

Humanisation as a Goal of Revolution*

SARAL K. CHATTERJI

Humanisation as a category of thought is common to both theology and secular political movements. It is an objective, though in different senses, of change and revolution in both. While in the former it has an eschatological dimension relating it to salvation, the latter is supposed to confine it to 'this side of death and disintegration', within the framework of earthly existence. In the theological approach the struggle to humanise the world is brought into closer relationship with God's offer of a new humanity in Jesus Christ, the New Man. It is through this identification with Jesus who, being one with the transcendental God, rose from the dead, thereby defeating sin, including the corporate sins and dehumanising forces of 'principalities and powers', that the theological approach is able to construct the concept of true humanisation, which includes both transcendence and a justification of struggles for humanisation in this world within the eschatological framework. Thus, true humanisation is dependent on this relationship, and unless this transcendental dimension is realised in the struggle for humanisation, 'man does not have room to be truly human'. This also leads us to see how the world history of struggles is brought into relationship with salvation-history. In the words of M. M. 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 powers for the humanisation of the

* A paper read at a Seminar on 'Politics, Revolution and Humanisation' conducted by Dr Charles West at Bishop's College, Calcutta, in August 1972,

structures of collective existence. . . . Salvation remains eschatological, but the historical responsibility within the eschatological framework cannot but include the task of humanisation of the world in secular history.¹

All this is well known to those familiar with theological reflection and debates on salvation, humanisation and mission. For the purpose of this paper, however, I would like to emphasise certain ideas which are, to my mind, related to the above theological formulations.

The first is that the new humanity offered to the world in Christ is not to be identified with the Church alone. It is given to all peoples and all nations. The fellowship which the new humanity implies incorporates both the Church and the larger secular world. This means that in so far as the new humanity in Christ has relevance also to the struggles for humanisation in this world, these events are of significance both to salvation history and world history, even though those who participate in them may not know or acknowledge the gift of new humanity. It is clear, therefore, that the task of those who do acknowledge it is to participate in these struggles; and that, in the context particularly of the struggles in this country, without participation with a well-determined historical perspective much else will be fruitless.

The second idea inherent in the theological position stated above is that 'God makes both nature and secular history participate in the history of salvation'; and that those whom He commissions to carry out His work may be quite unaware of Him. Consider the following lines:

'For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen,
I call you by name, I surname you, though you do
not know me,
I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me
there is no God,
I gird you, though you do not know me.' (Isa. 45:4).

One might add that wherever those who profess to know Him have failed in their mission or been indifferent to the need for struggle for humanisation, He has used solely those who do not know Him or even those who are opposed to Him.

¹ M. M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanisation*, CLS/CISRS 1971, p. 8.

The third idea I wish to emphasise here is related to the process of secularisation. This world-wide process which owes its origin to the Judaeo-Christian tradition devalues the pretensions of human structures to sacredness and the idea that everything, the temporal and the eternal, the divine and the human, nature and society, are all part of a cosmic whole. It destroys the notion of the immutability of the social order, it undermines also much of the claim of religion, with its own structures, to be supra-mundane. Emerito Nacpil deduces from this an important corollary which I would like to mention here. He says:

‘The Christian faith has spawned in history an almost perfect liberation of man from mythical, religious and metaphysical custody so that the only way for this process to be complete is to declare its independence from its primal source, take on life of its own, and determine the direction and limits in which it should move’.²

This means that the secularised world which has come of age has its own life to live in independence, and that it should take the secularisation process to its logical end. Bonhoeffer, whom Nacpil quotes in this connection, speaks of God allowing himself to be edged out of this world and on to the Cross. Thus God, according to this view, who teaches men to get along without Him, accompanies the world, rather than abandons it, in suffering and pain to the very end of the process. At this point, when man becomes himself, standing alone without the traditional crutches, God becomes possible to him. But whether God becomes a real possibility depends, as Nacpil points out, on whether the Church ‘remains true to its Gospel of freedom, and has accompanied man in suffering all the way to the very end’.

The implication of these ideas is that in the unfolding drama of humanisation it is theologically possible to assign the central role together with, or rather opposite to, Christ the New Man, to the social and political struggles of our time for freedom and justice. Those who profess to know Him or to worship Him can play a significant role only to the extent that they learn to follow their master into the thick of the battle for humanisation already going on in the world. This also means that they must acquire a definite, well-defined perspective on the historical struggle for humanisation. It is not enough to propound alter-

² E. P. Nacpil, *Mission and Change*, East Asia Christian Council, 1968.

native choices present in given situations. It is necessary to *choose* between the conflicting sides. We shall return to this presently, when we consider the Indian situation.

The characterisation of the secular political movements, including those which have been traditionally anti-religious, as lacking in transcendental dimension misses much of the ethos of those movements. Unfortunately M. M. Thomas, in order to illustrate his point about the essential incompleteness of a humanism shorn of transcendence, mentions in his book *Salvation and Humanisation* persons, most of whom opted out of the political or revolutionary struggle for humanisation. From personal knowledge I can say that it would not have been difficult to find, even within the same movement which produced personalities like J. P. Narain and Achut Patwardhan, whom M. M. Thomas mentions, others who were keenly conscious of the limitations of every human struggle, and were convinced of the need for continual renewal and permanent struggle against dehumanisation. When, for example, a week before he died, Dr Rammanohar Lohia asked me to begin afresh the search for what he called 'the socialist identity', he was not only pointing his prophetic finger at the successes and failures of his famous strategy of non-Congressism, but also raising his longing eyes to the future, which though unborn was yet present in the events of the contemporary world, when the self-understanding and the search for identity of all those who fight for humanisation would coincide with the liberation of man. Like him, countless others would be one with Rabindranath Tagore in saying 'salvation through renunciation is not for me'. Like him they would indeed go further in affirming that for them salvation means remaining at their posts in the on-going struggle, in the hope that this struggle through the coming ages would reach its fulfilment. What they see at the end is probably not God or Christ. But I suggest that to the extent that they realise their own finiteness and incompleteness, their struggle indeed is a preparation for Him and a part of salvation history.

Apparently some continental and East European Marxist-philosophers are now speaking in the same vein about humanisation and transcendence, although it has taken them long and bloody years to realise it. Commenting on the discussion on Marx's theory of alienation, an Italian Marxist thinker observes: 'It seems to me that this dimension is leading to the realisation that the end of capitalist alienation (in which the worker becomes

a stranger to his own work and consequently to himself) does not necessarily mean the end of alienation in general'.³ In other words, new forms of alienation can and do arise even after the changes in the productive structure have taken place, and classes have disappeared. It seems to me that one of the ideas which comes out strongly in Mao Tse Tung's writings says the same thing to us. It is that contradictions do not disappear altogether even in a socialist society, where the contradiction between leaders and led can still be a major stumbling-block in the path of the revolution. Roger Garaudy puts the problem of transcendence in Marxist thinking clearly when he says that the question of transcendence remains although the religious answer to it is false. To quote Lombardo Radice again:

"There is something going beyond or transcending nature, history and individual experience: it is the future. The individual has a permanent feeling of incompleteness. He bears in himself not only the past, but also the possibility of future evolution. If I am correct in interpreting Garaudy's ideas, he puts the source, or at least one source, of religion deeper than Marx did—the projection of mankind into the future, and in the incompleteness of evolution in each of its states."⁴

Thus if world history is already a part of salvation-history, and questions of a theological nature are already being asked by ideologically orientated people, cannot theology grapple with such ideological questions as a well-determined historical perspective on the struggle for humanisation and liberation? I believe it is possible to think through from the theological premises stated above in order to arrive at a meaningful perspective capable of guiding people to the ongoing struggle. Although this is possible, many theologians, and the Church, have consistently stopped short. It is the unwillingness to think *ideologically and radically* about society, even when speaking of participation in the revolution of our times, which has confined the theological insights within the framework of 'religion'. In the absence of such a perspective, the concern for humanisation finds expression in the traditional pietistic attitudes of charity and compassion;

³ Lombardo Radice, 'Some Open Questions in the Dialogue between Marxists and Christians' *Study Encounter*, Vol. IV, No. 1, 1968 (World Council of Churches), p. 28.

⁴ L. Radice, *Op. cit.*

but it fails to bring out the fundamental factors which have to be tackled and fought against. In concrete situations such as those existing in India and other Asian countries, this results in a sad distortion of the prophetic role of the Church.

Let us consider this problem briefly in the context of the Indian situation. What does this perspective on the struggle for humanisation imply? The dehumanising forces in Indian society are commonly identified as poverty, starvation, disease, ignorance, etc., and the task of humanisation is seen to be identical with solving these specific problems. Often the problems of outmoded values and institutions are also taken into consideration, but by and large it is assumed that these will change automatically with economic development. As Gunnar Myrdal has shown so clearly, the analysis of development produced by official planners, decision-makers and other intellectuals is based on the *ceteris paribus* ('other things remaining the same') principle, and the automatic *mutatis mutandis* ('necessary changes having been made') assumptions in regard to most of the fundamental factors which fall outside the convenient models of economic growth, such as power-structures, the nature and source of the power of the ruling *élite*, the social, economic and cultural origins of exploitation, and the rigid institutional factors in general. This kind of analysis is easy, as it does not have to cope with the intransigent forces of traditions; and it is also safe from the point of view of vested interests, the *status quo*, and the ruling classes. I am not trying to say that economic measures for development are unimportant, or that the Church and other voluntary agencies should not rush with relief and aid whenever and wherever these are needed. What I do want to emphasise is the fact that the sum total of all these concerns does not exhaust the concern for humanisation.

Indian society presents the picture of a unique exploitative system, without reference to which it is impossible to determine any perspective on the struggle for humanisation. Here we can do no more than mention a major aspect of this system, *viz.*, the nature of the power-structure in the country. I repeat here a part of what I have written about it elsewhere:

"The various elements of the *élite* have common features and interests which transcend the narrowly conceived class demarcations. What are these common features of the different sections of the *élite*? A characteristic of the *élite* which has made

the stratification in society more rigid and exploitation more ingenious is a fairly widespread and high degree of correlation between an ascribed social status and wealth. Generally speaking, if class is determined by the possession or otherwise of economic wealth, and social hierarchy by caste ranking, then it would not be entirely wrong to say that they go together. It would ordinarily be quite unnecessary to mention the obvious fact that this class-caste combination would also monopolise culture and education. However, this last characteristic has acquired great social significance in contemporary India where power, wealth and education have come to depend on the knowledge of English language. The English language has, therefore, become an instrument through which the *status quo* is maintained and, as the majority of the people cannot acquire a sufficient knowledge of the language, a way of blocking the path of the under-privileged towards progress and prosperity.

'Decision-makers in every sphere, political party leaders, and the bureaucracy share these characteristics of caste, wealth and language. It is unlikely that anything that would destroy these sources of power, which coexist in clusters and are mutually strengthening, would find favour with the political and intellectual *élite* of the country. It is this peculiar characteristic of the power structure as a whole, rather than the interest of any class, that stands in the way of a radical transformation of society.'⁵

This typology of the power-*élite*, together with the various institutional factors implied in it, as well as those analysed by social scientists like Gunnar Myrdal, give us a good idea of what the struggle for humanisation is about. Given this, the question to which we must address ourselves is this: do the theological and social insights enable us to determine a strategy of change relevant and powerful enough to take us towards humanisation? On the plane of strategy, theological discussions have often stressed the role of religions, particularly the so-called renascent religions, and the need for dialogue between different faiths on

⁵ Saral K. Chatterji, (ed.), *Political Prospects in India*, CISRS 1971, pp. 158f.

the subject of humanisation. But neither in terms of the theological formulations in the preceding sections of this paper, nor of concrete situations in this country, can we consider the role of religions as crucial in humanisation and secularisation. Presumably those who affirm their significance have the Western experience in mind. The Western experience of secularisation draws our attention to such factors as the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the renaissance, the reformation, industrialisation and the growth of technology. The application of this syndrome to a traditional society would imply a change in the religious tradition, a reformation no less, resulting in a changed world view, and a beginning or an acceleration of the process of secularisation. To my mind, the religious interpretations that have been, or are being, made in this country, are not even the beginnings of a reformation capable of moulding people's minds and behaviour. In this country there has always been an almost unbridgeable gap between the highly intellectualised religion of a handful of people belonging to the upper classes and castes, and the popular religiosity of the masses. What happens in one scarcely affects the other. Thus, the struggle for humanisation cannot wait for religious reformations to take place, or for religions to develop the necessary ethic. I do not deny the theoretical possibility of all religions undergoing changes and developing the new ethic of humanisation, but in determining priorities in the strategy of struggle, religions, both because of historical and inherent reasons, cannot be relied upon as a major instrument. Nor, as we pointed out earlier, can the urge for humanisation be taken care of by the automatic *mutatis mutandis* and the *ceteris paribus* assumptions of social science. In other words, humanisation cannot be expected as an automatic result of economic development. We are therefore left with the people's conscious struggle against the dehumanising forces as the promise of the real possibility of humanisation.

In terms of the preceding formulations we can hardly speak of a conflict between the meaning of incarnation in the context of humanisation, and the ideology behind a comprehensive struggle against all forms of dehumanisation. Without an awareness of the former, the latter may remain incomplete: a messianic surrogate, perhaps, but it is still a preparation for true humanisation. This certainly presupposes a judgement, in the light of the meaning of incarnation, of ideologies and movements. That God will judge is no justification for not making use of His

gifts to man of freedom and the responsibility to choose rightly. The distortion of the encounter between incarnation and ideology takes place only when the Church, or the ecumenical movement itself, becomes one with the ideology of vested interests, or with those which, in spite of their professed revolutionary aims, betray unmistakable signs of dehumanisation.

This ideological dimension of messianic humanism is an automatic discriminator between different ideologies and movements, and helps to determine the nature of involvement as well as its scope. It not only helps to discriminate between the forces of *status quo* and vested interests on the one hand, and those of fundamental change on the other, but also between the diverse ideologies and movements belonging to the latter. It helps to determine also the extent to which it is possible or desirable to come to an understanding with these forces. In all this, however, the basic point is the capacity to identify the root causes of dehumanisation, and to be committed to an all-out struggle against them. Without this dimension, the theological perspective will remain incomplete, just as the purely secular ideology without the eschatological perspective will remain ineffective in the face of corruption and disintegration.

This complementary dimension, therefore, is the link between the theological and secular perspectives. The failure to be conscious of this link, and the resulting inability to adopt an integrated approach to humanisation have been a major defect of the development conferences of the Church in India and Asia. Participation in the struggle for humanisation cannot but be a political problem in the broad sense of the term. It is in a very real sense the political aspect of salvation-activity in this world of men. Without this link, the concern for humanisation is not transformed into the politics of humanisation.

The politics of humanisation, then, is also the means through which we can establish the essential link between our concern for true humanisation, with its eschatological perspective, and the messianic reality. "The stewards of "the mystery of our religion" suggests Paul Lehmann, 'have been conspicuously insensitive to its messianic substance, and have allowed unavoidable metaphysical formulations to obscure the messianic reality of the incarnation.'⁶ The messianic reality includes the world of men, with its corporate structure, institutions and values, or

⁶ Paul L. Lehmann, *Ideology and Incarnation*, John Knox Association, 1962, p. 24.

(in other words) those very things which form the subject-matter of the politics of humanisation; and the dynamic concept of this reality, without which it has little significance, implies a fundamental renewal through destruction or adjustment, depending on the nature of the root-causes of dehumanisation, and the elasticity of the structures. Whether it is revolution or reform that is needed, the politics of humanisation is both a theological and a secular concept.

There is still one difficulty which needs to be tackled. The prevalent opinion about the Church's actual participation in the struggle for humanisation is that it should refrain from taking sides in the battle. In terms of our typology of the power-struggle in this country, the question can be asked whether, in the continuing struggle against it, the Church can accept both the *élite* and the exploited masses. The view that the Church transcends ideologies, classes or interests does not help us very much; on the other hand, it tends to confirm the suspicion that the Church is dependent for its own structures on the ruling power structures. This view, which leads to such formulations as 'the need to work with all' etc., which are commonly found in ecumenical circles, should be distinguished from the one which affirms the universality of the mission of the Church. The gospel and its messianic humanism are relevant to all, they lead everyone to the struggle for humanisation, and thereby lead everyone to liberation. We have a parallel to this in Marx's thinking, that in the industrial society both the proletariat and the capitalists suffer from alienation; the capitalists, however, are comfortable in their alienation, while the proletariat is forced into a miserable existence. By implication, therefore, revolution frees both the classes of individuals. In the same way, the act of the Church in taking a definite stand in favour of radical change in concrete situations should not mean the rejection of those who represent the vested interests, although it does mean that the Church is irrevocably committed to the destruction of the concentration of power in their hands, and of their oppressive institutions.

There are thus no substitute ways for this commitment in the Church's thought and action, i.e., in its mission to the contemporary revolution. It is this special ideological or political perspective on humanisation which will enable the Church to accompany man, perhaps *incognito* like its Lord and Master, to the very end of the journey, and to help him to come into the inheritance for which God has designed him.