



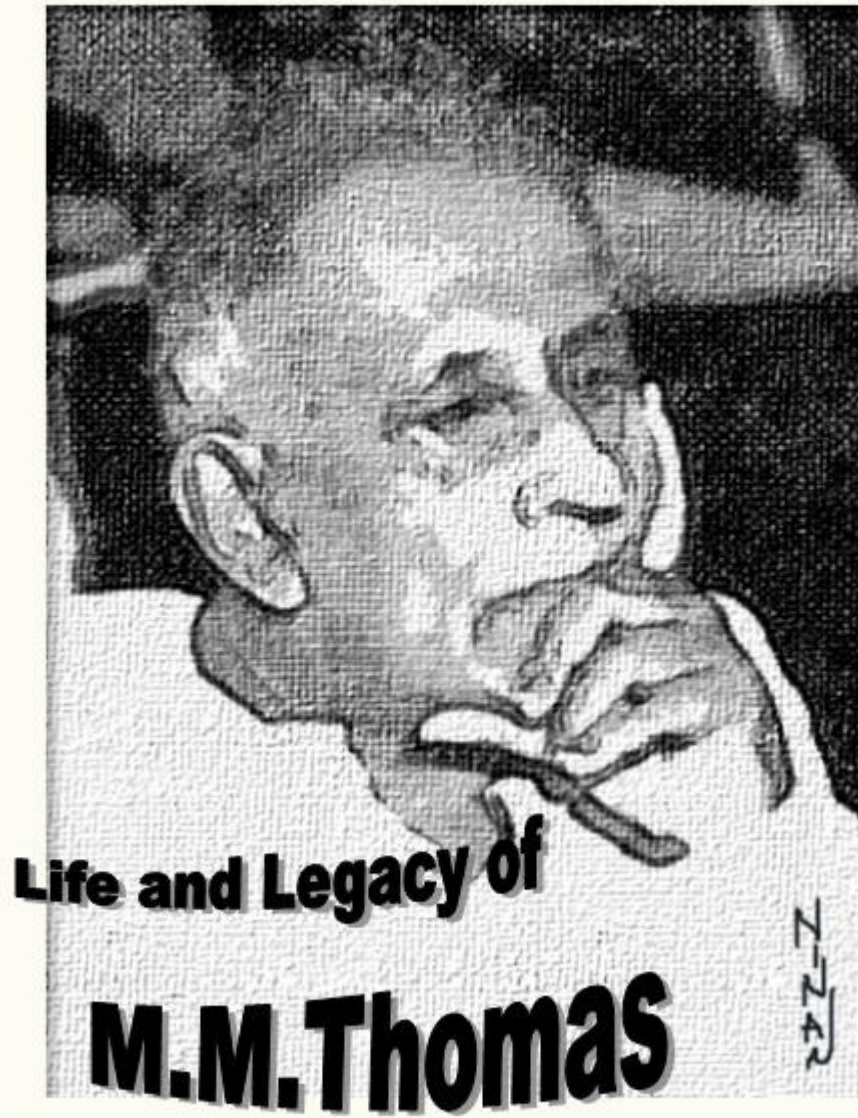
**Life, Legacy**  
**and**  
**Theology**  
**of**  
**M.M.Thomas**


*An Anthology*

**by**  
**M.M.Ninan**



**Dr. M.M.Ninan**  
**5708 Rudy Dr.**  
**San Jose. Ca 951**





**WE ARE ALL HOLOGRAPHS. EACH CARRYING THE SAME DATA.  
WE ALL CARRY THE SAME HERITAGE:  
A HERITAGE HANDED DOWN THROUGH GENERATIONS.  
OF ETERNAL LOVE THAT POURED OUT FROM HEAVEN.  
WE ALL CARRY THE SAME MESSAGE.  
A MESSAGE OF LOVE WHICH CALLS US ALL  
TO SERVE AND LOVE. TO DIE  
FOR THOSE WHO ARE OUR BROTHERS**

**LOVED ONES FROM THE PAST AND PRESENT. WE ALWAYS REMEMBER.  
LEGACIES OF LOVE AND PRIDE. WE PASS THEM DOWN TO GENERATIONS  
LEGACIES OF TRIUMPHS. TRAGEDIES. AND TEARS.  
TALES OF JOY. SACRIFICE. AND SORROW  
HISTORIES OF FATHERS WHO FOUGHT.  
STORIES OF MOTHERS WHO GAVE LIFE  
OUR ROOTS ARE TIED TO OUR PAST.  
OUR HERITAGE IS EMBEDDED IN THE PRESENT  
IN THE YEARS TO COME. A NEW GENERATION WILL TELL  
THE STORIES OF OUR LOVE, JOY AND SACRIFICE**



## THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

A new commandment I give you. "Love one another, as I have loved you."



Dr M M Thomas

Madathilparampil Mammen Thomas (1916 - 1996)

Renowned Indian Christian Theologian, Social Thinker, Activist and  
Governor of Nagaland (from May 1990 to April 1992).

He also served as the Chairperson of the Central Committee of World Council of  
Churches (1968-1975)

## **Dr M M Thomas: A tribute by Dr. M.M. Ninan**

**If you don't love, who will?**

**A brother pays homage to his big brother**

*Dr.M.M.Ninan*



M.M.Thomas was my eldest brother. He was born in 1916 and I was born in 1934. He was the first born in the family and I am the last born. With an age difference of 18 years, my memories of him are only as an active social worker. In those days when a degree

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

was considered the ultimate status in society, instead of taking up a lucrative job - which was easy to find - he went down to the capital of Kerala and started an orphanage; where he trained children in technological skill so that they may become useful and productive citizens. He was influenced both by the Indian Independence Movement (following the footsteps of our father M.M.Mammen) and by the Marxist Movement. My father, being in the publishing field, provided the impetus for Thomas to go over from mere passive social work to political activism; as he himself was involved in the Indian Independence struggle in cooperation with Gandhi while maintaining his personal commitment to Christ. With such a Christian upbringing at home, our morals were always fixed in the Bible and in Christ's teachings. Even when some of us went to extreme groups, we still maintained the strong Christian convictions and ideals. It was this christocentric upbringing confronted with the demands of a pluralistic society and secular politics that produced M.M.

He left for Geneva while my thought patterns were being formed, again under the same Christian background with almost similar conditions. Soon I left for Africa and MM returned to India. I got involved in the missions in the Sudan and in Yemen. But as a young Christian my first understanding of the Sovereignty of God came through my brother. I could not at times explain the problems I was facing in my workplace and in the Christian field. One simple question put to me by my brother, echoes in my ears over and over again -and that put me in the right perspective. "Who is important? You or God?" Without that understanding I could not have survived. He learned it in the hard way when his beloved wife left him. Pennocha (Mrs. Elizabeth Thomas) died of cancer. This changed his life completely and came to know of a God who was sovereign. Instead being bitter he grew closer to God in a personal way and prompted him into action based on the royal law of love. His favorite poster that hangs behind his old Kerala Charu Kasera was the picture of a crucified Christ with the words. "If you don't love, who will?" His theology and actions were controlled by the centrality of the Crucified Christ and he transmitted this to all around.

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

He encouraged everyone to write. "Stop studying alone and start writing along with it" was his last advice to me when we met in San Jose in May 1996. We transfer our heritage and a life time of learning by putting our thought and experience in writing-which may otherwise be lost to the generations. This was his passion for many years. This impetus has created many of his students to be excellent communicators and theologians.

As the Madathilparampil Family remembers him - our Big Brother, we proudly present a life well worth lived. From a simple home in Kozhencheri he ascended the Sarvanjapeeda of theological world and rose to become the Governor of Nagaland. He refused to compromise his faith and ideals and left the honor and power the world gave him with greater dignity. He has fought the valiant battle, he has kept the faith, and now a crown of glory awaits him. It is difficult to give any tribute to my brother's life without acknowledging his vast contributions to society and Christianity. I thought this is best done by quoting a tribute rendered by the Princeton Seminary Faculty. No one could summarize his contributions better than this.

I quote:

[A Tribute (May 15, 1916 - December 3, 1996) by Charles C. West, the Stephen Covwell. Professor of Christian Ethics Emeritus at Princeton Theological Seminary, delivered this memorial minute at the February 26, 1997 meeting of the Seminary faculty as published in The Princeton Seminary Bulletin, Volume XVIII Number 2 New Series 1997, 208-210]

Between 1980 and 1987 Madathilparampil Mammen Thomas, known to almost everyone as MM was for a semester each of six years a guest professor of Ethics, Mission, and ecumenics at Princeton Theological Seminary. It was just before the John A. Mackay Chair in World Christianity was established. Otherwise, he would certainly have been its first incumbent. He taught such courses as The Gospel in a Pluralistic World; The Church

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

in Mission and Unity; Christian Social Ethics in Asian Perspective; and above all, The Ecumenical Movement: Its Past, Its Present, and Its Future. To say that he taught these subjects is, however, hardly inadequate. He was the ecumenical movement in our midst. He embodied the world church mission and, through his teaching presence, made us a part of it.

M.M.Thomas was born May 15, 1916 to a devout Mar Thoma Christian family in Kerala, South India. In that church, with its Syrian Orthodox liturgical tradition and its evangelical piety, his christocentric spirituality took form. It was the beginning of a life long adventure, a living encounter with Hindu faith and practice, especially that of Gandhi, on the one side and with Communist commitment and ideology on the other. At one point in his youth, he applied for ordination in the Mar Thoma Church and for membership in the Communist Party. The Church rejected him because of his Marxist leanings of his social ethics; the Party rejected him because of his Christian faith. As it has turned out, the Communists were right and the Church was mistaken. He became, with only a college degree, a self educated theologian, in later life a dialogue partner with the major Christian scholars of his day. At the same time his social ethics, though deeply committed to the struggle of the poor for justice and humanity, broke sharply with the total claim of Marxist-Leninist ideology and Communist policy. But the heart of his ministry was ecumenical study and action, where spirituality, theology, ideology, and social conscience met in Christian witness to a world in revolution.

The vehicle of his ministry was the ecumenical movement, in India and abroad. MM was first secretary of the Youth Christian Council of Action in his native Kerala, then Student Christian Movement secretary in Madras, and Youth Secretary of the Mar Thoma Church. From 1947 to 1952 he served on the staff of the World Student Christian Federation in Geneva, with special emphasis on Christian political witness. He took part in the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1948 and in the formation of the Council's Department of Church and Society, of which he became an active member and chairman

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

from 1961 to 1968. In this capacity he also chaired the World Conference on Church and Society at Geneva in 1966. From 1968 to 1975 he served as Chairman of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches itself, guiding it through some of the stormiest years of its history. Through the power of his thought, the breadth of his vision, and the genius of his diplomacy, he influenced the mind and policy of the ecumenical movement more than any other person save its architect, W.A.Visser't Hooft. The honorary doctorate conferred on him by the University of Uppsala in 1978 was a belated recognition of the status he had already earned.

The centerpiece of M.M.Thomas' work was, however, in India itself. Returning from Geneva in 1952, he threw himself into social work and joined with India's leading theologian, P.D.Devanandan, in 1957 to form the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, which he served first as Associate Director and then, upon Devanandan's death, as Director until his retirement in 1976. Over these years the Institute poured out literature for the guidance of both church and society in India on social policy, cultural encounter, Christian-Hindu relations, political analysis, family problems, and ecumenical affairs. This literature was usually the product of study groups composed of some of the best minds of India, working intensely to produce something close to consensus report, which was then edited and published under the names of Thomas and Devanandan. We will never know how much of these reports was M.M.'s own work. He plowed his genius into the common process and made it fruitful. This did not prevent him, however from producing a large and diverse literature of his own, in his native Malayalam and English, on themes as diverse as Man in the Universe of Faiths; Secular Ideologies and the Secular Meaning of Christ; The Christian Response to the Asian Revolution; The Acknowledged Christ of Indian Renaissance, Meditations of The Realization of the Cross, and a series of Bible studies for the church in Kerala. It also did not prevent him from opposing, at serious risk of arrest and imprisonment, Indira Gandhi's suspension of democracy in 1976. This led indirectly to his appointment as governor of the largely Christian state of Nagaland in North East India in 1991, a post in

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which he was as much a pastor as official until his resignation in 1993, in protest against central government corruption.

M.M.Thomas came to Princeton as a guest professor after his retirement from the Christian Institute. His contacts with the Seminary, however, are older and newer than this. In earlier years he sent two of his colleagues, E.V. Mathew and Saral Chatterjee, to study here on visiting fellowships. Over the years he has recommended many other students for our consideration, most recently from the Christian student fellowship that has had, and still has, its headquarters in Thiruvalla, Kerala home. At the time of his death on December 3, 1996, he was actively promoting three-year research project on mission and evangelism in India, for which he had recruited as advisers two members of the Princeton Seminary faculty. The ecumenical ministry that was his is ours as well. He was for a while our teacher and our friend. He remains our inspiration and our challenge.

Courtesy:

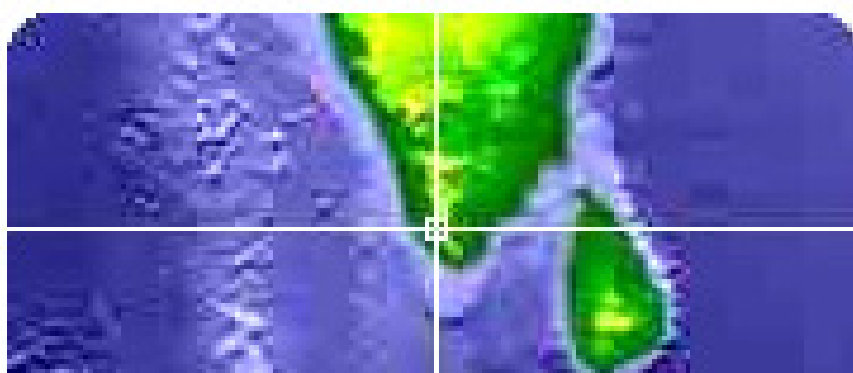
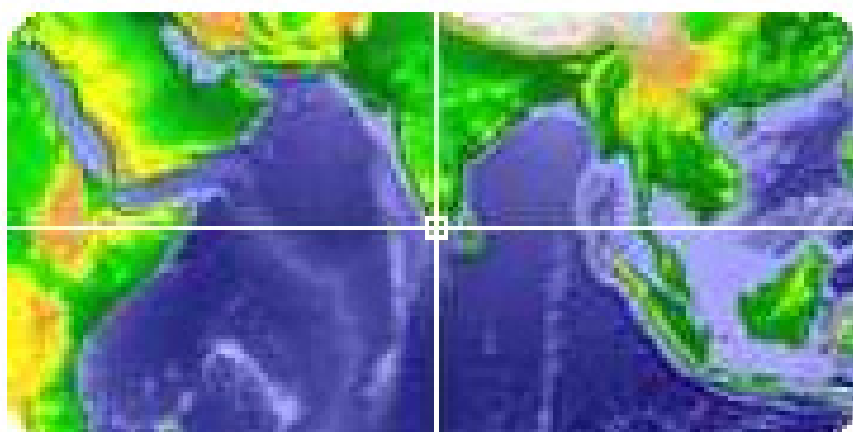
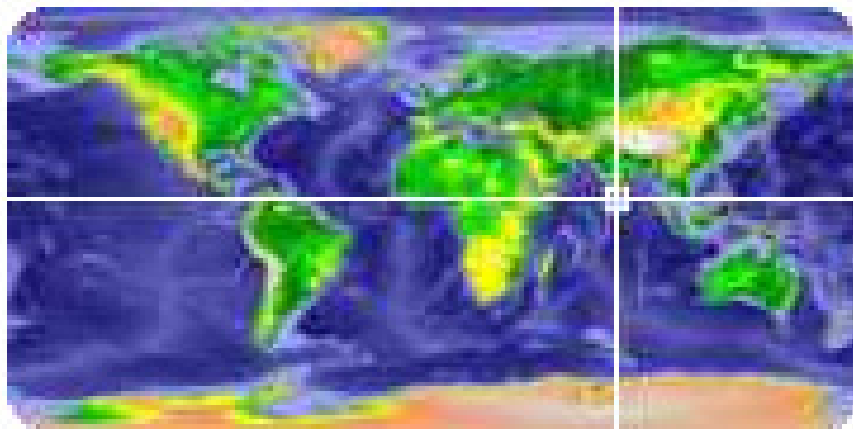
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Mrs. Elizabeth Thomas (Pennamma), MM's wife.

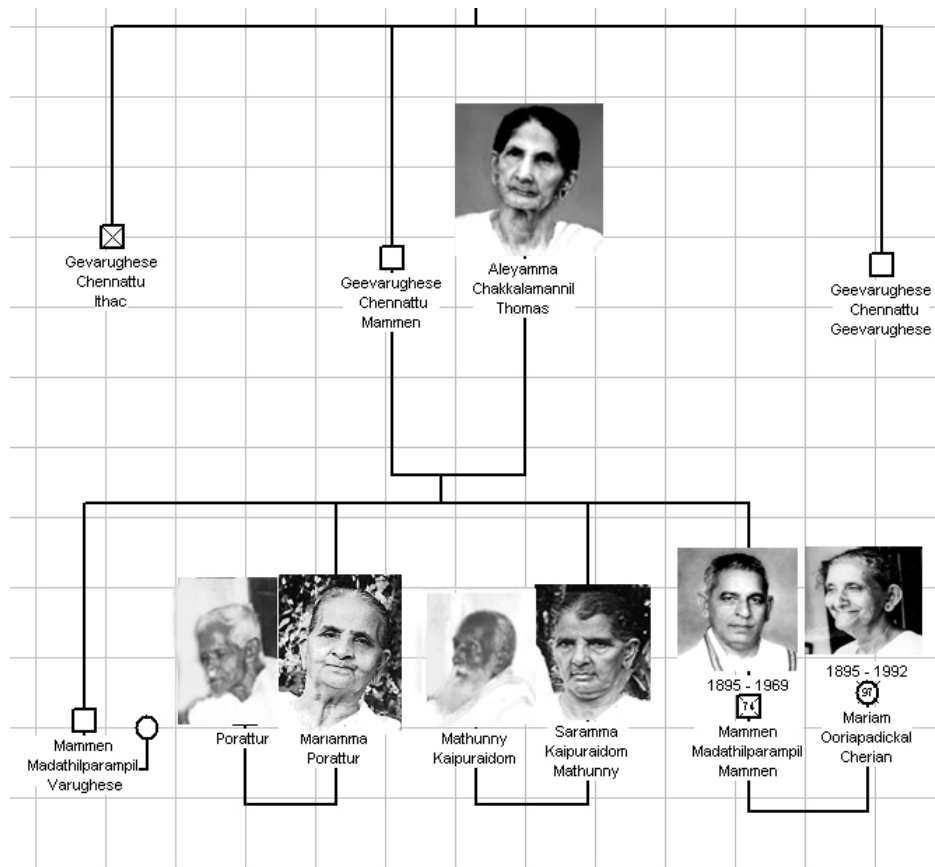
She passed away on 22 December 1969  
in her 51st year due to cancer.



## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS



# THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS



## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS



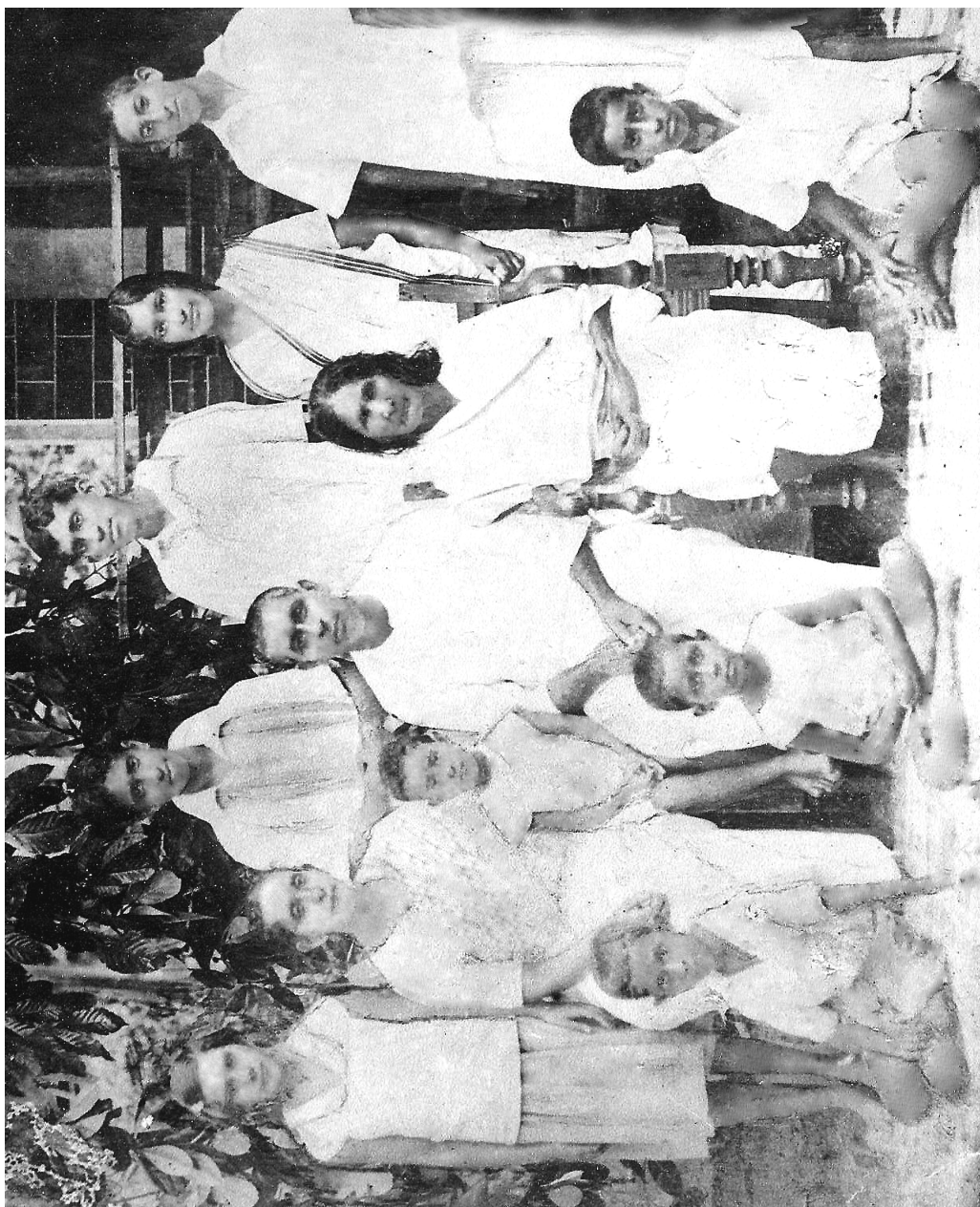
Madathilparampil Mammen Mammen  
Printer, Publisher, Freedom Fighter  
Father of M.M.Thomas



Mrs. Mariamma Mammen  
Teacher  
Mother of M.M.Thomas



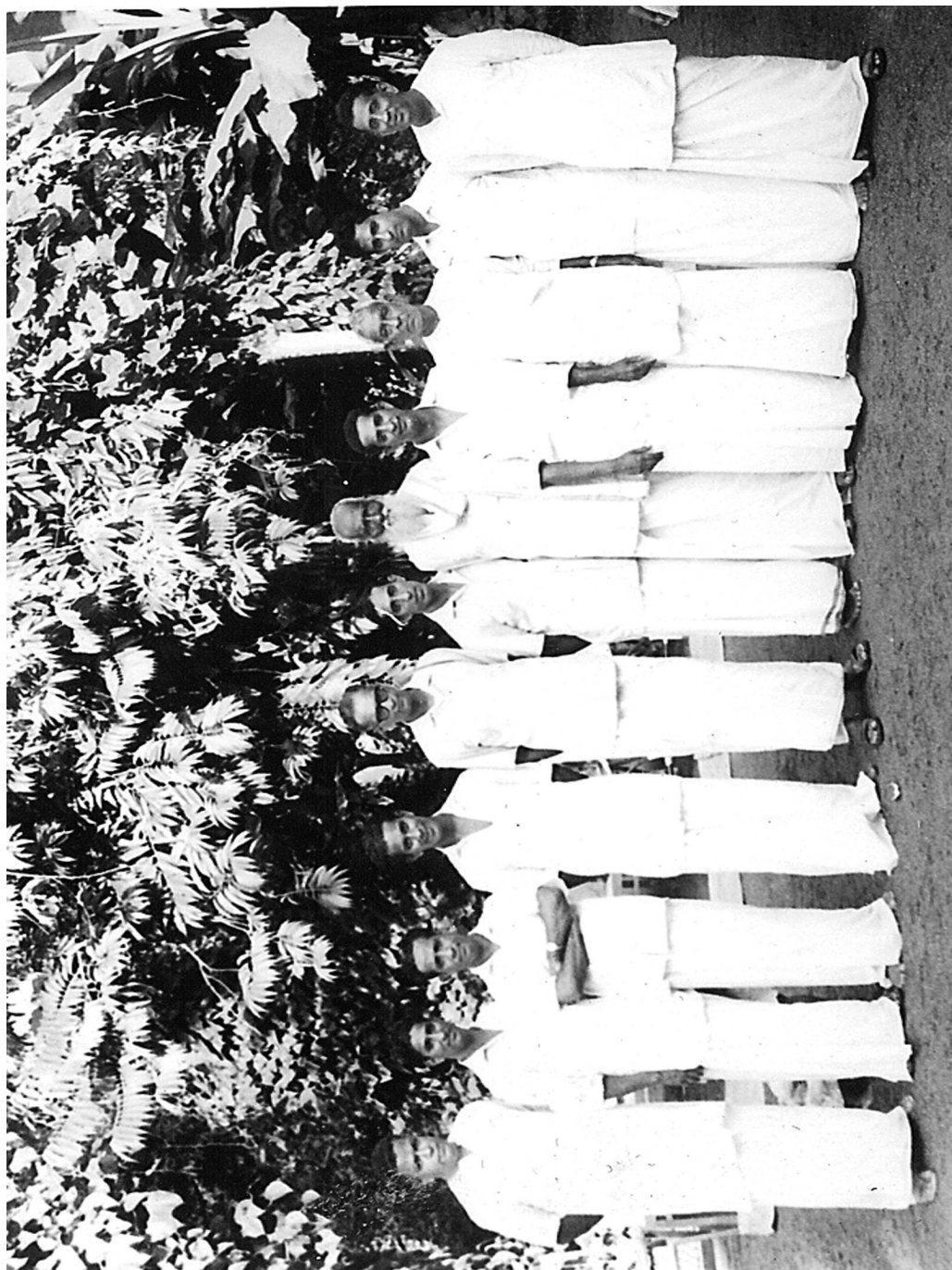
1936





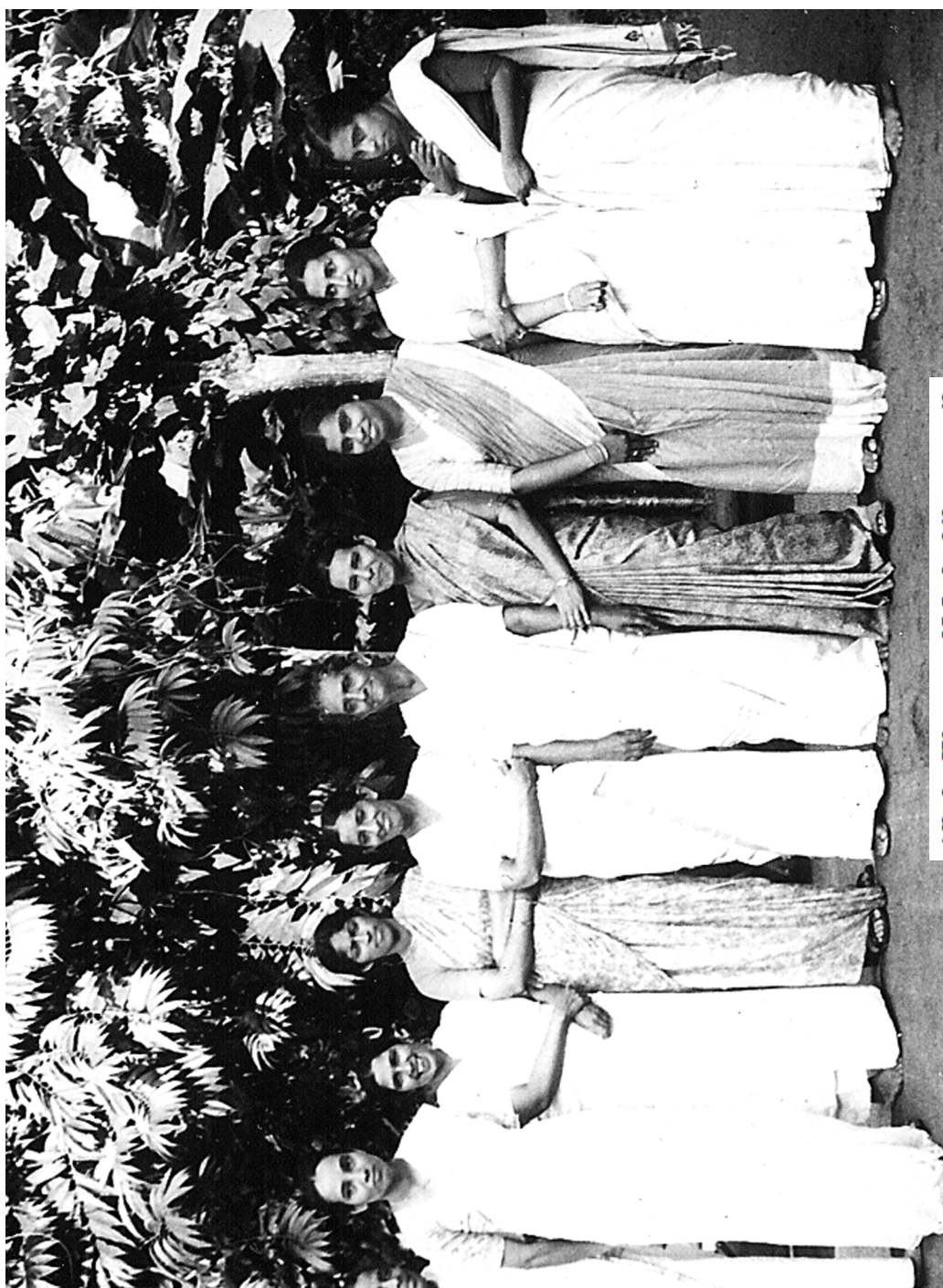
1951





**All the Men of Madathilparampil  
1962**





All the Women of Madathilparampil  
1962



## **Life of M.M.Thomas**

**1916 May 15: Born to Mr. M.M.Mammen (Printer, Freedom Fighter) and Mrs.Mariamamma Mammen (Teacher);  
Madathilparampil, Kozhencheri, Kerala, India**

**1921-1931 School Education:  
Melukara Girls School (till 4th standard)  
St Thomas High School, Kozhencherry**

**1931-35: Degree education  
Science College, Trivandrum, Kerala  
Gold Medal for good conduct;  
Degree of BA in Chemistry with first class**

**1935-37: Teacher, Ashramam High School, Perumbavoor**

**1937: At Christava Ashramam, Alappuzha  
and Manganam (Kottayam)**

**1938: Balabhavan, Thiruvananthapuram:  
Working among street children, giving technical  
education to make them self sufficient**

**1939: Youth Christian Council of Action;  
protest against the construction of the statue of  
Sir. C.P. Ramaswami Ayer**

**1941: With Dr Kheythan at Bangalore,  
along with A.K. Thampi.  
Reading and study**

**1942-44: Active member of  
Youth Christian Council of Action.  
Staying at Christava Ashramam, Manganam,  
along with A.K. Thampi and E.V. Mathew**

**1944-45: SCM activities; Editor of the Student Outlook**

**1945: Marriage with Ms. Elizabeth Thomas (Pennamma)**

**1944-47: First term as General Secretary,  
Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam**

**1947-50: Secretary, World Student Christian Federation,  
Geneva; organising the World Christian Youth  
Conference at Oslo (August 1947);  
participation in the making of the book on  
church and society published  
in connection with the WCC inaugural Assembly  
at Amsterdam.**

**1948 December: Leadership Conference of WSCF  
at Candy, Sri Lanka**

**1949: Conference of Asian Church Leaders, Bangkok**

**1949-52: WSCF Vice Chairperson from Asia  
and also serving as its part-time Secretary**

**1952: International Youth Christian Conference  
at Kottayam, Kerala;  
publishing the book,  
*Adhunika Bharathathile Rashtreeya Chinthagathikal*;  
Secretary of Committee for Literature on Social  
Concerns;  
WCC Central Committee at Luknow, India.**

**1953-54: Reading and Study at Union Theological  
Seminary, New York.**

**1954: WCC Assembly at Evanston**

**1957: Associate Director, CISRS;  
Editor of its journal, *Religion and Society***

**1959: Secretary of the Committee on Social  
Transformation,  
Nominated by the East Asia Christian Conference;  
begins the Asian journal, *Church and Society***

**1961: WCC Assembly, New Delhi**

**1961-68: Chairperson,  
Commission to Study Church and Society, WCC**

**1962-76: CISRS Director**

**1966: Chairperson, Third World Conference towards the  
formation of a Christian Social Ethics, Geneva.**

**1966-67: Visiting Professor, Union Theological Seminary,  
New York**

**1968-75: Chairperson, WCC Central Committee  
(Elected in the Uppsala Assembly of WCC in 1968,  
continues till the Nairobi Assembly in 1975);  
Editor, *Guardian Weekly*, Madras**

**1969: Pennamma (MM's wife) passes away due to cancer  
at her 51st year.**

**1972-73: William Patton Fellow, Selly Oak College**

**1975-77: Activism and writing against the Emergency  
Rule, India**



## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

**1976: Chairperson, Kerala People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL)**

**1977-1995: Writing and publishing of Bible reflections and interpretations in Malayalam for Christian Literature Society (CLS), Tiruvalla.**

**1979-89: Visiting professorship at Bochum University, Germany (1979),  
Princeton Seminary, USA (1980, 1982-88),  
Ann Dover Newton, Boston (1981),  
Southern Methodist University (1989)**

**1990-92: Governor of Nagaland**

**1996 December 3: Death**

(Courtesy: K.C. Varughese: *MM Thomas: Mathathmaka Chinthakalile Darshanika Prathibha*. Tiruvalla: CSS, 1996)

**Dr. M.M.Thomas  
Governor of Nagaland  
Chairman, World Council of Churches,  
Director,  
Christian Institute of Study of Religion and Society  
Married to:  
Prof. Elizabeth Kurien  
Maliyakal, Amallore, Tiruvalla**

Mammen Thomas,  
Sunnyvale, CA

Dr.Syamala  
Marv Thomas

Dr. Kurien Thomas,  
CMC, Vellore

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS



Mammen Thomas Family

Arun, Thampy, Ajit, Ammu, Anila



Syamala John Family

John, Sunil, Syama, Tina

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS



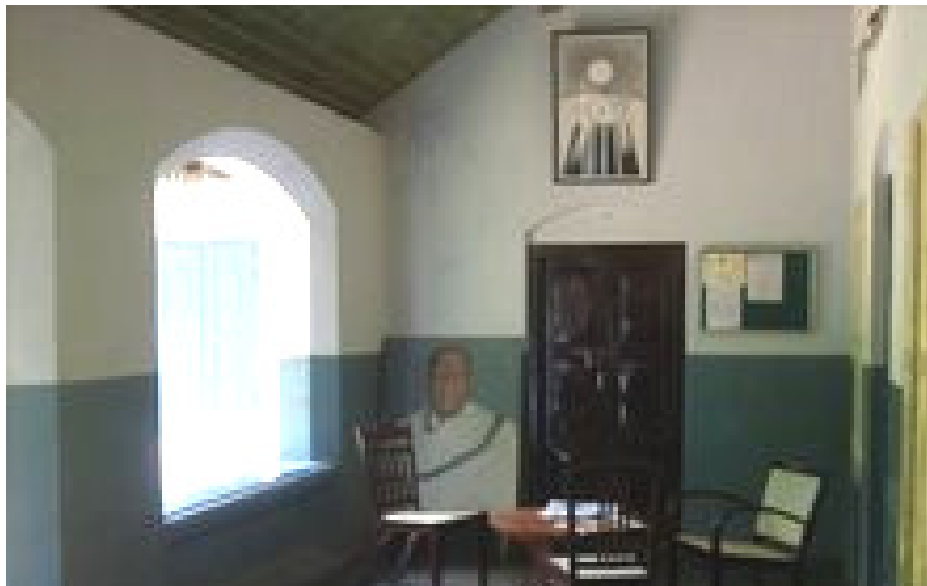
Kurien Thomas Family

Reuben, Pushpa, Kurien, Roshen



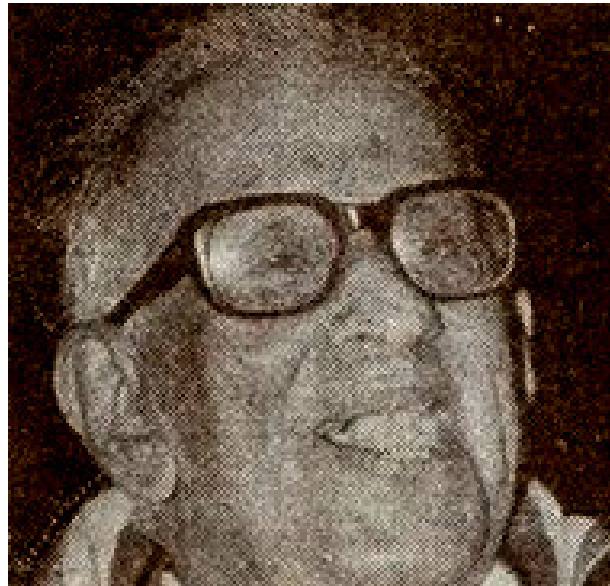
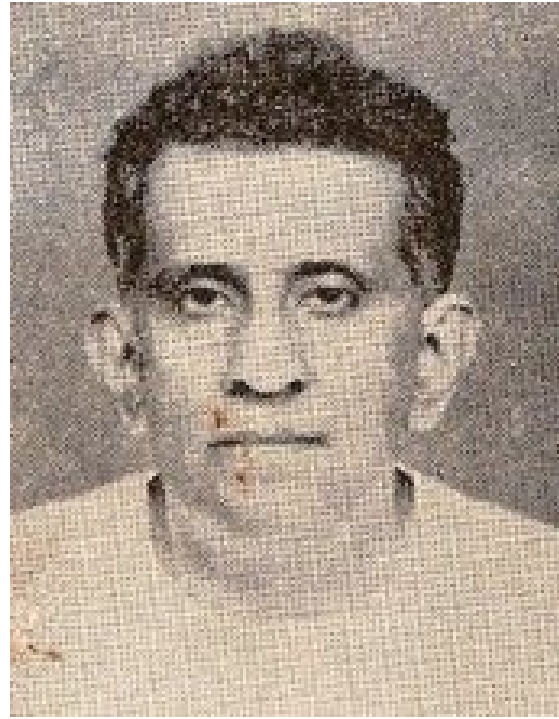
## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

**PENNAMMA BHAVANAM,**  
Manjadi P.O., Tiruvalla - 5,  
Pathanamthitta District, Kerala.

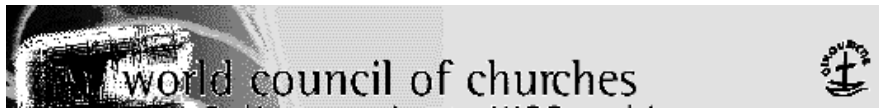


Front Veranda

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS







## First assembly, Amsterdam 1948

Place: Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Dates: 22 August to 4 September, 1948

Theme: **Man's Disorder and God's Design**

Member churches: 147

It was on the 23rd of August 1948, in Amsterdam, that the World Council of Churches was officially founded. 147 churches from different confessions and many countries came together to commit themselves to the ecumenical movement.

At the assembly in Amsterdam, four sections were organized to examine aspects of the theme "Man's Disorder and God's Design":

- the universal church in God's design
- the church's witness to God's design
- the church and the disorder of society
- the church and the international disorder.



## Second assembly, Evanston 1954

Place: Evanston, Illinois, USA

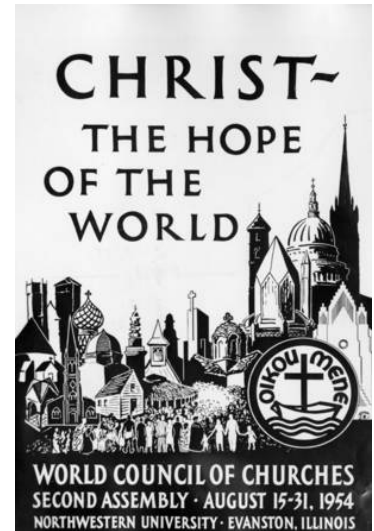
Dates: 15-31 August, 1954

Theme: **Christ - the Hope of the World**

Member churches: 161

The only WCC assembly to date held in the United States, it to some degree reflected - and certainly reflected on - the East-West tensions of the cold war. The Assembly divided its work into six sections:

- Our oneness in Christ and our disunity as churches
- The mission of the church to those outside her life
- The responsible society in a world perspective
- Christians in the struggle for world community
- The churches amid racial and ethnic tension
- The laity: the Christian in his vocation.
- 



## Third assembly, New Delhi 1961

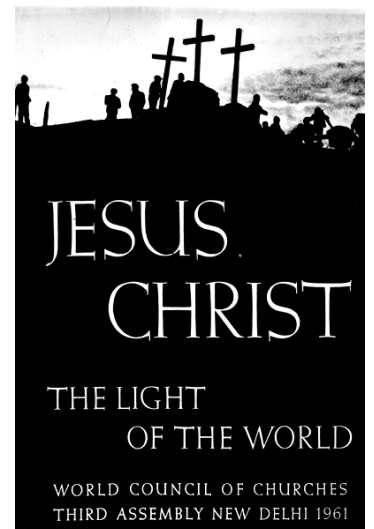
Place: New Delhi, India

Dates: 19 November to 5 December, 1961

Theme: **Jesus Christ - the Light of the World**

Member churches: 197

Best remembered for the incorporation of the International Missionary Council into the WCC, and the admission of 23 new member churches, including significant sectors of Eastern Orthodoxy and churches from newly independent nations, the Assembly focused on the theme "Jesus Christ - the Light of the World" with three sections on **witness**, **service** and **unity**.



## Fourth assembly, Uppsala 1968

Place: Uppsala, Sweden

Dates: 4-20 July, 1968

Theme: **Behold, I make all things new**

Member churches: 235



## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

The assembly at Uppsala bore further testimony to the expanding membership of the Council, as well as the fresh breezes of Vatican II that brought Catholic observers to participate in the meeting and discuss further opportunities for cooperation. Sections were organized under the headings:

- The Holy Spirit and the catholicity of the church
- Renewal in mission
- World economic and social development
- Towards justice and peace in international affairs
- Worship
- Towards new styles of living.



### Fifth assembly, Nairobi 1975

Place: Nairobi, Kenya

Dates: 23 November to 10 December, 1975

Theme: **Jesus Christ Frees and Unites**

Member churches: 285

*"Jesus Christ frees and unites"* the delegates sang in the midst of **Nairobi's** life: people from around the earth, standing before God in their captivities and disunities and naming a divine possibility.

The assembly section titles echo concerns of that turbulent decade:

- Confessing Christ today
- What unity requires
- Seeking community
- Education for liberation and community
- Structures of injustice and struggles for liberation
- Human development



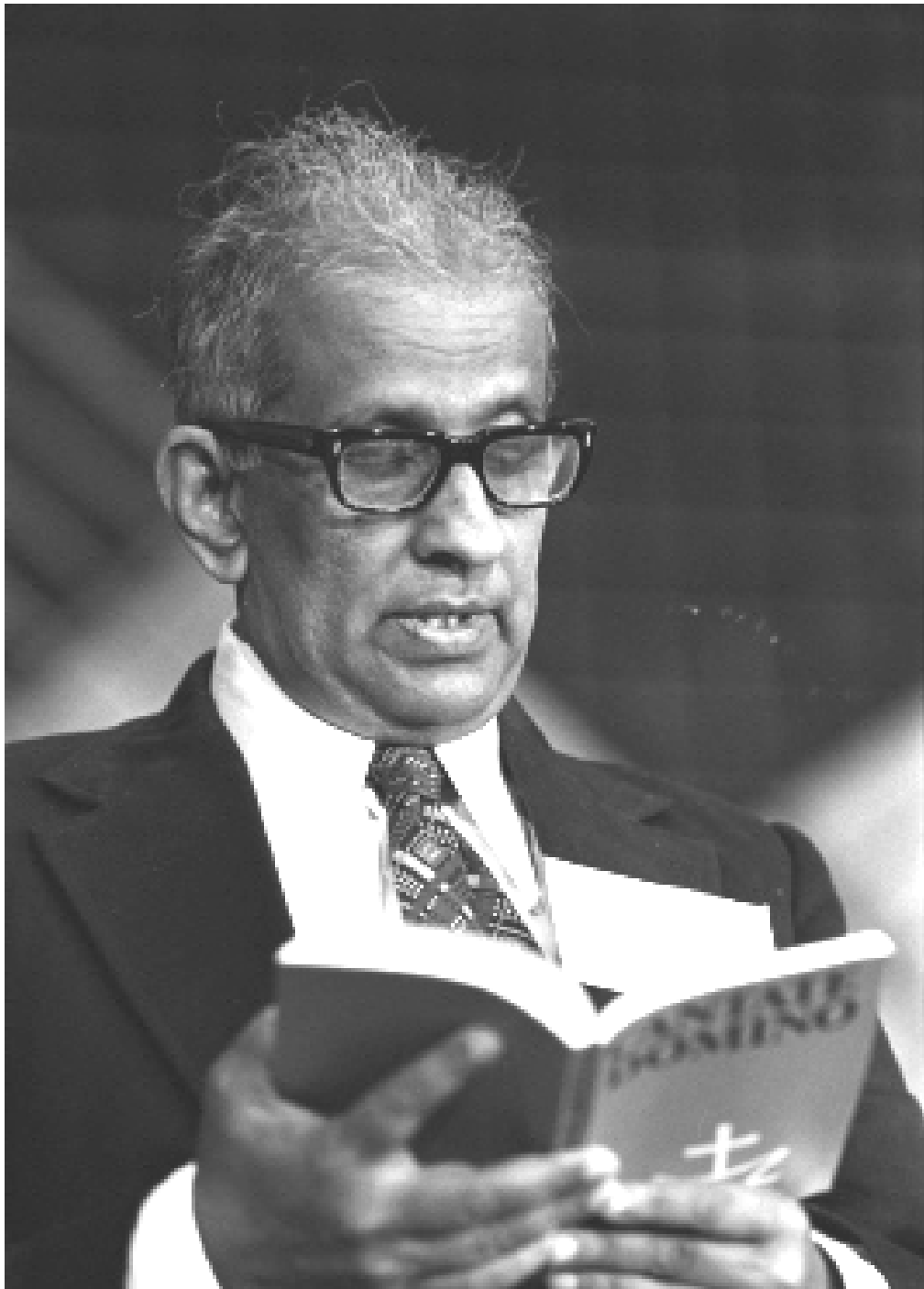
## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS



M.M.Thomas Speaking in the Podium WCC



M. M. Thomas (left), director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society in Bangalore, India, and Rev. T. C. Thomas, Principal of Mar Thoma College, Kerala, India, are delegates to the fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Uppsala, Sweden, 1968



Central committee moderator M.M. Thomas



Prof. M. M. Thomas, director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society in Bangalore, India, speaking in a plenary session of the fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Uppsala, Sweden, 1968.



M. M. Thomas of Bangalore, India,  
chairman of the WCC Central Committee,  
became an honorary member of the  
Ponca Indian Tribe of Oklahoma  
when he was presented with the tribe's  
eagle feather headdress  
by the Rev. Thomas Roughface (right),  
a Methodist district superintendent.

Mr Thomas was christened  
**Gah-hee-gah Don-Gah**  
(Big Chief).

For Mr Roughface it was the fulfilment of a lifelong ambition. "I've always wanted to meet  
a real Indian",  
he told Mr Thomas.

Executive Committee Meeting, Tulsa, January 1969.



Left to right:

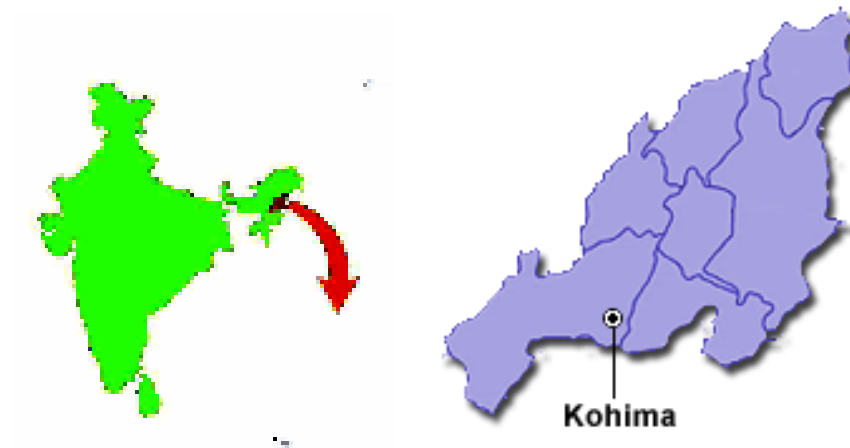
Bishop Juvenaly of Zairaisk;  
Dr Eugene C. Blake,  
(general secretary elect);  
Miss Margaret Mead,  
(Curator at the American Museum of Natural History);  
Mr M. M. Thomas,  
(Director of the Christian Institute for religion and society);  
Pastor Richard Andriamanjato,  
(Deputy in the National Assembly of Madagascar  
and mayor of Tananarive).

World Conference on Church and Society, Geneva, July 1966

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS



## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS



Durbar Hall at Raj Bhavan, Kohima  
Nagaland



## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS



Baptist Church of Kohima



Ceremonial Procession During Nazo Festival By Nagaland Tribes

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS



Headhunting and the associated fertility cults were the sources of inspiration for all aspects of Naga culture - religion, folklore, the arts. Thus, skulls were generally exhibited at what was considered the village's most fertility place, e.g. inside the morung, the chief's house, the log-drum house, at the fertility pole or at the stone-settings.





## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS





## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS



**Funeral of Dr MM Thomas**





## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS



## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS



Bishop Dr. Paulose Mar Paulose and priests  
leading the prayer at maliackel

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS



The last journey starts







## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS



The Procession through the Tiruvalla Town



The State Salute to an ex-governor, thinker, theologian and activist





**St. Gregory Episcopal Church  
honors  
M.M.Thomas  
as a Saint  
alongside of  
Francis of Assisi**



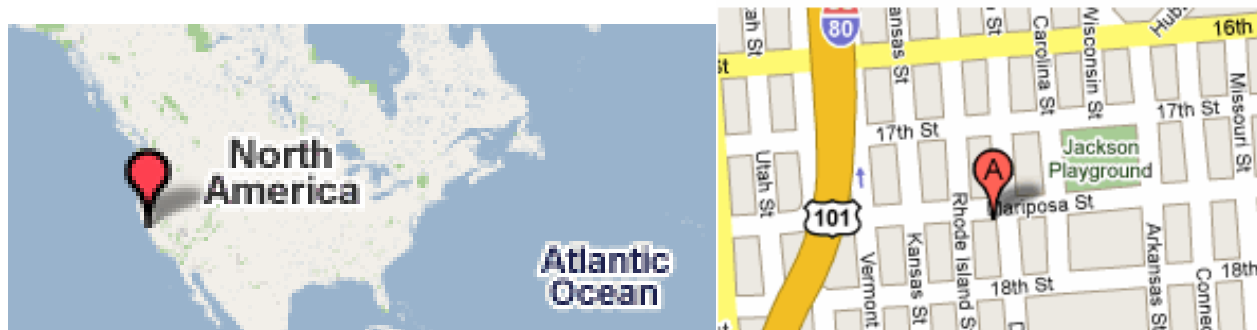


## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

St. Gregory Episcopal Church is widely known for its experimental liturgies which mix elements of orthodox and western Christian practice, and for its unusual building with its gigantic mural of "dancing saints."



St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, De Haro and Mariposa Streets, San Francisco







## Dancing Saints

**Megory Anderson**

There is a church on Potrero Hill called Saint Gregory Nyssa Episcopal Church, and it is filled with dancing. Saints dance on the walls, and people join them below. Dance as part of the liturgical rite dates back to ancient Christian practices. ("Once there was a time when the whole rational creation formed a single dancing chorus looking upward to the one leader of this dance. And the harmony of motion that they learned from his law found its way into their dancing."—Gregory of Nyssa, fourth-century Cappadocian bishop and theologian, in his commentary on Psalm 50.)

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

Inside this San Francisco church, you look up and see men and women, children, and elders; Muslim, Jewish, Christian; some dead four hundred years, some only a decade or two. The figures are in bright blues and reds and whites, with golden orbs around their heads. All are connected in a spiral dance, arm in arm, circling the walls of Saint Gregory's, inviting the community of here and now to join them. What is it about that invitation to the dance? And how does it work to enhance a community's spiritual life?

Many religious traditions use the body and motion in prayer. Watch an Orthodox Jew, wrapped in prayer shawl, as his body sways back and forth in prayer. See a room full of Muslims as they prostrate themselves on the floor, heads touching the ground, facing Mecca, in submission to the Divine. There is something amazingly beautiful as a whirling dervish twirls around and around as music and prayer intensify. Our bodies help us both draw inward toward the inner presence of the Divine and reach out to the transcendent creator of the universe. At Saint Gregory's, however, movement and dance go beyond traditional use of the body in prayer.

If you walk into the church on a Sunday morning, there are some things you notice right away. One is that there is both stillness and movement. You sit and listen to words and to silence. And then you move. You move from one space to another, from the quiet, still space to the wide and open rotunda where the altar sits, and you dance, around and around the table. Just like the shared silence, movement is a community action.

Another thing you notice is that you are not alone at Saint Gregory's. The spiritual experience is a shared one; it is intertwined. There is something profound about being invited to place your hand on the shoulder of the person in front of you and move into a circle of prayer and communion. You go together, holding on to someone who is holding on to you. You become an integral part of the movement, a link. And the icon saints who dance in a circle above your head are not there for ornamentation; they are truly part of that community. They raise you both figuratively and literally into the dance.

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But does spiritual practice have to contain movement? Not always. As in the discipline of tai chi, there is significant value to balance. Stillness is good. Movement is good. Together, they can create wholeness. So what does it mean to go from an observer's experience of spiritual connection to one of bodily connection, where you are not only moving your own body but you are moving in rhythm with so many others? One member of the congregation said, "When I need solitary prayer, I can find it in the quiet moments. But on Sunday mornings, I am pulled into the dance. I have to recognize that God wants all of me, body and soul, and we are in this together. I look up at those saints—and I do have my favorites—and realize that I have to keep moving too. One foot in front of the other. There are times when I can barely recognize the melody, much less do the dance, but most often, those dancing saints keep me focused and inspired. I dance because they dance. I am here because they are here."

*Saint Gregory Nyssa Episcopal Church ([www.SaintGregorys.org](http://www.SaintGregorys.org)) is located at the corner of Mariposa and DeHaro Streets on Potrero Hill. Megory Anderson, a longtime member of the congregation, is the founder and director of the Sacred Dying Foundation ([www.SacredDying.org](http://www.SacredDying.org)) in San Francisco.*





## **The Dancing Saints**

Donald Schell

St. Gregory's Episcopal Church  
500 De Haro Street  
San Francisco, CA 94107

St Gregory's Saint Selection Committee offers these eighty saints (there are ten more not yet listed here), to be painted as a grand icon in our church rotunda, a single statement of God's remarkable and remarkably diverse work in human life.

Many, many more obviously belong to this group-Martin Luther King Jr., Mary and Martha of Bethany, Raoul Wallenberg, Hildegard of Bingen, Erasmus, Emily Dickinson, Oscar Romero, Helen Keller, Stephen Biko, and easily hundreds and thousands more we could name and research, not to mention the legions of unknown and now forgotten holy ones (represented for us by the Alexandrian Washerwoman).

In addition to our primary goal of showing an image of God's many and diverse ways of working in people's lives, we aimed to achieve a reasonable representation of men and women (and a few children) from different historical periods, life roles and kinds of work. Whenever we heard or felt, "of course, we have to include...", we paused and gave that person an extra skeptical scrutiny, trying to push our list beyond a self-evident "hall of fame" and further, beyond mainstream church consensus, stretching our thinking and enlarging our gratitude for grace overflowing in so many startling and different lives.

We were aware of our particular place and time and tried to honor its gift and see past its limitation. Sometimes in a choice between two worthy people, we gave preference to the local figure, emphasizing God's work here among us. We represented important events of our historical moment, late 20th Century America - the U.S. Civil Rights movement and

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World War II - but we also stretched to include other kinds of 20th century people and to create a balance with other historical periods.

If we have done our work well, a hundred years from now, the congregation of St. Gregory's and its visitors will recognize a voice from 1997, undoubtedly sensing some of our historical prejudice and also, we hope, seeing us stretch beyond it to show a sweeping, universal vision of God shining through human life.





***Richard Fabian's –***

**WHO ARE THESE LIKE STARS APPEARING**

Richard Fabian, one of Saint Gregory's founding rectors, wrote the article below, "Who Are These Like Stars Appearing" in 1997, when work on the Dancing Saints Icon had recently begun.

"Once there was a time when the whole rational creation formed a single dancing chorus looking upward to the one leader of this dance. And the harmony of motion that they learned from his law found its way into their dancing."—Gregory of Nyssa, from R. Gagne, *Introducing Dance in Christian Worship*

Gregory of Nyssa's commentary on Psalm 50 gives us here his vision of the world's peoples in harmony-not just audible harmony, but active dancing harmony. While other ancient preachers decried popular dancing, and music in general, as dangerously libidinous, Gregory Nyssen and his friend Gregory Nazianzen extolled its use in worship. Today St. Gregory's Church in San Francisco has revived congregational dancing; and to crown our new church building, we asked our architect and iconographer, John Goldman and Mark Dukes, to present Gregory Nyssen's vision in two circles of saints drawn larger than life, dancing on the walls above our altar; while we dance below; and Christ the Lord of the Dance leads all from the building's focal point.

The identities of the saints portrayed will surprise some; but for years St. Gregory's church has fostered a broad idea of "sainthood," in place of the commonplace notion of rarified moral purity. Our Easter procession litany invites saints to "come rejoice with us," mixing famous saints with other departed folks the congregation nominate each year; and many combinations draw laughter: Lucille Ball and Charlie Chaplin, for example. The list

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of dancing saints for our icon was chosen more laboriously but will be just as striking, for the same reason.

Our idea of sainthood comes from both the Bible and Gregory's books. The Hebrew concept of holiness originally had no moral content, but simply meant having God's stamp on you, like a branded steer: marked and set apart as God's own. Slowly the idea grew, that this mark implied a Godlike inner character and active life, or ought to. Hence St. Paul appealed to the Corinthian Christians: now you are saints, so clean up your act! As the Bible sees it, saints and sinners are the same people. We celebrate those whose lives show God at work, building a deep character to match the godlike image which stamps them as God's own from the start.

Of course God works with more than Christians, and more than Christians are saints. Gregory Nyssen held that every human can progress toward God- indeed, to stop our progress is already to move the other way. All humanity shares God's image, and shows it to the universe, so the whole can live and move toward God together. That is the job all people are made for, our natural function. Where God's image is obscured by sin, and nature's harmony is broken, Christ rediscovers this image for us, and teaches us to mend conflict and restore harmony so that all can move toward God once again. Every aspect of human nature-our minds, our bodies, our virtues, our desires, our sexuality, even our mortality-God has made for this purpose. And so every human progressing toward goodness plays a part in the salvation of the world. This universal view made Gregory an extraordinary theologian in his day-extraordinarily like the Biblical writers, in fact-and draws fresh interest today, as people of many world faiths find more and more they share.

For an icon portraying St. Gregory's vision, the dancers must be diverse, and exemplify traits that Gregory's teaching emphasizes and our congregation's life upholds. Our members' meeting identified the qualities we were looking for; then a committee of six members and clergy gathered 350 nominations and researched biographies, sifting,

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combining, stirring and reducing these to seventy-four. Nearly every church member will find a name they offered here. Nearly every life will find an exemplar.

Christian or not, these men and women and children each show us some of God's image, as Christ makes that image fully plain to us. Our list includes people who crossed boundaries in ways that unified humanity, often at their own cost. Some proved lifelong models of virtue; others changed direction dramatically from evil to good, even near the end of life. Like Gregory himself, some were on the frontier of Christian thought and living, and had gifts that were unrecognized or disparaged in their time; yet their gifts matter for what we do today. Others have been long revered throughout the world's churches. Some overcame difficult circumstances; others moved toward God despite the distractions of worldly comfort and power. Many were mystics like Gregory, seeing God in all creation. Some taught and still teach; all learned to pursue goodness, even into the darkness where people must choose without seeing.

Musicians, artists, writers, poets, dancers, workers, organizers, missionaries, princes, martyrs, spiritual teachers, protesters, prophets, reformers, judges, builders, conservationists, liberators, scholars, healers, soldiers, monastics, couples straight and gay, diplomats, planners, governors, and wild and domestic beasts. Christian, Jew, Muslim, Confucian, Buddhist, Hindu, Shinto, Pagan; of many continents, races, classes, and eras. These heroes and heroines lead us in our dancing, as all look upward to Jesus, the perfecter of human faith, drawing new harmony from his example as Gregory teaches us to do.





**Saint: M. M. THOMAS**  
**(MADHATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS)**

(1916 - 1997)

***Right most wearing a blue Indian Dhoti and jubba, next to St. Francis of Assisi with his wolf.***

A layman from the Mar Thoma Church, Kerala. Pioneering ecumenical leader, onetime chair of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, director of the Institute



for the Study of Religion and Society in Bangalore, and in 1990, he became the governor of Nagaland. M. M. did the unprecedented thing of retiring to his local village, where he lived among the people, and began a Biblical commentary in the local language. He died travelling on a train from Madras.

### ***The Dancing Saints***

The Dancing Saints icon is a monumental, surprising and powerful statement of faith for the ages, created by iconographer Mark Dukes with the rectors and congregation of Saint Gregory's. When completed in 2008, it will be a 3,000 square foot painting wrapping around the entire church rotunda, showing ninety larger-than life saints; four animals; stars, moons, suns and a twelve-foot dancing Christ.

The saints—ranging from traditional figures like King David, Teresa of Avila and Frances of Assisi to unorthodox and non-Christian people like Malcolm X, Anne Frank, and Margaret Mead—represent musicians, artists, mathematicians, martyrs, scholars, mystics, lovers, prophets and sinners from all times, from many faiths and backgrounds.

As the congregation dances around the altar, the saints dance above, proclaiming a sweeping, universal vision of God shining through human life.

<http://deacondukes.blogspot.com/2009/01/saint-gregorys-dancing-saints-icon.html>

"I have two expressions to my iconography; my personal and my liturgical. My liturgical work I have expressed chiefly through my Neo-Byzantine icon project The Dancing Saints Icon of St. Gregory's Episcopal Church, San Francisco. This is a 2500 plus square feet icon mural that decorates the rotunda of the church's sanctuary and consists of a depiction of 90 oversize traditional and nontraditional "saints" from diverse times and cultures from all over the world. They are all dancing with an even larger size Christ. Among the selected 90 saints are people like Malcolm X, Queen Elizabeth, Rumi, Ella

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Fitzgerald, Gandhi, Anne Frank, Cesar Chavez, John Coltrane (of course) and Sorghaghtani Beki, the mother of Kublai Khan. The artistic challenge was to translate the ancient Byzantine stylization and bring it to fresh and contemporary places while still honoring the ancient tradition. The iconographic difficulties of recognizable likenesses, culturally diverse costumes, ethnic diversity and different spiritual traditions, all brought together in a large scale work has given this project a unique place in the history of art and religious iconography.”

Deacon Dukes, Iconographer



St. Gregory's Church invites people to see  
God's image in all humankind, to sing and dance  
to Jesus' lead, and to become God's friends.

## **“Where is God?”**

written following the great famine of Shertallay, Kerala, India, 1941



There was heaviness in my heart,  
A loneliness cut me through,  
Have I put my trust in God in vain?  
Have I placed my feet on slippery ground?



Vain was the faith in a caring God  
Vain was the trust in a loving Father,  
For God is with the wicked in their pleasures,  
A slave of them of them that seek for themselves,



He prepares a table for them anywhere they want,  
And spreads a carpet for them wherever they walk,  
He makes them shine like holy men,  
And gives the honoured places in His Church,  
And in His Heaven, palaces decked with jewels;

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS



But for these, they must fade and fall,  
Like flowers in the forest,  
With not a soul to watch, nor a tear to mark their end;  
Form dust they came, and to dust they return,





And no God cares.  
...But then thought I,  
The sun had set and it was dark,  
All around was silence --



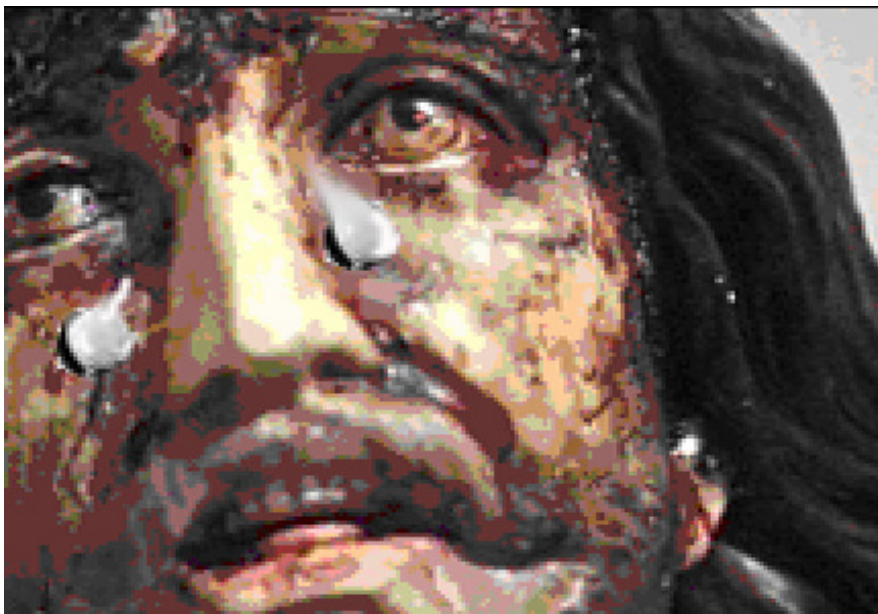


The silence of Death;  
And while I looked, I saw a flickering light far off;  
I made for it; a man was digging a little grave;  
Thought I, who must this man be,





Who has strength enough to dig a grave for his little child?  
He was weeping as he dug;  
his sighs were deep, and his sobs loud,  
And he was alone, amidst the corpses that lay all around.



With fear in my heart,  
I approached the man digging the grave,  
in the flickering light,  
He turned his face to me;  
Lo, it is Christ!

His eyes were red with weeping, and his face wet with tears,  
Jesus wept;  
He said to me in a low voice, through sobs,  
Why dost thou do this to me?  
I thirst, I starve  
For in as much as ye did it not to these, ye did it not to me.



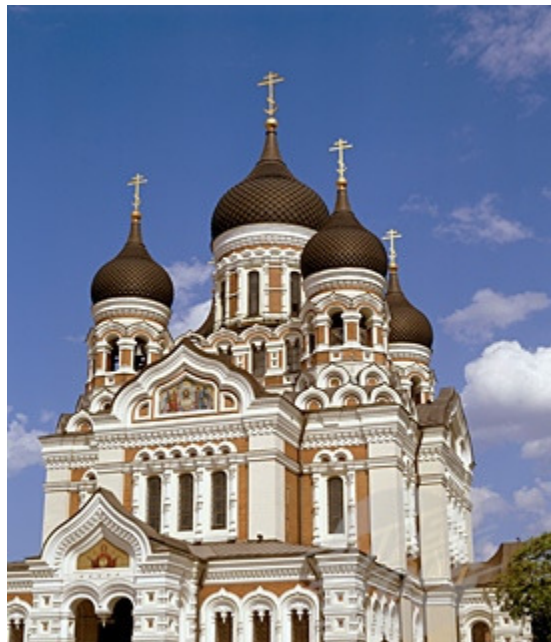
I am dying.  
Why dost thou break my heart?  
For in their afflictions am I afflicted  
In their deaths I am crucified.  
Then was my heart grieved and I was pricked in my reins,  
I had almost said in my heart, Thou dost not Care,  
So foolish was I and ignorant,  
I was a beast before Thee.



## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS



Ye who praise him in the sanctuary,  
Ye who call on him with doors all shut,  
Open your eyes and See your God is not Before ye,



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He is there in the land of desolation,  
Alone,  
In The dark  
Amidst the corpses,  
Starving with the millions that starve,  
Dying with the millions that Die





## M. M. Thomas

1916 - 1996

Dr. M.M.Thomas was one of the foremost Christian leaders of the nineteenth century. He was Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and Governor of Nagaland. An ecumenical theologian of repute, he wrote more than sixty books on Theology and Mission, including 24 theological commentaries on the books of the bible in Malayalam (the official language of the Indian state of Kerala).

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- New Creation in Christ: Twelve Selected Sermons Given on Various Occasions



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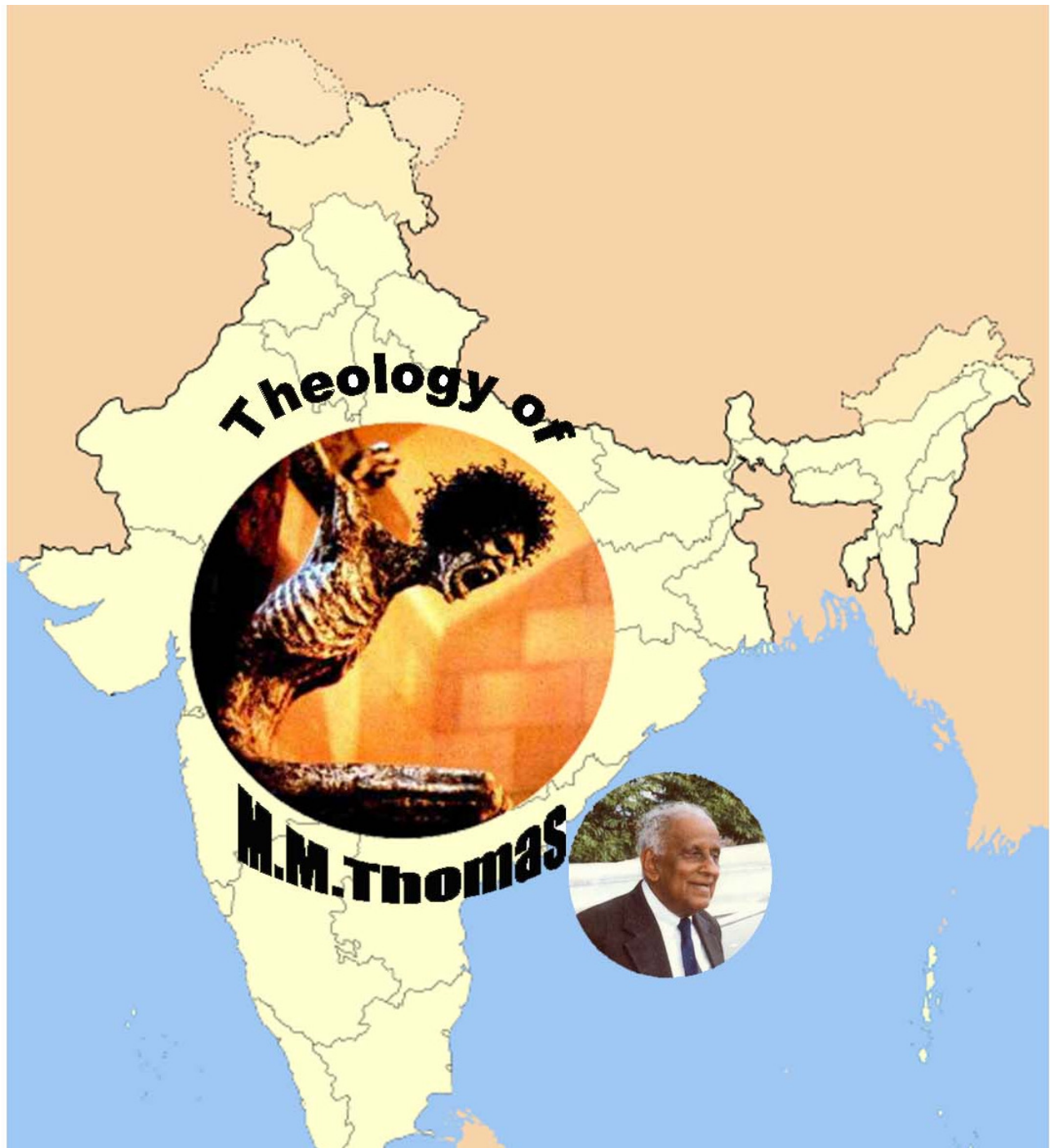
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CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY'S ENGAGEMENT WITH RELIGIOUS PLURALISM:  
DAMAYANTHI M.A. NILES

HISTORY OF HINDU-CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTERS AD 304 TO 1996  
SITA RAM GOEL

THE INDWELLER (ANTHARAYAMIN) - SHAKTI/HOLY SPIRIT/RUH/AYKAA MAYEE -  
IS ONLY BEING WORTH REALIZING

M.M.THOMAS AND DALIT THEOLOGY:  
ADRIAN BIRD



**M. M. Thomas**

**A Tribute on His 70th Birthday**

**Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios**



(1922- 1996).

First metropolitan of Delhi Diocese; Principal of the Orthodox Theological Seminary at Kottayam; Founder of the Delhi Orthodox Centre.

Articulator of the Orthodox faith across the world; Biblical scholar and teacher; Exponent of sacred traditions; Promoter of unity among Orthodox Churches; Ecumenical leader devoted to interfaith dialogue and cooperation; President of the World Council of Churches.

Scholar, philosopher, author, educationist, editor, linguist, public speaker, socio-political thinker, lover of children and nature, advocate of women's equality, environmental integrity and holistic health. Crusader against exploitation, discrimination, neo-colonialism and religious-cultural arrogance; activist for disarmament, justice and peace. Life-long seeker after the light of knowledge, truth, and the transcendent source of our being.

I first met M. M. in New York. I think it was 1953. He was spending a year reading at Union Seminary. I was an ordinary B. D. student at Princeton. He was already a Guru, well known in Indian Christian circles, as well as in W.S.C.F. circles. I was totally

unknown in India, having left the country in 1947. My few youthful exploits in Ethiopia and the legends attached to them were most likely unknown to M. M. as they were unknown to many Indian Christians until much later.

I went to see him to learn and to be inspired. But I did it in the typical Indian way. I just barged in and introduced myself, a procedure M. M. did not particularly like. He made me to understand clearly that he had come to America to do some reading and did not have much time for idle conversation.

Anyway there was no idle conversation. I left after about 5 minutes, with the satisfaction that I had met the great man face to face.

After I come back to India and became an active, worker in the Student Christian Movement of India, contacts became easier and more frequent. We began sharing platforms and traveling to conferences together. I remember the W.S.C.F. conference in Rangoon. That must have been 30 years ago. I had just joined the staff of Emperor Haile Sellassie, and had come to Burma from Addis Ababa, via India.

We got to Rangoon at about 4 a.m. and since the conference was in a High School, our facilities were limited. M. M. desperately wanted a cup of tea. Harry Daniel was with us as well as our brother from Sri Lanka, whose name now escapes me. Harry taunted us, saying "I am born in Burma. I assure you, if you want a cup of tea, just walk around near the school, and you will find some Malayali pouring out tea." So that is what we did - the four of us wandering around the school in Rangoon, at about 4.30 a.m. We did not have to walk far before we found a Malayalee tea-shop, and all of us were so pleased, I remember.

In those days, I had a reputation as an interpreter of M. M. Thomas. My mind was much simpler than his. What he expressed in complex technical terminology. I could, inadequately of course, summarise in simpler language. Quite often, after M. M. had spoken in English, I would be asked to summarize in English, or if he spoke in Malayalam, to reformulate it in the same language, for the benefit of the audience.

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Our contacts became more frequent after 1961, when he was Moderator of the Department of Church and Society in the W.C.C. and I became W.C.C.'s Associate General Secretary and Director of the Division of Ecumenical Action.

We both had come through the fifties when "nation-building" and Christian contribution to "Asian Revolution" had become the main concerns for thinking Christians in the newly independent countries of Asia. M. M. saw at that time two forces sweeping our nations, along with the surge and emergence of formerly subject peoples - the impact of science and technology on our cultures and ways of living, and the sweeping road-roller of secularisation crushing old ideologies and religions.

He was a "Rapid Social Change" man, welcoming the acceleration of the pace of social revolution, but warning people not to idealize or idolize any particular ideology or institution. No political order or political party or moral system or ideology was to be identified with the Kingdom of God. This he had learned from Barth and the Niebuhrs. But he saw Jesus Christ at work in the social revolution. For him Jesus Christ was more at work in what was happening outside the Church than inside it. But there was no room for any utopianism, no ideology of the inevitable success of the revolution, no easy optimism about higher standards of living yielding greater human dignity and freedom.

Many misunderstood M. M. that he was substituting Revelation by Revolution. In fact my colleague on our staff in Geneva, Prof. Hans Heinrich Wolf, the Director of the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, attacked M. M. in those terms. In fact, however, M. M. never absolutized any Revolution. This was merely a sub-liminal fear of the German psyche stemming from some 19th century experiences, making them terribly scared about the word "Revolution."

What M. M. stood for was full humanisation of the human race - the development of the awareness of dignity, freedom and responsibility in every human being. So when the Human Rights movement was launched in the middle of the seventies, it was a confirmation of what M. M. stood for - the centrality and priority of the human.



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During the period from 1968-1975 when M. M. was Chairman of the Central Committee of the W.C.C., there were a number of attacks on M. M.'s theology from good friends like Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, Prof. Wolf and others. Behind these was a fear that M. M. was watering down good old European Christianity and the unspoken western anxiety that the leadership of the Christian Ecumenical Movement may not be safe in the hands of non-European Christians like M. M. Thomas and Philip Potter. Is Christianity safe in the hands of the West?

It is a good thing that M. M. is not a systematic theologian. If he were he would have been lost in the labyrinths of methodological precisions and terminological exactitudes which would have made him unreadable.

M. M. is a pious liberal Christian, devoutly committed to Jesus Christ, but not to the Christ believed by the Church. It is a Christ about whom he learned much from Marxism and Gandhism, and whose main work is in society rather than in the Church or in the individual soul. Christ is at work in technology, in the Asian Revolution, in all social change everywhere. Christ is also the norm for our participation in all change.

There is no doubt that for many Protestant Christians and others committed to social change. M. M. has been a source of great inspiration and encouragement. I remember George Fernandez, who, if anything is a Roman Catholic, saying in a Delhi meeting over which I was presiding, that he was prepared to fall at M. M.'s feet and kiss his feet. He added also, for my benefit, that he could do that with no other Christian leaders.

M. M. remains a great teacher and a prolific writer, even as he enters his seventies. May God grant him many more years of mental and bodily health and vigour to further clarify the framework of his thought. I would like, personally, to see his thought move and develop in two different directions. First, his ecclesiology, with its sacramental theology, will have to show more clearly the *distinctions* and *relations* between the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the community of faith on the one hand and in the world as a whole on the other.

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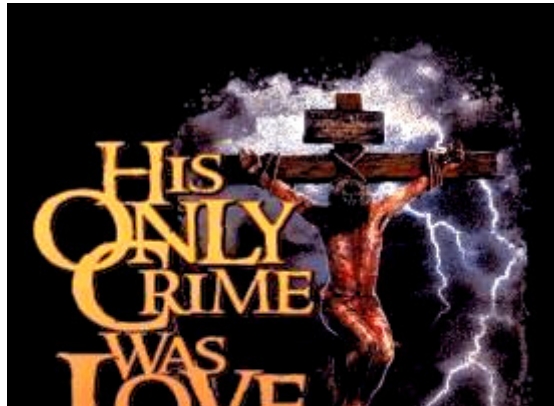
Second, in developing the latter aspect, i.e. the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the world, he would have to make the Cross on which the world is today hanging a little more clear. That Cross has a North-South beam and an East-West beam. He would still have to work out the relation between the East-west tensions as not just super-power rivalry, but also as a conflict which has its roots in the exploitation and oppression of the many by the few.

M. M. is both an ex-Marxist and an ex-Gandhian, though his actual involvement and deep penetration of Marxism and Gandhism was of somewhat short duration. He is seeking to go beyond both Marxism and Gandhism through his perception of a Cosmic Christ.

To make that Cosmic Christ make sense to Christians and non-Christians alike in the context of today's world is a big challenge indeed, to him as well as to the rest of us.

I salute M. M. and pay my humble tribute to him. May God guide him and use him for many more years to come.

<http://www.paulosmargregorios.info/English%20Articles/M.%20M.%20Thomas.htm>





**IN MEMORIAM:  
M.M. Thomas; Paulos Mar Gregorios  
- Obituary**

***Ecumenical Review, The , Jan, 1997  
by Paul Abrecht***



Abrecht, Paul (1917-2005) Director of Church and Society, WCC

[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2065/is\\_n1\\_v49/ai\\_19209008](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2065/is_n1_v49/ai_19209008)

The deaths -- in India in late November and early December 1996 -- of Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios and M.M. Thomas have brought to a close the ecumenical careers of two of the most creative leaders of the World Council of Churches in the period of its early development and rapid growth 1948-68.

During more than four decades, from the formative period of the WCC until its seventh assembly (Canberra 1991), these two Indian Christians made, often in strikingly different

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ways, large and lasting contributions to the Council's theological and ethical thought on social issues, especially as developed in its programmes on church and society, international affairs and work with the laity. Those involved in the WCC in these years will recall with deep appreciation the stimulating witness of these two churchmen, both products of the Christian community of Kerala, India's most populous Christian state.

M.M. Thomas began his ecumenical career by the usual route in the years preceding the creation of the WCC: through his leadership in the Indian Student Christian Movement and in the World Student Christian Federation, on whose staff he served from 1946 to 1951. He gained international recognition for his contribution to the first World Christian Youth Conference in Oslo in 1947. That same year he was invited to take part in the preparations for the consideration of social and political questions at the first WCC assembly in Amsterdam -- the only person from the third world in these preparatory discussions on "the church and the disorder of society". In December 1949 he was the drafter of a statement on "The Church in Social and Political Life" at the first meeting of the newly created East Asia Christian Conference. The study on "The Christian in the World Struggle" which he and Davis McCaughey completed for the WSCF in 1951 was the first ecumenical response to the "revolutionary changes" resulting from the worldwide political upheaval following the second world war, including the national independence movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

In early December 1952 M.M. chaired a World Christian Youth Conference in Kottayam, South India, the first to be convened outside the West, a dramatic meeting in a memorable setting for the 800 Christian student and youth who participated. A few weeks later he was in Lucknow, North India, one of the leaders of a WCC-convened study conference on the church and social issues in Asia and principal drafter of its pioneering report on "The Responsible Society in East Asia in Light of the World Situation". In 1953 he joined the preparatory group on social questions for the WCC's second assembly (Evanston 1954).

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Largely on the basis of the Lucknow report, Evanston recommended that the WCC should focus for the next seven years on the social and political questions facing the churches in the "developing" countries. When the newly created WCC department on church and society launched a six-year programme on "The Common Christian Responsibility towards Areas of Rapid Social Change" in 1955, M.M. was named a member of the working committee and the staff representative in Asia for this project. This was the beginning of his career as a full-time ecumenical scholar, especially on social questions in Asia, working out of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, which he and his mentor and friend Paul Devanandan had founded in Bangalore in 1953. In cooperation with the East Asia Christian Conference M.M. soon became the strategist of a vital Asian study programme on social issues. A quick and clear drafter, he produced in these years a stream of literature on Christian social witness, challenging clergy and laity in the churches of Asia to reflection and action on economic and political goals of nation-building. At the international Christian conference on "Rapid Social Change" in Greece in 1959, he and John Bennett of the USA co-chaired the section on "Christian Responsibility in Political Action", producing a report which became a guide for worldwide Christian reflection and action.

Such creative work increased M.M.'s role in the World Council of Churches:

- 1) in 1961 he and Egbert de Vries of the Netherlands addressed the WCC's third assembly in New Delhi on the findings of the Rapid Social Change study;
- 2) in 1962, as chairman of the WCC working committee on Church and Society, he guided the preparations for -- and chaired -- the world conference on "Christians in the Technical and Social Revolutions of Our Time", convened in Geneva in July 1966;
- 3) in 1968 he was named delegate from the Mar Thoma Church to the WCC's fourth assembly in Uppsala. There, on the recommendation of Eugene Carson Blake, the

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WCC's general secretary, he was chosen to chair the WCC central committee -- the first lay person and non-westerner elected to this leading position;

4) in 1975, at the end of his term as central committee moderator, he chaired the WCC's fifth assembly in Nairobi. Swedish Church historian Alf Tergel succinctly sums up M.M. Thomas's remarkable ecumenical career: "Along with Visser 't Hooft, M.M. Thomas has had the greatest influence on the modern ecumenical movement."

After his retirement from the World Council M.M. concentrated on producing a series of twenty Bible studies in his native Malayalam, highlighting those passages which had been decisive for him in his reflection on the life and witness of the Christian in the modern world.

In May 1990 the Indian government appointed him governor of Nagaland, home of the Naga, a largely Christianized tribal people in northeast India. He had served in this capacity for just under two years when the Indian government asked for his resignation because he was encouraging the people in the development of their own views on their social and cultural future rather than acting as the pliant tool of the central government in New Delhi.

M.M. Thomas was a layman who engaged throughout his career in a search for the theological and ethical basis of a Christian understanding of and witness to the tumultuous social and political developments that followed the second world war; Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios (earlier Paul Verghese) was an ecclesiastic of one of the ancient churches of Christendom who sought to relate his own oriental Orthodox theological heritage to the demands of the ecumenical movement and to the challenge of rapid political and social change. That difference helps to explain the disagreements on social ethical issues which often divided these two Indian Christians in their respective roles within the WCC and the broader ecumenical movement.



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Father Paul began his international ecumenical career in 1962 when he was appointed associate general secretary of the WCC and director of the division on ecumenical action, which grouped together all ecumenical work with the laity. After training for the priesthood, he had studied theology and philosophy in North America and Europe and was a gifted linguist and biblical scholar. He was also deeply interested in the situation of the church in Eastern Europe and in Africa, where he had served for three years as a private secretary to the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie. As the first Orthodox theologian on the WCC staff, he was much sought after as a leader of Bible study, especially with lay persons. His biblical studies for the section on international issues of peace and war at the 1966 Geneva conference on church and society left a deep and lasting impression on the 100 or so Christian political and economic leaders in the group.

Paul Verghese left the WCC staff in 1967 to become principal of his church's theological seminary in Kottayam. In this capacity he represented the Syrian Orthodox Church of Malabar as a delegate to the WCC's fourth assembly (Uppsala 1968) and subsequent assemblies up to Canberra 1991. Named metropolitan of New Delhi in 1974, he became a member of the WCC central and executive committees from 1975 to 1983 then was elected a WCC president from 1983 to 1991.

A forceful and often acerbic speaker, he sometimes stimulated and annoyed his audiences in about equal proportions. He was not neutral between East and West -- he was anti-West: for its racism and for its conservative political-economic influence on world social and economic development. Some mistook his concern for the church in the Soviet Union and his participation in the Prague-based (and Soviet-influenced) Christian Peace Conference as a sign of a pro-communist stance. But he joined the majority of the executive committee in voting for a statement that was sharply critical of the USSR when it invaded Afghanistan in 1980.

In these ideological and political matters Metropolitan Gregorios often differed fundamentally from M.M. Thomas, who was also an Indian nationalist critical of the West

and an advocate of radical social change, but was deeply committed to the essential values of Western democracy and freedom and an opponent of all forms of totalitarianism in both East and West. The differences between these two Indian ecumenists emerged publicly in 1975-76, in their opposing responses to the "amended maintenance of internal security act" which empowered Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi to detain without trial and deny other judicial remedies to people arrested on political grounds. M.M. was one of the leaders of a strong Christian protest in this period of "national emergency", while Gregorios became a leader of a group which approved the emergency measures. He took this position not only as evidence of the loyalty of the Christian minority community to the Congress Party and to Indira Gandhi, but also because of his conviction that excessive freedom had become a hindrance to economic development and social justice in India. The WCC through both general secretary Philip Potter and the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, fully supported the position of those opposing Mrs Gandhi's action, despite the fact that Gregorios was then a member of both the central and executive committees.

Despite these differences, in 1976, by action of the central committee, Gregorios was made moderator of the working committee on Church and Society and thus leader of the preparations for the world conference on "Faith, Science and the Future", convened at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1979. With more than 400 official participants and an additional 500 press and invited guests, this was undoubtedly one of the most significant WCC-sponsored encounters of the 1970s, and the metropolitan responded to the challenge brilliantly: as chairman of the conference he captivated the assembled scientists and technologists and the MIT community by his understanding of the social ethical problems in their disciplines. Undoubtedly it was one of his greatest contributions to the life and work of the WCC and to the witness of the ecumenical movement in the contemporary world.

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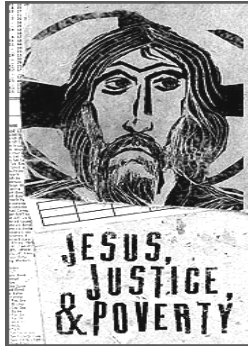
These two ecumenical pioneers from India were instrumental, in their varied ways, in formulating the spiritual, social and ethical perspectives of the whole twentieth-century ecumenical movement. The church in all the world is deeply in their debt.

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- Report of the General Secretary - World Council of Churches Central Committee, Geneva, 12-20 September 1996 - Common Understanding and Vision  
by Konrad Raiser
- To do the right thing or to do the thing right? Humanitarianism and ethics - Common Understanding and Vision  
by Peter Walker
- Reconciliation among nations: the role of the church - Common Understanding and Vision  
by Joanna Udal
- Costly communion: mission between ecclesiology and ethics - Common Understanding and Vision  
by George Vandervelde
- Communion with, not under the Pope - Common Understanding and Vision  
by Reinhard Frieling
- Towards a common understanding and vision of the WCC: a working draft for a policy statement - World Council of Churches - Common Understanding and Vision - Transcript
- The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Anglican Tradition. - book reviews  
by Thomas K. Carroll
- In memoriam: M.M. Thomas; Paulos Mar Gregorios - Obituary  
by Paul Abrecht



**ETHICS OF A WORLD COMMUNITY:  
CONTRIBUTION OF DR M.M. THOMAS  
BASED ON INDIAN REALITY.**

International Review of Mission , April, 1996

Ariarajah, Seevaratnam Wesley



Professor of Ecumenical Theology

“The prophet Isaiah speaks of his calling to be a prophet through the dramatic vision "of the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty" in the temple as an event that happened "in the year that King Uzziah died" (Isa. 6:1). The point is that it was not only the calling but also the timing that had an enormous significance to the ministry that was to follow.

It is difficult to reflect on the lives and ministries of P.D. Devanandan and his worthy successor, M.M. Thomas, without being acutely conscious of the historical moment in which they were called to their ...”



## **CONVERSION AND COMMUNITY:**

Revisiting the

Lesslie Newbigin-M.M. Thomas Debate.

(debate on nature of conversion and Christian community):

**George R. Hunsberger**



Dean of Journey and Professor of Congregational Mission, Western Seminary. Holland, MI 49423 .

*International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (Refereed)

July 1, 1998 Overseas Ministries Study Center Volume 22 Issue: 3 Page: 112(6)

“The debate between Bishop Lesslie Newbigin and his friend M.M. Thomas focused on the nature of conversion and Christian community. The debate underlies the results of sociological studies on Indians' beliefs on Jesus Christ and theologian Kaj Baago's concerns on the relationship between the Christian faith of Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims with Christ. It also discussed concerns associated with the different forms of the church and factors influencing conversion.”



**The Canadian Churches' Forum for Global Ministries**

**Le Forum des églises canadiennes pour les ministères globaux**

<http://www.ccforum.ca/history.htm>

“By the late 1950s, the Canadian School of Mission was running several programs: courses on Christian mission for university students; courses for missionaries on furlough; the Toronto Institute of Linguistics; an expanded version of the Missionary Orientation Conference, memorial lectures; customized tutoring programs; not to mention maintaining a very specialized missions library. The J. Lowell Murray Memorial Lecture Series was inaugurated which over the years would attract such eminent international personalities as Dr. Frank W. Price, Dr. M.M. Thomas and Dr. Jose Miguez Bonino”

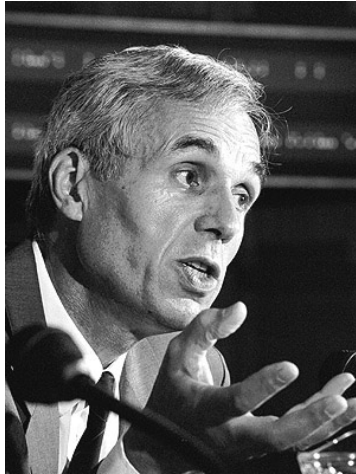






## LIBERATION OF THE OPPRESSED: A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

by Dr. Konrad Raiser



**Konrad Raiser** (born 25 January 1938) is a former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Born in Magdeburg, Germany in 1938, Konrad Raiser studied theology and started working with the World Council of Churches, first in the department for Faith and Order. He later became the Deputy General Secretary. Leaving the WCC in 1983, Raiser began to teach theology at Bochum University in Germany until he returned again to Geneva in 1992, this time elected as General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. He served the WCC in this capacity until 2004.

Address at the International Consultation on  
Contemporary Reflection on Global Oppressed Communities  
Gurukul Lutheran Theological College  
Chennai, India  
24 February 2003

<http://www.gltc.edu/gurukul/05-projects/projects/print/frontiers-02.htm>

"If liberation stops with a mere exodus, painful experience shows that the liberated will all too often follow the same logic as their former oppressors. Therefore Jesus calls us for an ethical transformation of structures, cultures and systems. Speaking at the Nairobi Assembly of the WCC, Dr. M. M. Thomas said: "The history of the church and (hu)mankind is evidence that Jesus Christ and the ferment he creates continue all the motifs of liberation present in the Old and New Testaments. He shatters every unity, which turns into bondage, whether it be social, moral, cultural or religious; he makes men and women free to establish a more mature unity, only to break it when it too turns into bondage. ... The divine promise in Jesus Christ of humanity's ultimate maturity is the ever-present dynamic within the dialectic of freedom and unity, which we call history. In the light of the continuing work of Christ to liberate people from premature unities for more mature unities, we have to see every unity and every freedom which beckon us in personal, social or church life as en route - as helping us in our pilgrimage of faith under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to 'a city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God' (Hebr.11:10)."



## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS



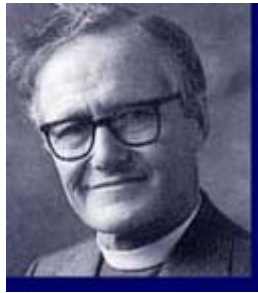
*Jesus Christ frees and unites" we sang in the midst of Nairobi's life: people from around the earth, standing before God in our captivities and disunities and naming a divine possibility*

### CHRISTIAN UNITY AT NAIROBI: SOME PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

1976 ,

**Bishop J.E. Lesslie Newbigin**

**Mid-Stream: The Ecumenical Movement Today**



<http://www.newbigin.net/assets/pdf/76cuan.pdf>

“The two major addresses of M. M. Thomas (Moderator of the Central Committee) and Philip Potter (General Secretary) Were - in different ways - masterly interpretations of the way the Council had travelled since Uppsala and of the situation which the Fifth

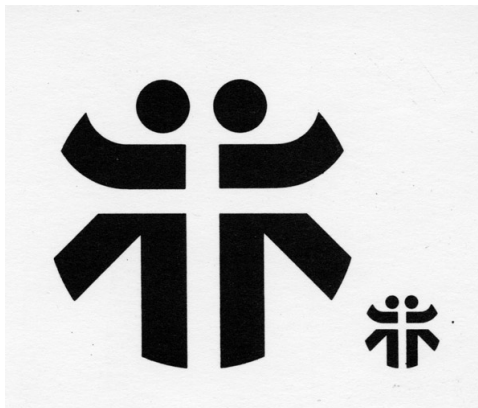
## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

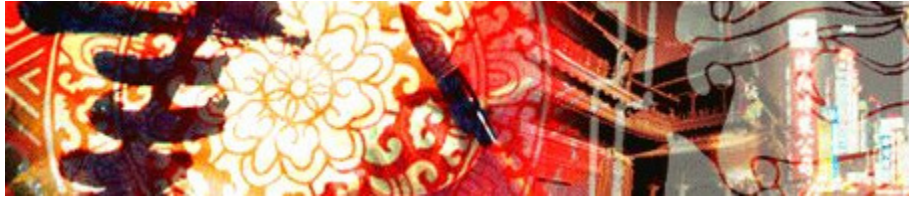
Assembly must confront. The World Council has been severely criticized since Uppsala on the ground that it has become too much absorbed in the 'horizontal' dimension of the Christian life and not enough in the 'vertical.' Some of the criticism has been, in my opinion, justified, but the issues have been confused. It is not a question of finding a right compromise between 'vertical' and 'horizontal' (which would presumably be a trajectory of 45 degrees, leading into an orbit which would touch neither earth nor heaven!). It is a matter of finding the right relation between the law and the Gospel. It is a matter of so speaking and acting that it becomes clear both that it is Jesus Christ and he alone who frees and unites, and that the freedom and unity which he has given is not a merely private and spiritual affair but is a freedom and unity which becomes operative in the public life of men. Both Thomas and Potter, in their different ways, pointed us to the center of our faith and called for a profounder spirituality, but one which would not be a spirituality of escape but "a spirituality for combat" (Thomas), a "spirituality for engagement" (Potter). As Desmond Tutu of South Africa put it: "It must be seen to be the case that it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ which is the source of our concern for shalom." As compared with Uppsala, Nairobi was much more truly centred in the Gospel, but it did not for that reason lose any of the sharpness of Uppsala's call for action in the world." To quote Roger Mehl (France), "Faith must always be translated into tangible deeds in regard to one's neighbor . . . our actions add nothing to the work of salvation carried out by God alone : they are merely testimony that we have not received his salvation in vain, that we have not belittled it. . ." To my mind this was the most important difference between Nairobi and Uppsala. Uppsala was a shattering proclamation of the Law - a law by which the Christian world is condemned as under God's wrath. Perhaps God intended us to hear only the law at that moment; we did not hear the Gospel. The fundamental criticism that can be made against the programs of the WCC during the seven years since Uppsala is that they have given the impression of being the work of those who are under the Law rather than under the Gospel. At Nairobi we really heard the Gospel; we heard the call to faith in Jesus Christ; we were able to make together that true confession of sin which is only possible to those who know that they are forgiven. I hope and believe

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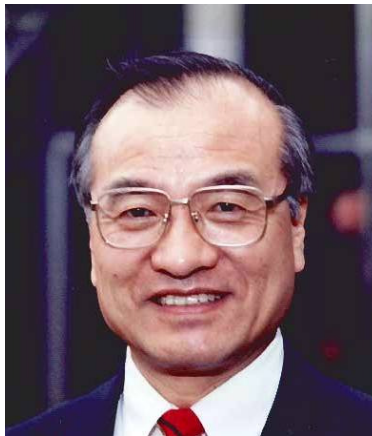
that the 'works' which will follow in the coming seven years will truly be works which point men to Jesus Christ. This may sound very subjective: I can only say that it expresses what I felt most profoundly about this meeting.....

In his closing address Dr. M. M. Thomas said that the ecumenical movement is "an adventure in the understanding of the significance of Jesus Christ for our time." If we try to choose a narrower context for our work in the field of Church unity we shall rightly be by-passed. But if we are faithful to that definition, then we have a right to challenge those who dismiss this work as irrelevant. It is in fact of central relevance, for the significance of Jesus Christ for this or any other time can never be defined in terms of programs either of public justice or of private spirituality can only be defined in terms which include the creation of a visible community of people which the reality of God's shalom is tasted and enjoyed here and now in foretaste. To by-pass the issue of reunion, of the taking shape of that visible community in which all men and women of every kind have the possibility here and now of living in the fellowship of God's reign, means in the end to turn the Gospel into Law. "





**What Asian Christians Are Thinking**  
**A Theological Source Book**  
**Bong Rin Ro**



Educator. Bong Rin Ro was reared in Seoul, Korea during the Korean War. Following his father's death, Bong's mother and five siblings lived in extreme poverty. God answered his mother's prayers when Bong dedicated his life to the Lord's service. When Bong came in CBC in 1956, he knew few English words. But with the encouragement of his classmates, he graduated four years later. Bong and his wife, Alma, joined Overseas Missionary Fellowship in 1970 and began their ministry—training Asians at the Asia Theological Association. Bong presently serves as Executive Director for World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission. He travels extensively, speaking and teaching in an effort to bring an awareness of missions into the churches and encouraging young people to prepare for missions.

<http://www.luthersem.edu/camjad/CM6420/Bong.pdf>

**“5. Contextualization: Asian Theology\* Bong Rin Ro**

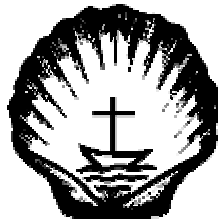
Dr. M. M. Thomas, Director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society in Bangalore, India., and former Chairman of the Central Committee of the WCC, interprets salvation in terms of humanization by which man finds his true humanness which has been oppressed by social injustice, war, and poverty. He is very much



horizontally oriented in his contextualization of the doctrine of salvation at the expense of the vertical relationship to God. Dr. Thomas says:

I cannot see any difference between the accepted missionary goal of a Christian Church expressing Christ in terms of the contemporary Hindu thought and life patterns and a Christ-centered Hindu Church of Christ which transforms Hindu thought and life patterns [M. M. Thomas, **Salvation and Humanisation** (Madras, India: CLS, 1971), p. 40. cf. Bruce Nicholls, "What is the Contextualization of Theology," *Theological News* (Oct., 1973), p. 7.]

This concept of humanization in salvation underlined the WCC gatherings in Uppsala in 1968, the Salvation Today Conference in Bangkok in 1973, and most recently in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1975. Evangelical Christians around the world expressed their concern at Lausanne, in 1974, about the concept of salvation, and made a joint Declaration in the Lausanne Covenant"



**A spirituality for combat**

"All liberation movements are prone to collective self-justification and self-righteousness, and are likely to end in seeing themselves as the Messiah or Saviour; the self-idolatry becomes the source of a new oppression ... But *we should find a spirituality which can keep people in the power struggle without their turning corrupt and oppressor.* Here the gospel of forgiveness or justification by faith has great relevance to collective liberation movements, in moulding their spirituality for struggle."

**M.M. Thomas**, in *Religion and the Revolt of the Oppressed*.

## World Council at Nairobi

By E. G. Homrighausen

Elmer G. Homrighausen, our Contributing Editor, has been writing "The Church in the World" section for many years. This year, he is reporting on the Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches, and he looks backward and forward from his unique observation post. In 1934, at Fano, Denmark, he attended a conference of the Universal Christian Council; in 1937, he was a delegate to the Oxford and Edinburgh conferences; just prior to 1948, he served as Secretary of Evangelism for the "World Council in Process of Formation." A cosmopolitan churchman who has circled the globe many times, preaching the gospel, lecturing and speaking, keeping in touch with current theological trends, "Homey" is pre-eminent as a reporter and interpreter of the world religious scene.

<http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/apr1976/v33-1-editorial3.htm>

Thomas stated that the search for Christian unity is an integral part of the search for human unity and the struggles of different peoples for dignity and justice. The time has come, he said, to stop arguing about *whether* there is a relation between the proclamation of the gospel and social engagement, and to discuss *what* that relation should be. He called for a true theology of dialogue, one that is faithful to the centrality of Jesus Christ and one that also realistically grapples with the secular world, including other faiths.....

# new "presidents" elected--Ms. Annie Jiagge, Reformed, of Ghana; the Rev. J. Miguez-Bonino, Methodist, Argentina; Metropolitan Nikodim, Russian Orthodox, USSR; General T. B. Simatupang, Reformed, Indonesia; Archbishop O. Sundby, Lutheran, Sweden; Ms. Cynthia Wedel, Episcopal, United States; (a move to substitute the name of M. M. Thomas for that of Metropolitan Nikodim failed because Thomas refused to allow his name to be placed in nomination);



**WAGING PEACE, BUILDING A WORLD IN WHICH LIFE MATTERS:  
FESTSCHRIFT TO HONOUR GABRIELLE DIETRICH**



**INTERVIEW WITH GABRIELE DIETRICH**

Gabriele Dietrich is German by birth who naturalised herself to India. Dr. Gabriele Dietrich live at the Social Analysis Center, Tamilnadu Theological Seminary in Madurai. RR stands for Rini Ralte who interviewed GD which stands for Gabriele Dietrich.

[http://empower.co.il/healingkiss/K.I.S.S.LOG/2008\\_04/04\\_25.htm](http://empower.co.il/healingkiss/K.I.S.S.LOG/2008_04/04_25.htm)

**So how did you go about it?**

GD We had been connected with the Ecumenical Centre Hendrik Kraemer House in Berlin under the leadership of Be' Ruys. Due to this, we had a contact with M.M. Thomas. Through the Youth Commission of the Christian Peace Conference we also had a connection with Margret Flory in 1970 and became the first non-American interns, together with Koos Koster, the Dutch journalist who was later murdered in El Salvador. We met M.M. Thomas for one hour in the station of Hannover when he came through and he agreed that we could plan a research stint of two years with the CISRS in Bangalore. We left Europe in December 1971 during the Bangla Desh War.

**How was it to work under M.M. Thomas at CISRS and how has he influenced you?  
How has TTS influenced you?**

GD We felt a great sense of freedom at the CISRS. M.M. was then the chairperson of the Executive of the WCC and traveled to Geneva frequently. He also stayed in his house in Thiruvalla frequently. When in Bangalore he shoved his suitcase under a bed in the CISRS and got on with his work. He was a great taskmaster and knew how to extract work, to make people read and write. He was also always keen to create a situation of debate and gave me all his manuscripts to read to get comments. He encouraged people to figure out what they wanted to do and then expected them to go ahead and do it. We traveled a great deal and got in touch with Marxists like Ajit Roy of the Marxist Review who became a close friend and who also befriended M.M. Thomas. We also came to know many Gandhians, most importantly S. Jaganathan and Ms. Krishnammal who had moved to East Thanjavur area after the Kilvenmani incident in which 44 Dalits were burnt in a hut in the end of the sixties, to support Dalit land struggles. M.M. was very open minded, influenced by Lohia socialism but open to Marxist and Gandhian thought. He had a strong commitment to participation in nation building and to the marginalized, which he specified to be Harijans, tribals and women. It was only later that the terminology shifted to Dalits and adivasis. Though my own research was mainly in the East Thanjavur area, the work in CISRS helped me to develop a certain grasp of the country as a whole. I also came to know some of the influential social scientists like A.R. Desai.

**Did you have any differences with MM?**

GD (Laughs) Actually I first clashed with him when I had been at the youth assembly of the EACC (later renamed CCA) in Singapore in 1973. I had attended a workshop on women and the report which we brought home was such that, many delegates got into difficulties with their churches over it. MM was quite disapproving of this report, because we had castigated family violence and accused the churches of being an agent of women's oppression. Later he himself became much more of a feminist.

The other difference I observed was that in the early seventies MM was a modernist who believed in technology driven development. He said: We first have to pollute a bit more in order to produce enough to distribute. Twenty years later he had become much more of an ecologist.

**Which of his thoughts have influenced you most?**

**GD** I was very moved by the way he struggled with the quest for **personhood in community**. He knew that individualism was not really an option. But for transforming communities from all their casteism, patriarchy and communalism, it was necessary to address the problem of structural sin. For this, spirituality for combat was required. But in order not to turn totalitarian in the process, MM emphasized the suffering servant as opposed to the conquering king of colonial history. **[Rachel: See the chapter in my book about the "Suffering" Servant. Today I would add, that "Conqueror and Sufferer condition each other", "Victimizers exist as long as self-victimizers exist"]** I could resonate with this trend of thought very well. In his old age, MM became a great supporter of social movements and was very close to the NAPM which became very active in the mid nineties. I still miss him very much.

**What was your response to the Emergency 1975-1977? How do you see this period looking back on it today?**

**GD** When the Emergency was declared in the summer of 1975, we happened to be in Europe. Our period with CISRS, which had extended over three years, was over and we were waiting for our working visa to join TTS. Suddenly there was this headline in the Boulevard Press: *"Most powerful woman in the world arrests hundreds of men in their beds"*. We got a terrible shock because we thought this was the end of our visa. But funny enough we got them very fast, because the administration had become more efficient. We came back to TTS in October 1975. We noticed that the progressive forces were divided in their assessment of the Emergency, as the CPI was supporting it, while

the CPI-M and the Marxist Leninists as well as many Gandhians were passionately opposed. I myself was never in doubt that suspension of constitutional rights was totally unacceptable. Later, I understood that the churches were also deeply divided on the issue. I happened to be an advisor to the General assembly of the WCC in Nairobi in December 1975. MM Thomas as chairman of the Executive was trying to move a resolution condemning the Emergency. He was scathingly attacked by Bishop Paulos Mar Gregorios. There were deep divisions in the Indian delegation. Finally the resolution was passed all the same. I felt a great sense of relief. There were many restrictions on social movements. S. Jagannathan went to jail.

The jail ministry of TTS had to look after the families of jailed Gandhians and so-called Naxalites in touching unity. I myself discovered that being active with women's groups was still possible, as it was seen as being innocuous and somehow legitimate, since it also was International Women's Year. Many of us were very disturbed by the violent evictions of slum dwellers in the big cities like Bombay and Delhi at the time. In the end of 1975, the Marxist journal Social Scientist organized a big women's conference in Trivandrum with over hundred participants. This was a very inspiring event in those stifling times.

As the press was heavily censored, it became very difficult to be well informed. Even the Guardian, a critical church weekly, was censored and had to fold up. The Marxist Review soldiered on under great difficulty. One of the most inspiring things were the cyclostyled letters which MM Thomas circulated during this period, against the 20 point programme which was anti-poor and the Taj Mahal policy which pursued city beautification at the cost of housing rights. They have later been published under the title "Response to tyranny" and are still one of the best textbooks for analyzing the Emergency.....



**EMBASSY, HOSPITALITY AND DIALOGUE:  
CHRISTIANS AND PEOPLE OF OTHER FAITHS**

**The Rt Revd. Michael Nazir-Ali, the Bishop of Rochester**



Bishop Michael, is the 106th Bishop of Rochester. He is originally from Pakistan and was the first non-white Diocesan Bishop in the Church of England. He was appointed to Rochester in 1994. Before that he was the General Secretary of the Church Mission Society and before that Bishop of Raiwind in Pakistan and theological Assistant to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Since 1999 he has also been a member of the House of Lords.

[http://www.comprendre.org/Nazir\\_Ali.html](http://www.comprendre.org/Nazir_Ali.html)

“It is not only Christians, however, who have felt the need to learn from others. Dr. M. M. Thomas, the *doyen* of Indian theologians, has drawn our attention to the acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance. According to him, although this recognition is partial and inadequate, it is important, for the sake of the Church's mission, that it should be understood and evaluated. In his work he has tried to engage with leading Hindu reformers, such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, especially in relation to their understanding of the meaning of Jesus Christ and of Christianity for religion and society in contemporary India. Dr. Thomas also discusses and points out that the course of Indian Christian theology has definitely been affected by this acknowledgement of Christ within Hinduism itself.”



QUEZON CITY, Philippines (UCAN) -- "Faith and Community: Muslim-Christian Cooperation and Understanding in a Changing Asia," a consultation organized by the Christian Conference of Asia was held March 24-29, in Quezon City, the Philippines.



**FAITH AND COMMUNITY: MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN COOPERATION AND  
UNDERSTANDING IN A CHANGING ASIA**

<http://www.ucanews.com/1996/04/19/muslims-christians-see-need-to-cooperate-in-asia-take-1/>

"Dr. M.M. Thomas emphasized that religions must evaluate modernity from the position based on two affirmations. One is of "solidarity with victims," the people at the bottom, in their self-awakening and in their struggle for liberation. The other is the priority of social development over economic. In the religiously pluralistic modern situation, Dr. Thomas called for religions to reform themselves in order to assimilate the creativity and the human values of modernity and redefine them as principles of religious humanism."



## **SPIRITUALITY OF RESISTANCE**

**AS INTRODUCED BY MMT**

**Konrad Raiser Geneva, September 2003**

**Paper presented at the WCC Internal Encounter of Churches,  
Agencies and Other Partners on the World Bank and IMF Geneva, 12  
September 2003**

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/poverty-wealth-and-ecology/neoliberal-paradigm/12-09-03-spirituality-of-resistance.html>

However, the ecumenical movement has contributed to the rediscovery and re-affirmation of another dimension of spirituality which has always been alive in the church and not least among the monastic orders. From the early Benedictine motto *ora et labora* to the programmatic linkage between struggle and contemplation by the Taizé Community, from the missionary spirituality of the simple presence to the affirmation of a liturgy after the liturgy in Orthodox thought, there have been numerous attempts to live a life of spirituality in the midst of worldly struggles.

At the Nairobi Assembly of the WCC in 1975, the Moderator of the Central Committee, Dr. M.M. Thomas, pointed to this newly discovered dimension of spirituality with the phrase "spirituality for combat". He did not propose a spiritual upgrading of political struggles, nor was he interested in instrumentalizing spirituality as a moral preparation for combat. Rather, he wanted to point to the fact that the struggles for justice and human dignity have a spiritual dimension of their own. In fact, the powers that be, whether political, economic or financial, tend to cultivate their own spirituality, calling for sacrifices and asking for trust and faithful allegiance. The struggle for justice very often is a struggle about true and false spirituality, about true and false worship, or about serving God or an

idol. M.M. Thomas added: "Let us not forget that our struggle is not merely against others but also against ourselves, not against flesh and blood, but against the false spiritualities of the idolatry of race, nation and class and of the self-righteousness of ideals which reinforce collective structures of inhumanity and oppression".

The impulse provided by M.M. Thomas to place the reflection about spirituality into the context of worldly struggles has opened up a discussion which has found its echo in subsequent assemblies. Thus, following this line of thought, the Vancouver Assembly affirmed that "the spiritual struggle of the church must involve it in the struggle of the poor, the oppressed, the alienated and the exiled. The Spirit is among struggling people." And the assembly added the recommendation: "That the churches explore forms through which Christian spirituality is manifested in the struggle for justice and human dignity."

In the period between the Assemblies at Vancouver (1983) and Canberra (1991) the search for "a spirituality for our times" was the focus of intensive ecumenical dialogue and reflection. The report of Section IV of the Canberra Assembly under the title "Holy Spirit - transform and sanctify us!" summarizes the affirmations on ecumenical spirituality arising from these dialogues in the following terms: "Spirituality - in its manifold forms - is about receiving energy for life, being cleansed, inspired and set free, in every way being conformed to Christ. An ecumenical spirituality for our times should be incarnational, here and now, life-giving, rooted in the scriptures and nourished by prayer; it should be communitarian in celebrating, centred around the eucharist, expressed in service and witness, trusting and confident. It will inevitably lead to suffering; it is open to the wider oikoumene, joyful and hopeful. Its source and guide is the action of the Holy Spirit. It is lived and sought in community and for others. It is an ongoing process of formation and discipleship."

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## FROM MARXISM TO AMBEDKARISM

V.T. RAJSHEKAR

It was a surprise phone call by the late Dr. M.M. Thomas, then Director of the CISRS, that perhaps brought about a turning point in my life and also made me plunge into the Dalit movement wholesale. Until the 70s, I was fully immersed in Marxism though I was gradually getting disappointed with its leadership's stubborn adherence to "class struggle" ignoring the fact of **caste** in India. I tried my best to persuade the upper caste Marxist leadership to take note of the "caste" but it was not willing. "Class" is nothing but caste in India. India's Marxist leadership used Marxism to deceive the vast Dalits and Backward Castes to maintain the upper caste hegemony on the party. I was slowly getting disappointed with the Marxists and taking interest in Dr. Ambedkar, independent India's leader of the oppressed masses.

I was then in the *Indian Express*, Bangalore, as its Deputy Chief Reporter. *Indian Express* in those days was the country's largest circulated English daily. In its Aug.15, 1975 edition, it carried my article, "Dalit movement in Karnataka", on its prestigious edit page.

### SLAVES OF HINDU INDIA

Next day I got a call from Dr. Thomas asking me if I could develop the article and write a book itself which the CISRS would publish. I jumped at the idea because that would give me an opportunity to write my first book. Next day I went to CISRS office on Millers Road in Bangalore and met Dr. Thomas whom I found an extraordinary person.

Dalits are Hindu India's slaves — not only neglected and forgotten but the worst persecuted lot despite the fact they comprise the country's single largest segment (20%), I was wondering how the head of a big Christian organisation spared a thought for the forgotten "Wretched of the earth"?

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

Dr. M.M. Thomas later rose to great heights in the World Council of Churches and then became Governor of Nagaland after retirement from the WCC. I had occasion to visit his home in Thiruvalla, Kerala, after his death. His whole house was converted into a memorial for this great man who lived a simple life and gave a Dalit thrust to the Christian theology. Like a true Christian, Dr. M.M. Thomas tried to bend his Christian Institute (CISRS) towards Dalits, realising the Christian duty towards the country's worst persecuted segment of the society.

### **SANCTIFIED RACISM**

By commissioning me to write the book, CISRS helped me travel all over Karnataka and observe for myself the inhuman exploitation of a set of people who are strangely called Hindu by the Hindu rulers of India.

It is true that certain sections of population are persecuted in different parts of the world. But in the case of India the persecution of Dalits has also the religious sanction under Hinduism. It is this sanctified racism that is the speciality of Hinduism. And Dr. M.M. Thomas was deeply worried about this and on several occasions he opened up his heart to me.

Today, after a gap of 22 years I can say that it is this book (*Dalit Movement in Karnataka*, 1978, pp.150, CISRS) which the CISRS helped me to write not only made me jump into Dalit movement but also launch in 1981 the *Dalit Voice*, English fortnightly, which later turned out be the country's oldest and the largest circulated organ of the persecuted nationalities denied human rights. To that extent I have to acknowledge my gratefulness to Dr. M.M. Thomas and Prof. Saral Chatterji who succeeded him.

I am therefore grateful to CISRS for opening a new chapter in my life.



## **JESUS AS GURU**

### **The image of Christ among Hindus and Christians of India**

By Jan Peter Schouten



M.M.Thomas (1915-1996) was born in southern India, in the state of Kerala. His parents belonged to the Marthoma Church which had separated from the ancient Syrian Orthodox church in Kerala in the nineteenth century. The latter church traced its history back to the preaching of the apostle Thomas in the first century. The Mar Thoma church arose as a result of a reform movement that was oriented towards British Protestantism. Just like Panikkar, Thomas first studied chemistry. He was self taught as a theologian. As a young man, Thomas had been strongly influenced by Marxism. There had been a strong communist movement in Kerala since the beginning of the twentieth century. For Thomas, the question of social justice and the necessity of revolutionary upheaval have always remained important. It is thus not surprising that he found his career in socially engaged Christian organizations. He first worked for the World Student Christian Federation, and then became director of the Christian Institute of Study of Religion and Society in Bangalore, He never held a church office but was chairperson of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches from 1968 to 1975. Lastle, he held a high government position from 1990 to 1992 as governor of the Indian State of Nagaland.

## **BOOK REVIEWS and reflections**

**About Face:  
Two Books on Images of God**  
<http://eapi.admu.edu.ph/eapr002/mary.htm>

***Mary C. Thomas, F.C.J***

Under the heading of socio-economic liberationist writers, Küster summarizes Leonardo Boff (Brazil), Jon Sobrino (El Salvador), James Cone (Afro-American), Allan Boesak (South African), Ahn Byung (South Korean), Arvind Nirmal (Indian), and Teruo Kuribayashi (Japan). Küster seems more familiar with the Asian authors, though he gives an interesting contrast between Cone and Boesak. Under the heading of culture and religion dialogists, Küster summarizes Charles Nyamiti (Tanzania), Bénézet Bujo (Zaire), M.M. Thomas (India), Stanley Samartha (India), Katsumi Takizawa (Japan), Seiichi Yogi (Japan), Kosuke Koyama (Japan), and C.S. Song (Taiwan). This is an impressive list and the background information Küster presents on each of his writers, the summary of their works, and the comparisons and contrasts he makes between them comprise the bulk of his book.

It is in his discussion of the Asian theologians that Küster is most familiar. He outlines M.M. Thomas' commitment to the justice of the human Jesus and shows how Samartha's adoption of Hindu Upandishad ideas brings him too far from the Christian Jesus: "Whereas in M.M. Thomas the christology to some degree becomes a hermeneutical instrument for preserving Christian identity in the pluralism of Asian religions, in Samartha it dissolves in the hermeneutical field of reference which he has chosen, the advaita philosophy of Shankara"(91). In this, Küster shows his own preference, which is never made explicit, for the inclusive approach to interfaith and intercultural dialogue, despite its problems:

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

"The inner contradiction of the inclusive model, which sees the other as already standing under the salvation of Jesus Christ and thus in the last resort cannot take the other religions seriously, remains. However, the question is whether it is possible to think out coherent theology in any other way.

At any rate the attempt to remove this contradiction by a theocentric model, of the kind put forward by S. Samartha and K. Takizawa, is doomed to failure" (135).



## NEED OF A DALIT THEOLOGY

by James Massey

Christian Conference of Asia

96 Pak Tin Village Area 2, Mei Tin Road, Shatin NT

Hong Kong SAR, CHINA

"The question about theology is equally closely related both to the Church and the Dalits. After all, what is theology? According to M.M. Thomas, "Living theology is the manner in which a church confesses its faith and establishes its historical existence in dialogue with its own environment." Here the phrase which needs consideration is 'own environment.' Now what is the environment in which the Indian Church lives? One answer to this question is that it is a multi-faith or a pluralistic environment. This is the reality to which up till now Indian Christians and others, as thinkers and converts, have tried to respond. Certain responses to this reality have given birth to a theology currently known as 'Indian Christian theology', which, however, is not really relevant to the living situations of the majority of the people.

To speak in terms of the traditional categories, Indian Christian Theology, following the Brahmanic tradition, has trodden the *jnana marga*, the *bhakti marga*, and the *Karma marga*. In Brahmanabandhav Upadhyaya, we have a brilliant theologian who attempts a synthesis of Sankara's Advaita Vedanta and Christian Theology. In Bishop A.J. Appasamy, we had a *bhakti margi* theologian, who tried to synthesise Ramanuja's Vishistha Advaita with Christian theology. In M.M. Thomas we see a theologian... who laid the foundation for a more active theological involvement in India-the *Karma marga*. In Chenchiah we find an attempt to synthesise Christian theology with Sir. Aurobindo's 'Integral Yoga.'

## A Brief Overview of Ecumenical Engagement in Interfaith Relations

[http://vacouncilofchurches.org/cms/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=121&Itemid=98](http://vacouncilofchurches.org/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=121&Itemid=98)

Rev. Dr. Shanta Premawardhana  
Associate General Secretary for interfaith relations at  
the National Council of Churches USA,



In India, the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society in Bangalore was headed by M.M. Thomas. A prolific writer with an acute theological mind, Thomas became one of Asia's most respected theologians and a foremost proponent of the dialogical approach. His work *Salvation and Humanisation*, had a significant impact on the 1972 Chiang Mai conference of WCC's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism which produced the document "Salvation Today." With that Thomas became the foremost proponent of a soteriological model for dialogue. Christopher Duraisingh writes of M.M. Thomas:

He has insisted that it is the collective struggles of human beings for their humanization that provides an adequate point of departure and ground for our rethinking mission and dialogue. It is not through our a priori doctrinal formulations on God or Christ, but rather through our collective human search for meaning and sacredness that the "universe of faiths" could be adequately understood.



**Rabbi Martin van den Bergh**  
**is the Rabbi of Ohel Leah Synagogue in Hong Kong**



“The failure of established religion to satisfy this modern spiritual questing goes beyond what Bruce perceives as its falling out of popular favour. It has possibly to do more with three resultants of modernity. One - we have become more self-centred. Two - we tend to reject the regimens that any faith religion may impose, especially if it is perceived to reject the life-style that I may wish to lead. Three - secularization and the more aggressive move of Post-Modern Humanism. It was already recognised in the 19th Century by Dr. M. M. Thomas of the impact of humanism upon transcendence to a divine creator or divine redeemer. “



How can we sing your song, O God in a strange land?  
How can we witness to your all-embracing love with lives full of painful contradictions?  
How can we be ambassadors of reconciliation in a world enslaved by sin and death,  
where children suffer and starve and many labor in vain while a few live in luxury;  
where, in midst of our lives, we dwell under the shadow of death?  
What answer shall we give to the suffering (what shall we say in our own hearts)  
when they cry from the depths:  
“Where now is your God?”

From *The Worship Book* of the  
5th Assembly of the WCC, Nairobi, 1975

**A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO THE SUCCESSION LAWS**

Aruna Gnanadason



“It is essential to make a distinction between the social and religious practices of a community and the faith they process. Too often unjust social practices and religious rituals are given quai-divinelegitimazation. The scriptures too are interpreted to suit the designs of vested interests and power groups. Dr. M.M. Thomas a renowned Indian theologian cautions:

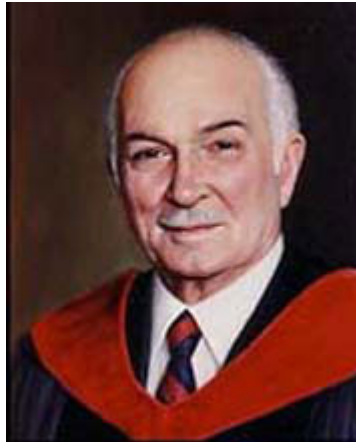
“The word of God needs to be distinguished from human words, and faith from doctrines so that we can move on to more adequate human words and doctrines to express the word and the content of the faith.”





## **THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD**

By E. G. Homrighausen



## **NEW ISSUES FOR THE WORLD COUNCIL**

"THE Central Committee of the World Council of Churches met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in January, 1971. It heard several provocative addresses and confronted several new issues. Meeting for the second time in Africa made members aware of the deeper theological realities and wider ecumenical dimensions of the ecumenical movement in our time.

Dr. M. M. Thomas, Chairman of the Committee, delivered the keynote address. Instead of using the horizontal-vertical figure which was emphasized at the Uppsala Assembly, he suggested that a new figure from the field of geometry be used to describe the dimensions of the Council's nature and task: the center and the radii. He asked, "What is the central concern of the fellowship in thought, life, and activities of the World Council? Do the many aspects of the life of the Council radiate from and express this central concern? If so, how? Do some activities of the Council give undue importance to things that are marginal?"

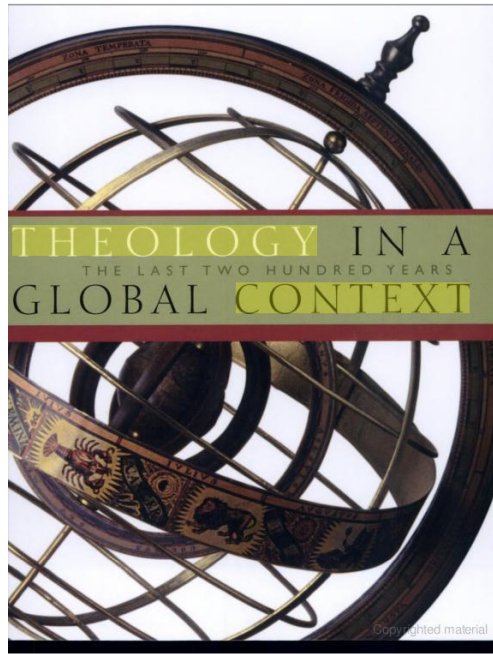
## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

Thomas maintained that the world outside is raising these questions, as are some of the many members of the Council. The distinctions between the center, the radius, and periphery become increasingly important as the Council seeks, under the mandate of the Uppsala Assembly, to enlarge the circle, on the one hand, and to become more militant, on the other.

These questions are increasingly important since the Council now includes not only churches with western Protestant traditions but also most of the Orthodox churches, and many churches in Latin America, Asia, Africa (deeply oriented toward African culture), and those of Pentecostal spirituality. This expansion has brought into the Council the human hopes and despair of the wide world in the midst of which the churches struggle to witness to their faith and life in Christ. The Council has been greatly enlarged in program and membership.

Along with this development has come a new sense that the Council should not only engage in study but that its churches should seek to define more precisely-in the light of the central faith-their common goals as regards unity, witness, and service, so that the Council will be an instrument of the churches for mutual help to reach their goals.

Dr. Thomas proceeded to emphasize the implications of the Council's Christological center and its theological-ethical basis in the struggle for human community at the local and world levels. This theological basis implies a catholicity that is the criterion not only for the Christian community but for the life and unity of all mankind. It implies, too, that churches which deny the ethics of world community may be considered guilty of heresy."



## THEOLOGY IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

By Hans Schwarz

### **A Christ –Centered Ecumenical Theology: M.M.Thomas**

M.M.Thomas (1916-96) has been perhaps the most prominent ecumenical theologian of India, though a layperson. He belonged to the Mar Thoma church and was its first full-time secretary in the youth department, beginning in 1945. From 1947 to 1953 he was on the staff of the World Student Christian Federation in Geneva, and after that was involved in ecumenical ventures in Geneva, serving from 1968 to 1975 as the chairperson of the Central Committee of the WCC. He was also active on the Indian scene, having moved from an associate director to the director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (CISRS). From 1989 to 1994 he was governor of Nagaland, a state in northeast India. As with all Indian Christian theologians, it is clear for Thomas that “the context of Indian Christian theology is the dialogue between Christ

and India.” But in delineating the criteria for an Indian Christian theology, he uses no Indian religious concepts, but rather envisions a “Christ centered syncretic process” In which the beliefs and expressions of the peoples of the world contain elements that can serve as a starting point of contact for the Christian message. (We remember that African theologians argued along similar lines about the religious heritage of Africa.) The reason for this is that “every man, whether he acknowledges God mentally or not, has a dimension of self-awareness of the presence of the ultimate and ultimate responsibility.” There is already a point of contact within each human being. Since Christ transcends the culture of Western Christendom and is able to relate himself creatively to other cultures, there is also the possibility of “Christ reforming all religions and in –forming Himself in them”

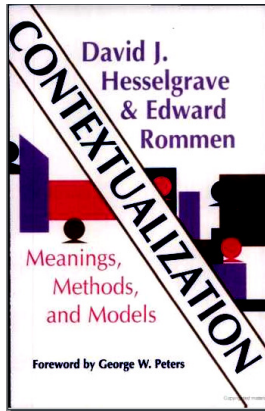
About India, Thomas is primarily concerned that Christian theology does its homework, meaning first of all that it recognizes that a living theology is always situational or contextual, Indian theology must reevaluate the classical and confessional theological traditions it has inherited from the West even to the point of understanding anew the meaning of orthodoxy and heresy, because even “the best theological definitions of the faith are necessarily fragmentary. One sided . situation-bound and inadequate to express the plenitude of God in Jesus Christ. A heretic , then, is someone who considers his or her own theology to be absolute and who therefore separates from the continuity of the great vision and the unity of the church, whereas orthodoxy endeavors to stand within the universal community of the faithful.

Theology, according to Thomas, is a rational understanding of the truth and the meaning of its commitment. “The divine-human encounter of faith at spiritual depth comes to consciousness in theology, and makes possible its own critical evaluation so that a renewed commitment of faith and a correction its expressions are continually made possible. Theology is not an intellectual enterprise, but is rooted in faith and seeks to understand this faith in the Anselmian tradition. Theology is also not isolated, but it is the

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

servant of the community of faith. It helps the church to understand, evaluate, and renew its nature and functions. This means that theology is not only embedded in the community, but also relates to the community because knowing and doing belong together for Thomas. While there are certainly many influences discernible in Thomas' theology, such as Karl Barth, but also Emil Brunner, his Christ-centers theology at the same time reacts against some currents in Indian reflection, such as that of Raimon Panikkar, for whom Christ, as we will see later, in an implicit way emerges from the Hindu religious context. For Thomas, however, Christ can emerge only when he is named, however partial and inadequate such naming may be.





**Asia**  
**M. M. Thomas and Kosuke Koyama**

## **M. M. Thomas: "Christ-Centered Syncretism"**

Arnold Toynbee believed that if Christianity is to be the religion of the future it must become less exclusivistic, more open to change and to accepting various ways of expressing the results of the religious quest. Stated another way, Christianity must become more inclusivistic, more like Hinduism in its ability to incorporate a wide variety of views without losing its own identity. If widely accepted, the theology of M. M. Thomas would eventuate in just that kind of Christianity.

A layman of the Mar Thoma Church of South India, Thomas is director emeritus of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore, and editor of its journal, *Religion and Society*. He is past chairman of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. This analysis of his theology is based in the main upon two monographs, "India: Toward an Indigenous Christian Theology" (which provides the essential thought of his book, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* and "Theological Insights for a Secular Anthropology the epilogue of *Secular Ideologies of India and the Secular Meaning of Christ*." Use is also made of *Man and the Universe of Faiths*.

Thomas's *indigenous theology* is perhaps best understood within the

somewhat turbulent stream of World Council discussions regarding the Christian attitude toward non-Christian faiths which date back to the Jerusalem conference in 1928. To understand the attitude and the issues involved one must perceive the openness to other religions expressed at Jerusalem and by William Hocking and the members of the Laymen's Inquiry in the early 1930s; the exclusivistic position taken by Hendrik Kraemer at the World Missionary Conference in Tambaram, India, in 1938; the inauguration of interreligious dialogues by the WCC; and, of course, various efforts to contextualize theology during the 1970s and 1980s. Over the years of his involvement Thomas has responded to the ebb and flow, the central current and the side eddies, of ecumenical discussion. Though some observers find indications of a more evangelical posture in his most recent writings, generally he has taken a position that has broad ecumenical support.

Like Koyama's, but with a closer affinity to liberation theologians, Thomas's view of history is central to his way of doing theology. For Thomas God is not reaching into human history from the outside to effect his purposes. Rather he is working out his purpose from within history. Inevitably, therefore, all theology involves an understanding of both a general and a particular history. A Christian theology for India—or, perhaps better, an Indian Christian theology—must recognize God's past and present workings in the Hindu renaissance and in the incursion of secularism in India and work for the realization of his future purpose.

*The Acknowledgment of Christ in the Indian Renaissance*

Kraemer felt that Indian religions revolve around a central and unchanging monistic core. Thomas disagrees with Kraemer. He says that the Hindu renaissance in modern times "represents an effort to put meaning-content into the term 'personal' as applied to God, man and society, and to affirm God's purposive work in world life as directed toward an end." Largely as a result of the impact of



Westernization and Christianity, Thomas believes, India is in tension. Monism no longer provides the unified center for Indian life and thought.

The church has not been entirely unresponsive to this state of affairs. Increasingly the church in India has opened up to the idea of an *Indian* church, "witnessing to Christ within the context of the Indian realities of life, and in this sense, indigenous." (Thomas has continued to use the older term *indigenous* long after the new term *contextualization* became current.) Five tributaries have led to this new openness.

1. *Theological education.* In 1968—the year of the appointment of the advisory group to the TEF which recommended the third (reform) mandate—the National Consultation on Theological Education was held in India. The report coming out of that meeting noted that Western models of ministry were slowly giving way to models better adapted to the Indian environment. It called for a new and more radical adaptation which would share in India's search for new meaning and a new humanity by seeking to lead people out of poverty, by an open encounter with other religions which would discern the values resident in them, and by learning to minister to those who must make decisions in the face of unprecedented change in political, economic, intellectual, religious, and cultural life.

2. *Discussion on church union.* Gradually progress has been made in the struggle for a unity among Indian churches which expresses both the life and thought of the church universal and the spiritual values of the Indian heritage. Thomas draws encouragement from the fact that this sentiment has now found expression in the constitution of the Church of South India.

3. *Christian apologetics.* The crucial issues of an indigenous Indian theology have been formulated and clarified in dialogue with proponents of a nascent Hinduism over a long period of time. In fact, very soon after the coming of William Carey, Rammohan Roy fought against the monism and polytheism of traditional Hinduism and interpreted Christ as a great moral teacher and religious messenger. To Roy, Christ

was the "pre-existent firstborn of creatures." Forgiveness is available through repentance without Christ's atonement. (One of the famous Scramapore trio, Joshua Marshman, took issue with Roy.)

Over the years the contributions to dialogue and a rethinking of both Hindu and Christian teachings by such men as Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, J. R. Chandran, Aiyadurai J. Appasamy, Surjit Singh, and Mahatma Gandhi have pointed in the direction of an indigenous theology. Ramakrishna "experienced" identity with Kali, Rama, Brahman, Mohammed, and Christ and espoused the equality of religions. Building on this, Vivekananda taught that experience with a personal God may be a step toward identity of the soul with Brahman and that Jesus himself progressed through stages to the point where he could say, "I and my Father are one." Chandran viewed this as the abandonment of religious discrimination but insisted that Christianity must grapple with the truth behind ideas of the Impersonal Ultimate and the ultimacy of the mystical experience. Appasamy advocated that Christians speak to Hinduism "from the inside." Singh used Radhakrishnan's ideas to develop a new Christology. Gandhi was attracted to Jesus, but believed in him not as a historical person but as the personification of nonviolence.

4. *Thinking on Christianity and other religions.* Most early missionaries in India thought Hinduism was a product of the devil, but theological liberalism came to affirm its treasures and worth. Some liberals believed that it is possible to be a Christian within Hinduism apart from baptism and joining a Christian church. Others believed that those who came to recognize Christianity as the fulfilment of Hinduism should become part of the Christian communities. The Hocking report and Kraemer's response contributed to a tension in this area which has not been entirely resolved by more recent efforts at interreligious dialogue, but Thomas believes that the tension will be overcome.

5. *A theology of nationalism.* Thomas speaks of the contributions of educational missionaries such as Alexander Duff, John Wilson, and William Miller who saw the

substitution of Western culture for Indian culture as a preparation for the gospel. Christian Nationalists such as Charles F. Andrews, S. K. Rudra, S. K. Datta, and K. T. Paul in one way or another reinforced the notion that the gospel of Christ could contribute greatly to the breakdown of caste and the building up of a new, unified Indian nation.

One would be hard-pressed to understand Thomas's indigenous theology apart from these tributaries. Concerning them he writes, "The five streams ... have contributed to the development of the idea of an Indian church witnessing to Christ within the context of the Indian realities of life, and in this sense, indigenous. It must be immediately pointed out that the contemporary Indian reality *is not the traditional one, but the traditional one renewed under the impact of the West and of the awakening*" (emphasis added)

#### *The Secular Meaning of Christ*

Thomas believes that Christ is present, not alone in the renaissance of a religious India influenced by Christianity and Westernization, but also in secular ideologies which have some Christian roots. With his view of history and an enlarged definition of theology as "the intellectual articulation of man's faith in God or in a structure of meaning and sacredness which is seen as his ultimate destiny,"<sup>20</sup> Thomas can restate in theological terms the ideologies of all of the political systems of India from liberal nationalism and democratic socialism to Marxism-Leninism. Conversely, he is able to redefine theological doctrines in secular terms. As in the case of the religious renaissance, this process has two primary and positive results, according to Thomas. First, these ideologies are understood as sacred though secular—as having a *Christ meaning*. Second, it discloses their errors and myopias. Let us see how this works out in particular instances.

1. *A realistic ideology of social humanism.* Some elements of Christian theology (in this case, anthropological) are relevant to social humanism and therefore should be restated in secular terms:

- a. Man as created in the image of God. In secular terms this affirms that man is a spiritual being and is called to fulfill himself by mastery over nature and by engaging in dialogue and communion with others in society.
- b. Man as a fallen creature. In secular language this can be interpreted as the tendency to self-alienation in man's spirit resulting from the self-love and self-centeredness which seek to wield power over others.
- c. The crucified and risen Christ. Christ is the true man. He is the source of the renewal of human nature (humanization) and, through this, the renewal of all things. Secularly this involves a recognition that the ultimate pattern of life, a life of self-giving love as the criterion of true humanity and social community, is the pattern of Jesus' humanity.
- d. The kingdom of God as the absolute future of man and society. Christian hope for the future is based on the power of the Spirit that raised Christ from the dead and which is at work renewing all societies and all of creation. Secularly put, there is a transcendent reality, a providence, or a presence which determines man's future and is available for the humanization of man, nature, and society even when conditions are seemingly hopeless.

*A critique of secular humanism.*

According to Thomas this kind of syncretized theologizing opens the eyes of the church to what God is doing outside her walls and opens the mouths of Christians to dialogue with secular humanists. It also enables a critique of secular humanism in, though not necessarily on, its own terms. Why not on its own terms? Theology rules out all closed forms of secular humanism which not only oppose the gospel but are devoid of a comprehensive understanding of man and therefore become dehumanizing. Positively, however, a secular humanism which espouses humanization, liberation,

creativity, love, and purpose in history is "integral to the faith and hope of the Christian gospel.

Nicholls has since said that Thomas has moved toward "a more evangelical appreciation of the relationship between text and content." One hopes that this is so.

Though many will be tempted to feel pessimism when they survey contemporary events in the religious and secular worlds, Thomas has a profound faith in the process he describes.

The historical process is affirmed through its transformation which is as radical as the one which happened quietly in the inhumanization of God in Jesus in the history of the world, or as what happened with greater trauma in the resurrection through death of the historical humanity of Jesus. Such an eschatological hope alone can give natural necessity, human determinism, and transcendent providence each its due place in the interpretation of the historical process as a whole and the human reality in any historical situation.... The meaning of every historical action directed to love and justice in history and every fragmentary realization of truth, goodness, and beauty in life is protected, redeemed, and fulfilled in the end. How, we do not know. But our guarantee is the risen Jesus Christ."

### *The Hidden Christ Revealed*

Traditionally missions in India found Christ in the Bible, preached this Christ to the people without respect to Indian understandings, and worked to raise up a Christian church that had but little relevance to Indian life and thought. But there is now an openness to the Christ who in all of history is working out his new-creation and new-humanity purposes. This hidden Christ is being revealed as a result.

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

Sunand Sumithra and Bruce J. Nicholls summarize Thomas's approach in four steps:'

1. His starting point is *man's quest*. He analyzes what man is searching for and discovers that the primary search is for human dignity, freedom, creativity, and meaning in history.
2. He asks what *Christ offers* to these quests. He responds that Christ is offering exactly those things for which man is searching. Christ is the new man, the new humanity. Humanization is the most relevant point of entry for dialogue between Christianity and the other religions.
3. Then what is the *mission of the church*? It is to participate with Christ in the liberation movements of our time, so that man may receive what he is searching for. The confession of participation is the essence of the mission of the church.
4. Finally, what is the *goal of humanity*? It is the humanity of mankind leading ultimately to a just world society. This utopian world society is at best the preparation for the coming kingdom of God, for the kingdom of men is necessary raw material for the kingdom of God.

Sumithra and Nicholls go on to say that Thomas's theology is situational, "born out of the meeting of the living church and its world" and always moving in the direction of synthesis.' In the Indian case the results of this meeting of church and world become evident in, among other things, a "Christ-Centered Hindu Church" that will transform Hindu patterns in accord with the missionary goal.

A profound faith this is; but is it also apostolic That is the important question.

Praxis Nos. 3 – 4 1991

## **PERSPECTIVE**

### **THE CHANGING FACE OF SOCIALISM AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE CHURCHES**

**Bastiaan Wielenga**



"Many attempts to describe a better socialism evoke the language of humanism. The forerunners of the Prague spring in 1968 spoke of "socialism with a human face". Gorbachev and Yakovlev speak of "humanistic socialism". Dr. M.M. Thomas projects a "new socialism which will have the person at its centre and as its motivation". This emphasis is an affirmation of the human subject over against repressive state socialism with its giganto-maniacal development concept. But the whole humanist tradition needs to be critically reviewed especially with its male-centeredness and its failure to overcome patriarchal bias as well as its tendency to assume control of the human over nature, which has contributed to the present ecological problem. The realm of human freedom will collapse if we fail to acknowledge our continuing dependency on nature and to take responsibility for a sustainable, durable interaction.

Beneath that collectivism however is the same atomisation of modern society which underlies the individualism of capitalist society. This has its roots in one dominant strain of Marxist thought which expects everything from large-scale socialized production as the



base for socialist society. But human beings live and experience themselves as social beings, as "persons-in-community" (M.M. Thomas).

The difficulty is that the structuring of modern society, be it capitalist or state-socialist» suppresses the awareness of basic human needs. This applies not only to social needs, but also to ecological needs. We need viable ecosystems in order to survive. We need patterns of production and consumption which can be sustained for generations to come. Adivasis, women and peasants living in direct interaction with nature feel and perceive these needs existentially and act on them. But others, especially city-dwellers, are not confronted with these. It requires strenuous efforts to convince people that certain patterns of motorized private transport are not sustainable in the long run and still they may not act on it. It is amazing to see that people who have grown up with non-mechanized habits are unable to return to them. The same applies in the area of production. It has been proved that certain traditional fishing methods are optional in providing a sustainable pattern of production, whereas the present mechanization of boats and modernisation of gear cannot be sustained for long. People know it. But how to achieve a turning "back" and a slowing down in order to survive in the long run?

It is true that we cannot simply return to the past as Mahatma Gandhi seemed to suggest when he prophetically warned that the expansionism of modern civilisation would be destructive and unsustainable. Yet the assumption that humankind can march on equally like this without end is illusory. In his talk on the prophetic ministry of the church Dr. M.M. Thomas compares the transition of tribal Israel to the monarchical state with the process of transition from tradition to modernity which Nagaland is experiencing today. Elsewhere he raises the question how traditional values can be preserved and integrated. Probably, they cannot survive as mere values unless on a new level a material social basis is created which can sustain these values in daily praxis."

## MEMORIES and REFLECTIONS

T.J. THOMAS  
*Theckethil* KUMBANAD

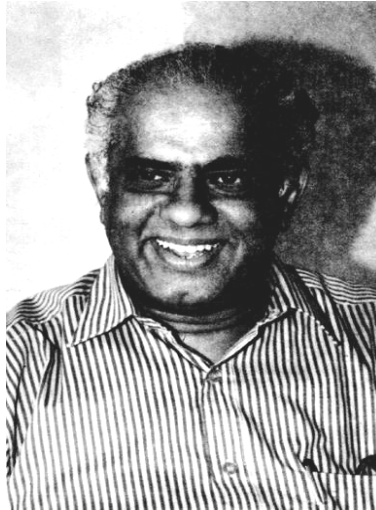


“In my second year of stay in the hostel I had to leave the hostel thus. I then joined the Y.M.C.A. hostel. It was there that I came to know Dr. M.M. Thomas, who was my room mate and one year junior to me in college. The founder-director of the Ecumenical Centre at Whitefield near Bangalore which attained international repute, Rev. Dr. M.A. Thomas was also in the hostel then. He was also a year junior to me in college but he was an History student and so his college was different. Rev. Dr. K.K. George was also then in my college and junior to me, (a class mate of Dr. M.M. Thomas - both Chemistry students) but lived in a lodge very close to the Y.M.C.A. I mention these names because they were all regular and ardent members of the prayer group (described below). M.A. Thomas was a very jolly fellow and we used to enter adjacent bathrooms which were directly under the raised stage of the Y.M.C.A. Auditorium. Both of us enjoyed loud singing in the bath room which would reverberate loudly much to the annoyance of the Y.M.C.A. Secretary because the noise would be a great nuisance to the meetings in progress in the auditorium. I must admit as youngsters we were a bit cheeky too earning a bit of the Secretary’s chiding.

## CTC Bulletin

### **Theological Education for Public Discourse on Theology in India**

**K. C. Abraham**



“First is the focus on "common good". In an essay reflecting on theology in the modern German University, Moltmann writes that theological faculties in the universities are expected" to have an eye on the common good of the whole society in its wider ramifications, and not just to look to their own religious communities. For even the particularist religious communities participate in the common good and contribute to the 'good life' of the community. "It is developed in open discourse" (God for a Secular Society, 256). He further adds, "the specific contribution of theology cannot be to reiterate secular options. Taking the categories of what is in correspondence and harmony with God and what is in contradiction to him, it has to set the common good in the light of the kingdom of God and his righteousness and justice".

Translating this into our multi-religious context one may say that discourse on common good should be centered on the idea of secular, which serves as the foundation of our

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national life. Secular is not understood as anti-religious. In India, thanks to the legacy of Nehru, the secular is open secularism embracing a humanistic vision. It is in this sense that MM Thomas also used the same term. He repeatedly argued for a non-communal, secular form of involvement by Christians in the national life. A humanistic/secular vision gives different religions and ideologies a common basis for cooperative action. Today this secular legacy has been grossly ignored. Fundamentalist forces are making an organized attempt to foist their partisan agenda in the educational field. A theological critique of this, borne out of our commitment to the liberative message of the gospel, is imperative.



**THE CHALLENGE OF CHURCHLESS CHRISTIANITY:  
AN EVANGELICAL ASSESSMENT.**

Publication Date: 01-OCT-05

Publication Title: International Bulletin of Missionary Research

**Tennent, Timothy C.**

Professor of World Missions, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, MA, USA;



Director of Missions Programs and Chair of the J. Christy Wilson Jr. Center for World Missions;  
Ordained minister of United Methodist Churches

**Critique and Debate**

Such a departure has been proposed by, among others, M. M. Thomas (1916-96), a well-known Indian theologian and ecumenical leader who for years was the director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, in Bangalore. The major critique of Thomas's ecclesiology was developed by Lesslie Newbigin (1909-98), British missionary to India, ecumenical leader, and bishop of the Church of South India. The result was a whole body of literature between these two men on the subject of

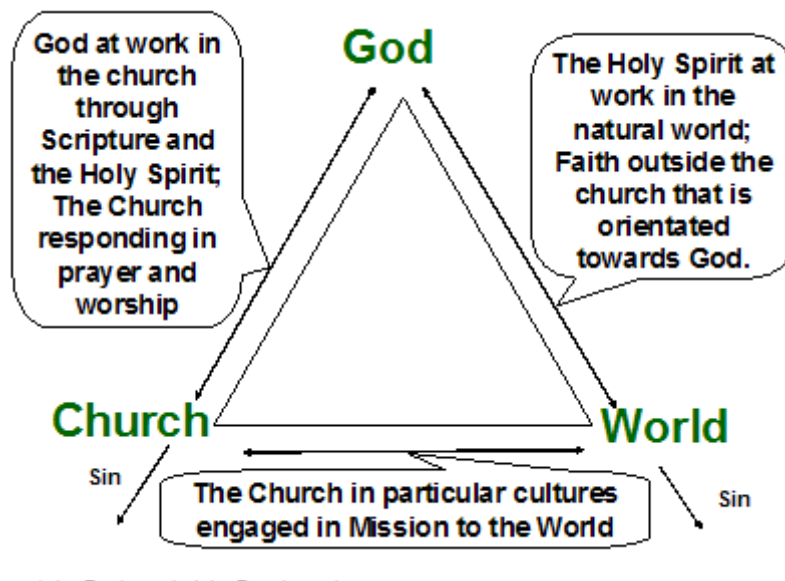
ecclesiology, with many discussions on the nature of the church as a visible community. They each wrote dozens of books and articles. (22) The debate between Thomas and Newbigin on this issue remains the most sustained and theologically reflective discussion to date.

M. M. Thomas. In 1971 Thomas published a landmark book entitled *Salvation and Humanisation*. It is an examination of issues related to the theology of mission seen from within the particularities of the Indian context. Central to Thomas's vision is a radical rethinking of ecclesiology. Thomas is concerned with the implications of a church that becomes increasingly isolated from society. He therefore encourages the idea of a "Christ-centered secular fellowship outside the Church." He goes on to argue that a vigorous ecclesiology should embrace a view of the church that can "take form in all religious communities" because it "transcends all religious communities." Thomas would clearly embrace the notion of what Hoefer calls "churchless Christianity" but would rephrase it by saying that the church does not always exist as a defined, visible community but can be formed within other religious communities, such as Hinduism and Islam. He states this point explicitly when he says that the church can "take form as a Christ-centered fellowship of faith and ethics in the Hindu religious community." (23) The fact that these followers of Jesus reject the sacrament of baptism is not, according to Thomas, because they do not wish to identify fully with Christ but because, in India, baptism has become "a sign not primarily of incorporation into Christ but of proselytism into a socio-political community involving rejection of their [own] socio-political-religious communities." (24) Since baptism as a "transfer of communal affiliation" is understood in India as an act of hostility toward one's own culture and social background, it makes a travesty of the true nature of baptism. Therefore, according to Thomas, at least in India we should not insist that the sacrament of baptism be considered a mark of the true church.

Thomas insists that there is a distinctive new humanity that belongs to Jesus Christ, but that this new humanity cannot be equated with the visible church. He says that "in spite

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of the famous slogan *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*," the new humanity of Christ does in fact exist outside the "empirical Church." (25) This is a new understanding of what might be called the invisible church. When Luther introduced the distinction of the invisible and visible church, it was for the purpose of acknowledging that there were unregenerate unbelievers who did not truly belong to Christ but who had become empirically united with the visible church on earth. Thomas is arguing the reverse situation. Namely, there are those who truly belong to Christ and thus are members of the invisible church in heaven but who have not united with any empirical, visible church on earth. Luther is concerned about unbelievers inside the visible church; Thomas is concerned with believers inside the visible community of Hinduism.







## **Jesus the Christ: the ONLY Way to God and to Human Flourishing**

**M. Thomas Thangaraj**



Professor Thangaraj has published various articles in Tamil, English and U.S. periodicals and has written Christian hymns in Tamil for use in churches in India. His current research focuses on Indian Christian theological responses to religious pluralism and on constructing a systematic theology from a global perspective.

### **Ecclesiological Dimension:**

The role of the institutional church in the divine scheme of human well-being is an important dimension of this core-issue. If the church, as it now exists, is an integral part of the divine economy, then exclusivist claims about Christ will lead to particular understandings of mission as evangelism and church growth. Wesley Ariarajah's discussion of religion in bipolar categories of established/prophetic or movement/institution has raised some important issues to be looked at in detail. There is yet another dimension to this discussion too. Even if Christ is the only way, it does not necessarily follow that we need to have a church like the one we have now. On the other hand, if Christ's claim to exclusivity does not include a vision of a community of faith like

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the church, do we not then end up as disjointed individuals who are attached, singly, to Christ? These are questions to ponder. M. M. Thomas, a 20th century Indian Christian theologian, maps a way forward in his vision of the church as a "Christ-centered fellowship" that is not limited to the organized institutional church alone.





**New vision and challenges to ecumenism  
in the 21st century  
*NCC Korea 80th anniversary celebration***

**Keynote address by Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia**  
Seoul, 23 August 2004

In 1975, as liberation theology was rising to prominence, M.M. Thomas of India, then Moderator of the World Council of Churches' Central Committee, spoke of the need for a "spirituality of combat" in confronting the principalities and powers of this life. In the 1980s the WCC-URM sought the spirituality that undergirds the community of people engaged in the struggles for transformation of society.

Between Indian and Indian:  
A Response to Roger Hooker  
By Charles A. Ryerson

<http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/jan1985/v41-4-article9.htm>

“Roger Hooker concludes his article with Fr. Amos Rajanomey in Delhi telling his Hindu neighbors that “he wants to convert the life of this area.” We can expand his statement to include a crucial dimension of Christian mission, a dimension which is often lost in obsession with individual souls. Christians are called to be a creative minority in India, helping Indians and Hindus in the stupendous task of reinterpreting and redefining themselves. This task requires a reaching out to Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and other groups, and an engaging not only in “dialogue” but in actual participation in inclusive nation building. The late Dr. Paul Devanandan, and living leaders such as M. M. Thomas, have laid the foundations for this task.”



**The Emergent Gospel:  
Theology from the Underside of History**  
**Papers from the Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians,  
Dar Es Salaam, August 5-12, 1976**

Edited by Sergio Torres & Virginia Fabella, M.M.

***Chapter 13: Development of Christian Theology in India by  
J.R. Chandran (India)***

“Finally, in discussing the theology of liberation and humanization, MM Thomas (1916-) whose role in the ecumenical movement shaped his focus on the gospel as a tool for justice and liberation. Thomas spoke to three aspects of dialogue:

- 1) studying the contribution of each faith to man and society;
- 2) seeking to understand the central theological issues in each faith; and
- 3) the dialogue “in the cave of the heart” of which Abhishiktananda [the French Benedictine monk who served as a bridge to Hindu and Christian theology].

Thomas focused on the first, where Hindus and Christians could come together in the context of modernity and secularism, and take action for the good of the nation as a whole. In conclusion, the survey reiterates that there is no pattern or model for Indian Christian theology, and that it is not important to concentrate only on doctrinal formulation. It is important to take “a stand for righteousness, peace and justice in human affairs” that would not lead to polarization, and not create an abstract theology. It is when the process of doing – grappling with the suffering of the oppressed and the totality of the Indian religious, social and cultural situation – becomes the real basis of Indian Christian theology, that it will become part of universal Christian theology.”



**THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY LECTURE**

Old Government House Lecture Theatre  
City Campus, The University of Auckland  
Auckland, New Zealand

Wednesday, 1 August 2007, 6.00 pm

**“Public Theology –  
a Latin captivity of the Church?  
Violence and Public Theology in the praxis of the Church in Asia”**

**James Haire**  
*Charles Sturt University*



“Again, this close inter-relationship of the personal, the political and the public is seen in the work of Mammen Madathilparampil Thomas, or M M Thomas, in India , against the background of debates on the state as secular or as influenced by Hinduism. Thomas, a member of the Mar Syrian Church of Malabar, spent much of his career involved in the issues of Christianity and society, both in India and through the World Council of Churches, and completed his career as Governor of the Indian State of Mizoram. Unlike the early indigenous Indian theologian Vengal Chakkarai, who was interested in the *bakti*-

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*marga*, “the way of devotion”, Thomas was interested in the *karma-marga*, “the way of action”. One of his aims was to contribute to a humanized world community, along with other religious traditions. Especially in his work, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, Thomas demonstrates how Christianity has constantly had responsibility for introducing new elements into Indian society, particularly in facing the three challenging Indian issues of group over individual, of certain individuals over others, and of male over female. The introducing of these new elements have brought about many changes to the core of Indian society, both politically and otherwise, and also to Hinduism itself.”





<http://www.nccusa.org/pdfs/damayanthi.html>.

*Christian Theology's Engagement with Religious Pluralism*

Damayanthi M.A. Niles



“The potential fruitfulness of this method of entering dialogue with other faiths is seen in the work of M.M.Thomas in his book *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*. In this work Thomas looks at the understanding of Christ in some key Hindu thinkers during the period of India’s struggle for independence, and how they have explicitly stated their understanding of who Christ is with reference to their own philosophies and praxis in relation to nation building. Examining this process, Thomas is able not only to enrich his own theology, but also to position his own thinking and praxis with regard to nation building as a Christian.

Constructing theology in a manner that values and takes plurality seriously allows us as Christians to celebrate and participate in the diversity around us and to add our own

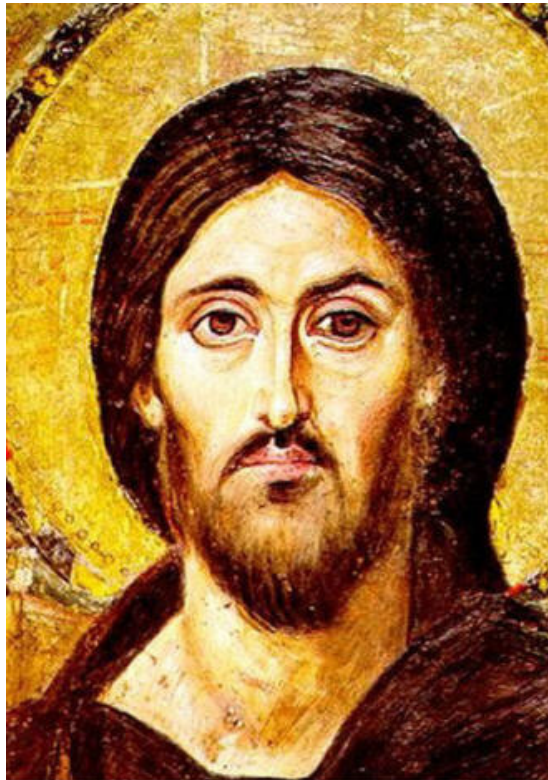
## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

particular stories, enriching the story of God's work in the world. It also helps us to hear the weaker and marginalised voices often silenced in the name of an artificial unity. “

“The Problem of Co-operation between Foreign and Native Workers,” in *World Missionary Conference*

1910 *Edinburgh: The History and records of the Conference*, vol. 9 (Edinburgh & London: Oliphant,

Anderson & Ferrier, 1910) 315



## HISTORY OF HINDU-CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTERS

**AD 304 TO 1996**

**Sita Ram Goel**



Voice of India, New Delhi

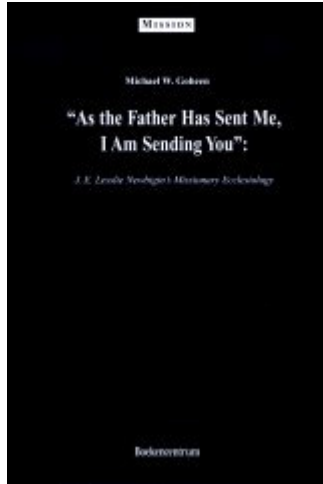
“Readers of the dialogue between Swami Devananda Saraswati and Fr. Bede Griffiths which has been summarised in this study (pp. 386-98) can see for themselves how confidently Fr. Bede invokes the names of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Ramana Maharshi, Mahatma Gandhi and Ramalinga Swamikal and regards them as Hindu in religion while being Christian in spirit. Dr. M. M. Thomas, a noted theologian, goes much further in his thesis, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, first published in 1970 and republished in a second edition in 1976. It is supposed to be a rejoinder to Dr. Raymond Panikkar’s *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, an earlier theological exercise published in 1964. But while the title of Dr. Panikkar’s book had the merit of suggesting only a speculation, howsoever wild, the title of Dr. Thomas’ book is a misrepresentation of the Hindu point of view, as he himself shows in course of presenting the views of Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Keshub Chander Sen, P. C. Mozoomdar, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Dr. Radhakrishnan and Mahatma Gandhi. None of these Hindu thinkers ever admitted that the Jesus of history was the Christ of Christian theology, that is, the only son .of God and the sole saviour of mankind.”

**THE INDWELLER**  
**(Antharayamin) -**  
**Shakti/Holy Spirit/Ruh/Aykaa Mayee -**  
**is only Being worth realizing**

[http://www.adishakti.org/forum/indweller\\_antharayamin\\_is\\_shakti\\_holy\\_spirit\\_ruh\\_eykaa\\_mayee\\_only\\_being\\_worth\\_realizing\\_9-1-2006.htm](http://www.adishakti.org/forum/indweller_antharayamin_is_shakti_holy_spirit_ruh_eykaa_mayee_only_being_worth_realizing_9-1-2006.htm)



“The shakti tradition derives from the pre-Aryan concept of primal energy, the feminine power of the creation. That is, it predates the rise of the Brahmins and the Hindu caste structure. It is therefore attractive to those who reject the hegemony of Vedic Hinduism and seek to subvert it. The late elder-statesman of Indian Christian theology, M.M. Thomas followed Chenchiah in making the new creation wrought in Christ the starting point for theology in order to interpret the gospel for modern, secular India, rather than in traditional, religious terms. Thomas recounts how Hindu reformers struggled within classical Hinduism to transform a static concept of the world as the unfolding of the Universal Spirit into a purposive one in which the Spirit is “the dynamic of cosmic evolution”. Though they succeeded in so doing, in Thomas’s view they still tended to lack a “realistic appreciation of the depth of evil which the Spirit of God has to contend with”, as described in the New Testament by the language of Satan and evil spirits. The language of non-brahminic shakti contains within it the “spirituality for combat” that Thomas was searching for and lays a pneumatological foundation for theologies of liberation”



**“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you”:  
J.E. Lesslie Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology**

**Goheen, M.W.  
2001**

<http://igitur-archive.library.uu.nl/dissertations/1947080/c3.pdf>  
Tekst. - Proefschrift Universiteit Utrecht

### **3. FROM A CHRISTOCENTRIC TO A TRINITARIAN MISSIONARY ECCLESIOLOGY (1959-1998)**

A debate between M. M. Thomas and Hendrikus Berkhof in a discussion on the witness of Christians to men in the secular world pointed to the growing differences between the older and newer understandings of mission. Thomas argued that the task of mission was to discern where Christ is present in the quest for humanization and nation-building and identify oneself with that struggle through full participation in what was truly human. Berkhof believed that taking our clue to understanding God's will for humankind from the events of history rather than what God has done in Jesus Christ could lead to serious misunderstanding (1993h:195; cf. Löffler 1968). In any case, there was agreement that the structures of the congregation must be reformed and Mexico endorsed the study project on the missionary structure of the congregation as the means to discover “the forms of missionary obedience to which Christ is calling us” (Orchard 1964:158).

Newbigin addressed each of these themes a number of times throughout this period. However, it was a debate with M. M. Thomas that emerged out of discussions on salvation and conversion that bore the most ecclesiological fruit.<sup>4</sup> The exchange was the fruit of conversations that each had carried on separately (Hunsberger 1998:176). At

Mexico in 1963 M. M. Thomas and Hendrikus Berkhof had begun a debate on the nature of salvation in a secular world. At the prompting of Loffler, they had carried forward this discussion in print (Loffler 1968). Newbigin responded to this exchange in an article published in a *Festschrift* for Bengt Sundkler (1969a). Thomas entered the debate with a discussion of salvation. Newbigin's entry into the debate came as a result of a discussion of conversion in which he critiqued Kaj Baago (Baago 1966). Thomas published a book in 1971 entitled *Salvation and Humanisation* in which he took issue with Newbigin's critique at a number of points. Newbigin reviewed his book critically and through a published exchange of letters the debate was carried forward (Hunsberger 1998:177).

Two issues were discussed which are important for the topic of this book. First, Thomas and Newbigin disagreed on the relationship of evangelism to humanization. Thomas followed the Uppsala Assembly in speaking of 'points of mission' where the gospel is relevant for that time. For Thomas the struggle for humanization was that point of mission where the gospel "comes alive." Thomas emphasized context over the content of the gospel and stood in danger of allowing the gospel and evangelism to be swallowed up by efforts of humanization. Newbigin responded with a critique which highlighted the content and universal validity of the gospel. Newbigin was not prepared to allow evangelism to be swept away (Loffler 1968:14-33; 1969a:260f.).

The second point of disagreement between Thomas and Newbigin is the extent of the new humanity. Are the boundaries of the church and the new humanity coextensive? If not, how can that new humanity be seen outside the boundaries of the church? Thomas enlarged the notion of the new humanity to such an extent that the importance of the church as a visible institution was threatened. While Newbigin agreed that God's salvific work spilled over beyond the bounds of the church, he was not willing to diminish the importance of that body as a visible community. The debates within the ecumenical tradition around salvation and conversion led to discussions between Thomas and

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

Newbigin that sharpened the latter's thinking on the issue of the church and its evangelistic task (1971c:72ff.).....

A debate between M. M. Thomas and Hendrikus Berkhof in a discussion on the witness of Christians to men in the secular world pointed to the growing differences between the older and newer understandings of mission. Thomas argued that the task of mission was to discern where Christ is present in the quest for humanization and nation-building and identify oneself with that struggle through full participation in what was truly human. Berkhof believed that taking our clue to understanding God's will for humankind from the events of history rather than what God has done in Jesus Christ could lead to serious misunderstanding (1993h:195; cf. Loffler 1968). In any case, there was agreement that the structures of the congregation must be reformed and Mexico endorsed the study project on the missionary structure of the congregation as the means to discover "the forms of missionary obedience to which Christ is calling us" (Orchard 1964:158).



## Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction

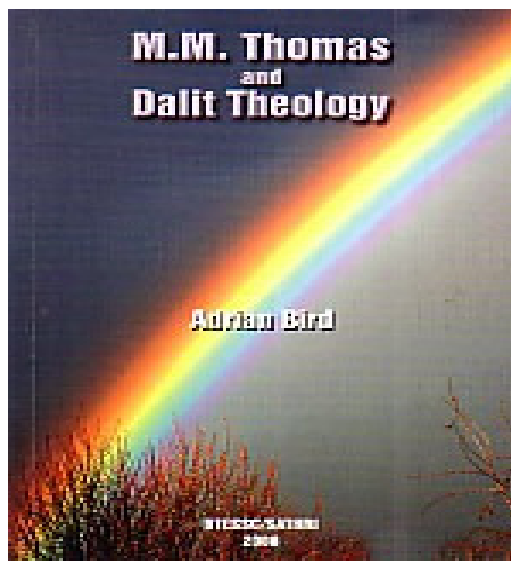
By Johannes Verkuyl

Translated and edited by Dale Cooper. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1978.

The fourth section centers on religions and ideologies. With Newbigin, M. M. Thomas, Vicedom, and others, Verkuyl makes the trinitarian confession the touchstone for a theology of religions. He points to God's Spirit at work in other religions, but rejects the positions of Rahner, Schlette, and Panikkar as well as Troeltsch, Hocking, and W. Cantwell Smith. He urges dialogue for understanding, for cooperation, and also for witness. Here he relates himself to Kenneth Cragg and D. T. Niles. In addition, he holds that one of missiology's most basic tasks today is assessing the world's ideologies-the "powers." They can neither be denied to be important by an apolitical pietism nor be substituted for the gospel. Rather, they pose a challenge to *missio politica ecumenica*, the clear-headed service of justice wherever injustice exists.



**M.M. THOMAS:  
THEOLOGICAL SIGNPOSTS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF DALIT THEOLOGY,  
PhD Theses, University of Edinburgh, UK February, 2008**



**Adrian Bird**

Chapter No.	Chapter Title
	Introduction
Chapter 1	Dalit Identity and the Emergence of Dalit Theology
Chapter II	The Theology of M M Thomas
Chapter III	Critical Dialogue: M M Thomas and Bishop M Azariah
Chapter IV	Critical Dialogue
Chapter V	The New Humanity in Christ
Chapter VI	Critical Reflection of Second Generation Dalit Theologians

## Introduction

### 1. Introduction

This thesis argues that Indian Christian theologian, M.M. Thomas, contributed significant theological signposts for the emergence of Dalit Christian theology. The controversial nature of this thesis is clear given the fact that Dalit theology emerged in India during the 1980s in “radical discontinuity with the Indian Christian Theology of the Brahminical tradition.”<sup>1</sup> As a non-Dalit Indian Christian thinker, Thomas’s theology was thus considered irrelevant for Dalit theology. Yet it is argued that Dalit theology did not emerge in a theological vacuum, but that significant antecedent contributions paved the way for its

emergence. This thesis identifies M.M. Thomas as one such influence critically discernable within first generation Dalit theological writing. The Chapter begins with a brief overview of the Indian Christian theological tradition and the consequent rise of Dalit theology, prior to introducing M.M. Thomas and outlining the thesis statement and methodological approach adopted for this research.....

### 1.8. Research Questions

The research questions assist in substantiating the thesis that M.M. Thomas contributed significant theological signposts for the emergence and development of Dalit theology. The following questions will be addressed during the course of this research:

- Is a dichotomous methodology, which sets Dalit theology against Indian Christian theology, adequate for locating the theology of M.M. Thomas?
- Liberation from dehumanisation, existential pathos, injustice and indignity are primary theological goals of Dalit theology. How may M.M. Thomas’s theology of New

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

Humanity in Christ, set within the broader paradigm of Creation-Fall-Redemption-Consummation, be considered relevant to the Dalit theological quest?

- Dalit theologians seeks to maintain an essential link between Christian and non-Christian Dalits in the quest for Dalit liberation. How are M.M. Thomas's reflections of koinonia-in-Christ amidst the pluralistic religio- secular context relevant for emerging Dalit theology?
- How do Bishop Azariah and Bishop Devasahayam, as first generation Dalit theologians, assess the theological contribution of M.M. Thomas?
- Critically evaluating the diachronic movement of Dalit theology, how do second generation Dalit theologians assess the theological contribution of M.M. Thomas as relevant for Dalit theological discourse today?

### 1.5. Thesis Core

M.M. Thomas is classified by Dalit theologians as a caste Indian Christian theologian, and thus irrelevant for Dalit theology. Arvind P. Nirmal labelled Thomas as an exponent of Hindu karma marga,<sup>77</sup> effectively categorising him as a theological foe rather than ally of Dalit theology. Bishop Azariah describes Thomas as a 'Bramhminical theologian' who excluded Dalits from his theological reflections on the process of humanisation.<sup>78</sup> Bishop Devasahayam argues that Indian Christian theologians, including M.M. Thomas, offered little more than 'demonologies' for failing to name caste as the original sin in India.<sup>79</sup>

Certainly M.M. Thomas was not Dalit, and thus did not and could not reflect theologically from a Dalit perspective. Neither did he set about to write a theology specifically related to the Dalit context or experience. Indeed Dalit theology as a named

movement emerged in the twilight of Thomas's life. If we accept Nirmal's position that the epistemological starting point for Dalit theological reflection is that of pain-pathos experience, then certainly M.M. Thomas's theology cannot simply be transposed into the Dalit theological context. Certainly the attempt to force, as it were, a square peg into a round hole will prove fruitless.

As noted above, the emergence of Dalit theology in the 1980s marked the beginnings of a diachronic movement which sought to establish an authentic theology of liberation, focussing on key issues of human identity and dignity, justice and humanisation of oppressed Dalits. Despite the call for 'radical discontinuity' with Indian Christian theology, however, this thesis argues that M.M. Thomas contributed significant theological signposts for the emergence of Dalit theology.<sup>80</sup>

M.M. Thomas has been described by Dr. Abraham Stephen as an 'Asian liberation theologian', a theologian deeply concerned with the struggles of the suffering Asian people.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, Thomas's attempts to articulate the integral relation between salvation and humanisation demonstrate a deep theological concern for human equality, dignity, justice and the liberation of the oppressed. In the midst of a rapidly changing religio-secular context, Thomas sought to make theology relevant to the vision of a transformed Indian society, concerned with the struggle of the poor and oppressed for justice, dignity, and the power to participate in the decision making structures of India. His interpretation of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ within the broader framework of creation-fall-redemption-consummation, allowed Thomas to envision a new Indian society centred on the Cross as the divine forgiveness of sin. The paradigm of New Humanity in Christ would be the foundation for a creative vision of transformed society, transcending divisive communal identity and structures, allowing the people to live in freedom, dignity, and responsibility as persons-in-community. Locating M.M. Thomas as a liberation theologian opposed to

caste communalism, class injustice and human indignity, and as a man searching for a dynamic theological foundation adequate to the quest for a full, liberating and just Indian society, it is argued that his theological contribution was significant for the emergence of Dalit theology, and remains relevant for present day Dalit theological discourse

## **Chapter II: The Theology of M.M. Thomas**

### **1. Introduction**

In this chapter I provide an overview of M.M. Thomas's theology, establishing an essential foundation on which critical discourse with Dalit theology is built in subsequent chapters. Following an introduction to M.M. Thomas, I begin by assessing Arvind Nirmal's claim that Thomas was an exponent of karma marga, and thus an elite Indian Christian theologian irrelevant for Dalit theology. By arguing against Nirmal's classification, the path is opened for critical assessment of Thomas's contributory relevance for emerging Dalit theology. This includes an attempt to locate Thomas's theology essentially within the broad theological paradigm of creation-fall-redemption-consummation, centred on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Within this broad theological framework, it is argued that Thomas's interpretation of New Humanity in Christ urges the creative participation of humanity towards the transformation of society on the principles of humanisation and justice.

### **2. M.M. Thomas**

Madathiparampil Mammen Thomas was born into a middle-class Syrian Christian family on 15 May, 1916, at Kavungumrayay in central Kerala.<sup>1</sup> He would become one of the great ecumenical theologians of the twentieth century, deeply concerned that the Christian Gospel would have a 'challenging relevance'<sup>2</sup> to the people struggling for justice and dignity in the midst of modern India. Following his

early involvement in the Indian Student Christian Movement and World Student Christian Fellowship,<sup>3</sup> M.M. Thomas became a member of the Asian working committee for the World Council of Churches programme “The Common Christian Responsibility towards Areas of Rapid Social Change” (1955). In 1957 the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (CISRS) was founded under the leadership of Paul Devanandan to study modern religious and secular movements of India. Following the death of Devanandan, Thomas became Director of CISRS (1961-1976), becoming “the architect and main thinker of Indian Christian social thought during the last decades.”<sup>4</sup> In 1962 Thomas chaired the World Council of Churches (WCC) working committee of Church and Society and in 1966 the Geneva conference on ‘Christians in the Technical and Social Revolutions of Our Time.’<sup>5</sup> In 1968, while attending the WCC fourth Assembly at Uppsala as a delegate from the Mar Thoma Church, Thomas became the first non-westerner and lay person to be elected Chair of the WCC central committee, fulfilling this role at the Fifth Assembly in Nairobi, 1975.<sup>6</sup> In 1990 Thomas was appointed Governor of Nagaland, although after two years the Indian government sought his resignation for encouraging the people to develop their “own views on their social and cultural future rather than acting as a pliant tool of the central government in New Delhi.”<sup>7</sup>

M.M. Thomas, prolific writer and theologian, died on December 3, 1996, a “father figure to numerous subaltern movements and social action groups.”<sup>8</sup> Robin Boyd notes that Thomas was a man, “deeply and intelligently committed to Christ, to the Church, to social and political justice, to Christian unity, and ultimately to the unity of the whole human race.”<sup>9</sup>



## 2.1 M.M. Thomas's theology: A karma maarga?

In his pioneer speech in Bangalore, Arvind P. Nirmal called for the emergence of a 'counter theology' to Brahminical Indian Christian theology in order to represent to the voice and experience of Dalit Christians.<sup>10</sup> A dichotomy within the theological realm of India was thus established, setting Dalit theology against Indian Christian theology. Within this dichotomy, Nirmal effectively categorised M.M. Thomas as an Indian Christian thinker influenced by the Brahminic tradition. In his oft quoted passage calling for a counter theology to emerge, Nirmal writes:

To speak in terms of the traditional Indian categories, Indian Christian Theology, following the Brahminical tradition, has trodden the jnana maarga, the bhakti maarga and the karma maarga...In M.M. Thomas we have a theologian who has contributed to theological anthropology at the international level and who laid the foundations for a more active theological involvement in India – the karma maarga.<sup>11</sup>

Thomas was thus classified as an Indian Christian theologian who worked on behalf of the elite,<sup>12</sup> considered more of a foe than an ally to Dalit theology. In other words, the categorization of M.M. Thomas as an exponent of karma m arga within a dichotomous methodology effectively dismissed Thomas's theology as irrelevant for Dalit theology. This may in part explain why there is only scant mention of M.M. Thomas in the writing of first generation Dalit theologians. Yet if it can be shown that Nirmal's assessment of Thomas is inadequate, this offers legitimate and important grounds for this thesis, which argues that M.M. Thomas contributed significant theological signposts for the emergence of Dalit theology. In this section I question the validity of Nirmal's classification of Thomas as an exponent of karma marga.

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

In the Introduction, caution was raised against Nirmal's dichotomous classification of theologians. It is argued here that such a classification fails to adequately locate the theology of M.M. Thomas. While it is clear that Thomas was well versed and influenced by the contributions of Indian Christian theologians,<sup>13</sup> his theological concern was not in relating the Christian message to classical expressions of Hindu religion and philosophy, but rather to nascent patterns of Hindu religious expression and the secular ideologies emerging in modern India. The theological endeavours and reflections of Indian theologians such as Paul Devanandan and M.M. Thomas reflect a theological approach distinct from the prevalent Indian Christian theological tradition. In this respect the clear cut dichotomy suggested by Nirmal blurs under closer scrutiny.

The term *marga* is a Sanskrit term used within the Hindu tradition to refer to a 'path' or way of salvation. In the Hindu tradition there are commonly three such paths to salvation, the *jñāna marga*, or path of knowledge, the *bhakti marga*, or path of devotion, and the *karma marga*, known as the path of action.<sup>14</sup> Nirmal had argued that because Indian Christian theology had trodden these three paths of the Brahminic tradition, Dalit theology must develop as a counter theology.<sup>15</sup>

Significantly, however, *karma marga* is a path towards union with God, relating to action in the world in order to attain liberation.<sup>16</sup> Certainly if we were to determine which of the Hindu *margas* comes closest to Thomas's thought, the answer would be the *karma marga*. While Thomas affirms the significance of Christian-Hindu dialogue at the level of mystical spiritual interiority, as pursued by Swami Abishiktananda,<sup>17</sup> he is critical of this approach if it leads to "the exclusion of all bodily and social exteriority, and a concentration on the eternal Christ to the exclusion of the historical Jesus."<sup>18</sup> Thomas considered 'humanism' and not 'divinism' to be the most appropriate theological meeting

point between Christianity and Hinduism, and sought to relate theology to responsible action within the context of the world towards humanisation and social transformation.<sup>19</sup>

Boyd correctly notes that Thomas's interest was in the Christian and Hindu meeting together "in the context of modern, secular India in order to find common fields of action and service for the good of the nation as a whole and of individual 'persons'."<sup>20</sup> In this light, M.M. Thomas appreciated the contribution of Rammohan Roy and Gandhi, who were concerned with the moral regeneration of Indian society, and Swami Vivekananda, who sought to demonstrate how Hinduism could take seriously the human values to which modern India was awakening.<sup>21</sup> Commenting on these Indian thinkers, Thomas writes: "Though from different angles, one from the social and one from the spiritual, both types of Neo-Hindus are dealing with the question of the relation between man's ultimate spiritual destiny and the regeneration of human society in modern Indian history."<sup>22</sup> Yet while positively affirming the quest of Neo-Hindu thinkers to relate spirituality to the regeneration of Indian society, Thomas viewed redemption in Christ to be the source of such transformation. The significance of this difference cannot be underestimated.

Given Thomas's desire to essentially relate faith and action, Boyd investigates the possibility of describing Thomas's approach as an 'enriched karma marga', recognising his endeavour to seek a path of 'loving, self-sacrificing service.'<sup>23</sup> While this is done positively, in order to assess the possibility of formulating a 'Christian karma marga', Boyd argues, significantly, that essential 'differences' must be considered.<sup>24</sup> Noting Thomas's desire for the Church in India to reconstruct Gandhian ethical insights within the framework of its doctrine of redemption in Christ, Boyd crucially identifies the difficulty in making an uncritical and unqualified identification of M.M. Thomas with karma marga.<sup>25</sup> Rather than affirm a path to salvation, M.M.

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

Thomas regarded action as a path of witness to the salvation offered in Christ.

Thomas writes:

We may find what is said on thinking, emotion, and action as parallel to the paths of Jnana, Bhakti, and Karma in Hinduism. But these understandings in Christianity and Hinduism have radical difference. In Christianity the only one path to God's presence is Christ; that means faith in Christ. Knowledge, devotion and action are means of expressing this faith in Christ; they are not paths in themselves

Here Thomas makes a fundamental distinction between the Hindu m argas and the Christian path in Christ. While Thomas affirms the necessity of faith seeking responsible action, this is merely an expression of faith in Christ and not a path in itself towards salvation. The karma m arga, as a path in itself, thus differs essentially from Thomas's understanding of Christ to reach God.<sup>26</sup>

Nirmal's classification of Thomas as an exponent of karma m arga fails, therefore, to appreciate Thomas's understanding of social action in relation to salvation and humanisation in Christ. Certainly Thomas objects to any form of human works or law as a path towards self-redemption, believing that transformation of community through action comes as a result of forgiveness of sin and divine Grace through Christ:

The Cross is the justification of sinful life and action through Divine forgiveness. This faith can liberate the political and social workers and the political and social movements from endless attempts at self-justification...The Christian doctrine of justification by faith in the Grace of God through Christ and not the works is of tremendous relevance to the transfiguration of politics and radical social change.<sup>27</sup>

## THEOLOGY OF MADATHILPARAMPIL MAMMEN THOMAS

The Hindu karma marga does not acknowledge the reality of the power of sin and the tragic depths of human action requiring forgiveness through the Cross, and thus fundamentally differs from Thomas's theological position. Only divine forgiveness, and not greater moral principles or moral law, can be the answer to sin.<sup>28</sup>

It is clear that Nirmal did not seek to classify M.M. Thomas as a theological exponent of karma marga in order to assess the positive fruits that may be born from such an investigation, as attempted by Boyd. Rather, Nirmal categorized M.M. Thomas from within a rigid methodological framework in order to exclude Thomas's contribution as irrelevant for Dalit theology. While whole-heartedly agreeing with the call of Nirmal for Dalits to participate in a theological realm which had been denied them, one may justifiably question the dichotomous methodology which so easily dismissed the theological contribution of M.M. Thomas. Indeed, arguing against Nirmal's assessment of Thomas, the path is opened to assess the relevance of M.M. Thomas's theological contribution for emerging Dalit theology

### 2.2. Theology of M.M. Thomas

This section offers an overview of M.M. Thomas's theology. Although Thomas himself warned against attempts to 'systematize an unsystematic body of writings',<sup>29</sup> this overview provides a necessary outline of Thomas theology. The writings of M.M. Thomas are prolific and diverse, and shifts in his thought can clearly be identified, as noted ably by T.M. Philip.<sup>30</sup> Thomas was confident that no final system of theology could adequately define the relation between God, Christ, humanity, the Church and the world.<sup>31</sup> His theological journey was an attempt to understand the changing context in which he lived in light of the Gospel, and to understand the Gospel in light of the context he lived. Thus Thomas's theology was open to challenge and change in the midst of a dynamic Indian context.

Yet it is possible to identify in Thomas's writing a core theological framework in which dynamic engagement with the shifting context takes place. While there is flexibility within this framework, allowing for essential adaptability as a result of such engagement, the paradigmatic framework itself remains fixed. The overriding framework of Thomas's theology is located in the paradigm of creation-fall-redemption-consummation. The paradigmatic centre of Thomas's theological framework is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Gospel, he writes, "is what God has done for the salvation of humankind through the life, death on the cross, resurrection, and glorification of Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>32</sup> Thus, Christology becomes the dynamic centre of Thomas's theology. For Thomas, the past, present and future are essentially bound together in Christ.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, K.P. Kuruvila correctly acknowledges that in Thomas's theology, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ cannot be separated from the whole Christ-event.<sup>34</sup> Thomas's theological assertion of New Humanity in Christ, which envisions the possibility of individual and social transformation that is central to Dalit theology, stems from Thomas's Christological interpretation of the Cross and Resurrection within the broader framework of creation-fall-redemption-consummation.

The following section identifies key theological elements which together establish a broader picture of Thomas's theology, necessary for providing a theological basis on which the research thesis can be assessed in discussion with Dalit theologians

### 2.3. Loving Fellowship with God

The love of God lies at the heart of Thomas's theology and Christological reflection, running as the central and constant stream through the paradigm of creation-fall-redemption-consummation. God's love is expressed in the creation of the world, and it was for love that God sent Christ to the world to redeem the world from sin. Building upon the theological foundation of God's love, Thomas considers the human person to be created by God for loving relationship. He writes: "God created the Universe that He

might share His life with many who would be His children. It was for God's fellowship that man was made, for, sharing in fellowship, is the very essence of true love.<sup>35</sup> Indeed Thomas suggests that God is "restless without man, moving towards us – through all his creation" in a bid to be in fellowship with humanity.<sup>36</sup> Thomas is not primarily interested in what he terms the "speculative metaphysical question of the 'essential being' of God as He is in Himself, or the 'Nature' of the person of Jesus."<sup>37</sup> Rather, he considers the primary concern of the Bible to be, "what God is in relation to man and in Jesus as God's revelation to men, and as God's deed for the redemption of mankind and human history."<sup>38</sup> Thus relationship of God to humankind and, consequently, the redemption of humankind become central to Thomas's theology. Rooted in divine love, "God's purpose is to create a family of men and women who reflect the glory of the true humanity that lives in him alone."<sup>39</sup>

The essence of true human being and personality, notes Thomas, is rooted in divine relationship, expressed in communion with God.<sup>40</sup> God desires to be in relationship with humankind and is like the prodigal's father, waiting anxiously to be re-united in fellowship with the son. God is like the woman searching for the lost coin, and like the shepherd who searches for the lost sheep.<sup>41</sup> And when the sheep is found: "How delighted he is then! He lifts it on his shoulders, and home he goes to call his friends and neighbours together. 'Rejoice with me!' he cries."<sup>42</sup> Thomas thus interprets the incarnation of Jesus in light of God's search for a dwelling place with humanity.

#### 2.4. Human Fellowship

God created humanity to be in relationship with one another in community: "It is as we realize our relationship with our heavenly Father that we realize our oneness with all humanity. As we rejoice in our sonship, we realize our true relationship with all men, at all times and in all places."<sup>43</sup> As Creator, God addresses the finite human as 'Thou',

and the person enters into 'communion with God' and 'community with neighbour'.<sup>44</sup> Thomas writes:

Two facts about man are proclaimed by the doctrine of creation. First, that the creative Will of God is the ground of man's essential being; second, that his being expresses itself in love, which is spontaneous mutuality. In other words, the end of man is communion with God and community with neighbour...We are by our nature a people of God. It means that worship and obedience to God, and reverence of and community with neighbour are correlatives of personality, and are the very essence of personal being.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the essence of being human is to be in relationship to God and neighbour within the community.<sup>46</sup> Yet the reality of sin and self-righteousness leads the human to rebel against God, thus becoming alienated from self and alienated from true community with neighbour.<sup>47</sup> The distortion of relationship finds ultimate reconciliation in the Cross and resurrection of Christ, viewed by Thomas as the 'focal point of the divine-human relationship'.<sup>48</sup>

## 2.5. Human creativity

It is clear from the Creation covenant, notes Thomas, that God bestowed on humankind 'a share in the divine creativity', affording humanity the power and responsibility to "cooperate with God in the continuance of the creation."<sup>49</sup> Humans were created by God to multiply, till the ground and make tools sufficient to produce food and other necessities in order to sustain the community of life on earth.<sup>50</sup> The transformation of nature through labour and stewardship are considered essential aspects of intrinsic human vocation.<sup>51</sup> Thomas writes: "One may say that human



creativity directed to world development including working of nature, building new tools, planning new societies, belongs to the essence of human freedom implanted in humanity as the 'image of God.'<sup>52</sup> The human vocation towards creative development and transformation in line with divine purpose for human relationship in community is thus considered a necessary part of human personality. Thus to deny participation in creativity and transformation is to deny the essence of divinely created personality.

Although sin perverted the human task of creativity and development, distorting the divine-human relationship and bringing strife and chaos to the world,<sup>53</sup> neither the human revolt against God, nor God's judgment, took away the human endowment towards creativity. Rather, sin introduced the potential for exploitation and destruction leading to the disintegration of society:

When sin did not destroy creativity, the murderous spirit of Cain, and the revengeful self-aggressive spirit of Lamech entered all Developmental creativity making them morally ambiguous and misdirecting to serve purposes of exploitation and oppression rather than humanness. This is the tragedy of the developmental creativity in human history...Human creativity becomes a destructive force and brings disintegration to community as judgment of God.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, human creativity is not lost as a result of sin. Rather, sin enters into the creative process as a 'destructive force' bringing 'disintegration to community'. This is an essential point in the development of Thomas's theology as he moves beyond an early resonance with liberal theology.<sup>55</sup> There is a tension between the creative capacity of humanity to work in accordance with the creative purpose of God in building true human community in Christ, and the continued disintegration of community as a result of sin. Significantly, however, the creative capacity for transformation of society is present as

part of the true essence of being human in Christ.

## 2.6. Individual sin

M.M. Thomas's understanding of sin is an essential component of his theological and Christological reflections. The title of an early work, *Christian Social Thought and Action – A Necessary Tragedy*, written in 1943, denotes Thomas's post-Enlightenment stance on the concept of human nature. Although Thomas will eventually move beyond this work, emphasising the power of the Cross for transformation beyond judgment, these early reflections are worth noting.

Thomas asks:

Man and society have their origin in the creative act of God. Therefore Jesus Christ the Incarnate God is the reality of every man, and the community of Grace is the reality of society. But does society fail to realize its destiny? Should it fail? Can we not build up a society which is the Kingdom of God? Why can't we if we ought? These questions need careful examination.<sup>56</sup>

Here Thomas's interpretation of sin relates both to the human individual and, significantly, to the building of society in accordance with the community of grace offered in Christ. Influenced by the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr, Nicholas Berdyaev, and C.H. Dodd, Thomas notes: "I was primarily interested in the theological interpretation of the loss of humanity in liberal individualism and totalitarian collective societies the meaning of true community and in that light, the Christian approach to Indian national ideologies, culture and politics."<sup>57</sup> Thomas thus sought to understand the personal dimension of human existence in relation to the broader community of persons, a factor he considered particularly relevant to the Indian quest for post-Independence nation building.<sup>58</sup> Here we detect the seeds of Thomas's attempt to

maintain in essential tension the person in community through the paradigm of koinonia-in-Christ, a paradigm which will subsequently be identified as significant for emerging Dalit theology.

With Enlightenment faith in the inherent goodness of humanity waning, given the tragedy of two World Wars, M.M. Thomas acknowledges the influence of Freud, Marx and Nietzsche, who “came to see deep down in man’s sub-conscious a principle of self-contradiction which disintegrates him and leads him and his civilization to death”.<sup>59</sup> The realization of the “dark abyss within the depths of human personality”, notes Thomas, turned Christianity away from its liberal humanist tendencies, towards a re-acceptance of the Christian doctrine of Original sin.<sup>60</sup> Thomas’s interpretation of the original sin is worth quoting at length:

It was a desire to be like God that led to the fall of Adam and Eve.

Man knew he was not the maker of the universe and the master of his destiny; that he was helpless without God, dependent on God, finite and a creature. But man wanted to be like God – self-sufficient, independent, and infinite; he wanted to be the Creator, the centre round which the whole universe revolved. And it was this rebellion of man against his own finite creature-hood – this anxiety to be self-sufficient and independent – in other words to be God, to have the world revolving round his self at its centre – it was this spiritual pride that marred the divine image that he was. This then is original sin – man’s declaration of independence of God or man’s desire to become God; his denial of the Lordship of God; making his own goodness ultimate – this is the original sin of man.<sup>61</sup>

M. M. Thomas interprets sin to be the rebellion of the finite human self from God. The ‘original’ sin of the human is the refusal of the spirit to acknowledge the sovereignty of

God, worshipping self rather than God.<sup>62</sup> Alienation from the true essence of being in relationship to God leads to alienation from the true self.

Here Thomas interprets sin in individualistic terms, although his concern has significant implications for the wider community. The first is the tendency to make 'absolute' the partial community, such as caste, race or nation.<sup>63</sup> The second is the effect that sin has on relationship to neighbour. For Thomas, when the human assumes the role of God, so too does he assume the role of God over neighbour.<sup>64</sup> Instead of reverence for the mystery of the other, the other becomes an object for exploitation in the vain hope of self-grandeur and self-justification, causing inevitable conflict and division, enemy and slave.<sup>65</sup> He writes:

A conflict is set up within man between his asserted independence and the awareness of the reality of his dependence. And he tries to resolve this intolerable tension by trying to forget this dependence by changing relationships with his neighbours; he imposes himself as a god over them. Instead of 'meeting' them in reverence, he seeks to 'absorb or use' them.<sup>66</sup>

The reality of sin thus has direct consequences for human relationship. Alienation of self leads to alienation from neighbour, leading to the disintegration of human community.

There is no Pelagian optimism for Thomas in the capacity of humanity to act in obedience to the will of God. The self-righteousness of the human, in accordance with St. Paul, prevents the human from doing the good intended.<sup>67</sup> The world cannot realize its true being without the redemptive power of Christ. All human attempts for righteousness will be unsuccessful.<sup>68</sup> Influenced by C.H. Dodd, Thomas notes that at the time of Christ, there were plenty of human movements striving for 'good': The

Jewish nationalist movement produced the 'finest flower of Jewish heroism' and was a great movement for human freedom; the Jewish religion and law produced their 'finest flower in the Pharisee', standing upright for moral law and ethical righteousness; Imperial Rome sought peace and unity, law and order, in a bid to unite the world.<sup>69</sup> Thomas writes of these movements: "The best achievements of man in Church and State, in politics and religion – these three, the great forces of good and righteousness in the ancient world – they crucified Christ...herein is original sin revealed – as a principle of contradiction, as pride, that turns every human righteousness into its very opposite."<sup>70</sup> Sin does not mean the absence of 'goodness', but rather the infection of the good by the spirit of self-sufficiency.<sup>71</sup>

There can therefore be no division between the good and the evil, just and unjust, for all fall under the grace of God in Christ.<sup>72</sup> Thomas writes in reference to this inner contradiction: "The devil is not the brute in man, as we sometimes think; the devil is always the proud angel in man."<sup>73</sup> In light of this reality M.M. Thomas cautions against the sinful tendency present in the midst of liberating movements seeking justice. He writes:

All liberation movements are prone to collective self-justification and self-righteousness and is likely to end in seeing itself as the Messiah or Saviour; the self-idolatry becomes the source of a new oppression...Here the gospel of forgiveness or justification by faith has great relevance to collective liberation movements, in moulding their spirituality for struggle, liberating the liberal movements from becoming self-righteous.<sup>74</sup>

The Cross of Christ, for Thomas, becomes the central paradigm for overcoming the sinful tendency to self-righteousness, and thus essentially relevant to the pluralistic

religio-secular context of India.

## 2.7. Corporate sin

M.M. Thomas affirms the 1975 World Council of Churches Report on 'Structures of Injustice and Struggles for Liberation', acknowledging that evil works not only through the individual person but also through the "exploitative social structures which humiliate [hu]mankind".<sup>75</sup> Thomas writes: "Today, more than ever before, we have become aware that the corporate structures of oppression and injustice have behind them the support and sanction of demonic spirits of idolatry of creatures of race, nation and class, absolutised by human worship."<sup>76</sup> While sin has a consequence for the human individual, the liberating power of God in Christ must, according to Thomas, transform not only the person but also the oppressive structures of society, demanding a struggle for economic justice and political freedom in the context of human existence.<sup>77</sup>

M.M. Thomas admits that during his early student days, following a deep evangelical experience of conversion in his personal life, he was indifferent to the social evils present around him.<sup>78</sup> Influenced by Jawaharlal Nehru, Karl Marx and Mahatma Gandhi, however, Thomas began to be awakened to the reality of evil structural forces. Although Nehru was a secular humanist, he had often used the term 'demonic' in reference to the caste system. Marx saw in the economic system a built-in power of alienation responsible for the reality of poverty and oppression in India, a fetish system perceived by the people to be mysterious and spiritual.<sup>79</sup>

Gandhi had spoken of the satanic forces of modern materialistic civilization, and the need to fight in the world of politics against 'satanic forces'.<sup>80</sup> During the struggle for responsible government and social justice in nation-building India, Thomas became engrossed in the study of Indian society. During this period he became conscious that

corporate human life was under the power of a “spirit of perversity, some structure of evil, the demonic.”<sup>81</sup> This realization prompted a significant shift early in his theology, viewing sin, and thus redemption in Christ, as essentially corporate as well as individual: “That traditional and modern corporate structures of Indian society were under the sway of demons, fetishes and satanic forces which have to be fought came as an important discovery for me.”<sup>82</sup>

Significantly, however, Thomas does not interpret sin as a force beyond human nature, thus denying human responsibility for evil. Rather, he understands corporate sin as integrally related to the sins of self-righteous individuals: “The human self stands in vital relation to structures of society, dynamics of history and the material creation. Therefore, idolatry and sin pervert these corporate relationships and make them demonic. And therefore redemption from sin must mean victory over the corporate demons.”<sup>83</sup> This does not mean, however, that the solution to corporate sin finds any easy resolution through redemption of individual sin. While not diminishing the reality of individual sin, Thomas stresses that no ‘individual salvation’ can alone change oppressive structures and dehumanising institutions. There is a need for ‘corporate salvation’ in the resurrected Christ, who is ‘victorious over structures of evil’<sup>84</sup>

Gandhi’s search for a religious spirituality to combat the spiritual evils present in the corporate life of India had a deep impact on Thomas, prompting in depth Bible study with other members of the Student Christian Movement of Kerala. Thomas found in the Bible, “not merely the Christ who brought divine forgiveness to individuals but also the Christ’s victory over ‘principalities and powers.’”<sup>85</sup> He considered these principalities and powers as “the sins of idolatry of many generations accumulated and institutionalised in social structures, economic systems and cultural traditions and which have acquired an independent momentum in our common life and on individuals now

living.”<sup>86</sup> Thomas was deeply conscious and concerned about the effects of corporate sin in the lives of those exploited by economic, political, religious and cultural structures of Indian society.

The significance of this period in Thomas’s life and for his theology cannot be overlooked. For Thomas, the process of nation-building essentially included the search for ‘spirituality’ conducive to the pursuit of social justice and humanity for the victims of corporate sin in India. M.M. Thomas’s reflections on corporate sin are thus undertaken with a deep theological concern for human community. He believed Christ to be victorious over every power of evil obstructing true human community, and thus crucial for contemporary India:<sup>87</sup> “Certainly sin has its corporate expression in the dehumanizing spiritual forces of corporate life, the demons of principalities and powers; and the victory of Christ over them and salvation in Christ must find its manifestation in power over these forces as power for the humanisation of our structures of collective existence.”<sup>88</sup> Only in Christ could the obstacles to human community be overcome.

## 2.8. God acts in History

For Thomas, God’s relationship to humanity and the world is essentially historical. God acts and relates to humanity and the world within history, beginning with creation: “Yahweh reveals his actions in the history of humankind. The history of the world is the history of God’s [covenantal] promises to the humans, and their fulfilment; in fact they appear as events in history.”<sup>89</sup> God created humanity, a humanity capable of responding to God and discerning God’s purposes for the world (Gen.1:27; 2:7, 22, 5:1-3, 24; 6:9; 9:9); God punished humanity that rejected responsibility to God and neighbour, contrary to the purpose of God (Gen. 3:16-19, 23-24; 4:1-13; 7:21; 11:8).<sup>90</sup> The consequence of sin in the world resulted in the judgment of God, yet God resisted the temptation to destroy humanity through the flood, and entered into a covenant of



Preservation with the fallen world through Noah.<sup>91</sup> God's initial contempt for the wickedness of the heart of humanity, leading to the divine pronouncement: "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground",<sup>92</sup> shifted to the compassionate proclamation: "neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done."<sup>93</sup> Rather than allow history to end in natural tragedy, God proposes a 'remedy for destruction.'<sup>94</sup> Thus the covenant of 'preservation' with Noah re-established the order of creation, introducing a rule of law and order. Given the human tendency to selfishness, God developed instruments of legal justice to limit the destructive human potential, establishing laws against human wickedness and introducing the seeds of mutual human accountability.<sup>95</sup>

These laws were established to preserve the dignity of human life within sinful society.<sup>96</sup>

The preservation of the fallen world through God's covenant with Noah has meaning, notes Thomas, in light of God's ultimate plan to root out sinfulness from the spirit of humanity, as witnessed through the third covenant, the covenant of Redemption made with Abraham.<sup>97</sup> This covenant was the "first step in the history of the mighty acts of God for the redemption of humanity from sin itself".<sup>98</sup> Thomas is critical, however, that the Abrahamic covenant of redemption is often separated from the history of the Adamic and Noahic covenants, leading to a false understanding of the meaning of redemption.<sup>99</sup> Thomas argues that the election of a specific community by God through Abraham must be read in wider context of the covenants made for all humanity. Only then can the ultimate purpose of God to bless 'all the families of the earth' be truly comprehended.<sup>100</sup> Only in this context, set within the framework of a universal beginning and a universal end encompassing all humanity

can the specific election, identity and mission to the people of Israel be interpreted.<sup>101</sup> This becomes essential to understanding Thomas's reflections on the relation between Church and the world through the paradigm of koinonia- in-Christ. God acts in history for the redemption of all humanity from the alienation of sin and disintegration of community.

## 2.8. Human Community, Law and Justice

The integral relationship between 'law' and 'liberation' becomes clear for Thomas through the covenant at Mt. Sinai. The people of Israel are reminded that God's act of liberation is foundational for God's covenant relationship with them.

Indeed, notes Thomas, the Ten Commandments begin: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage (Exod.20:2)." <sup>102</sup> Thus, the law is a symbol of divine grace, with no contradiction between the two.<sup>103</sup>

In the context of liberation from slavery in Egypt, the laws given at Mt. Sinai highlight that God reveals a concern for 'freedom and justice of the human community.'<sup>104</sup> The divine vocation given to Israel is to create a community where there is no slavery, manifesting the dignity of humanity created in God's own image, and observing mutual responsibilities for human justice.<sup>105</sup> All ordinances given by Moses to the people affirmed human dignity before God, including the right of human life and the responsibility for social ordering rendering justice to the poor, orphans and aliens.<sup>106</sup> Failure to observe these laws in favour of justice within the community resulted in divine anger and judgment: "The LORD's anger is kindled against those who oppress the poor and the down-trodden, and it brings judgment on the community."<sup>107</sup>

The integral relationship between devotion to God and God's justice within social life is found, notes Thomas, in the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament, which condemned human piety at the expense of justice. God shows favour to the poor and the oppressed within the Israelite community, just as God showed favour to the oppressed in Egypt.<sup>108</sup> Once again, however, Thomas stresses that the divine laws within prophetic discourse are not restricted to the Israelite community, but concerned with the whole of humankind: "Just as God created all humankind he also executes judgment over all humankind. Amos says that Yahweh's justice is equally applicable to Damascus (1:3), Gaza (1:6), Tyre (1:9), Edom (1:11), Ammonites (1:13), Moab (2:1), Judah (2:4) and Israel (2:6)."<sup>109</sup> Further, Thomas acknowledges that the liberation of any society from slavery is a result of the pressure from Yahweh. Just as God liberated the Israelites from Egypt, so has God acted as liberator in the history of other communities, as noted in Amos 9:7: "Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel?" says the LORD. 'Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir?"<sup>110</sup> Significantly, if any nation or people are liberated then it is due to God's powerful act within history for the fulfilment of God's purposes, "whether they recognize this truth or not."<sup>111</sup>

Despite the prophetic call for justice, however, the law was unable to destroy the rebellious spirit of the people who continued to be unfaithful to God. Thus the prophetic voice foresaw the emergence of a new covenant:

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt,...I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.<sup>112</sup>

This new covenant would be offered to all people until justice had been established across the earth (Isa: 42:4-7), with the creation of a new humanity liberated from the slavery of 'all Pharaohs.'<sup>113</sup> Through the new covenant, established in Jesus Christ, the "social, liberation purposes underlying the old covenant, and which was incapable of getting practiced on the basis of it, will get realised powerfully in history."<sup>114</sup> In his early meditations, *The Realization of the Cross*, Thomas writes:

When thus God sent his own Son into the world to befriend the sinner and to seek and save the lost, the very essence of the humanity which is of God was revealed in all its fullness. In a real sense it became available for the human race...The very nature of God's relationship with man was unveiled in him as a fact in history – the fact we call Redemption.<sup>115</sup>

### 3. The Christology of M.M. Thomas

The theology of M.M. Thomas cannot be understood apart from his Christology, for he views the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as the guarantee of God's redemptive purpose for humanity. Christ thus becomes the central focus of the creation-fall-redemption-consummation paradigm.<sup>116</sup> Although Thomas's Christology is examined as a separate unit here, it remains integrally connected to and continuous with the observations made in the previous section.

#### 3.1. The Incarnation of Christ

M.M. Thomas interprets the salvation act of God in Jesus Christ to be a historical event representing the goal of human history.<sup>117</sup> Reflecting on the core message of the Christian Gospel, he writes: "It is for the...sake of the world that God became man in Jesus Christ. The heart of the gospel is that God loved the world so much that he gave his only begotten Son to be its salvation (John 3:16),

that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:9).<sup>118</sup> The Incarnation of God as a human person in relationship with other human persons becomes “the spiritual basis of the dignity and rights of human beings as persons in society.”<sup>119</sup> It is, the revelation of the truth that the universe itself is personal in nature. Human beings have inalienable rights only in the light of God’s relation with them as persons, as manifested in the incarnation. The Gospel has been a message of dignity and hope for the outcaste and the poor wherever a living church has communicated the gospel of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>120</sup>

Challenging the thoughts of Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda, Thomas emphasised the importance of the historical Jesus. Vivekananda had spoken of the uncertainty of a religion and a human salvation which depended upon a historical person: “If there is one blow to the historicity of that life...the whole building tumbles down, never to regain its lost status.”<sup>121</sup> Stressing the Hindu precedence on relating salvation to ‘principles’, Vivekananda argued:

It is in vain if we try to gather together all the peoples of the world around a single personality. It is difficult to make them gather together around eternal and universal principles. If it ever becomes possible to bring the largest portion of humanity to one way of thinking in regard to religion, mark you, it must always be through principles and not through persons.<sup>122</sup>

While not discounting the reality of Jesus’ historicity, Vivekananda questions whether this historicity holds any theological significance for a spiritual faith.<sup>123</sup> Gandhi had argued that proof or otherwise of Jesus’ life would not diminish the validity of the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>124</sup> Thomas quotes Gandhi, who wrote: “it would be poor comfort to the world, if it had to depend upon a historical God who died

2000 years ago...Do not then preach the God of history but show Him as He lives today through you.”<sup>125</sup>

In response, M.M. Thomas argued:

Probably one of the most significant tasks for a theology of mission is to restate the significance of the historicity of the Person of Jesus within the essential core of the Christian message. It is only if a historical event belongs to the essence of the Christian Gospel that historical human existence can acquire a positive relation to our eternal salvation.<sup>126</sup>

Elsewhere Thomas writes: “The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ of Nazareth understood as the culmination of God’s revelatory activity is the most indubitable proof that the world of history is the sphere of God’s mighty works and the object of God’s love.”<sup>127</sup>

Certainly M.M. Thomas did not dismiss the significance of the spiritual and moral principles of Jesus Christ which had been so significant in the lives of many Indians, including Ram Mohan Roy and Mahatma Gandhi. Indeed Thomas called for further theological exploration concerning the relationship between ‘principle’ and ‘person’, which he considered to be similar to the relationship between Law and Grace. The principle, he notes, when made self-sufficient and autonomous, inevitably falls into the spirit of self-righteousness, thus introducing contradiction and ultimately tragedy into its strivings for moral regeneration. Thomas quotes the words of John Mathai: “There is a distinction well observed in the teaching of Christ: knowledge of right is not the same thing as the power to do right.”<sup>128</sup> In a critical examination of the thoughts of Gandhi, M.M. Thomas argues that the human search for self-righteousness cannot be overcome by ‘more moral principles’, but rather through the power of Divine forgiveness offered in Christ.<sup>129</sup> Thus the significance of the Gospel lies beyond mere moral principle or philosophic doctrine, and must be viewed as historic news which is bound to the

historical person of Christ, the bearer of salvation for all humankind.<sup>130</sup>

### 3.2. The Cross of Christ

We may agree with T.M. Philip that as Christology lies at the heart of M.M. Thomas's theology, so does the Cross lie at the heart of his Christology.<sup>131</sup> In this section I shall examine Thomas's interpretation of the Cross as it relates to God's love, the victory of Christ over principalities and powers and to Divine forgiveness and Grace.

M.M. Thomas writes of the Cross of Christ: "The cross was the supreme fact in the life of Jesus. It was the supreme moment in the manifestation of God's own life, the moment when he revealed his very self in relation to the human race."<sup>132</sup> In a contemporary world which seems indifferent to human relations, human beings long to love and be loved. The Cross overcomes the tragedy of lovelessness as a consequence of self-love: "The Cross reveals God and His purpose for His whole creation as Love. It gives the assurance that the universe has at its centre not a Chaos, not even a cold, calculating Mind, but a Cross – i.e. a heart throbbing for all men with understanding, suffering and forgiving love."<sup>133</sup>

Through the Cross, God's love and desire to be in relationship to humanity is fully revealed. In response to human sin and ignorance, God's love is voluntarily given for the forgiveness of sin.<sup>134</sup> It is a self-emptying act of redemptive love whereby all may enter into fellowship with God and express this love in community with neighbour. In a devotional prayer Thomas writes: "Father, every time we wander away from your presence, we hurt you afresh and make you unhappy. But your love never fails to pursue us, and you love us out of our sinfulness."<sup>135</sup> Through the Cross of Christ, God literally 'loves' sinful humanity 'out of our sinfulness'. It is this love, expressed so clearly in the Cross of Christ, which becomes the foundation for the divine-human relationship

and for true human community.

The Cross, for Thomas, represents a “decisive historical event in which God drives out the Prince of this world”.<sup>136</sup> Through the Cross and resurrection sin is overcome, and thus interpreted as victory over all structures of evil, and finally death itself.<sup>137</sup> Recollecting a visit to Oslo in a 1954 sermon, Thomas writes:

I remember visiting the Vigeland Park in Oslo, where I saw carved in stone, a man struggling with a big lizard representing humanity’s struggle with the cosmic powers of evil. In that story, man gets finally crushed to death by the lizard. If that is the ultimate truth about man, then life and labour are all in vain. But from Vigeland’s Park one goes to the Oslo Cathedral and the theme of the famous paintings of the ceiling is Christus Victor – Christ victorious over the dragon through the Cross, Christ reigning over the cosmic powers, Christ coming again as the Lord of Glory – these are the pictures – pictures that speak of deliverance from the powers of evil, offered to man in Christ Jesus.<sup>138</sup>

This provides a wonderful insight into M.M. Thomas’s reflections on the Cross as victory over principalities and powers, here represented as the lizard crushing the life of humanity. The image of Christ as Christus Victor is thus central to Thomas’s theology.<sup>139</sup> Through Christ’s death and resurrection humanity is redeemed from sin, that is, from human rebellion and broken relationship with God.<sup>140</sup> Thomas writes: “At the Cross of Christ, the utter devastatingness of God’s judgment upon guilt and the utter self-giving, forgiving love and identification with which God embraces the sinner are revealed.”<sup>141</sup> The juxtaposition of judgement and forgiveness is evident in the Cross event. It is this reality, experienced not as a once for all but daily reality, which provides the basis for Thomas’s optimism, and caution, in the struggle for



humanisation, justice and social transformation.

In a sermon delivered in Dimapur, 1991, M.M. Thomas asks: "What is the secret of human community?"<sup>142</sup> Here Thomas reflects on the power of moral law, scientific advancement or philosophical knowledge as sources of communion with God and neighbour. Obedience to moral law is certainly of importance, he suggests, challenging moral lawlessness. Yet, while moral law may be considered a pointer to divine love, the moral legalist approach of obedience to duty cannot by itself create true community.<sup>143</sup> Even when one zealously seeks to serve one's neighbour, 'inner conflict' means that such action is conducted in "utter self-righteousness and self-love...without any real love of neighbour."<sup>144</sup> Quoting from I Corinthians, Thomas writes: "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing."<sup>145</sup> Noting Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the Publican praying in the temple, Thomas observes that the Pharisee alienates himself from both God and from neighbour because of his devotion to a moral law which affirms superiority over the Publican.<sup>146</sup> The path of moral law cannot be the ultimate path of community because it can too easily become self-centred and thus anti-community.

M.M. Thomas also acknowledges the potential benefits for the development of human community resulting from scientific and technological knowledge, as well as modern education:

Let us not minimise the achievements of reason and science. It has made the world one; and I know how much education has meant for the villagers of India in freeing them from ignorance and superstition and how much science and technics may mean to lift up the hungry millions, how much scientific medicine can mean to a village which by habit has come to think of every disease as due to a spell of

some evil power. Knowledge certainly means power and freedom, in one sense.<sup>147</sup>

Yet, he adds, such knowledge is inadequate to create true community, as evidenced by the continued exploitation of one nation over another, and the growing gulf being between rich and the poor. While it may be true that knowledge has produced new ideas relating to inter-personal relationship and inter-cultural community, “it has also added new power to the traditional oppressor and created new forms of oppression throughout the world.”<sup>148</sup>

In a similar fashion, M.M. Thomas disputes the possibility of philosophical knowledge for creating true human community. Referring to the jñāna path of spiritual knowledge, Thomas acknowledges the importance of knowledge of spiritual communion with the whole of creation, but adds critically that the ‘spirituality of cosmic unity’ has often accepted inequality within human society, as evidenced in the caste system of India.<sup>149</sup>

In light of the above, Thomas asks: “If thus moral law cannot create community and if knowledge, scientific, philosophical or spiritual cannot do it, what is the path to overcome alienation of persons and peoples from one another and to reconcile them to create community?”<sup>150</sup> His answer brings us again to the heart of his theology; the Cross of Christ: “The New Testament says that it is to be found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. At the foot of the Cross, all human beings and peoples find themselves to be one in the sin of crucifying God incarnate and one in the realization of Divine forgiveness, in the mercy of God freely and undeservedly given.”<sup>151</sup> At the foot of Christ humanity finds both judgment of sin and the redemptive grace of God’s forgiveness. At the Cross humanity finds the key to true human community, bound together in the redemption of God through Christ.

The issue of forgiveness in the context of hierarchical caste hegemony remains a significant concern for Dalit theologians, an issue to be addressed in subsequent chapters. Significantly, Thomas does not seek to shy away from the reality of division in India. Indeed, it is precisely within the context of divisiveness that he considers the Cross essential: "It is here that the experience of human solidarity in sin and forgiving grace at the foot of the Cross of Christ becomes a source of a vision of a new humanity transcending diverse communities but also of a reconciling power breaking down or lowering the walls of partition between them."<sup>152</sup>

### 3.3. The Resurrection of Christ

M.M. Thomas writes that the Cross of Jesus Christ without the resurrection is nothing but a grim tragedy.<sup>153</sup> The reality of resurrection provides the believer with a sense of security and a "conviction that God is ultimately in control and his purposes for us are good and eternal."<sup>154</sup> Significantly, Thomas stresses the importance of the bodily resurrection of Christ: "If Christ rose in the body, the redemption he wrought was not merely of my spirit or soul, but one of the whole of me, body, mind and soul, and of the whole relationship to nature and men."<sup>155</sup> Redemption in Christ could not, for Thomas, be interpreted merely as a message of human spirituality, but must be concerned with the wholeness of the human being, humanity and creation. The bodily resurrection of Jesus emphasises, in line with Pauline theology, that the body is a vital element of human personhood to be redeemed.<sup>156</sup> Thus the body, and the material existence of everyday life, are essential components of redeemed personality.

M.M. Thomas essentially opposes a 'lopsided' Christian understanding of salvation perceived in purely spiritual and individualistic terms. Quoting from a study of village Christians in Andhra, South India, which highlighted an exclusive spiritualistic interpretation of salvation, Thomas notes that Christians "worship Jesus for the salvation of their souls while they worship village deities for harvest, health

and well-being.”<sup>157</sup> By acknowledging God as Lord of all creation, with a concern for the welfare of humanity and the created order, Thomas theologically posits that liberation cannot but include the concern for health, economic welfare and social justice.<sup>158</sup> He writes: “God is concerned, not merely with saving souls for heaven but with saving the whole human being – including his/her life in the body, life in society, life of relation with the world of nature, the earth and the sun, the forests, mountains and oceans – that is human beings in their totality as bodily, social and spiritual persons.”<sup>159</sup> Redemption is not limited to the future when Christ comes again, but is realised in part within history. In the resurrection of Christ the power of the Kingdom of God moves “into the history of mankind taking control of the powers of this world and bringing men to righteousness of God in which the New Age has arrived.”<sup>160</sup> Thomas writes:

His empty tomb shows that the Kingdom of God has already come and broken into this world of sin. Death is already conquered as the last enemy. God has vindicated His Son, His only Son. Creator assumed creaturehood but returns to sharing the glory of the Father. He ascends to His Father and yet He says He is always with us. He has broken the barriers of space and time and the material world. Mary recognises the Lord when he calls her. Each one of us is named and He calls us by our name, to be partakers of His victory, members of His Kingdom, here and now and for ever more!<sup>161</sup>

Thomas confesses the difficulty in grasping this concept: “The inter-relation of the resurrection faith, the heavenly hope and the dynamism for the renewal of life now is always difficult to grasp and more difficult to stay with.”<sup>162</sup> Yet it is within this tension that the resurrection message becomes significant as the source of hope for

the transformation of society and human relations within the contemporary world.

### 3.4. Forgiveness

Asked to reflect upon one aspect of faith that had been particularly important throughout his theological life, M.M. Thomas responded: "it was not difficult to come to the conclusion that it was the Gospel of Divine Forgiveness offered in the Crucified and Risen Lord Jesus."<sup>163</sup> At a personal level, the forgiveness of God offered at the Cross gives to personal life a sense of worth and destiny, despite any moral, intellectual or spiritual despair.<sup>164</sup> He adds:

But it also gives him/her a realization of solidarity with all men and women before God, both in sin and divine forgiveness and opens up the vision and power of a new human fellowship and a new humanity in Christ. In that sense the divine forgiveness offered in Christ is deeply social in character, and provides the source, the criterion and goal of the struggle everywhere today for new societies which can do justice to the dignity of the human being.<sup>165</sup>

The Cross is where human self-centredness is broken and restored under Divine grace to form a new human solidarity based upon mutual forgiveness.<sup>166</sup> As the human person acknowledges humbly the divine forgiveness offered through Christ, so too are they open to affirm their, "oneness with all men as sinners forgiven and as brothers for whom Christ Jesus died."<sup>167</sup> Human fellowship is thus a fellowship of forgiven sinners.<sup>168</sup> The distinction made between race, religion, caste, class, and nation, have little importance when viewed in light of the divine forgiveness at the foot of the Cross. Thomas writes: "All are brothers and equal in the light of the forgiveness God had given to all in Christ."<sup>169</sup> Thus divine forgiveness has implications beyond the

personal as the basis for social transformation. Indeed divine forgiveness is the only basis in which the enemy can become a true brother or sister.<sup>170</sup> Thomas argues: “The community of forgiven sinners becomes also the beginning of a New Humanity in History. It transcends all division of nature and history because it is based on the common acknowledgement of solidarity in sin and Divine Forgiveness.”<sup>171</sup> Thomas’s reflections on forgiveness are central to his reflections on the role Christianity could play in the nation-building search of newly independent India.

### 3.5. New Humanity in Christ

New Humanity in Christ is a key paradigm for M.M. Thomas’s theological reflection, framed within the broader paradigm of creation-fall-redemption-consummation. Thomas rejects the notion that redemption in Christ is a ‘return to the paradise lost,’ <sup>172</sup> suggesting that in Christ there is a new reality ‘pregnant with the promise and power of renewal’.<sup>173</sup> The basic weakness of law in the Old Testament, notes Thomas, is that it could not ultimately provide a solution to humanity’s spiritual rebellion against God.<sup>174</sup> The prophetic tradition promised a new Moses in which humankind would be ‘liberated from all Pharaohs’, leading to the creation of a new humanity and a new human race.<sup>175</sup> The fulfilment of the prophetic tradition is found in Jesus Christ, through whom a new covenant is established with humanity and all creation. This Messiah comes not to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them. (Mat. 5:17)<sup>176</sup> While the law was unable to deliver humanity from the sin of self-justification and self-righteousness, the Cross of Christ reveals the love and grace of God for sinful humanity, a love which “eradicates self-love and enmity to God which is at the spiritual centre of the human person.”<sup>177</sup> The Gospel is thus the message of a Christ who makes all things new: God by raising Jesus Christ from the dead makes all things new. At the Cross, all things are exposed as nothing and judged worthy only of death and annihilation. But in the Resurrection of Jesus, God not only raises Jesus from

the dead, but out of nothing He also brings into being, in the Risen Christ, a new world, a new creation...In Christ, 'Old things are passed away: behold all things are become new.'<sup>178</sup>

In Jesus Christ, the redemptive purpose of God for creation is revealed in terms of reconciliation to God and the creation of a human community founded in love.<sup>179</sup> The redemption hoped for in the Old Testament becomes a present reality within the world following the death and resurrection of Christ, releasing a "universal power within and between the divided communities destroying the spirit of enmity and creating a ferment of genuine humanism working towards the unity of all humanity and all creation."<sup>180</sup> New Humanity in Christ offers the possibility of transformation of the pattern of life in the world.<sup>181</sup> Humanity is thus called to discern the presence and activity of Christ, becoming co-workers with Christ for the renewal of the world.<sup>182</sup> This means working, in response to the divine forgiveness in Christ, to renew structures of society to develop a true human community.

To the extent that human beings live in the realm of the redemptive love of Christ, argues M.M. Thomas, they are 'released from the law.'<sup>183</sup> Yet Thomas is clear that humanity lives between the present and the future consummation of the Kingdom of God. In Christ the "New Age has been inaugurated in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ", but history is moving towards the time of ultimate redemption of all things in the Consummation of the Kingdom of God.<sup>184</sup> Being free from the law, therefore, does not mean that laws are not necessary within society: Christians like everyone else are self-centred and need checks to self aggression and exploitation. Perfect love is not a possibility in this fallen world whether we are Christians or others...True "there is no room for fear in love; perfect love banishes fear" (1 John4:18). Till perfection comes in the end, sinful human beings will always need the fear of moral law in their own

conscience, and when that fails the fear of the law of State, with the Police behind it.  
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In the 'penultimate' reality of the world before the end in Christ, when creativity can turn so easily into destruction and exploitation, questions of law and justice demand constant revision and accountability. Here the Cross becomes not a once for all occurrence but a vital daily reality in the world, challenging structures of power manifest in the form of class, caste or nation, in order to redress the balance of power in favour of justice.

### 3.5. Consummation of the Kingdom

In a sermon to a group of graduating students at United Theological College, Bangalore, M.M. Thomas reminds those gathered of the core of Christian Gospel message: "Then comes the end, when he [Jesus] delivers the Kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet."<sup>186</sup> (I Cor. 15:24-25) Here Thomas points to the end, when Christ delivers the Kingdom to God. Expressing the significance of this passage, he writes:

This whole Corinthian passage is most significant for an understanding of the Gospel of Christ. It speaks of its various dimensions. It is the Gospel of the Risen Christ as the guarantee of the resurrection of all men in Christ. It is the gospel of the kingly rule of Christ, overcoming sin and all the structures of evil, and finally death itself, and of the end-event, namely the conversion of the kingdoms of this world into the Kingdom of God through Christ.<sup>187</sup>

Ultimately, therefore, salvation is interpreted by Thomas in eschatological terms. The Christian creed declares the whole of creation to be reconciled to God in Christ,



who will come again in glory to consummate His Kingdom, the final point and ultimate meaning for history.<sup>188</sup> The Kingdom of God on earth cannot be conceived or achieved by a sinful humanity.<sup>189</sup> Christian eschatology points to the fulfilment of the historical destiny of the created order, a consummation which relates to the world of persons but has essential social and cosmic implications: "All things will be summed up in Him [Christ] in the end."<sup>190</sup> There is an eschatological hope in Christ beyond history.

When the Kingdom of God finally comes, it must "come as the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven, with judgment and redemption on the social history, which by itself cannot fulfil its destiny."<sup>191</sup> Thomas does not, therefore, consider humanisation and salvation to be identical. Rather, he considers humanisation to be integrally related to salvation.<sup>192</sup> The reality of the consummation of all things in Christ does not mean that Christian life is "suspended between a 'has been' and a 'not yet'."<sup>193</sup> Christian life is more than simply living between the resurrection and consummation.<sup>194</sup> It is concerned with responsible living in the world towards a new humanity in Christ whose ultimate reality is eschatological. Thus, for Thomas: "Salvation remains eschatological, but the historical responsibility within the eschatological framework cannot but include the task of humanisation of the world in secular history."<sup>195</sup>

While there is no continuity between the historical and the eschatological, there are however, "infinite possibilities of the eschatological becoming historical."<sup>196</sup> The message of divine forgiveness in Christ is not to be considered merely 'beyond history', and therefore beyond politics the struggle for power in the worldly realm.<sup>197</sup> Rather it is a message of power to transform the world in order that humanity may become 'more human.'<sup>198</sup> The historical and the eternal are inter-related in that there is a "reality of

the historical and the human in the eternal, and the presence of the eternal in the historical and the human.”<sup>199</sup> While the most perfect human society, bound by sin, cannot be equated with the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of ‘resurrection-life’ does not start beyond death, but begins and is ‘partially realised’ within the dimension of history.<sup>200</sup> Thus the goal of the Church and the Christian community is to translate its eschatological hope into partial but time-bound historical hopes.<sup>201</sup>

### 3.6. Solidarity with the oppressed

K.P. Kuruvila notes that there is no thorough discussion within M.M. Thomas’s writings regarding God and suffering. Yet Kuruvila correctly acknowledges that Thomas’s affirmation of the crucifixion of Jesus as “the symbol of God as suffering love identifying himself with the agony of oppressed humanity”<sup>202</sup> is an ever present theme in Thomas’s theology.<sup>203</sup> Despite a universal understanding of sin, Thomas acknowledges the reality of the oppressed within humanity, victims of injustice and exploitation at the hands of corporate structures motivated by individual and collective self-righteousness. Thus the demand for justice is a prevalent concern within Thomas’s writings based on his theological understanding of the love and purpose of God as revealed in Christ: “The Christian concern for Justice may be defined as the faith-response to God’s loving and righteous purpose for the world as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”<sup>204</sup> To work for justice in the world is thus regarded as a faith response to God in Christ. As the Cross in India has been regarded by both Christians and non-Christians as the “identification of God with the victims of history”,<sup>205</sup> so too is it the basis of Christian identification with the victims of oppression within the contemporary world.<sup>206</sup>

Why does the Church come into the picture? Because the God of Jesus Christ is in solidarity with victims of oppression...The crucifixion of Christ is an event in history

which reveals God identifying himself with the suffering people, the victims of oppression and structures of evil...It is the event of the Cross and Resurrection that Christian faith sees the transformation of human life beginning and moving towards the Kingdom of God. The resurrection means that the forces of death and evil which find expression in the oppression of humanity have been and will be finally overcome.<sup>207</sup>

A significant insight into Thomas's recognition of God's solidarity with the victims of society is found in a poetic meditation, written following the great famine of Shertallay, 1941, entitled "Where is God?" The meditation is worth quoting at length:

There was heaviness in my heart,  
A loneliness cut me through,  
Have I put my trust in God in vain?  
Have I placed my feet on slippery ground?  
Vain was the faith in a caring God  
Vain was the trust in a loving Father,  
For God is with the wicked in their pleasures,  
A slave of them of them that seek for themselves,  
He prepares a table for them anywhere they want,  
And spreads a carpet for them wherever they walk,  
He makes them shine like holy men,  
And gives the honoured places in His Church,  
And in His Heaven, palaces decked with jewels;  
But for these, they must fade and fall,  
Like flowers in the forest,  
With not a soul to watch, nor a tear to mark their end;  
From dust they came, and to dust they return,  
And no God cares.

...But then thought I,

The sun had set and it was dark, All  
around was silence --  
The silence of Death;  
And while I looked, I saw a flickering light far off;  
I made for it; a man was digging a little grave;  
Thought I, who must this man be,  
Who has strength enough to dig a grave for his little child?  
He was weeping as he dug; his sighs were deep, and his sobs  
loud,  
And he was alone, amidst the corpses that lay all around.

With fear in my heart,  
I approached the man digging the grave, in the flickering light,  
He turned his face to me;  
Lo, it is Christ!  
His eyes were red with weeping, and his face wet with tears,  
Jesus wept;  
He said to me in a low voice, through sobs,  
Why dost thou do this to me?  
I thirst, I starve  
For in as much as ye did it not to these, ye did it not to me.  
I am dying.  
Why dost thou break my heart?  
For in their afflictions am I afflicted,  
In their deaths I am crucified.

Then was my heart grieved and I was pricked in my reins,

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I had almost said in my heart, Thou dost not Care,  
So foolish was I and ignorant,  
I was a beast before Thee.  
Ye who praise him in the sanctuary,  
Ye who call on him with doors all shut,  
Open your eyes and See your God is not Before ye,  
He is there in the land of desolation,  
Alone,  
In The dark  
Amidst the corpses,  
Starving with the millions that starve,  
Dying with the millions that Die.<sup>208</sup>

This poem provides a powerful glimpse into the depths of Thomas's reflections on God's relation to suffering humanity. The title itself reflects Thomas's angst in attempting to theologically grapple with the reality of a loving God and human suffering. In the poem he suggests that it is the very encounter of Jesus at the graves of the people that doubt is transformed, in recognition that God is present amidst the suffering, deeply concerned for those who are afflicted and dying. When this devotion is placed within M.M. Thomas's broader theological framework of creation-fall-redemption and consummation, it becomes clear that Thomas is concerned for the struggle of the suffering and the oppressed in line with the divine purpose of God for humanity, grounded in God's love, and redeemed through the Cross and resurrection of Christ. The recognition of God's solidarity with the oppressed demands Christian responsibility within the context of the suffering in the contemporary world. This involves not mere charity but also involvement to struggle against the status quo power structures in order to work for justice:

It is when Christians identify themselves with the struggles of the poor against poverty and for conditions of true development in

concrete situation, and are able to reflect with men of other faiths and no faith on the meaning and end of such struggles, that they can make their unique contribution to the new ideology of a politics of world development....If Christian ecumenism cannot become the dynamic for such a political development, what is it for?<sup>209</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

In this chapter a brief overview of M.M. Thomas's theology has been articulated, located within the paradigm of creation-fall-redemption-consummation. At the heart of this paradigm is Thomas's Christology, interpreted as the ultimate act of God within history for the reconciliation of divine-human and human-human relationship. In Christ the law of the prophets is fulfilled and a new covenant is established based upon God's love and desire for the redemption of the world.

Through the Cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Kingdom of God is inaugurated in history. Christ is victor over sin and death, and becomes the first fruits of the New Creation and guarantee of the future hope of the consummation of the Kingdom of God.<sup>210</sup>

Humanity, for Thomas, has the creative capacity and the responsibility to transform nature and develop tools for the welfare of community life as part of the human vocation. Humanity thus has the creative responsibility to be engaged in social and political action in order to struggle against injustice in the world: "There is always a justification for social and political force in order to control human selfishness and quest for power, in order to prevent humans killing and over exploiting each other in the sinful world and to provide social welfare and justice to all humans, at least in some measure."<sup>211</sup> Thomas did not advocate Christian withdrawal from the world, but

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called for direct involvement in the struggle for a just and equal community within society. Significantly for Thomas, the 'three-fold activity of God', namely Creation, Judgment and Redemption, motivated by God's love and directed towards the establishment of the Kingdom of God, continue today through the ferment of development, justice and love within the world:<sup>212</sup>

God calls human beings to participate with God in all these three levels of Divine mission, namely to participate in programmes of creative development, to be involved in fighting injustice and establishing social justice through the rule of law and other checks to oppressive power and along with it all to participate in the redemptive mission of love.<sup>213</sup>

Within the dynamic nucleus of Thomas's theology significant theological signposts for the emergence of Dalit theology may be identified. In the subsequent Chapters Thomas's theology is brought into critical engagement with Dalit theologians in order to assess Thomas's theological contribution for the emergence of Dalit theology.