



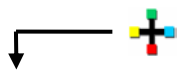
A Review of "Revolution as Revelation: A Study of M. M. Thomas's Theology," by Sunand Sumithra. New Delhi: Theological Research and Communications Institute, and Tubingen: International Christian Network, 1984.

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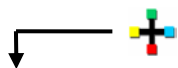
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This is a doctoral dissertation done under the guidance of Professor Peter Beyerhaus at Tubingen, Germany. Sumithra has confined himself to the writings of Thomas from 1954 to 1976. From this period 380 books and articles are listed; sadly, *Joyful & Triumphant* is omitted, the writing that gives perhaps the clearest insight into Thomas's personal faith. Sumithra's conclusion is that "Thomas's theology, being an



attempt to reconcile a philosophy of continuous dynamic evolution, Marxist-Leninist ideology and Hindu spirituality on the one hand, with the biblical revelation on the other, tends ultimately to deprive God of his holiness, Jesus Christ of his lordship and man of his faith, primarily because Thomas neglects the unique character of the Bible" (p. 317).

Readers of Thomas's work who find this conclusion surprising will also be surprised to know that Thomas accepts the impersonal *brahman* of the Vedanta (pp. 132, 301, 334) and denies the lordship of Christ (p. 337), that "his theology makes Christ marginal, almost as an appendage" (p. 322), and that "biblical categories are irrelevant to his system" (p. 323). These conclusions are reached by a method sustained throughout the book: short extracts of Thomas's writings are quoted and then "interpreted." A few examples will indicate the method. Thus Thomas writes: "When the Christian Church speaks of 'original sin' it means that this self-centricity is a fact for all men in all conditions of society, so that self-interest and self-righteousness are perennially present in man's life." Sumithra comments: "Thus, for Thomas, Original Sin means universality of sin, not that every single individual is a sinner" (pp. 122f.). Thomas writes: "St. Paul sees in the

risen Christ 'the first fruits' of the re-creation of humanity, the inauguration of a movement through which Christ establishes his reign over all rule and authority...." Sumithra comments that this shows "the understanding of resurrection as happening in the subjective, spiritual world" (p. 160). Thomas writes: "God must be worshipped through Jesus Christ as an essential part of the community life." Sumithra comments, "Thus, Jesus being God-for-man in Thomas's thinking, he takes a place similar to that of a demiurge" (p. 171). I have marked about sixty "interpretations" of this kind-plainly remote to the point of contradiction from the text.

Why is Sumithra unable to understand Thomas's thought? It is because he begins from a so-called classical view of mission, loosely put together from elements of Ziegenbalg and Carey (pp. 1-9) and later amplified as "the redemption of a person from the wrath of God, through his faith in the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ for his sins, so that the sinner is forgiven and joins the Church for further nurture in the spiritual life" (p. 203). Missing from this definition is any reference to the corporate and cosmic dimensions of Christ's work or to the ethical implications of salvation. Other elements in the author's framework become clear as the study proceeds. God's transcendence is defined in natural-theology terms-"separation from man" (p. 171), "omniscience and omnipotence" (p. 324), and total uninvolvedness in history (p. 267). Sumithra cannot, therefore, accept Thomas's more biblical categories for describing transcendence (p. 165). True to his natural-theology approach, Sumithra sees "body" and "soul" as "substances" whose separateness must be affirmed, and therefore rejects Thomas's biblical perception of the body-soul unity. There is no place for the cosmic Christ of Ephesians and Colossians. With this natural theology goes a strict individualism. The Holy Spirit works with individuals, not with the church (p. 334), which is defined as "an impersonal organization" (p. 219), and it is not surprising that God is understood to be "a person" (p. 133).

The thought of M. M. Thomas needs and deserves thorough theological study. Unfortunately, this volume does not contribute to this task.

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