Greek. An Anglo-Australian riding with them rudely listened to their conversation, saying, "This is Australia. We speak English here." Helen was a bit frightened and very offended. She did not reply to the angry man, but she quickly moved herself and Themis away from the impertinent stranger.

Operating under a false assumption, Eleftherios and Helen had unknowingly prepared Themis for school life in Great Britain, thinking that Australia was a carbon copy of England. The truth was that Australia had its own rugged character.

Themis recalls coming to school in St. Albans on the first day dressed like "Little Lord Fauntleroy," the character made famous in the children's stories by Frances H. Burnett in the late 1800s. Dressed like the son of an English Lord, Themis was the immediate target of the other boys, who had a good laugh at his expense. After a couple of rough days, Helen purchased more suitable attire for Themis.

One advantage of being fully Anglicized was that Themis spoke and wrote the King's English better than most of his Australian classmates. This was not lost on his teachers, and his high marks reflected his language proficiency. Young Themis was also one of the few children with manners. He said things like "Excuse me," "Yes sir," and

"No miss." His instructors loved it. Themis brought gifts for his teachers that his mother had prepared.

From the time he started school in Egypt through his primary and secondary school days in Australia, Themis was an outstanding student. Learning came naturally to him, and he enjoyed studying. Strong academic performance provided a reliable reinforcer for young Themis; his self-esteem was bolstered by his outstanding grades.

Themis's memories of his time in St. Albans were primarily positive. Like any 11-year-old, life was an adventure, and new places and people were fun and exciting. One of the Serbian boys introduced Themis to Australian Rules Football.

Up to this point, 'football' for Themis was soccer. He was amazed and intrigued when he first laid eyes on the oddly egg-shaped ball and was told it was used in a very popular Australian sport. He learned the basics of the game from his Serbian friends. From that moment on, Themis was hooked. Aussie Rules football became his favorite sport.

A few months after they arrived in Australia, Ketty and Zvetos's house was finished. The Adamopoulos now had two rooms to share and indoor plumbing to boot. This house was on Cole Street in Williamstown, Victoria, another Melbourne suburb. While they didn't have their own home yet, at least now Eleftherios, Helen, and the children lived with family in modern conditions.

Helen gave Themis a choice of schools in Williamstown. They were both nearby to where they were living and so equally convenient. One was a Catholic school, and the other was public. At the public school, the kids lined up outside in the morning and were led inside by snare drummers. Themis thought that was just about the coolest thing in the world, so he told his mother that's where he wanted to go. Not long after he enrolled, Themis became a snare drummer and took his turn leading the kids to their opening classes.

Like most of his peers, Themis could not get enough of late 1950s American Rock and Roll. His favorites were artists like Elvis, Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry, and Ricky

Nelson. While television was becoming more popular, it was beyond the means of Themis's parents to provide TV in their home. But they did have a radio, or at least Uncle Zveto had one.

Radio serials were still very popular in the late 50s because television programming was limited. Themis loved to listen to *The Adventures of Superman*, *Biggles*, *Tarzan*, and *Dad and Dave*. The serials began at six o'clock at night and lasted for an hour. Each serial had a ten-to-fifteen-minute segment with a cliffhanger ending. If you wanted to find out what happened to Tarzan, if he escaped whatever jungle terror was chasing him, you had to tune in the next day.

Zveto loved his nephew, but Themis regularly tested his Uncle's patience. Themis snuck into the living room and listened to the radio very low when no one was around. The wood cabinet stereo console was Zveto's pride and joy.

Themis got away with it most of the time, but occasionally Zveto would find Themis hiding under a stool and yank him out of the room. Themis repeated his 'crime' on a nightly basis. No matter how often he got caught, the radio was too tempting.

While Themis's surreptitious radio listening was a problem, there were other tensions between Zveto and the Adamopoulos. Although they shared the same Orthodox values, the two families were very different in temperament.

Zveto was a hard-working laborer at the Dunlop tire factory. Eleftherios had managed to get a job at Monsanto as a chemist. Helen was completing the coursework required at Melbourne University to teach French in public high school. Ketty tried to smooth things over, but the Adamopoulos decided it was better to move on.

The Zagamis, an Italian family, had some rooms to rent, so the Adamopoulos decided to move there temporarily. Their house wasn't far from Ketty and Zveto's home. Eleftherios and Helen were saving for their own home, but they were still a few months away from having enough to purchase their house. Themis was thrilled because the Zagamis had a nice radio, and their son Pino was also about his age. Themis now had a built-in playmate and access to his music and beloved serials.

Living next door to the Zagamis was a family with a son about Themis's age named Con (short for Constantine). Con was a guitar player. Themis had never played the guitar before, but he became intrigued watching Con strum away. Soon Themis was borrowing Con's guitar and experimenting with the instrument. Themis's parents bought him a guitar, and he began taking formal lessons.

In the 1950s (indeed up to the present day), Greeks and Italians, and other Southern Europeans were called "wogs" by many Anglo-Australians. The best comparison to being a "wog" in Australia in the 1950s was an African American in the United States during the same period. While "wogs" were not segregated from Northern Europeans like African Americans were in the American South, people of Greek, Italian and Serbian descent were considered by many to be racially inferior to Anglo-Australians.

Depending on who was using the term, a wog could be a minor slight or a nasty racial epithet. Given the widespread racial prejudice in Australian society at that time, one would expect that the treatment received by children who fit the stereotype of a wog in a school dominated by Anglo-Australian kids could be rough.

Despite his "wogish" name, Themis managed to avoid serious discrimination. Why? His friends gave him nicknames like "Mopo" or "Mopsy," so his wogish last name Adamopoulo was less of a stumbling block. He looked more British than Mediterranean, had light skin and black hair, and spoke proper English. After a while, he developed an Australian accent.

By the time he reached high school, Themis was deliberately distancing himself from his Greek heritage. Most of his friends were Anglo. He saw how the Anglo-Australians, particularly the adults, looked down on the Greeks, Italians, and Serbs. He thought Anglos were superior somehow and wanted to be a part of the dominant social group. He wanted to be favored, not one of the shunned.

Over time, Eleftherios and Helen regained the social status they once had in Egypt, at least in economic terms. Eleftherios moved up the ladder at Monsanto. After completing the required coursework, Helen became a French teacher in a public school.

It wasn't long before she moved to the prestigious Presbyterian Ladies University. Now everyone called her "Madame."

Before Themis started high school, the Adamopoulos bought their first house on Nelson Place in Williamstown. Themis loved his new home. His window looked out at Hobson Bay. He spent hours watching the boats come in and out of the harbor, just as he had once done from his window in Alexandria. Themis also enjoyed walking out to the pier and taking in the sea air.

There was little hint of what was to come for Themis – he was an innocent, shy and unassuming young man finding his way through the maze of adolescence.

Chapter Four

Coming of Age

Williamstown High School on Pasco Street was originally built in the 1870s; it was expanded after World War I and renovated in 1948. When Themí enrolled in 1959, the school reflected the greater Melbourne area community – most of the kids were Anglo-Australian from lower to middle-class households.

The school was divided into four "houses" representing an Australian animal (Koala, Dingo, Possum, and Wombat). These houses were used to group students for sports, musicals, and other intra-school activities. The school's colors were black, yellow, and red and displayed on the uniform sleeve and the cap. Themí was a Wombat.

As a young teenager, Themí loved the Sherlock Holmes books by Arthur Conan Doyle and devoured everything Edgar Allen Poe wrote. He was also a big fan of the novel *On The Beach* by the Australian writer Nevil Shute. *On The Beach* is a post-apocalyptic tale about a U.S. nuclear sub visiting Melbourne after a nuclear holocaust. The book was adapted into a 1959 film starring Gregory Peck, Ava Gardner, Fred Astaire, and Anthony Perkins.

The movie was filmed near Williamstown. The entire community was fascinated by the movie stars. Anthony Perkins was an up-and-coming actor (this was a few years before his big Hitchcock hit *Psycho*). Themí remembers going to the local cafe and watching Perkins pose and preen for an adoring crowd of girls.

The actor Themí most wanted to meet was Gregory Peck, who was then in his movie star prime. Mr. Peck and the other cast members had caravans (trailers) parked near the set. Notebook and pen in hand, Themí knocked on Mr. Peck's door. To his great surprise, Gregory Peck answered.

Unable to muster anything glib, Themis blurted out, "Are you Gregory Peck?" Mr. Peck responded, "Well, kid, do I look like Santa Claus?" After a few seconds of laughter, Mr. Peck signed Themis's autograph book, and Themis went on his way.

While he was not the most popular boy in school, Themis assimilated quite well into the Williamstown High School scene. He became Class Captain, the Aussie equivalent of U.S. Class President, in Form Year Three (U.S. 9th Grade). Themis's best friends were all Anglos, except for Con (Constantine), the Greek, the young man he knew from his younger days living next door to the Zagamis. Despite being a relatively recent immigrant, Themis's identity was now wholly Australian and less and less Greek.

In sharp contrast to his feelings and beliefs only a few short years later, Themis joined the school cadets, the rough equivalent of the ROTC in the United States. Under Mao Tse Tung, China flexed its muscles. Given that Australia was less than twenty years removed from Japanese aggression and World War II, people took the threat to the region from a belligerent Red China seriously. Themis thought becoming a soldier in training was a good option. For one thing, it further integrated him into the ruling social class.

While he stayed in the cadets for a year, Themis was not enthusiastic about the military. As a fifteen and sixteen-year-old, he generally favored the government and its military policies. These were the pre-Vietnam days, and "the war" Australia won was still World War II.

Themis, despite being Greek, was accepted into Anglo circles. He was "Mopo," and his main interest was messing around with his buddies. They did what all Aussie kids of that era did – dodged trains, played games, hung out, and committed harmless pranks.

Girls were the number one topic of discussion. Themis had crushes on several girls, all of them blondes. Like any young teenage boy, he went from crush to crush, but he never even kissed a girl.

In every way, Themis was naturally innocent. While his innocence would be overcome by events in subsequent years, young Themis was an immigrant boy who simply wanted to fit in, to be accepted by his peers.

Williamstown High had school dances. Rock and roll was not allowed; that would be way too risqué. The kids were forced to endure ballroom dancing under the very attentive eyes of faculty and staff. Themis remembers dancing with a few girls at these events, but he was so petrified of saying or doing something wrong that he endured rather than enjoyed the experience.

Eleftherios and Helen were not regular churchgoers. Themis recalls only going to church on rare occasions. When he did go, it was a social event, not a spiritual one. One of Themis's mates, Michael Beacom, was an atheist. The few discussions Themis had at that time about religion or faith were with Michael.

At this tender age, Themis pretty much decided that Christianity (and all other forms of God worship) were nothing but antiquated notions not worthy of his attention. He was not openly hostile towards religion, which would come later, but a belief in the Almighty became irrelevant, especially in a Christian God.

What was not irrelevant to Themis was playing guitar. He and Con continued to practice together. Despite his shyness, Themis experienced his first taste of performance stardom when he and Con played the song *Apache* by The Shadows at a school assembly. The kids loved it, especially the girls. Themis was hooked. Music, rock and roll music, in particular, was definitely for him.

As Themis began to explore music, an exciting opportunity opened for him in his Form 5 (American equivalent of Junior) year. Each house in his school was required to form a choir. The choirs then competed against each other in a school-wide contest. Themis loved to sing, so participating in the choir was a given. When the student choir master Barry Coates had to withdraw due to illness, the school appointed Themis as head of the Wombat house choir.

The Wombat choir had to learn and perform the piece A Real Nice Clambake from the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical Carousel. Needless to say, the choice of song was not popular with the students – Carousel was a 1940s-era Broadway musical. Themis took on the challenge and trained over 100 students to sing A Real Nice Clambake in a competition. The experience further developed Themis's budding musical skills and bolstered his confidence.

Like most young men, Themis wanted to excel at sports. He was coordinated and good-sized, but Themis's poor vision hindered him. However, he did have one shining moment of football glory.

After scoring four goals for his intramural Wombat house team, the coach picked Themis for his school-wide Second Team (the US equivalent of Junior Varsity). Themis got into a Second Team game. The ball was kicked in the air, and all Themis had to do was grab it, and then he would be clear to advance the ball toward the goal. When a stampede of large boys trampled him right before he could catch the ball, the coach removed him from the game.

Themis had no better luck playing Aussie football outside of school. Try as he might, Themis trained and practiced hard, but he never excelled at the sport. After being tossed to the ground like a rag doll and shattering a finger in a local club game, Themis decided that music was a better option for him than athletics.

Eleftherios Adamopoulos was, at heart, a scientist. Although he had many talents, his first love was chemistry. Themis understood from an early age that his father wanted him to follow in his scientific footsteps.

During his Williamstown High years, Eleftherios taught his son in his backyard shed laboratory about reactions and changes to substances – the basics of chemistry. Themis could quote the periodic table and describe basic experiments and the scientific method by sixteen. While Themis enjoyed learning and loved his father, he did not share his father's affection for science. It's not that chemistry or science bored young Themis; they simply did not rouse his intellectual or emotional passion.

Themis and his father did share some hobbies, primarily stamp collecting. They exchanged stamps with other collectors and spent time perusing the Gibbons catalog, determining their collection's worth and choosing new stamps to acquire. They attended monthly meetings of the local Philatelic Society. Over time, Themis and his dad created an outstanding collection that an expert would love.

They also both enjoyed going to the movies. Despite being underage, Themis often snuck into the "adult" seven pm movie, which featured such racy stars as Bridget Bardot. If a Bridget Bardot film was playing, it was a sure thing that Themis and Eleftherios would stay to watch the movie. They were also both fans of Alfred Hitchcock and made a point of seeing all his films as soon as they were released.

But in late 1963, everything changed - for Themis and every other teenager and young adult in Australia, America, and the United Kingdom. The Beatles - John, Paul, George, and Ringo - took the world by storm. In a year, the old rock and roll of Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly, and Chuck Berry was replaced by a different sound coming from the "British Invasion." The world had never seen anything like this before. A new era of popular music had begun.

In early 1964 there were no British-style "longhair" groups in Australia - no one was yet trying to duplicate The Beatles' style and success in Melbourne. Themis and a few of his friends were intent on doing just that. They formed a band and called themselves The Flies (insect names for rock bands were all the craze).

The Flies copied The Beatles look and chose songs that reflected the style of the tunes The Beatles made popular. Almost overnight, The Flies became a sensation in Melbourne and across Australia.

There was one other thing Themis had to do. He looked like a Beatle, and his band sang like the Beatles. He needed a new name to go along with his rock and roll identity. Themistocles Adamopoulos was too wogish of a name for a bass player in a mod rock and roll band. His name needed to sound Liverpool-like. It was not Anglo enough for a pop idol.

Themí Adams was born. For the next two years, he lived the life of a rock star.

Chapter Five

The Rock Star

In December of 1963, Themis graduated high school. His future course was seemingly set. His excellent grades in his final high school year earned Themis a Commonwealth scholarship to the University of Melbourne. In the early 1960s, the University of Melbourne was the elite Victorian university. With a few months on his hands before college began, Themis wanted to hang out at Williamstown beach and enjoy the summer in the sun.

His father, Eleftherios, had a different idea. Instead of lounging on the beach all summer, he asked his son, why not go out, get a job, earn money, and learn discipline? Themis reluctantly agreed to his father's more practical but less enjoyable plan. Besides, he could still hang out at the ocean on his days off and at sunset.

Themis responded to an advertisement for a position selling encyclopedias door to door. He applied and was hired on the spot. Before he could go out and sell, Themis had to complete a two-week training program. A young man named John Thomas was also in this encyclopedia sales training program. Though he was slightly older and more experienced in life than the recent high school graduate Themis, they quickly became friends. As it turned out, they were both guitar players.

The Beatles were taking Australia by storm. No past teenage craze or fad could compare to what was happening. Nobody wanted to talk about anything other than the Fab Four. John and Themis's interest in selling encyclopedias quickly faded because they came up with a far better idea than selling books – why not form a Beatles-type group and take advantage of the mania? So that's exactly what they did.

A friend of John Thomas' named Evan Dunston, a part of Melbourne's theatre scene, was also keen on creating the first mod "longhair" band in Melbourne. Even before the group was fully formed, Evan realized the market potential of such a venture and became their first manager. As they went through the motions of being door-to-door

salesmen, Themis and John kept their ears to the ground. They were looking for a lead singer and a drummer to complete their act.

Ronnie Burns worked as a window display designer during the day, dressing manikins in the latest fashions to attract the passersby into the upscale Meyers department store and singing ballads in Melbourne's Bohemian coffee houses at night. Ronnie was in a band called The G Men with his brother, Frank. The G Men played songs by Cliff Richards and The Shadows.

John Thomas had heard about Ronnie and his talent as a singer. He asked Evan to contact him and audition him. He did. Ronnie came to Evan's apartment with his guitar. Themis and John were also there. They were very impressed with Ronnie. He was good-looking, had a great voice, and could easily sing the Paul McCartney ballads once the band's repertoire was established.

Themis and John convinced Ronnie that The G Men were going nowhere. The Flies concept, however, could easily hit the big time. Ronnie was in. The Flies were complete when they found Hank Wallace, a blonde, good-looking young drummer.

They started regular band practice, mainly at Ronnie's parent's house in Elwood, one of Melbourne's major beach locations. Their songs consisted mainly of Beatles, Rolling Stones, Kinks, Chuck Berry, and Peter and Gordon songs.

Through Evan Dunston, The Flies started getting jobs. They got a steady gig at the George Hotel in St. Kilda, one of Melbourne's well-known hotels. It gave the boys the opportunity to come together as a group, socially and musically. As they got better, their audience grew.

Themis was taken with the whole scene – the music, the attention, the girls. After playing a few weeks at the George, Themis and his bandmates were convinced that they were potentially on to something big. Evan talked to people about recording contracts, tours, and far bigger gigs.

A comedian named Danny also performed at the George Hotel. He was much older than Themí, in his thirties, and had a girlfriend who lived with him. They shared a large house in Fitzroy Street in St. Kilda.

Danny's fiancé was in her thirties and treated the teenage Themí like a younger brother. She realized that Themí was fresh out of school and needed protection. Despite his mother's objections, Themí moved into Danny's house. She was concerned for Themí's safety. At that time, Fitzroy Street in St. Kilda was a seedy, sleazy environment, not fitting for Helen's innocent son. Themí was also much closer to Ronnie's house and the city action than he was in Williamstown.

One night after The Flies did their show at the George Hotel, Themí returned to his room to sleep. He was awakened a few minutes after he nodded off by a drunken man accusing him of having immoral intentions toward his fiancé. Danny was going berserk, punching Themí repeatedly as he cursed him.

Themí was not accustomed to violence. He did not grow up in a violent family and did not get into altercations at school, so he had no self-defense skills. Luckily for Themí, Danny's girlfriend came running into the room and yelled at Danny to stop. She was screaming, "This is an innocent boy!" Danny came to his senses and thankfully realized his paranoia. He got the message. He stopped beating Themí and left the room. Themí was shaken up and quite bruised, but no serious damage was done.

The following day Danny found Themí and profusely apologized for his behavior. In addition to being a comic, Danny was a tough, streetwise guy, the opposite of Themí. He hung out with some nefarious types. Getting all rough and tumble was part of his scene. Themí knew that Danny was usually armed. But, chalking the incident up to a drunken fit of rage, Themí decided to stay. He was friends with Danny and his fiancé, so he thought it was a one-time incident that would not be repeated. He was wrong.

A few days later, Danny did it again. He entered Themí's room in a drunken rage and punched Themí in the face while making wild accusations. This time, Danny pulled a gun on Themí and threatened him with it. As before, the incident ended when Danny's girlfriend came running in screaming at him. Danny came to his senses and backed

down. That was enough for Themis. He moved out immediately and got a room somewhere else.

Themis came home one day in early March 1964 and told his parents that he was deferring his university scholarship for a while to pursue a career as a professional musician. Initially, this pronouncement did not sit well with either Eleftherios or Helen, but they had little choice. Themis was of legal age, and he could live his life as he pleased.

Helen, more than Eleftherios, at least got Themis's main point. The Flies could capitalize on The Beatles' popularity and potentially become stars themselves. Reluctantly, Themis's folks tacitly approved his plans, but they remained highly skeptical. To them, Themis becoming a professional musician was, at best, a fleeting hobby and, at worst, a very threatening distraction from a promising academic career.

Always looking for an opportunity to shine, the boys decided to participate in the annual Moomba Festival. Roughly akin to a large state fair in the United States, the Moomba Festival runs during the Australian Labour Day holiday from Friday to the second Monday in March. In 1964, one contest at the festival was for the musical group that looked and sounded most like The Beatles.

The Flies won the Moomba Beatles contest, which proved their coming-out party. A Melbourne area promoter, Gary Spry, saw them perform at the Moomba Festival. Immediately after that, Spry became The Flies' manager and signed the band to a recording deal with RCA Records. As The Flies moved on to bigger and better things, Evan Dunston was left behind.

Gary was a rich guy, the son of a millionaire. He lived in Toorak, one of Melbourne's most prestigious suburbs. Spry was married to a beautiful woman, part of Melbourne's "old money" aristocracy. She was not amused by all this dust-up over silly rock music, and she wondered why her husband was wasting his time messing around with these young punks. Jeff Joseph was Gary Spry's right-hand man. Later, Joseph became very famous and influential in the Australian music industry.

The Flies were booked as the main attraction at Gary Spry's new "Mod" club, Pinocchios. They were the house band for the next six months. This guaranteed steady money but also exposure to the mainstream music industry.

In mid-1964, The Flies released their first single, Tell Her That. It became a local hit in Melbourne and gained some traction across Australia. Later in 1964, Spry began booking gigs for The Flies in Sydney, Australia's largest city.

Their pioneering long hair look and some of their escapades attracted attention and controversy, further fueling the group's growing popularity. Spry commissioned Carole West to do a publicity shoot of the band getting their long hair washed and styled in the mod look at a fashionable hair salon run by the socialite Lilian Franks. It was a great way to draw attention to the band.

The hairdresser was a young Lynn Randell, who became an international pop star with a huge hit in 1967 in America and Australia called Ciao Baby. She went on tour with the Monkeys and Jimi Hendrix. Her discovery was a direct result of the Flies hair salon photo shoot. Them and Lynn became good friends.

Spry booked The Flies on popular Australian music television programs like Bandstand, Kommotion, and The Go! Show. Them recalls meeting future stars like Olivia Newton-John at these TV events and hanging out with visiting pop stars like Manfred Mann. In their gigs, The Flies played a combination of their own material and songs by The Searchers, The Hollies, and Herman's Hermits, along with some of the more blues-oriented Beatles numbers.

By September of 1964, Them and his fellow Flies members were full-blown Melbourne area and, to a degree, national celebrities. Everywhere they appeared in late 1964 through 1965, they were mobbed. Young girls literally fainted at their concerts.

Even Them's sister, Mary, got caught up in the hysteria. An attractive schoolgirl of fourteen, when The Flies hit it big, she decided to take full advantage of her brother's fame.

Themí was rehearsing a song with Ronnie and John in the lounge room of his parent's home. He heard a commotion in front of the house. When he went outside to see what was up, he saw Mary acting as an auctioneer.

She sold various things which belonged to or were touched by her brother; mostly everyday, small items like his comb, toothbrush, and old shoes. The bidding was vigorous, and Mary was getting abundant shillings from Themí's adoring female teenage fans.

A bit annoyed, Themí mildly chastised his little sister. Mary explained that she was only selling things he no longer wanted or needed, so what was the big deal? She did promise not to auction off Themí's property in the future. She kept her word, sort of...

A few weeks later, Themí awoke on a Saturday morning to the sound of what he thought were people talking in his bedroom. Having played a gig the previous night, Themí was slow to come around. When he did manage to fully open his eyes for a second, he thought he must be dreaming. His bedroom was packed with his teenage fans, boys and girls. They were watching him sleep.

This was another one of Mary's entrepreneurial schemes – she charged admission for the opportunity to watch Themí sleep. She later admitted that she had organized such "watch Themí sleep" tours on several occasions without waking him. He found this escapade far less humorous than Mary selling his excess grooming supplies. But he didn't come down too hard on his sister. He was used to all the attention, although he made Mary promise that she would never try anything like that again.

In January of 1965, Themí was in his family's Williamstown home, ready to go out and see the other major British Invasion rock group of the era, The Rolling Stones. The Stones were playing a large theater, The Palais, in the seaside suburb of St. Kilda.

Before it was time to go to the concert, Gary Spry called him and asked him what he was doing. Themí said that he was headed out the door to go to the Stones concert. Spry told him, "That's great. Bring your bass guitar." Themí asked, "Why?" Gary said,

"Because you're playing at the Stones concert." At the last minute, Gary Spry had been able to book The Flies as the opening act for the Rolling Stones.

Themí flew out the door, hopped in his Morris Minor, and headed straight for St. Kilda. His excitement was fever pitch. Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones were the hottest rock group in the world then, only rivaled in popularity by the Beatles. He would now be able to meet Mick Jagger, Brian Jones, and Bill Wyman, the bass guitarist.

The Flies played regularly, so doing a set on short notice was not a big deal. What was a big deal was opening for two of the most famous rock acts on the planet - Roy Orbison, also extremely popular in early '65, was the other headliner on the bill.

Playing to the sold-out theater filled with hysterical fans was a thrill, but Themí was even more excited when he got to meet the Stones backstage. Themí mustered the courage to approach Bill Wyman, the Stones bass player. He asked Bill to show him the bass riff on their popular hit song, Route 66. Bill condescendingly obliged. Ronnie had even more success. Ronnie was invited to Brian Jones' dressing room, and Jones gave him half the bottle of fragrance that he used. Ronnie treasured it for the next five years.

The highlight of the experience was being in the company of Mick Jagger. Mick was an incredible personality – everything seemed to revolve around him. Like The Beatles, Mick Jagger was a rock superstar, one of the very first who could legitimately claim this title.

The Flies opened for The Stones on some of their Australian shows. After one of the concerts, Themí was invited to a private party in Toorak, where Mick Jagger was hanging out. This was early 1965 before the psychedelic era began, so while people drank at the party, Themí does not recall any drugs being used. Themí noticed that every girl in the house was staring at Mick Jagger.

The Flies' popularity was now at its zenith. They went on to open for more top-flight international acts. Little Millie, whose legal name was Millie Small, came to Melbourne right after The Rolling Stones. She had a huge hit called My Boy Lollipop, but her true claim to fame was being billed as the Blue Beat Girl. This musical genre

had recently emerged from Millie's home island of Jamaica and was the direct precursor to Reggae.

But it wasn't all fun and games. In early 1965, at the height of The Flies' surge of popularity, Themis was walking in a public park near the Yarra River in downtown Melbourne. He was accompanied by a girl named Sharon. They were walking and enjoying the beauty of the park and the cool evening breeze at sunset.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, a group of seven to eight young men appeared and surrounded Themis and his friend. They were a part of gangs called "rockers" - boys who identified with the 1950s-era celebrities and musicians - Elvis Presley, James Dean, Marlon Brando, Buddy Holly, Ricky Nelson, Crash Craddock, etc. They wore their hair slicked back with grease and sported leather jackets.

It was an end of an era for the rockers. The Beatles, the long-haired, bell-bottom trouser mods, were winning the cultural battle. They may have recognized him from The Flies, but they did not say so if they did. Themis was in the wrong place with a young lady at the wrong time. He was the enemy. The rockers made it clear that Themis was trespassing on their turf and that he would pay the price for his audacity.

The thugs shoved Themis around, and then they started to beat him. This was no schoolyard shoving match – the boys hit Themis with all they had. When Themis fell to the ground and tried to cover up and deflect the blows, the boys kicked him mercilessly. Several of these kicks landed squarely on Themis's head. In seconds, Themis was knocked unconscious. The rockers mercilessly continued to kick and beat Themis after he passed out.

Sharon stood her ground and started screaming for help the moment the thugs began beating Themis. Her actions probably saved his life. Themis awoke from an unconscious daze to the sight of medics loading him into an ambulance. He was rushed to the nearest hospital.

While Themis would recover from most of his injuries within a relatively short period, he sustained a macular hemorrhage in his left eye, causing blood clots to

develop. His left eye was now seriously damaged. While he had peripheral vision, his center vision was now blurred and distorted. Reading from that eye was almost impossible.

There was nothing Prof. Crocker, Melbourne's top ophthalmologist at the time, could do to restore his sight. His advice was to take an aspirin daily to prevent the other eye from developing a similar fate. Themí did not heed that advice. His vision wasn't good to begin with. He had severe myopia from his childhood. Now he was left with severe myopia in one eye with only peripheral and distorted vision in the other.

Themí's vision deteriorated over the years, partly due to the aftereffects of this assault. His right eye also developed macular hemorrhage. Had he heeded Prof. Crocker's advice, he might have saved his right eye.

He is considered legally blind in Australia. Themí cannot do things like drive a car, but he can move around without assistance. He reads with big print when in public. Otherwise, he must place printed material pressed to his nose to see the letters.

When Themí sustained these injuries, he was on top of the world. But he did not allow his vision loss to deter him from performing. Themí took his misfortune in stride and was thankful that he wasn't killed or rendered seriously disabled. He recalls that this experience taught him to cope with adversity and deal with setbacks.

Now in the public spotlight for a year, Themí and his friends from The Flies had become more accustomed to the celebrity lifestyle. They were constantly in demand. Gary Spry kept them very busy playing live events or recording songs in the studio.

Mid-1965 proved to be the high-water mark for The Flies. In May of 1965, The Flies went on a national tour of Australia, visiting Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia, and Tasmania. They recorded and released their second single, *Doing the Mod*. It was a hit in Melbourne and Sydney and became their signature song.

An incident at a performance in Adelaide highlighted the group's popularity. They were booked at a busy shopping emporium. The stage was makeshift at best. Themí, Ronnie, John, and Hank noticed how unstable the platform was and the lack of

adequate security. Hundreds of teenagers were crammed into a small space that could only comfortably accommodate half their number. The band took their places and began playing their first song.

The group finished their set, and the fans went nuts. The boys went into their temporary backstage dressing room. Suddenly they could see the walls bend and fall in. The girls pulled the portable dressing room to the ground, and it collapsed. The band was miraculously unhurt by their rough tumble to the floor. They got up, looked around, and ran for safety.

By late 1965, other bands, like The Easybeats, The Twilights, featuring Glenn Sharrock, were gaining prominence. The Twilights eventually became The Little River Band. Themis understood that groups like The Twilights were more technically refined and had superior musical talent to The Flies.

The Flies were divided musically, although the boys in the band were all great friends. Ronnie did not see his future as the lead singer of The Flies. He liked ballads. Ronnie was the epitome of a pop star – good-looking with a smooth, crooner-type voice. Themis was more of a blues rocker. He loved the blues and the harder-edged rock beats that were just becoming popular in 1965.

Ronnie Burns departed and became a solo act. He soon became a national icon. He was one of the most popular singers in Australia from the late-1960s through the early-1970s. Later in life, Ronnie and his wife Maggie Stewart founded the Appin Hall Children's Foundation, a refuge in Tasmania for war orphans and children with chronic illnesses. In 2013, Ronnie was awarded the Member of the Order of Australia with the citation, "For significant service to the community."

Truth be told, while he deferred his entry into Melbourne University, Themis always intended on eventually pursuing his studies. When the Flies broke up, Themis returned to University in March 1966. While he continued to play guitar and bass guitar in impromptu rock bands for several more years, he never again sought or achieved any public fame as a musician.

Chapter Six

Melbourne University

When Themí re-enrolled at the University of Melbourne in March of 1966, he changed his field of studies from the Faculty of Commerce to the Faculty of Arts. Try as he might, because Themí genuinely wished to please his father, he could not muster any enthusiasm for pursuing chemistry or business studies. He was, however, fascinated by the world of ideas.

Because of a two-year absence from studies, Themí's first-year grades suffered. However, his marks were stellar the following year, and he enrolled in an Honors program in the Department of Political Science, majoring in Political Studies with a minor in Philosophy.

Ironically, in his first academic year at Melbourne University, a Jesuit priest-lecturer of Philosophy at the University introduced Themí to Plato, specifically to Plato's classic work, *The Republic*. Young Themí was fascinated by Plato's theory concerning the nature of reality, that material or visible reality was only an opaque reflection or shadow of a higher and unchanging truth. Intimidated yet fascinated by the collar, Themí's prejudice lessened as Father Francis' skills as a lecturer and profound philosophical knowledge became obvious.

Early in the semester, Themí went with a friend to meet Father Francis in his office one-on-one after class. He asked his professor who he considered the three most influential personalities in all human history. Father Francis replied without hesitation, "Shakespeare, Socrates, and Jesus Christ." Themí politely smiled and left. He pondered this statement for some time.

While he continued to learn from Father Francis' lectures, Themí could not get past a respected academic putting Jesus in the same great man category as Socrates. He wondered how such a bright and talented lecturer could be deceived by religious propaganda.

In Themis's mind, placing Jesus on the same level as Socrates was strange. "Oh well," he reasoned, "Father Francis is a priest, after all." He even thought it inappropriate to place Shakespeare in that category. Aristotle, the father of logic and empiricism, would have been included in Themis's list alongside Socrates.

These were turbulent times. The Vietnam War raged, and students were demonstrating in Australia and America. The counterculture was blooming, and second-wave feminism was creating a new sense of womanhood.

Themis was a neo-Marxist, which was part of the New Left. The New Left was an umbrella term that described novel approaches to Marxism that integrated contemporary concepts into the original economic philosophy. These included Freudian Psychoanalysis, Vienna Circle's Critical Theory, and strands of Existentialism.

The catalyst that brought together the New Left's various factions was their opposition to the Vietnam War. Australia supported the American intervention in Vietnam by sending its own troops.

Themis was called up for military service. Even though he had served in the military school cadets for two years, he was exempted because of his flat feet and poor vision. So, while he was not personally at risk of dying in a Southeast Asian jungle, he saw the Vietnam War through the lens of neo-Marxism – the Capitalists were exploiting the working class and sending them to the killing fields of Southeast Asia to further their ideological ends and in the process kill much of the rural peasant population of Vietnam.

Australia's involvement in Vietnam was partly based on the Domino Theory, a famous Cold War principle held by the West. It postulated that if one nation fell under Communism (e.g., Vietnam), the neighboring states would also be in line to become Communist. Since Australia was geographically close to Vietnam, the Domino Theory policymakers, also compounded by racial fears of the imminent "Yellow Peril," justified their intervention in Vietnam as critical in the attempt to halt the spread of Communism in the region.

Unlike many of his New Left peers, such as Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) or anarchists, Themis never advocated violence to achieve political ends. He adopted the philosophical tenants of Marxism and rejected Capitalism but was drawn to a Mahatma Gandhi style of passive resistance. For example, when he and other students occupied the Union Building at the University of Melbourne or marched in Moratoria throughout the streets of Melbourne in protest against Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War, Themis never participated in any violent action.

Once he immersed himself into the worldview of dialectical materialism, there was no turning back. Themis had found the philosophical bedrock he'd been searching for. Not only did Marx's social justice concepts speak to Themis's conscience, Marx's rejection of God, particularly the idea of a Christian God, also rang true to him. For the neo-Marxists, Christianity and Capitalism went hand in hand, particularly in the conservative Liberal Party of Australia and the Republican Party of the U.S.A.

The idea that God was an invented notion by the bourgeoisie to enslave the proletariat by the promise of an afterlife became a reasonable principle for Themis the atheist. He could fully express and justify his atheist views using the Marxist linguistic and conceptual framework. Themis adopted whole cloth the concept that theism was a form of "opiate for the masses," in Marx's words.

Whenever Themis encountered Christians during this period of his life, he was polite unless pressed. More than once, a street preacher or an avid Christian cornered him. Themis's reply was basically, "God does not exist. You believe in a myth." There was no room for agnosticism in Themis's worldview – the notion that God existed was simply irrelevant.

Themis also viewed faith as a weakness, a reliance on the external rather than the internal. This was more or less a Nietzschean perspective. The believer's faith was simply a psychological shield that eased the proletariat, at least to some degree, from the burdens, suffering, and fears of life placed on them by their Capitalist oppressors. Therefore, the church, priests, and bishops were counter-revolutionary instruments feeding the Capitalist agenda.

In October 1966, United States President Lyndon Johnson visited Australia. The Prime Minister of Australia, Harold Holt, and his Liberal Party strongly supported the Vietnam War and LBJ. Holt's famous line, "All the way with LBJ," made him anathema to the anti-Vietnam War student movement, who viewed President Johnson as an American imperialist, an inhumane villain, worthy only of total condemnation.

While opinion polls showed that most Australians were still in favor of their country's involvement in the Vietnam War in late 1966, support for the war was rapidly dissolving. Everywhere LBJ went – Sydney, Canberra, and Melbourne – protesters turned out in force to greet him.

Themis was among the protestors who lined Johnson's parade route through Parkville on Grattan Street adjacent to Melbourne University. While Themis did not hurl anything at the passing U.S. President's black limousine, some of his fellow students covered the car and the security detail walking with it in red and green paint while others pelted the car with eggs. The police did not have sufficient numbers to charge into the crowd or look for the perpetrators. Even if they did, Themis and his fellow student radicals would have quickly managed to disappear into the maze of Carlton streets and houses they knew so well.

Themis and his cohorts expected a revolution. Like the SDS leader Tom Hayden in America, the Australian student New Left was convinced that eventually the revolution would be achieved.

But there were many factions - Trotskyists, Maoists, Leninists, Yippies, and Anarchists. All did not agree on tactics. It was clear, however, that there could be no revolution unless the ordinary Australian working class was involved. The worker strike would be the great weapon. For one summer break, Themis joined the railway yards in Spencer Street in Melbourne as a casual worker. He began agitating to provoke railway workers to strike. He failed.

Although he made his voice heard as an anti-war protestor, Themis did not neglect his studies. On the contrary, he was an honors-level student after his first year. He was awarded the A.J. Aird Memorial Award for his results in the Public

Administration unit and was appointed a teaching assistant (tutor) in that unit. Themis saw his future as an academic – a professor (lecturer) at a major university and, at the same time, a spokesman for the proletariat and the immigrant community.

University wasn't all work and political activism. Themis played part-time in a rock group called The Secrets for fun and extra cash. He even became a dance instructor, teaching university students to move to the latest beats.

By 1967 and 1968, the music Themis and his friends listened to was changing. The Beatles were still popular, but now a new "acid" type rock was all the rage. Cream, The Jimi Hendrix Experience, Jim Morrison and The Doors, and Jefferson Airplane became extremely popular with the "hippie generation." Themis was not yet a hippie, but his musical tastes and inclinations led him towards this new psychedelic or acid rock music.

In 1968, Themis stood for the prestigious Presidency of the Melbourne University Political Science Society. Past Presidents of the Society had become Cabinet Ministers and high government and academic officials. Essentially, the Presidency was a ticket to success, so it was a highly sought-after post.

Themis was the overwhelming favorite to win the election, but he had a problem. He refused to run on anything but a purely neo-Marxist platform. His friends and academic advisors counseled him to temper his hard line without abandoning his core principles. He was told that he was virtually assured of election to the Presidency if he moderated his views to a degree. But Themis Adams refused to compromise his principles. He held steadfast to his Marxist platform and narrowly lost the election.

Despite this setback, young Themis was well on his way to becoming Professor Adams and living the life of a well-respected academic.

Then something happened that changed everything. His life was dramatically altered. What was once important now had to take a back seat to something new.

Themis fell in love.

Chapter Seven

Wendy

From time to time, as he moved through the hallways of the Old Arts Building at Melbourne University, Themis passed by a strikingly beautiful young lady. She looked as if she had stepped straight out of the pages of Vogue, with straight blonde hair and blue eyes, fair skin, and always wearing the most up-to-date fashions.

She could have been a perfect model for the Mary Quant mod look. In some ways, she resembled a young Brigitte Bardot. When Themis and this mystery beauty made eye contact, they often exchanged smiles but never spoke. His unexpressed attraction continued.

Themis made discrete inquiries about her. Her name was Wendy Louise Saunders, and she studied psychology in the Faculty of Arts. She attended classes in some of the same buildings as Themis.

He thought pursuing Wendy was probably pointless because there was too much competition. Since they had some mutual friends, Themis and Wendy ran into each other every now and then in the local University hangout pub. They were part of a group and no more than casual acquaintances.

In November of 1967, Themis was in the middle of his end-of-year exams in the Department of Political Science. He was pursuing an Honors Program, and the standards were higher. The Australian summer break was approaching, but before he could think about what to do with some free time, Themis had to buckle down and work hard.

Still living at his parent's home in Melbourne's Toorak, Themis was studying in his room when the phone rang. He picked up the phone. A young lady on the other end of the line asked to speak to him. To his astonishment, it was the striking Wendy. The unapproachable and elusive dream girl was calling him!

He wondered how she got his phone number. Why was she calling him? Did she need a ride somewhere, a favor, or borrow a book? After gathering himself as best as possible, Themis managed to eke out a few words.

To his great surprise, Wendy asked him out on a post-exam date. Without thinking, Themis stumbled and said, "My exams aren't over yet, but they will be soon. I would love to go out on a celebration date with you." His head was whirling. The most beautiful girl in the world had just asked him out. He felt like he had just won the lottery.

On the day of their date, they went for coffee and then to the park. They talked for hours. Themis was smitten like never before. Wendy returned his affections to the same degree. From then on, Themis and Wendy saw each other regularly and talked on the phone daily for hours.

His feelings for Wendy were something new. Wendy captured his heart completely. They were informally "engaged" a few weeks after their first date. He did not want to lose her, and she did not want to lose him.

Themis's mother, Helen, wasn't too excited. She was concerned about her son's relationship, primarily because Wendy was Anglo-Saxon and Themis was Greek. Helen worried that a culture clash between them may arise in the future with issues relating to traditional family values and different dietary habits. Helen was also troubled about Wendy's provocative dress style – extreme miniskirts and see-through dresses.

Wendy wasn't an Orthodox Christian. Like Themis, Wendy was an atheist. While Themis didn't care about Wendy's lack of Orthodox religious affiliation at the time, Helen thought it might be more critical in the future. Helen was advised by one of her Greek friends that even if they ended up married, it would be okay if things didn't work out between them because they would not be married in the Orthodox Church. Matrimonial union outside the Orthodox Church would not be recognized as sacramental nor binding.

But such things were of no interest to Themis nor Wendy. They were both stunningly good-looking, educated, extremely modern, and the envy of their peers.

In late 1968, Themis and Wendy exchanged matrimonial vows at the Melbourne University chapel. More than anything else, they took this step to appease their families. Since neither Themis nor Wendy believed in God, their union had no religious significance beyond Australian law and an affirming statement about their love for each other.

It would be very significant for Themis's subsequent ecclesiastical life that this event did not occur within the auspices of any of the three ancient Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, or Coptic). As such, it could not be recognized as a sacramental bond.

The young couple moved into a small apartment in Parkville, within walking distance of the university, and started to build a future. Wendy was employed by the Education Department of Victoria, teaching at Williamstown Girls Secondary School.

Williamstown is a historical area of Melbourne. It was also the suburb where Themis lived and attended primary and secondary school during his later childhood and teenage years. He made it his obligation to drive to Williamstown several times a week in the afternoon to offer Wendy a comfortable trip to Parkville. Themis also worked as a teacher with the Department of Education at Maribyrnong High School. But it was part-time to supplement Wendy's salary.

As their life progressed, Themis was fully occupied with his university studies and could not give Wendy his full attention. Wendy resented this and did not seem to understand that this was a natural, normal, yet temporary development in their relationship.

In early 1970, at the instigation of one of Themis's friends, Ian, a dedicated political anarchist, Wendy began experimenting with LSD and marijuana. Her appearance changed from an elegant fashion model to a "drop-out" hippie chick. Themis was okay with these changes, although he chose to limit his pot smoking or consumption of other drugs at that time – especially hard drugs. His goal was to complete his university studies. For that, he needed a clear and focused mind.

Wendy increasingly immersed herself in the counter-culture milieu. This was the era of free love – the Woodstock music festival and the flower power children of Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco. This was the period of second-wave feminism, with Australia's Germaine Greer as one of its chief spokeswomen. Traditional concepts of family and marriage were under attack from many quarters. Social commentators who preached the benefits of the new "if it feels good, do it" relativist morality eschewed marriage as an outmoded bourgeois concept - a shackling contract, a misogynist institution.

In December 1970, Themis worked very hard on his master's thesis. Wendy was often bored, so she told Themis she was going out with her girlfriends for the evening. Themis didn't mind – he needed to study and didn't want Wendy sitting around watching him with his nose stuck in a book.

As a twenty-one-year-old girl, having a social life was very important to Wendy. Themis's top priority was his education and his promising university career. He had already been appointed as a Tutor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Melbourne. It was clear that he was heading to an elite high-income academic post.

Themis's dedication to study and research was an investment that would eventually guarantee the son of immigrants a comfortable and respectable professional life. He would reap the rewards of his many years of sacrificial study. His parents and his sister Mary were so proud of him. But that was soon to stop.

To economize, Themis and Wendy moved to a one-room unit on Elgin Street. It was very close to the University, but it was tiny. Next door lived a long-haired artist, Neil, who was working for a major Melbourne Television network, preparing and designing props. Wendy occasionally went next door and shared a joint with him and his girlfriend. She also had a keen interest in art.

Themis and Wendy's apartment was becoming a real problem - it was simply too cramped. One of Wendy's girlfriends offered the opportunity for Themis and Wendy to

take occupancy of her rented house on MacArthur Place, which she and her partner were vacating.

The home was a classic, sizeable double-story, Victorian terrace house with a backyard. The kitchen and large living room, and another bedroom were located downstairs. The upstairs of the home featured a master bedroom with balcony, a bathroom, and an office. The balcony view was of park greenery, Victorian architecture, and vintage terrace houses.

Wendy and Themis immediately rented the home. They even sublet the room downstairs to ease their rent expense. The room was taken by Mark Gillespie, an architecture student who would become a famous composer-musician in Australia in the mid-1970s. Their house was a huge upgrade over their previous one-room unit. From Themis's perspective, things were looking up.

One evening, after a long day at the University, Themis came home. Wendy told him she was about to go to a rock concert in Carlton with one of her girlfriends. Themis ate and settled down to his studies. He was researching the political socialization of Greek immigrant children - how they picked up and internalized their political knowledge within a migrant environment.

Time flew, and it was now very late. Wendy had not returned home. Themis was concerned because Wendy had a habit of letting him know her schedule. He walked out of his house and started asking around. He was told that Wendy was in an apartment on Elgin Street, next door to the one-room unit they had previously rented.

Themis walked to the residence. It was Neil's place, which he occupied with his girlfriend. He knocked on the door. Neil opened the door. He was stoned. Themis walked inside and saw that Wendy was sitting comfortably on an oversized couch, looking disheveled and wasted.

They were alone. Neil's girlfriend was not around. It didn't take long for Themis to reach the inevitable conclusion. He was totally heartbroken, shocked, angry, and felt betrayed. Another man might have physically attacked Neil, but Themis was not an

aggressive person. He said nothing, gathered up Wendy, and prepared to take her back home. She did not resist.

As she reached the door, she looked around and gave Neil a warm look. Themí did not know what to do. He loved Wendy. But now Wendy's affection lay elsewhere. It was clear to him that for many months, while he was studying, she was secretly going to Neil.

Not long after this incident, Wendy told Themí that she was moving in with Neil and their relationship was over. However, she explained that she would stay a little longer while Neil organized for his girlfriend's permanent departure. Within a few weeks, she took her clothes and her few belongings and moved out.

Themí was not prepared for what came next. He became extremely depressed. His life plan, to become a university lecturer and enjoy the benefits of that life with his beautiful Wendy, was destroyed in the blink of an eye. His career meant nothing now. Had he possessed a suicidal personality, he might have committed suicide, but he was not that type of person. Deep despair lay on him like a blanket of doom. He sought solace among his friends, especially his high school pal, Michael Beacom, who expressed sympathy and sensitivity, but it could not fill the void.

He had now canceled his master's program at the university and was becoming increasingly bitter. Themí had to come to terms with reality. Wendy was gone. Accept it and move on. But it was hard to escape this emotional nightmare.

One day he jumped into his Holden Brougham car and sped away. It began to rain. Then the showers became a cloudburst. Barely able to see through his tears, Themí's attention was on anything but the road.

His mind circled back to memories from the past two years – his parents, his mother's warnings, his feelings of failure, his shattered dreams. He had a beautiful, intelligent, and engaging partner yet chose to neglect her for his studies. Yet now, his studies meant nothing. Then the "if only's" started. "If only I had been a better

companion. If only I had listened to my mother. If only I had not moved to the Elgin Street room, she would not have met Neil. If only, if only I had..."

Themí passed St. Kilda Junction and was driving along the highway. He was in a daze. His thoughts were interrupted when he came out of his stupor long enough to realize that there would be a dangerous situation unless he slowed down quickly.

Traveling at top speed, he immediately slammed on the brakes. The road was wet. His sedan spun uncontrollably and entirely around. He narrowly missed tumbling over or crashing.

As the rain came down, Themí shook like a leaf in his car. He could have easily died on the highway and perhaps killed or injured others. But he was unsure if anything, even life and death, mattered anymore. Everything he had been living for was gone.

He was angry, hurt, confused, and betrayed, but mostly empty. He felt as if life had no meaning, purpose, hope, or salvation.

Chapter Eight

Themí The Hippie

After Wendy left, Themí continued to live in the MacArthur Place house. His interest in life fell to the point where he cared about little. He avoided seeing his parents and his sister Mary. He washed infrequently, let his beard grow, lost weight, and didn't care about his health. He started to look more like a dropout than the fashionably mod Themí Adams. He did not clean his home regularly, so stacks of dishes, piles of laundry, and junk littered every room.

As 1971 unfolded and summer turned to autumn, Themí wasn't getting any better. On the contrary, his downhill slide continued.

Hippie types, male and female, started showing up at his door. At first, there were four main counter-culture interlopers – Sagittarius, Tibetan Tantric devotee Richard, Ziggy, and the always interesting Preacher Barry. They asked if they could "crash at Themí's pad" for a while. Themí welcomed the company as a distraction from his depression.

He began using marijuana daily, and quickly fell into the tune-in, turn-on, and dropout culture. A year earlier, Themí was emotionally fulfilled and a rising star in the academic world. Now, he was stuck in a hippie-style rut – hanging out with people who, no matter how nice they were, had no ambition in life other than to get high and listen to rock music on the stereo. The decline was stunning.

Themí's parents were concerned and occasionally visited his derelict home, which must have appeared to them as a horror house. They brought traditional hot Greek food for their disoriented and lost son. This was a shattering blow for them, a tragedy.

This was not why they immigrated to Australia. Maybe they should have chosen Brazil rather than Australia as their future destination. Perhaps Rio de Janeiro, with its

Portuguese and European cultural influences, would have been a more suitable, conservative environment for Themis's young adult years. Should they have followed the example of most of their relatives and settled in Greece? There, Themis would have grown up in a vastly different, far more traditional, conservative Orthodox Christian environment than in laissez-faire Australia.

Themis felt embarrassment and shame when they visited - a painful feeling of letting them down. They had sacrificed so much to provide for him and Mary. Now it seemed that their efforts, at least for him, had failed. But Themis saw no way forward. All he could do was find solace in being the head of an urban hippie commune.

Sagittarius and his fellow stoners had a completely different upbringing than Themis. They were not academics or political activists. Instead, they were unapologetic social dropouts.

Ziggy was the poster boy for the hippie movement. Tibetan Tantric Richard looked like a scraggly Dalai Lama. Preacher Barry was once an evangelical pastor who somehow lost his faith in Jesus in pursuit of a more worldly life. Now adrift in a fog of pot-induced confusion, he was still hilarious and, at times, quite wise. Themis enjoyed his company and guitar playing.

Many years later, when Themis was in a far better state of mind and living a totally different life, he ran into Pastor Barry. He lived in poor conditions in a run-down, crowded backpackers' boarding house in Bondi Beach, near Sydney. Time had not affected him. He was still living in a 1970's hippie bubble. His name was no longer Barry; it was now "Beautiful."

Over time, Themis's house became a crash pad for any hippie in the area. One or two were heroin addicts, but Themis would not permit them to shoot up in his pad. They went to heroin-addict houses in Carlton and returned to MacArthur Place to crash.

Themis never used hard drugs. His pad was a marijuana-hashish hangout. It was shared and readily available, though not in large quantities. The getting high ritual was on twenty-four seven. The local police noticed this and knocked on the door a few

times, but strangely, no search ensued. If the authorities had searched Themis home, they would not have found large quantities of weed. Marijuana and hashish, by and large, were not sold at the MacArthur Place pad. It was consumed.

Whenever he slowed down enough to think, Themis depression re-emerged. Life became all about the moment because if it was not about a constant party, then Themis was tossed back into the pit, hopeless and living a life without real meaning.

Mary felt a pressing need to check in with her brother. She was now a thriving primary school teacher leading a well-adjusted and orderly life. Mary was worried about Themis because she suspected he was headed down a sad and dangerous path to nowhere. After watching her brother succeed in the music world and then at the university, she could not accept that this was his intended destiny.

On a Saturday, Mary stopped by Themis home. The usual hippie crowd was absent because they had gone to an outdoor music festival. At first, Marys loud knocks on the door went unanswered. She thought her brother might not be home until she heard some stumbling inside the house. A few seconds later, Themis opened the door. He was happy to see her and let her in.

Themis looked terrible. Mary thought he must have slept in his clothes – not just last night but perhaps for several nights. The house was a mess. Trash and various items were strewn everywhere. Pieces of hardened stale bread lay on the kitchen table. No one was feeding the cat. Mary instinctively knew that something had to be done. She could not leave her beloved brother in such a state of misery.

Although it had been months since they split up, Themis tie to Wendy remained strong. Rationally, he knew that the bond he believed they once shared was over, but that provided no comfort. His biggest issue was not the emotional pain he felt, but the emptiness. His hippie friends were a consolation, but the void he was experiencing was crushing. It seemed that nothing could fill that void.

Mary noticed some pot on a table and asked him how much he was using. Themis tried to minimize the impact that marijuana was having on his life, but Mary knew better.

She told Themis that he needed some help and that she was taking him to see their parents.

Themis did not want to face his parents in his condition. He admitted to Mary that the emptiness he was feeling was overwhelming. Then Mary told him it was time to act and not look back. Mary helped Themis straighten up his house, then took him out to eat.

Mary's visit and display of love and concern proved to be a turning point in Themis's life, or at least the start of a turning point. He tossed out many of his hippie boarders, and his house was no longer party central. While he did not quit smoking marijuana, he knew that his current lifestyle was not the answer to his dilemma. But what was the solution?

Themis decided that the time had come for him to explore an inner revolution rather than a political revolution. Several people Themis admired, most notably John Lennon and George Harrison of The Beatles, talked about their personal spiritual journeys in India.

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, an Indian guru, became The Beatles' personal spiritual advisor. Although The Beatles disassociated themselves with the Maharishi in June of 1968, calling their time spent with him a "public mistake," the Maharishi went on to found thousands of Transcendental Meditation centers worldwide.

Parallel to the impact of Eastern religion on Western youth at that time, Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert led the psychedelic counter-culture revolution. Leary and Alpert were ex-Harvard psychology professors. While at Harvard, they ran experiments using LSD as a consciousness exploration aide and therapeutic tool.

Their 1962 "Good Friday Experiment," in conjunction with Harvard Divinity School's theology students, was a controlled study to research the link between LSD and spiritual experience. The basic idea was that LSD could be used to expand the patient's mind, thus leading to psychological and religious insights which would be inaccessible through living the routines of middle-class life in America. They also

promoted Eastern Spirituality, especially Hinduism, Buddhism, and Yoga, as venues for an altered spiritual consciousness.

During that time, Richard Alpert (also known as Baba Ram Dass) came to Melbourne. Themí went to see him. He had read parts of his book and was intrigued by his theories. Themí considered the possibility of expanding his consciousness by using LSD.

Christianity wasn't on Themí's radar. He believed that the story of Jesus Christ was irrelevant to him. That said, certain things happened that gave Themí pause. They foreshadowed what was to come next for him, but at the time, he had no idea of the more profound significance of these seemingly trivial events.

Seeking religious truths, Themí's journey started with an exploration of Hinduism. He attended Hindu worship at a Hari Krishna temple in St. Kilda. One day, the service focused on the Hindu god Krishna. After the service, Themí stood in line with the other faithful. They were waiting their turn to drink the "sacred" water pooled at the base of the statue of Krishna.

Themí looked at the people drinking the water from the statue's base. This was a total turn-off. Pieces of paint had peeled off from the figure. These and other particles were floating in the water. He refused to drink the water. In any event, that was the end of Themí's Hari Krishna experiment.

In the early 1970s, many popular rock groups – Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, and others – wore crosses around their necks as jewelry and decoration. They ascribed no religious significance to the crosses they wore. They were merely ornaments.

Sometimes, Themí also wore a cross. He simply thought it was cool. But that would provide an interesting catalyst in his spiritual quest in a situation he experienced at the Divine Light Mission center in Carlton.

After rejecting the Hare Krishna movement, Themí explored another form of Hinduism. He attended meditation sessions at the Divine Light Mission (DLM) Ashram in Carlton. The DLM was founded in 1960 by a prominent guru in northern India. A decade

later, this Mission had gained popularity in the West and was headed by the guru's teenage son, Prem Rawat. Hundreds of ashrams were established in the West, including Australia.

It was alleged that Rawat was the Avatar, the manifestation of the Divine and Savior. During one meditation session, Rawat's disciple and guru walked around and tapped certain people on the forehead, saying, "Receive spiritual knowledge."

Themis was sitting and quietly meditating. That particular day he was wearing a cross. The guru stopped and spoke to him. The guru asked Themis to remove his cross. Themis responded, "Why? It's just a cross. What's the big deal?" The guru again insisted that he remove the cross. Themis said he wouldn't remove it, and the guru asked Themis to leave.

As he walked outside, Themis wondered why the guru was bothered with the cross. Surely the Avatar's disciple could not feel threatened or disturbed by a cross. Or could he? If so, then why was he intimidated? Themis also wondered why he acted in such a defiant manner. Why was he defending the cross? Was it the guru's tone or demeanor that caused his reaction? Was it his own Greek temperament? No, it was something else, but he could not figure out what it was. However, through that episode, the seeds of Christianity were slowly being laid.

Regardless of the context, Themis did not like being told what to do and when to do it. He decided it was just that simple; he would wear whatever ornaments he pleased, and if the guru or anyone else didn't like it, it was too bad.

As the year ended, Themis was less depressed and more engaged with people and the world, but he was still searching. Wendy was no longer the answer. She was no longer the issue. There was something much bigger in the air, a spiritual quest. But how? Experiment more with cannabis? Learn how to meditate? Go to India or Tibet?

His hunger for meaning was growing. What he was searching for was elusive, yet part of him was convinced the answer was all around him, and he was just too blind to see it.

While he still lived in the house at MacArthur Place, Themis started spending considerable time in Eltham. Situated on the outskirts of Melbourne, Eltham was largely undeveloped, quasi-rural. In the 1930s, the Montsarat Eltham artists' colony was built. By 1971, Eltham had become a hippie and a counter-culture safe zone.

Themis had a friend, Duncan, who lived in Eltham. Duncan was a frequent visitor to MacArthur Place and had encouraged Themis to visit and stay in Eltham as a means of rest, meditation, and clearing the mind. Themis agreed. At the time, he did not realize how significant that decision would be.



Eleftherios and Helen Adamopoulos in Melbourne



Helen Adamopoulo with Themis and Mary



Eleftherios and Helen Adamopoulo in Egypt



Young Themis in Egypt



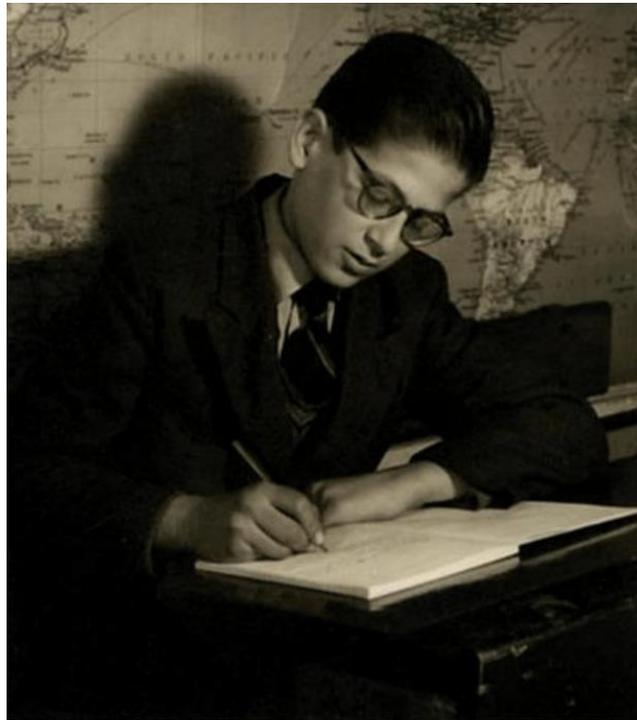
Themis and Mary just before they left Alexandria



Themí and Mary with Santa – 1950s



Them and Mary – High School Years



Williamstown High School
1959

Them in High School



An early photo of The Flies - 1964



The Flies circa late 1964





The Flies – Early Publicity Photo



The Flies live 1965



On Tour - 1965

the fabulous

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* • **THE CRICKETTS**



The Boys At The Bar



The Flies Publicity Photo - 1965



Themi Posing With His Car – 1965



Themi Adams performing with The Flies on Aussie Garage 1964



Themi 1965



Themi, Mary and friends - late 1960s



Ronnie Burns, Themis and Hank Willis – early 2000s

Chapter Nine

Epiphany: Heaven and Hell

Located on the northeastern fringes of the greater metropolitan area, Eltham was Melbourne's original Bohemian colony. The Montsalvat artist community, with its Gothic castle, was a tourist attraction. Themí's friend Duncan rented a small house on a large tract of land at the end of a rural gravel road in Eltham.

The Eltham connection provided Themí with some relief from depression and uncertainty. Attracted by the non-conformist lifestyle, he was a frequent visitor to Duncan's house. Through Duncan, various avant-garde social doors opened to him. He mingled with poets, musicians, and celebrated artists. There was a counterculture "hippie commune" feel about the house and its occupants, with which Themí was now familiar. It was an antidote for his insecurity.

In the seclusion of Eltham, one possessed the ability to do what one wanted, away from prying eyes. In between the sounds of Led Zeppelin, the Rolling Stones, and Pink Floyd, the partaking of marijuana or hashish was almost obligatory. Some were also experimenting with mushrooms or LSD.

Through the influence of the teachings of the ex-Harvard Professor but now psychedelic guru Timothy Leary, and his associate Richard Alpert, Themí experimented with LSD occasionally. In the early seventies, in the "turn on, tune in, drop out" counterculture, this was regarded as one of the symbols of rebellion, a mark of freedom from the perceived conformist social shackles and a step forward towards a spiritually enlightened utopia. Themí's neo-Marxist socio-political youth narrative was partly complemented or supplanted by the search for a Huxleyan neo-consciousness nirvana.

Themí was still a neo-Marxist atheist. He could not believe in an Omnipotent, All-Powerful Judeo-Christian God. He considered this irrational. Yet, because of the Beatles' experimentation and experience in India and a growing flirtation with Hinduism

and Buddhism, he, and others within the alternative youth culture, were now beginning to explore spirituality.

Up to this point, he had not yet found anything to displace or complement his secular worldview. But he was searching. With the new trend towards the metaphysical, with its proclamation of the attainment of cosmic consciousness, Themí was intrigued and started to realize that perhaps there was more to understanding the universe and the human condition than historical materialism and empirical logic.

Over a few months, beginning in October of 1971, a series of mystical visions opened Themí's doors of perception to the existence of a spiritual universe.

A dozen or so people were sitting in Duncan's main room. They were arranged in a large circle, smoking marijuana. Mellow rock music played on the stereo. No one said anything to Themí as he walked in and sat down. Themí joined in the smoking rituals. He closed his eyes and drifted away. After a while, when the effects of the marijuana had diminished and recalling how beautiful and temperate the evening was, Themí stood up and went outside. His mind was now clear. He needed some fresh air.

He walked about fifty yards from the house near a stand of trees. He looked up at the vast array of stars. The moon was nearly full and glowing. He walked around slowly and quietly. He was alone; everyone else was in the house. Themí felt at peace. He could hear the crickets in the background and music playing softly in the distance.

Suddenly, Themí experienced a vision of Light. It would be one of several he underwent over the ensuing few months. With the passing of time, the precise remembrance, description, and nature of some of these mystical events and their sequence would become somewhat blurry. But some were more striking, and he remembers them in more exact terms. But with all his visions, their fundamental message, impact, and life-changing consequences remain with him.

On that night in Eltham, Themí was overwhelmed by a bright yellow Light. It exuded royalty and majesty. As it swirled around at its center, it got darker at the edges, almost brown. The Light blazed right in front of him, shining. The contrast could not

have been more striking - the boundary between Light and darkness was stark; the Light simply ended as if an unseen barrier was stopping it.

Themi was in awe, in a state of rapture. Despite its intense yellow or golden brightness, he looked right into it without discomfort. The character of the Light never changed; it swirled and swirled as Themi watched it. He heard nothing – there were no voices in his vision, though there was a noetic understanding of its Divine nature.

The stars became brighter, and the trees had a glow around them. Themi did not feel alone or isolated but rather part of a great plan, a grand design, a part of God's creation. He sensed that the meaning of life was being revealed to him. He felt a verification that there is a metaphysical world, a spiritual realm that most do not know exists. The vision, at its essence, evoked a haunting and unspoken sense of Christianity, of Christ.

Unaware of time, Themi had no idea if he had been outside for five minutes or five hours. Reflexively, he found himself genuflecting on one knee before the Light. Unconscious childhood memories of St. Constantine's night vision came to mind. With a surety he had never had before about anything, Themi knew that he had experienced a Christian vision. Had he witnessed what Orthodox Christianity describes as the Transfiguration Light?

At some point, he stood up. He started to walk along the gravel road outside his friend's property. After taking a few steps down the road, he was caught up in another vision. This one was completely different.

It was a horror scene of fear, reminiscent of an Edgar Allan Poe-style anxiety attack. He was no longer seeing and feeling the presence of the Divine. He had tumbled into a macabre hell, a place of terror. Unlike his initial vision, he was now in darkness, with no possibility of Light.

Snakes and scorpions of all kinds surrounded him and started to threaten him. He experienced indescribable moments of terror, a fear that would instantly transform one's black hair into white. There lurked an awareness of shocking brutality and

merciless torment. He panicked that he might pass on and be trapped and lost in Hades irretrievably.

Thankfully, the terrible drama ceased. His hair was still brown. He had just experienced heaven and hell. This was beyond his terms of logic.

It would take time for Themis to fully digest and comprehend the significance and consequences of what he had experienced. That night in Eltham was part of his evolving Christianisation process. It was the beginning of his mystical encounters with the Divine. It was one of several “Road to Damascus” moments that transformed an unbeliever, an atheist, into a servant of Jesus Christ.

Not long after the Eltham experience, Themis was at a double-story Victorian terraced home in North Carlton, a student and immigrant inner suburb of Melbourne. It was, more or less, a hippie commune. He was visiting a recent acquaintance, a young woman, Rena, whose parents were from Malta.

In the front room, Justin, a resident or visitor to the house, sat playing his guitar. He was a blues guitarist, and Themis was impressed by his skill. At some point during the visit, Themis went out into the backyard.

Suddenly everything changed. Was he still in the backyard, or was he in the living room? He could not recall. It seemed that he had entered a Salvador Dalí surrealistic space. Unlike his Eltham experience, Themis was now directly involved and not just an observer. He had become the center point of this new mystical occurrence.

He felt something like electrical energy surging through his body. He became rigidly stiff, like a piece of wood, and was unable to move. Pure Light and Energy streamed through his body. It wasn't painful - on the contrary, it was ecstatic.

Themis was filled with incredible amazement, awe, and surrender. He felt as if he was stretched out lying on a wooden crucifix, in a cruciform position. It was manifestly clear that this experience was also a Christian revelation. Without any words spoken, he instinctively knew Christ was beckoning him; the Lord was near. How could he refuse the call?

Another mystical experience that Themí vividly recalls occurred at his rented Carlton terraced house in MacArthur Place. After his first vision at Eltham, Themí cleaned his home and removed the riff-raff element who had squatted there after his downhill slide began months earlier.

Themí accepted two new residents at Macarthur Place, Jeff and Nicole, a husband and wife. They were kind and debutantes in the counterculture movement. Coming to Macarthur Place was apparently their initiation into the “hippie dropout” way of life.

One afternoon, Themí walked downstairs. Jeff and Nicole were sitting in the enclosure under the stairs. As he looked at them, Jeff and Nicole were transformed into beautiful, magnified versions of themselves. It was as if they had been converted into the Blessed Joseph and the Virgin Mary. The surroundings became pastoral, with sheep grazing on an open green field. A feeling of sublime serenity, love, and security overwhelmed Themí.

In late 1971, Themí knew little about Jesus, only bits and pieces. He had never read the Old or New Testament. He had no idea what Christians believed beyond the most basic tenets. All around him, people were talking about Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Marcuse, Chairman Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Malcolm X, Buddhism, and Hinduism, but hardly anyone was talking about Jesus.

To Karl Marx, Christianity was a tool the bourgeoisie used to dominate the proletariat – nothing more, nothing less. Nietzsche, a very influential philosopher among the young of the nineteen sixties and seventies, postulated that the Age of Enlightenment and the Age of Reason had dismissed the necessity for the existence of God. Thus, Nietzsche would famously proclaim that “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed Him.” In Australia, Neo-Marxists identified Anglicanism, the dominant Christian denomination, in association with colonialism and racism.

By accepting the call of Christ, Themí now made a very difficult about-face. It took courage. Why? He knew what to expect. He knew he would be shunned by his contemporaries. He realized he would lose most of his current friends and social circle.

He foresaw that the counterculture elites would reject him and even consider him a counter revolutionary.

He understood that he would need to start his life anew. New circles of friends. New habits. New behavior. No more cannabis. No more hashish. No more LSD. It is important to note that Themis cautions against using LSD unless taken in a proper, legal, scientific, medically supervised environment or for medical research due to its potentially dangerous effects on some people.

Themis would no longer ascribe to moral anarchy; instead, he embraced Christian moral and ethical principles. No more following each fashion of the day, but the firm and unchanging teachings of Jesus. No more unhealthy food – he became a vegetarian. No longer would he use the name, Themis Adams. He returned to his original birth name – Themistocles / Themis Adamopoulos.

While he remained empathetic to the suffering of the common man at the hands of elites, Themis now realized that some 1800 years before Karl Marx's writings on the exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class, Jesus had already sternly warned and condemned the non-philanthropic rich, while on the other hand bestowing blessings upon the poor with the hope of eternal life.

Themis had been, in every sense of the word, reborn. His past life as a heartbreaker rock star, a blind follower of fashion, and a secular philosopher rapidly faded. He was now a "Follower of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

He understood that he had been selfish; he was a sinner, especially in his loose living during his rock star days. Now, with a sense of shame and guilt for the past, it was time to repent.

Although he had been baptized as a Greek Orthodox, Themis had no idea if he was an Orthodox Christian, an Anglican, a Catholic, or whatever – he did not know much about the theological differences between denominations. He was sure God was speaking to him, and he needed to listen.

In early 1972, Themis resigned as a teaching assistant at Melbourne University. While his metamorphosis was just beginning, Themis Adams, the Marxist, atheist, and one-time rock star, became Themistocles Adamopoulos, the Christian.

Chapter Ten

Born From Above

The more he read the Scriptures, prayed, and contemplated his mystical experiences, Themí realized that he had led a worldly and sinful life before his conversion. Now his only desire was to be a servant of Christ. That meant the way he lived had to radically change.

This transformation was anything but easy. Themí experienced far more agony than ecstasy as he struggled to define his place in an unfamiliar world and forge a new identity and relationships.

He stopped listening to rock music, his former passion. He tossed all his favorite albums in the trash, believing the entire musical genre was demonic. He cut his hair short and wore deliberately square, uncool clothes. Themí stayed away from his old friends – indeed, he had few friends for a time.

Starting with Matthew and ending with John, Themí read and reread all the Gospels. He analyzed and underlined passages, searching for little signs and veiled meanings. He desperately needed to understand who this God was who had reached out and touched him.

Themí was "born from above," as Jesus described in John chapter three. Contrary to popular Protestant theology, this famous passage is best translated as "born from above" rather than being "born again." The text refers to the necessity of a convert to Christianity to completely re-orient oneself, discard their old lifestyle, and fully adopt the faith.

He was childlike in many ways, almost helpless. Themí questioned everything worldly and materialistic as he discovered Gospel spirituality and its way of thinking, talking, and behaving. He was thoroughly convinced of the reality of Christ by his visions. Now, he had to conform his life to the teachings and example of Christ.

Themi's early spiritual journey was focused on repentance. He felt compelled to seek forgiveness for the mistakes he had made. His rock star ego had to be removed from his consciousness. He would need to cultivate the virtues of chastity and humility, which had been missing in his atheistic days.

A sense of holy shame dominated his personality. He was not despondent because he knew that through the Blood of Christ his sins had been forgiven, but he was determined to show remorse and to erase from his thoughts and behavior anything that did not glorify Jesus.

Themi moved back home. Eleftherios and Helen were thrilled with this decision, at least in one respect – if Themi was home, they could keep a closer eye on him. Themi had gone from a successful and emotionally satisfied man with his sights on a Ph.D. and a blooming academic career to a full-blown pot-smoking hippie to a very intense, committed Christian. This was an extraordinary journey. The most troubling aspect of this metamorphosis was its speed – all these changes had occurred in less than three years.

After moving home, Themi refused to have any contact with women beyond what was absolutely required. This was one aspect of his repentance. The same went for money.

At first, Themi was so rigorous that Mary, or his mother, would have to go with him if he needed to do some shopping because he would not touch money, believing that you either serve God or Mammon. Where once he had immersed himself in philosophy and listened to rock music for hours on end, now Themi voraciously absorbed Scripture.

Eleftherios and Helen's concern for their son intensified when Themi told them he was dropping out of university entirely. Why? Because, according to Themi, the university was a prestigious institution, a place of privilege. Humility obliged him to step down from prestige, privilege, and elitism. He was also concerned about the secular nature of their education. Themi wanted to learn the lessons the Lord would have him know, and those things were not taught by secular professors.

He took the Gospel promise literally to "sell all you got, give it to the poor and come and follow me, and I will show you the Kingdom of Heaven." This was reinforced by the Biblical declaration that "money is the root of all kinds of evil." Themis sold his belongings, including his car, and secretly gave the money to the poor or to the Church. Helen and Eleftherios were shocked. Themis responded that, like St. Francis, he was becoming a beggar to align himself and his values with Jesus.

Eleftherios was concerned enough about Themis's state of mind to insist he see a psychiatrist. His son's behavior was strange, entirely out of character. It was as if Themis had the same body and name, but he was not the same person. It seemed he was possessed by an external force.

Themis could have said no and refused to see the psychiatrist, but he chose to honor his father's request. He wanted to show his dad that he was beyond psychiatric analysis and the realms of measurement by any secular philosophy. Themis knew he had not lost his mind. If anything, he believed he was discovering his true self. But he also understood that his transformation was too rapid. His parents needed time to absorb it.

Predictably, the psychiatrist was not religious and highly skeptical of Themis's claims that he had recently had a Divine encounter. Themis was sure that he was okay, but convincing others of the genuineness of his religious experiences was a nearly impossible task. To a psychiatrist, such statements are the hallmark of mental disorder, not enlightenment.

The psychiatrist suggested to Eleftherios that he have Themis committed to properly deal with his delusions and instability. Themis was unsure if his father would seriously consider taking such an extreme action.

During those days, it was common to administer "shock therapy." This treatment involved the administration of an electrically induced convulsion which was thought to be therapeutic. Unfortunately, in the 1970s, the machines used for this procedure were not always safe. Some patients were rendered cognitively impaired. Some suffered

memory loss. With repeated shocks, some were even induced into a vegetative state of mind - awake but without any awareness.

Around the time of The Flies, the lead singer of one of Australia's top pop groups, the Easybeats, was Stevie Wright. In 1976, addicted to heroin and alcohol, he sought psychiatric therapy. As a result of the treatment at Sydney's Chelmsford Private Hospital, which included Electrico-Convulsive Therapy (shock therapy), Wright, as well as other patients who underwent similar treatment at the same hospital, suffered brain damage and lifelong side effects.

Had Themis father consented to the psychiatrist's treatment regimen, perhaps that would have been Themis fate. Thankfully, Eleftherios declined to institutionalize his son, saying only, "We'll take care of him." Eleftherios probably saved his son from a dismal future with that decision. Retrospectively, Themis understood that to be an act of God's merciful intervention.

Through her work as an educator, Helen had become good friends with the wife of the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane, Dr. Felix Arnott. Mrs. Arnott asked Themis to go and see the Archbishop in Brisbane. She believed that he might be able to guide Themis Christian walk. For his mother's sake, he tacitly agreed to do so, but he had another plan that he wanted to pursue before seriously considering meeting with the Archbishop.

Themis was determined, in imitation of Jesus, to experience a life of poverty firsthand. He wanted to understand why Jesus had such an affinity for the poor. Perhaps if he knew more about what it was like to be poor, he reasoned, he might better understand God's purpose for his life. So Themis packed a few belongings and headed to Brisbane on the train. Brisbane is over 1,000 miles north of Melbourne, so this was no casual trip.

When he arrived, Themis went to the Brisbane YMCA and booked himself into the cheapest room. He explored the city square, talked to the homeless, visited the impoverished sections of Brisbane, and immersed himself among the marginalized.

At that time, Themis had a romanticized notion of beggars, a concept of them being the "holy poor." He was also influenced by the social justice elements of his former Marxist philosophy - this aspect of his old persona was now becoming integrated with his Christian beliefs.

After a couple of weeks, Themis thought he had learned a few lessons. He did not feel that the people he encountered were undeserving of mercy, but he quickly understood that most of the men he met lived on the street due to alcoholism or drug abuse. Few beggars he met were working-class people down on their luck or homeless because someone directly abused them.

Themis stopped using drugs after his visions, and he never drank. He assumed that if he continued to live in voluntary poverty, his would be a "holy poverty," poverty dedicated to Christ.

He realized the beggars he met in the parks and streets of Brisbane were not his teachers as he thought they might be. He did not wish to emulate them, but he did want to help them. He understood now that the homeless needed to learn the Divine instructions, which, if followed, lead to a blessed, productive, and fulfilled life. While, in theory, selling all your possessions and helping the poor was perhaps the most Christ-like thing someone could do, Themis learned there was more to it in practice.

In no way did Themis's Brisbane experience diminish his desire to live in poverty or serve the poor. What it did do was open his eyes to certain realities. Themis needed to understand more, gain experience, follow his path, and obey Christ. Simply falling in with alcoholics was not how he believed God wanted him to spend his days. Instead, his role should be to help them.

He had promised to meet with the Anglican Archbishop. After all, in his mother's mind, that was the purported aim of his trip to Brisbane. Themis thought, "The Archbishop probably lives in a mansion. What do I have in common with mansions?" Themis was sure that he would be rejected or be led to a Christian path that excluded poverty. So, he chose not to go and see him, despite his mother's request.

After a few weeks or so in Brisbane, Themis decided to walk back to Melbourne, to be a true beggar for the Lord. This was quite the challenge, given that Melbourne is 1,675 kilometers south of Brisbane. But Themis believed this was what God wanted him to do, so he set out on a pilgrimage-type journey with only the money in his pocket and the surety that God was with him and provided for him.

Themis wanted to experience a homeless life and beg for his upkeep. He would work for his maintenance when begging was not realistic. He planned to hitchhike and stay in cheap hotels when he could not sleep outside.

His first stop was Surfer's Paradise, now called the Gold Coast, sixty miles south of Brisbane. When Themis arrived exhausted, he decided to look up some of his parents' Greek friends. They welcomed him and offered food and even a bed to rest and stay overnight. He accepted. The journey was still young, he reasoned. He could practice homelessness as his journey continued.

Byron Bay, across the Queensland state border, was Themis's next stop. While in Byron Bay, he met a young man on a pier who offered him a job as a deckhand on a small tuna boat. Themis took him up on the job offer, and he stayed on board for a short time.

During one of his hitchhikes, the car's driver turned out to be the owner and captain of a large fishing boat at Ulladulla. Themis accepted the offer of a job on the boat. He had his own sleeping bunk, daily food, and a small salary.

During fishing expeditions out in the open ocean, Themis was placed in a basket on the side of the boat with a fishing line. As the boat turned on its side, Themis was immersed in the ocean up to his belly. He pulled in the line and tossed live tuna onto the deck. The job was backbreaking and exhausting, but Themis enjoyed the experience and earned much-needed cash.

When Themis finally arrived home, Eleftherios and Helen were greatly relieved. Themis had been out of touch for weeks, so they wondered where their son was and how he was doing. While Themis had lost some weight, he was clearly in good health. They

were even more relieved when Themis told them that it was time he became a productive member of society. He had settled on becoming a humble schoolteacher rather than a university lecturer.

His parents encouraged their son to pursue a normal life. Find a wife, preferably a Greek girl. Marry, and settle down to Christian family life. After all, his bond to Wendy had not been sacramental nor within the Orthodox Church, as Helen reminded her son. He was canonically eligible to seek marriage. Themis didn't dismiss the possibility of marriage out of hand. He gave it considerable thought. But the Gospel's call to celibacy was very appealing to him.

Helen suggested that Themis take her young hairdresser, Sophia, out on a date. She had already spoken to Sophia about her son, noting his higher education and past achievements. Sophia was interested and agreed. A date was organized.

Themis took Sophia to a movie. When the lights went out, he started feeling guilty, that he was somehow sinning. At the interval, he politely told Sophia that he was not feeling well, and took her back home, never to see her again. When Themis's mother met with Sophia a few days later, she explained to Helen that her son was better suited to become a monk.

It was also time for Themis to begin worshipping with fellow Christians. Probing and sampling what they had to offer, Themis searched for a church home.

He started with the Methodists and then the Presbyterians. He found much to like in the Protestant denominations, especially their knowledge and emphasis on Holy Scripture. In the mid-1970s, there were no Evangelical Pentecostal churches in Melbourne – that movement would come later.

Themis had some issues with the mainstream Protestants. They seemed unreceptive to the mystery, to the more undefinable, mystical aspects of the Christian faith. While Themis admired the Protestants' scriptural orientation, family values, devotion, and decency, he wanted something more - a church in touch with the ancient teachings of the Apostles, a church unafraid to think of God in terms of Mystery and

Holiness. It seemed that Protestantism had no room for the ineffable, the transcendent. No call to poverty and celibacy. Where were the monks? The monasteries? The mystical experience? The union with God?

Eventually, Themis felt called to stay faithful to his baptism and remain in the Greek Orthodox Church. His decision to be part of the Orthodox Church was initially based on the belief that God had placed him in the Orthodox faith by birth and that He did so for a reason. In time, Themis defended his allegiance to the Orthodox Church due to its apostolic antiquity, the unbroken apostolic succession for its priesthood, and its emphasis on mystical experience and the notion of sacrament.

For various reasons, Themis's early years in the Greek Orthodox church in Melbourne were difficult.

In the mid-seventies, the church in Melbourne was mainly composed of first-generation Greek immigrants with little or no knowledge of English. The clergy reflected this social and demographic pattern. Themis, at that stage, had very little knowledge of Greek, so communication wasn't easy.

Church services were all exclusively celebrated in the Hellenistic Greek of the first century A.D. The clergy, with few exceptions, were not university graduates or trained theologians. At most, they had completed ecclesiastical schools in Greece.

Due to these limitations, any profound theological or philosophical discussion concerning issues of faith wasn't possible. There were no youth fellowships where Themis could share his faith and experiences with persons of his age group who had grown up in Australia. Themis had to rely on books, especially Timothy Ware's celebrated and popular publication, "The Orthodox Church."

His "born from above" zeal for the Gospel and Christ made Themis suspicious in the eyes of many in the clergy. He was not entirely welcomed in all parishes. Some of the clergy even criticized him as a heretic.

Eventually, Themis found one or two helpful priests. In addition, a layperson, who eventually joined the clergy, Athanasios Tryantafyllou, mentored Themis in his early

years in Orthodoxy. He was among the first to see Themis's potential for the Church. In Themis's eyes, Athanasius was a true man of God who loved the Holy Scriptures.

Athanasius formed Bible Study groups in some Greek Orthodox parishes. The studies were conducted in Greek. He invited Themis to accompany him as his assistant and to provide a ten-minute English study for the youth. This led to the first formation of English-speaking youth fellowships in Melbourne, beginning in Brunswick, and led to the establishment of other youth fellowships in Melbourne.

With the arrival of a young Greek theologian in Melbourne from Greece, Stelios Menis, Themis finally had access to a fully qualified Orthodox theologian who could speak English and discuss theology easily. A second theologian, Father Ilias Kentrotis, born in Australia and studied in Greece, also returned to Australia. Father Kentrotis consolidated the work which Themis had initiated as a new believer.

In 1976, a young, highly educated theologian, poet, and master of the Greek language was appointed by the Holy Synod of Constantinople as the Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia, the late Archbishop Stylianos (Harkianakis). Themis would find further sympathy and encouragement to study theology from the Archbishop.

Despite the initial challenges, Themis was determined to remain in the Orthodox Church. His commitment to Christ was not negotiable, no matter the suspicions or the misunderstandings. However, he was hesitant to explain the exact nature of his conversion, visions, and mystical experiences. Even his parents and Mary remained in the dark concerning the precise details of Themis's Divine encounters.

While he was certain of their authenticity, Themis was sure others would be skeptical. He did not want people, especially his family, the clergy, or the faithful, to think that he had lost his grip on reality. One visit to a religiously hostile psychiatrist provided more than enough incentive for Themis to be cautious about his spiritual disclosures.

It took many years for Themis to discuss his visions and to discern what God wanted him to do with his life. However, these early years as a Christian, between 1972 to 1976, set the foundation for what was to come.

Chapter Eleven

A Fool For Christ

“We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.”

First Corinthians, Chapter Four, Verse Ten

Themí believes that the period between his visions and his decision to pursue a religious life was when he was the “holiest.” Since he was not yet part of any religious order, which would later provide the context and discipline required to fully develop, Themí was uninhibited in his enthusiasm; he was “on fire” for the Lord. His Christian spirit was not yet tempered by wisdom, so he made many mistakes, but only with the best intentions.

In his previous life, Themí had not seriously considered becoming a public school teacher. He knew that he had the skill set to be a good instructor at any level, but his sights were firmly set on becoming a university professor.

But when he returned to Melbourne after his experience in Brisbane and his long walk home, Themí engaged in prayerful self-assessment. He was sure that being a beggar was not what God wanted him to do. He was also equally convinced that pursuing a Ph.D. in a secular subject in the Australian university system's worldly, predominantly atheist environment was not the right path.

Convinced that God had led him to get a degree in education for a reason, Themí thought that teaching might be the place for him. His agenda was simple – find a suitable position in a Christian school so that he could pass on both his worldly knowledge and instill the Gospel in young minds.

Themis thought that becoming a teacher in a Catholic High School might be his best option, so he applied for an instructor's position at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic High School in Melbourne. After reviewing his resume, the principal at St. Thomas Aquinas, Mr. McElroy, brought Themis in for an interview.

On paper, Mr. Themis Adamopoulos was an outstanding candidate for a teaching position at St. Thomas Aquinas. Anyone evaluating Themis's curriculum vitae would conclude what Mr. McElroy did; Themis Adamopoulos should finish his graduate degree and become a professor. Without question, Themis was overqualified.

Rather than consider it fortunate for St. Thomas Aquinas to acquire a teacher of Themis's caliber, Mr. McElroy was skeptical. Why was this brilliant and talented young man seeking a position at his school? What was wrong with him?

During the job interview, Mr. McElroy asked Themis, "Why do you want to teach at St. Thomas Aquinas?" Themis replied he wanted to "Preach the Gospel at every opportunity." No matter what Mr. McElroy asked him, Themis worked into the response that he was excited to teach at the school because it allowed him to share the Good News of Jesus with the students.

Looking for clarification, Mr. McElroy asked, "What do you mean by the comment, 'I want to use Biblical principals in the classroom at every opportunity?'"

Themis answered, saying that he meant exactly what he said. He wanted to "Use the Bible as a teaching tool whenever possible."

Mr. McElroy had heard enough. He put Themis's application back in a file folder and placed it on the side of his desk. "Mr. Adamopoulos. Your background is superb, and I judge you to be an outstanding young man who is very well-qualified. That said, I'm afraid that I cannot offer you a teaching position here."

Themis was astonished. "Why not?" he asked.

"Because we already have a Chaplain."

Themis replied that he was not applying for a Chaplain's position.

Taking a deep breath, Mr. McElroy responded, "I cannot have John the Baptist teaching school here. The complaints would be endless. Many parents would not stand for it, and neither would the students."

Themis responded, "I thought this was a Catholic school?"

McElroy said that St. Thomas was a Catholic school with proper catechism instruction. He ended the job interview by saying, "Mr. Adamopoulos, the culture here is not well suited to your proposed teaching style."

As he walked out the door, Themis was baffled. Although he was not a Roman Catholic, reviewing his answers to Mr. McElroy's questions, he could not find where anything he said could be considered offensive to the Catholic Church. Was St. Thomas Aquinas a Christ-centered school or not? Why would they object to an instructor who wanted to use the Gospel as a teaching tool?

Upon reflection, Themis realized that his enthusiasm for the Gospel had frightened or put off Mr. McElroy. Although he did not fully understand this, he accepted it. He wondered if all Catholic High School principals would judge him the same way, as being too outspoken, too enthusiastic about the faith. He decided not to apply to any other Catholic schools but to seek a public high school position.

During his interview for a position at the Richmond Technical School, Themis mentioned his religious views but did not emphasize them. The principal at Richmond was in a different position than Mr. McElroy. Richmond was about the last place any instructor wanted to teach.

Almost every student at Richmond came from a lower socio-economic background and a troubled home. They were not Anglo-Australian; they were Italian, Greek, or Aborigine. On paper, Themis Adamopoulos looked like the best candidate for an instructor to walk through Richmond's doors in a very long time, so Themis was hired on the spot.

During his first few weeks at Richmond, Themis made a few friends, but he also ruffled feathers. Aware that teaching Christianity or any other religion in public school was against the law, Themis tried to circumvent the restriction.

In his English class, Themis taught grammar by having students break down sentences taken from the Bible. From a purely instructional point of view, the students

did not suffer because tens of thousands of passages in the Bible can be used to diagram a sentence or demonstrate the parts of speech. However, Themí's use of the Bible as a teaching tool drew immediate protest from the students and some parents. Soon his principal admonished him to stop discussing or using the Bible in the classroom.

The teachers at Richmond took turns as monitors in the schoolyard. During the lunch break, the kids assembled in a common area to hang out and talk. One day Themí was monitoring the schoolyard when one of his students, a brash teenager named Dominic, approached him.

Themí and Dominic had a history. Dominic was not a fan of Themí's teaching style; he was not a fan of anyone's teaching style. Dominic was a wanna-be tough guy. He had a small entourage that followed him around – immature boys who thought Dominic was the coolest kid in the world. Themí was not impressed by Dominic's bluster, and he and Dominic had verbally sparred in class.

Like many other boys at the school, Dominic was on the verge of getting into serious trouble. Themí was genuinely concerned for the boy. He wanted Dominic and his friends to know that there was another, better way to live your life, far more conducive to happiness. The trouble was there seemed to be no way for Themí to share this message with Dominic and his gang because they were completely uninterested in anything he had to say.

Dominic walked up to Themí in the yard and brashly dropped a sandwich wrapper on the ground right in front of him. There was a rule against littering on the compound, and the monitoring teachers were charged with enforcing it.

Themí asked Dominic to pick up the wrapper.

Dominic responded, "Go to hell."

Politely, Themí asked Dominic again, "Toss the wrapper in the rubbish can."

Dominic replied, "Why don't I toss you in the rubbish can!"

When Themis again asked Dominic to pick up the trash, Dominic responded by striking Themis in the face with his fist. Stunned for a second, Themis rubbed his jaw and again asked politely, "Dominic, please pick up the wrapper." Dominic hit Themis again, this time harder.

The second blow did more damage, but Themis quickly came around and repeated his request that Dominic put the sandwich wrapper in the rubbish can. Incensed, Dominic put all his strength into it and hit Themis once more. This time, the force of the blow brought Themis to his knees. A small crowd of kids had now gathered to watch the spectacle.

Themis knelt for a second, then stood up and pointed at his other cheek, which Dominic had not yet struck. Dominic wound up, ready to deliver yet another blow, when he dropped to his knees and started to cry.

Themis put his hand on Dominic's shoulder and said, "It's alright, Dominic. Everything will be okay."

Dominic blurted out between his sobs, "I'm sorry. I don't know why I did that. I ...". Now the tears were really flowing. Dominic could not speak; he could only sit there and cry.

At that moment, a couple of teachers burst through the ring of kids surrounding Themis and Dominic. They demanded to know what was going on.

"Nothing," Themis said, "Dominic and I were just having a discussion."

One of the teachers then blurted out, "That's not what happened. Dominic hit you. Your face is all red, Mr. Adamopoulos." Themis had accomplished his mission, and he would not allow these teachers to spoil all his progress.

"No one hit me, but Dominic and I need to talk." Themis, his arm still around Dominic, led the boy away from the crowd. The teachers could do nothing other than report the incident to the principal.

Not surprisingly, Themis quickly learned that Dominic's home life was less than stellar. He talked to Dominic like a man and told him that violence was not an answer to life problems. Because he had taken Dominic's blows and not backed down or retaliated, he had earned the boy's respect.

Unfortunately, this incident and several others resulted in Themis being removed from the classroom. The Melbourne School System did not have sufficient grounds to fire him, but they put Themis in an administrative, "paper pushing" role where they could keep him away from the students and out of trouble.

Themis was transferred from school to school, tucked away in the office, and not allowed to teach. Of course, this was not what Themis wanted to do. He wanted to share the Gospel with the kids, to be a light to them.

Archbishop Stylanios took an interest in young Themis. The Archbishop was a relatively young man himself, in his mid-30s. He could see that Themis's passion for Christ was extraordinary, if undisciplined. The Archbishop encouraged Themis to study theology and pursue a religious life, possibly as a priest.

At the time, there was no Orthodox University in Australia, so Themis chose to study Theology at the Roman Catholic Seminary of Corpus Christi in Clayton. He did not have any ambitions to become a priest, but becoming a monk was something Themis was now seriously considering.

After his foray into teaching, Themis was unsure if he was meant to be in the world. Perhaps a cloistered life of prayer with other monks was the best way Themis could serve God. He left that option open as he started his religious education at Corpus Christi.

Chapter Twelve

Themi The Theologian

In 1978, Themi enrolled in the Roman Catholic Seminary of Corpus Christi in Clayton. This marked the beginning of an extraordinary odyssey that would take him across two continents to pursue theological and Biblical studies in such illustrious institutions as Harvard, Princeton, and Brown.

Corpus Christi was a golden opportunity for Themi. Most of his classmates were on track to become Roman Catholic priests. He participated in in-depth discussions and daily dialogues with like-minded peers. This was answered prayer. Themi was no longer a "lone wolf," or someone people shunned because of his religious zeal.

He understood that there were differences between Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, but Themi also knew that there were many points of agreement. Archbishop Stylianos told him, half in jest, just to "cover your ears" whenever the Corpus Christi lecturers discussed the infallibility of the Bishop of Rome.

Themi's classmates and professors knew that he was aligned with the Orthodox Church and possibly intended to live his life as a monk, so no one attempted to convert him to Roman Catholicism or disrespected his Orthodox background. He was struck by their open-minded attitude and culture; they were comfortable criticizing their ecclesiastical tradition whenever they felt necessary. Themi's thirst for theological knowledge grew exponentially in this progressive environment.

Applying his intellect to studying theology, which literally means "the study of God," was joyously fulfilling. Themi listened attentively to Catholic intellectuals' content, manner, and methodology. He did not agree with everything that was said, particularly issues about the post-Enlightenment trend to "demythologize" the Holy Scripture (to this day, he remains conservative on the subject of the inspiration and infallibility of the

Bible). Themis absorbed all the information he could and found common ground, collegial affinity, and mutual respect with students and staff.

After graduating from Corpus Christi in 1981 with a bachelor's degree in Theology, Themis met with Archbishop Stylianos. They discussed Themis's ecclesiastical future and the needs of the Orthodox Church in Australia. Themis was intent on pursuing a calling in Christian academia. It was now time for him to study theology in an Orthodox environment. But where?

In the early 1980s, Australia had no Orthodox theological institutions. The Archbishop advised Themis not to pursue theological studies in Greece but to continue his academic journey in the United States.

"Because of your background, you will feel more at home in America than in Greece," the Archbishop explained. Themis agreed. He had grown up on a steady diet of American television, movies, music, and popular culture. Undoubtedly, some of the best higher education opportunities existed in the States, especially with Ivy League universities.

Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts, initially rejected Themis's application to enroll in its Master of Theological Studies program. Why the rejection? Themis had all the academic requirements for admission (and then some), so that was not the problem.

Since becoming a Christian, Themis has vowed never to lie and be transparent, no matter the cost. Virtue to him is not limited to large matters but to small and seemingly insignificant ones as well. While it was not required in his application, for transparency, Themis disclosed that he had used illegal substances such as marijuana, hashish, and LSD in his pre-Christian youth. This disclosure sank his candidacy.

Saddened and distraught by his Holy Cross rejection, Themis devised an alternative plan. He applied to St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Crestwood, New York. This seminary is run by the Orthodox Church in America (formerly Russian Orthodoxy). Since its inception in 1938, this seminary has featured

some of the greatest minds of modern Orthodox Theology among its faculty, such as George Florovsky, Alexander Schmemmann, and John Meyendorff.

Since it was not required, Themis was advised by those close to him not to disclose all aspects of his past on his St. Vladimir's application. They argued, why allow your dream to collapse? However, again led by his uncompromising allegiance to honesty and transparency, he was committed to completing this application without censorship. It was more important for him to please God than man, even if his dream would not be fulfilled.

What Themis needed was an ecclesiastical "referee." Since St. Vladimir's Seminary was a Slavic institution, Themis wanted to enlist the support of the Bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Australia. The Bishop lived in a monastery in the rural Victorian town of Elaine, a considerable distance from Melbourne.

Themis was familiar with the monastery. He was a frequent pilgrim and had even stayed there for a few days. With his friend Andrea, they drove to St. Sabba's Monastery with all the necessary application papers.

The Bishop was relatively new to Australia and unfamiliar with American or Australian counterculture. He wanted to help Themis but felt it was best for the reputation of his young diocese and his new appointment not to endorse someone who had previously meddled with drugs, so he refused to write a letter of recommendation to St. Vladimir's Seminary.

Themis was now back to square one, but he was sure God would somehow intervene. He did not have to wait very long.

Fr. Ilias Kentrotis, Melbourne's first fluent English-speaking Greek Orthodox priest, was sympathetic to Themis's plight. He knew Fr. Alkiviadis Calivas, the then Dean of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. When Fr. Ilias wholeheartedly recommended Themis, he was accepted into Holy Cross.

However, there was still one more hurdle, the U.S.A. visa requirements.

Armed with the acceptance letters from Holy Cross, Themis now needed to procure a student entry visit to the United States. He applied at the American consulate in Melbourne.

To his shock, one of the questions asked on the student visa entry form was whether the applicant had ever taken illegal substances. Themis could easily have answered no to this question because he had never been arrested and had no police or criminal record for the use of marijuana or hashish.

Trusting in God and not wishing to lie to the U.S.A. authorities, Themis acknowledged having smoked pot and hashish and even added that he had experimented with LSD a few times. And just to ensure his complete transparency before God and man, he also admitted to having distributed small amounts of pot and LSD to his friends and even to some strangers as part of his campaign to spread the basic tenets of the counterculture revolution.

The officer at the American consulate was not much older than Themis. He was totally unprepared and disarmed by Themis's honesty. The officer explained that by disclosing his youthful indiscretions, Themis risked being refused entry to the U.S.A. He warned that Themis would, from now on, per the letter of the law, need a waiver every time he applied to enter the U.S.A. Also, Themis would never be eligible to apply for American citizenship. Because of this confession, to this day, Themis needs a waiver before traveling to the States.

In 1982, an initial waiver was approved. By God's grace, all the application and travel obstacles were overcome. Themis could now travel to America and pursue his theological studies.

Themis made lifetime friends and enjoyed his time at Holy Cross, but he never forgot his core reason for coming to America, to achieve spiritual growth through theological training from an Orthodox Christian perspective. He was unwavering towards this purpose and worked hard to deepen his knowledge and skills in understanding and interpreting the Holy Scriptures.

The greater Boston area is home to some of America's top colleges, universities, research centers, and libraries. In addition to the world-famous Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard University, the Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium (BTIC) offers the largest theological training organization in the world with a unique wealth of printed resource material.

Themis was perfectly aware of the value of his location. It was no accident. This was part of a deliberate plan, his destiny. It was God's reward for his repentant servant, and Themis was determined to make the most of it. He succeeded beyond his wildest expectations.

The BTIC is an academic alliance of prestigious theological institutions throughout the greater Boston area. They offer students enrolled in affiliated schools an opportunity to cross-register and participate in courses offered by the other schools.

The institutions affiliated with the BTIC are Harvard Divinity School, Boston University School of Theology, Boston College, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, and several others. As a Holy Cross student, Themis could enroll in any unit or units offered by Harvard Divinity School at no extra cost. He instantly took advantage of this fantastic opportunity to study at America's most prestigious Ivy League university and one of the world's leading academic institutions.

Ivy League universities are among America's oldest private colleges. They are characterized by academic excellence, outstanding research, limited selectivity of admission numbers, and exorbitant fees. For example, average tuition fees at Harvard with room and board cost around \$75,000 per year.

Themis pursued several units at Harvard, including Biblical Hebrew, Gnosticism and Early Christianity, New Testament History, Dead Sea Scrolls, and others. His exposure to the rigorous Harvard academic standards and his prior theological training in Melbourne's Corpus Christi Seminary gave him an edge over most of his fellow students at Holy Cross.

While attending classes at Harvard, Themis soon realized that Harvard's approach to theological studies was secular, not spiritual. It was assumed that faith had no part in pursuing theological knowledge. For Themis, this was a bewildering paradox.

After his conversion in the early 1970s, Themis left secular studies to pursue theology, essentially abandoning atheism to pursue faith. Now he found himself, more than a decade later, studying at the prestigious Harvard University, where they treated theology with a secular mind. The irony was not lost on him.

Then, and today, some of the most prestigious departments of theology in America, under the influence of German rationalism, tend to view the Bible not so much as the Word of God but rather in mythological terms. Any miraculous account in the Holy Scriptures is rejected.

The famous German New Testament scholar at Marburg University, Rudolf Bultmann (1884 – 1976), argued that the only thing that we could state about the life of Jesus was that "He was crucified under Pontius Pilate." Many biblical events' historicity, especially the miraculous ones, are negated. For example, from the Old Testament, the ancient exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt to the Land of Israel, as described in the Book of Exodus, is treated by these "demythologization school" scholars as a nation - foundation myth.

But Ivy League schools in the United States once had close ties to the Christian faith. The Puritans founded Harvard in 1636 to train their clergy and, to a lesser degree, civil servants. It was named after its original benefactor, the Puritan clergyman John Harvard. Daily prayer and study of the New and Old Testaments (in their original languages) were required components of a Harvard education in the 17th and 18th centuries. Indeed, Harvard's crimson emblem, which carries the Latin term for "truth," "veritas," in its original sense it designated the "Truth for Christ."

Beginning in the 19th century, the mission of the Ivy League schools broadened, emphasizing cultural and secular studies over training aspiring pastors or clergymen. From the mid-1800s through the 1960s, the Ivy League Divinity Schools moved first

towards liberal Protestantism and then pluralism (the notion that colleges should not hold one religious belief over any other). Brown and Princeton were the last two Ivy League universities to require chapel attendance. This stopped in 1964.

Rather than engage in what Themis perceived to be pointless and endless debates with agnostic or atheist theologians throughout his American academic career, he did his best to avoid classes that dealt directly with Christ, at least at Ivy League schools. Instead, he chose topics concerning the Apostle Paul and his letters. This is because St. Paul is considered a historical figure in these institutions, and at least seven of the Pauline letters are considered to have been composed by St. Paul.

He focused on Biblical archaeology, Biblical languages, Jewish rabbinic studies, Hellenistic and Greco-Roman History, Gnosticism, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Canon of the New Testament, and the history of ancient Israel. Most of these fields of study did not fall under the spell of the "demythologization school." His goal was not to win arguments but to learn all he could about his faith and the Holy Scriptures.

Themis saw the increasing secularization of the West – North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand - as a dangerous cultural shift. The primary reason he wanted to become a specialist Biblical scholar was to defend the Scriptures in a secular, non-believing world and gain credibility with young people and seminarians in the Orthodox Church, so they would have confidence in the authority of the Holy Scriptures.

There were services twice a day at the School's Byzantine-style chapel. These worship services were obligatory for all Hellenic College and Holy Cross students. While academia was not compromised at Holy Cross, the approach to theological instruction respected the mystical and spiritual aspect of learning about the Divine.

Each Holy Cross student was assigned a spiritual father to facilitate spiritual growth. They sought spiritual guidance from him as well as offering regular confession. Themis was assigned the Reverend Father George Economou, a Greek – Australian who had married and settled in the United States.

Themi made many lifelong friends at Holy Cross - John Marragos and Harry Boutselis (nicknamed "Bumper"), to name just two. Themi and "Bumper" shared a liking for contemporary music. On occasions, during breaks from school, Harry and Themi would cruise around Boston in Harry's car, listening to the tunes of the jazz trumpeter Miles Davis.

Peter Souritzidis and Themi also met while Themi was at Holy Cross. At that time, Peter was in his final year of studies at Boston's Northeastern University, preparing to become an engineer. Peter was fairly new to the United States, coming to America from Greece. They met through Themi's spiritual father. Later in his life, due mainly to Themi's influence, Peter became a very successful Greek Orthodox priest. Father Souritzidis currently serves as parish priest at St. George's Church in Clifton, New Jersey.

During his studies in America, while he was under no vow of obedience, Themi remained celibate. This is something he had held since the time of his visions and conversion to Christianity.

In 1984, Themi graduated from Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, successfully completing the Master of Theological Studies (MTS) program. Themi was now, on paper, a qualified Orthodox theologian. His intent was to pursue advanced Biblical studies. Themi believed he could best serve the Orthodox Church by becoming a Biblical scholar. Most Orthodox graduates preferred to pursue post-graduate studies in Patristics (the study of the Church Fathers), Liturgics, Ecclesiastical Byzantine History, or Byzantine musicology.

By instinct, Themi was drawn to the Holy Scriptures. He understood that this was the fundamental basis of the Orthodox Faith. However, because Protestantism seemed to have appropriated the Holy Scriptures from the time of Martin Luther's Reformation in the sixteenth century, there was a kind of trepidation among Orthodox scholars, that those dealing exclusively with Holy Scripture research would be branded as Protestants. As such, a serious deficiency existed in this area within worldwide Orthodox academia. Themi felt called to be among the few to fill this gap.

Themi was accepted and chose to study next at the historical Princeton Seminary in New Jersey. Princeton Seminary, established in 1812, is one of the premier theological schools in the U.S.A. and has extremely rigorous admittance standards. It also tends to be somewhat more conservative than Harvard.

At Princeton, Themi focused on New Testament studies, earning a Master of Theology in 1985. He studied under two world-celebrated scholars, Prof. Bruce Metzger and Prof. James Charlesworth.

Dr. Metzger was considered one of the foremost conservative scholars of the text and versions of the New Testament. Themi learned to read the ancient Syriac and Sahidic Coptic languages.

Under the tutelage of Prof. James Charlesworth, Themi undertook studies in the so-called "pseudo-epigraphical" writings - the corpus of early Jewish writings just before the coming of Jesus, which were not included either in the Old or New Testament canons. They had religious authority in certain circles of early Judaism and are essential in the study of the New Testament, especially the apocalyptic or "end time" literature.

In 1986, the last step in Themi's theological academic odyssey was entering a Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy) program in New Testament studies at Brown University's Department of Religious Studies. Brown University is a private Ivy League university in Providence, Rhode Island. It was founded in 1764, before the American Revolution, while Rhode Island was still a British colony. It is the seventh oldest institution of higher learning in the U.S.A., with highly rigorous entry standards.

The Brown program continued Themi's interest in studying the New Testament from social, linguistic, and archeological perspectives. At Brown, Themi studied under Stanley Stowers, a well-known New Testament Pauline scholar and an expert in Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions, particularly as applied to the letters of St. Paul. Themi's doctoral thesis, supervised by Prof. Stowers, concerned St. Paul's interaction with Greco-Roman philosophy and rhetoric in St. Paul's understanding of endurance. As part of his Brown program, Themi also studied aspects of rabbinic Judaism under the celebrated scholar of early Judaism, Prof. Jacob Neusner.

While Themis was completing his studies at Brown, his sister Mary helped care for their parents, who had reached retirement age. Eleftherios and Helen supported Themis's graduate studies, contributing many of the funds required to complete his theological training. Themis also worked as a Teaching Assistant at Brown to ease the financial burden. The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia under Archbishop Stylianos also occasionally sent some assistance.

In 1988, before finishing his Ph.D. at Brown, Themis returned to Australia and was tonsured a monk by Archbishop Stylianos. He went back and forth between Australia and America in the early 1990s, lecturing at the newly established St. Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College in Sydney and returning to Providence to complete his Ph.D. program and thesis at Brown.

Themis had come full circle. In 1971, his goal was to become an influential atheist academic, a tenured professor of political science at an Australian University. In 1972, Christ intervened. By the mid-1990s, he would finally become a university and seminary lecturer but this time for the glory of Christ rather than Marx. His goal of achieving academic success at the highest level had been realized by the grace of God.

Chapter Thirteen

Professor Adamopoulo

Starting in 1996, Brother and now Dr. Themistocles Adamopoulo was a Lecturer in Biblical Studies, Biblical Languages, and Early Christian History at St. Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College in Redfern. In the prime of his life, Brother Themis was on track to enjoy a long and distinguished career as a Biblical researcher and instructor of the next generation of Australian Orthodox priests.

As an academic researcher, Brother Themis concentrated on the writings of St. Paul. His doctorate at Brown University dealt with a specific interaction between Hellenistic philosophy and St. Paul's concept of endurance. This led to his initiation of an international seminar on Pauline studies at St. Andrew's College, which included such renowned Australian scholars as Dr. Chris Forbes and Prof. Edwin Judge. He invited such distinguished American Pauline scholars as Prof. Stanley Stowers (Brown University) and Prof. John Fitzgerald (Notre Dame) to address his St. Andrew's College New Testament class.

As a result of his previous coursework at Harvard, he was also intrigued by the enigmatic and heterodox Gnostic Coptic texts discovered in Egypt (at Nag Hammadi) in 1949. In particular, he pondered their relationship to the New Testament and early Christianity. Having studied Coptic at Princeton, he was appointed as a visiting lecturer in Coptic at Australia's oldest and most prestigious tertiary institution Sydney University, and subsequently at Macquarie University.

In addition to maintaining his spiritual commitments as a tonsured monk of the Orthodox Church, he was now fully emerged in academia – teaching, researching, and publishing.

In 1998, having spent weeks updating and revising a prior essay submitted at Harvard, he was ready to present an important lecture on how the Trimorphic Protenoia, one of the Nag Hammadi Gnostic documents, related to the Gospel of John. This was

the first time this was to be discussed in Australia. Themí disputed the German theory that the Gnostic text influenced the Gospel of John and not the other way around.

For Brother Themí, this research was a serious academic effort involving intricate detail and analysis. It was a big deal in theological circles, particularly for Australian New Testament studies. But when only four or five people attended his presentation of the results of his investigation, he wondered, "Is this how I'm supposed to spend the rest of my life? Is Christ being praised here? Did it really matter to anyone outside a handful of elite Biblical scholars whether the Gospel of John influenced the Trimorphic Proténia or vice versa?"

Then and now, Brother Themí believed that Biblical scholarship was important work. Yet, increasingly, something was missing for him. Was he doing the right thing by spending his time teaching seminarians and the academic intricacies of Biblical scholarship? Doesn't the Bible teach us to help the poor, the sick, the hungry, the marginalized, the orphan, and the widow? Is not the central message of the Gospel to spread the message of salvation and Divine love? Brother Themí was now beginning to head in a new direction.

After his conversion in the early 1970s, Themí abandoned Marx's atheism. He rejected the idea that God did not exist, and that religion was the "opiate of the masses." He no longer accepted that everything in life revolved around economic materialism. But he never discarded all of Marx's principles, especially the desire to help the poor, the disenfranchised, the oppressed, and the marginalized in modern society. These principles were firmly embodied in the teachings of Jesus long before Karl Marx.

Brother Themí's resolve to push for reform and be an advocate for the poor increased as the months went by. While he had known who Mother Teresa of Calcutta was for some time, now he took a greater interest in her. He became more familiar with the work of the Missionaries of Charity.

Many aspects of Mother Teresa's life caught Brother Themí's attention. He marveled at her resilience and fearlessness. He greatly admired her humility. Although she, by her own admission, was not a theologian, Brother Themí could not argue with

her that Jesus Christ's most urgent and compelling call was to show mercy to the poor. He believed that Mother Teresa was translating theology into pure praxis.

This small, fragile, aged woman was perhaps the most powerful example of a Christian in action he had ever seen. Teresa's work made him think about St. Francis of Assisi, Christ's Medieval beggar. Both Francis and Teresa had given up everything to serve the poor. They both considered their poverty to be a form of spiritual wealth. While both St. Francis and Mother Teresa were not Orthodox saints, they both represented a road to Heaven by embracing poverty and working for the poor.

Brother Themis had a seminarian student named Kyriakos. He saw something special in him that he liked. So, when Kyriakos began to fall a little behind in his academic coursework, Themis requested to speak with him.

When Brother Themis asked Kyriakos why his academic work was slowing down, he could tell that Kyriakos was embarrassed. As his professor, Brother Themis deserved an answer. He got one, but not the one he was expecting.

Rather than concentrating full-time on his coursework, Kyriakos was ministering to the poor and distributing food and other supplies to the homeless. Redfern had some enclaves of prosperity, but the community overall was poor. Kyriakos had been assisting the homeless at the large park adjacent to the seminary. He was spending time there that he should have devoted to his studies.

While Kyriakos would have to work hard and get back on track (and he did so), it was Themis who felt a sense of shame. In his own way, his student was doing what Mother Teresa was doing, helping the disadvantaged. Today, Kyriakos is a Greek Orthodox Bishop in Melbourne, Australia. He continues to bring his genuine concern for the poor into his episcopacy.

Preparing his lectures or praying in his seminary room late at night, Brother Themis could hear the shouts and screams of the homeless and drug addicts in the park across from the seminary building. These were poor people literally living next door to him.

Themis had reached a tipping point. He could no longer stand by and let others serve the poor. He knew that God was now calling him to serve the poor. It was now his time to help.

There was a rundown old Roman Catholic Church in Redfern, not too far from St. Andrews seminary. Brother Themis was aware of the church because he'd heard people talk about the priest there, Father Kennedy, in glowing terms. Father Kennedy was known for his tireless service to the poor.

Dressed in formal monastic attire, Themis visited Father Kennedy's church. The building was in poor condition; the outside was deteriorating red brick, most windows were broken out, and the grounds were unkempt. The people who lived in the neighborhood were indigenous Australians or poor whites. Most were either underemployed or on the dole drug addicts.

When Brother Themis walked inside, he noticed that the pews had been tossed around – it looked like there had recently been a fight inside the church. Looking across the room, Themis saw a tall, white man in his 50s, dressed in street clothes. The man approached Themis, and they spoke.

"Are you Father Kennedy?" Themis asked.

"Yes, that's me. How can I help you?" Father Kennedy responded.

"I'm Brother Themis Adamopoulos from St. Andrew's, the Greek Orthodox Theological School down the road. I lecture in Biblical studies. I have heard about you and your work. I'm in awe. I'd like to help you, to work with the poor."

"You're a priest?" Father Kennedy asked.

"No, I'm a monk. I'm a Lecturer in Biblical Studies at St...."

"Look. I think that'll do," Father Kennedy said, interrupting. "You live in another world, Brother Themis. Go back to your books and studies, to your ivory tower. You don't belong here. I've got work to do."

And with that, Father Kennedy turned and walked away, leaving Brother Themis standing there stunned and shocked in his neatly pressed, formal ecclesiastical robe.

Brother Themis did not pursue Father Kennedy or try and plead his case that he indeed sincerely wanted to help the poor. He understood why someone like Father Kennedy, who worked tirelessly to help those in his community who were most in need, had no time to discuss serving the poor with a religious academic like Brother Themistocles. Of course, Father Kennedy had no idea of Brother Themis's past and could not foresee his future.

This was a turning point for Brother Themis. His priorities were changing. His desire to change his life's focus from Biblical scholarship to Biblical action in directly serving the poor grew. After reflection and prayer, Brother Themis realized that Father Kennedy was right – "the emperor had no clothes." What had Themis done for the poor over the past 20 years? Not nearly enough, in his mind.

Brother Themis wondered what he was trying to prove as an academic. That he was more intelligent than everyone else? In many ways, Themis now believed that religious academia had become an ego trip for him, that he was trying to show the world how knowledgeable he was, how well informed and sophisticated.

In addition to Mother Teresa, he also admired the example and courage of Bishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador. Known as the "Bishop of the poor," Oscar Romero stood alongside the underprivileged during El Salvador's brutal civil war. Bishop Oscar was assassinated by right-wing thugs while conducting Mass in San Salvador in 1980. Brother Themis asked himself, do I have the courage to live such a life? To stand up for the masses and for Christ against authoritarian oppression? He believed that with the help of Christ, he should try.

Brother Themis considered many options. There were poor in Australia who needed help. In America, despite its widespread prosperity, there were millions of poor. Central and South America were also candidates.

But ultimately, he wanted to go to only one place, Africa. Why? He was born in Egypt and, therefore, a legitimate son of the African continent, a White African. Also, Brother Themis believed that the poor he would encounter in Africa would often belong to an ongoing and systemic culture of poverty and not be poor due to drug addiction or alcoholism.

In 1998, Brother Themis wrote to the Pope in Alexandria, Petros II. He told His Beatitude that it was his desire to teach in an African seminary and to serve the poor. The response he received was swift and decisive - Pope and Patriarch Petros II responded to Brother Themis's letter personally. He invited him to come to Africa and serve.

While Brother Themis was honored and humbled that the Alexandrian Pope had personally invited him to come to Africa and serve, he knew that Archbishop Stylianos, the then Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church of Australia, had to approve the transfer, or he would be unable to leave Australia.

To his surprise, His Eminence Stylianos approved of Brother Themis's move to Africa and told him, "Go with Abraham's blessing."

The truth was that, by 1998, Brother Themis and Archbishop Stylianos had a very strained relationship. While Brother Themis's primary motivation in moving to Africa was to serve the poor, his difficulties with the Archbishop were also a factor.

From Brother Themis's early days as a Christian until he returned from America to Australia to teach at the seminary in Sydney in the early 1990s, Archbishop Stylianos was supportive. The Archbishop was one of the few people in the Greek Orthodox Church back in 1977 who saw that young Themis was full of zeal and passion for the Lord and not, as some priests in Melbourne believed, mentally ill or otherwise compromised. For this, Themis is forever grateful to the Archbishop. Furthermore, during his time at the Seminary in Sydney, Brother Themis's father confessor was Archbishop Stylianos.

The problems began as Themis realized that many young people were absent from Church attendance due to a basic linguistic challenge. The Church celebrations were performed in Byzantine Greek rather than modern Greek or English. It wasn't possible for a Greek born in Australia to have access to ancient Greek dialect. This led to indifference and even rejection of the Church by most English-speaking Greek youth. In addition, given its ethnic emphasis, any attempt to bring non-Greeks into the Australian Greek Orthodox Church was almost impossible.

In America, Brother Themis became accustomed to services being conducted in English, or a mixture of Greek and English. While many American Greek Orthodox churches had a majority Greek ethnic membership, by and large they were open to non-Greek converts. In Themis's view, this was more in accord with Christ's final instructions: "Therefore go and make disciples of all the nations and baptize them in the name of the Father and The Son and The Holy Spirit."

Brother Themis advocated for the keeping of Byzantine Greek language-only services in the Church in Australia for the older immigrant population, but he wanted to open mission churches throughout Australia that conducted services in English for the benefit of all ethnic groups, including Greeks.

In 1872, the Greek Orthodox church, in a Council held in Constantinople, condemned Phyletism, or the practice of creating churches based primarily on ethnic or social characteristics. Brother Themis was not condemning Greeks or arguing that they should not be allowed to enjoy Greek language-only services, but instead he was affirming the church's catholicity and sacred duty to share the Gospel with all the nations and to welcome all into Christ's Holy Church.

Archbishop Stylianos firmly opposed creating mission or other Australian churches that conducted services exclusively in English. His view was that the Greeks had fought and died against the Ottomans for 400 years to preserve the Greek language, the language of the Gospels. Now, Brother Themis wants to come along and undermine it? Of course, Brother Themis wished to do no such thing. He was firmly in

favor of opening the church to new, non-Greek converts and engaging more closely with Greek youth, who were rejecting their traditional church in large numbers.

The debates between the Archbishop and Brother Themis became heated. Every time there was a conference or church meeting, Brother Themis would raise the English language Divine Liturgy controversy. At one clergy-laity conference, the Archbishop became so upset with Brother Themis that he stomped his foot up and down on the platform where Brother Themis was speaking, forcing Brother Themis to stop talking and come from the platform and sit down.

In Brother Themis's words, this issue was the "atomic bomb" between himself and the Archbishop. Brother Themis was obedient. He would stop speaking when ordered to do so, but he also took every opportunity available to him to push for more English-speaking services and to preach the Gospel in Australia to non-Greeks.

When Brother Themis made statements like, "Are we a church, or a Greek ghetto?" he became a martyr for the cause of church reform. This created a schism between not only Brother Themis and the Archbishop but also between factions within the church. Neither side would give in, but because the Archbishop had the power, there was no reform in the 1990s. No new mission churches were established. Greek-only Divine Liturgy remained the norm.

The creation of English-speaking mission churches within the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese had to await the appointment of a younger and more energetic Archbishop in Australia, His Eminence Makarios in 2019. By then, Brother Themis had served the Greek Orthodox Church in Africa for two decades.

The language of Church services was not the only issue between Brother Themis and the Archbishop. Brother Themis's outspoken preaching on the church's duty to the poor also earned him the Archbishop's ire.

When he was allowed to do so, Brother Themis's dynamic speaking ability was in constant demand. On one occasion, the parish priest of the old St. Catherine's Church in Sydney (Mascot) asked Brother Themis to visit and give them a sermon.

On that Sunday, the Gospel reading was Jesus' parable concerning the near impossibility of the rich attaining the Kingdom of Heaven. Brother Themis delivered an impassioned plea for the affluent to share more with their less fortunate neighbors if they were to achieve salvation. Otherwise, their road to salvation would be challenging.

Brother Themis chastised wealthy Australian Greeks for their moral failure of living well while turning a blind eye to the poor. He told his audience, a significant portion of which was now bristling at his every word, that Christ's admonition (Matthew Chapter 19, verse 24) that it was harder for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into the Kingdom of Heaven was not a metaphor, it was to be taken literally.

Half of the parish was cheering Brother Themis on, while the wealthier portion was angered. When Themis finished his sermon and the Liturgy ended, Brother Themis was cautioned not to leave the sanctuary area since there were scuffles outside the church. A fistfight had broken out between some members of the two factions – the haves and the have-nots.

Several wealthier parishioners complained to the Archbishop about Brother Themis and his sermon, saying that he had “arrogantly condemned them” without justification. Called to explain himself, Brother Themis told the Archbishop that he was preaching the Gospel per Biblical and church teachings. While he did not intend to provoke any violence, he did intend to warn the rich concerning their salvation. Brother Themis viewed that as his duty to preach the Gospel to the people even if it made them uncomfortable.

The Archbishop sided with the wealthy parishioners who felt Brother Themis had gone too far. Brother Themis's punishment? A three-month ban on him preaching in the diocese. He accepted the chastisement and complied, but that was not the end of the conflict.

For one reason or another, the Archbishop regularly found fault with Themis's speech and actions after this episode. Another incident in Melbourne was the proverbial “straw that broke the camel's back.”

On a trip home, Brother Themis addressed a youth seminar in Melbourne. After the lecture, a nun who had attended Brother Themis's talk had a private discussion with him. He explained to her that according to the writings of the Apostle Paul, the True Church was the New Israel, the new Chosen Nation of God. Therefore, Christians were New Israelites in the Spirit.

The nun was confused and upset. Due to her limited theological knowledge, she misunderstood the statement and reported the matter to the local Bishop, indicating that Brother Themis was telling the Greek Orthodox that they were "Jewish." She found this assertion of the Church as the New Israel confusing and offensive. She considered herself "Greek" and not "Israelite." The notion of the Church as the "New Israel" was alien to her, as it is for many other Christians.

Nothing else was said about Themis's encounter with the nun. Unaware of what was brewing behind his back, Brother Themis gave the matter no further thought and returned to his lecturing duties in Sydney.

A short time after this incident, Brother Themis's mother, Helen, who had served many years in the Diocese Philoptochos ("Friends of the Poor") committee, was called to meet the Archbishop and other Melbourne area Bishops. Helen was angrily told that the Church was "Greek" and not "Israelite" or "Hebrew," as her son had falsely suggested by "demonic influence."

Helen had no idea what the Archbishop was talking about, but his shouting that her son was "demonically possessed" was enough to make her faint. Helen was carried downstairs, where her friend drove her back to her house.

Not knowing what had happened, Themis's father, Eleftherios, wondered if his wife perhaps had a heart attack or a stroke. After a few moments, he determined that Helen was physically okay. There would be no need to call for medical attention.

Brother Themis was enraged, but he did not display this emotion when he was summoned to the Archbishop's office in Sydney to discuss the incident. Calmly, he asked, "Do you know what anguish you have given to my mother?" The Archbishop

expressed some remorse and offered to apologize to Helen. He immediately called her and spoke to her.

This incident proved to be the tipping point. Brother Themis wanted to serve the poor but doing so in Australia was no longer possible. He simply could no longer imagine living under the rule of an Archbishop who personally disliked him, even though he realized that he had been responsible for some of this unfortunate situation.

Brother Themis believed his physical and mental health would rapidly deteriorate if he stayed in Australia. Themis's father sternly advised him, saying: "My son, there is no future for you in the current administration of the Greek Orthodox Church of Australia. Go elsewhere, even though your mother and I will miss you."

Looking back, Brother Themis believes that multiple factors led to his move to Africa. While his desire to serve the poor, in obedience to the Gospel, in his native continent was the driving motivation, he acknowledges that his poor relationship with Archbishop Stylianos was a significant factor in his decision to leave Australia.

Bishop Themis fondly remembers that during the latter period of Archbishop Stylianos's life, he granted him permission to raise funds in Australia for his philanthropic work in Africa. The Archbishop's personal attitude towards Brother Themis, to some extent, had softened over time.

On his part, and following the teachings of Jesus, Brother Themis had moved on and sought to leave bad feelings behind. Upon hearing of Archbishop Stylianos' final repose in March of 2019, he dropped all obligations in Sierra Leone and out of respect for his former Father Confessor, made the quickest possible arrangements to fly halfway around the world to Sydney in time for the funeral.

Whatever the mix of causes and motivations, the die was now cast. Brother Themis was on the move, rushing headlong toward his new destiny.

Chapter Fourteen

Father Themis

Having made an irreversible decision to leave and serve the Lord Christ and His church abroad, Brother Themis faced a dilemma. Where to go? Greece? Join a monastery at Mount Athos? But how would he serve the poor?

He could return to America. But that would mean continuing his academic lifestyle, teaching in some Orthodox seminary. But what about serving the poor? Despite its immense national wealth, there was poverty in America.

But if he wished to serve the poorest of the poor, what better place to go than back to the continent of his birth, Africa. Since ten of the poorest nations in the world are in Africa, it seemed the logical choice. But Brother Themis believed it was more than logical; it was God's calling. This would soon be confirmed.

Themis wrote a letter to His Beatitude, the Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, Petros VII. He requested a transfer to the Orthodox Church in Africa. He did not imagine he would receive a quick response.

To his surprise, within a short time, Brother Themis received a letter from Patriarch Petros himself. He was accepted. Come to Alexandria. Come to Africa! Themis was so happy, for the first time in many years. But an obstacle had to be overcome before he could transfer and travel.

Ecclesiastical protocol had to be observed. Essentially, Themis needed the blessings and written permission of Archbishop Stylianos to transfer to the Church of Alexandria. The Greek Orthodox Church of Australia belonged to a different jurisdiction; it was under the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Due to their problematic personal relationship, Brother Themis was unsure how Archbishop Stylianos would respond to the request. What if he refused his request for a

transfer? The situation in the archdiocese in Australia had become toxic for Brother Themis. He wanted out. It would not take long for him to discover his fate.

They met in the Archbishop's office. Brother Themis repeated his request. The Archbishop did not hesitate to reply, saying, "You are free to go. You have mine and Abraham's blessings."

Brother Themis was stunned by the response. He could not recall receiving "Abraham's blessings" from anyone before. He vividly remembers the conversation to this day.

Archbishop Stylianos had refused to write letters of release for others, but Brother Themis received an official letter of honorable release. Themis felt reborn and full of energy. He was excited to begin a new chapter in his life. He thanked God for His blessings and mercy.

When Themis arrived in Egypt in February 1999, his first stop was the ancient St. Savvas Monastery, one of the headquarters of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria. His initial instructions were to settle in and wait for further guidance from Patriarch Petros.

While Brother Themis had been granted his desire to serve the poor in his native Africa, he did not know where he would be assigned. In the Greek Orthodox Church, monks and priests do not choose their assignments; that privilege belongs to bishops, archbishops, and the hierarchy. Themis thought that the best use of his talents would be to teach in a seminary and directly minister to the poor, perhaps in Kenya. He also knew that the Patriarch might wish to start a theological school in Alexandria, and if that's where and how he was called to serve, then he would do so joyfully.

St. Savva's Monastery dates to pre-Christian times. Originally an area dedicated to the pagan gods of the Greco-Roman period, in the fourth century a Christian church was built on the site and dedicated to the Apostles. Within a few years, monks assembled around the church, and a monastery was established.

In the seventh century, the monastery was destroyed by an earthquake but was later rebuilt and dedicated to St. Savvas the Sanctified, one of the great desert fathers. By the second half of the twentieth century, the monastery had significantly deteriorated. Patriarch Nicholas VI decided to demolish all the buildings, except for the church, and build a new complex. The restoration of St. Savvas the Sanctified Monastery was completed in the last years of the twentieth century.

It had been over forty years since Brother Themis was last in Alexandria. The city he knew as a child in the 1950s had changed, but not as much as he had expected. Much of the city, especially the central district, was almost the same as in the 1950s, so Themis could locate many shops and restaurants his parents frequented.

Brother Themis visited his boyhood home. After explaining to the Arab lady who now occupied the apartment he had lived there long ago, she allowed him to look around. Themis's impression was that the residence looked much smaller than he remembered, but he was only ten years old the last time he saw it. The apartment no longer overlooked the Mediterranean; new buildings had been constructed, blocking the magnificent ocean panorama.

Themis toured the Palace of King Farouk at Montazah, something he would have been forbidden to do as a boy. He took the tram and explored the old sections of Alexandria. Then he found the family's old holiday house and visited Mandarrah beach where he and his dad would often fish.

The prospect of Themis becoming a priest was first discussed during his initial meeting with Patriarch Petros. This development surprised Themis because he considered himself too great of a sinner and not eligible for the priesthood.

Patriarch Petros explained that the African church had a tremendous manpower shortage and needed more priests, especially educated priests. While he understood that Themis had led a non-Christian life in his youth, he also understood that Themis was a new man. Whatever sins he had committed before his conversion were out of ignorance of Christ.

A confession is required before any ordination. The Patriarch told Themis the father confessor would determine his eligibility or non-eligibility for the priesthood. In the Orthodox Church, a pre-ordination confession is extensive - it covers the entire life of the candidate priest. Patriarch Petros assigned his Metropolitan, Irenaeus of Port Said, a senior hierarch of the Patriarchate, to handle the matter.

Sadly, some years later, in September of 2004, while on his way by helicopter to the Monastic community of Mount Athos, Metropolitan Irenaeus and eleven representatives of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, including Pope and Patriarch Petros VII, perished when their helicopter crashed minutes before the scheduled landing, killing all on board.

Brother Themis prayed long and hard the evening before his confession. He wanted to become a priest, but he remembered his sins. He struggled with his conscience. He was consoled by the fact that he was in a unique situation. Themis thought to himself: "How many priests, deacons, or lay people have been personally invited for ordination by a patriarch of the Church? Not many. It must be considered a rare honor and privilege which cannot easily be dismissed. It needs to be taken seriously."

During his lengthy confession in the Patriarchal chapel before Metropolitan Irenaeus, Themis held nothing back. He told Irenaeus all about his rock star days, the drugs he took, the atheistic, libertine philosophy he espoused as a youth without Christ, and many of his other mistakes.

During the intense confession, something strange and unexpected happened. Themis is a man who firmly resists any emotional urge to cry in front of others. If need be, shedding tears could only occur in a private setting when he was alone. Yet on that day, something happened that he could not control.

Themis sobbed uncontrollably during his confession, a rare display of emotion. The experience was cathartic. While Themis had confessed his sins before, this was different. The process was complete and more final.

When the confession was over, Irenaeus had only one thing to say, “Themistocles, you will make a great priest. I will write the letter of approval (symarteria).” Themis thought perhaps Metropolitan Irenaeus was saying this to make him feel better, but he soon realized the Metropolitan’s feelings were genuine.

For a brief time, Themis considered refusing his call to the priesthood. Was it the right decision? Was he worthy of such an honor? In the final analysis, Themis reasoned that if the Patriarch and the Metropolitan believed he was an acceptable candidate, then it was God’s will, and he must accept it.

Under Greek Orthodox canon law, a priest can be married if he is married before his ordination. If his wife dies or leaves the marriage, the priest cannot get remarried. There are certain exceptions to this principle that the local bishop has the right to exercise in extraordinary circumstances called “oikonomia.”

The only marriages the Greek Orthodox church recognizes under canon law are those performed in the Orthodox church or in the Catholic and Coptic churches since they are considered Apostolic. Why? Marriage is a sacrament within these three ancient Christian traditions. But even in the case of a Catholic or Coptic marriage, a specific extra prayer or blessing is required for its recognition as a valid sacrament within the Orthodox Church. The same applies to baptism.

Themis’s union with Wendy was invalid. Why? It was not undertaken in the Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, or the Coptic Church. Also, there were two further aspects of its invalidity. Wendy was the unfaithful partner and not Themis. This exonerated Themis from guilt; he was the “innocent” party. Also, Themis was an atheist at the time of the union.

The church viewed Themis’s relationship with Wendy as fornication, that is living with a woman outside the sacrament of marriage. This was a sin for which Themis confessed and under the compassion of “oikonomia” was forgiven. Therefore, under the rules of the Greek Orthodox Church, Themis was never married in a sacramental manner and hence eligible through the exercise of “oikonomia” to become a celibate priest.

Patriarch Petros decided that Themis would first be ordained a deacon and then a priest shortly after he arrived in Kenya in April 1999. Though he was born in Africa, Themis had never been south of the Sahara, so this was a new experience for him in every way.

The Kenyan Orthodox Seminary is in an outer suburb of Nairobi, Riruta Satellite. The compound has historical significance.

In 1956, the British exiled Archbishop Makarios from Cyprus. He was first held in Kenya's chief port city, Mombasa, and then taken to the Seychelle Islands. Makarios' legacy and fame earned through his struggle for independence from British colonial rule endeared him to many African leaders, including Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya. He was seen as a fellow Third World liberation hero.

When Makarios was finally released, he became the President of Cyprus. Jomo Kenyatta, the first President of Kenya, offered Archbishop/President Makarios and the Greek Orthodox Church a gift, an extensive area of land in Riruta Satellite. It was there that the Seminary and the headquarters of the Orthodox Church of Kenya was established.

When President Makarios passed away in 1977, Jomo Kenyatta paid a stirring tribute to his friend, "The noble ideals and universal principles for which Archbishop Makarios lived should remain a guiding light for the entire world. In his passing away, Kenya has indeed lost an irreplaceable friend."

In his honor, the Orthodox Church of Kenya named the seminary the Archbishop of Cyprus Makarios III Ecclesiastical School.

Not long after he arrived in Nairobi in 1999, Themis was ordained a deacon by Metropolitan Seraphim. The ordination occurred in the small, rural church of St. John the Baptist, located in a remote Kenyan village. The church was little more than a collection of "zinc" (corrugated tin) sheets built on a fragile wooden framework. The ordination ceremony was small and simple – perfect in Themis's eyes. A few days later, Deacon Themis was ordained a celibate priest, receiving the rank of an archimandrite

soon after. He was ready to begin his mission to the poor in Nairobi and the seminary students.

Themis decision to abandon his academic career as a Biblical scholar and dedicate his life to serving the poor in Africa resulted from a young man's Divine vision decades earlier. Some have challenged Themis visions, questioning their authenticity and Themis mental state at the time. But what further validation of Themis visions should be required than his lifetime of dedicated service to Jesus?

It is not uncommon for people to claim supernatural influences in their decision to become Christians. While most of these experiences are not as dramatic as St. Paul's Damascus Road encounter or Themis vision of Divine Light in Australia, it's what happens after the vision that matters.

A young man who once thought God was a children's fable, a fictitious crutch leaned on by the weak-minded and used by the bourgeoisie to exploit the masses, was now a celibate priest in the Greek Orthodox Church. And not just any priest. Themis was not only a world-class Biblical scholar, he was a person who chose to dedicate his life to serving not the poor but the extremely poor.

While he would never refer to himself as a hero of the church or a role model for other Christians, I believe that Themis life is a testament to the power of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit to shape and transform a sinner into a servant of God, to create a shining light of love where there was once only darkness, disdain, and unbelief.

I have daydreamed about meeting truly holy people – going back in time and having a conversation with St. John Chrysostom, listening to St. Nektarios preach, or visiting with St. Francis as he walked the dusty roads of Italy. I never thought I would be blessed to meet someone like my religious heroes and be tasked to tell his life story. It is an honor beyond words to express.

In a world full of fakes and poseurs, Themis Adamopoulos is the genuine article, someone who truly embraces Christ's greatest commandment, to love one another as He loved us.

Chapter Fifteen

Kenya

Father Themis was excited to start his new role as an African missionary. He diligently prepared for his post by studying the history and culture of Kenya, but soon learned that there was no substitute for experience.

One of the first things that struck Themis when he arrived in Kenya was the tribalism and linguistic diversity. The Kenyan population is not homogeneous.

The Kikuyus are the largest and most politically powerful segment of the population. They are part of the Bantu family of people and have their own unique customs and language. Besides the Kikuyu, the main other Bantu groups include Luos, Meruans, and the Kisis. The Nilote communities, the second largest tribal group in Kenya, include the legendary Masais, Luos, Kalenjins, and Turkanas.

These two ethnic families are often in tension with each other, particularly the Luos and the Kikuyus, especially during elections when voting tends to split along ethnic lines. Violence is the norm during elections, and it can reach civil war fever.

Except for a brief period when North Africa became part of the Byzantine Empire, the Orthodox Church had never supported or participated in the imperialist colonization of Sub-Saharan Africa. The British were a different story.

In 1888, the British made what is now Kenya a British colony. For the next seven decades, the British expropriated land and resources from the Kenyan people by force.

For example, during the Mau Mau rebellion, led mainly by the Kikuyus, nearly half a million Kikuyus were held as political prisoners. Over one million were forcibly restricted to their villages, which were basically concentration camps. There was no dignity in being a Kikuyu Kenyan in the eyes of the British colonialists.

Not all Kenyans hold a negative outlook on colonial Britain. The Luos acknowledge that despite the harshness, the British brought tangible benefits to Kenya – education, banking, technology, law, and property rights that have assisted in the modernization process.

Greek missionaries are often referred to with the pejorative designation of "mzungus" (white person), but they are not automatically tarred with the same negative brush as the British. A missionary must prove himself before he receives acceptance as a non-racist. Father Themis knew that he must become familiar with the local ways, or he risked being falsely labeled a racist or "white tyrant."

Two incidents illustrate Father Themis's challenges in becoming an effective instructor for his Kenyan students.

Shortly after his arrival, the Archbishop asked Father Themis to lecture the students about prayer in the chapel.

After his presentation, one of the students, a Kikuyu Kenyan, asked Father Themis, "Can we play now?"

At the very least, Father thought this was an odd question. He was talking about prayer, and now this seminarian wants to play. He wondered, is this some sort of local custom?

Confused yet composed, Themis asked this seminarian, "What game do you want to play? Do you mean football?"

"No game, just to play," he responded.

Had this been an identical situation in Australia, Father Themis would have dismissed the student as being frivolous. But this was Africa. He had to respond respectfully and seek to understand cultural nuances.

"Okay... Play what, exactly, basketball?" Themis asked, totally puzzled.

Laughter erupted around the chapel. Some of the seminarians now understood Themis predicament. One of the seminarians explained, "In the Kikuyu dialect, there is no 'r' sound. The English 'r' sound is pronounced a 'l.' He is asking you for all of us to pray together now. He wants to p-r-a-y, Father, not play. Can we play now?"

Father Themis learned a valuable lesson. Don't react negatively if you are in a strange, incomprehensible situation. Be patient and friendly, and the issue will likely resolve itself peacefully.

Teaching seminarians was nothing new for Themis; he had been doing so for years. He did not consider himself a harsh taskmaster with his students, but Father believed that he would be remiss in his duties as a seminary lecturer if he did not clarify to his class that a priest must be disciplined and will be held to the highest standards.

One day, as he explained this critical concept to his students, one of the seminarians, Moses, thumped on his desk, stood, and snarled, "We do not tolerate dictators here!"

No student in Australia or America had ever referred to Father Themis in such a pejorative manner. He was addressing the Kenyan seminarians the same way he used to speak to seminarians in Sydney. However, this was not Sydney. This was Nairobi.

Father Themis immediately recognized that there was something different here. He was doing something wrong. What was it? His mind raced. Is it related to race relations? He was a white man teaching African students. Whether he liked it or not, he had inherited the legacy of British colonial history.

As a white man among Kenyans, he would have to adapt his teaching style to Kenyan culture. He needed to change his tone without changing his personality. Despite over half a century of independence, the brutality and injustice of British rule in Kenya has not evaporated from the Kenyan psyche. Father Themis could still admonish and discipline, but he needed to do so without giving the impression of arrogance or aggression.

From his youth in Australia onward, Themis has been conscious of the evil of racism. Before his conversion, Themis condemned racism on secular grounds and was sensitive to the adverse effects of racism on society and the individual. For example, as a student activist, Themis condemned the then apartheid system of South Africa and argued for Aboriginal rights. After he became a Christian, Father Themis condemned racism on more than its secular injustice.

In his heart, Themis knew that God did not discriminate based on skin color or race and to consider one race superior or inferior to another was a sin. In his epistle addressed to the Galatian Church, St. Paul famously explained, "There is neither Jew nor Greek...we are one in Christ." The Book of Genesis also reinforces the notion of racial equality by declaring that all humans are created in the image of God. The New Testament clarifies that Christ did not shed his salvific and redemptive blood for a particular race of people but for all of humanity.

As Father Themis learned and improved his interactions with the seminarians and with Kenyans in general, there was one vital weapon still missing from his social arsenal. He needed to employ one of his biggest gifts which had endeared him among students and parishioners in Australia and America, humor. Over time, Father Themis developed a sufficient knowledge of Kenyan current events to tell jokes and elicit some occasional healthy laughter in his classes.

The biggest challenge in gaining solid acceptance was to learn to speak Swahili / Kiswahili – the unifying language of Kenya and the lingua franca of East Africa (including Tanzania, Mozambique, and parts of Uganda). It is a mixture of Bantu languages with Arabic.

Once settled in, Father Themis got to work on improving the Seminary and adding to the facilities. His educational experience in America and Australia enhanced his vision.

Seeing empty land on the Riruta Satellite church compound that could be put to a better purpose, Father urged his Metropolitan Seraphim to expand the infrastructure

before others claimed the unused area. With the help of his Greek sponsors, Themis created a teacher's college, nursery, and primary school.

Father knew that to defeat the culture of poverty, the church needed to provide people with vocational skills. Tailors were in high demand in Nairobi. Most people could not afford new clothes, so clothing repair was a skill that brought immediate and long-term employment.

Friends in Australia helped Father purchase a quantity of hand-powered Singer and Swan sewing machines. Since most of the women in the district did not have access to a regular electricity supply, hand-powered machines were a more practical option.

It only took a short time after the machines arrived for Father Themis to establish a trade school to teach girls the art of tailoring. The classes were held in a three-story building that Metropolitan Seraphim had recently built but had yet to be used.

Patriarch Petros tasked Father Themis with bettering the Seminary and raising academic standards. Father started using new instructional technologies, such as computer projectors. He dedicated himself to improving the quality of education and the daily lives of the seminarians.

Father Themis was also the parish priest of St. John the Baptist, the church where he was ordained. The church was located near the seminary. The congregation was comprised, for the most part, of the poorest families in the area.

The greatest challenge he faced with his parish was the scourge of AIDS. Unlike in the developed world, AIDS in Kenya was primarily a heterosexual disease. It had become a scourge; AIDS was Kenya's leading cause of death in the late 1990s. Since younger adults were most affected, AIDS destroyed families, reduced economic growth, exacerbated poverty, and created massive social disruptions.

By 1998, almost 14% of Kenya's adult population had the HIV virus or about 2.1 million people. Young women aged fifteen through nineteen were five times more likely

to be infected with HIV. Almost 1 million Kenyan children lost a father or a mother to AIDS by 2001.

At the turn of the century, the transmission modes of HIV AIDS were well known – sexual intercourse, the use of contaminated syringes by drug users, mother-to-child infection through nursing, re-use of needles in medical settings, and the transfusion of contaminated blood products. In Kenya, it was common knowledge that the number one AIDS transmission mechanism was heterosexual intercourse.

In the late 1990s, effective treatment for AIDS was hard to come by in Kenya. The widespread distribution of free or inexpensive antiretroviral therapy (ART) was still years away. The surest way to prevent getting AIDS (in Africa or anywhere else on the planet) was to abstain from sexual activity with anyone who was not your spouse or faithful partner and to avoid intravenous drug use. Father Themis estimates around one in four of his parishioners at St. John the Baptist had HIV or AIDS.

Despite knowing that he was risking his life by doing so, Father Themis consumed the undistributed portion of the Holy Communion after every Divine Liturgy, when the parishioners had received the sacrament from one common cup. This was his duty as a priest.

At the time, it was unclear whether the HIV virus could be transmitted by saliva. In faith, Father Themis was willing to take that risk every time he celebrated a divine liturgy in his HIV/AIDS infected parish. Father Themis viewed each distribution of Holy Communion as an act of faith, trusting God to keep him healthy. In the time he served as the parish priest at St. John the Baptist, Father Themis ministered to his flock who were HIV positive, but he was never infected.

After serving less than a year in Kenya, Father Themis was informed that his mother was seriously ill. Before surgery, Helen called and spoke with her son, essentially saying goodbye. Themis rushed home, but his mother was in a coma when he got to Melbourne. The consensus was that she would not awake from her coma and pass away within a short time.

Surprising all, Helen woke from her coma when Themis arrived. They had the opportunity to speak to each other at some length. She was ecstatic that her son had become an archimandrite, a high-ranking celibate priest. She was her usual vibrant self. Helen asked about his mission and his life in Kenya. For a moment, Themis was convinced that his mother would survive this episode. He was wrong.

After saying what she needed to say to her son, Helen slipped back into a coma. While she was in a coma, Father Themis, his sister Mary and their father spent hours at her bedside praying. The medical staff advised them to terminate Helen's life. They refused and were ready to take legal action to keep her alive, but that proved unnecessary. A few days later, on a Sunday, Helen passed away and went to the Lord in peace.

After a very moving funeral, in which Father Themis delivered the oration, he said goodbye to his sister and father and returned to Kenya with a heavy heart. Eleftherios died one year later, but Father Themis could not return to see his father before the end came. He was able to attend the funeral.

In a year, Father Themis and his sister had lost their beloved parents. Themis knew that his mother and father were immensely proud of him and what he was achieving in Kenya. Both Helen and Eleftherios took communion regularly and increased their faith in their later years, no doubt in part to the example of their son and his dedication to Christ.

Father Themis returned annually to Australia to raise money for his African missionary efforts. He had big ambitions for the Kenyan Orthodox mission. To accomplish his goals, Themis needed a reliable source of funding for his projects.

Two or three years before Themis left for Africa, one of Themis's former seminary students, Father Demetrius Tsakas, became a parish priest in central Brisbane's St. George church. The priest asked Brother Themis to come to his church and give a two-day series of lectures. Brother Themis chose to speak on the Book of the Apocalypse.

A man in his mid-thirties, Louie Toumbas, a Greek Cypriot by ancestry, had become a successful Brisbane real estate investor. He attended Orthodox Bible studies and youth programs growing up, but he stopped regularly attending Orthodox Church services as a young adult because he was sick and tired of its excessive Greekness.

Though he was Greek-Cypriot by heritage, Louie was born in Australia. He had become a true blue Aussie. English was Louie's native tongue, so Greek-language only Divine Liturgy discouraged him from attending Greek Orthodox churches. In his mind, the church appeared more interested in promoting Greece and the Greek language than Jesus. So, he went to English-speaking churches - Baptist, Catholic, Pentecostal, and others – within driving distance of his house. He considered himself "born again" in the Protestant sense, but he did not completely cut ties with his Orthodox parish.

Not long before Brother Themis's first visit to Brisbane, Father Demetrius started doing Orthodox Divine Liturgy in English on Saturday evenings. This not only got Louie's attention but also got him back regularly in an Orthodox pew.

Father Tsakas asked Louie to raise money to buy Bibles for the church. He did so. Then Father Tsakas asked Louie if he would be willing to cover the expense of bringing Brother Themis to speak at the Brisbane church on the Book of the Apocalypse and the 666. He said "no problem" to this second request and covered the cost.

Louie was tasked with going to the airport and picking up Brother Themis. Before he left to pick up Themis, Fr. Demetrius told him, "Louie, Brother Themis was a former rock star, ex-hippie, an ex-Marxist, now a monk, and my Biblical Studies lecturer at the seminary."

To Brother Themis, Louie looked like a typical businessman. To Louie, Brother Themis looked like a typical monk. There was no common ground. He drove Themis to Father Demetrius' house, dropped him off, and didn't see him again until the event began.

On the opening night of Brother Themis End Times presentation, the church was packed, standing room only. When he began his lecture, the first statement Themis made was, "Raise your hand if you brought a Bible."

Only a handful of those in attendance did so, one of them being Louie. Seeing the response, Brother Themis said,

"If you don't have a Bible, how do you expect to test me, to validate what I am telling you is true? The Bible is the Word of God. You must check what I say with its text and not simply accept my words just because I am a monk and wear a long black cassock."

When Brother Themis said this, Louie said to himself, "I love this guy."

During a midway break in his lecture, Themis went into the priest's office for a drink of water and contemplation. Louie came in and introduced himself again. He told Themis that he was very impressed and that his admonition that people should have brought their Bibles to the lecture was right on point. They exchanged pleasantries, then Brother Themis resumed his lecture and finished his presentation.

For a couple of years, Louie sponsored Brother Themis to visit Brisbane periodically and speak to the church. Then, Themis just disappeared. Louie wasn't sure where he was, but Brother Themis no longer came up from Sydney to speak.

Eventually, Brother Themis returned to Brisbane, now as Father Themis, with an African mission in Kenya. He asked Father Demetrius if he knew anyone interested in helping finance his efforts in Nairobi. He replied that he did and that Father Themis already knew the man, Louie.

Father Themis and Louie met for lunch at a Subway sandwich shop. They had a pleasant conversation and got along well. Father Themis told Louie about his work in Africa and what he was trying to accomplish. Louie gave Father Themis a small donation and told him he would be happy to provide him with financial assistance from time to time, but he was not interested in going to Kenya, doing business there, or sponsoring projects in Nairobi.

For two or three years, when Father Themis returned to Brisbane, Louie gave him a donation, they had a pleasant chat, and that was the end. But then something remarkable happened.

In a stroke of good fortune, Louie made a significant sum of money in five days in a real estate transaction. Louie went to his friend's apartment on the eighteenth floor of a high-rise in the central business district of Brisbane to celebrate his good fortune. He went out on the veranda and started praying aloud, "Lord, I will do whatever you want with this money because I am a Christian. All you need to do is send me a text message, and I'll do whatever you want me to do with this money."

The very second he finished saying these words, Father Themis rang Louie from Kenya. Astonished, Louie answered. Father Themis said, "Hello Louie, this is Father Themis calling you from Kenya. The Lord inspired me to call you and see how you and your family are doing. Are you okay? Is your family okay?"

Louie replied that all was well and thanked Father for his concern. Satisfied that Louie was not in distress, Father Themis said, "Great. Thank you, brother," and hung up.

Louie looked at the heavens and said, "Are you joking with me?"

It was a Thursday evening in Brisbane. Louie called his wife, Suzanne, and asked her, "What are you doing on Monday?"

"Nothing. Why?" She replied.

"Pack your bags. We are going to Africa," Louie responded to his utterly astonished wife.

On the flight over, Louie's plan was to give Father Themis a sizeable donation, tell him God Bless, and ask him to leave him alone from now on. Most of the money he was carrying was earmarked to pay for a property Louie owned with his family in Cyprus. But God had other plans.

Louie and his wife stayed in Kenya for two weeks. When Louie saw what Father Themis had accomplished in Kenya, he was blown away by the phenomenal progress.

He decided to donate all the money that he brought from Australia, which was the money he had from the real estate deal, to assist Father Themi's projects.

After sending Suzanne back to Australia, Louie continued to Cyprus. Sitting in the backyard of his family house, without the money for the house, Louie prayed aloud, "Lord, you've got the wrong guy. I'm the guy that sits in my Bentley and lounges on my sofa in my air-conditioned home, watching television. I'm not the guy that travels 20,000 kilometers across the world to look after African children..."

His prayer was interrupted by a telephone call. It was a real estate agent in Brisbane. Before leaving home, Louie had put in an offer on an old, abandoned Catholic convent in Brisbane. The agent told him the property was his if he lifted his offer a bit. Louie said, "Done."

Louie sold that convent property within a year for more than three times what he had paid.

This was the beginning, not the end, of Louie's good fortune in business. He attributes all his success since that time to the blessings he received from giving away some of his profit to assist Father Themi's projects in Africa. Louie admits that before he met Father Themi, he mainly was "smoke and mirrors." By that, he means that he pretended to be richer than he really was. Now, the more money he gives to charity, the more he makes.

Louie helped found Paradise4Kids in Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and recently the European Union. While helping many charity projects, to this day, the primary fund-raising revenue is for Bishop Themi's missionary efforts.

Father Themi had a platoon of supporters when he started in Kenya in the late 1990s. Now he has an army. Besides Louie, that army includes Father Peter Souritzidis, his wife, Presbyter Gigi from New Jersey, and their friend Linda Chelius. They form the heart of the Paradise4Kids USA team that raises most of the funds required to keep the present West African Mission operational and growing.

In Australia, particularly in Melbourne, Father Themis's hometown, Paradise4Kids is run by Jane Pallot and her committee. Jane was among the very first people to recognize the work of Father Themis and to lend a hand. She and her husband, David, visited the Sierra Leone mission. They both have medical backgrounds.

Bishop Themis receives assistance in Thessaloniki through the Fraternity of Foreign Orthodox Missions and the St. Cosmas Missionary Alliance. He was introduced to them by his close friend Dr. Constantine Christomanos. In Athens, Dr. Ioannis Perakis has been a long-time friend and supporter of Bishop Themis's work in West Africa.

Louie and Themis speak on an almost daily basis. While they have serious disagreements, their partnership has stood the test of time and has borne tremendous fruit for the cause of Christ and His church.

There were challenges and tensions during Themis's Kenyan experience, but these are inevitable in daily human existence. Overall, Kenya was good to Father. It was a solid training ground and helped him become an effective African missionary.

After serving eight years in Kenya, the time had come for Father Themis to have his own Mission where the priorities of the poor would not have to be weighed against institutional protocol.

Listening to the BBC, Themis heard about Sierra Leone and its devastating, brutal civil war. This led to further research, which convinced Father Themis that if there was one place on the planet that desperately needed Christ's love, it was Sierra Leone.

At that time, Sierra Leone was the poorest nation in the world. Since the Orthodox Church did not exist in Sierra Leone, Themis would be breaking new ground. He would start a mission on virgin soil, building everything from scratch.

In sum, it was perfect.

As required by church protocol, Father Themis asked for and received permission to transfer from Kenya and start a mission in Sierra Leone from His Beatitude Patriarch Theodoros II.

But before Father Themis could leave for Sierra Leone, he had to contend with a political and humanitarian crisis worse than anything he had ever seen in his eight years in Kenya.

In 2007, a Kenyan presidential election was held. Kikuyu Mwai Kibaki was declared the winner over the Luo opposition candidate, Raila Odinga. Conflict and instability erupted post-election.

At the village of Kiambaa, a fire burned alive fifty people in a church attended by Kikuyus. The fire sparked ethnic clashes throughout Kenya, resulting in looting, extreme violence (especially in the Nairobi slums), thousands of deaths, internal displacement, and civil insecurity.

Kofi Annan, the ex-UN Secretary General, was tasked with negotiating peace between the opposition groups. Louie Toumbas had just arrived from Australia to accompany Father Themis to Sierra Leone. Coincidentally, he was staying at the same hotel as Kofi Annan. Louie managed to get invited to join Annan at a morning coffee break in the hotel's restaurant. It's not every day someone can have a coffee and cigarette break with a Nobel Peace Prize winner. Louie has never forgotten that moment.

Father Themis's sister, Mary Adams, had also arrived in Kenya. Her purpose was twofold - to help her brother prepare for the move to Sierra Leone and to explore Kenya and its renowned wildlife reserves. Like Louie, she was unaware of Kenya's dire situation before her arrival. In fact, Mary had already started her safari trip when the violence began. Alerted to the danger, Mary returned to Nairobi. She recalls that on her way back to the Seminary, she saw villages that were previously standing now burnt to the ground.

Besides Kofi Annan, another distinguished official had come to Kenya. The Commonwealth sent a delegation to supervise the presidential election. The head of the delegation happened to be the former president of Sierra Leone, Ahmed Kabbah. Both Father Themis and his sister Mary took full advantage of his presence. They discussed their imminent move to Sierra Leone and received sound advice from Mr. Kabbah on how to effectively establish the Orthodox mission in Freetown.

While Mary stayed at the Seminary in Riruta Satellite, Louie was stuck in the hotel, unable to leave due to the political instability and resulting street violence. Father Themis and his driver, Jared, took the dangerous drive from the Seminary to the hotel to try and retrieve Louie.

When the car approached the central city district, an angry, machete-waving mob blocked the roadway. As a Luo, Jared knew he would be cut to pieces if the crowd managed to stop the car. Father Themis was also at risk simply for being in the car with a Luo.

For the first time since Father Themis had known Jared, he was told in no uncertain terms, "Father, if you want to live, keep quiet. Don't talk. I am taking over now."

With that stern admonition, Jared quickly turned the car around. The mob was running towards the vehicle. Father Themis held his breath and prayed silently. Jared managed the U-turn skillfully and pressed his foot on the accelerator. He did not slow down until they had reached the seminary gates. Once the violence died down, Louie was able to safely leave the hotel.

Father Themis was not the same man who had left Australia years earlier. He was personally fulfilled, more alive, healthier, and happier. The challenges of being an African missionary were demanding - disease, insects, the tropical heat, humidity, hostility from some of those he wished to serve – but he would not trade those conditions for the squabbling in Australia and the condemnation, even the persecution he was forced to endure because of his vision of a multi-ethnic church. Themis felt young again, ready to take on whatever Christ had waiting for him in Sierra Leone.

Chapter Sixteen

Sierra Leone

In 1652, the first slaves from Sierra Leone were transported to the British Southern Colonies in North America. This abominable trade flourished for more than a century, with an estimated twelve million souls kidnapped and sent in chains across the Atlantic.

In 1792, Thomas Peters, an African American former slave, worked with British abolitionists to create a settlement that would come to be known as Freetown. Subsequently, thousands of freed slaves from across the British Empire immigrated to West Africa.

Sierra Leone became a British Crown Colony in 1808. It wasn't until 1960 that Sierra Leone was granted independence from Great Britain. In April 1961, Sierra Leone became independent under Prime Minister Milton Margai. From 1961 through 1991, a series of national governments came and went, most of which were plagued by poor administration and corruption.

From 1991 through 2002, a brutal civil war pitted the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), backed by Liberia's Charles Taylor, against the Sierra Leone government. 50,000 people were killed in the brutal civil war, and another 25,000 had one or more limbs cut off by RUF forces in retaliation or to intimidate them into submission.

The RUF "recruited" thousands of child soldiers, boys under eighteen, to fight in its rebel army. These child soldiers were known for their extreme brutality. Often, the children were abducted, drugged, or forced into submission by threatening their family members.

At the war's end, because many of them were brainwashed and addicted to narcotics, most child soldiers needed rehabilitation and care before being safely sent home to their families. Some never recovered and suffered mental disorders.

Sierra Leone was the poorest nation on the planet, devastated by a decade-long civil war, endemic corruption, and economic stagnation when Father Themis and Louie Toumbas flew out of Nairobi for Freetown in January 2008. When they arrived, they were met by Abdul Kargbo and his young half-brother, King David Kargbo.

A name like "King David" is not unusual in Sierra Leone or in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Babies can be named by the day of their birth. For example, the former Ghanaian diplomat and United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, was called Kofi because he was born on a Friday ("Kofi" literally means "Born on Friday" or "Friday's child").

Newborns are often given celebrity names. In the last few years, scores of Luo parents in Kenya called their new sons Obama because of the former U.S. President's father's Luo ancestry. King David Kargbo's name falls within the category of biblical celebrity names.

Father Themis recruited three Orthodox men from Kenya to assist in the foundation of the Orthodox Church in Sierra Leone. They were Deacon Charalambus, a former Nairobi Orthodox Ecclesiastical School student, Jared Odiga, Father Themis's driver in Kenya, and Clotaire Nkounkou, a Congolese ex-student from the Nairobi Ecclesiastical School.

This group was expanded by the addition of locals. The first was King David Kargbo. His brother Abdul appointed him as the Mission Assistant.

The newly elected President of Sierra Leone, Dr. Ernest Bai Koromo, a Christian, welcomed Themis with open arms. Koromo, a businessman before entering politics, is generally viewed as an effective leader who won free and fair elections. He focused on rebuilding the country's infrastructure, fighting systemic corruption, and improving the health care system.

For the next ten years, Koromo served two five-year terms in office, he and Father Themis met periodically and enjoyed a cordial relationship. They discussed Father Themis's goals to improve early childhood education and care for the disabled. A

Senior Minister of Internal Affairs, Dauda Kamara, was a Koromo appointee and very supportive of the Mission's efforts. When Father Themis needed help from the national government, he called Mr. Kamara.

Sierra Leone is a rare African nation with a long-term cordial relationship between Muslims and Christians. Inter-religious marriages are common. Many Sierra Leoneans describe their religious affiliations as "Christmas," a combination of Muslim and Christian.

When Father Themis first met with President Koroma, he was told, "Father Themis, you are most welcome to Sierra Leone. Please do not cause any friction between your church and Muslims."

To this day, Bishop Themis employs many Muslims as non-ecclesiastical workers within the Mission - drivers, security guards, compound managers, cooks, cleaners, and building contractors. Mostly, he has found them to be honest and reliable.

King David is a good example. He was a Muslim when he met Father Themis. Over time, he became Father Themis's right-hand man. Father trusted King David so much that he would not make any critical decisions about the Mission without consulting him.

Eventually, after witnessing and participating in all the humanitarian work of the Mission, King David chose to be baptized an Orthodox Christian. He also became the Mission's Public Relations Officer.

King David is highly skilled in photography and video recording. All the lengthy promotion videos of the Mission's work and activities, edited in Melbourne and Sydney and shown whenever Father Themis visited Australia, were primarily composed of King David's original footage.

In 2023, King David will depart from the Mission as a full-time employee. His love for football (soccer) has created a new opportunity. King David was instrumental in establishing the Mission's successful and premiership-winning underage football club (Orthodox Football Club). Now, he will work with Louie Toumbas, the Australian

philanthropic organization HADA, and FIFA to create a humanitarian football project for underprivileged boys in Sierra Leone. Working with Bishop Themí, King David gained the experience, skills, administrative abilities, and crucial international networking required to achieve this goal.

A wise old adage in Africa says, "It is better to teach someone how to fish than to give him a fish." Father Themí's goal is to empower people to stand independently rather than constantly depending on the Mission's charity for their livelihood.

The Mission's first compound and headquarters was in a three-story stone house in Babadorie Hill in the Lumley district of Freetown. Father Themí secured the place in his initial reconnaissance visit in December 2007. By Sierra Leonean standards, the house was above average, but by Australian and United States standards, it was marginal, at best.

There was only sporadic electric power available at the house. When the power would come on every few days, it only lasted for about an hour, so there was no air conditioning in the house to relieve the occupants from the tropical heat and humidity.

Municipal water was unavailable, so their water came from a well on the compound that had to be pumped to a tank. They cooked on a propane gas stove and used a generator for power. The kitchen, such as it was, did double duty as the chapel and cooking area.

The weather was another challenge. There are two seasons in Sierra Leone. The rainy season, with its cataclysmic downpours, runs from May through October, and the dry season lasts from mid-November through to May. Rats and cockroaches are a constant nuisance in houses. Mosquitoes are active after sunset, spreading malaria far and wide.

At night, packs of wild dogs roamed the streets in front of the Mission house. The animals made terrible noises, making sleep difficult. Security was always an issue. Calling the police and expecting immediate help was problematic at best.

Resources were scarce. Father Themis and his group had to be self-reliant in every respect and simply learn to adjust to their new situation. Their daily prayers in the kitchen "chapel" helped to provide courage, endurance, and strength.

There were other problems the Mission faced in its initial days - criminal conduct and tribal tensions.

The house on Babadorie Hill came with a house manager, Hassan Kamara, a young Muslim man. Hassan's job was to ensure the house ran as smoothly as possible – provide a steady water supply from the well, start the generator whenever electricity was required and ensure the house had an acceptable level of cleanliness. Hassan also ran errands at the local shops. His behavior towards the missionaries was always respectful and polite.

So it was surprising one afternoon when the police came to the house and arrested Hassan. The missionaries were busy that day and had not noticed that the car, which Father Themis had brought from Kenya, was missing.

The police asked to see Father Themis. He came down to the main gate facing the road and saw Hassan in police detainment. A crowd had gathered because of the law enforcement presence. Father wondered, was Hassan trying to sell the car? Was he simply going on a joy ride that turned sour? Father had no idea what Hassan's motivation was to take the vehicle.

The police officer explained, "If you lay charges, we will take him to the cell. He will face the court and either pay the damages or go to jail."

The crowd was now fully involved in the situation, hurling insults at Hassan and apologizing to Father Themis. They knew Hassan would not be able pay damages, so jail was the only just solution.

Hassan was on his knees with fear and tears in his eyes, crying out for mercy. As each moment passed, the crowd became angrier. They were shocked when Father Themis said, "In accordance with our faith, which is based on the teachings of Jesus, I

am quite willing to forgive him. I, therefore, press no charges and will pay for any damages."

The crowd, the police, and the neighbors looking in from their fences were stunned. At first, the throng was eerily silent, but then they broke out in protest. Father Themis stood firm, "I forgive him. Let him go."

The police had no choice; they released Hassan. He crawled to where Father Themis was standing, with tears pouring down his cheeks, profusely thanking him for his mercy.

"It is Jesus who forgives you, not I. Do not repeat this again," Themis admonished.

This was a life-changing moment for Hassan. In due time and after much reflection, he would ask to be baptized an Orthodox Christian. His baptismal name was Alexander.

Alexander is now Father Alexander, a priest of the Orthodox Church Mission.

Father Themis faced another challenge from within the team he brought from Kenya. Deacon Charalambus was a Meru. The Meru people are closely related to the Kikuyus. They share similar ethnic and political views. The Luos are traditionally viewed negatively by the Kikuyus. Jared was a Luo.

As the days and months progressed at Babadorie Hill, so did the ethnic tensions they had brought from Kenya. It eventually resulted in Deacon Charalambus returning to Kenya.

In 2008, Qelfala was a young man who had recently left school. He and Hassan met as youngsters and continued their friendship after school. Qelfala visited Hassan almost daily in the afternoons at the Babaorie Hill house.

During these visits, Qelfala became curious about the new occupants. He wondered what religious group they represented. Wanting to learn more, Qelfala was told that he was welcome to attend their Orthodox Christian services. He soon became a regular attendee and expressed his desire to convert and be baptized.

Qelfala has the distinction of being the first convert to the Sierra Leone Orthodox Mission. His new name was Kyriakos (in Latin, Dominic).

Kyriakos displayed a happy and easygoing disposition. He was always willing to help. However, it wasn't long before Father learned that Kyriakos had experienced a very difficult childhood and adolescence.

In 2000, Kyriakos' lived with his mother and sister. His father was from Bumbali, and his mother was from Guinea. He had two sisters, Alice and Cleopatra.

During the Civil War, the RUF captured Kyriakos and his sister Alice. They were part of a fifty-prisoner group forced to march for miles in the heat. Kyriakos was only eleven years old. Alice was twenty.

Kyriakos struggled with the heavy weight of wood he was forced to carry and nearly collapsed from exhaustion. When his sister Alice protested to the RUF guards and yelled for Kyriakos to drop his load, the rebels shot and killed her. Kyriakos could not turn around and see if Alice was alive or dead. Had he done that or uttered a word of protest, they would have murdered him too. Although he was in shock, Kyriakos continued the forced march until they stopped for the night.

Three days later, government troops appeared and chased away the RUF rebels. Kyriakos was free to go back and search for his sister. He found her in the hospital morgue. Then he took Alice's body to their village in Bumbali. Kyriakos and his mother buried Alice there and did their best to avoid the conflict for the remainder of the war.

When Kyriakos joined the church in 2008, his other sister, Cleopatra, lived with him in Freetown. Later that same year, Cleopatra moved back to Bumbali to care for her mother. She went for a walk in March 2011. Cleopatra was eighteen and still a virgin. Some juju rituals require virgins to be sacrificed to "achieve" their desired spiritual goal.

When they found Cleopatra's burned remains, several parts of her body were missing. Desecration of the corpse is a sure sign of a juju ritual killing. The body of another little girl, perhaps nine or ten, was found next to Cleopatra. She was also mutilated and burned.

The police investigated the murder, but all they could determine was that Cleopatra was approached by two men who asked her for sexual favors. When she refused, they kidnapped and killed her. To this day, no one has been convicted of this heinous crime.

As the years passed, and despite periodic failures, Kyriakos became the Mission's chief chanter. Eventually, he was ordained to the priesthood, becoming Father Kyriakos.

Once he had gained local support and a foothold in Freetown, Father Themis searched for opportunities to serve Christ and the community. It would not be long before the Mission's first full-scale project was underway.

An attorney, who was also a member of Parliament, told Father Themis about a group of squatters in the heart of the city who were in desperate need of assistance.

Following the directions given by his attorney contact, Father walked into a run-down, two-story building in the heart of the city on Walpole Street. Everything inside was destroyed, all the windows were smashed, and graffiti littered every wall. The unfortunate souls living in this place were all amputees and polio victims, the offscouring of the lowest rung of Sierra Leone society.

There were no toilets, no running water, and no working amenities of any kind. The residents of this miserable encampment begged in the streets or searched for scraps from the trash and then returned "home" to rest. Troublesome and unruly, they were prone to acts of violence and all but unmanageable. Children were also living in these appalling conditions. Sierra Leone society often rejects the disabled and their children because they are considered cursed.

Sierra Leone has no social safety net and no government-run assistance programs for people with disabilities. The least fortunate had nowhere to turn other than the streets.

Worse, as if it could get worse, the people living in this hellhole were being threatened with eviction. The building owner wanted to clean up the property and realize

a return on his investment. It was clear that the disabled needed a place of refuge, a permanent home, rather than squatting in a dilapidated building until forced to leave.

To accomplish his goal, Father Themis needed land. In the Waterloo region of Freetown, Themis came across a parcel no one else seemed to want. The national government gave the Mission the land, ten acres along the main highway. But that was the beginning, not the end, of the story.

In Sierra Leone, land sales are often problematic. Once a parcel is purchased, interlopers may claim rights to all or part of the property based on spurious reasons, hoping for a settlement to net them cash or a small piece of the tract.

As soon as Themis acquired the Waterloo land, the owner of the building on Walpole where the disabled were squatting kicked them all out. Working through his new network of Sierra Leone private and public contacts, Themis found the disabled temporary places to stay; but that was a band-aid, not a cure.

With the help of a Greek architect, Mr. Nicholas Fournairis, within a short time Father Themis built eight mudbrick houses with four rooms each on his Waterloo property. Each disabled family had a room to live in, with access to running water, food, and basic medical care. A school was planned on the complex, so the children would be educated.

A conflict arose after the disabled were settled into their new homes. Some of the residents were led to believe by agitators that the land and houses belonged to them and not to the Mission. This discord created general mistrust and eventually led to violence.

One evening, Father Themis and an entourage, which included Jared Odiga and Kyriakos, went to Waterloo to conduct Vespers services. A food truck was scheduled to meet them there. It was supposed to arrive early so they could feed the disabled before services began.

When Father and his group arrived, the food truck was nowhere to be seen. A hundred people were waiting for them, and they were far more interested in eating than salvation. Father Themis knew this could mean trouble.

It was raining, and the rain intensified when Father Themis and his crew got out of the Landcruiser that brought them to Waterloo. Father began the Vespers service with his back facing the congregation. He was quickly interrupted by angry noises from the crowd.

The crowd yelled, "We are starving! We need food!" in Krio. "You promised to feed us!" Rocks flew towards the altar, and then the mob turned over benches and tossed them around. Some men took out knives and moved threateningly toward Father Themis.

Jared, Kyriakos, and a deacon blocked the angry men from reaching Father Themis. Kyriakos was stabbed in the hand and began to bleed profusely. One of Father's group broke free, ran to the Landcruiser, and sped off to get the police, shouting, "They are trying to kill us!"

When Father had no more room to retreat and was about to be assaulted, a beautiful young girl, no more than ten, wafer thin, with light skin, straight hair, and huge eyes, made her way through the angry mob and touched Themis on the arm.

Father Themis, Jared, and Kyriakos were led by the girl to an open area beside the church. The rain suddenly stopped. Instantly, the crowd backed off. In a flash, their mood completely changed, and they were no longer threatening. The food truck arrived, and it was all smiles.

They looked around, but the girl was gone. Jared asked Father Themis, "That was amazing. Who was that little girl?"

Three police cars pulled up, and several officers jumped out, ready to make arrests. Father Themis calmed the policemen and told them everything was alright. The cops saw Kyriakos and his wounded hand, but Themis said it was nothing, just an accident.

Was the intervention of the little girl a miracle? Neither Themí nor anyone associated with the Mission has seen her before or since. This was not the first time (nor the last) Father Themí dodged a potentially life-threatening situation. Is this due to fortunate circumstances or direct help from Above?

The more time you spend with Father Themí, the more you realize he is blessed and highly favored. While it is unwise to see angels around every corner, it would be naïve to assume that Bishop Themistocles doesn't receive help from the Lord.

Using the resources available to him, Father Themí acquired a primary school called the June Hurst Roness School on the edge of the central business district of Freetown. The school was in terrible condition, missing walls and windows, and was prone to be attacked by mobs. The Deputy Mayor of Freetown, Mohammed Bobson Kamara, was instrumental in transferring the school to the Orthodox Mission.

Themí arranged for the school infrastructure to be rebuilt and upgraded. Walls and windows were replaced. A perimeter fence was installed, and the buildings were repaired. Desks, blackboards, and everything required for a functioning primary school were brought in by the Mission. An Orthodox church was built on the school property.

In 2008 and 2009, the Mission acquired the land to build the Tower Hill complex. When Themí first discovered the property, it was undeveloped land full of thorns, thickets, and rodents. While there were challenges to building on the site, Themí's vision was clear.

Father wanted to build a church at Tower Hill, Sts. Constantine and Helen. He wanted to build a Teacher's College and the Mission's headquarters. While it would take five years plus to finish all the construction, Themí eventually built what he first saw in his mind's eye.

The first two years of the Mission were turbulent, but by 2010 Father Themí had firmly established himself and the Mission in Sierra Leone. Now he resolved to expand on his initial success.

Chapter Seventeen

Challenges And Opportunities

As time passed, Father Themis and the Orthodox Mission's work in Sierra Leone gained more support. While the Greek sponsorship remained, assistance now also came from Australia through Paradise4Kids (P4K).

Louie Toumbas, P4K's founder and director, worked hard to create a philanthropic network that Father Themis could rely upon to fund his Mission. Any funds raised by Father Themis during his visits to Australia, America and the United Kingdom were handled and accounted for by P4K. P4K also used social media to reach potential supporters across the globe, primarily through Facebook.

The Syke Street schools became a severe challenge for Father. The problem was a communication breakdown between the Freetown City Council and the Ministry of Education.

The Council legally leased the school to the Mission. They receive annual payments for the lease (which the Mission has faithfully paid without a break since 2009). The problem is that the Ministry of Education (and other influential people) question the lease's validity.

Because of this difference of opinion, the school is run as a government-assisted school, not a private institution. Father Themis has tried to explain, negotiate, and compromise with all the stakeholders for years. But despite his best efforts, the Syke Street school challenge persists.

It was nearly solved in early 2018. Father Themis decided to go above all the different factions and appeal directly to the nation's President, Ernest Koroma. Father Themis and colleagues from the Mission met with the President at the State House. The President had also invited the then Minister of Education, the late Dr. Bah, to be present.

Father showed the President the extensive plans for the Syke Street compound and emphasized that it would serve the poor while being a private school. Father Themis received full support from the President and was instructed to start the project. When the APC government lost the election after the initial construction began, the plan was back to ground zero.

Today, Father Themis (with the help of the Mission lawyer) advises all parties that the Mission's two-story building will become operational, with the Grade Four and Five students from the nearby new Orthodox Mission School at Kroo Bay attending classes there.

At Waterloo, the squabble over who owned the land continued to fester. By mid-2010, Themis had still not put a perimeter fence around Waterloo, which, in hindsight, was a mistake.

One of the challenges at Waterloo was encroachment on the land. Due to a lack of funds, the Mission could not immediately build a perimeter wall around its property. As a result, almost half the land was lost due to illegal encroachments by trespassers. But the biggest challenge in Waterloo was the disabled.

Father was reluctant to chastise the disabled people on his compound too harshly. He thought that forgiveness was the best way to reach them and bring about long-term, positive change in their aggressive and irresponsible behavior. That said, he could no longer ignore a core group of troublemakers – the same people were repeatedly disrupting the community.

After a series of violent attacks on each other, with knives, broken glass bottles, and clubs, Father Themis instituted the "blood rule," which said if you commit violence against any person on the compound and draw blood, you are immediately banished from Waterloo. The "blood rule" reduced tensions but did not solve all the problems.

In December 2011, the Orthodox Church Mission was honored to receive and welcome His Beatitude Pope and Patriarch Theodore II. The Orthodox Pope took part in the first service in the new Cathedral of Sts. Eleutherius and George at Tower Hill.

The Pope was given honorary Head of State status by President Koroma. The Patriarch's visit marked the first time a prominent Christian religious figure had visited Sierra Leone.

"Papa" has been the designation for the Archbishop of Alexandria and Patriarch of Africa in the See of Saint Mark for centuries. This office has historically held the title of Pope – "Παπας" (papas), which means "Father" in Greek and Coptic - since Pope Heraclius, the 13th Alexandrine Bishop (227–248 AD), was the first to associate "Pope" with the title of the Bishop of Alexandria.

The Alexandrian episcopate was revered as one of the three major Christian sees (along with Rome and Antioch) before Constantinople or Jerusalem was granted similar status (in 381 and 451, respectively). In the sixth century, these five archbishops were formally given the title of Patriarch and were subsequently known as the Pentarchy.

In May 2013, His Eminence Metropolitan George visited the Sierra Leone Orthodox Mission for the first time after being elected as the new hierarch of coastal West Africa (including Sierra Leone). After touring the Syke Street school and Tower Hill complex, the archbishop wanted to see the Waterloo compound.

Father Themis explained to the Metropolitan that the atmosphere at Waterloo was turbulent because the disabled community could be unpredictable, even violent. Regardless, the Metropolitan wanted to look at the compound, so Father obliged.

When they arrived at Waterloo, many of the disabled, and their able-bodied family members, were moving around the compound. Activity centered on one of the resident housing buildings. Most of the roof had been torn off the building during a recent storm, so those living there were exposed to the elements.

Father Themis and the Archbishop stopped walking because three disabled men were yelling and gesturing at a group of residents. When they saw Father Themis and the Metropolitan, they pointed at them and then back at the damaged building. They demanded that Father Themis fix the storm-damaged roof right now, this instant.

The compound manager explained that they were obtaining the materials to effect repairs as quickly as possible and that it takes a little time to gather everything required to do the job. The Metropolitan politely explained that presently he was on a tour of the compound and that Father Themis would fix it as quickly as possible. The unruly crowd did not like his response.

Showing no respect for the hierarchy, the residents' aggressive protests turned violent. Sensing trouble, Father Themis moved quickly to protect the Metropolitan. He asked Kyriakos and Jared to promptly take the hierarch to the car's safety and drive him out of the compound.

Then a stick flew in their direction, and a rock sailed, followed by a piece of brick. Realizing they were taking the Metropolitan to the car, they rushed and blocked it. Father switched tactics and took the Metropolitan to the priest's house on the compound.

The disabled would not allow anyone near the vehicle unless they were given money by the Metropolitan. Father Themis made a deal with them to resolve the conflict - let the Metropolitan go with their leader Moses to Tower Hill, where they would receive gifts and money. As a guarantee, Father Themis would remain at Waterloo until the car returned with Moses and the money. The situation was resolved when Moses returned with fifty Euros. The crisis was over.

Metropolitan George was puzzled as to why they were behaving this way. After all, didn't Father Themis feed and care for them? Father explained that some of them, a few vocal agitators, stirred up trouble at every opportunity. Given the pain and suffering these people had been through, it didn't take much to turn them into a frothy mob.

Father Themis argued that these men must not be judged too harshly because the poor souls have known only violence and war. Most of them were just frightened and confused. This incident was the contradiction between the old and the new Sierra Leone – the troublemakers were stuck in past patterns of behavior, and patience, time, catechesis, and Christ were required for them to change.

Dealing with damaged souls on the Waterloo compound was only one of Father Themis's challenges. Another problem he faced was the widespread practice of Juju, the original form of voodoo, in West Africa.

Juju is folk magic based on the belief that charms or spells can inflict pain or punishment on a person or grant blessings like good health or prosperity. In one form or another, Juju has been part of Africa for centuries.

Father Themis constantly preaches against Juju, but despite his warnings, the practice of using Juju to invoke magical powers to solve problems, settle disputes and influence human events is a constant threat to his flock.

A disturbing aspect of Juju is the brutal practice of human sacrifice. As appalling and primitive as ritual killing is to Western sensibilities, it is nevertheless true that human sacrifices are part of West African culture.

The killing of Kyriakos' sister, Cleopatra, is not unique. Sadly, the story of Kyriakos' family tragedy with Juju illustrates the hazard Sierra Leonians still confront today.

No one knows how many young women (and men) are killed as human sacrifices in West Africa – undoubtedly, many more than are reported to the authorities. Juju is woven into the fabric of Sierra Leone's culture. Even Orthodox priests are not immune to this temptation.

One of Father Themis's priests told him he did not want to liturgize with a second priest because he feared the second priest was doing Juju on him to "hurt him with magic." He accused the Juju priest of placing magic particles in the Holy Communion. This priest told Father Themis that he was not from Sierra Leone he did not understand the seriousness of this problem.

Father dismissed these concerns because there was no direct evidence to support the claims. Then, six months later, the priest died. He had asthma from childhood and sought treatment at the clinic but to no avail.

Was there anything nefarious in the priest's death? There was no way to know and insufficient grounds to involve the police. While Father Themis dismissed any notion of a magic spell being the cause of his priest's death, he did call the wife and brother of the priest to let them know that the priest felt threatened. He even mentioned the matter to a police inspector who was sympathetic to Father Themis's challenges. But he dismissed the issue.

From 2011 through 2013, several young girls known to the Mission were killed in Freetown, the apparent victims of human sacrifice. To Father's knowledge, none of these ritual killings were ever solved. In response, he put strict measures in place on kids being picked up or escorted off the Mission School property.

By December 2013, Father Themis had built his Waterloo compound, Tower Hill headquarters, school, and church. The economy in Greece was stabilizing, and P4K was a steady source of financial support.

Father was focused on expanding his Mission, serving more people, baptizing, preaching, liturgizing, feeding the poor, orphans, and widows, and educating the next generation of Sierra Leonians. The number of the Orthodox clergy was also expanding, with new priests and new deacons serving the Church. Plans to build an orphanage were also laid down.

Themis had no way of knowing that his world was about to be turned upside down.

Chapter Eighteen

The Ebola Crisis Begins

The first time Father Themis heard about Ebola was while he was serving as a missionary in Kenya.

On November 26, 2007, the United States Center for Disease Control (CDC) received blood samples from the Uganda Ministry of Health, taken from twenty of the forty-nine patients involved in an outbreak of an unknown illness in the Bundibugyo district in western Uganda. These patients reported fever, enteritis, and bleeding.

Genetic sequencing of a small segment of viral RNA from samples indicated the presence of a previously unknown strain of the Ebola virus. At the invitation of the Uganda Ministry of Health, international health agencies deployed field investigators to the affected region.

A laboratory was set up in Entebbe at the Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI). As the outbreak neared conclusion in January 2008, the number of suspected cases rose to one hundred and forty-nine. The Kenyan government immediately shut the border with Uganda, and the outbreak was contained. Everyone at the Nairobi Mission was relieved and felt safe once the crisis faded.

What Father Themis remembers most from learning about Ebola in 2007 is it was incurable, essentially a death sentence. It wasn't until March of 2014 that Ebola resurfaced in his world.

Father was on a fundraising trip in Greece when he heard on the BBC that Ebola had struck Guinea, Sierra Leone's northern neighbor. Expecting a repeat of what happened in Uganda in 2007, he assumed that immediate measures would be implemented to contain the outbreak in Guinea.

Unfortunately, the 2014 West African Ebola outbreak was not contained in Guinea. A viral fire started that would not be extinguished until 11,310 West Africans had perished.

From the outset, Sierra Leone's Ebola problem was shrouded in misinformation and myth. While most medical professionals knew how serious a threat Ebola was, the average citizen was not well informed.

When the first Ebola patients sought assistance, animist West African witch doctors prescribed powders and potions derived from native plants to "cure" the deadly disease. These encounters resulted not in a cure but rather further spreading of Ebola through direct contact between the infected and their "healers."

Traditional West African funerals for Ebola victims, which involves washing and cleaning the corpse, continued to be held. Often the burial practice includes relatives of the deceased washing their hands in a common bowl and then touching the face of their departed loved one. While this "love touching" is intended to create unity between the living and the dead, the result was Ebola infected entire communities in a matter of hours.

Juju Masters, the title West African people give to those proficient in the black art, claimed that Ebola was brought into Sierra Leone through "invisible airplanes" and "invisible people." While this sounds absurd to modern ears, a significant portion of the populace took this nonsense seriously. When a rubbish fire erupted near the Lungi Airport, the Juju Masters said the "invisible Ebola plane crashed," and the pilots and passengers died.

At the same time Ebola hit Sierra Leone's cities, the "big needle" myth kept scores of people away from clinics and hospitals. The rumor was that if you went to the hospital seeking diagnosis and treatment for Ebola (or for an illness you thought might be Ebola), a doctor with a "big needle full of poison" would kill you. Given the significant mistrust Sierra Leonians have for modern medicine, this malicious rumor was effective, for a time, in keeping some people from seeking treatment for Ebola, or any other ailment, at clinics and hospitals.

By March 2014, Ebola had spread from Guinea to central Sierra Leone. In April, Father Themis warned his parishioners, the government, and anyone else who would listen, that Ebola was deadly and that it was only a matter of time before the disease reached Freetown.

While some shared Father Themis's belief that Ebola was an impending nightmare, in April and May of 2014, most thought "Father Ebola," as Themis had come to be known, was overstating the danger. In their minds, Ebola would not amount to anything more than a short-term, relatively minor public health problem.

On March 31st, in a CNN report, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) warned the world that "The spread of this epidemic is unprecedented because past outbreaks were contained and involved more remote locations. The geography of this outbreak is worrisome because it will greatly complicate the tasks of organizations working to control the epidemic."

On this same day, March 31st, a World Health Organization spokesman said that while the Ebola outbreak was "serious," it was still "relatively small."

After Father Themis became a Christian, he started to yearn for cleanliness, a near OCD-type condition. Initially, this was part of his constant confession; frequently cleaning and denying himself former small pleasures (ex. rock music, lavish food, Australian Rules Football) became a strategy for repentance. With Ebola, Father Themis's cleanliness obsessions were magnified and proved invaluable.

Before Ebola hit Freetown with all its fury, Father started his Ebola prevention campaign. He received gloves and other personal protective gear shipments from his overseas donors. He handed out these gloves to beggars in the street and set up chlorine buckets so people could wash their arms and hands and kill the virus.

At the Syke Street School, Tower Hill, and especially at Waterloo, Father Themis implemented strict cleanliness protocols and lockdowns. Anyone coming to the compound with a temperature over 37 degrees Celsius (98.6 degrees Fahrenheit) could not get in.

During the summer of 2014, I worked with Father Themi, writing a feature film script based on his life. We spoke frequently. Here are some of Father Themi's thoughts and observations pulled from our recorded conversations -

7/31/2014: Ebola is now out of control; people are starting to panic. Airport is nearly shut down, just before I am scheduled to leave. Starting to get into panic mode. Nation shutting down on Monday. Three more nurses died of Ebola. SL (Sierra Leone) cannot handle it. WHO is going to step in.

Why so long for WHO to step in? After 700 people are dead? WHO is now stepping in. (United) States is now covering the Ebola crisis in SL. Two months ago, I wrote an article for an Ortho journal, which was not published. I was leaving in one week.

Civil War and Ebola, a litany of disasters for SL. Amazing to think about this, and it's a theme. Where Christ is needed the most.

8/2/2014: SL is used to crisis. Suffered consistently since 1991. No other country suffered as much as SL. It has become the epicenter of this regional outbreak. Viscous thing compared to civil war; it is an invisible serial killer. At least during the civil war could hear the bombs and see the enemy, but with Ebola, it is silent and unpredictable.

A lot of self-examination here. Why us after years and years of suffering, war, poverty, and corruption? Just starting to get back on its feet, now wham!! Theories and speculation – some see it as punishment because of Voodoo/Juju. Some people are in denial – think it is a huge stunt for dollars.

Doctors and nurses have died. They were not fully aware of the risks. Now all the nurses and doctors run away, afraid of the risk. A lethal cocktail of misunderstandings allows the virus to prosper.

Panic is setting in. The same panic attacks used to experience during the war are coming back. Anxious and don't know where to turn. Our services are on Saturday afternoon. Today the church was only three-quarters full. Cannot leave SL. Airport is almost closed. If you want to leave SL -\$4000 to \$5000, that would typically cost \$1000.

Our projects have over 2000 schoolkids, etc. under our care, plus the college another 150 to 200 and Waterloo 100 – 2500 people. We pray a lot about it. Constant prayer for Divine intervention.

8/13/2014: Worst period of the crisis; hoping it's under control soon “only get better.” Doctors have run away, and nurses have fled. Few clinics are open everyone scared of everyone else. If you complain about having a headache, you are considered to have Ebola. Trying to cope as best as we can. Government has tried quarantining affected areas. Medical services are unable to cope with the problem. Outside help is required.

Daily life is extremely difficult. Wear gloves all the time. Not sure if the person you're talking to has Ebola. Government shut down the country. 7pm curfew, crowds not allowed to gather - like a war situation. Now, doing something about it. For a while, nothing happened. It could become a global crisis.

SL is isolated from the world. Fear and anxiety of the unknown. Trying to instill a sound understanding of what we are dealing with. A lot of daily discomfort beyond the anxiety of getting Ebola. A member of SL Parliament came to see me. The man is a traditional chief. Came asking for assistance in his chieftom and needed buckets with taps, 400 buckets. I got him 30, all I could do. A chlorine water wash is required. Face masks, gloves, buckets, chlorine. Everything shut down.

No cases of Ebola yet. Then the begging in the streets must stop, infecting everyone. Over 100 people live here in Waterloo. We bring them food every day. Don't leave the compound. I'll lock you out of the compound if you go to beg, you cannot come in. A few hours later, they said ok, we accept for three weeks. They were quarantined with no incidences of Ebola.

8/17/2022: The only congregating is in churches and mosques. Nobody cares about SL. The world is focused elsewhere, not on SL. If something is not done to contain this plague, this Ebola thing will reach the USA and Australia. Has to be “stopped here.” Cases and deaths are underreported because people just run away. The government does not have money, infrastructure, or expertise to help them. I

continue to feed the poor and hand out gloves to the poor. About to get the first batch of gloves and PPE from Aussie.

8/22/2014: Frustration with the international community. Traditionally Brits are closest to SL. Brits were the first to move out. British Airways was the first airline to stop service. The Chinese have given money. SL is pro-Western, but they are starting to question Western ties. American doctors working in Liberia got Ebola, flew to America, got treatment, builds resentment. SL is treated as a second-class nation - "The Politics of Ebola."

Local resentment, or better-called disappointment. Now we know who our true friends are. NGOs have left, and the whites have gone. When things were peaceful, whites enjoyed it, then they fled. US State Department is keeping a skeleton staff. No American is to come to SL.

Imagine if Ebola hit Chicago in 1976. From 1976 until now, they would have developed some drug, cure, or therapy. When it hits Africa, Congo, nothing has been created. No cure for diseases coming out of Africa. Last 40, 50 years no research on Malaria. No updates. People are frustrated. SL feels abandoned by the UK.

Focused on keeping all our people alive. Facemasks, gloves, chlorine buckets. This is my priority.

8/27/2014: The problem right now - Canadian people pulling out, British pulling out, WHO pulling out. Should be coming in. Canada's latest pull-out, 4 or 5 workers staying in the hotel, and someone in the hotel got Ebola. All the guests are being quarantined, so they choose just to leave. We are disappointed. Not getting enough help from overseas. They expected Big White Brother to help. Big White Brother takes diamonds and resources, but where is he now?

9/2/2014: People die of routine causes, for example, heart attacks. Doctors and nurses are dying; some did not flee. Sad side effect of the Ebola crisis - food shortages. Food prices are sky high. I'm expecting riots any day over food shortages. Still feels like

SL is being abandoned. What happens if I get Ebola? People come with a spacesuit on, and I'll be dead. It's out of control.

9 16 2014 – People are being turned away and dying in the streets. Gets worse, not better. The entire city is covered with bodies; there is nothing we can do. Fear - I see it in their eyes. I don't rest.

Let's examine Father Themis's comments in the context of events in the summer of 2014.

By mid-June, MSF (Doctors Without Borders or Médecins Sans Frontières) was sounding the alarm. However, there was still no coordinated response from the developed world. "The epidemic is out of control," the MSF Operations Director said. "There is a real risk of it spreading into other areas. A massive deployment of resources will be needed."

Unfortunately, MSF was a "John the Baptist" figure in June 2014. Nearly all NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and Western powers pulled their people out of Sierra Leone that summer. The consensus in the developed world then was to wait and see how the crisis would develop before sounding the alarm. Father could not wait for others to act because *"Our projects have over 2000 schoolkids, etc. under our care, plus the college another 150 to 200 and Waterloo 100 – total 2500 people. We pray a lot about it. Constant prayer for Divine intervention."*

In late July, the Peace Corps removed its 300-plus volunteers from the region. On August 4th, United States President Obama held a meeting at the White House with African heads of state. Even though thousands of West Africans had already been infected, Ebola wasn't mentioned.

In sworn testimony before a U.S. Congressional Committee, the head of Samaritan's Purse said that the United States' response to the Ebola crisis was an unqualified "failure." On August 11th, the United States ordered all its embassy staff and

family members to leave Sierra Leone. Great Britain had already pulled its people out of the country.

The few organizations that not only stayed but ramped up their presence during the summer were Doctors Without Borders, or MSF, and a handful of other stalwart NGOs. Without the timely and sustained intervention of MSF, the Ebola crisis in West Africa would have been exponentially worse in terms of death and economic and social devastation.

West Africa has a fragile health care infrastructure. In the United States, there are 2.5 doctors per 1000 people. In Sierra Leone in 2014, there were 0.022 physicians per 1000 people and a minimal number of hospitals and clinics. So, when the doctors and nurses in Sierra Leone fled in a panic that summer because they did not have adequate information or equipment to deal with the emergency, there was no one to replace them. As Father put it, this was a key component of the *“lethal cocktail of misunderstandings”* that led to thousands of deaths.

Father Themis did not say things like, *“Nobody cares about SL. The world is focused elsewhere, not on SL”* and *“We are disappointed. Not getting enough help from overseas. They expected the Big White Brother to help. Big White Brother takes diamonds, resources, but where is he now?”* without justification.

Who can question Father’s assertion that if Ebola had struck New York City, Toronto, London, or Berlin, the world’s response would have been immediate and stunning in size and scope? Father Themis asks a question we should all ask ourselves, *“Is an African life as valuable as an American, English, or German life?”*

Nearly a decade before the Black Lives Matter movement came to prominence in America and elsewhere, Father Themis was begging the world to save Black lives and doing everything he could, at great personal risk, to preserve every Black life possible during an extreme health crisis.

The United States and the developed world have, and continue to, spend billions of dollars through governments, NGOs, and private individuals to improve the lives and health of African people. This effort should be recognized and applauded.

However, it is also true the developed world has a long, sad, and ugly history of exploiting African people for their resources, both human (slavery being the worst form of this abuse) and physical (diamonds, precious metals, oil, etc.). Father Themis argues that while we cannot change the past, do we not now owe a particular obligation to the Black and Brown peoples of the world to help them, especially during times of crisis?

Father would never seek to deny anyone the best treatment possible for Ebola. That said, the vastly disparate treatment of the West Africans who were dying by the thousands and two Americans who contracted the disease in the summer of 2014 while serving in West Africa, Dr. Kent Brantly and Nancy Writebol, was, if nothing else, a disturbing example of the disparate treatment received by West African and developed world Ebola patients.

Dr. Brantly and Ms. Writebol were flown by private jet to Emory University Hospital in Atlanta in early August. They both received the highest standard of care and survived. At the same time, in August of 2014, thousands of West African Ebola victims were dying in squalor, and America had yet to send significant help to the region.

Ken Issacs of Samaritan's Purse said, "The Ebola crisis we are facing is not a surprise to us at Samaritan's Purse, but it took two Americans getting the disease for the international community and the United States to take serious notice of the largest outbreak of the disease in history."

On September 7th, President Obama declared the West African Ebola outbreak a "national security priority." His stated reason for America choosing to intervene in the crisis was, "In West Africa, Ebola is now an epidemic of the likes that we have not seen before... Today, thousands of people in West Africa are infected. That number could rapidly grow to tens of thousands. And if the outbreak is not stopped now, we could be looking at hundreds of thousands of people infected, with profound political and economic and security implications for all of us. So, this is an epidemic that is not

just a threat to regional security -- it's a potential threat to global security if these countries break down, if their economies break down, if people panic. That has profound effects on all of us, even if we are not directly contracting the disease."

Speaking to journalists on NBC's Meet The Press, the President was even more specific as to why America was acting, "If we don't make that effort now, and this spreads not just through Africa but other parts of the world, there's the prospect then that the virus mutates. It becomes more easily transmittable. And then it could be a serious danger to the United States."

In fairness, President Obama also spoke about his empathy for West Africans and his desire to help those afflicted in the region with Ebola. Neither this author nor Bishop Themis argues that America acted without a heart for those suffering in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and elsewhere. However, it is inescapable that America, Europe, and the rest of the developed world were slow to intervene until the West African Ebola crisis exploded in intensity and posed a serious threat to global health.

Perhaps that's the correct way for developed countries' governments to respond to health crises, only when their national security interests are threatened. Father Themis has a higher standard, believing that every life has equal value in God's eyes, whether a person is born in Sierra Leone, Russia, America, Nicaragua, or elsewhere.

By September 2014, West Africa was descending into chaos. In Father Themis's words, "*People are being turned away, and they are dying in the streets. Gets worse, not better. The entire city is covered with bodies; there is nothing we can do. Fear - I see it in their eyes. I don't rest.*" The Sierra Leone national government declared a state of emergency and locked down the entire country for three days. Curfews and other movement restrictions were put in place and remained effective for months to come.

The death count was rising exponentially. Father was doing his best to keep everyone under his care safe, distribute extra supplies to local authorities as he could, and feed and shelter as many people as possible. He was exhausted, and his limited resources were strained to the breaking point.

Chapter Nineteen

Unimaginable Horror

In October 2014, I edited an article Father Themis wrote and wanted to publish in America, Greece, and elsewhere. He called his piece *Questions from Ground Zero*. It is presented here in its entirety:

It is my habit to wake up early and read the Bible. This morning my Scripture reading was interrupted by a bright lightning display and earth-shaking thunderstorm which sounded like cannon fire exploding in the air. The downpour was torrential. It is the rainy season in West Africa.

The news here is not very good. The Ebola epidemic is out of control. Unless some extraordinary assistance is immediately forthcoming, we are on the verge of a medical catastrophe on a scale unseen since the Bubonic plague ravaged Europe centuries ago. One credible estimate is that 60,000 West Africans will be infected by the Ebola virus in the next few weeks. Reported Ebola cases are doubling every 20 days.

We know how to stop the spread of this disease – through case finding, isolation of ill people, contacting people exposed to the ill person, and further isolation of the contacts if they develop symptoms. In Sierra Leone, while the government has taken concrete steps to accomplish these objectives, they simply do not have the manpower or resources to defeat Ebola on its own.

A few weeks ago, in my meeting with the President of Sierra Leone, he offered sincere gratitude to us for the small and insignificant help we could give him. I could see in his eyes the compassion for his nation, knowing the tidal wave of death that was about to come and flow over his desperate people.

Some mornings when I wake up to read the Scriptures, if I have a sniffle or a slight cough, I say to myself, "That's it. I have Ebola". And then I do my best to try and laugh it off, wondering if I make it to Heaven, will I be held in quarantine for twenty-one days until

God lets me in! Sometimes the only thing one can do to try and stay sane is laugh a little during such unimaginable horror.

Bodies are being left in the streets here for days at a time. People will not touch them for fear of getting the disease. Burial crews are understaffed and overworked. Most of our clinics, hospitals, and pharmacies have shut down. Doctors and nurses have fled, fearing for their own lives, leaving an already impoverished medical infrastructure in a derelict state.

The international community has let West Africa down. I listen to the BBC radio every night. Over 5000 people have died from Ebola in West Africa so far. Yet BBC news broadcasts are filled with the latest updates on two or three Westerners with the disease. We get minute-by-minute progress reports on Western people fighting for their lives in state-of-the-art medical facilities, while every hour of everyday people are dying here in large numbers.

Why has it taken so long for world governments to respond in force to this crisis? Much more must be done and done now. We need an invasion of doctors, nurses, and fully equipped medical personnel. If this does not happen, the epidemic will continue to rage, tens of thousands more people will die, and Ebola will become even harder to contain.

Some of us in West Africa are wondering, why did it take six months from the beginning of the outbreak in March before the nations of the world decided to act? Why was it that only when the Ebola epidemic in West Africa evolved into a global crisis did the international cavalry begin to arrive?

Why has no vaccine or cure been found since the first outbreak of Ebola in 1976 in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo)? The inevitable question, therefore, remains – had the original outbreak of Ebola occurred in 1976 in New York, Paris, London, or Moscow, would there still be no cure after some four decades?

Today I was shocked and greatly dismayed to hear the announcement by the Australian government through Immigration Minister Scott Morrison that Australia will no

longer process visa requests from any West African country. Mr. Morrison added that holders of permanent Australian visas will be subject to mandatory three-week quarantine before they depart from West Africa. In essence, Australia is closing itself off from West Africa.

Closing off all immigration to Australia from West Africa is not only a terrible thing to do in terms of the message it sends to the people here – and that message is to go ahead and die, but do so quietly and leave us alone, we chose to distance ourselves from your suffering – it is also counter-productive. We need to do everything we can to incentivize Australian health care workers to come here and do the work that needs to be done. Making it more difficult than it has to be to return home only diminishes the possibility of getting the people we need to come here and fight for the survival of this nation.

I'm embarrassed that my home country is the only major Western nation not to send personnel to West Africa to fight this plague. Australia has been and continues to be willing to send military equipment and soldiers to the Middle East to fight battles there, but it has been unwilling to send even one soldier here to try and save lives.

I have tried very hard to be a good ambassador for Australia to the West African people. How do I explain this latest decision by the Australian government to the people here? Where is the goodwill, the compassion, or even the basic common sense in such mean-spirited and short-sighted folly? I'm truly embarrassed for my country right now. That said, daily, I am reminded of the generosity and concern shown by individual Australians who have been instrumental in helping us fight this evil pestilence.

I do have some good news to share. None of the Orthodox Christian followers here have been infected with the virus. This is the result of the grace of God, hard work, and the assistance of our Mission's international sponsors and supporters, such as HADA, PK4 Africa in Australia and the USA, and the Orthodox Christian community in Greece. The outpouring of support we've received from our donors has been truly humbling.

The most vulnerable segment of our Mission's flock is the disabled community we feed and house at our Waterloo compound. A person with a disability is at increased risk of infection because he relies on others for mobility. The disabled have a propensity to beg in the streets of Freetown. Begging has become a potentially lethal activity here for our entire Mission. If one of our disabled people gets infected, our entire compound could become contaminated.

Thankfully, we have managed to quarantine most of our disabled residents. We've achieved this through education, distributing protective items (gloves, face masks, chlorine, etc.), and increasing our financial assistance to them. Those disabled who chose not to quarantine are now given assistance outside our facilities.

As for me, this is my home, and as a shepherd, I must stay with my flock, care for them, protect them, and do my best with God's grace to see that evil takes no prisoners. Even though I have no need for anything, there is great need all around me.

During my quiet time in the morning, I will continue to pray for my beloved Australia and indeed all the governments of the developed world that they might be moved to send us the people and resources required to stop this plague now before tens of thousands more suffer needless and excruciatingly painful deaths. The only just, rational, and compassionate response to this epidemic is for all of us to become our brother's keeper, even if our brother is half a world away.

Shortly after Father Themi wrote *Questions from Ground Zero*, he followed it up with a second article, which I have edited for purposes of this book:

Those of us at the center of the Ebola outbreak are both very thankful for our support from private and governmental sources. We are puzzled by what we see as a lack of a coordinated and full response to this desperate crisis. Simply put – the Ebola epidemic is out of control.

While the international media has widely reported this, the world's governments have yet to fully accept this reality. Despite the World Health Organization, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, and other respected institutions declaring with a united voice

that an unprecedented nightmare is raging – five people a minute in Sierra Leone are being exposed to the Ebola virus - we still do not have the necessary doctors, nurses, clinics and essential supplies to even begin to get a handle on this Apocalyptic scourge.

Most of our clinics, hospitals, and pharmacies have shut down. At least 40 medical workers have died from Ebola in Sierra Leone. Doctors and nurses have fled, fearing for their own lives, leaving an already impoverished medical infrastructure in a derelict state. Those open facilities are, for the most part, ill-equipped to handle the current outbreak. Not only are medical workers not trained to handle the Ebola virus (which is often confused with malaria), but they also lack the most basic preventative and protective supplies such as gloves, face masks, scrub suits, disinfectant gels, etc.

Liberia has reached such a desperate point that Ebola patients are simply turned away and left to die unattended in the streets – at times drawing crowds of terrified onlookers.

The Ebola problem is compounded by local cultural practices and anxieties:

- Fear has arisen among ordinary people that they may become infected with the Ebola virus if they go to a hospital or clinic. The result is that common medical problems, such as appendicitis, are not being treated, resulting in numerous needless deaths.*
- There is great anxiety about the possibility of misdiagnosis - a common cold, diarrhea, or a skin rash can easily be misdiagnosed as Ebola. Some people in Sierra Leone believe that doctors are under instructions to kill them through a lethal injection if they are diagnosed with Ebola. For this reason, some people prefer to treat themselves with visits to a pharmacy or a traditional herbalist. Such thinking complicates efforts to control the outbreak.*
- Some West Africans still believe in the ancient pre-colonial practice of witchcraft and magic. They reject Western medicine and turn to the tribal witch doctors and herbalists for treatment with disastrous consequences.*

- *In remote rural areas of the region, it is thought by some that Ebola either does not exist or that it is brought in by health care workers. There is even a ludicrous conspiratorial belief held by some in Sierra Leone that the Ebola outbreak is the direct result of a CIA experimental program in biological warfare conducted in Kenema that somehow went wrong. As a result of these beliefs, healthcare workers have been attacked and even killed.*

Why has it taken so long for world governments to respond in force to this crisis?

While I applaud the recent pronouncements of U.S. President Obama to send troops and facilities to Liberia, much more has to be done and done now. We need an invasion of doctors, nurses, and fully equipped medical personnel. If this does not happen, the epidemic will continue to rage, tens of thousands more people will die, and Ebola will become even harder to contain.

Ebola has now reached Texas in the United States. I have been saying this to anyone who would listen since March of this year – Ebola can and will reach the West unless it is stopped here first. Yes, the modern medical infrastructure in the West makes containing Ebola much more likely, but the disease quickly spreads through routine human contact.

People can have the disease for days and exhibit no symptoms – until they travel to their homeland and spread it there as was apparently the case with the Liberian man who flew to Texas. It is incredibly naïve to assume that if 60,000 or 100,000 West Africans contract Ebola, the disease will be contained here and not reach non-African countries.

The United States, Europe, Asia, and Australia are simply playing with fire and hoping not to get burned. This makes no sense to those of us who are forced to watch people die in the streets daily from a disease that, while it has no known cure, can be contained and eradicated through a sustained international humanitarian effort. Why is it that while non-African Ebola-infected health workers in Sierra Leone are able to be

flown out and receive the very best available treatment abroad locals – even doctors – are left to die here? The conclusions are uncomfortably obvious.

Social justice issues aside, world governments can no longer sit on the sidelines or take half measures. The Ebola epidemic now threatens not only the people of Africa but the entire planet. It is time to sound the alarm and bring the resources to bear to eradicate this pestilence now.

Anything less than an immediate, all-out response to this crisis not only puts the nations of West Africa at risk of societal collapse, death, and suffering on an almost unimaginable scale, it puts every American, European, Asian and Australian in danger of contracting a disease for which there is no cure.

From mid-September 2014 onward, the United States, Great Britain, and other developed countries started sending substantial resources into West Africa to fight Ebola. However, it took several weeks for all the medical personnel and equipment to be deployed.

Father Themí's frustration, evident in the two pieces he wrote and released to the press in September and October of 2014, is understandable. But his expressed concerns went far beyond the developed world's failure to quickly respond to the Ebola crisis.

How are we to interpret Father Themí's unflattering evaluation of the developed world's general lack of concern for African people? Should his views be dismissed as venting by a religious zealot who loves the poor but has unrealistic expectations of the developed world's responsibility to deal justly with and care for its less fortunate neighbors?

Let's start by analyzing the validity of Father Themí's criticisms of the world's response to the West African Ebola crisis.

All the direct quotes I attribute to Father Themí in this book about the Ebola epidemic were made by him in real-time as the events unfolded. His raw honesty and Christian values are on full display. With Bishop Themí, you always get the unfiltered

truth as he sees it, with zero spin or sugar coating to make his opinions more palatable to anyone, especially political and social elites.

In November 2015, with the full benefit of hindsight, the Harvard Global Health Institute issued its landmark *Report of the Harvard-LSHTM Independent Panel on the Global Response to Ebola*. I encourage anyone who wants to know more about the West African Ebola crisis and the lessons we should learn from the world's response to the crisis to read the report. The report is available for free at <https://globalhealth.harvard.edu>.

While I was half a globe away, in a sense, I lived through the Ebola crisis with Father Themis as it unfolded. I was not at risk and, for sure, I would have fled Sierra Leone when Ebola hit. Nonetheless, I experienced the crisis first through his eyes and then followed up on what I learned from Father by watching news accounts and doing further research.

When I first read the Harvard study a few years back, I was astonished at how closely the Harvard Panel's views mirrored those of Father Themis. The Harvard study largely expressed what Father noted and commented on in real time.

Here are three examples of this congruity (and there are more) –

Harvard Study Recommendation #1 – “All countries need a minimum level of core capacity to detect, report, and respond rapidly to outbreaks. The shortage of such capacities in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone enabled Ebola to develop into a national, and worldwide, crisis. The global community must agree on a clear strategy to ensure that governments invest domestically in building such capacities and mobilize adequate external support to supplement efforts in poorer countries.”

This is exactly what Father Themis said to me and the world in 2014. The Orthodox Mission focuses most of its efforts on building the human infrastructure of Sierra Leone by educating the next generation of its citizens and leaders. Then and now, Father Themis has unceasingly argued for the further development of West Africa's health care system utilizing both local and international resources.

Harvard Study Recommendation #2 – “WHO should promote early reporting of outbreaks by commending countries that rapidly and publicly share information while publishing lists of countries that delay reporting.”

If the local and international authorities had paid attention and listened to Father Themis in March, April, and May of 2014, the Ebola crisis could have been lessened through swift and decisive intervention. “Father Ebola” shouted the warning as loud as he could, but he was dismissed as an alarmist.

Harvard Study Recommendation #7 – “Additionally, research funders should establish a worldwide research and development financing facility for outbreak-relevant drugs, vaccines, diagnostics, and non-pharmaceutical supplies (such as personal protective equipment) when commercial incentives are not appropriate.”

Father’s observation that if Ebola had hit Chicago, Paris, or Moscow in 1976, the pharmaceutical industry would have developed an effective vaccine and/or treatment regimen by 2014 is echoed by the Harvard Panel.

The body of the Study Group report touches on many of Father Themis’s criticisms and observations. For instance –

“Media attention and public interest substantially increased after the evacuation of two infected US aid workers from Liberia. Fear and hysteria in response to Ebola infections in the USA led to quarantines of returning aid workers and other counterproductive measures for controlling the epidemic.²² Dozens of countries, private companies, and universities began implementing travel restrictions, and many airlines ceased flying into the region.”

In August 2014, Father Themis said, “*American doctors working in Liberia got Ebola, flew to America, got treatment, builds resentment. SL is treated as a second-class nation - “The Politics of Ebola.”*

A summation near the end of the Harvard Study Group report caught my eye -

“The human catastrophe of the Ebola epidemic that began in 2013 shocked the world’s conscience and created an unprecedented crisis. It exposed deep inadequacies in the national and international institutions responsible for protecting the public from the far-reaching human, social, economic and political consequences of disease outbreaks. The reputation and credibility of WHO has suffered a particularly fierce blow. Ebola brought to the forefront a central question: is major reform of international institutions feasible to restore confidence and prevent future catastrophes? Or should leaders conclude the system is beyond repair and take ad hoc measures when the next major outbreak strikes?”

As of mid-2022, thankfully, we have not yet experienced an Ebola outbreak on the scale of West Africa in 2014. We did just endure the COVID pandemic. I wonder, did we learn anything from the Ebola crisis that helped us handle a worldwide health catastrophe? Has the reputation of WHO improved over the past seven years since the Harvard Study Group report was issued? Do we have more or less confidence now, post-COVID, in WHO and other international actors to effectively deal with a massive viral outbreak?

The Ebola crisis tested Father’s endurance and strengthened his faith. Considering that the poorest of the poor and hundreds of vulnerable children were under his care, the fact that Father was able to help protect all of them is nothing short of a miracle.

The Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone

















Chapter 20

Life After Ebola

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the West African Ebola outbreak officially over in June 2016, although by the fall of 2015 it was evident that the worst of the storm had passed. Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone were the hardest hit, with Sierra Leone at the top of this unfortunate list. According to WHO, nearly 4000 people died in Sierra Leone from Ebola.

Not one of these 4000 deaths were baptized members of the Orthodox Mission community.

For two years, Father Themis waged war against the disease. Yes, he used the weapons of science and medicine – chlorine washing, personal protective gear, temperature checks, social distancing, etc. – but those were not the only munitions in his arsenal.

Believing that Divine assistance was required if he was to save the souls under his care, Father Themis prayed non-stop, and, to the greatest extent possible, he distributed the body and blood of Christ to the faithful. European friends sent Father Themis “plague prayers” from the Middle Ages, those used by Christians in the 14th century to combat the Bubonic pestilence. Thousands of Father’s supporters around the globe added their prayers to his in a constant petition to the Almighty for mercy.

Father Themis was brave and diligent and deserves respect and praise for his efforts to save the poorest of the poor from one of the most virulent viruses on the planet. While this is no doubt true, Father Themis gives all the credit to Jesus Christ for keeping so many people alive and well when all around them death claimed the lives of thousands of their countrymen.

But Father Themis did more than just help his own parishioners. He donated rice, personal protective gear and other much needed supplies to the government and

private groups when they were needed most. During the outbreak, the Mission earned a reputation within Sierra Leone as a positive force in the country.

After Ebola subsided, Father Themis was uncomfortable with the notion that Ebola was gone and would never return. The scientific consensus is that a migrating bat from the Congo brought the curse to West Africa in 2013. What's to stop another bat from doing the same thing today?

According to PLOS, a non-profit, open access publisher of medical research, as of 2022, thirteen Ebola vaccine candidates have entered human trials. One CDC-approved vaccine for Zaire Ebola is now available (the strain that hit West Africa in 2014).

According to PLOS –

While substantial progress has been made in the development of EBOV vaccines, multiple questions remain unanswered including the following: what is the durability and the immediacy of immune responses generated by different vaccines; what are the specific correlates and thresholds of protection; do any interactions or interferences exist between vaccines and potential therapeutics; what is the safety of these vaccines in special populations, particularly pregnant women and the immunocompromised; and can vaccines be formulated to be stable for long-term storage at 2 to 8°C, which would be useful in endemic areas?

Another major hurdle is mitigating the economic risks for manufacturers and distributors of EBOV vaccines since the demand may not be high enough to warrant stockpiling. Outbreaks also tend to occur in resource-poor countries leaving little financial incentive for commercial development. In January 2021, the International Coordinating Group (ICG) comprised of public and private benefactors established an Ebola vaccine stockpile in Sweden with the goal of manufacturing 500,000 doses. Stockpiling is an important step toward controlling EBOV outbreaks as it is critical for ensuring timely access to vaccines for at-risk populations.

The first two sentences of the second paragraph above are crucial to understanding why Father Themi remains “uncomfortable” with the idea that Ebola has come and gone and will not threaten the lives of millions of Africans in the future.

If the worst were to happen again, how long would it take for the pharmaceutical industry to produce enough vaccines to inoculate the West African people? If the past is prologue, there will be enough Ebola vaccine to treat health care workers and those with the money to buy the vaccine, but it may take far too long to ramp up production and provide the millions of doses required to save the masses.

Post-Ebola, Father Themi was faced with a difficult situation at Waterloo. The disabled, who he had sheltered and fed for many years, became increasingly unhappy with their circumstances.

From 2008 onward, when he first encountered the disabled on Walpole Street, Father Themi was keenly aware of the trauma they had been through - a civil war, abandonment, permanent injury. He hoped that through his hard work, the help of the church, and the grace of God, he could convince many of them to change their ways and live in peace.

Tensions at Waterloo reached a boiling point in 2018. The residents were constantly upset and never satisfied, demanding more money, food, and water. Vandalism increased in the compound. Some of the disabled helped criminals steal from the Mission. Drugs and prostitutes were brought into the community. Young girls, who attended school there, were sexually harassed.

When the residents conspired with outside agitators to illegally claim ownership of the Waterloo compound, Father Themi was forced to act. The time had come to end the housing and care of the disabled at Waterloo.

Father Themi’s dilemma was morally justifying removing people who were physically disabled. Most of them were missing a limb, sometimes multiple limbs, and were mentally challenged by the trauma of war and street life. He discussed this dilemma with the Sierra Leone Minister of Social Welfare.

The Minister told Father that he had to remove the disabled for the benefit of the Mission. The orphans and schoolchildren were frightened of them. The greater good had to be considered.

After a meeting at Waterloo, attended by the disabled residents, Father Themí, his staff, and the Minister of Social Justice, the disabled agreed to leave if they were paid to do so. After some negotiation, the Mission decided to pay \$2,200 U.S. Dollars to each disabled family if they agreed to leave the compound. Since there were thirty-plus families on the compound, that was a large sum of money, especially in the context of Sierra Leone.

On the appointed day, each disabled family appeared at the Ministry of Social Welfare, signed an agreement saying they had no further claims against the Mission, received their payment, and left.

Today, the Waterloo compound is at peace. The focus now is on educating children and caring for Ebola orphans. Bishop Themí is guided by the words of the Apostle James who said, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (James 1:27)."

Two orphanages are now built and operational at Waterloo, one for boys and the other for girls. Father Themí's program pays for all the housing, clothing, medical care, and education of the kids under his care until they reach eighteen. If the Mission cares for a child from age 4 or 5 until they reach maturity, that's a substantial expense.

Unlike secular Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the Orthodox Mission in Sierra Leone is restricted from receiving funding from virtually all government and most private foundation sources. This "prejudice against religion," in Bishop Themí's words, reduces his ability to serve more people, especially children, who are in great need.

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) estimates that over 11,000 children in Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia lost their

parents during the Ebola crisis. When at total capacity, the Waterloo orphanages will serve twenty-five or so youngsters. Bishop Themis would love to have the facilities required to look after more kids and, God willing, over time, the generosity of his supporters will provide for more buildings and staff so he can help more orphans.

Due to the severe poverty of West Africa, some people use children in schemes to extort money from the government and private organizations, including the Orthodox Mission. Children are brought to the Mission or other charitable organizations by adults who claim the children are orphans and in need of guardianship. A year or so later, the parents of these children suddenly appear at whatever facility they are housed in and scream, “Why did you take my child?!” demanding compensation for their “unjust” treatment.

To avoid this type of chicanery, the Orthodox Mission now has a strict policy in place that all orphans under its care must be brought to them by the Sierra Leone Ministry of Social Welfare. If the government certifies that the child is an orphan, the Mission is immune from any liability if the child turns out to have a living parent(s).

The female orphans of Sierra Leone present perhaps the most challenges. When a child is orphaned, they are often passed to relatives or neighbors who can see to their needs. If the child is a young girl, the “price” of her care is often being sexually abused by older male relatives. These abused girls are initially frightened and withdrawn when they are brought to the orphanage. But once they understand they are safe and cared for at the Mission, they blossom like flowers in the Spring.

In 2019, Father Themis welcomed his friend John Karakis from Greece. John, in Father’s words, “wanted to see the worst part of Freetown.” So Themis took him to Kroo Bay.

Located near the central business district of Freetown, Kroo Bay is a squalid collection of shacks built upon a layer of garbage. More than ten thousand people call this slum home. There is no running water, sanitation, or medical services beyond the most primitive clinic.

The residents of Kroo Bay literally have nothing. They struggle daily to survive in the most primitive and filthy conditions imaginable. Rainwater naturally funnels from the surrounding hills into Kroo Bay, causing a literal flood of garbage in the rainy season. Disease runs rampant, and life expectancy is short.

Kroo Bay is a scandal. No human being should be forced to live in such a place. People live there only because they have nowhere else to go.

When Bishop Themis and John Karakis visited Kroo Bay, there was only one broken-down old school that was truly pitiful – smashed windows and walls, garbage was strewn everywhere. John saw it and cried. After drying his tears, he told Themis, “I’m going to build you a new school here.” Bishop Themis knew that while John wasn’t a poor man, he wasn’t rich either.

“How are you going to do that, John?” Themis asked his friend.

“I’m going back to Greece, and I’ll raise the money,” John vowed.

True to his promise, John Karakis accomplished his goal. He worked hard for many months and eventually raised funds required to build a school. Bishop Themis hired a local builder and constructed a two-story school with classrooms, indoor plumbing, electricity, a full staff of teachers, and a chaplain.

Bishop Themis, John, several Freetown City Council members, and other community leaders opened the school in late 2021. The local children went wild and jumped for joy when they were let into the building and saw that everything was new, bright, and clean.

Bishop Themis hopes this is just the beginning. He has plans to build a bridge across the creek, a medical clinic, and a hall for the children to gather and eat meals. But for now, five hundred or so kids, who literally have nothing else in their lives, have a school to attend and educators to help raise them from poverty.

From 2016 onward, Paradise4Kids (P4K), continued to be the primary financial sponsor for the Mission. Fundraising efforts were successful, with donations increasing year over year until 2020.

West Africa was minimally impacted when the COVID pandemic hit Europe, America, and Asia. There were very few deaths and no widespread mitigation measures, like the lockdowns seen in America, Great Britain, Australia, and elsewhere. One of the reasons why could be that Sierra Leone has a very young population, with an average age of twenty. Another is the abundant sunshine – COVID does not do well in the presence of Vitamin D.

But COVID did have an adverse impact on the Mission. Beginning in early 2020, donations to P4K began to drop off, reflecting the tough economic times in the developed world. Travel restrictions kept Bishop Themis from visiting Australia, Great Britain, or the United States to fundraise. In fact, it was not until July 2022 that Bishop Themis was allowed to return home.

Today, donations are back to pre-pandemic levels and rising once more. Bishop Themis is free to travel, at least to Australia. Since the Bishop chooses not to get vaccinated against COVID, as of the date of this writing (December 2022), he still cannot visit the United States.

From 2008 to 2022, fourteen or so years ago, the Orthodox Mission in Sierra Leone has grown from nothing to a multi-compound operation that feeds and educates hundreds of children daily. Until Bishop Themis arrived, the Orthodox faith was virtually unknown in Sierra Leone. Now, hundreds of people have been baptized and are actively participating in the life of the church.

At Tower Hill, Bishop Themis built the Mission House, a Teacher's College, an Orthodox Cathedral, and a school -



Tower Hill 2022



Mary Adams teaching kindergarten at Tower Hill



Sts. Helen and Constantine Church – Tower Hill 2022



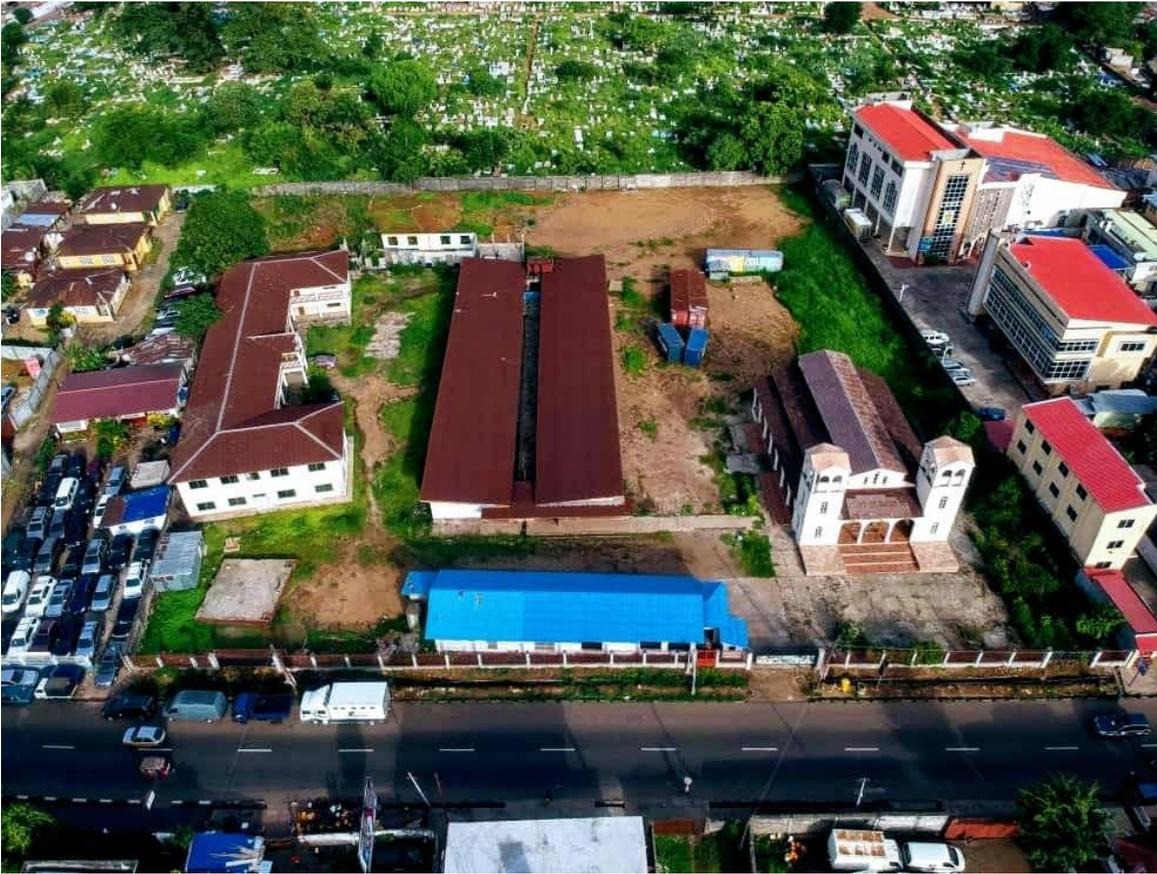
Inside Sts. Helen and Constantine Church – Tower Hill 2022

At Waterloo, the Mission has two orphanages, a primary school, a clinic and other facilities -



Waterloo 2022

At Syke Street, the Mission has a primary school and a church -



Syke Street School Complex - 2022

At Kroo Bay, the Mission has a brand new school –



Kroo Bay school plaque - 2022



The kids of Kroo Bay – 2022



Children playing Mission football – 2022

In addition, the Mission has purchased land on Lungi Beach, across the bay from the airport in Freetown. Bishop Themi intends to use this land as a recreational area for the children, transporting them there on Fridays and bringing them home on Sunday evenings. His plans include building a dormitory and a small chapel on site.

Bishop Themi's goal is expansion, so he can serve more people. God willing, expect the Orthodox Mission in Sierra Leone to grow in the years ahead.

Chapter 21

Reflections and Wisdom

In many parts of the world, especially in Africa and the Middle East, there is open hostility between Christians and Muslims. Bishop Themis says a "simple stability" exists between the faiths in Sierra Leone, and generally, people get along "quite well."

There is a mosque outside one of the Mission's compounds, and Bishop Themis helps them whenever possible. All his drivers and some of his security people are Muslims. Some of the teachers at the Mission's schools are Muslim. Of course, no child is ever denied services or treated differently than others because of his religious affiliation.

But Bishop Themis worries that this long-standing peace is fragile. While tribal divisions cause more friction and lead to more violence than religious quarrels, religious differences are amplified when pressure is put on Sierra Leone society at large.

In late 2022, West Africa is in the grips of soaring inflation. Prices for everything, especially fuel and food, have risen far more than in the developed world. For example, the cost of diesel fuel rose over 400% in 2022, making it nearly unaffordable for the Mission to run its electrical generators. Since the average Sierra Leonian lives on about \$1.25 per day, skyrocketing prices for necessities cause severe hardship.

Themis's sister Mary Adams has labored by his side for many years in the Mission. She graduated college in the 1970s and worked as a primary school teacher in Melbourne for decades. As Mary advanced in her career, she became a school principal. She chose not to marry.

Despite the distance between them from the 1970s through the 1990s, Mary and Themis remained close. She is the only living soul who witnessed firsthand all the changes Themis Adamopoulos underwent in his life, from rock star to Marxist/Atheist

academic, to a theologian, and finally to an African missionary. Her dedication to Jesus and her brother's vision of serving the poor is time-tested and truly extraordinary.

Bishop Themis describes his sister affectionately as a "nun in everything but name." She is, in his words, "a strong Western woman who exhibits the best of her Greek heritage and Australian resiliency." Over time, Themis has come to rely on his sister more than anyone else at the Mission.

Mary runs all the schools at the Orthodox Mission compounds - the kindergarten and primary schools and the Teacher's College. Bishop Themis told me, "Mary is better at school administration than I could ever be. She tells me what she needs, and I do my best to provide it for her."

More than a sister or an administrator, Mary is also a close advisor and friend to her brother. Whenever he needs advice, especially a trusted second opinion on a Mission matter, Bishop Themis turns to Mary.

The only time Themis and Mary have to see each other is in the evening, for ten or fifteen minutes over coffee. They cherish these moments and the blessing of working together to serve the Lord.

Not long ago, Mary Adams was given a rare honor. On a visit to Freetown by the Patriarch of Alexandria, during Liturgy he called her up to the throne. His Beatitude then made Mary a Deaconess of the church.

About the year 400 A.D., the Greek Orthodox Church abandoned the practice of allowing women to become deacons. However, the Russian Orthodox Church has always had deaconesses. In 2004, the Greek Orthodox church officially reinstated women to the diaconate, but few women have been ordained. Mary does not participate as a male deacon would in the liturgy. Her title is more honorary but, in Bishop Themis's view, beyond well deserved.

For some time, Mary Adams (and others, especially certain Greek Metropolitans) advocated that Themis be made a Bishop. Themis never sought the position in any way. He followed the example of St. John Chrysostom, happy to be a priest and hoping to

avoid the entanglements of administrative work and other non-Mission responsibilities. Any added prestige or glory that would accompany his becoming a Bishop was meaningless as far as he was concerned. In late 2021, although he did not know precisely what was happening, Themis "sensed" something was happening behind the scenes.

In January 2022, Father Themis got a call from his friend Kyriakos, who became a Bishop in Melbourne in November 2021. Kyriakos told him that he had become a Bishop. Father Themis thought he might be pulling his leg, but Kyriakos said it was announced in the encyclicals. Themis does not get encyclicals quickly in Africa – it often takes a couple of weeks or more for him to get such news.

Themis told Mary what Kyriakos told him, but she could not confirm the development. A few hours later, Father Themis got a call from his Metropolitan, his Eminence George, and was told that he was indeed made a Bishop. He was elected as a Bishop unanimously by the Holy Synod and assigned to serve as Assistant Bishop to His Beatitude Theodore II, Pope and Patriarch of All Africa. Thankfully, he will remain in place in Sierra Leone at the Mission.

Father Themis was ordained as a Bishop in Alexandria. Father Peter Souritzidis and Father Alex Karloutsos from the United States, along with their wives, came to the ceremony. Other dignitaries from Greece were there, including the local consulate.

In Themis's words, it seemed almost "absurd" and "surrealistic" that he was given the honor of becoming a Bishop. Even after five decades, Themis believes that people's perceptions of him may be clouded by his atheistic past. As the time approached for his ordination, his view shifted a bit, and he considered the whole process "quite extraordinary." His conclusion was that his becoming a Bishop proved, more than anything else, that "God has a sense of humor."

The standard fare acceptance speech for a Greek Orthodox Bishop is a formal presentation, perhaps even a bit "stuffy." Bishop Themis's acceptance speech was taken directly from his life and was more of a reality check than a formal speech. He told the assembled that his aim was to be the Bishop of the Hungry, to spend the rest of his life

servicing the poor. He explained that he had become adept at servicing the poor over the past two and a half decades, and this is where he could do the most good for the cause of Christ.

In the Greek Orthodox Church, a Bishop has authority and prestige. Themis is aware of the temptation of such power, so he is careful to remain grounded and not change his core personality. Because of his past conflicts with a few of the Bishops in authority over him, Themis vows to refrain from ever putting on an authoritarian air or using his enhanced status to "lord over anyone."

Bishop Themis hopes his elevation will open more fundraising doors and increase the Mission's credibility. More than anything else, Themis prays that his episcopal standing will raise the world's consciousness of the great scandal of poverty.



Bishop Themis in Greece – 2022

The hard truth is that most people in America, Europe, or Australia are busy caring for their families and living their lives. The suffering of people who often don't look like them and live thousands of miles away across oceans is not their concern.

When I had my own "moment of revelation" in 2002, a conversion experience far less intense than Themi's vision of Light in 1971, I was forced to face reality. My sin had deeply wounded myself, my family, and my friends. I had been an atheist and an amoral person, a materialist who lived a selfish, hedonistic life.

As I learned more about my new faith, I was struck by the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 25, verses 31-46, which reads –

"When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.

Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left.

Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?'

And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?'

Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.'

And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

For almost a decade after my conversion to Christianity, I lived in a situation that inspired me to focus on the literal meaning of this verse from Matthew. Then my fortunes improved. I married, inherited some wonderful stepchildren, and began to live a more "normal" life. I lost touch with my belief that I had a duty to help the poor, regardless of my circumstances, and that this is what Christ expects of me.

Bishop Themis will tell you this passage should be taken literally. Themis believes that when we pass on, our Maker will ask us what we did to feed the poor, visit the sick or have mercy on those in prison.

Most people do not want to be told that they will be judged by Christ after they die and that His standard of judgment will be the mercy they showed to the people most in need. But that's precisely what Themis says will happen to us all – me, him, you, everyone.

We have the food and resources to feed, clothe and house every human being on the planet. As individuals and nations, we simply chose not to do so. That's why Bishop Themis calls the level of poverty in the world a "scandal." By "scandal," he means "a circumstance or action that offends propriety or established moral conceptions or disgraces those associated with it."

I've also learned from Bishop Themis that simply selling all your belongings, giving everything to the poor, and living as a beggar is probably not our best option, or, better put, the one that will serve Christ best. But all of us can choose to give more and be better stewards of our resources.

Through the example of his life, Bishop Themis has also taught me that giving to the poor means more than seeing that they have enough to eat and drink. We need to invest in education and training for our brothers and sisters, so they can learn to make better choices and take full advantage of the blessings they receive.

That's why you see Bishop Themis doing both things – dispensing money, food, clothing, and shelter to the poor and educating them, especially their children, so they can lift themselves up to the degree possible given where they live.

In the second decade of the 21st Century, the developed world has become more aware of the scourge of racism. Political movements now champion slogans like "Black Lives Matter," and popular culture is more in tune with the need to lift those who have historically been treated as second-class human beings. In fact, in America today there are few worse things you can call someone than a racist.

Bishop Themis believes this Biblical verse should most guide us when we consider the issue of racism, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28)."

Here is how I see it. The negative impact of racist policies and practices of the past by governments or individuals cannot be magically erased by proclaiming this truth. However, to replace one form of racial prejudice for another by claiming that one ethnic group is always the victim or another the guilty does not further the cause of Christ.

Christians are called to a different standard. We must view the world through Christ's eyes, and His eyes do not see Black, White, Brown, or Yellow; they see only His children.

Closely related to the issue of racism is immigration. Both America and Europe are facing monumental challenges with illegal immigration. What does Bishop Themis have to say about this?

For starters, Bishop Themis feels for the immigrant. After all, as a child, he was brought from his native Egypt to Australia and struggled to adapt. Immigrants are often forced to master a new language, face racism and social pressures, and live in defacto ethnic ghettos.

He believes that every nation has the right to control its own borders. If countries like Hungary, Russia, or the United States under Trump choose not to allow

immigration, that's "Caesar's position." That said, Christ calls us to be merciful to the immigrant in all circumstances, so simply discarding people like waste products at the border isn't the answer.

What is the answer, in the Bishop's view, is helping people where they live, working with them to develop their own country's educational, social, and economic infrastructure. If we do this, emigrants will choose not to risk their lives on a leaky raft to float across the Mediterranean Sea or be smuggled by gangsters across the U.S. - Mexican border.

Themi believes what the churches are doing in Africa is the right thing. He points out what should be obvious to everyone - if the Christian churches stopped their philanthropic work in Africa tomorrow, as some in the increasingly atheistic West advocate, forty million people would starve within a couple of months.

But the Bishop goes further. He challenges countries to end their anti-religious prejudice. He believes that billions of dollars could be deployed in faith-based programs monitored by good people with accountability and transparency. If this happened, millions of lives could not only be saved, but even more would be vastly improved by more investment in schools, colleges, hospitals, and businesses.

Sadly, the governments of the world are reflecting the predominant beliefs of their citizens by refusing to use Christian and other religious charities as a vehicle to help the developing world.

The Gallup Poll, which has been surveying Americans for nearly a Century, has annually asked people in the USA if they believe in God since 1945. Until 1970, the number of people who believed in God held steady at 95% or higher. In 2022, the number of people who believed in God plunged to 81%, the lowest in American history. However, these numbers likely overstate the lack of faith in God in America and elsewhere.

If the question is framed as, "Do you believe in God with absolute certainty?" most Western European countries surveyed report that less than 15% of people believe

in God to this degree. Eastern and Southern Europeans are much more inclined to believe in God, with some countries reporting a nearly 60% affirmative response to the question.

Atheism is on the rise everywhere. Church attendance in the developed world is way down, and not just because of the COVID pandemic. Religion is seen as antiquated, false, and even dangerous by hardline Leftist politicians, who openly flout their anti-Christian views as a badge of honor.

Bishop Themis shares the traditionally Liberal sentiments of touting minority rights and exposing the historical oppression of disadvantaged groups. But he objects to the "human" centered basis of modern Liberal political philosophy. Why?

First, to deny God's reality is to deny the truth, to turn our backs on what makes us truly human. Second, when there are no Divine standards, everything is relative – not just morality but even the right to life itself. Third, this is the sin of pride, thinking we are equal to, or superior, to God. Lucifer fell from grace because of his pride.

My belief is this - when morality is relative, whoever is in power decides what is right and wrong. This type of thinking led to the greatest tragedies of the 20th Century and the slaughter of millions of people in Nazi Germany, Communist Russia, and Maoist China. I wonder, could such tragedies be in our future?

Bishop Themis asks, are we living in the "post-Christian age?" If so, then he warns that we are in great peril. Modern Liberalism, called Progressivism in America and elsewhere, is a close cousin to neo-Marxism, a political philosophy with which Themis is very familiar. In its fullest expression, Marxism leads to totalitarianism by granting the state rights that only God can truly endow.

As I wrote this book, I was struck by something I was told many years ago by a Catholic priest friend, Father Frank from California. He said, "Holy men and women are different and marvelous expressions of Christ. Evil people are dull. They stumble through life, committing the same deadly sins over and over. Sin isn't that interesting,

and it produces only misery. Spreading the love of Christ leads to a blossoming of the human spirit and happiness."

Father Frank knows what he's talking about. He's been the chaplain at some of the highest-level Federal prisons in America, including the maximum security lockup in Florence, Colorado.

Bishop Themistocles Adamopoulo is anything but dull. Years ago, a beer company advertising spokesman jokingly claimed to be "the most interesting man in the world." I disagree. Themis has him beaten hands down. A rock star, atheist, Marxist, a world-class theologian, an African missionary, and an Orthodox Bishop all in one lifetime? His life story reads more like a bestselling novel than a biography.

Louie Toumbas says, "Father Themis is the opposite of everything we call natural. That's because he's a holy man. He doesn't care about money; he doesn't care about his own life. He's a disaster as a businessman. He will not sack (fire) people when they're bad. All he does is forgive people. He is the last to judge anyone.

"I'm a businessman. I want to run things in a certain manner. Brother Themis does things the holy way, not the business way. He annoys the crap out of me. Jesus annoyed people.

"What is important to me is not important to him. Brother Themis only cares about helping people, making sure this kid gets fed and educated, this man receives the operation he needs, and so on. Nothing else concerns the man.

"Here's a perfect example. Just last week (Bishop Themis was in Australia), Father Themis goes into the supermarket. I'm sitting in the car waiting for him. On his way out, remember Themis is blind as a bat, he bumps into the only beggar in the shopping center parking lot. I get out of the car and walk over to make sure everything's okay. He picks the lady up and talks with her about Jesus. She stunk of beer. He told her alcohol was no good for her, you need Jesus. She started to cry.

"He asked her if she had a Bible. She said no. He reaches into his pocket and gives her \$20 to buy a Bible. He asked her if she had a church to go to. She said no, so

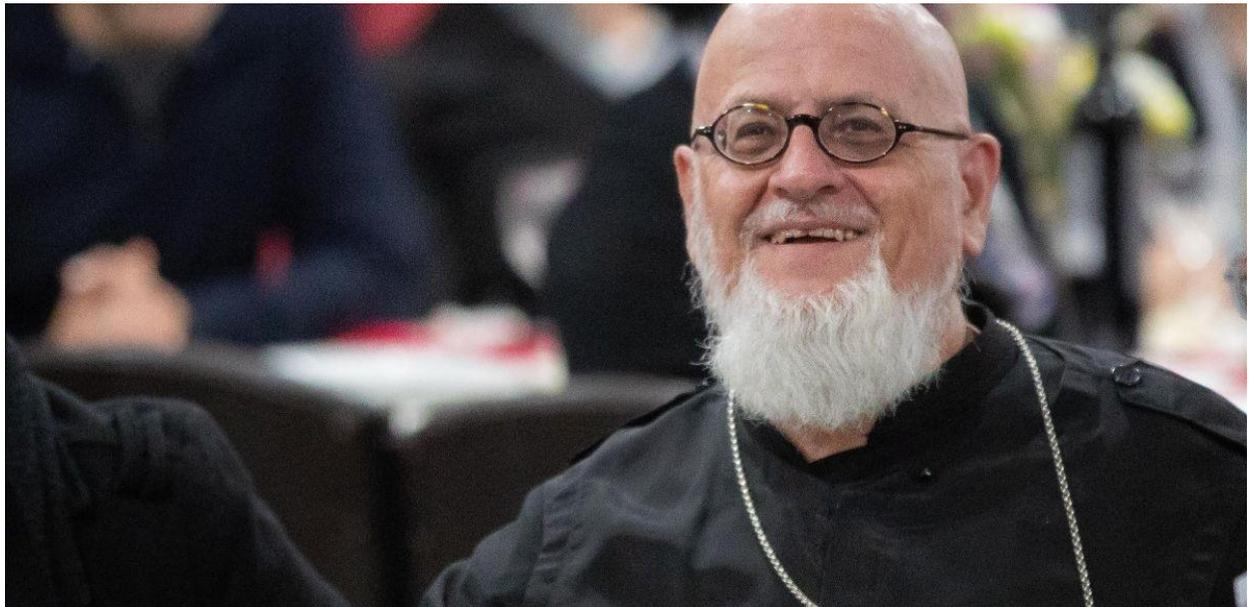
I got on my phone and found a church within 50 meters of where she lives. Themí tells her to go there Sunday at 9:30, buy a Bible and ask for help. They will help you."

Themí isn't perfect – after all, he prefers cricket to American baseball, which must be a sin. He believes that Australian Rules Football is the most entertaining sport on the planet. He can be challenging to work with, and his jokes are a bit too clean for my taste.

All kidding aside (Themí actually has a great sense of humor), I love Bishop Themí because there is no one else like him. There never will be another Themí, just as there will never be another John Chrysostom, Saul of Tarsus, or Francis of Assisi.

I pray that the Lord will keep Bishop Themí healthy and in place in Sierra Leone for many years. The world needs him now more than ever.







Father Peter Souritzidis, Bishop Themis and Father Alex Karloutsos



Father Themis Becoming Bishop Themis - 2022



Bishop Themis and Hank Hanegraaff



Eli Bear and Father Themis - 2016