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**HOMINISATION AND THE KINGDOM OF  
GOD: A STUDY ON E. SCHILLEBEECKX  
AND M.M. THOMAS**

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**Introduction**

The heart of Christian faith is the conviction that God has worked salvation in Jesus Christ for the whole universe. Therefore, the whole question is with regard to salvation or human destiny. In terms of etymology salvation comes from the Latin word *salus*. It is synonymous with the Sanskrit word *sarvah* which means whole, intact, integral, etc. The concept of 'wholeness' or 'to be human' presupposes two principles: the realization of all given potentials, and the liberation from all that hinders and destroys the wholeness. The destiny of the human person is thus salvation in two dimensions namely, the attainment of God and the fulfilment in and through the world with its completion in the *eschaton*.<sup>1</sup> If we wish to see the

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<sup>1</sup>S. Athappily, *Mystery and Destiny of the Human Person: A Theological Anthropology*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2005, 156.

destiny of the human in terms of fulfilment and completion and its expression right now, in the time before death, salvation has to touch our history, biology, social life, etc. Since salvation is integral, it touches upon not merely transcendent, spiritual and vertical dimensions, but horizontal as well. As *Gaudium et Spes* teaches, "The expectation of the new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this world" (GS, 39).

The destiny of humankind or the Kingdom of God preached by Jesus was a this-worldly reality with its eschatological fulfilment. "The Kingdom of God is a state of being under the divine providential and fatherly/motherly care. It is a state of affairs which would benefit the whole of humankind and the entire cosmos." With this reflection in mind, in this study we consider the theme of hominisation and its relationship with the Kingdom of God in the writings of Edward Schillebeeckx and Madathilparampil Mammen Thomas (M.M. Thomas).

### **Status Questionis**

The content of the preaching of Jesus is, "the time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near" (Mk 1:15). It indicates that the reign of God had already been inaugurated in and through him. At the same time he teaches us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come" (Mt 6:10). In 'the already' realized presence of the Kingdom of God Jesus sees the full accomplishment in the 'not yet' aspect of the Kingdom. Therefore the conclusion can be made that Christians are in the precarious situation of the present and the future. They live in the polarity and tension between the 'already and not yet' with regard to their destiny' as J. Fuellenbach comments.<sup>2</sup>

The International Theological Commission elaborates the modern phenomenon of the secularization of society that has a one sided vision of the human being to the extent that it ignores 'the mystery' aspect of humankind and, as a consequence, does not propagate an integral vision.<sup>3</sup> In *Redemptoris Missio* Pope John Paul II puts forward a vital observation:

The temptation today is to reduce Christianity to merely human wisdom, a pseudo-science of well-being. In our heavily secularized world a 'gradual secularization of salvation' has taken place, so that people strive for the good of man, but man who is truncated, reduced to his merely horizontal dimension (RM, 11).

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<sup>2</sup>J. Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today*, New York: Orbis Books, 1995, 188-203.

<sup>3</sup>*International Theological Commission: Texts and Documents, 1986-2007*, vol. II, Sanfransisco: Ignatius Press, 2009, 56.

On the other hand there is also a problem of choosing a pietistic way which gives too much focus on the future life ignoring the social responsibilities. The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* sees a profound link between human advancements and evangelization because the human is not an abstract being but is subject to social and economic situations. It is appropriate to refer to two instructions of the Church. *Liberatis Nuntius* shares the perception of the dignity of the human person, created “in the image and likeness of God” (Gen 1:26-27). This very image is “ridiculed and scorned” due to various kinds of oppressions namely, cultural, political, racial, social, and economic. *Liberatis Conscientia* also teaches that “an unjust social order is a threat and an obstacle which can compromise his (human) destiny.” All these teachings emphasize the spiritual core of the human person while speaking about human welfare and human destiny which modern secularism, modern humanism and globalization often forget. In other words as St Irenaeus has pointed out, “The Glory of God is the fully alive human and the life of man is the vision of God.”

The two theologians under consideration in this study, Edward Schillebeeckx and M.M. Thomas, wanted to emphasize the spiritual core of the human person while speaking about human welfare. This is what we express in the term *hominisation* even though they do not deal with this term directly. We have to see their reflections against the background of natural theology based on reason in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when we find a breach between theology and anthropology, between God and the world, between the Church and humankind.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

Subsequent to the presentations of problems involved and preliminary observations, the dissertation is basically divided into three chapters, each with its own brief introduction and conclusion. Finally, the findings of the of the research are presented in summary form in the general conclusion. To set the stage for this study, I propose to conduct a short investigation on the aspects of the relationship between the praxis and human destiny in the light of the meaning of the term *hominisation* namely, from biblical theological and secular perspectives and the reflections of the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes*. The word *hominisation* is a different form of humanization and denotes a *higher level of being* as far as evolution is concerned. The subsequent sub-section is dedicated to the theological problems of *hominisation* in the writings of Teilhard de Chardin and Karl Rahner. T. Chardin tried to describe a clear picture of evolution from cosmogenesis to anthropogenesis and then to Christogenesis. K.

Rahner offered a more philosophical presupposition and theological interpretation. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century we see many philosophers and ideologies that attack religion and its supernatural or transcendent values and they understood salvation in terms of this-worldly categories. Here in this study we deal with the arguments of secular humanists as the two theologians of our choice often criticize them.

Having set the stage, we analyze, in the second chapter the works of E. Schillebeeckx who tried to bring the modern secular understanding of human destiny and the Christian eschatological hope of future into a mutual positive relationship.

Humans are inescapably historical, that is, they live from the past in the present with the possibilities of the future open before them. This future consists in the full realization of the *humanum*. Thus for Schillebeeckx, the present salvation in the world is dialectically a sacrament of the salvation to come in God's reign.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, for Schillebeeckx, in his own memorable phrase *extramundum nulla salus est*, (There is no salvation outside of this world). He visualizes *humanum* as a way to the Kingdom of God. Beginning with the question of theodicy he is aiming to determine the essence of the human being as the image of God and its reflection in selfless love towards fellow human beings. In the sub-sections we consider consecutively Schillebeeckx's brief life history in relation to his personal development of humanistic theology, his concept of theodicy, his theological influences, the concept of humankind as a God-human inter-subjectivity with a special reference to the model of Jesus Christ, anthropological constants in relation to destiny, reflections on the contrast experiences, the future orientation of humankind, the importance of human history in human destiny, the mutual relationship between Kingdom of God and hominisation after the model of the teachings of Jesus and his parables, and the role of grace in this process of hominisation.

Chapter three is an expository-analytical study to comprehend the reflections of the Indian theologian M.M. Thomas. For M.M. Thomas the Kingdom of God or life after death does not start only after death. Salvation remains eschatological but the historical responsibility within the eschatological framework cannot but include the task of the humanization of the world in secular history. The first two sub-sections are dedicated to the context of the immediate life of M.M. Thomas especially, the development of humanistic theology in him and his theological influences. Then the investigation proceeds to the

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<sup>4</sup>J.L. Walls, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, New York: Oxford, 2008, 226.

question of theodicy in him. He does not speak about the attributes of God namely, omnipresence omnipotence, omniscience, etc.; instead, he elaborates on God's loving relationship with the world. Although the transcendental aspect of God is the basis for hominisation, M.M. Thomas conceives God as *wholly other for others*. Consequently, a considerable amount of space is dedicated to elaborate the concept of the human as 'spirited matter.' In the subsequent sub-section we deal with the dynamic nature of the doctrine of creation. M.M. Thomas tries to transcend all elements of historical humanization namely, freedom, justice, law, etc. to make heaven and earth nearer. He places his focus on Christ in interpreting the four great plot movements in Scripture namely, Creation-Fall-Redemption-Consummation. The crucified Jesus and Risen Christ is the paradigm for human salvation and indeed, the Cross has become an important sign for the struggle of humanity in India. It is within this framework that he viewed critically the injustices in Indian society namely, caste, social and economic inequalities, etc. He conceives Christ's salvific work as social and cosmic and the Power of Christ is the basis of humanized life which in turn creates a casteless and classless society known as the 'new humanity.' Furthermore, this was the basis for his spirituality. For him human spirituality should lead us to participate in the necessities of nature and to transcend nature in history transforming it in the light of that destiny.

The general concluding section is a synthesis of the reflections of E. Schillebeeckx and M.M. Thomas. We also will consider the important contributions of these theologians in contemporary theological discussion in the face of growing secularism and globalism in the post modern era. A considerable portion of this section is treated separately in an attempt to enhance their contributions with the help of Church documents.

### **Positive Aspects of Their Theology**

Both E. Schillebeeckx and M.M. Thomas had great confidence in God. For them 'God is for the human being.' The focal point is the human experience. Revelation as God's action is manifested in human experience and in human action. The fundamental theological and anthropological principle according to Schillebeeckx include all aspects of human life namely, relationship with one another, in the progress of the economic system, mystical experience and ecological appeals. At the same time our fulfilment cannot be confined to the earthly order of history alone. Similarly, M.M. Thomas was not primarily interested in the speculative metaphysical dimension of the essential being of God. He was against, as he calls it, any 'lopsided

Christian understanding of liberation which focuses on merely spiritualistic and individualistic terms.'

These two theologians were 'the theologians of hope.' In their theological articulations they tried to give confidence to the modern world. From concept to practical enterprise they focused on the transformation of the world and the development of a better human society. These theologians remind us of our tasks and responsibilities that we cannot pass over to God. In all these reflections both of these theologians wanted to suppress any dualistic attitude since mysticism and human work go hand in hand for them. Their theological commitment to the context and human situation and their focus on the transcendent word of God keep alive their theology in a dialectical tension between transcendence and involvement in social situations. This is the special flavour of their theological enterprise.

### **Conclusion**

In every religious experience the aspect of mystery shows the presence of God. Being convinced that they are loved by God, people come to know their authenticity and dignity. They come to recognise that their dignity is authenticated and established not in themselves but in the network of relationships with fellow human beings and in the realities around them. By love people can bring peace in the face of conflict, boost healthy relationships instead of hatred and seek justice in the face of the reality of exploitation. When we say God is the creator, it is not in the sphere of conceptual knowledge or from a theoretical convention or principle. It points to God's gratuitous love and merciful action towards the human. Therefore GS, 13 says that any breakdown of the relationship with God causes a rupture in the internal unity of the person, a breakdown in relationships among humankind and with other creatures as well.

The truism of "Image and Likeness" involves being in relationship. Therefore every person created in "the image and likeness of God" finds his authenticity and fulfilment only in creating a web of relationships of love, solidarity, and justice when he embarks upon any activity in society. Then everything will be in accordance with the plan of God. Therefore, it is our Christian duty to translate charity into political, economic and religious activities. Modern theology tries to examine how decisive and significant these activities are for the concept of salvation. A kind of ascetic spirit is required here. The conception of the transcendental and worldly dimension of salvation becomes imperative. That is the perennial challenge for theology today.