CHAPTER IV
INTER-CHURCH CONVERSATIONS

The wish for unity is an inborn urge of every man in spite of different and challenging circumstances. The major nations of the world are trying to be united in their efforts to establish peace and to further development in the world. This urge for unity is all the more evident in the Christian Churches, especially among the St. Thomas Christians who were in one communion in the beginning. The divisions which occurred in the Syrian Churches of Kerala are due to missionary and political reasons. The tragic picture of the divided Syrian Christian Churches of Kerala calls for our zealous attention. This sad situation has made many a Christian think about the divisions in the Churches and visualise the possible ways to meet together for promoting unity among the divided Syrian Christians.

Two factors are considered to be influential in bringing about the unity movement in Kerala. The first is the ancient tradition and culture of the Thomas Christians. From the first century to the sixteenth, they had a common tradition and common history. This oneness must have helped them to come closer. The memories of oneness must have created an urge for unity to witness Christ before the world. The
second factor is the modern Biblical studies. Modern scientific research and study of the Bible were felt as common necessities by Catholics and Non-Catholics. This study brought the scholars together. All the Anglicans thought that they should be one. The same thought motivated Methodists, Lutherans, etc. This movement helped the Syrians to come closer and establish dialogue among themselves.

The 19th and 20th centuries witnessed certain remarkable movements which played a key role in the ecumenical movements fostering important trends among the Syrians. The following are some of the important movements of the 19th and 20th centuries.

4.1 Universal Evangelical Alliance

This was started in 1847. Those alliances tried for unity of Churches through spiritual activities and pious associations. Adolf Monod, a Frenchman, who was the spokesman of these alliances, used the term 'Ecumenism' for the first time to note the unity efforts

4.2 The Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A)

The Evangelical Awakening urged the youth to start this movement, which led to the unity efforts. The Y.M.C.A was started in 1844 in England. It seeks to unite those young men who, regarding Jesus Christ as their God and saviour, according to the Holy Scriptures, desired to be His disciples in their faith and in their life to associate their efforts for the extension of His Kingdom amongst young men.

The Y.M.C.A is made up of men from all faiths; at the same time, it is rooted in the Christian faith. It is this uniqueness of Christian
faith that encompasses people of all faiths in order to achieve the essential goal of building up a just and fraternal world. The relationship between the search for unity in faith and engagement in human struggle is not altogether a new idea. The very nature and calling of the Church is that it is to be present in the society in such a way that it should strengthen the Church. The search for unity which does not take into account the hopes of the people for full participation in the human family would be a retreat from the vision of Jesus as it was envisaged in the high priestly prayer. As far as the action of a Christian movement today is concerned, development, in its local and global aspects, should be accorded higher priority on its agenda. The Y.M.C.A had its branches in Kerala and it became a greater force in helping our Churches move towards the kind of society which enabled every individual to achieve his full potential. This association should be remembered with gratitude among pioneering ecumenical movements. It took some of the best men belonging to three great nations of the world to build the one vibrant youth movement, the Young Men’s Christian Association of India, which for a century has promoted excellence among the young. Born as a mid-nineteenth century urban enterprise, the Y.M.C.A launched a movement to meet human needs of the modern city, a product of the industrial revolution. London was the birth-place of the Y.M.C.A. Movement, itself the handiwork of George Williams, a God-inspired businessman.

4.3 The Indian Situation

The general atmosphere in India was not conducive to the growth of the Y.M.C.A movement. The Y.M.C.A came into its own in the
service of Indian youth and made a permanent contribution to the making of modern India. The appointment of K.T. Paul served to Indianise the Y.M.C.A., which came to be the first amongst all missionary organisations in the country which were engaged in the great task of discovering and training Indian leaders of adequate education and entrusting to them larger responsibilities. Behind the new and startling experiment was the powerful support of Dr. John R. Mott who had always demonstrated a genius for discovering the right man at the right time. It was he who had, in fact, drawn K.T. Paul in to the service of the Y.M.C.A.

4.4 Role of the Y.M.C.A

The Indian Christian community did not remain untouche d by the prevailing spirit. The Y.M.C.A contributed much to blunt the edge of hostility to the Indian Christian community and Church. The first Y.M.C.A in India was started at Calcutta on 1st August 1854 in a meeting at the Town Hall. When we trace the history it had no already progress. Its purpose was to spread moral and religious knowledge among young men by meeting, library, organising lectures on scientific and religious subjects and conducting Sunday schools, prayer meetings and Bible study groups. Today, government, voluntary organisations and institutions have realised the fact that any attempt at development of our nation will be futile unless the attempts are directed at the village level, even though the Y.M.C.A is generally considered as an urban organisation.
4.5 The Young Women's Christian Association (Y.W.C.A.)

This was started in 1855. The ideals and goals of these associations are almost the same as those of the Y.M.C.A. After ten years of the foundation of the Y.M.C.A, they must have felt the need of having a common Christian forum for the young women to get united. The Y.W.C.A. attracted the Keralites and many young women, full of enthusiasm to join this movement.

4.6 The Student Christian Movement (S.C.M)

"The inter-denominational basis" of the S.C.M. prepared the way for the churches to come together in the Faith and Order Movement, and compare the different doctrines and to share their treasures. Many of the modern ecumenical leaders were trained by the Student Christian Movement in its ecumenical laboratories of mutual learning through its regular prayer meetings, group discussions, Bible studies and annual conferences. The Madras Christian College played a leading role in training youths with an ecumenical outlook. The basis of the S.C.M in the Madras Christian College was always national. The theological basis of the movement as adopted in 1895 was "A Belief in Jesus Christ as God and the Saviour of the World". The students, fired with a passion for the Evangelisation of the world, wanted to draw to their fellowships all their fellow students, to whatever Churches they belonged. The best way was to approach the churches themselves and explain the nature and objectives of this movement. Many churches of different spiritual traditions welcomed this movement. It became an interdenominational movement. Thus, a new basis for co-operation,
not hitherto tried, had been devised which was to have far-reaching results for the Christian Churches. The S.C.M. developed a new approach and method for ecumenical conversations and removed the great psychological obstacles by demonstrating the possibility of a new type of Christian organisation where loyal members of different Churches would meet without compromise. Our purpose here is not to write the history of the Student Christian Movement. We only want to point out how “the interdenominational basis” of the Student Christian Movement prepared the way for the churches to come together in the Faith and Order Movement to discuss and compare their different doctrines and thus to share their treasures. As a reaction to the Enlightenment of the 18th century and its child, Rationalism, the 19th century gave birth to diverse spiritual movements and to the Evangelical awakening. On the other, as a reaction, there arose many voluntary movements like the Evangelical Alliance, the Y.M.C.A, the Y.W.C.A, the Inter-seminary Missionary Alliance, the Student Voluntary Movement, and so on. It is the Y.M.C.A and the Y.W.C.A, founded in 1844 and 1855 respectively, which started to organise the students through their student departments.

The basis of the Student Christian Movement was always inter-denominational, although in its early years, it was limited to the reformation churches. The method of the Student Christian Movement was not “undenominational” but “inter-denominational”, succeeded by the terms “inter-confessional” and “ecumenical”. A new ecumenical ideal was presented, which combined faithfully the two ideals of the past, “Unity in Truth” and “Unity in Fellowship”.

4.7 Faith and Order Movement

These were the two ecumenical movements which paved the way for the formation of the World Council of Churches. These movements were started specifically for the unity of the churches. Regarding the origin of the Faith and Order Movement, one author speaks, "Various factors prepared the way for the Faith and Order Movement and its comparative method. It was the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh of 1910 which gave inspiration to Bishop Brent and others to hold a similar world conference of faith and order". This movement prepared the way for the various Syrian Churches to come closer. The groundwork for both was prepared by the voluntary movements of the 19th century, especially by the Student Christian Movement, which was a child of the evangelical awakening and the missionary movement of the 18th and 19th centuries. The formation of the World Denominational Fellowship, was a process initiated in the latter part of the 19th century and completed in the 20th century. Comparing the faith and order of the different churches, with a view to reaching agreement and unity was, after all, not novel in the history of the Churches. It was the dominant ideal of unity, which was often spoken of as "Unity in Truth", and was vigorously promoted by its apostles in all the different Churches throughout the history of the Ecumenical Movement.

4.8 The Bible Society

The Bible Society also helped to experience a sense of unity in the Churches of Malabar in South India. In 1804, British and foreign
Bible societies came into existence. Within its first ten years, it formed branches in many parts of the world. It brought various denominations closer and closer.

4.9 The South Indian United Church (S.I.U.C.)

Col. Macaulay, the first British Resident in Travancore, who was very much concerned with the welfare of the Syrian Church, reported: "To Unite them to the Church of England would in my opinion be a most notable work". He made some attempts to bring about the union, but they did not bear fruit. The first fruitful attempt at an interdenominational union was the S.I.U.C formed in 1908. This was a union of Congregational and Presbyterian Churches in South India and Jaffna in Ceylon. In 1919 the Basel Mission in the district of Malabar also joined. The Church order was a mixture of Congregationalism and Presbyterianism. The church was governed by eight regional Church Councils and had also a General Assembly which, however, lacked authority. Its decisions had to be ratified by Church Councils before implementation.

4.10 The National Missionary Council of India, Burma and Ceylon (N.M.C.I)

The National Missionary Council of India was established in 1912. It aided famine relief, promoted literature, agriculture, education and village improvement, set up a youth committee, and inaugurated a Christian Home Movement. Always it stressed evangelism, especially through the mass movements from which came so large a percentage
of accession to the Churches. Under the supervision of the N.M.C.I. in India, there was a Medical Missionary Association; later, as the indigenous element increased, to be called the Christian Medical Association of India. There was also literature societies, including a Christian Literature Society for India. The co-operation was outstanding in the field of education, especially in higher education, many Christian colleges were supported by the joint enterprise of several denominations.

4.11 Inter-denominational Unity Efforts

Let us see the various institutions that enriched the development of inter-denominational unity. The prominent among them were the following:-

4.11.1 The Serampore College

The theological education displayed a striking measure of co-operation in the fields of denominational institutions, inter-denominational colleges and seminaries. The Serampore College was one among them. It was the centre of the theological enterprise for the whole of India. Founded by the great pioneer of modern protestant missions, William Carey, through a charter from the Danish Government later confirmed by the Governments of Great Britain and Bengal, it had authority to grant degrees, including those in Divinity.

4.11.2 The Madras Christian College and Ecumenism

A new window was opened in the field of higher education and ecumenism with the foundation of the Madras Christian College. It
was a great institution supported by many churches, but mainly under
Scottish and Presbyterian leadership. The most remarkable student
of this great institution in the field of ecumenism was K.C. Chacko
(died in 1947) who in his year was reckoned as a great intellectual.
Chacko exercised an ecumenical influence without parallel in the Lesser
Eastern Churches. In 1911, he attended the meeting of the World
Student Christian Federation in Constantinople; this experience was
to lead him on to greater things. It was as a result of the prayers and
efforts of K.C. Chacko that in January 1913 the leaders of the Malankara,
Mar Thoma and Anglican Churches were introduced to meet at Serampore,
under the chairmanship of Dr. Mott, to discuss their common problems.
The atmosphere was far more friendly than any one had imagined
possible, and this conference marked a turning-point in inter-Church
relationship in Travancore\(^3\). An increasing number of Syrian students
came either to Serampore or to the (Anglican) Bishop's college, Calcutta,
for their theological training.

4.11.3 The Union Christian College, Alwaye (U.C.College)

The foundation of the Alwaye U.C.college in 1921 as a venture
of faith on the part of a group of friends, the old students of the
Madras Christian College belonging to the Orthodox and the Mar Thoma
Churches, together with an Anglican missionary, raised great hopes
towards Christian unity in Travancore\(^4\). Those hopes were raised
to a higher pitch when representatives of the Churches came together
in the thirties to discuss the points of agreement as well as of differences
between their Churches with a view to promoting closer co-operation
But, for various reasons, the negotiations were broken off. They had the unstinted support of many influential senior leaders in the different denominations. Not unnaturally, they feared that denominational differences and jealousies might hamper and even kill the young institution. But in spite of all such fears, the college made steady progress from the very beginning, despite serious financial handicaps. One distinguishing feature of it is that the permanent Christian teachers who had dedicated themselves to the service of the college constituted a fellowship on a footing of essential quality, and this fellowship was responsible for the daily working and internal administration of the institution, though there was an external governing council on which sat representatives of the three churches, along with those of the fellowship. The college follows the same set-up even today and stands as a shining example of successful inter-denominational co-operation. The college took the lead in organising the Kerala Council of Church Union composed of leading representatives of three churches, bishops, clergy and laymen. They met more than once to consider the question of the churches themselves drawing closer together in some kind of union. Over a whole generation, Alwaye has exercised a healing ecumenical influence in an area in which the Christian situation is perhaps more complicated than in any other part of the world. The fruits of these wider contacts were seen when both these branches of the ancient Indian Church became member churches of the World Council of Churches and were represented at the Amsterdam Assembly by their Metropolitans. In these ecumenical contacts, they had much in common, not only with the other Lesser Eastern Churches, but also with the Churches of the great Orthodox tradition.
4.11.4 World Council of Churches

The year 1920 is a decisive date in the history of the ecumenical movement, and also in the relations between the Eastern churches and the western. From that year till the outbreak of the second World War in 1939, there were three distinct channels for those increasingly closer contacts which culminated in the formation of the World Council of Churches with the participation of several Eastern churches. The Edinburgh 1910 Conference, the Life and work movement, and the Faith and Order Movement created a sense of togetherness and oneness in various denominations. They stressed the need for a league of Churches. The first meeting of the W.C.C. met at Amsterdam in 1948. The main theme of the assembly was "man's disorder and God's design". It was in this assembly that the W.C.C. was officially constituted.

4.12 Attitude of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church towards Church Union

The Mar Thoma Syrian Church is a unique church which is both conservative and radical in thought and action. For that reason itself, the Church has an important place and role in the unity of Churches. For an effective communication of the gospel, mutual acceptance and love between different Churches are highly essential. The feeling of oneness among the churches is also important. Up to the 16th century, the Syrian Church in India was an undivided church. Due to various reasons it split into different denominations. In spite of the division, the Mar Thoma Church had always been for unity and better understanding between different Churches. Another factor that influenced its thinking
was the ecumenical fervour provided by ecumenical conferences in the former part of the 20th century. All these factors persuaded the Mar Thoma Syrian church to play an important role among different churches and organisations to attain better understanding and cooperation between them.

4.12.1 Role in the field of Ecumenism

The Mar Thoma Church took a keen interest in the Ecumenical Movement. It sent official delegates to the World Youth Conferences at Oslo, Amsterdam and Kottayam and to the meetings of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam and Evanston. Besides, the individual members of the church had been taking active parts in ecumenical negotiations like W.S.C.F; Y.M.C.A; Y.W.C.A; etc as secretaries, organisers, consultants, leaders of conferences and in other capacities. The name of M.M. Thomas is worth mentioning together with that of the Metropolitan Juhanon Mar Thoma who was one of the presidents of the World council of churches. It must be noted that in the ecumenical field, the Mar Thoma delegates took an independent stand, identifying themselves, neither with the so-called Orthodox camp nor with the western 'Reformed' camp. The Syrian churches of Matańkara were to, remind themselves that ecumenicity did not merely mean taking part in a world organisation. It was all very well for a church to participate in ecumenical conferences. But since ecumenicity was the very nature of the Church, it had to be correctly illustrated in the life of a particular church in the place where it existed. The Church to be ecumenical
had, therefore, to possess a world-wide outlook and it should be all-embracing in its love; exclusiveness of any kind would be the very negation of ecumenism. This naturally led to the consideration of the attitude of the Mar Thoma Church towards Church union.

4.12.2 Maramon Convention

The Mar Thoma Syrian Church understood it as its first duty to preach and proclaim the Gospel of the kingdom of God to all people everywhere, to the uttermost corners of the earth. The first convention of 1070 Malayalam Era (1895 A.D) was held for eight days at Maramon in central Travancore. The very Rev. K.E. Oommen records that the members of the backward and depressed classes (then considered untouchables) were allowed free access to the meetings of the Convention and that sight of those people sitting side by side with the members of the Syrian community, singing praises to our lord and hearing from his word, was a great spectacle of Christian unity, which cut across colour and communal barriers. One special feature of the convention was that it was not designed to promote any sectarian teachings.

The messages were based on the fundamentals of the Christian faith and designed to draw the listeners closer to the Lord. They explained how God revealed Himself to mankind through His son, Jesus Christ, and called upon the hearers to come to his saving grace by renouncing their sinful ways and dedicating themselves to His will and discipline. Hence the messages were acceptable to all the Christian communities in Kerala.
4.13 The MarThoma Syrian Church and Churches with Full Communion Relationship

The ecumenical spirit which is being kept by the Mar Thoma Church from its beginning, produced much fruit especially in the ecumenical era of the 20th century. Regarding the unity of Churches, the Church considered it as the will of God. To accomplish that will, the Church had always been in the forefront of the union negotiations. Through continuous efforts the Church established full communion relationship with some of the important Churches in and outside India. The union negotiations between the Mar Thoma Church and some other important Churches culminated in the establishment of full communion relationship.

4.13.1 Relationships with the Anglican Church

Towards the close of the 18th century, the British East India Company became the dominating western power in India. Since 1793, the British East India Company did not encourage the work of missionaries other than their own chaplains. But in 1813, they renewed their Charter and allowed missionaries to work in India. As a result of the Charter, a great expansion of Protestant mission was visible in India. A notable feature of the Charter of 1813 was the establishment of an ecclesiastical power in India. It consisted of a Bishop at Calcutta and three Archdeacons in each of the three Presidency towns of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. This was the introduction of the Anglican Church in India. In 1833, two bishops were appointed to Madras and Bombay, in addition to a bishop already in Calcutta.
of the 19th century, Travancore and Cochin entered into treaty relationship with the British, to protect themselves from Tippu Sultan. As per the condition, the first British Resident, Colonel Macaulay, was appointed in Travancore. He was succeeded by Col. Munro. He took interest in the welfare of the Syrians. The life of the Syrian Church was deteriorating during that period. So he took the initiative and wrote to the Church Missionary Society (CMS) to send a mission of help. The CMS responded positively and sent Rev. Thomas Norton to Malabar in 1816. Mr. K.K Kuruvilla puts it thus:

"The beginning of the 19th century was characterised by the interest of the Church of England in the welfare of the Syrian Church. The visit of Buchanan and the influence of the British Resident, Col. Munro, led to the arrival of the CMS missionaries in Malabar."

In the following year, three prominent CMS missionaries, who were known as Kottayam Trios, Benjamin Bailey, Joseph Fenn and Henry Becker came to Kottayam and worked among Syrians during the period of Pulicot Mar Dionysius and Punnathra Mar Dionysius. They made a spiritual impact upon the Church in the direction of participation of the life of its members in accordance with Christian standards. Unfortunately, a tension developed between the missionaries and their Metropolitan of the Syrian Church, Chepatt Mar Dionysius. During this time, the old missionaries left the country and two missionaries, Joseph Peet and W.J. Woodcock, arrived. But the tension between
them was not solved. In 1835, Anglican Bishop of Calcutta, Bishop Wilson tried to solve the problems between the missionaries and the Metropolitan. For that he made some suggestions to the Metropolitan\textsuperscript{24}. To consider the suggestion, the Metropolitan, Cheppat Mar Dionysius, convened a Synod at Mavelikkara in 1836 and finally rejected all the suggestions and also prohibited the work of missionaries in the Syrian Church. That was the end of the mission help\textsuperscript{25}. The result of the unfortunate event was that some of the Syrians who had welcomed the teachings of the missionaries left the Church and became Anglicans\textsuperscript{26}. Thus in 1936 a joint committee was appointed by both Churches to study the matter of inter-communion relationships\textsuperscript{27}. The joint committee considered the matter carefully and they came to a unanimous decision about the matter. They suggested that "............... there was no bar in respect of order, worship and doctrines, to the formal establishment of the measure of inter-communion known as occasional inter communion, between the two churches"\textsuperscript{28}.

4.13.2 Relationship with the Church of South India

Union attempts among churches started in India in the early part of the 20th century. Different kinds of merger or union began to take place because of the feeling of urgency for unity among the different churches. In South India, two Presbyterian missions, namely, the United Free Church of Scotland Mission and the Arcot Mission of the American Dutch Reformed Church combined together and formed a federal union in 1901\textsuperscript{29}. In 1904, the Congregational churches of the American missions in South Travancore came into a similar federal
The home boards of both the South Indian Presbyterian missions and the Congregational churches were consulted about the wider union proposal and they responded positively. Thus, in 1907, the proposed scheme of organic union was accepted and as a result, in 1908, the Presbiterian and Congregational bodies came together and formed the South India United Church. To attain real unity among episcopal and other churches, Bishop Whitehead convened a meeting of the leaders of both Anglican and S.I.U.C in 1910. It was only a first step in the unity efforts of the churches. After the inauguration of the Church of South India, the Mar Thoma Church felt the need for closer union with it.

4.13.3 The Joint Theological Commission of C.N.I - C.S.I and the Mar Thoma Church

After the establishment of full Communion relationship between the C.S.I and the Mar Thoma Church, the Joint Theological commission of both the churches met at Kottayam in May 1974. The meeting noted that both the churches were in full communion with Church of North India. So they proposed the formation of a Joint Commission of the three churches to explore possibilities of close relationship among the three churches. The proposal to form a Joint Theological Commission was accepted by all the three churches, and they appointed their representatives. Thus C.S.I, C.N.I, and Mar Thoma Church Joint Theological Commission met at Madras in January 1975. All the representatives agreed upon the following objective of the commission:
"To explore the possibilities of close co-operation between the CSI, the CNI and the Mar Thoma Church to discuss questions of faith and order and other relevant issues, so that there may be union between these churches keeping in mind the ultimate goal of all Christian people in India for the fulfilment of the mission of the church"34.

4.13.4 **Unity Efforts through the Joint Council**

The very existence of the Joint Council is a visible manifestation of the unity of the C.S.I, C.N.I and Mar Thoma Church. The Joint Council attempted to attain a sense of oneness among the members of the three churches and to equip the church for joint missionary efforts. The Joint Council evolved a number of programmes to facilitate unity among three churches.

4.14 **The Mar Thoma Church and Its Relations with other Churches and Ecumenical Organisations**

The Mar Thoma Church has been maintaining very good relationship with other churches, even though there is no formal relationships. Many a time the church took active leadership and participation in ecumenical efforts with other churches, with which she has had daily contacts. Some of such churches are the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, the Malabar Independent Syrian Church of Tozhiyur and the Roman Catholic Church. To widen the horizon of the ecumenical vision, the Mar Thoma Church has been taking keen interest in the world-
wide and nation-wide organisations which promotes a spirit of ecumenism.

4.14.1 The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

According to tradition, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church was founded by St. Thomas and it dates back to A.D. 52. Till the latter part of the 19th century, the Mar Thoma Church and the Orthodox Church had been one undivided church. The reformation in the Syrian Church in 1836 was the cause of division. Those who opposed the reform formed what was later known as the Orthodox Syrian Church. After the division, some efforts had taken place for finding out amicable solutions to some of the existing problems and for new ways for unity. The first attempt in the line was made in December 1912 at Serampore. The meeting was convened under the leadership of Dr. John R. Mott, an ecumenical giant of that time. The Mar Thoma Church and the Orthodox Church were represented by some clergymen and lay people under the leadership of Titus II Metropolitan and Mar Dionysius Vattasseril respectively. The establishment of the Union Christian College at Alwaye in 1921 was one of the outcomes of that meeting. Unofficial meetings took place between the Mar Thoma, Orthodox and Anglican churches, after the formation of the college.

It was meant to establish closer unity between these churches. In that consultation, Rev C.P. Philipose, Rev. V.P. Mammen, Rev. V.T Chacko, Fr. Alexis, Mr. K.C. Mammen Mappila, etc. represented the Orthodox Church in those meetings. As a result of those talks, all the three churches reached some kind of agreement in certain matters,
but it did not bear fruit because of the internal problems in the Jacobite (Orthodox) Church. In the 1960's, a dialogue group was formed under the leadership of Mr. C.P. Mathew of the Mar Thoma Church and Mr. K.M. Cherian of the Orthodox Church. They met many times on an informal level. They considered different possibilities of the two churches to work closer in a cordial and prayerful atmosphere. In these unofficial meetings, they discussed their common heritage and the factors that caused division of the Syrian Church. A spirit of understanding and acceptance among the two churches was one of the prominent results of the dialogue series. Though the oriental heritage is the same, both the churches have no communion relationships. But they are co-operating in social and public concerns. Marriages between the two churches are also frequent. Nowadays, the Mar Thoma Church has been seriously thinking about starting conversations again with all the Eastern churches including the Orthodox Syrian Church, aiming at a better relationship. The interest which had been shown by Dr. Juhanon Mar Thoma in settling the internal problems in the Jacobite (Orthodox) Church was also commendable in this respect.

4.14.2 The Independent Syrian Church of Thozhiyur

The origin of the Independent Syrian Church of Thozhiyur goes back to the period of Mar Thoma VI. During that period a foreign bishop named Mar Gregorios consecrated one priest, Fr. Gevarghese from Kattumangattu family, as Mar Koorilos. It was without the permission of the then Malankara Metropolitan, Mar Thoma VI, and thus he complained against it to the Government. As a result of that, Mar Koorilos had to
settle in Anjoor, three miles away from Kunnamkulam. Some families also joined him. This was the origin of the Independent Syrian Church of Thozhiyur (Thozhiyur Church\(^39\)). The later history of the Mar Thoma and Thozhiyur Churches shows that both churches were friendly and helped each other in times of crisis. Mar Philoxinos II of the Thozhiyur Church had the privilege to consecrate three bishops for the Syrian church consecutively. They were Mar Dionysius I, II and III. Another Metropolitan of the Church, Mar Kurilos, helped the Mar Thoma Church by consecrating Titus I Mar Thoma when Thomas Mar Athanasius passed away without consecrating a successor\(^40\). In turn, the Mar Thoma Church also helped the Tozhiyur Church on different occasions. In 1856, Mathews Mar Athanasius consecrated Mar Koorilos of Alathoor, when Philexinos II died without a successor. Mar Athanasius also helped the Church to win the case in Calicut and Madras High Court about the independence of the Thozhiyur Church\(^41\). Since the consecration of Titus I, the Mar Thoma Metropolitans had been helping the Thozhiyur Church by consecrating their Metropolitans in times of need. Dr. Juhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan contributed valuable service to the Church by drafting a constitution for the use of that Church\(^42\). In 1977, the Metropolitan, Paulose Mar Philexinos, quit the Church and joined the Roman Catholic Church. In that critical situation, Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan consecrated Mathews Mar Koorilos and solved that problem\(^43\). As a result of the special relationships between the two churches, students from the Thozhiyur church have been studying in the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam.
4.14.3 The Roman Catholic Church

The relationship of the Mar Thoma Church with the Roman Catholic Church was not cordial because of their imposition of the supremacy of the Pope and due to various theological reasons. Till the middle of the 20th century, there was, in a sense, no relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Mar Thoma Church. The trend had changed a little bit when the second Vatican Council was called by Pope John XXIII in 1963. As per the invitation, the Mar Thoma Church sent three observers to attend the Council. They were Thomas Mar Athanasius, Philipose Mar Crysostem and C.P. Mathew. Since then the relationship between the two churches improved a lot. The church has recently been permitting marriage relationship with the Roman Catholic Church with special sanction from the Metropolitan or the bishop concerned. In 1968, the first ecumenical pastoral letter was issued by 38 Bishops of the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Mar Thoma and C.S.I Churches and the Church of the East (Chaldean). The establishment of Nilakkal Ecumenical Christian Centre was one of the recent efforts of all the Episcopal Churches in Kerala. It is believed that Nilakkal is one of the seven churches founded by St. Thomas. So the Christians in Kerala felt the need for constructing a church there. But the attempt had to face some difficulties. They were settled and a church was built in 1984. This is the first church built by all the Episcopal Churches together in the history of Indian Church. In all these efforts, the Mar Thoma Church played an active role. The Church is acting as a bridge church in bringing all the Syrian churches together.
Another achievement through the Nilakkal Ecumenical Trust is the formation of an Ecumenical fellowship. The aim of it is the meaningful co-operation of different churches. The members of the fellowship include bishops and clerics from the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, C.S.I and Mar Thoma Churches. The Mar Thoma Church keeps good relationship with the Chaldean Syrian Church. The Metropolitan of that Church, Mar Aprem, has been participating in the important functions of the Mar Thoma Church.

We have seen different types of ecumenical activities of the Mar Thoma Church. It has kept good relationship also with other churches abroad. The relationship of Mar Thoma Church with Orthodox, Thozhiyur and Roman Catholic Churches should be improved. The contributions of the Church in the Nilakkal Ecumenical Trust is very great. It is acting there as a bridge church and trying to bring all the Episcopalian churches to better understanding and co-operation. The church is framing a constitution. At present it is helping by giving assistance in the theological studies. The Mar Thoma Church has made phenomenal contributions to ecumenism through the long involvement and leadership in most of the important ecumenical organisations. It has contributed much to other churches through their leadership participation and initiation using the platform of Maramon convention. The church is creating better understanding with other churches. The contribution of the church in the field of unity of all churches is appreciable. But the task of the church is still left unfulfilled. It should go forward to bring all the churches in India together into a union of the churches. It is the duty of the Church to act as a bridge church across other churches at the dawn of a new decade and a new century.
4.15 Attitude of the Orthodox Syrian Church Towards Church Union

The Ecumenical movement has helped the church to get out of its isolation and to enter into dialogue with fellow Christians. The Orthodox Student Christian (Mar Gregorios Orthodox student Christian) Movement has been the vital factor of the church's life for the last sixty five years. This was initiated by Mr. K.C.Chacko, Mr.C.O. Oommen, Mr. A.A.Paul and Mr. E.J. Philipose all who had their university education in Madras Christian College. The Churches in Kerala have undertaken the responsibility of finding solutions to the socio-economic problems of the country.

The Syrian Orthodox Church adopts the very basic question of its own unity and ecumenicity. Under the pressure of these serious events, it may be deeply understood that the urgent petition of Jesus "That they may be one 46" is fully relevant today. To a great extent, the ecumenical movement or Reunion Movement has helped the Syrian Orthodox Church to rediscover its individuality, to get rid of its isolation, and to establish close ties with other churches, both Eastern and Western. The unity we must strive for is the unity of all human beings, wholeness of work in all spheres of life, bound together in a living and joyful sacrifice laid before God in worship.

4.16 The Ecumenical Witness of the Orthodox church

The 20th century is often referred to as the century of the Ecumenical Movement. The impact of the world wide ecumenical movement is
also felt in the Orthodox Syrian Church. The beiginning of the church union consciousness can be traced to a group of students from different churches in Kerala, studying at Madras Christian College in the first decade of 20th century. There they came under the influence of Miller, Skinner and Hogg and also they had greater opportunities to participate in inter-denominational activities. The Orthodox Church was actively involved in the Student Christian Movement of India. In 1913, Fr. P.T Gheevarghese joined the staff of Serampore College. That time, a large number of Orthodox students went either to Serampore or to the Bishops College at Calcutta for theological training. It was the concern for ecumenical co-operation in Kerala that led Mr. K.C. Chacko and others from the Orthodox, Mar Thoma and Anglican Churches to found the Union Christian College, Alwaye, in 1921. All these contacts in the ecumenical organisations made the Orthodox Church rethink its life and mission in the light of a wider perspective, in collaboration with other churches.

4.17 Ecumenical Concern of the Catholic Church

Even though the Catholic Church has not taken official membership in the World Council of Churches, which is considered as the most powerful common forum for unity efforts, it sends representatives as official delegates for the discussions. There is a growing awareness in the Catholic Church that it should take more efforts for Ecumenical dialogue and Christian unity. The very decree on Ecumenism shows the attitude of the church towards the separated brethren. The starting of the secretariat for promoting christian unity in the Vatican is another
milestone in the promotion of unity. The meetings and joint declarations of the Pope with the heads of different separated churches are also clear expressions of the church’s concern for the promotion of ecumenical efforts. Ecumenism can be called the first fruit of the ecumenical concern of the Catholic Church.
Notes and References


9. Pathil, Kuncheria, *Models in Ecumenical Dialogue*, Bangalore, 1961, p. 12. The concrete suggestion to hold a world conference on faith and order came from Bishop Brent while he was speaking to the General convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church about his impressions of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference.


18. C.B. Firth, *op.cit.*, p.158.


43. C.A. George, *op.cit.*, p.118.


46. John, 17, 11-23.