

HOMINISATION AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE WRITINGS OF THE INDIAN SOCIAL THEOLOGIAN M.M. THOMAS

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Abstract

Redemption according to MMT is not the going back or the restoration of the stage before the fall or the lost paradise but the process of the growth of the human being towards freedom as God's children engaged in an endeavour in collaboration with God for the creation of a new heaven and a new earth as God's adult children (the Kingdom of God on earth). The Christian vocation to the Church is to witness and become a catalyst for the building of a new world and new culture. The goal of theology is salvific action which is the spiritual motive of humanisation. "The Christian spirituality is not something that happens between Church and God, but 'between the world and God.'" The saving activity of Christ demands a certain mode of spirituality in us. The joys, aspirations, failings, uncertainties of the world form part of our adoration, confession, thanksgiving and intercession and the offering of ourselves for the transformation of the world.

Keywords: Divinization, Historicity, Kingdom of God, Hominisation, Humanisation, Inter-religious Dialogue, Mission, Salvation, Spirited Matter, Spirituality

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Introduction

M.M. Thomas' [MMT]¹ whole concept of salvation or the Kingdom of God and its relationship with humanisation can be summarized in his typical definition of hominisation:

The fact is that Hominisation... increases the potentiality of both humanization and dehumanization and reflects growth in the condition of human maturity not its fulfillment; it is a new stage in the process of the becoming of man, bringing both 'heaven' and 'hell' nearer to his spiritual vision.²

He sees the central Christian concept of salvation not merely as confined to the relationship between God and human person but involving also social and cosmic dimensions. In MMT's understanding of human destiny we see an organic unity of everything in terms of humanization. It involves the fulfilment of creation, the restoration of all relations with God, the establishment of a social order, the experience of divine forgiveness, the end of alienation at all levels and a striving towards humanisation.

1. The Word Hominsation

We have the oft-quoted statement from St Irenaeus: "The glory of God is man fully alive and the life of man is the vision of God (*Gloria enim Dei vivens homo, vita autem hominis visio Dei*).³ What is this fullness of human being? Where shall we encounter it? Accordingly, the perennial questions pertaining to the end of human life are whether life is destined towards communion with God as its end (divinization, theosis) which is very much spiritualistic in nature or towards neighbour. The word humanization is a secular term as it is the end of human life proposed by secular humanists. Today the imago Dei in human being is disfigured substantially by the new materialistic theories and cultures ('death of God' theory in Europe and consumerism, for example). We need to revitalize our

¹Madathiparampil Mammen Thomas (1916-1996) was born in the South Indian State of Kerala in a devout Christian family belonging to the Syrian Marthoma Church. He was one of the most remarkable Indian theologians, former governor of Nagaland, a renowned ecumenical leader, and an outstanding scholar who made an indelible mark on the twentieth century ecumenical movement. Thomas served the World Council of Churches (WCC) as moderator of its Central Committee from 1968 to 1975. Thomas was a prolific writer both in English and his native language Malayalam, and wrote over 60 books and close to a thousand articles, some unpublished. *Towards a Theology of Contemporary Ecumenism* (Madrass: CLS, 1978) presents some of this work.

²Cf. M.M. Thomas, *Man and Universe of Faiths*, Madras: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (CISRS), 1975, 30.

³Irenaeus, *Conte les Heresies*, IV, 20. 7.

anthropology on the basis of our Christian Categories. The word hominization denotes exactly the same. Though the word was coined by Teilhard de Chardin and subsequently developed by Karl Rahner in terms of human evolution, their prime motive was to merge heaven and earth together. In the internal sphere we encounter the dignity and credibility of human life. In this article through the window of hominization we try to comprehend the integral view of human being and their destiny.

2. A Critic of Martin Luther

Martin Luther had a radical and pessimistic attitude towards human nature. He conceived the complete destruction of and separation between human nature and God's grace by the sins of our first parents. What Jesus accomplished by his incarnation was a new relationship and a new covenant with God.⁴ MMT agrees with Luther's internal contradictions of human nature and is of the opinion that it needs forgiveness.⁵ But opposed the pessimistic attitude of Luther regarding human nature, in his assertion of the complete breakdown of its divinity with the first sin, leaving it with the world of "princes and devil", "to Machiavellis and Hitlers."⁶ At times of suffering and of violence and injustice one must say that it is only to be expected from this world. MMT wanted to emphasize the dialectical relationship between this world and other worldly destinies. This relationship must lead us to action in all spheres of life on earth.

3. God's Favour for the Human Being

Let us begin this discussion with MMT's concepts of God and humankind in relation to the process of humanisation. MMT does not speak about the ontological dimension of God. 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.⁷ He was not interested in the speculative metaphysical dimension of God.⁸ Adrian Bird, quoting from one of MMT's lectures

⁴Cf. J. Dillenberger, *Protestant Christianity: Interpreted through its Development*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954, 28-29.

⁵Cf. T.J. Thomas, *Ethics of a World Community*, Calcutta: Puncti Pustak, 1999, 53.

⁶Cf. M.M. Thomas, *Ideological Quest*, Madras: CLS, 1983, 159.

⁷Cf. V. Devasahayam, "Search for the Last, the Least, and the Lost: M.M. Thomas' Understanding of Human, God and the New Community," in *A Tribute to M.M. Thomas: Christian Witness in Society*, ed., K.C. Abraham, Bangalore: BTE-SSC, 1998, 114.

⁸Cf. M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization: Some Critical Issues of the theology of Mission in Contemporary India*, Bangalore: CIRS, 1971, 7.

regarding the biblical message says, "Its primary interest is in what God is in relation to man and in Jesus as God's revelation to man, and as God's deed for the redemption of mankind and human history."⁹ Although the transcendental aspect of God is the basis for humanisation, MMT conceives God as *wholly other for others*. He wanted to explain the existence of God in terms of an immanent way as God is present in society. As Creator, Judge, Preserver and Redeemer, God is related to human beings, according to MMT.¹⁰ God is for the salvation of the world and MMT conceived salvation as primarily humanization. Human beings should attain their fulfilment in love revealed by God in Jesus and in the service of humanity. The Church is given the task of witnessing this love in history and to serve as the first fruit of the Kingdom of God.¹¹

4. God's Action in History

History for MMT is the platform where God relates to humanity and to the world. Here, history is conceived "as the conversation between man and God, a dialectic between human freedom and Divine Grace; history is the working out of man's destiny."¹²

MMT answers the question about the work of God in stating that God is in search of the poor and oppressed. Yahweh's liberating action in Israel's history namely, emancipation from the clutches of slavery, entering into a covenant with God in a loving relationship and concern for the poor all represent the basis for the law of the Jubilee year.¹³ Through humanizing works, God, in his providence, is establishing the basic norms for the realizations of a greater human dignity based on human creativity and mature human living. When we acknowledge God as Lord of all creation who is concerned with good of the whole of humanity, MMT speaks in theological terms that liberation cannot but include a concern for health, economic welfare and social justice.¹⁴

⁹Cf. A. Bird, "M.M. Thomas: Theological Signposts for the Emergence of Dalith Theology," in ed., G. Shiri, *Contextualization: A Re-reading of M.M. Thomas*, Thiruvalla: CSS Books, 2007, 45.

¹⁰Cf. M.M. Thomas, *In the Beginning God: Contextual Theological Bible Commentary*, trans., T.M. Philip, Thiruvalla: C.L.S., 2003, 128.

¹¹Thomas, *In the Beginning*, 128.

¹²Cf. M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking and Responsibility*, Unpublished Manuscript, Bangalore: UTC, 1971, 33.

¹³Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Città del Vaticano: Libreria, Editrice Vaticana, 2004, 61-90, 13-17.

¹⁴Cf. M.M. Thomas, *The Gospel of Forgiveness and Koinonia*, Thiruvalla: CSS Books, 1994, 59.

5. The Human Being as 'Spirited Matter'¹⁵

The term spirited matter points to an integral view of the human being towards his destiny. It involves the spiritual and the material. The consciousness of finite being, the combination of the reality of spirit and matter in the human being and his creative capacity contribute to his material as well as his spiritual destiny in history.

5.1. Positive Aspects of Finiteness

The human being is a finite spiritual being who lives in nature. He is, in addition, a transcendent being and by virtue of that for MMT humankind knows that he/she is a finite creature. Consequently he knows that he has an obligation to recognize the otherness of God and other people. The creaturely finiteness or selfhood is a gift from God: it is his essence, since in Gen 1:13 we read that His creatures are "very good." Again, for MMT, personhood involves two elements namely, the awareness of the human being about objective natural necessities and the presence of the other person and knowledge about their spiritual destiny.¹⁶ Creatureliness and finitude is the basis for the participation of the human in history and spirituality.

5.2. Spirit-Nature Unity in the Human Being (Spirited Matter)

The nature-spirit unity and its implications are the hallmark of MMT's anthropology. First and foremost, humankind is a part of nature and related to nature as other beings. But the human has the awareness of his involvement in nature as well as the capacity to transcend nature with a sense of personhood and responsibility. The human's participation in the natural order is influenced by the spirit. MMT takes the example from Gen 2:7 to expand his idea: "The Lord God formed man out of dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." According to MMT the word man does not denote only the spiritual part of man but instead the whole person, the nature-spirit unity.¹⁷ MMT believes in the resurrection of the body not as the immortality of the spirit alone, due to the distortion effected by sin, but the resurrection of the body as well. He agrees with Bonheoffer, "Man is a bodily being and remains so in eternity as well."¹⁸ MMT takes the idea of Bonheoffer

¹⁵I owe this term human being as 'spirited matter' to one of the famous Indian biblical theologians, Joseph Pathrapankal CMI.

¹⁶Cf. M.M. Thomas, *Secular Ideologies in India and Secular Meaning of Christ*, Bangalore: CLS, 1976, 195.

¹⁷Cf. M.M. Thomas, "A Christian View of Society," *Religion and Society* 1 (Oct-Dec, 1960) 53.

¹⁸Cf. M.M. Thomas, "A Christian View of Society," 53. D. Bonheoffer, *Ethics*, Macmillan, ed., New York: Eberhard Bethge, 1965, 156, 188.

and characterized “the ‘human’ as the ‘penultimate’ dimension which points towards and reflects Christ the ultimate.”¹⁹ This body-spirit unity is also proposed by Karl Rahner in terms of the Resurrection of the Body in his *Theological Investigations*.²⁰ Man is a being endowed with a body and remains thus in eternity as well and therefore the body and spirit are inseparably together.²¹ Christian redemption means the redemption of the whole life namely, bodily rights, food, clothing, housing, education, medical care, etc. The awareness of his being both body and spirit makes man an historical being.

6. The Importance and the Dynamic Nature of Historicity

History can be a tragedy to those who believe that it has an ultimate goal. But a cyclic concept of history denies this tragedy. MMT says that any concept of the end of history by fate or the will of God loses the meaning of history. OT reveals history as the conversation between man and God based on human freedom and God’s grace to create history.²²

The notion of history for MMT was the activity of the human being in collaboration with God and other fellow beings to fulfil the will of God in the act of creation. “The God of the Bible is the God of history;” and if we separate the interrelatedness of God, the world and human beings it would defeat the reality of history and the purpose of creation.²³ Therefore, according to T.J. Thomas one of the main characteristics of MMT’s anthropology is the idea of humankind as historical beings moving towards a historical end and self-fulfilment.²⁴

7. The Relationship between Salvation History and World History

In connection with theology of mission MMT sees the relationship between “the gospel of salvation and struggles of men everywhere for their humanity.”²⁵ In other words it is the relationship between mission and humanization. In this connection MMT points out the relationship between salvation history and world history. The only

¹⁹Cf. M.M. Thomas, *Some Theological Dialogue*, Madras: CLS, 1976, 27.

²⁰Cf. K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, “Resurrection of the Body,” vol. II, 203-216; Cf. M.M. Thomas, *Ideological Quest*, 242, 263; Cf. R. Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1964, 112.

²¹Cf. M.M. Thomas, “A Christian View of Society,” 53.

²²Cf. M.M. Thomas, *Faith Seeking*, 33.

²³Cf. M.M. Thomas, *Secular Ideologies*, 194.

²⁴Cf. T.J. Thomas, *Ethics of a World Community: Contributions of Dr. M.M. Thomas Based on Indian Reality*, Calcutta: Puntis Pustak, 1999, 43.

²⁵M.M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 2.

one sided view of the Church's mission namely, mission confined to preaching alone, leads to the hidden nature of the reality of Christ. MMT says, "The rest of human history is given up as lost or if Christ is acknowledged as working in it, the work is seen as being totally hidden, with no glimpse available to man of the pattern of his creating, judging and saving work."²⁶ As a result there arose a "Christian indifference" to the secular world. He says, "It seems to me that a neat and absolute division between salvation history and secular history has done no good to theology."²⁷

MMT sees salvation as eschatological but the historical responsibility to eschatological perfection should include the struggle for humanization. The Kingdom of God or the resurrected life does not begin after life, it is partially realized here and now. It calls for the understanding of the relationship and interrelatedness of the historical and human eternity or better to say the realization and "presence of the eternal in the historical and the human."

8. Interpretation of the Doctrine of Creation-Redemption and the Fall

MMT wanted to interpret the doctrines of creation, the fall and the redemption in view of the dynamic nature of historicity of the human being. Taking inspiration from Teilhard de Chardin, MMT is of the opinion that these doctrines were formed at a time when the concept of nature and society were conceived in terms of a static phenomenon. But our age acknowledges the truth about nature, the human and society as dynamic and evolutionary and consequently necessitates the translation of biblical stories or doctrines into insights. According to MMT the Biblical concepts of creation, fall and redemption are not mere historical events of the past. In theology they are ever occurring or continuing events. They help us to discern and participate in Christ's presence in the making of a new creation and community in Jesus Christ.²⁸

MMT becomes a critic when he observes the Hindu view of *Sanathana Dharma* (Eternal Law), the theology of apartheid, male dominance in society, the caste system, racism, the suppression of the struggle for justice and freedom, etc. as the after effects of the view of the static nature of creation.²⁹ We make a point here that there is an

²⁶M.M.Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 7.

²⁷M.M.Thomas, "Issues Concerning the Life and Work of the Church in Revolutionary World," *Ecumenical Review* 4 (October 1968) 413.

²⁸Cf. M.M. Thomas, *Man and the Universe of Faiths*, Bangalore: CISRS, 1975, 130-31.

²⁹Cf. M.M. Thomas, *Theology of Change* (Malayalam), Thiruvalla: Daivasastra Prasadheekarana Samithi, 1982, 92; Cf. T.J. Thomas, *Ethics of a World community*, 62.

intrinsic tension between creation and eschatology where history has a not-yet-fully specific realization.³⁰ That prompts the involvement of the human in the world of struggles.

8.1. The Dynamic Nature of Creation in View of Redemption

MMT reflects on creation and redemption in parallel terms. So we take them together. For him creation is not merely something that happened in the past at a particular point in time. It is also dynamic. This dynamic nature of creation is proposed by J. Moltmann in his typical expression, "*creatio originalis, -creatio continua- creatio nuova.*"³¹ In MMT's opinion it is better to say God "creates" rather than God created.³² Creation is not over, but ever occurring due to divine intervention and continuous human creativity. As a co-creator the creative process continues to grow in history on the basis of his spiritual response.

Influenced by Martin Buber's thought, MMT says, "Creation is the world in motion towards its fulfillment in the coming *eschaton*. The *eschaton* is the creative power, the inner dynamic, of the world in process, of the history of mankind towards its integration in the Lordship of Christ."³³ Redemption according to MMT is not the going back or the restoration of the stage before the fall or the lost paradise but the process of the growth of the human being towards freedom as God's children engaged in an endeavour in collaboration with God for the creation of a new heaven and a new earth as God's adult children (the Kingdom of God on earth).³⁴

8.2. The Interpretation of the Doctrine of the Fall

For MMT the fall is inextricably linked to creation. For him the fall is the denial and non-fulfilment of human destiny whereas creation and redemption call for a destiny in terms of the social dimension. The first fall is not static and it is very close to us. "It is our own self" according to MMT.³⁵ As freedom grew in the human being sin arose developing in them the consciousness of a co-creator.³⁶ In the human

³⁰Cf. D.W. Hardy, "Creation and Eschatology," in C.E. Gunton, ed., *The Doctrine of Creation*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1997), 114.

³¹Cf. J. Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1985, 55. According to him the initial creation is to be understood as "*creatio mutabilis*"; Cf. J. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 207.

³²Thomas, *Man and the Universe of Faiths*, 131.

³³Thomas, *Man and the Universe of Faiths*, 132.

³⁴Cf. M.M. Thomas, *Theology of Change*, 98. Cf. T.J. Thomas, *Ethics of a World Community*, 63.

³⁵Thomas, *Man and the Universe of Faiths*, 131.

³⁶Thomas, *Man and the Universe of Faiths*, 131.

being the reality of original sin is revealed when the human turns away from God in his freedom to himself. MMT says, "Man essentially dependent and helpless without God declares himself independent and self-sufficient 'like God' ... This then is the essence of original sin – namely, pride and assertion of self-sufficiency."³⁷ It is 'man's innate self-centeredness according to MMT.³⁸ The tendency to self-righteousness in the human clearly points to the presence of original sin and defeats the purpose of creation.

MMT further explains that what we witness in the world is the increase of goodness and the increase of evil simultaneously. Any assertion of human goodness alone expressed in history for establishing the kingdom of God ignoring the presence of God's purpose of creation obstructs one in finding one's full humanity. That leads to totalitarianism and power politics. Therefore, we have to reject the worship and sin of human goodness.

9. The Historicity of the Church and Humanisation

For MMT the problem of theology today is to make new the relationship between the particularism of the Church and the universalism of the end, i.e., the other world, as far as the mission of the Church is concerned. It is the task of the people of God that they have to transform the kingdoms of this world into the Kingdom of God and His Christ.³⁹

Therefore, the Christian vocation to the Church is to witness and become a catalyst for the building up of a new world and new culture. The goal of theology is salvific action which is the spiritual motive of humanisation.⁴⁰ The sign of the Kingdom to come is evident in the participation in building the tissues of genuine human community in the presence of communal groupings of human beings in history.⁴¹ The *Basileia* is taking shape in the world when we respond to God's acting in history in the form of struggling for justice.⁴²

MMT is critical of the general concept prevalent in the Church that the Kingdom is a matter of life after death and spirituality has nothing to do with worldly affairs. In his opinion "human spirituality is

³⁷Thomas, *Ideological Quest*, 115; Philip, *The Encounter between Theology and Ideology*, 45.

³⁸Cf. M.M. Thomas, "Report of the Chairman of the Executive Committee," *Ecumenical Review* 4 (October 1972) 408.

³⁹Thomas, *Man and the Universe of Faiths*, 135.

⁴⁰Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 10.

⁴¹Thomas, *Man and the Universe of Faiths*, 139.

⁴² Cf. M.M. Thomas, *Some Theological Dialogue*, Madras: CLS, 1972, 142-143.

dependent largely upon his material condition." If the Church does not recognize this as fact, "it cuts at the root of spirituality in the world."⁴³

10. The Concept of Salvation

There have been different theologies with regard to the doctrines and the understanding of the destiny of human beings. The Roman Catholic understanding of Natural Law is based on the concept that there is an essential goodness in the world which God has created.⁴⁴ There is no sacred and profane in the eyes of God. Moreover, human destiny is not only futuristic; it is 'already' and 'not yet.' Contemporary theology calls for an action oriented life in society. "Contemporary forms of eschatology attempt to relate hope for the ultimate to practical responsibilities in the penultimate areas of political, social and economic structures of the present."⁴⁵ On the other hand unlike Catholic Theology, the Reformed Churches gave much emphasis on the redemption attained by Jesus in purely individualistic terms. Being so preoccupied with the spirituality, they often forgot and even dismissed the objective structures and social relations of human existence as insignificant. MMT identifies various dimensions of the quest for salvation. Firstly, salvation involves selfhood, self-identity or group identity. Only a being which has self-awareness can be called a spiritual being; that is the uniqueness of the human being. Secondly, it involves the attainment of a historical consciousness and the purpose of history. It helps human beings to become aware that they are future-oriented persons giving them an impetus to fight against present injustice. Thirdly, it also involves the making of a community based on freedom, equality, and fraternity against the oppressive structures of caste, class and patriarchy.⁴⁶

Western missionaries in India imported a pietistic view of salvation which has ignored this worldly aspect of salvation.⁴⁷ Saving souls was their only motive. He says; "It means that evangelicalism becomes religious individualism so totally concerned with an inner spirituality that the objective structures and relations of human social existence tend to get summarily dismissed as virtually

⁴³Thomas, *Ideological Quest*, 27; Cf. M.M. Thomas, "The Churches in the Political Struggles of our Day," *Ecumenical Review* 2 (January 1951) 124-126.

⁴⁴Cf. J. Neuner-J. Dupuis, ed., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, Bangalore: Theological Publication of India, 1992, 2079.

⁴⁵Cf. D. Patte, ed. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, London: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 373.

⁴⁶Thomas, *Man and the Universe of Faiths*, 23ff.

⁴⁷Cf. M.M. Thomas, *Evangelical Social Gospel: A New Look at the Reformation of Abraham Malpan*, Madras: C.L.S., 1977, 28-30.

insignificant.”⁴⁸ MMT had a critical attitude of this shallow purely individualistic view of human beings and their salvation. He terms it as “lopsided anthropology.”⁴⁹ This “lopsided anthropology” is an obstacle to the wholeness of person as body and soul. Since the message of Christ reveals the purpose of God in creation and takes the world to fulfilment, the world assumes a central position in the Gospel. “God so loved the world. For MMT, spirituality unrelated to the temporal is hypocrisy.”⁵⁰ We are called to witness to this Kingdom not only in our faith but also in our deeds.

10.1. Humanisation as a Way to Salvation

Salvation for MMT is a realized salvation and for him humanization is that realized salvation which is the penultimate goal of eternal life.⁵¹ In a seminar at Kerala University on October 4, 1990, while speaking about the positive merits that communism provided to the Christian understanding of human destiny, MMT comments that Christianity has the tendency to conceive human beings only as a soul apart from the body and social history. MMT sees salvation as the “spiritual inwardness of true humanisation.”⁵² Although salvation and humanisation cannot be identified, they are essentially related. He defines salvation as humanisation in an eschatological sense in that all the struggles on earth for a partial realization of humanity in the world point to the eschatological dimension of judgment and fulfilment.⁵³ He also mentions the reverse namely that, “eschatology could be the basis of a proper political and social ethics in the society.”⁵⁴ As a critic of secular humanists he says:

The ultimate destiny of man in the Resurrection beyond sin, guilt and death must have its realization, however partial it may be, in terms of his historical destiny – even as no humanism which does not take into serious account the reality of sin as self-righteousness, guilt and fear of death, in the light of the Cross of Christ, can grapple responsibly with the forces of dehumanization...⁵⁵

⁴⁸Thomas, *Evangelical Social Gospel*, 28.

⁴⁹Thomas, *Evangelical Social Gospel*, 28; Thomas, *Some Theological Dialogue*, 101; Cf. M.M. Thomas, *Contemporary Ecumenism, Towards a Theology of Contemporary Ecumenism*, Madras: CLS, 1978, 64.

⁵⁰Thomas, *Contemporary Ecumenism*, 65.

⁵¹Cf. M.M. Thomas, “The Salvific Value of Non-Christian Religions According to Asian Christian Theologians in Asian-Published Theological Journals 1965-1970,” Review of the book by Asandas Balchand, Manila: 1973, in *Religion and Society* 20 (September 1973) 101.

⁵²Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 10.

⁵³Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 8, 18.

⁵⁴Cf. M.M. Thomas, “Some Comments,” *Ecumenical Review* 1 (January, 1966), 25.

⁵⁵Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 8.

With regard to outcastes, the poor and orphans, they saw the Christian faith as a source and means for humanisation. For them the salvation offered by the Christ was not an individual salvation or Kingdom of God after death, but also the spiritual source of a community in which their own dignity is maintained and recognized. MMT says, "it was the promise of humanisation inherent in the gospel of salvation that led to the influx of the oppressed into the Church."⁵⁶ Therefore, he has developed a relationship between theology and anthropology and salvation and humanisation. Salvation is not only a reconciliation of the human being with God but it is a deliverance from evil namely, dehumanizing structures and evil ideologies.⁵⁷ MMT's theological approach is to discover the fuller humanity.

10.2. The Task of Christian Mission

With regard to the communication of the Christian faith (mission), MMT explains the importance of salvation and humanisation. He does it by evaluating the contemporary context:

The crucial question raised on the theology of mission in the world-wide discussion of it today is that of the relation between the gospel of salvation and the struggles of men everywhere for their humanity, constituting as this does the contemporary context of the world in which the gospel has to be communicated. The question, in other words, is that of relation between Mission and Humanization.⁵⁸

For MMT, Christ's message is the cutting edge between the Gospel and the human quest for a fully alive humanity.⁵⁹ For him the definition of theology is "a cutting line between the Word and the World. It is the word confronting the world."⁶⁰ The emphasis is on the power of Christ who lives in the contemporary situation of the community judging the importance and relevance of faith in the present historical situation of human existence.⁶¹ On the basis of this theological conviction, he says, "the glorified humanity of the Risen Christ is to be realized not after death, but within the historical process, not by isolated individuals but by men in the corporateness of their relations in society and to the cosmos."⁶²

⁵⁶Thomas, *Salvation and Humanisation*, 14.

⁵⁷Cf. S. Sumithra, *Revelation as Revolution: A Study of M.M. Thomas' Theology*, Tübingen: International Christian Network, 1984, 202.

⁵⁸Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 2.

⁵⁹Thomas, *Some Theological Dialogue*, 94-109.

⁶⁰Thomas, *Contemporary Ecumenism*, 24.

⁶¹Thomas, *Some Theological Dialogue*, 96-97.

⁶²Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 10.

Therefore, humanisation of the world is inevitable to mission. He says, "Humanization is the goal of mission."⁶³ MMT assumes this in the above citation that the work of Christ in the historical life of the Church or in the secular world in general must encourage Christians to be involved in the human struggle. Here we see a change from the classical understanding of the concept of the Church's mission. He deduces from all his reflections that social justice, physical welfare, political freedom and economic sufficiency are the motives of the meaning of salvation in Christ today.

10.3. The Goal of Christian Spirituality

The question is, as MMT ponders, "How is the spiritual anguish of men and women expressed in their striving for human dignity related to man's hunger for *theosis*, his ultimate destiny in God."⁶⁴ MMT is clear about his content of spirituality. He says, "The Christian spirituality is not something that happens between Church and God, but 'between the world and God.'" The saving activity of Christ demands a certain mode of spirituality in us. The joys, aspirations, failings, uncertainties of the world form part of our adoration, confession, thanksgiving and intercession and the offering of ourselves for the transformation of the world.⁶⁵ Christian spirituality does not have an individualistic character but is corporate and expresses itself in fellowship. MMT sees Christian spirituality in terms of humanisation, saying:

Thus Christian spirituality becomes the foundation of all our concerns, for mission to the world and service of the world, and of our participation in all the struggles for world community, justice, peace and development among mankind in partnership with men of other faiths, religious or secular.⁶⁶

MMT observes in the words of Nicholas Berdyaev's that "while the problem of my own bread is a material question, the problem of my neighbour's bread is a spiritual one and therefore, economics is shot through with human spirituality."⁶⁷ Therefore, salvation of spirituality itself is the primary concern for the Christian mission.

⁶³Cf. M.M. Thomas, "Issues Concerning the Life and Work of the Church in a Revolutionary World," *Ecumenical Review* 4 (October 1968) 412.

⁶⁴Thomas, *Contemporary Ecumenism*, 273.

⁶⁵Cf. M.M. Thomas, "The Pattern of Christian Spirituality," *Religion and Society*, 1 (March, 1969) 65.

⁶⁶Cf. M.M. Thomas, *New Creation in Christ*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1976, 57.

⁶⁷Thomas, *Contemporary Ecumenism*, 180.

11. Humanity as a Means for Dialogue with Other Religions

MMT evaluates the nature of mission of the Church in India. On the phenomenon of pluralistic faiths in India, MMT observes that the major emphasis of earlier liberalism was the manner in which Christianity could be the fulfilment of other religions.⁶⁸ Today, however, in the contemporary period the point of contact with other faiths is not religion but humanity. For him Christian mission is to develop a concern for the proper promotion of a genuine human world. For that he calls for a substantial integration between religions, ideologies, and cultures as a basis of inter-religious relations.⁶⁹ MMT views that the problems of humanization are the point of entry into the dialogue with Hinduism.⁷⁰ He says,

The new situation calls for a new Christological understanding of our common humanity, with all its secular and religious dimensions, and of the life and mission of the Church in relation to how other religious dimensions and of the life and mission of the Church in relation to how other religious and secular ideological communities of faith are in God's scheme of salvation and will be consummated or completed in God's Kingdom.⁷¹

12. Relevance of "Spirituality for Combat" for our Times

MMT defines his favourite phrase 'spirituality for combat.' MMT puts forward certain issues for the articulation of the new way of theologizing. First of all he speaks of the need of a theological anthropology in terms of the New Humanity in Christ in view of the human family in totality and in the challenge to modern life. MMT sees the positive role of modern technology and politics in bringing human wholeness but many a time they lack the sense of mystery and the element of transcendence and result in dehumanization. Secondly, the basis for human responsibility for a better world is the ultimate hope of the fulfilment of history in Christ and in His Kingdom. In the world of science and technology, the eschatological perspective is a better answer to fatalism since any attempt to put trust solely in the capacity of man and his destiny is in vain as the negative effect of it results in fatalism and thereby in disappointment. It is the duty of Christians to lift fatalism and to participate in God's

⁶⁸M.M. Thomas, *The Christian Response to the Asian Revolution*, London: SCM, 1966, 96-101.

⁶⁹Cf. M.M. Thomas, "Christ-Centered Syncretism," *Religion and Society* 1 (March 1979) 26.

⁷⁰Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization*, 20.

⁷¹Cf. M.M. Thomas, *Risking Christ for the Sake of Christ: Towards an Ecumenical Theology of Pluralism*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1987, 15.

work with a view of hope and transcendence which is already present in the world. Thirdly, the identity of the Church is dependent upon its identification and solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. Fourthly, any struggle for social justice must accept human solidarity in sin and divine forgiveness. There is no place for violence in this struggle. An integration of the struggle for political justice and ultimate destiny becomes an imperative in the modern period. All these ideas call for 'spirituality for combat' according to MMT.

MMT mentions three kinds of spirituality. The first is the mystical spirituality that is in tune with Hindu Vedantic spirituality of which the goal is the union with God. The second is the *sadhu* spirituality of which the complete renunciation of the world is the motive. The third is the prophetic or incarnational spirituality which is attained through the sharing and involvement in the suffering of the people and their release from it.⁷² We have to make all our struggles as a part of the celebration of humankind.⁷³

13. Contemporary Relevance of Theological Humanism

Firstly, the contemporary world spirit is marked by globalization, free market, individualism, self-sufficiency and self-righteousness. The movements of enlightenment and death of God again gain advantage in the present scenario. Secularization of the society is a fashion now where capital and monetary matters decides the future of the society. Materialistic attitude of the present society is to be watched carefully. The postmodernist mind of the present man and his philosophical approach to life has to be evaluated critically with utmost care because from consequences that make repercussions in the society are very alarming. "Where are we heading to" is the often quoted question from contemporary thinkers. We need to answer this metaphysical question. Secular humanists and communists anchor on the human welfare alone as far as materialistic enhancement is concerned neglecting the spiritual content of human being because humans are intrinsically religious. Against modern humanists and atheists, theologians like MMT assert that if man is the source of any ethical value in history, we would not have any guarantee for the belief that good will have the last word. History as such does not give us any optimistic ground for future expectation and progress. Then the future of man will be in doom and despair. Against this modern

⁷²Cf. M.M. Thomas, "Christian Spirituality," in *The Guardian* 21 (1969), 270, cited in S. Sumithra, *Revelation as Revolution*, 92.

⁷³Thomas, *Contemporary Ecumenism*, 309-314.

theological humanists see the hominization process as an integral one since human is spirited matter. They want to give a new hope to modern man. They long for fuller human existence in a relational sphere with God, human and nature. What we need is a prophetic spirituality which has human concern.

Secondly, with the mushroom growth of new age and charismatic movements and even with the focus on cultic liturgy, some sort of 'lopsided anthropology' is in play, as MMT puts it. The privatization of faith and saving the soul are the hallmark of these movements ignoring the liberative aspect of human being in an integral way. This is precisely the reason behind the catholic theology of salvation which is in one phrase "already and not yet" and which is all the more expressed in our social teachings and thoughts. Especially in the latter part of 50 years since Vatican II we witness a shrinking in the mind of the church altering the focus on soul saving alone. The spirit of the Council is slowly diminishing along with the anthropological mind that prevails in the psyche of the world community which gives rise to absolutization of one's own religion (eg., the treat of ISIS), cult (eg., emergence of personal gods), nation (eg., fake nationalism of Hidutva ideology), culture (eg., identification of Hindu religion with Indian culture), etc. There is no difference between the sacred and the profane. As GS would say we should but involve in the secular welfare of the society where God and world merge together (GS, 35).

Thirdly as far as India is concerned, we live in the pretext of the phenomenon of secularism. The fundamental issues are: how do we preach the salvation through Jesus? How can we tackle the problem of syncretism and relativism as far as the doctrines are concerned in the present pluralistic context? What would be our point of departure for an inter-religious dialogue? Or do we need inter-religious dialogue at all? For theological humanists and according to the theology of inter-religious dialogue as well the meeting point of all religion is humanity themselves. Irrespective of caste, creed and doctrines we come together, cooperate together for the promotion of humanity and wellbeing of all. A give and take policy is always recommended. Imbibe the good spirit of the other religion and try to understand and appreciate the goodness while being faithful to one's own faith categories is the core endeavour. However, the starting point is not doctrines but *humanum* itself but doctrine is the last point that we should experience and arrive at. Therefore, according to Christian humanists like MMT the centre is the humanity of Jesus and a Christ centred syncretism is possible since we live in a

pluralistic context where we witness a migration of cultures, ideologies and doctrines.

Conclusion

MMT tried to transcend all elements of historical humanisation namely, freedom, justice, law, etc. to make heaven nearer to human beings as his definition of hominization says. MMTs' anthropological and sociological concerns meet at a point in which the divine purpose of creation, the divine human relationship in Christ and human redemption in Christ finds its fulfilment. It is within this framework that he viewed critically the injustices in Indian society namely, caste system, social and economic injustices, etc. He conceives Christ's salvific work to be social and cosmic and the Power of Christ to be the ground of humanization. Spirituality for him was not merely the traditional, mystical and pietistic, but rather a spirituality of involvement in all struggles of justice and human dignity.