CHAPTER 4

CONTEMPORARY VIEWS ON SALVATION IN CHRISTIANITY
In the contemporary world, humanity is experiencing tremendous advancements in almost all spheres of life and with this humanity's understanding of different things is also changing. New understandings, new interpretations of ideas become necessary based on the new, changing situations of the world today. So in the present dynamic world, understanding of religion is also changing and this only makes religion still relevant to the technologically advancing world of today. Owing to the advancements and developments humanity to day is being mechanised and slowly it is losing, humanness as such. There are many de-humanising factors in the present world. Religion has to react to this situation of today. In this process new interpretation of the different aspects of religion becomes a must. Accordingly the concept of salvation is also interpreted by different thinkers in different ways to day. Of the many Christian thinkers who have given new meaning to the concept of salvation, for the present study the views of two thinkers namely, Paul Tillich and M.M.Thomas are taken into consideration.

4.1 PAUL TILLICH

Paul Tillich is a well known German - American Theologian and Philosopher of 20th Century. He is considered to be one of the leading religious thinkers of the contemporary world. His theological thinking is based on Existentialism and so he is identified as an Existential Theologian. His theology is known as "theology of correlation" in the sense that it brings in a
correlation between Theology and Philosophy, between Essentialism and Existentialism. For this attempt he is known as boundary theologian. Paul Tillich is recognised as an important thinker of religion for his contribution to theory of religion, religious symbolism and religious socialism as well.

4.1.1 His Life

Paul Tillich was born in Germany in August 1986, to a Luthern Priest. Paul Tillich had his University studies in Berlin, Tubingen, Halle and Breaslau. He earned his doctorate in Philosophy at Breaslau in 1910. He had his theological studies at Halle and was ordained as priest in 1912. He served as Army Chaplain during the first world war (1914-18) and that experience of him had its very great impact on his thinking later. After the war in 1918 he joined a group called Religious Socialists and entered politics. From 1919 to 1933 he taught in many Universities like Berlin, Marburg and Frankfurt. In 1933 during Hitler’s regime Tillich was working in Frankfurt University and due to his political affiliation and disloyalty to the ruler, he was dismissed from service. At that time Reimhold Neibuhr invited him to U.S.A. This made Tillich to work in the Union Theological seminary, New York. Later he taught in Harvard University till 1962. He worked in University of Chicago also. During that period, when he was in America, Tillich came out with many of his writings and thus he became well known. His major works include *Systematic Theology, Dynamics of Faith, The Courage to be, Christ and Culture, History of Christian Thought, Ultimate Concern* etc. Tillich died in the year 1965.
4.1.2  His interpretation of Salvation

Paul Tillich’s interpretation of the concept of salvation can be analysed by exploring the meaning in which he is using the term salvation, his projection of Christ as the healing and saving power and his explanation of salvation and atonement. Further, Tillich very clearly presents his three fold character of salvation and the relation between salvation and the Kingdom of God.

4.1.2.1 Meaning of Salvation

Paul Tillich’s explanation of salvation is centered around the New Being in Jesus the Christ and Christ is concerned as the Power of Salvation. Paul Tillich addressed Christ as the saviour, the mediator or the redeemer. According to Tillich the term ‘Salvation’ has different connotations. The general impression is that salvation is something which saves us from ultimate negativity of exclusion from the Kingdom of God and eternal life. But at different points of time ‘salvation’ has been given different emphasises. Tillich points out that for early Greek Church it meant escape from death and error, for Roman Catholic Church it is an escape from guilt and its consequence in this life and the life after, for early Protestant Church it meant escape from the law and its condemning power and for liberal Protestants it is the overcoming of special sins and progress towards perfection.\(^1\) Thus gradually the original idea of salvation from ultimate negativity of exclusion from eternal

life has been pushed to the background. Thus Tillich very clearly establishes the fact that the term ‘salvation’ gets new expression and new emphasis at different points of time. However when Paul Tillich wants to use the term ‘salvation’ he prefers to use it in one of its earliest expressions as ‘healing’. Since it is very meaningful in the present day context also. He prefers to use the meaning of healing to the term salvation because in the present context the man’s characteristic of main existence is estrangement.

In Tillich’s understanding man is in estrangement from essential being and from God. That is man as he exists is not what he essentially is and ought to be. The estrangement is the sin of unbelief which turns away man from God. P.Krishnan observes:

"Estrangement as an ontological fact expresses itself in every free act of man. The estranged state contradicts man’s essential being. It contradicts the created structure of himself and his world and their interdependence. And self-contradiction drives toward self-destruction". \(^2\) Hence a healing touch of reuniting man’s existence and essence is very much needed. This is commented by Walter Leibrecht as "the salvation of man through the overcoming and healing of the divorce between existence and essence". \(^3\) Paul Tillich observes, "In this sense, healing means reuniting that which is estranged, giving a center to what is split, overcoming the split between God and man, man and


\(^3\) Walter Leibrecht (Ed), *Religion and Culture*, p.23.
his world, man and himself". So from the old understanding Tillich has developed a new and relevant meaning. This new meaning is well expressed in his explanation of New being. "The new being is the power of which never destroys creation, but transforms the old creation into a new one, actualized through the Spirit who creatively conquers the ambiguities of life". The healing work is carried out by the New Being-Jesus the Christ. This idea of Paul Tillich is more relevant to the humanity of today because in the name of race, class, caste, religion, denomination etc., humanity is divided. Hence the healing power of God can be relevant in uniting the divided humanity of today. So salvation means to Tillich, healing and this healing work is well expressed in the New Being Jesus the Christ and so Jesus is the saviour. "Therefore wherever there is saving power in mankind, it must be judged by the saving power in Jesus as the Christ".

4.1.2.2 Christ as the healing and saving power

Paul Tillich explains Jesus the Christ as the New Being and in him is the power of healing and saving. So he terms Jesus the Christ as the saviour "through the universal significance of his being as the New being". The Christ is termed as "Mediator" also. Generally this expression of mediator has got two elements. The first one is that the idea of mediator-god bridges the gap

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between human beings and the transcendent reality of God. The second one is that the function of a mediator is to re-unite what is estranged and reconcile man and God. According to Paul Tillich both these meanings of mediator apply to Jesus as the Christ. He says, "Both elements of the idea of the mediator have been applied to Jesus as the Christ. In his face we see the face of God and in him we experience the reconciling will of God; in both respects he is the Mediator". So salvation means to Paul Tillich healing through reconciliation and re-union.

It is worth noting that Paul Tillich explains that salvation is brought out by God only and not through any self attempt. Self-attempt for salvation referred by Tillich as self-salvation. Man tries to seek salvation through religious ways, legalistic ways, ascetic ways, sacraments, doctrines and other emotional ways. But Tillich feels that these ways of self-salvation are failure only. The estrangement between God and man is healed not by any third person or any method of self-salvation but by God himself through the expression of Jesus the Christ as atonement. So he is termed as 'Redeemer'. This gives the meaning that to redeem, buy back human beings, God has given a price to Satan. Paul Tillich views this traditional imagery as symbol and he says, "the symbolism of man's liberation from demonic powers plays a great role in the traditional doctrine of atonement. Therefore, it is quite justifiable to apply the term 'Redeemer' to Jesus as the Christ". Thus Tillich presents


Jesus the Christ as the New Being is the Mediator and Redeemer and thereby the healing and saving power.

4.1.2.3 Salvation and Atonement

Paul Tillich feels that man is in the state of estrangement from God because of his own guilt. This estrangement is overcome, the guilt is removed and the reconciliation is made through the atoning act of the New Being as Jesus the Christ. When man accepts this divine act then atonement becomes both objective and subjective experience to him. The estrangement occurs through the demonic powers of the world and prevents the individual from being re-united with God. So the symbolism of man's liberation from demonic powers becomes the message of Christianity. Thus according to Paul Tillich, man is saved from estrangement, from his own guilt and from the demonic powers through experiencing the atoning power of the New Being in Jesus as the Christ. He attempts to explain this experience of atonement through the following six principles

"The first and all decisive principle is that the atoning processes are created by God and God alone".\textsuperscript{11} According to Paul Tillich the healing work through atonement is the work, of God only. The removal of guilt in man and the re-union of man and God, is not solely the work, of Christ, but it is the work of God and Christ functions as the mediator in the reconciling work of God to man.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Ibid}, p.173.
The second principle for a doctrine of atonement is that there are no conflicts in God between his reconciling love and his retributive justice.\textsuperscript{12} God's Justice is not to be understood as a process which exactly calculates man's sins and allows exact punishment for the same. According to Paul Tillich God's Justice is one form of love, through which God tries to break the forces which are the causes for man's estrangement from God. So God's justice is not a condemnation on man but it brings new life, regains God's love to man. Thus there is not conflict in God's love and justice to man.

The third principle for a doctrine of atonement is that, "The divine removal of guilt and punishment is not an act of overlooking the reality and depth of existential estrangement".\textsuperscript{13} Paul Tillich feels that when we believe that through atonement God has forgiven our sins, this should be understood in its reality. Human ideas of forgiveness is mutual between two persons; but the idea of God forgiving man cannot be totally compared with that. God need not be forgiven by man and God's forgiveness is not a private matter.

The fourth principle for a doctrine of atonement is that "God's atoning activity must be understood as his participation in existential estrangement and its self-destructive consequences".\textsuperscript{14} For Paul Tillich it is the very crux of the doctrine of atonement. He emphasises on God's acting with man and his world. In this process God takes the suffering of the world as on to himself.

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid}, p.174.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid}, p.174.
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid}, p.174.
Tillich says, "The Power of God is that. He overcomes estrangement, not that He prevents it, that He takes it, symbolically speaking, upon Himself not that He remains in a dead identity with Himself. This is the meaning of the age-old symbol of the god participating in creaturely suffering, a symbol which in Christianity was applied to the interpretation of the Cross of Him who was said to be the Christ." Thus for Tillich this expression is symbolic and this reflects the idea that God is participating in the existential estrangement of man and helps to overcome this suffering of estrangement.

"The fifth principle of a doctrine of atonement is that in the cross of Christ the divine participation in existential estrangement becomes manifest". According to Tillich the cross of the Christ is the manifestation of the actual participation of God in the suffering of the world. Christ is taking upon himself the destructive consequences of estrangement, the guilt of humanity and thus performing the act of atonement. The result of this atoning act is that humanity is eternally reconciled to God.

"The sixth principle of a doctrine of atonement is that through participation in the New being, which is the being of Jesus as the Christ, men also participate in the manifestation of the atoning act of God". Tillich means by this that God through Christ in his atoning process takes part in the suffering of existential estrangement of the human beings and not suffering as

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a substitute for humans. By taking part in the suffering of the human beings, God is transforming them. So Tillich very clearly states that through God’s taking part in human suffering human beings get the privilege of taking part in the transformation act of God, accepting it and being transformed by it. This is explained by Paul Tillich as the threefold character of salvation.

4.1.2.4.0 The threefold character of salvation

While explaining the concept of salvation Paul Tillich, tries to present it in a threefold form as follows: - 1. Salvation as participation in the New being, 2. as acceptance of the New being and 3. as transformation by the New being.

4.1.2.4.1 Salvation as participation in the New being

By this Paul Tillich means that the saving power of the new being in Jesus as the Christ is enabling man to participate in the New being. The power of the New Being is laying hold of man who is still in bondage to the old being and grasping and drawing him into itself. This can be called as being in the New Being or being in Christ. According to Tillich the classical terms used to describe this state are "New Birth", "Regeneration", "being a new creatures".\(^\text{18}\) This state is generally viewed as an opposite to the state of estrangement and it is considered to be a subjective process. Tillich prefers to term this state of participation in the new being as "Regeneration" and says it is Universal in nature. He further adds,"it is the new state of things, the

\(^\text{18}\) Ibid, p.177.
new eon, which the Christ brought; the individual enters it, and in so doing he himself participates in it and is reborn through participation".\(^1^9\) By the grace of God man is entering into the New Being and this means that he is overcoming the estrangement and this is one important aspect of salvation. So according to Paul Tillich the objective reality of the new being manifested as Jesus the Christ becomes the subjective reality to an individual by his participation in it and this becomes possible through faith. This leads to the next character of salvation.

### 4.1.2.4.2 Salvation as acceptance of the New Being

This is otherwise explained by Paul Tillich as "justification". He prefers to place this character of salvation next to the previous one-Regeneration, because justification presupposes faith. As already explained, Regeneration or participation in the New Being, is based on faith and according to Tillich, faith is not a human act, but it is the act of the divine spirit. So justification becomes possible only after Regeneration-participating in the New Being. Like Regeneration, justification is also first an objective event and second a subjective reception.

Paul Tillich says, "Justification brings the element of 'inspite of' into the process of salvation. It is the immediate consequence of the doctrine of atonement, and it is the heart and center of salvation".\(^2^0\) Justification is used

\(^{19}\) *Ibid*, p.177.

here in the sense 'making just'. Man is estranged from God by his own guilt but inspite of that God brings him in unity with him which is manifest in the New being in Christ. This is purely an act of God and in this sense it is an objective event. In Pauline doctrine the same is explained as justification by grace through faith. It is purely an act of God and for this act God is not depending on man. God is accepting man who is unacceptable. This is considered as the justifying act of God and man has salvation from his state of guilt and estrangement only through such a way. P.Krishnan observes, "Tillich asserts that it (justification) is the only way to overcome the anxiety of guilt; it enables man to look away from himself and his state of estrangement and self-destruction to the justifying act of God".21 But the question here is whether man has got any part to play in this event. The common answer given by thinkers including Luther is that man has got no part to play in this event. But Paul Tillich feels that there is a subjective side in the objective event of justification. That is man should accept that he is accepted. Man should accept that there is nothing in him that enables God to accept him, yet he is accepted by God. Now the question is how is this possible? and the traditional answer is that this is possible through the power of Christ, the New Being. By participating in the New Being man accepts the New Being and is accepted in the status of new being. As we have already discussed in the previous point - Regeneration-man participates in the New Being through faith. Tillich explains that faith is not man's work but is the work of God. So the whole event is the work of God and man has to accept that

he is accepted. By grace of God man is overcoming guilt which means obtaining forgiveness of sin and this is another important aspect of salvation. In the more recent terminology this aspect is referred to as "accepting acceptance though being unacceptable".\textsuperscript{22}

While discussing the idea of justification, Paul Tillich cautions us about the expressions "justification by grace through faith". This is often used as "justification by faith". This does not mean that faith is an act of man through which he gains justification. Tillich says, "The cause is God alone (by grace), but the faith that one is accepted is the channel through which grace is mediated to man (through faith)"\textsuperscript{23} Justification by grace is considered as the highest form of divine justice and this is based on love.

4.1.2.4.3 Salvation as transformation by the New Being

This is referred to as sanctification by Paul Tillich. He feels that sanctification is different from regeneration and justification as these two mean the reunion of what is estranged. But sanctification is a process by which man is reformed by the power of the New Being. The literal meaning of this word can be "being received into the community of the sancti".\textsuperscript{24} This may mean that man is being received into the community of those who are grasped by the power of the New Being. But Tillich prefers to explain sanctification as

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Paul Tillich,"Nature of a Liberating Conscience" In C.Elish Netson, (Ed.), \textit{Conscience}, p.69.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Paul Tillich, \textit{Systematic Theology}, Vol.2, p.179.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} \textit{Ibid}, p.179.
\end{itemize}
"the process in which the power of the New Being transforms personality and community inside and outside the Church, both the religious and the secular realm, are objects of the sanctifying work of the divine spirit, who is the actuality of the New Being".\textsuperscript{25} Here Tillich very neatly extends the meaning of salvation to outside Church and thus widens the scope of salvation to the secular realms also. Referring to Tillich's inclusion of healing under salvation of man, Walter Leibrecht comments, "a purely spiritual or ecclesiastical salvation would not for him be Christian salvation. Salvation-the reality of the 'new being' as revealed in Jesus Christ-is always concerned with man and his world; divine grace reuniting and healing man's broken life encompasses the totality of man's world".\textsuperscript{26} Paul Tillich gives a new dimension and new relevance to the concept of salvation by emphasising the healing power of God through the New Being and thus transforming humanity. This transformation or salvation is taking place within human history and this leads to the new experience of the Kingdom of God.

4.1.2.5 Salvation and the Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God is explained by Paul Tillich as "the symbol of ultimate evolution and ultimate salvation in complete unity".\textsuperscript{27} Revelation and salvation cannot be separated. Revelation can be possible only in the presence

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, pp.179-80.


\textsuperscript{27} Paul Tillich, \textit{Systematic Theology}, Vol.1, p.147.
of salvation and salvation can occur only within a correlation of revelation. This unity is leading us into the Kingdom of God. "And of course, where there is manifestation of the Kingdom God, there is revelation and salvation" says Paul Tillich. The symbol of Kingdom of God is utilised by Tillich in two sense: one is the inner historical and the other one is trans-historical. In the first sense it means the symbol of "Spiritual Presence" of God in human being and in the second sense it means the symbol of "Eternal life". The Central manifestation of the Kingdom of God in history is through the Christ event and salvation becomes possible through this revelation. The salvation offered through the New Being enables humanity to experience the ultimate salvation or inherit the Kingdom of God. Thus the symbol of Kingdom of God is explained by Tillich as salvation within human history and as ultimate salvation that is trans-historical. This does not mean that the experience of the Kingdom of God is totally beyond human history. Heywod Thomas, while commenting on Tillich's explanation of the Kingdom of God, observes, "The Kingdom of God does not belong entirely to another world but points to history itself in so far as it points to the struggle between the divine and the demonic Kingdom which has human history as its battle field." The experience of the Kingdom of God has already been started with the New Being Jesus the Christ and he represents the Kingdom of God in history. "The appearance of the New

28 Ibid, p.144.
31 J.Heywood Thomas, Paul Tillich an Appraisal, p.159.
Being in whom the contrast between essential and existential being is overcome constitutes the center of history, and in Christ as the center of history the Kingdom of God manifests itself as the ultimate meaning of history."\(^{32}\) says Heywood Thomas. So the humanity is transformed by the saving power of God expressed in Christ and this experience is very much within human history, but Paul Tillich feels that this experience can not be confirmed to here alone but it is trans-historical also. He explains: "As inner-historical, it (Kingdom of God) participates in the dynamics of history; as trans-historical, it answers the questions implied in the ambiguities of the dynamics of history. In the former quality it is manifest through the Spiritual Presence; in the latter it is identical with Eternal life. This double quality of the Kingdom of God makes it a most important and difficult symbol of Christian Thought".\(^{33}\) To be brief even the symbol of the Kingdom of God is also centered around the concept of salvation according to Paul Tillich.

### 4.1.3 An Evaluation

The religious socialism of Paul Tillich has helped him to give a relevant, more meaningful explanation of religious concepts. Through religious socialism he tries to understand the divine ground of the social and economic situation. He feels that the social conditions of a period can be real stumbling blocks to the spiritual welfare or growth of a man. This idea of Tillich can be well extended to his explanation of salvation also in the sense, there can be

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many social factors which can be real hindrances to man's spiritual growth towards the state of salvation. There are plenty of factors in the social order which are perpetuating man's estrangement in different areas. In this context the concept of salvation as explained by Paul Tillich becomes more meaningful to the contemporary humanity. Because Tillich is using this concept-salvation-as healing of the estrangement between existence and essence, estrangement between man and world. Humanity is very much divided in the name of class, race caste, religion, language, culture, development etc..There are many more de-humanising factors in societies today which alienate and isolate some groups of people. These things inturn estrange man's relation with fellow beings, the world and God also. So this must be set right. This estrangement should be healed and that process is salvation according to Paul Tillich.

4.2 M.M. THOMAS

Dr.M.M.Thomas is an Indian Christian lay theologian, known for his religious socialism like Paul Tillich. Thomas is identified with those Indian Christian thinkers like, P.D.Devanandan, C.F.Andrews, who have advocated close relation of theology with modern secular India and the World in the context of Asian revolution. Paul Tillich. talks about revelation as salvation and Thomas talks about revelation as humanisation and thus salvation. Humanisation is the thrust of his theology and social action is the expression of his theology. There were so many factors in his life that influenced him to develop such a type of thinking.
4.2.1 His Life

Madathilaparimbil Mammen Thomas was born in 1916 in Kerala. His father was a well known evangelist of the Orthodox Syrian Church and a nationalist. Thomas had his education in Trivandrum, Kerala. During his student days he lived a very pious Christian life. After his studies he worked in Ashram School in Perumpavoor. He was also one of those who were responsible for the formation of the Youth Christian Council of Action in 1938 and tried out the social implication of the Christian Gospel. During that time he had a great fascination for Marxism and started trying to reconcile the spirit of Christ with Marxist-Leninist ideology. According to his critics this impossible attempt of Thomas is dominant in many of his writings and expressions. In fact at that point of his life he tried and failed in both, to get ordained in the Mar Thoma Church and to get membership in Communist Party of India. During 1943-45 he joined the student Christian Movement. His association with SCM took him to Geneva as a political secretary of the World Student’s Christian Federation. In this capacity he travelled far and wide, organising and attending conferences. When he was in Geneva he was closely associated with the World Council of Churches and attended the first assembly of W.C.C. During this period only gradually he was getting out of communistic ideas. In 1953 Thomas went to Union Theological Seminary in New York to study Theology for one year. During this time he was influenced by the thinking of Paul Tillich and others. In 1954 he attended the second Assembly of W.C.C. Then he returned to India to work with the newly formed Christian Institute for the Study of Society under the Directorship of P.D.Devanandan.
In 1957 this institute became CISRS and Thomas continued as its Assistant Director. In 1962 he became its Director, after the death of P.D. Devanandan and continued till his retirement in 1976. During 1966-67 Thomas went to Union Theological Seminary in New York (U.T.S) as visiting Professor. In 1968 he was elected as the Moderator of the Central Committee of the W.C.C. and was in that position till 1975. In 1990 he was made the Governor of Nagaland and he gave it up after a year. Thomas wrote innumerable articles and many books. Some of his well known books are *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance, Salvation and Humanisation, Christian Response to the Asian Revolution, Secularism in India and Secular Meaning of Christ, Christian Participation in Nation Building, Man and the Universe of faiths, Towards a Theology of Contemporary Ecumenism*, etc. Thomas passed away in 1996.

4.2.2.0 His Interpretation of Salvation

M.M. Thomas has contributed much to Indian Christian thought and his contribution can be titled as Theology of Society. The core of his thinking is about humanism, love in God and in fellow beings. His thinking is very much relevant today because of his theology of action. He tries to project Christianity as a *Karma Marga*. His idea of salvation can be understood better through his expression of Theology of Mission and Humanisation.
4.2.2.1 Theology of Mission

Theology of mission generally deals with the nature, means and end of the Christian Mission. At different points of time, based on different settings, conditions, rethinking of the mission of the Church has become necessary. M.M.Thomas has also attempted such a rethinking of the mission of the Church based on his own time. He views Church as a People’s Movement with its mission "centered in Christ and mediate the transforming power of the New Humanity in Christ to the communities and nations and cultures as well as the religious and secular structures within which it sojourns".34

Mission according to Thomas means the communication of the message of salvation humanity has obtained through Jesus Christ, so that every one can be saved. He says:

"Mission therefore could be defined as the communication of this message of salvation through Jesus Christ to the end that men may respond in faith and be saved. Mission is essentially evangelistic mission or mission of salvation. I think we shall only confuse the discussion of the theology of mission, if we give any other definition of mission which takes away this cutting edge".35

So, Thomas feels that the Christian mission is the propagation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and being witness to salvation in Jesus Christ. Being


witness to the action of Christ may be in a form of dialogue with people of other religions or proclamation of the Gospel or living a silent Christian life of suffering for Christ. God was at work in Jesus Christ and through him the New Humanity is offered to all humans by God. This New Humanity facilitates new actions and the mission of the Church is to have a renewal or rethinking of this action based on the context in which it is carried out. This makes M.M. Thomas to present Christian mission as Karma Mārga or a way of action.

4.2.2.2 Christian Mission as Karma Mārga

The theology of mission emphasised by Thomas is action oriented. In the words of Robin Boyd, Thomas "is attracted to a faith which issues in constructive social action—perhaps indeed a form of Karma Mārga".36 Thomas feels that Christian participation in the world-struggle as an essential part of spiritual life. The Church is expected to identify itself with the world and participate in its struggle for human rights, social justice and world community. According to Thomas the Upsala Assembly of W.C.C. had also in its report on 'Renewal in Mission' emphasised that the Church should participate in social action also besides its spiritual dimension. After Upsala, the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Commission also stressed the importance of social action. Thomas observes, "Lambeth states that Mission involves both identification with Christ and identification with one's neighbour in Christ".37 The work of Christ has already established the relevance of

36 Robin Boyd, An Introduction to Christian Theology, p.313.
37 M.M. Thomas, Salvation and Humanisation, p.6.
mission to the secular world. So Thomas feels that God is at work through Christ in the secular world and those who believe this should extend their faith in social action too. God through Christ tries to reconcile the world, which is torn by divisions, oppressions of many kinds, to himself. This really is the context in which we have to understand the Christian mission to the world today. Thomas says, "Thus Jesus Christ and the New Humanity offered in him are presented as the spiritual foundation, the source of judgement, renewal and ultimate fulfillment of the struggle of mankind to day for its humanity". 38

Thomas is very clear that the spiritual foundation of our faith would become meaningful only when it results in some action in the society. Robin Boyd, while commenting on the point of M.M.Thomas says, "He repeatedly makes his own position clear; the love of God which finds its goal in mystic union is important and valid, but only if it finds its outlet in love for man, and in the doing of God's will on earth". 39 The love for humanity results only in social, political and other related actions. Thomas is not limiting Christian mission to mere preaching, "Thomas rejects the conservative evangelical tendency to limit the work of the Christian mission to preaching and Church growth; the Gospel of salvation must work itself out also in the realm of history and politics, and in the campaign to provide condition where men can live as real men". 40 Thomas's explanation of Christianity as Karma Mārga is something more than the ordinary usage of the word Karma Mārga. For

38 Ibid, p.4.
Thomas *Karma Mārga* involves self sacrificing love and service, and this is what we have to witness as Christians since we find this in the action of Christ. "Perhaps we should not go far wrong if we were to describe Thomas's own approach to theology as an 'enriched karma mārga' not of course in the sense of karma as a way of ritual or of 'mere good works', but as the way of loving self-sacrificing service".41 As per Thomas, Gandhiji has made the self sacrificing, vicarious service understandable to the Indians as Nishkāma-Karma.

Thomas was aware of the criticism on giving importance to service in Christian mission. Peter Beyerhaus's criticisms was, by emphasising service, there was a radical shift of the center from God to man, and thus the replacement of Theology by Anthropology. Thomas reacts to this criticism by saying that the Christian mission is neither centered on God nor centered on man but on God-man who is Jesus Christ. "Therefore properly speaking Christian missionary thinking cannot be either theology or anthropology except as either of them is related to christology. On the same reasoning if it is Christ-Centered, anthropology could become truly Christian in its frame work", says M.M.Thomas.42 In Christ, Thomas sees the Unity of God and man and the new pattern of humanity free of poverty, discrimination and injustice. Thomas prefers a battle to enable the whole world to come into this state of new humanity. Boyd comments, "Christians must join others in what Thomas calls a 'battle for a true anthropology' and it may be that Christians with that


deep Biblical insight into human nature can bring new dimension of love and
caring and justice into the secular struggle of the third world today. For
Thomas such a participation in the world struggle is an essential part of
spiritual life. Thus for M.M.Thomas, the Christian mission is basically a way
of action, a *Karma-Marga* which includes humanisation.

### 4.2.2.3 Humanisation

The goal of Christian mission is humanisation according to
M.M.Thomas, since he understands that humanisation is very much related
to salvation. Thomas says:

"Salvation itself could be defined as humanisation in a total and
eschatological sense. And all our struggles on earth for the
fragmentary realisation of man’s humanity point to this eschatological
humanisation as their judgement and fulfillment. Salvation has always
been seen by Christian mission in India in close integration with
humanisation".44

Here Thomas very clearly expresses his view that humanisation is the
goal of mission, historically as well as eschatologically. Historical in the sense
of humanisation process and eschatological in the sense of salvation process.
All our struggles on earth to restore, maintain and enhance human dignity are
considered as mission by M.M.Thomas because these struggles are means

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through which we can also achieve the same goal what God is achieving through Jesus Christ. For Thomas, secular goals can be valid goals for Christian mission if they are something to do with the process of humanisation. He says:

"The goal of all communication, namely the humanisation of man in community, is not essentially different from the goal of the communication of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the Church should be considered the ground and pillar of true communication anywhere."\(^{45}\)

Thomas finds the secret of true humanism in the divine humanity of Jesus Christ. Jesus as the greatest humanist saved many from their troubles and pains. The old creation is freed in the New Creation of Jesus Christ. Thomas uses Chenchaiah’s expression - ‘The Gospel of Jesus Christ and his New Creation’ to explain the true humanisation.\(^{46}\) In the way of cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ true humanism is revealed and to understand this humanism in Jesus Christ and to become human like him is humanisation. So, for Thomas, Christ becomes the model for true humanism and for the real humanisation process. This makes Boyd to say:

"In a sense, then, whenever Thomas uses the term humanisation, we should think of it, not in terms of mere anthropology, but in relation to Christ the true man, the kind of humanity which he wants to see


established on earth in the pattern of real life established by the one whom Chenchaiah called the "ādi-puruṣa of the new Creation".47

According to Thomas Christian mission is not just preaching and Church growth but it must result in action in the realms of history, politics and society at large so as to make human beings to live as real human beings. The Christian Gospel is nothing but the proclamation of Christ as the source and foundation of true humanisation. Jesus Christ worked for humanisation within human history. As a true human he worked for the liberation of the suffering, the oppressed, the poor and the needy and worked against all the dehumanising factors and condemned them. Jesus himself says, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord".48 So, Thomas strongly believes that there is enough justification for considering participation in any act of humanisation as essential to Christian mission. For Thomas the message that God has acted in a unique way in a secular historical event, namely the incarnation, the life, action, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, to inaugurate His Kingdom. This is the core of the Christian faith and this can provide the spiritual foundation for the new

47 Robin Boyd, Indian Christian Theology, p.319.
humanism. Thomas feels that the process of humanisation is very much connected to the idea of secularism.

4.2.2.4 Secularism and Humanisation

Secular ideologies and secular movements, are no doubt effective approaches towards the process of humanisation. Secular movements of the world have fought against the de-humanising factor like race, caste, gender discriminations, violations of human rights, slavery, oppression of the poor and needy, marginalisation of the have-nots, exploitation of the simple, innocent, illiterate and down trodden people. However according to Thomas, secular humanism is not total or wholistic because the transcendent element is missing in it. Anyhow there appears a trend in secular humanism today, to open towards the transcendent dimension also. As Thomas observes, after the experiment of Hiroshima, an ethical reappraisal of scientific secularism has been going on and after Krushchev’s revelation of the inhumanities of Stalinism there has been a revision of Marxian Socialist Humanism in the Communist movement of the world. Thomas feels that the search for more meaningful humanism has made the Marxist of Eastern Europe to take seriously the question of ultimate human destiny in some form. According to Thomas, closed secular humanism itself is a dehumanising factor and to avoid this, secular humanism should be open so that spiritual emigration from secularism is possible. Thomas explains this as the double pattern in the


50 M.M.Thomas, Salvation and Humanisation, p.43.
dialectics of secularism. Thomas finds such pattern is very much evident in Indian secularism. He sights the examples of Nehru, M.N.Roy, Ashok Mehta, Aurobindo and Jai Prakash. While talking about Nehru's socialist secularism. Thomas observes, "I was struck by the way he struggled to find a spiritual and ethical frame work which would make secularism subservient to the cause of humanism in Indian society through political action". Likewise, M.N.Roy started from Dialectical Materialism, journeyed through Physical Realism to Radical Humanism. Ashok Mehta before giving up socialism tried a humanist political philosophy which had the combination of the scientific insights of Karl Marx and the spiritual insights of Mahatma Gandhi. Autobindo started as secular politician and ended as a spiritual leader. Jai Prakash as a secular politician started with Communism journeyed through democratic socialism to Gandhism. These examples clearly indicate that secular movements towards humanism can result in transcendent dimension also. So, Thomas feels there must be a dialogue with secularism on true humanisation.

Thomas advocates the participation of the Church "in these struggles of secularism and secular men for an authentic understanding of man as he is confronted with the historical task of humanising the world, and with the radical demand for meaningful personal human existence". For Thomas, true humanisation is possible if Church participates in secular movements of

51 Ibid, p.44.
52 Ibid, p.44.
53 Ibid, pp.44, 45.
54 Ibid, p.12.
humanisation. In India this was put into practice even during the period of
William Carey as a missionary. He attempted to create public opinion against
dehumanising evils like infanticide, sati, untouchability and the deplorable
condition of the leprosy patients. Thomas comments, "Humanisation was
integral to mission as Carey understood it".\textsuperscript{55} Even the Christian evangelism
and conversations indirectly worked as factors of social and cultural
humanisation. As Christians the out castes, the deprived and the marginalised
gained new fellowship-\textit{koinonia} new status and dignity in the society. Thomas
observes:

"Where conversion was genuine, whether of individuals or of groups,
the converts saw salvation in Christ not only in terms of individual
salvation of heaven after death, but also as the spiritual source of a
new community on earth in which their human dignity and status
were recognized. It was the promise of humanisation inherent in the
gospel of salvation that led to the influx of the oppressed into the
church".\textsuperscript{56}

This new community or fellowship was gradually extended to a larger
secular brotherhood and involved in Indian national awakening and was
responsible for the development of the Theology of Nationalism even. Thomas
comments:

"They see the land of divine providence in the history of the British
connection with India, with the impact of Western culture an Indian Life and

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Ibid}, p.12.

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Ibid}, p.14.
thought and the awakening of the Indian people to new aspirations of freedom and justice.\textsuperscript{57}

Thomas feels that men like C.F. Andrews, K.T. Paul and S.K. Datta strongly supported the national renascence with its new sense of dignity and the Indian national struggle was one of the most significant ways in which India has responded to the Gospel. Thomas sums up by saying:

"On the whole Indian Christian thinking follows more or less the pattern of interpreting the social and cultural awakening associated with Indian nationalism as springing from the seed of the Gospel latent within Western culture and visible in the Western missionary enterprise, and in turn preparing the soil of India for the Gospel of Christ."\textsuperscript{58}

4.2.2.5 Dialogue on Humanisation

All religions are concerned about human well being and so Thomas feels that on humanisation a dialogue of religions is also possible. He sees humanisation as the historical destiny and salvation as the ultimate destiny and says, like Christianity all other religions are also concerned about the relation between man's historical and ultimate destinies.\textsuperscript{59} According to


\textsuperscript{59} M.M. Thomas, Salvation and Humanisation, p.20.
Thomas the many religions, of the pluralistic society of today, are really renewed so as to provide spiritual support to the struggle for social liberation or humanisation. In this context Thomas feels, that dialogue has relevance not only with religions but also with secular movements. For Thomas, "it is a framework of dialogue among religions and between religions and secular ideologies at the anthropological level in depth that can create the cultural and spiritual support to liberating social action". Thomas feels that Christians can take a lead in this direction and open themselves for dialogical existence with the social and spiritual currents of contemporary India. He observes:

"Dialogical existence means both participation in the social and spiritual movements of contemporary India and conversations with those involved in them on the meaning and relevance of the new Humanity in Christ for a new social Humanism and a new Indian spirituality".

Thus a clear inter relation between humanisation and salvation can be seen in Thomas's explanation of Christian mission. He says, "the mission of salvation and the task of humanisation are integrally related to each other, even if they cannot be considered identical". Thus Thomas presents humanisation as the historical destiny of man that is related to the ultimate

61 Ibid, p.236.
63 M.M.Thomas, Salvation and Humanisation, p.8.
destiny namely salvation, and salvation as the spiritual inwardness of true humanisation.

4.2.2.6 Salvation

According to M.M.Thomas salvation means humanisation and though they are not identical, salvation is very closely connected to humanisation, integrally related to it. He goes to the extent of defining salvation as humanisation in a total and eschatological sense.\(^6^4\) This means salvation (as humanisation) is something total and eschatological in the sense that salvation is the fullness of life, salvation is the liberation and salvation is the ultimate.

4.2.2.6.1 Salvation is the fullness of life

The Latin root word for Salvation - SALUS - means fullness. Here Thomas uses the word salvation in that meaning also. It is the fullness of life, that is, fullness of bodily health, material abundance, peace and justice in life for all. Thomas speaks of the fullness or wholeness of life by referring to Psalm 144:12-15.\(^6^5\) Here the Psalmist talks about the bodily health of the sons and beauty of young women, material abundance by way of agricultural and pastoral productivity, peace because of security from enemy aggression and social justice. Thomas believes that salvation leads to this fullness of life only. In this state there is fulfillment of all needs of human life. The aspirations and expectations of the people for richer and fuller human life is

\(^6^4\) *Ibid*, p.18.

realized in this state. Thomas's explanation of fullness of life is similar to the dominant Old Testament idea that whenever the Israelites honoured the covenant relation, with God, then their God blessed them with good health, material abundance, peace without any invasion by enemy force, justice and happiness because of everyone following the Law. Thomas' idea is that salvation refers to such fullness of life. This fullness of life includes the physiological and psychological needs of the people. Physiological needs in the sense of good health, material abundance etc, and psychological needs in the sense of the feeling of belongingness, peace, happiness etc.

4.2.2.6.2 Salvation is the Liberation

Another meaning of salvation as per Thomas is liberation. The Hebrew word - Yasha - used in the Old Testament has the meaning of liberation from oppression. In the same way Thomas uses this word salvation in the meaning of liberation from all oppression, injustice, poverty and so on. For Thomas the Exodus may be considered as the pattern of liberation of the Old Testament.\(^{66}\) Yahweh liberated the Israelites from slavery. Their slavery according to Thomas was a total slavery. It was a political, social as well as a spiritual slavery. Spiritual slavery in the sense that the Israelites were made to worship the Gods of Egypt. So the liberation brought by their God through Moses was a total liberation. It was a political, social as well as a spiritual liberation for them. This liberation culminated in the establishment of the covenant relationship with God. Thomas feels that the universalisation and the renewal

of the covenant relation was prophesied and the fulfillment of that we see in the New Testament in Christ. The New Testament understanding of liberation is from sin, but Thomas considers that the Exodus pattern of liberation is not negated here but it is broadened and deepened in the New Testament. Through Jesus Christ a total liberation for the whole humanity is worked out by God. Thomas says:

"Jesus considers himself as the new Moses bringing to all people their 'Exodus' from social-spiritual slavery and orienting their freedom to a new 'covenant' sealed with his own 'blood'. The pattern of Exodus remains, but the liberation is universalised and broadened".67

According to Thomas the understanding of salvation as liberation can be applied to different situations in the different parts of the world even today. Thomas observes:

"The openness of the Church based on its mission to the world, means today openness to the contemporary world to participate with Christ in the exodus of the oppressed to new life; and within that setting to witness to the New Humanity in Christ as the power to redeem cultures, ideologies and religions from the demonic forces inherent in them, and make them truly human".68

Thomas finds that the Exodus pattern of liberation is very closely related to the liberation in the Indian nationalism and socialism. But he feels


68 M.M.Thomas "The Open Church", In Mathai Zachariah (Ed), The Church: A People's Movement, p.36.
that the Indian Churches tend to understand the concept of liberation in the New Testament sense of liberation from sin.\(^{69}\) However when we experience Christ as the liberator, then the Church should not only proclaim but live this Gospel. Therefore Church has to participate in the movements of human liberation of our time so as to witness to Jesus Christ as the source, the judge and the liberator of human spirituality. According to Thomas, in Indian Society there are still many oppressing factors like caste, gender, poverty, illiteracy, power politics and so on. So, naturally Church in India has to play a definite role in liberating the Indian society from various oppressions. Thomas' attempt in "developing an Indian understanding of Christ takes seriously the India of secular humanism in the context of Christian participation in nation-building activities emerging from the Christological significance of the Christ's identification with the humanity of the oppressor".\(^{70}\) Thomas is aware of the danger of secular movements sometimes becoming self-righteous and self-idolatry and thus themselves becoming new oppression. He sights the example, of Stalinism for this. That is why Thomas suggests that Church should play an active role for the social cause, having Christ as the basis. He says, "In this way the Church may become the bearer, not only of the message of ultimate liberation of all things in Christ, but also of a secular ethic of political struggle justified by faith".\(^{71}\) Thus the danger of secular liberation movements


\(^{70}\) Thomas Pulianampattayil, *Centrality of Christ According to M.M. Thomas*, VINAI 92, p.49.

\(^{71}\) M.M. Thomas, "Spirituality for Combat" In K.M. George, (Ed.), *Freedom Love Community*, p.36.
becoming self-idolatrous may be avoided by justifying them through spirituality or faith. Thomas says:

"Here the gospel of forgiveness of justification by faith has great relevance to collective liberation movements, in moulding their spirituality for struggle, liberating the liberal movements from becoming self idolatrous". Thus Thomas establishes the close relation between secular liberation movements and spirituality. He presents this as the spiritual penetration in the struggle for a just human community at the world and national levels.

4.2.2.6.3 Salvation as the Ultimate

According to Thomas, salvation as a total experience of man is not just catering to the physiological, psychological and social needs of man but also the spiritual needs of him. In this respect he treats salvation as eschatological and transcendent also. Salvation as humanisation is the historical destiny and salvation as spirituality is the ultimate destiny of man and for Thomas both are integrally related. Thomas' explanation of salvation as the Ultimate can be understood as spirituality and salvation; Christ and salvation; and sin and salvation.

4.2.2.6.3.1 Spirituality and Salvation

The spirituality that Thomas talks about is closely connected to the personal, psychological and social conditions of man. Sunand Sumithra

explains this as a new spirituality which is related to revolution, to history of the world and to open secularism as such. Thomas observes:

"Human spirituality is integrally related to the sense of human selfhood, in which it knows itself to be participating in the necessities of nature and transcending nature in a historical destiny and transforming nature in relation to that destiny". For Thomas human beings are spiritual beings because they have the awareness of a subjective selfhood and this leads to the awareness of the objective world and Ultimate in the awareness of God. Thus he presents a trio of self-world-God with faiths or spiritualities seek to harmonise and understand. According to Thomas the word spirituality is used "to denote the manner in which humans, becoming aware of the transcendence of their selfhood over the world, seek to fulfil the self's meaning, purpose or destiny". The ultimate destiny of man according to Thomas is the resurrection beyond sin, guilt and death and this is referred as a glorified humanity in full communion with God or being in the Kingdom of God. "But the kingdom of resurrection-life, whether for individual or community, does not start only after death, it begins and partially realized here and now, within the dimension of a history facing death and disintegration". Though salvation as the Ultimate is referred as eschatological and transcendent, its preparation

73 Sunand Sumithra, *Christian Theology from an Indian Perspective*, p.166.


and partial fulfillment is realized within human history itself. As Thomas observes, "Salvation remains eschatological, but the historical responsibility within the eschatological frame work cannot but include the task of humanisation of the world in secular history". Therefore Thomas is establishing a close connection between the ultimate destiny through spirituality and the historical destiny through humanisation in the wholistic understanding of salvation. He sights Jesus Christ as an exact example for this integration of historical destiny and ultimate destiny for the whole of humanity.

4.2.2.6.3.2 Jesus Christ and Salvation

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ happened in secular history. For Thomas it is the message, that God has acted in a unique way in a secular historical event, namely the Incarnation, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to inaugurate his Kingdom. Jesus is the New man through him the mission of God to heal the sick, to help the poor and suffering, to liberate the oppressed, to save the sinners has been carried out. Jesus has proclaimed release or liberation to the captives, recovered sight to the blind, set at liberty those who have been oppressed by different oppressors including sin. The culmination of all these things is witnessed on the cross and after the cross. A self-less love has been revealed on the cross and the victory over the powers of evil has been actualized after the cross in resurrection and thus the hope of the ultimate, the resurrection-life, of the Kingdom of God is promised to the whole of humanity. Thus Jesus Christ has become the first fruit of the

77 Ibid., p.8.
ultimate destiny of humanity. Thomas finds in this Jesus Christ the integration of the secular history and the ultimate destiny of man. Thomas strongly believes that the human quest and struggle for humanisation has its answer in Jesus Christ who is the "deed of God in which the love of God and the ultimate destiny of man are both revealed and fulfilled". To sum up, Thomas presents the reality of Christ as follows:

"Jesus Christ is the New man through whom a New Humanity is created after the image of God (Col.3:10). He is the true Adam, through whom all mankind is continuously reconciled to God (2.Cor.5:19) and all creation is being perfected (Rom.8:21). He bears a movement of the spirit leading to the ultimate future of God's relation to man and nature, the consummation of the Kingdom where God shall be all in all" (I Cor.15:20-28; Eph.1:1-16).

Now humanity has to take this model of Jesus Christ for its total salvation by responding to Christ's offer of being an example, of being the New man. Thomas feels, that the response can be, accepting the pattern of humanisation process Christ carried out, accepting the pattern of self-giving love and forgiveness of Christ, accepting the divine mediation or the atonement of the suffering Messiah, accepting Christ as the Lord and saviour and being in the fellowship of the Church.


80 Sunand Sumithra, *Christian Theology from an Indian Perspective*, p.168.
4.2.6.3.3 Sin and Salvation

Thomas no doubt, emphasises that salvation for man should be from sin. But he recognises the presence of sin and evil, and their source not in man's body or fitness but in his spirit, in his spiritual turning away from God to his own self and making his life self-centric. Sin is the refusal of man's spirit to acknowledge the sovereignty of the creator and to recognise his dependence on Him; that is sin is the worship of the self rather than God. Sin is further explained by Thomas as self-righteousness, guilt and fear of death also. For Thomas sin affects the total self and its relation to God, neighbour and nature. Unless sin is overcome by taking the model of Christ, there can be no hope for man. According to Thomas:

"Sin has its corporate expression in the dehumanising spiritual forces of corporate life, the demons of principalities and powers; and the victory of Christ should mean victory 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". 81

This does not mean that Thomas is not for individual salvation, but for him even individual or personal salvation should lead to improvement of collective existence. He believes in the personal understanding of the love of God in Biblical terms, experiencing it through personal devotion more existentially, and expressing it in political and social conditions. This personalism

82 M.M.Thomas, Salvation and Humanisation, p.8.
in salvation as explained by Thomas, is referred by Boyd as, "Biblical, existentialist, socially and politically conditioned personalism".\(^3\) No doubt, Thomas is giving importance to personal salvation but he says that personal salvation becomes meaningful only when it is related to the structures of society. While talking about salvation in Indian context, Thomas emphasizes this point very clearly. For the out castes, the poor and the orphans, "salvation in Christ not only in terms of individual salvation or heaven after death but also as the spiritual source of a new community an earth in which their human dignity and status are recognised".\(^4\)

Thus for Thomas, salvation as spirituality is total and it is the preparation of the whole humanity towards its ultimate destiny of being in the Kingdom of God. This ultimate destiny can be to some extent experienced in this world itself since the New Humanity has come into existence with the New man Jesus Christ.

4.2.3 An Evaluation

According to M.M. Thomas, Christian mission is proclaiming the Gospel of salvation and be witness to that through a way of action. Salvation to Thomas starts with humanisation the historical destiny of humanity and prepares it for its ultimate destiny of inheriting the Kingdom of God. Here Thomas presents very neatly the integral relation between salvation and

\(^3\) Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, p.318.

humanisation. Thomas is not separating the spiritual from the secular, "This is to the credit of Thomas, for he does not see the spiritual aspect of man isolated but in its integral relations with all other aspects"\(^{85}\) says Sunand Sumithra. For the contemporary humanity this idea may be very appealing.

Thomas' explanation of salvation as fullness of life, liberation and the ultimate can be compared with Abraham Maslow's explanation of Hierarchy of needs. According to Maslow, when the lower needs are satisfied man is aspiring for higher needs. This psychological theory can be applied to Thomas' explanation of salvation. Here physiological needs in the sense of good health, material abundance and so on are explained as fullness of life and this forms the basis of salvation process. Then comes psychological needs in the sense of feeling of belongingness, peace and so on. The next is the social needs in the sense of freedom, liberation and finally the spiritual need or esteem need as self-actualisation or achieving ultimate goal. Physiological, psychological and social needs are explained by Thomas under the broad category of humanisation. This can form the secular aspect and this is integrally connected to the spiritual aspect in the total process of salvation. Through this comparison a sound psychological rationale can be given to Thomas' explanation of Salvation.

No doubt Thomas' idea of salvation is situational that is, the meaning and relevance of salvation depends on the cultural, political, social and religious situations. In one situation salvation may mean getting liberated from

\(^{85}\) Sunand Sumithra, *Christian Theology From An Indian Perspective*, p.170.
bondage of slavery, in another situation it may be from bondage of sin or illness; in yet another situation from the bondage of colonialism, racial discrimination, or oppression of the poor and so on. This explanation of Thomas is making the concept of Salvation relevant even to day.

So it can be derived that according to Thomas our understanding of salvation is changing as per the changing needs of the dynamic society. The application of the idea of salvation to our day to day conditions is also changing as per the changes in the situations. In this context Thomas' explanation of Christian mission as *Karma Mārga* is very much in tune with the fast changing nature of modern society.

There is a criticism that Thomas is not Biblical or spiritual in his explanation of salvation. Sunand Sumithra while evaluating the work of Thomas says, "His writings are more Philosophical, sociological, ideological or political but almost never biblical" But one can argue that this criticism need not be valid with regard to Thomas' explanation of salvation because the very basis of the idea of salvation as per Thomas is Christ only. For salvation as humanisation Thomas sights Christ as the example. He goes to the extent of saying that the purpose of Christian Mission is to make Christ known as the source and foundation of true humanisation. So Thomas is not deviating from the core of the Christian Gospel.

Above all Thomas’ explanation of the concept of salvation is more meaningful and relevant to the Indian context in the sense that he has presented salvation as liberation from colonialism and slavery; as humanisation of the outcasts, the poor and the orphans and thus building up a new fellowship, a new society and national community, where human dignity and status are recognised. Thomas has presented the Christian Gospel of salvation not only in the socio-political context of India but also in its spiritual context. This has enabled a dialogue with Hinduism and other religions of India, based on the common and basic context of humanisation. Thus Thomas has given a Christ centered, action oriented, context based explanation of the concept of salvation.