



Justice Alexander Thomas

Chairperson, Kerala State Human Rights Commission since July 2024. He was made a High Court judge in 2014, became the Acting Chief Justice for an interim period, and retired in July 2023.

He was government pleader from 1996 to 1988. He has also held the posts of Executive Chairman of Lakshadweep and Kerala Legal Services Authorities and Chairman of Kerala Judicial Academy.



Human Freedom, Dignity and Rights

Some Reflections on the Vision of
Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios



Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios Chair

School of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies
Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam

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**Human Freedom, Dignity and Rights:
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Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios**

Justice Alexander Thomas

(Chairperson, Kerala State Human Rights Commission,
and former Acting Chief Justice, High Court of Kerala)



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Publisher's Note

Dr Paulos Mar Gregorios Chair at the Mahatma Gandhi University continues to organise open seminars and lectures in creative faithfulness to the holistic, humanistic vision of Mar Gregorios and his renowned intellectual legacy that embraced various academic disciplines, secular ideologies and schools of philosophy and religion.

The Chair has now published the major books: 1) *Paulos Mar Gregorios: A Reader* (2017: Fortress Press, USA), 2) *Philosophy and the Quest for Meaning: Glimpses of Philosophical and Cultural Inquiry - Classical and Contemporary, Western and Eastern* (2022: MG University, Kottayam), 3) *Love's Freedom: The Grand Mystery* (2024: MG University, Kottayam).

We are grateful to Justice Alexander Thomas, Chairperson, Kerala State Human Rights Commission, and former Acting Chief Justice, High Court of Kerala, who is known for his significant judgments on environmental law, human rights, gender equality and social justice. He follows the thought-world of Dr Paulos Mar Gregorios in its philosophical, ethical and inter-faith dimensions.

My deep gratitude goes to the Vice Chancellor Prof. (Dr.) C.T. Aravindakumar, Prof (Dr) Noushad P. P., Director of the School of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies, Dr Hari Lakshmeendra Kumar, Associate Professor and co-ordinator, PMG Chair and members of the Syndicate for their generous support.

Fr Dr K M George,
Incumbent Chairperson, PMG Chair



Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios (1922-1996)

Outstanding scholar, theologian, philosopher, polyglot and man of letters, Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios sought to bring together in a holistic vision, several disciplines like philosophy, economics, political science, medicine, education, physics and theology.

Born in 1922 at Tripunithura, Kerala, the great scholar- bishop had his earlier stints in his homestate as a journalist and postal service employee. He proceeded to Ethiopia in 1947 accepting the job of a teacher there and in course of time became the Special Secretary to Emperor Haillie Sellasi. He had an exceptional educational career in Yale, Princeton and Oxford Universities. Returning to Kerala, he was ordained as a priest of the Orthodox Church. In 1967 Fr. Paul Verghese became the Principal of the Orthodox Theological Seminary. In 1975 elevated as a bishop, Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios took charge of the Delhi Diocese of the Orthodox Church in July 1975.

Honours came unsought to Mar Gregorios. He became President of the World Council of Churches and the Indian Philosophical Congress. In 1988, he received the Soviet Land Nehru Award. He travelled widely and showed an unusual intellectual courage to explore new paradigms in human thinking. He was visiting professor in several universities like the Jawaharlal Nehru University and the Delhi University.

Mar Gregorios has authored more than 50 books. *The Joy of Freedom, Freedom of Man, The Cosmic Man, The Human Presence, Enlightenment East and West, A Light Too Bright* and the spiritual autobiography *Love's Freedom: The Grand Mystery* are some of the most remarkable among these. Hundreds of his articles and lectures have been published in leading newspapers, and international magazines.

Human Freedom, Dignity and Rights: Some Reflections on the vision of Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios

Esteemed Vice Chancellor, guests, scholars, and students,

Today, we gather to reflect on the legacy of Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios, a luminary whose thoughts on human freedom, dignity, and rights are as profound as they are timeless. Known for his penetrating insights and global vision, Dr. Gregorios was described by former Supreme Court Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer as “a cultural wonder and global wanderer with a head and heart full of spiritual ware and moral corals.” Justice Iyer, who shared a deep intellectual kinship with Dr. Gregorios, noted, “what brought me closer to him is the crimson spirituality whereby socialism meets with humanism and both blend with the Supreme Light.” This rich description captures the essence of Dr. Gregorios’s life and thought: an unwavering commitment to justice, dignity, and compassion that transcends borders, ideologies, and doctrines.

Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios’s life journey, from his early years in Kerala to his experiences in Ethiopia, profoundly shaped his worldview on human dignity and unity. Serving as an educational advisor to Emperor Haile Selassie, he was deeply moved by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church’s rich cultural and spiritual heritage. This encounter strengthened his belief in the shared spiritual essence of humanity and the beauty of religious diversity. His Ethiopian experience inspired a lifelong commitment to

ecumenism—promoting unity among Christian traditions—and a vision of interfaith harmony that transcends religious boundaries. His journey, starting from humble beginnings in Kerala to a life of profound scholarship and spiritual leadership as an Eastern Orthodox theologian, philosopher, and Metropolitan of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, and his life experiences shaped his worldview—his encounters with poverty, injustice, and inequality deepened his commitment to human dignity as a universal right. His empathy and spirituality forged a philosophy that transcended religious boundaries, advocating for a world where dignity, respect, and compassion form the foundation of human interaction. Through his teachings and his writings, Dr. Gregorios emphasised that dignity is inherent, a divine aspect of every human being's existence, and his life exemplified a deep respect for that dignity across cultures and faiths. Through his leadership in the World Council of Churches and various interfaith dialogues, he championed the idea that true human dignity is honoured when faiths come together in mutual respect, compassion, and a shared quest for truth.

Dr. Gregorios's view of human freedom and dignity was grounded in a sense of spiritual wholeness. To him, every individual was a unique reflection of a divine light, capable of profound self-realisation and worthy of respect. This awareness guided his belief that each person holds an innate dignity, a value that no external force can diminish. He once observed, "To live without an awareness of who we are and what we are meant to be is perhaps the greatest tragedy of the human condition." He viewed freedom as a divine attribute, essential for all humanity, transcending gender and cultural boundaries.

Dr. Gregorios's reflections call upon us to recognize that freedom and dignity are not merely abstract ideals, but essential aspects of what it means to be human. His legacy challenges us

to envision a world that fosters these values—a world where socialism meets humanism, united in a shared commitment to justice, empathy, and the common good.

In a world often swayed by political and economic interests, Dr. Gregorios's thoughts challenge us to recognize the sanctity of the individual. He viewed each person not as a mere cog in the societal machine but as a being with an inherent worth, endowed with a purpose that transcends time. He once observed, "To live without an awareness of who we are and what we are meant to be is perhaps the greatest tragedy of the human condition." This conviction served as the cornerstone of his life's work, driving his advocacy for a society that nurtures the whole person. His life was a testament to compassionate activism, challenging exploitation and advocating for justice. Mar Gregorios believed in the transformative power of love, asserting that true freedom is rooted in the pursuit of truth and justice.

1. The Concept of Freedom in Gregorios's Thought

Human freedom, to Dr. Gregorios, is not simply the absence of restraint or oppression; it is the profound ability to actualize one's deepest potential. In his writings, he distinguished between external liberty and internal freedom, emphasising that true freedom arises when individuals can cultivate inner strength and insight. For him, inner freedom was a spiritual and intellectual state, a realm where human beings connect with their purpose.

His vision of freedom was closely intertwined with a collective responsibility, reminding us that no individual exists in isolation. In his words, "True freedom does not reside in selfish pursuits but in the service of others, for only through the well-being of all can one attain true liberty." This ideal speaks to the duties that come with freedom, advocating a balance that respects personal autonomy while fostering communal harmony. As we

reflect on his legacy, let us commit to fostering the ideals he championed—unity, respect, and unwavering support for the marginalised. Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios' views on human freedom profoundly shaped his advocacy for justice and peace. He believed that true freedom is a divine attribute, essential for all individuals, and endorsed the dignity of every person, regardless of gender or background.

In our contemporary world, rights often overshadow responsibilities, leading to a society where freedom is perceived merely as the right to individual expression or economic success. Dr. Gregorios, however, calls us to remember that freedom is rooted in moral consciousness, requiring self-awareness, humility, and a devotion to the greater good.

2. Human Dignity: A Universal Right

Dignity, in Dr. Gregorios's thought, is both inherent and relational. It is inherent because every human life possesses value beyond measure. It is relational because dignity is expressed and honoured within communities, and every human being's worth is intertwined with that of others. He passionately believed that "human dignity is inviolable," not contingent upon societal status, wealth, or achievements.

He often drew from religious teachings, affirming the belief that dignity is granted to every human being by virtue of their very existence. In his words, "The divine spark resides in all, a reminder that every soul deserves respect, compassion, and love." This principle resonates with the foundational doctrines of human rights and reminds us of the obligations that we hold toward each individual, irrespective of background or belief.

Dr. Gregorios's stance on dignity challenges us to re-evaluate our societal structures. In a world where consumerism and technology often diminish personal value, his philosophy invites us to safeguard each individual's worth. As he wisely noted,

“Dignity is the ground from which human freedom springs; without it, freedom becomes self-serving, and rights become tools for division rather than unity.”

3. Human Rights: A Moral Imperative

Dr. Gregorios’s reflections on human rights stem from his belief in the shared human experience. Rights, as he viewed them, are not privileges granted by governments but universal entitlements derived from human dignity. He recognized that true progress demands a commitment to social justice, advocating that a society which respects human rights is one that has reached a higher moral consciousness. His commitment to justice was evident in his passionate challenges against oppression, colonialism, and economic exploitation, often placing him in direct confrontation with powerful entities. Mar Gregorios emphasised the need for a just society aligned with Christian principles, advocating for social restructuring to address systemic poverty and inequality.

Yet, Dr. Gregorios also cautioned against reducing human rights to a mere legal framework. To him, rights are deeply moral concepts, rooted in empathy and solidarity. He noted, “When we speak of rights, let us remember they are the means through which society acknowledges the inestimable worth of each individual.” This reminder urges us to uphold rights not out of legal obligation alone, but as a reflection of our own humanity.

In his view, human rights without a foundation of dignity and freedom are hollow. They become tools for self-interest rather than pathways to justice. His stance aligns well with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, particularly its preamble, which states that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”

4. Bridging Rights and Responsibilities

A distinguishing feature of Dr. Gregorios's philosophy is his insistence that human rights must be balanced by responsibilities. He believed that rights, when exercised without responsibility, lead to societal fragmentation. "Rights, if not tempered by duties," he once observed, "become blind to the needs of others, and blind rights give rise to a world of competition rather than compassion."

In the current discourse on rights, where demands for individual entitlements often overshadow collective responsibilities, his message is particularly resonant. He urges us to approach rights with humility, seeing them as means to fulfil our duty toward others. True human rights advocacy, in his view, is not merely about enforcing laws; it is about cultivating a culture where each individual recognizes their role in uplifting the community.

5. The Ethical Foundation of Human Rights

One cannot examine Dr. Gregorios's views on human rights without acknowledging his ethical convictions. He argued that ethics must be the bedrock of any rights-based society. The reduction of human rights to policy or law, he warned, robs it of its deeper significance. Ethics, to him, was the universal language of compassion, integrity, and selflessness.

He believed that an ethical society prioritises not only rights but also moral accountability. In his words, "A society grounded in ethics does not need to enforce rights; it embodies them." This profound statement captures his hope for a world where justice flows naturally from shared values, rather than being imposed through regulations alone.

6. A Call for Compassionate Leadership

Dr. Gregorios's work reminds us that the protection of human rights and dignity requires a form of leadership infused with compassion and vision. He viewed leaders not as mere administrators of laws but as guardians of human welfare. His philosophy emphasises that the leaders who defend human rights must themselves embody the values they seek to promote. He once noted, "A society's moral health can be gauged by the courage and compassion of its leaders."

7. His Vision for the Future

Dr. Gregorios's vision for the future remains a clarion call to our generation. He envisioned a world where every person, regardless of their origins or beliefs, could live with dignity, freedom, and rights that nurture rather than constrain. In a memorable statement, he said, "The future will judge us not by the power we wielded but by the dignity we granted to the weakest among us."

Conclusion

Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios's vision of human dignity, freedom, and rights aligns closely with the philosophical evolution of human rights, which centers on the inherent worth of the individual. In Dr. Gregorios's view, dignity is the foundation of all human value, a sacred quality that each person carries by virtue of their existence, which in turn grounds their freedom and rights. Philosophers over centuries—from Enlightenment thinkers to modern human rights advocates—have argued that rights are not granted by states but derived from the intrinsic dignity of each human being. Freedom, in this context, is more than the absence of oppression; it is the capacity to realize one's potential within a just society. Dr. Gregorios took this further, seeing freedom as intrinsically tied to the well-being of others,

underscoring the mutual responsibilities that uphold rights. His philosophy reflects a view where dignity is inseparable from rights and freedom, each serving as pillars of a moral and humane society, echoing the deepest aspirations of human rights philosophy for a world of respect, justice, and solidarity.

As we reflect upon his words, may we find in them a call to action—a call to build a world worthy of the inherent worth he saw in every human being. For as Dr. Gregorios reminded us, “Our greatest purpose is not in seeking power, but in honouring the beauty and dignity of each human soul.” In reflecting on Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios’s profound insights, we are reminded that the true strength of human rights lies in their philosophical foundation—a foundation that honours human freedom, upholds dignity, and binds us in mutual respect. His vision urges us to see human rights not merely as entitlements or protections, but as moral imperatives woven into the fabric of our shared humanity. At its core, his philosophy teaches that freedom, dignity, and rights are interconnected ideals that, together, elevate the human experience. As we carry forward his legacy, may we strive to root our actions and policies in these principles, recognizing that a just society begins with an unwavering commitment to the dignity of every individual. In doing so, we not only honour the legacy of Metropolitan Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios, but also contribute to a world that reflects the highest aspirations of human rights.

In concluding, let us honour Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios by embracing his philosophy with open hearts and committed minds. As we seek to uphold the principles of freedom, dignity, and rights, may we strive to embody his vision: a society where each individual is valued, where justice is both a personal commitment and a collective goal, and where our shared humanity becomes the foundation for all that we pursue. His interfaith dialogue principles further promoted respect and understanding among

diverse beliefs, reinforcing his vision of a peaceful coexistence rooted in love and compassion.

Reflecting on the philosophical foundation of human rights, we find that their true strength lies in an unwavering commitment to freedom, dignity, and mutual respect. Human rights are not merely entitlements or legal protections; they are profound moral imperatives that recognize the intrinsic worth of every person. This foundation teaches us that freedom, dignity, and rights are interwoven ideals, essential to a just and humane society. By upholding these principles, we honour the highest aspirations of humanity—creating a world where each individual's inherent value is recognized, protected, and nurtured. Let this understanding guide us, reminding us that a genuinely just society begins with our commitment to these timeless values.

Thank you.



Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios Chair

Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam

Publications

1. Philosophy East and West
2. The Vision Beckons
3. How Do We Psychoanalyse Our Societies and Religions
4. Certainty and The Secular Which Do We want?
5. നമുക്കാവശ്യം സർവ്വമത സംഗ്രഹനിയായ ഒരു വിശ്വനാഗരികത
6. Towards A New Enlightenment This Time - Global, Spiritual and Comprehensive
7. The Dialogue of the Spirit & A Panchsheel for Religions
8. The Secular and The Spiritual: Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios and his Relevance Today
9. New Civilisation in the New Millennium
10. The Coming Great Civilisation Shift On Preparing to Lay Foundations for a New Civilisation
11. Philosophy and the Quest for Meaning: Glimpses of Philosophical and Cultural Inquiry - Classical and Contemporary, Western and Eastern
12. Love's Freedom: The Grand Mystery (A Spiritual Autobiography)