

Juhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan

Juhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan (Mar Thoma XVIII) was the Head of the Mar Thoma church from 1947- 1976, who gave leadership to the church and at the same time actively participated in social and political arenas. He was respected by people from all walks of life, from all religions and from all age groups. He is remembered for providing the church with the motto Lighted to Lighten. “The Church must be interested where human life is interested,” was his motto.

The first half of the twentieth century was a period of great turmoil all over the world. Two great world wars, poverty, famine and all kinds of natural calamities made the people all over the world to suffer. In India people rallied behind Mahatma Gandhi to attain freedom from the British and other foreign dominations. Religious and cultural organizations turned its back to the needs of the society, changes in social structure was unthinkable, obedience without questioning to the kings and autocrats was the law of the land, That was the world in the first half of the twentieth century.

The second half of the twentieth century was more peaceful. Formation of the United Nations and World Council of Churches helped to make peace permanent. India became independent and began struggling to establish stability in political, social and cultural arena.

Early life

Juhanon Mar Thoma was born on August 7, 1893 and was christened as C. M. John. His father was C. P. Mathew Munsiff (judge) Cherukara Paravelithundiyl, Ayroor, in Kerala. His mother was Annamma Kollenkeril, Aymanam, Kottayam. His parents called him Yohannachen. C. P. Mathew Munsiff was the grandson of the sister of Mathews Mar Athanasius Metropolitan.

Education

John was educated at Kottayam M.T. Seminary High School, Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum) Maharaja's college, Madras Wesley College and Madras Christian College. The stay at Madras, made

changes in his attitude, outlook and lifestyle. He was attracted to Indian Nationalism, and started to wear Khadi, following the principles of Mahatma Gandhi. He was able to meet a number of foreign missionaries that made him decide to select gospel work as his ambition.

After completing his education at Madras, he joined the United Theological College, Bangalore, and obtained BD Degree in 1922.

As a teacher

For six years after leaving Bangalore he was teaching at Mar Thoma Seminary High school, Kottayam. There, in addition to his teaching he was the boarding master and Scout Master also. In 1927, John was ordained as a deacon by Titus II Mar Thoma. In 1928 he left for higher studies at Union Theological Seminary in the city of New York. After obtaining STM. degree from there, he joined Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, England. He returned to Kerala and continued to teach at Mar Thoma Seminary High school and at the Theological seminary, Kottayam.

Scout leader

While teaching at M.T. Seminary Kottayam he was a Scoutmaster and later became the Scout commissioner. He was able to obtain Wood Badge, in Scouting. Third World Scout Jamboree was held Birkenhead, England in 1929 from July 31 to August 6. From 70 countries about 50,000 scouts attended. John attended this jamboree as a member of the Indian contingent. While in Canada he was also able to attend the YMCA Boys' camp held in Canada.

Ordination

John was ordained as a Kassa (clergy) at Ayroor church on October 7, 1933. He was appointed as vicar of Jerusalem church, Kottayam. There he was very active and motivated the youth for the church and social work, took part in youth camps, sports and boat races and was able to instill in them religious and social ideals. His tireless work affected his health and he had to retreat to a sanatorium for rest and treatment.

Malankara Throne

After the great swearing in 1653 it became necessary to appoint a bishop. For this purpose a special chair was made and Mar Thoma I the first bishop of Malankara church was enthroned. This throne, used for the consecration of Mar Thoma I, is in the possession of the Mar Thoma Church and is kept at Tiruvalla. It has been used in the installation of every Mar Thoma Metropolitan, to this day, so that the continuity of the throne of Mar Thoma is ensured. This was the throne used for the consecration of Mar Thoma XVIII, Juhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan.

Installation

To enhance the work of the church it was decided to consecrate two more bishops and the lot fell to John and C. T. Mathew. On December 30, 1937 both of them were consecrated at Tiruvalla. John was given the episcopal title Juhanon Mar Timotheos and Mathew was given the title Mathews Mar Athanasius. Mar Timotheos episcopa took charge of the Southern diocese.

Mar Thoma Metropolitan

Abraham Mar Thoma died on September 1, 1947. Juhanon Mar Timotheos was enthroned as Metropolitan Juhanon Mar Thoma at Kozhencherry church. From 1947 to 1953 the administration of the church was reinforced by the appointment of two Diocesan Secretaries. They gave valuable service to the church and that was a great relief for the two bishops, Juhanon Mar Thoma and Mathews Mar Athanasius Episcopa.

Three new bishops

During this period, members of the Mar Thoma church spread to Malaya, Singapore and the Gulf region in addition to various parts of India. As the church was growing and the work load was increasing the Prathinidhi Mandalam (Parliament of elected members from each parish and the clergy) of the church decided to consecrate M.G. Chandy, P. Thomas and Philip Oommen as bishops. Their consecration was held on May 23, 1953 at Tiruvalla. They were given the episcopal titles

Alexander Mar Theophilus (later Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan), Thomas Mar Athanasius (later Suffragan Metropolitan) and Philipose Mar Chrysostem (later Philipose Mar Chrysostem Mar Thoma Metropolitan).

Pathiopodesasamithi

Even before the consecration of the three bishops, Mr. K.N.Daniel, Kurumthottal, a renowned church historian and seminary professor criticized Juhanon Mar Thoma and accused him of going against the reformation ideals. Mr. Daniel and his followers formed an organization called Pathiopodesa Samiti (Organization for the propagation of sound doctrine). Several attempts were made for reconciliations. In 1955, Mr.K.N.Daniel filed a case against the Metropolitan. Rev.C.V.John a true friend and supporter of the Metropolitan was the co-defendant. In 1965 the supreme court of India gave the judgment in favour of the Metropolitan. In June 1960, 14 clergymen resigned and decided to leave the church. On January 26, 1961, they with their followers formed St.Thomas Evangelical Church of India.

Consecration of bishops

P.T. Joseph and V.T. Koshy were consecrated bishops by Juhanon Mar Thoma in February 1975. P.T. Joseph was given the episcopal title Joseph Mar Irenaeus (now Joseph Mar Thoma) and V.T. Koshy, Easow Mar Timotheos.

Ecumenical efforts

Ecumenism was a reality for him; he restored peace with the Indian Orthodox Church. He actively participated in ecumenical councils such as the World Council of Churches. In 1948, he led the delegation to the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam. At its second meeting at Evanston, Illinois in 1954 he was elected as one of the Presidents of WCC. During the third Assembly in New Delhi in 1961 he was the chairman and guided the deliberations with distinction.

It was in 1974, it was decided enter into full communion with the Churches of South India, North India and with various provinces in the Anglican communion.[1]

Social activities

On June 26, 1975 Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared Emergency. At that time on August 25, 1974, Juhanon Mar Thoma sent a letter to the Prime Minister arguing for the restoration of democracy. He was the only Indian Christian leader to do such a brave thing.

Education was also a major interest for the Metropolitan. He established four institutions of higher education. In 1974 Mar Thoma Theological Seminary was upgraded to a BD grade college of the Serampore University.

Hospitals, and social welfare institutions were opened during his life time. Realizing the pain of a family without a house of their own, he introduced the idea of building houses for the poor and providing land by the landless even in 1949. In 1967, before moving to the new residence built for the Metropolitan (known as Poolatheen), he made it a point to present a house to a poor homeless TB patient who was a non Christian

Juhanon Mar Thoma died on September 27, 1976 at Kottayam. The funeral service was held St. Thomas Church in Tiruvalla. A huge crowd was present to bid farewell to their beloved Metropolitan. He was interred in the Bishops' cemetery in the SCS Compound, Tiruvalla.