

Moran Mor Athanasius Yohan I Metropolitan of blessed memory.

Early life: the humble beginnings.

Moran Mor Athanasius Yohan I Metropolitan was born on March 8, 1950, in Niranam, Kerala, India, as the youngest of six children. Hailing from the same village where St. Thomas the disciple of Jesus had established a church during the 1st century AD, his childhood was one of simplicity and devotion to God.

In answer to his mother's prayers, he responded to God's divine call at the tender age of sixteen and spent the next eight years in the nooks and corners of the northern states of India, spreading God's love through words and actions. Through those experiences, he gained a deep appreciation and love for India's cultural and historical heritage, particularly rural life and people. He used to fondly recall the dal, roti, and pyaaj (staple food of the common man in North India) he used to eat from the roadside dhabas in Punjab and the lovely people he encountered in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, India.

It was also during this time that he developed the habit of reading, often reading multiple books each day—a habit he kept till the end of his earthly life. He worked very hard on himself, learned to be an excellent communicator, and soon became a recognised leader among his peers.

He then had the opportunity to study theology in the United States, after which he served as the priest of a local parish for four and a half years. Like many around him, he could have continued in the pursuit of the 'American dream', but together with his family, again in response to God's call to help the people of India and the surrounding nations, he left all such aspirations and obediently abandoned his life for the divine cause.

The speaker, author, and influencer:

It was at this juncture that he happened to get an opportunity to speak on the radio, and what happened next is history. He soon became the familiar voice of the popular radio broadcast 'Athmeeya Yathra' (Spiritual Journey) for millions of Indians, especially in the south of the country. What was most endearing about the Metropolitan was that he could connect to people from all walks of life—from the common man to the affluent. He spoke passionately about socially relevant subjects like marriage, raising children, alcoholism, etc. It is not an exaggeration to say that there was no house in Kerala that had not heard his voice over the radio during that period of time.

Through visual media (Athmeeya Yatra Television), music programmes, and radio broadcasts in over 110 languages, what started as a 15-minute radio broadcast, the 'Athmeeya Yathra' (Spiritual Journey), soon became a movement of people and churches, committed to serve society and uplift the poor and the downtrodden

Also a prolific author, Metropolitan Athanasius Yohan I wrote more than 300 books that offered practical and spiritual guidance on hundreds of subjects. Translated into dozens of major languages, these books have touched the lives of countless millions, transcending caste, color, creed and religion.

On February 6, 2003, he was consecrated according to the historical tradition of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic church in line with Apostolic succession as the Bishop and installed as the Metropolitan of Believers Eastern Church. Under his visionary leadership, the Believers Eastern Church became a global church, with 12,000 parishes and millions of faithful representing almost 300 different languages across four continents of the world. The church he led is, at present, the 3rd largest in India, and has significant influence in other Asian countries as well.

Social Contributions:

Even in the middle of numerous church responsibilities and engagements, Metropolitan Yohan never forgot the suffering of the millions in Asia. Gripped with the love of Jesus, he comforted the brokenhearted, cleaned the wounds of the lepers, embraced children, and went where many would not.

Moran Mor Athanasius Yohan I Metropolitan spearheaded projects that included caring for underprivileged children, providing access to sanitation and clean drinking water, empowering women and bringing relief and rehabilitation to victims of natural disasters , .

Through the Bridge of Hope (Hope for Children) project, more than 150,000 children were raised from poverty and given life, hope, and a future. More than 900 runaway street children were rehabilitated in the Asha Grih Homes, a government-approved project in Delhi, India.

Under the clean water project, more than 30,000 bore wells were installed, besides the 58,000+ bio-sand filters distributed all over India and other neighbouring countries.

As part of our sanitation campaign, 32,000 toilets were installed in the most underdeveloped areas.

35,000 women were empowered with vocational skills, 60,000 leprosy patients cared for, 13,00,000 mosquito nets distributed in malaria-prone areas, 12,00,000 people given free medical care, and 17,00,000 people assisted with self-sustaining tools and gifts—these staggering numbers are just a fraction of the tremendous impact of his endeavors.

During national disasters, the church he led was often the first to reach out for relief and rehabilitation. From building 1000 houses for cyclone-affected victims in Odhisa to gifting boats to the fishermen who lost them in a natural disaster in Kerala, he was instrumental in launching several relief efforts to serve those communities who were affected in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka.

The Visionary

His vision for education and healthcare led to the establishment of many reputed schools in India and other Asian countries. He was the vision behind establishing one of India's best hospitals, the Believers Church Medical College and Hospital, a 750-bed tertiary care hospital in Tiruvalla, Kerala (with the next phase of an expansion of 1000 beds in the works). The institution, BCMCH, experienced rapid growth and now boasts one of the top medical colleges, offering undergraduate and postgraduate medical training, along with a nursing college, paramedical courses, and numerous other allied courses.

He was a fierce environmentalist and avid nature lover, teaching people about water conservationism and the importance of tree and soil erosion even before the age of the internet. He was instrumental in creating a 7-acre natural water reservoir in the St. Thomas Community, where the church is headquartered. He was known for his simple lifestyle, which he consistently demonstrated through his daily actions and choices. Often seen riding his bicycle, he valued minimalism and championed living in harmony with nature, setting an example of a simple yet meaningful life.

An ever-expanding vision:

His vision extended beyond India and even Asia! He led the church to spread its influence in Africa in 2019. Starting in Kigali, Rwanda, with projects to help children and mothers in need, he also envisioned and laid the foundation for the Believers International Hospital and Research Centre – a multi-specialty hospital and medical college destined to bring hope to millions in Rwanda and the whole of East Africa. The first phase of the 220-bed hospital is expected to be commissioned by 2026.

Before he departed, he had the vision to expand to 10 more countries in Africa, including Liberia and other nations in West Africa.

Tribute to a life well-lived.

His departure on May 8, 2024, came as a shock to the millions of members of his church and the thousands he had influenced over the nearly five decades of serving God and humanity.

Many, including the Prime Minister of India and the President of Sri Lanka, sent their condolences, and prominent political leaders, including the Hon. Governor of Kerala, the Hon. Governor of Goa, and many notable Central and State political leaders, paid their tributes in person.

An estimated 75,000+ mourners from all walks of life, leaders of every episcopal church in Kerala, and prominent leaders from other faiths attended his funeral. It was held with full state honours at St. Thomas Believers Eastern Church Cathedral in Thiruvalla.

"Moran Mor Athanasius Yohan I Metropolitan's life is a testament to how God can transform a simple village boy into a beacon of hope and healing for millions. Although he departed suddenly, his influence lives on. He always believed in a God who loved everyone beyond caste, colour, creed, and religion, and he truly lived by these words."

"May his memory be eternal."