

MAR Osthathios SOWED THE SEEDS OF RENAISSANCE

Adv. Jino M Kurian

Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, the late lamented metropolitan of Indian Orthodox Church was a zealous leader, who sowed the seeds of renaissance. Being in the position of a bishop, he enlarged the scope of the institution to its optimum and utilized his talents for the common good. He was one of the most vibrant social leaders who has been gifted by Malankara¹ to the world in twentieth century. Mar Osthathios was renowned as Theologist, Sociologist, Missionary and also a Philanthropist. He was an Apostle who sowed the seeds of renaissance in all the fields of life.

Mar Osthathios was known as M P George before his ordination. George was born in one of the families believed in reformist churches but adopted to the Orthodox Christian thoughts when he grown up. George lost his primary education at earlier ages but miraculously became a well-known scholar later. One of his acquaintances recommended him to the Leonard Theological College in Jabalpur from where he completed BD and then from Drew University, New Jersey, he completed MA.² This tremendous change in his life reminds us the Biblical event of Jesus Christ, who blessed his illiterate disciples to travel and preach gospel throughout the world.³

He established the Gospel Center near Mavelikara in 1953 with a vision to propagate Holy Gospel among people. Mar Osthathios has a unique personality which was a reason of inspiration for many. He led reformations and build up a new face of humanity for the church. Let us see few thoughts from his inimitable life:

1. Selfless universal love

Osthathios' principles are evolved and rooted from the Holy Bible and traditional Christian teachings. He emphasized the love of Trinity as the ideal love of the universe. Christianity distinguishes limited love from agape or eternal, limitless, infinite love of God.⁴ St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians summarizing the fruit of the Holy Spirit as "faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."⁵ Faith and Hope are individualistic but love is social. One cannot achieve love without another being. Osthathios teaches that the love is Agape (In Hebrew divine love). He preached that the criterion of love is manifested finally, absolutely, only in the incarnation of God as Jesus of Nazareth.⁶ He explained that incarnation was both kenotic⁷ (Phli @:5-11) and cosmic⁸ (Col 1:15-20).⁹ It is the sharing fellowship of the

¹ Malankara is the traditional name of the Indian Orthodox Church. The word is derived from the name of the place Maliankara

² Dean W ferm, "Profiles in Liberation: 36 Portraits of the Third World Theologians", (Wipf & Stock Publishers Eugene, Oregon, 1981) p 92

³ The Gospels of the Holy Bible

⁴ Geevarghese Mar Osthathios. "More Cross-currents in Mission"(International Bulletin October 1982)p175

⁵ I Corinthians 13:13. Gal 5:22 provides the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control

⁶ Geevarghese Mar Osthathios. "More Cross-currents in Mission"(International Bulletin October 1982)p175

⁷ Meaning in Christian Theology "self emptying"

⁸ Meaning related to the universe

⁹ Geevarghese Mar Osthathios. "More Cross-currents in Mission"(International Bulletin October 1982)p175

Holy Trinity. The eschaton¹⁰ to which humanity is called through the Church is to the fullness of life in the fellowship of the Holy Trinity.¹¹

2. Social Justice and theories

Sociological theories of Mar Osthathios are well addressed by scholars and discussed among worldwide. Theory of Classless Society is an attempt to merge the socialistic approach of Social Science and rationalistic approach of spirituality on the same hand. His classless society was an instrument to defeat the atheism in communism. He explains the Lord's Prayer, Sermon on the Mount are the ethical standards of a classless society. He called for sharing of resources. Mar Osthathios unswervingly said that being Rich in a Poor World is a Sin.¹² He was an advocate of social justice against oppression of the poor as like the Prophet Amos. He emphasis both personal ministry and social ministry, meeting the material needs, physical requirements, cultural enlightenment, political liberation, historical and eschatological dimensions of life, secular and spiritual hunger, personal freedom and social justice and the quest for equality, fraternity and liberty.¹³ In the earliest 1980s, Mar Osthathios published articles and books containing the igniting thoughts for the liberation of downtrodden people. His thoughts inspired people of various parts of the world. Mar Osthathios's contributions to social science made him a Universal Bishop rather remaining in the shorten environment of Kerala.

3. Equality without discrimination

Mar Osthathios preached that there is no sexual distinction before the God. He illustrates that in a family there is the provision of the father, the love of the mother and the fellowship of the son. We can speak of God as "Our Father" as He provides everything for us. Similarly, we can speak of God as "Our Mother" as God is the source of love.¹⁴

Osthathios explained that:

"In the touching utterance of Jesus about Jerusalem, he compares his love for Jerusalem to that of a hen: "O Jerusalem, Jeruslaem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen, gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not (Matt 23:37)."¹⁵

After all, all language is just symbols. God is all sufficient, almighty, all loving, all judging, all sovereign. His all-inclusive virtue is love. Being traditional, there is great level of gender disparity in the Church.

¹⁰ Meaning in Christian Theology Ulitimate end as per the divine plan

¹¹ Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, "The Holy Trinity and the Kingdom of God", https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ijt/31-1_001.pdf visited at 4:50pm on 2/3/2019

¹² Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, "The sin of being rich in a poor world: Holy Trinity and social justice, (Christian Literature Society, Madras, 1983)

¹³ Geevarghese Mar Osthathios. "More Cross-currents in Mission"(International Bulletin October 1982)p175

¹⁴ Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, "The Holy Trinity and the Kingdom of God", https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ijt/31-1_001.pdf visited at 4:50pm on 2/3/2019

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Mar Osthathios and his contemporary bishop Paulose Mar Gregorios¹⁶ played significant role to reduce this disparity and propagated equality among all.¹⁷ Osthathios explained that men and women are distinct but equal. Their role in the society, church and family has various distinctive effects but both are equally required for the existence of the other. He reminded that in the Holy Church, Mary the mother of Jesus, gets importance more than his disciples. He dreamt for a society without gender discrimination and supremacy.¹⁸

4. Dalit Liberation and Mission Works

Pathrose Mar Osthathios¹⁹ (1886-1968) believed that when the Church's efforts uplift a number of Dalits²⁰, then the uplifted will lead the renaissance of rest of the Dalits. Saint Gregorios²¹ and Pathrose Mar Osthathios were two who gave great attention for the elevation of the Dalits. Mar Osthathios was also a firm follower of their principles. Osthathios preached that Jesus had great compassion towards wounded, oppressed, abused and outcast. He emphasized that Church should also abide by the way of Jesus. Mar Osthathios was never stood for conversion. He believed that mission should be able to broaden the vision of people. He stayed for people of all classes of the society. He aimed for educating poor children, developing rural areas, enabling illiterate to find livelihood, installing dispensaries for medical assistance of poor and other humanitarian works. He worked throughout India and outside also. His determination and efforts enlarged the vision of Mission Board of India, which is the body of Indian Orthodox Church looking after mission works. He is the founder of a good number of charitable programmes, mission centers including Marriage Assistance Foundation, Sick Aid Foundation, Save A Heart Foundation, House Building Aid Fund, Mission Training Centre, M.G.D Ashram Balabhavan Karunagiri, St. Paul's Asram Puthuppady, Haripad Mission Centre, Yacharam St.Gregorios Balagram, Bethanya Bhavan, St.George Balikagram Pune. NARSOC22 an organization to give assistance during disasters and others endeavors are purely propounding the selfless love of Jesus Christ.

Mission is for the common good. Word and action should combine together in Christian mission. Mar Osthathios was a firm follower this principle. He executed what he preached. His life was an inspiration for many to come close to Christ. For the downtrodden and marginalized, he was messenger of God. Osthathios laid the foundation for many humanitarian activities in Malankara. Now the responsibility is ours to nurture it. Gain morals from his life and take up the Jesus's Cross to walk ahead.

¹⁶ L.L.H.G Paulose Mar Gregorios (1924-1997) was the Diocesan Metropolitan on Indian Orthodox Church and former President of World Council of Churches(WCC)

¹⁷ Fr.John Thomas Karingattil, Sneha Samvedanam (Malayalam) (Bodhi Books, Kerala, 2010)p50

¹⁸ Fr.John Thomas Karingattil, Sneha Samvedanam (Malayalam) (Bodhi Books, Kerala, 2010)p50

¹⁹ L.L.H.G. Pathrose Mar Osthathios (1886-1968) was the founder of "Servants of the Cross" (Sleeba Dasa Samooham), a missionary society in 1924. Its objective was to uplift the Dalit group of people in the society to the front.

²⁰ As per traditional Indian caste system, Dalits were at the lower strata of the society.

²¹ First declared Saint of Indian Orthodox Church

²² Mission Team under Mar Osthathios assisted on the occurrence of natural calamities