CHAPTER VI

ECUMENISM AS A NEW ROAD TO THE REUNION

It is a search for unity. The way to Christian unity is to work out an ecclesiology for the church in India in the light of its history and mission in our nation. The first step towards a study of Christian unity in Kerala is to understand the history of the church. Today, we speak of different histories, the history of the Mar Thoma Church, the history of the Latin rite, the history of the CMS and so on. The story of the Kerala church is a continuous story. There are various reasons for the division of the church. With regard to the church in Kerala, political and cultural issues are among the major causes for the divisions in the church, in addition to certain doctrinal issues. The coming of the Portuguese and later of the English, and the arrival of western missions along with them were occasions of divisions in the Kerala churches. The major division that occurred in Kerala was at the end of the 16th century, marked by the Synod of Diamper with drastic results. When we look into the history of the Diamper Synod and the activities of Alexiz Menezes, there is no doubt that the political factor was one of the chief causes for the division. The search for unity should begin with an inter-denominational group to study and analyse the factors which caused the division, and which still separate the
Christains. Unity for negotiations in Kerala constitute the mission of the church in Kerala. Our churches in Kerala are divided into Syrian and non-Syrian or Romo-Syrian. Our cultural and social differences too have a dogmatic significance, as having to play a decisive role in the church. The Indian nation itself is moving towards a political and cultural unity beyond our traditional pluralism. Therefore, the unity of the church and the unity of the national community are very much related to each other.

6.1 Ecumenism: A New Trend towards the Reunion Movement

Before we deal with the teachings of the churches on Ecumenism, we would explain the term Ecumenism and its implications.

6.1.1 Meaning

The term ‘ecumenism’ is derived from the Greek word “Oikoumene” which is a derivative of the verb “Oikeo” which means “to inhabit,” to live etc. Oikoumene is the participle form of ‘Oikeo’ and it means, “the whole inhabited earth”, “mankind”, “civilized world”, etc. Oikoumene in this sense means a society or a civilization held together under common loyalties and standards. Thus, it means to live in a house. By extension, it means living together in harmony, peace and unity in the whole world considered to be a house or family for all humankind. Ecumenism, therefore, is a movement rather than an ideology. The unity of the church, for which the ecumenical movement strives, is only a milestone on the path towards the cosmic
unity. The oneness of all humanity is a much larger symbol of the unity. The unity of the church is a must but that is not the end of the road.

During the first half of the 20th century, the ‘Ecumenical Movement’ meant the movement towards the unity of the whole church. It meant a movement in the church towards the recovery of the unity of all creeds, rituals and polity. In other words, it is a new movement towards co-operation and unity of the churches and of Christians. The term ‘ecumenical’ is the label for the comprehensive movement for Christian co-operation and unity, which has assumed increasingly clear dimensions since the beginning of the 20th century. The official World Christian Council committee for writing the history of the Ecumenical Movement set the following terms of reference in 1946, that it should treat the efforts made across the centuries to secure (a) co-operation between Christians belonging to different confessions and churches; (b) cooperation between the several churches and confessions; (c) union or reunion of separated churches.;(d) full and final restoration of the unity of all christendom. Thus during the early days of the WCC, the Ecumenical Movement was understood by its leaders as a movement of the churches and Christians for the unity not only of the church but of the whole creation, a movement for peace, justice and the harmony of the whole creation. It tries to break down the walls of division and separation. Ecumenism is an effort to manifest one’s concern about people, about their social, economic and cultural life, about their environment, about their physical and spiritual well-being.
Churches interested in ecumenical movement and ecumenism in India must think in terms of unity of vision and plurality of action.

The first and foremost aim of the ecumenical movement has been to bring Christians of all traditions together. The ideological thrust of this move is that God is the creator of this universe and all the people. Ecumenism must cross ecclesiastical boundaries and start thinking about the well-being of all the people, people of all faiths and ideologies. This, in essence, would be the wider meaning of ecumenism.

### 6.1.2 Biblical Meaning

In the Biblical sense, ecumenism means world, mankind, community of the faithful, the church, etc. Anyway, the initial use of this term was clearly secular, and not at all religious. It often simply suggested a locality suitable to live in. It was in the second half of the 19th century that this term gained the specific Christian meaning as it is considered and understood now. It was with the origin of movements like Y.M.C.A and Y.W.C.A that this term gained a universal acceptance as a term that stands for the communion of Christian churches. Of course, this meaning is far away from the original sense of “Oikoumene”. But we can’t limit the meaning of this term simply to mean a communion of Christian churches. It has got wide implications in the Ecumenical era. The ecumenical movements stand for implementing the deeper meanings of ecumenism.

Thus, today ecumenism has come to mean “the mutual dialogue and quest for ecumenical (Universal) Christianity.” Thus the ecumenical movement is deeply related to the explicitation or revelation of the
essential unity of the church, the full communion of churches, their co-operation and the common witness they have in and to the world⁰⁰.

6.2 Prayer

Prayer is the soul of ecumenism. All Christians come together and pray for solutions to the manifold problems and issues that we face in our daily life. Though there are so many differences in teachings, the members of different churches get an opportunity to come together and pray for the common cause. “That they may be one” (John 17:21), the prayer of our Lord, plays the role of key importance for the ecumenical movement. Prayer is the most powerful weapon to cure the age-old wounds of separation. Through this we are brought back again and again to the call of our Lord for unity¹. Prayer helps a lot in building up the communion in ecumenism. The unity of the Church is built by worship, will be achieved through worship, and will be perfected in worship. There are so many things that help this common prayer. We have to be aware of the fact that in ecumenism prayer is the best means through which we can gain the goal of Christian unity. The reason is that it helps us to be more open, ready to listen to others. This mutul understanding is the corner-stone of unity.

6.3 Dialogue

In fact, it is one of the inevitable aspects of prayer, because prayer involves friendly conversation with God, and consequent good relationship with our brethren. Here the members, inspired by the Holy Spirit received in prayer, open themselves, without barriers, to
others. This opening is not meant for arguments and asserting one’s position; rather, it demands more churches one as he receives more understanding and patience. Unity necessarily presupposes the knowledge of others. It is here that the relevance of dialogue comes. “Through dialogue nobody wins or fails; rather it all the more enriches one as receives more knowledge about the other. This mutual understanding results in deep love. Here we have both unity of love and that of truth\textsuperscript{12}. Dialogue is the basic element of every community; without it there may be a group or crowd, and not a community. That is why it is said, “There is no dialogue without community and no community without dialogue\textsuperscript{13}.”

### 6.4 Divisions and Barriers

The great scandal of the church is its divisions. One must also note that it is difficult to bring the leaderships of these ‘churches’ together for a dialogue and understanding of its essential unity, because the allegiance and often the permission to be sought for it, are from outside. The Indian churches are more related to their missionary parent churches in other countries than to other churches within our own country.

### 6.5 Growth and Development of the Ecumenical Movement in India

The origin of Christianity in India is traced to St. Thomas and to the year A.D.52. However, it was only during the 18th and 19th centuries that different Christian missions and denominations from
the Euro- North American context spread Christianity in India. These missions and denominations were independent organisations, each advocating its own type of teaching and discipline, and this resulted in a great number of separate organisations. There have been separate Christian communities even among the same denominations coming from different countries. It was in such circumstances that the need for unity was felt by various mission agencies as well as by the leaders of the Indian churches at the dawn of this century. As M.M.Thomas rightly points out, ‘Christian Ecumenism refers to the movement which has come into being in this century to overcome the division within the church of Christ and restore its unity as a universal people of Christ’.

6.6 Indian Society and Ecumenism

Since Indian society is varied and diversified, we experience an interplay of various spiritualities, faiths and ideologies. The presence of different religions and cultural communities makes our society colourful and our life enriching and exciting. But, at one end of the social pendulum, we find the richness of faiths and cultures and at the other, extreme poverty. Although the word ‘Ecumenism’ originally referred to unity efforts among Christians, today it has rightly come to be understood in terms of its original meaning.

6.7 Ecumenical Movements

While we speak about ecumenism, it is a must to have an idea of the important ecumenical movements. We can see the begining of
such movements in the youth movements, like YMCA (1844) and YWCA (1855). They were non-Catholic ecumenical movements. Then came the SCM (Students Christian Movement) in 1895. Such sporadic attempts had a definite form with the January Octave for prayers and for the unity of Christians, founded by two Anglican layman, Spencesor Jones and Leuois Wattson in 1907. This was enriched by Paul Couturior, S.J.

6.7.1 Faith and Order

It is the first ecumenical movement. It was founded in 1910 by Charles Brent. Its motto was a “quest for unity in faith and order”. By ‘faith’ it meant the harmony in the belief and doctrinal expressions. And by ‘order’ it meant the order in worship and in government.

6.7.2 Life and Work

Inspired by “Faith and Order,” another movement came up in 1920 in Geneva. Its founder was Nathan Soderblom. It was more concerned with united actions. Thus, it was complementary to Faith and Order. In 1937, both these movements had their world conferences in England: of Faith and Order in Edinburgh, and that of “Life and Worship” in Oxford. Both these movements decided to have a common meeting in Utrech in the following year. But due to World War II, it had to be postponed. Then it was held in 1948 at Amsterdam. The Amsterdam meeting witnessed the origin of the World Council of Churches (W.C.C)
6.7.3 The World Council of Churches

The World Council of Churches is a Fellowship of churches. Almost all the churches in the World (Notably except the Catholic Church) are the members of it. The WCC recognizes the autonomy and independence of all its member churches. The basis of WCC is that, “the Churches should accept our Lord Jesus Christ as the Lord and Saviour. A Church can become the member of WCC, by accepting this basis of WCC or by expressing its willingness to co-operate on that basis. WCC’s Headquarters is at Geneva. The most important activities of WCC are:

(i) To facilitate the common actions of the churches, by being the meeting point of all churches;

(ii) Promotion of co-operation;

(iii) To develop ecumenical consciousness.

The Ecumenical Review is a periodical published by the W.C.C. It also arranges world conferences. The Catholic Church is not a member of W.C.C. But from 1961 onwards the Catholic Church sends her observers to the W.C.C. There is also a joint working group formed by the Catholic Church and the WCC.

6.8 Ecumenism among the Non-Catholic Churches and Communities

It is the non-Catholic Churches who took the most active interest in this greatest ecclesial phenomenon of our times. They understood
that the ecumenical perspective means that historians must make the past active and bring it to bear on the ecumenical issues and problems we face today.  

6.9 Protestant and Anglican Teachings

The Protestants began at first the ecumenical movements. The missionary movement, and the youth and students movements in the 19th century, prepared the ground for the emergence of the ecumenical movement. The Y.W.C.A and Y.M.C.A played a very significant role in the emergence of the ecumenical movement. The disunity in the church became a scandal before the world. It is against this backdrop that the Protestants and the Anglicans began to think of ecumenism. The Protestants as a whole have had a healthy attitude towards ecumenism. They have now a very good relationship among themselves and other non-Catholics, and also with the Catholic Church. Unity of churches, according to them is the unity in the same faith. The basis of this unity in faith is that all should believe in Jesus Christ who is God become man. Even though many Protestant groups are liberals and rationalists, all of them believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ, which is accepted as the doctrinal basis of the ecumenical movements.

6.10 Ecumenism - A Catholic View

It is a historical fact that the Catholic Church, though she had the intense desire for unity, never fostered the unity of churches as we see in the ecumenical movement, till the Vatican Council II. Until the Council, the Catholic Church had been holding the position that
all should come to the unity of the Catholic church, thus inviting others for ‘reunion’. But in Vatican II and later, the Catholic Church seriously thought about Ecumenism and expressed her view on this great movement. She officially published documents on Ecumenism, the decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II, the Ecumenical Directory Part I (1967) and Part II (1970). This was revised and published in 1993. The latest document was the encyclical ‘Ut unum Sint’ (1995). It is accepted by the Catholic Church that the Protestant and Orthodox Churches influenced her in the formation of her ideas on ecumenism. Cardinal Bea says, “I should like to say that it is our separated brethren, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant, who gave the first impulse to the modern ecumenical movement and that we have learned much from them, can learn still more”.

6.10.1 Vatican II-A Paradigm Shift in the Church’s Attitude towards Unity

It is in Vatican II that we see a clear doctrine of the Catholic Church on ecumenism. Now she has changed, her emphasis from reunion to unity of Churches. It is often said, “Under the charismatic leadership of Pope John XXIII a new dimension has been added to the life of the Catholic Church, the ecumenical dimension. But we have to remember that the Council has not abandoned her aim of bringing all Christians under one shepherd; rather, she sees the relevance of ecumenism in the present age. This is clear from the very first sentence of Unitas Redintegratio (Decree on Ecumenism) promulgated on November 21, 1964. It says, “The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the second Vatican
Council" (U.R.I) Thus it is clear that the council envisages the restoration of unity among all Christians. The Council also defines the status of the Church of Christ today. The church is now separated into ever so many groups. Though each church teaches its own doctrines, often opposite to the ones taught by other churches, it claims to be the real Church of Christ. According to the Council,

“ecumenical movement is the one which eagerly looks for the grace of the Holy Spirit for unity. Everywhere, large numbers have felt the impulse of this grace and among our separated brethren also there increases from day to day a movement, fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, for the restoration of unity among all Christians” (U.R.I).

The decree aims at explaining this ecumenical movement which originated among the non-Catholics, too, says Fr. Pallickathai in his book.19

6.10.2 The Decree of Vatican II on Ecumenism

1. Catholic Principles on Ecumenism

2. The practice of Ecumenism

6.10.2.1 Catholic Principles on Ecumenism

This chapter clearly explains the concepts of Vatican II on Ecumenism. The most striking point here is that the Catholic Church presents a view which includes all churches, which are in agreement with the ecumenical movement. After giving an explanation of ecumenism,
this chapter gives the picture of the Catholic Churches' relationship with the non-Catholic churches. Then it puts forward the need for working together for the unity of churches. The Council goes on to examine the common elements of unity that are found in the Non-Catholic churches and the Catholic Church. Ecumenism is a term which indicates all activities that foster the Christian unity. The individual reunions are not against the spirit of ecumenism, says the Council. They actually speak loudly of the need of attaining perfect unity.

6.10.2.2 The Practice of Ecumenism

In the second chapter of the Decree on Ecumenism, the council deals with some practical aspects of ecumenism. It finds three areas where ecumenism could be implemented in the present circumstances. They are the spiritual, intellectual and social areas.

We have been discussing the different aspects of ecumenism and the official teachings of different churches on this vital ecclesiological issue of this century. Having seen this, it becomes imperative for us to search what the relevance of ecumenism for the Indian Christians is. Then only our discussion becomes meaningful. For this we should have a clear idea of Christianity in India. Unity becomes real only when it is unity in diversity. If so, we can find such a good ground for unity nowhere other than India, because here we have ever so many groups of churches and ecclesial communities. All these churches and groups have their own teachings and modes of government. It is this diversity that prompts us to work for unity. Moreover, ecumenism envisages a wider union which includes even the non-Christian religions.
Since India is the land of many religions, the scope for this wider ecumenism is so evident. Hence, it is a must to have a clear knowledge of the Indian churches and their activities for ecumenism. There are Catholics, both Latin and Oriental Churches, Oriental non-Catholic churches, Protestants, Pentecostal sects and even some other ecclesial groups in Kerala. All of them, we may say, try to adopt their own way for the unity of churches. We cannot look at these attempts from the milieu in which the Indian church is. It is clearly the need of India that the churches should be united. So, we will also try to analyse the context imperative for us. Thus in this chapter, we will deal mainly two topics.

1. Activities of the Kerala Churches in the realm of ecumenism

2. Relevance and need of unity of churches in Kerala

a. Activities of the Kerala Churches in the Ecumenical Realm

We have seen the picture of the Kerala church which stands divided into ever so many groups and sects. Whatever may be the causes for these divisions, it is a fact that the Kerala church has lost its original unity. It is in the 20th century that we see a shift from the path of division to that of unity in the Kerala church. In this ecumenical era the shift in emphasis is very significant for the Kerala Christians. In this section, we look at the activities of the Kerala churches towards the goal of unity. At first, we shall see some of the significant attempts that took place in the Kerala church as a whole in the movement for the unity of churches. In the next section we shall see the contribution of each church towards the unity of churches.
b. Relevance and need of Unity of Churches in Kerala

There are many events that point to the thirst of the Kerala Christians for unity. Such events began to take place with the formation of the C.S.I, which was a unique event in the history of the Kerala church. It is a union of four churches: are the Methodists, the Congregationalists, the Presbyterians and the Anglicans. The formation of the C.S.I is a good example of the unity of churches. The C.S.I also tries to be in communion with other churches. At present, it is in communion with the Mar Thoma Church. Another incident in the line of the unity of churches is the Reunion movement of the Malankara Orthodox Church. Through this event the Malankara Orthodox Church came into communion with the Catholic Church (though not the whole church). This incident is known as the great event of unity in the Kerala church. At present a lot of attempts are being made for the communion of churches. All the churches try to enter into dialogue and prayer, and thus by understanding one another try to find out the areas for mutual co-operation and unity. The Unity Octave prayers are conducted throughout Kerala every year. Moreover, the theologians from the Catholic, Orthodox, Jacobite, Mar Thoma and C.S.I Churches gather at Kottayam every year inorder to strengthen the unity of churches. They discuss the theological matters which helps a lot for the understanding of each church. There are a lot of movements and organizations in Kerala that work for the fostering of the unity of churches. Thus we have the L.M.S in South Kerala, the Basel Mission in North Kerala, the YMCA, the Students Christian Movement, the
YWCA, the National Christian Council and its Kerala branch, the Youth Christian Council of Actions, the CLS, the Bible Society, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, etc. These movements and institutions influence the Kerala Christians a lot to promote inter-church relations.

There are other activities also. For example, the Ecumenical Bible Conventions that are conducted all over Kerala help a lot for the common witnessing. Another important thing to be noted is that the hierarchs of the churches in Kerala meet together and often publish pastoral letters of common significance. These pastoral letters help a lot in promoting the sense of unity among Christians. The latest of such ecumenical pastoral letters was on “corruption”. There are also common prayer sessions, social activities, etc. There is also a common board of Christian schools and colleges. Above all these, there is a place for common worship at Nilakkal. The centre of ecumenism also is situated there. All these are the manifestations of the efforts of Kerala Christians for the unity of churches. In fine, all the churches of Kerala try a lot to grow in unity and co-operation. If the activities go ahead with such a vigour and vitality, undoubtedly, there will be great changes in the Kerala church in the near future. Besides these common activities, each church has its own concept and unique attitude towards ecumenism. All the main churches of Kerala try a lot to attain the goal of ecumenism. But there are a lot of hurdles that are to be overcome. It is of use to have a clear notion of the activities and concepts of each church, in order to understand the status of ecumenism here.
6.11 Approach of Different Churches to Ecumenism

6.11.1 The Catholic Church

As in the Universal Church, we see a change of attitude in the Kerala church also, after the II Vatican Council. More openness and sense of acceptance came up in the Catholic Church. Other churches are accepted as sister churches today. The Catholic teachings on Ecumenism are based on the teachings of Vatican II and the post-councilian documents like the Ecumenical Directory and the Encyclical, ‘Ut Unum Sint It’. The Catholic Church arranges many study classes on her teachings on ecumenism, which are led by secular priests, members of the Society of Jesus, and religious devotees like the members of the Kurishumala Asharam. Many priests and bishops are the members of the ecumenical clergy fellowship. Moreover, the Kerala Catholics play a key role in the Unity Octave prayers conducted every year. At present, the Catholic church and the Syrian Orthodox Church have entered into an agreement which permits marriages between the faithful of the two churches. There are also continuous dialogues with other churches, of which the most significant ones are those with the Orthodox Syrian Church.

6.11.2 Catholic - Orthodox Dialogue

In 1986, when Pope John Paul II visited India, there was a dialogue between the Pope and the Catholicos at Mar Eliyah Cathedral, Kottayam, on 8th February 1986. This was the beginning of a chain of dialogues. Following this, from 22nd to 26th October, 1989, there was another session at Sophia, the Orthodox Centre at Kottayam. This
was the first meeting of the mixed commission between the Orthodox Syrian Church and the Catholic Church. The commission was established in order to prepare the way towards reaching communion and unity between the two churches. The two important issues discussed were the christological problem and mixed marriage. For further discussions, two committees were established. After much discussions, an agreement on christology was reached. The committee decided to continue the dialogue and all were unanimous on the need of focusing the discussion on the Eucharistic communion. The second phase of ecumenical dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church took place in December 1990, at the Spirituality Centre, Kottayam. The next meeting was on 8-11, December 1992, at the Spirituality Centre. In this meeting, the need for studying the common patrimony of the Kerala Church, before the 16th century, became the focal point of discussion. It is accepted that such dialogues help a lot for mutual understanding and cooperation. A lot of misconceptions about other churches could be removed there. Moreover, the Christian witnessing becomes all the more exemplary due to this cooperation. The St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathur, is a typical example of the ecumenical activities of the Kerala Catholic Church. There, the candidates for priesthood, or priests of the Orthodox, Jacobite and Mar Thoma Churches, study together with the Catholic students. This sort of academic training helps a lot in the formation of a good ecumenical mentality.

6.11.3 Some Areas of Special Attention

Despite all these positive achievements, the Kerala Catholic Church has a lot more to go ahead. There are many factors that
hinder the ecumenical activities of the Catholic Church. First of all, there are three rites in Kerala. The co-existence of these three rites should be the best place where ecumenism could survive. But, at present, such a thing does not take place. Many a time, the non-Latin Catholic churches are not given the place they should be given. The clear example of this can be seen in the restriction of jurisdiction of the oriental churches to a few places in India. This gives really a negative impression to the non-Catholics, regarding the straightforwardness of the Catholic Church in ecumenism. That is, it should be made clear that the non-Latin rites also are equal to the Latin rites, as particular churches. Real ecumenism does not mean uniformity but unity. That means the diversities of each church should be safeguarded. But, often, there takes place uniformity on the superficial level, bearing the mark of ecumenism. But this should not happen. Rather it should take place on the basis of principle. “Unity is essential and diversity in all the rest.” The process of giving full canonical status to the oriental Catholic churches of India should be intensified. In this regard, the Malabar Church could go a lot forward, whereas the Malankara Church is still not given the due consideration. This makes a lot of doubts among the non-Catholics about the sincerity of the ecumenical attempts made by the Catholic Church.

If only these drawbacks are rectified, the sincerity of the attempts for the unity of churches from the Catholic Church would be accepted and appreciated by sister churches. Often, the good deeds of the
Catholic Church are unluckily disowned and discarded by others. But once we practise in daily life the good things envisaged by the Council and the Ecumenical Directory, the good intention of the church will be accepted. So also, it is a must to transmit to the people the sense of unity. Thus the attempts will have good fruits in the Christian life of Kerala.

6.12 Activities of the Non-Catholic Churches

It is a fact that the non-Catholic churches, especially the Protestants, are in the forefront of ecumenical activities, ahead of others. The beginning of ecumenical activities in India can be seen in these churches and their mission activities. We have to look at the activities, of each of the Kerala churches in the field of ecumenism.

6.12.1 The Mar Thoma Church

From the very beginning, the Mr Thoma Church has been actively engaged in ecumenical activities. It has given special emphasis to the ecumenism in their activities. It has developed its own ecumenical outlook too. According to the Mar Thoma Church, ecumenism is the discovery of the wholeness of the universal church of Jesus Christ, through world-wide communication of different Christian points of view by various churches in Christendom. With this goal, the Mar Thoma Church co-operates with other churches, in the ecumenical activities. With every church, it has a good relationship. In 1952, Mathews Mar Athanasios, Mar Thoma Metropolitan, issued,
“a call to the churches of India, a document regarding the unity of churches. He says, when we greatly value our autonomy and traditional forms of worship, we feel that the time has come for us to make a move towards the realization of a Church of Christ in India. Autonomy, Biblical faith, Eastern forms of worship and Evangelistic vision are our cherished ideals. We feel that our church must be willing to become part of the Church of Christ in India”

6.12.2 Relationship with the Orthodox and Jacobite Churches

The Mar Thoma Church maintains good relationship with these churches. Actually, these three are different wings of the same church, that is, all these come from the same origin. There are ongoing efforts from the part of both churches to enter into dialogue and to find out the areas of unity in faith and united activities. This unity can very well be seen in the social welfare activities too. Mar Thoma Metropolitan Juhanon says, “As an Eastern church, the Mar Thoma Church’s primary responsibility is to try for closer connection with the Syrian Orthodox Jacobite Church”. These words show their willingness to enter into commitment towards church unity activities.

6.12.3 Relationship with the Anglican Church

The Mar Thoma Church is the first Eastern church which came into communion with the Anglican Church. Actually, the very origin of
the Mar Thoma Church owes much to the Anglican Church, as we have already seen. A more recent and important step taken by the Mar Thoma Church is that it decided to enter into inter-communion with the worldwide Anglican Communions in the U.S.A, U.K., Canada, Australia etc. Thus there is the full mutual acceptance of two churches. Such communications help the ecumenical activities a lot.

6.13 The Mar Thoma Church and the Roman Catholic Church

In the initial stages of the origin and development of the Mar Thoma Church, we do not see much cordial relationship with the Catholic Church. But, with the II Vatican Council, this situation changed. Pope John XXIII took special interest in inviting the Mar Thoma Church to the Council. As per this invitation, Bishops Thomas Mar Athanasius and Philipos Mar Chrysostom, and Mr. C. P. Mathew attended the Council as observers. This was a great event in the relationship between the two churches. At present, both the churches try a lot to come closer in many fields like the Unity Octave. Both churches try to understand each other and to work together hand in hand.

6.14 The Marthoma Church and the Tozhiyoor Church

Though there are differences in the theological outlooks, both these churches are in very good relationship. They also have accepted mutual ‘communicatio’ insacris. The Mar Thoma Church helps the Thozhiyoor Church whenever there is a need, as in Episcopal consecration.

6.15 The Joint Council of C.N.I., C.S.I and Mar Thoma Church

All these churches are in good relationship and in full communion. But the Mar Thoma Church is not a member of the C.S.I. It wishes to
explore possibilities of working together, especially in the fields of evangelization in India and other areas of co-operation in the fulfilment of the mission of the church. But, at the same time, it does not like to be merged in the other because it wants to keep its oriental tradition and identity. So, the Mar Thoma Church agreed to form a joint council of three churches consisting 30 representatives from each church, which includes 5 bishops, 10 prelates and 15 lay members of whom 5 should be women. At present, lots of attempts for the unity of churches take place under the leadership of this Joint Council.

6.16 The Mar Thoma Church and Ecumenical Organizations

The Mar Thoma Church plays an active role in the organizations for the unity of churches. It may be noted that even before the origin of the World Council of Churches, the Mar Thoma Church practised ecumenical fellowship through the Maramon Convention from 1896 onwards. Famous speakers of other churches, like the Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians etc, are invited to preach the gospel. All people, irrespective of caste, creed and colour, participate in the convention. It has been the member of the World Council of Churches since 1948, from the very beginning of the council. Mar Juhanon, the Mar Thoma Metropolitan, who attended the second Assembly of the W.C.C at Evanston in 1954, was elected as one of its presidents. Dr. M. M. Thomas, a faithful of the Mar Thoma Church, was the moderator of the 5th Assembly at Nairobi in 1975, when he was the chairman of the central committee. Bishop Thomas Mar Athanasios was the member of the Faith and Order Commission. At present, Zacharias Mar Theophilos is the representative
of the Mar Thoma Church in the central committee and Dr. M. J. Joseph is a member of the Faith and Order Commission. Besides such participation in the W.C.C, the Mar Thoma Church is also an active member of movements like the National Christian Council, Kerala Council of Churches, Christian Conference of Asia, Bible Society, etc. This active participation in all these organizations is the best example of the Mar Thoma Church’s desire for the unity of churches. The humanitarian, social, cultural and educational activities of the Mar Thoma Church are well appreciated. In these areas, it co-operates with the other churches too. The former metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church, Mar Alexander is an active worker of the ecumenical organizations. Thus the activities of the Mar Thoma Church give an urge and set a good example to other churches. Their openness and willingness to accept others are to be well appreciated.

6.17 The Ecumenical Activities of the Church of South India

The Church of South India also gives much prominence to ecumenical activities. The best example for this can be seen in the very formation of the church of South India, in which four churches are active participants. In this event, these churches foresaw the scope of a wider union in the future. Among these four churches in this union, only the Anglican Church has got the historical episcopacy. In spite of this, it entered into communion with the other three churches and formed the C.S.I. The ecumenical activities of the Anglican Church, therefore are those of the C.S.I. To have a clear idea of the C.S.I ecumenical activities helps us a lot in our search for the ecumenical
activities of its member churches. In the formation of the C.S.I., its members hoped that it might be a true leaven of unity in the life of India and that there might be a greater release of divine power throughout the world for the fulfilment of God’s purpose for this world. In the very constitution itself, its thirst for unity is inscribed. The Church of South India desires to be permanently in full communion and fellowship.

6.18 The C.S.I. and the Lutherans

There have been dialogues between the C.S.I. and the Lutheran Church since 1948. As a result of these dialogues, both could reach a consensus on matters of faith and teaching.

6.19 The C.S.I and the Mar Thoma Church

We have already seen this in the previous section. Both the churches agreed to have full communion in different areas, such as co-operation in the episcopal ordination of both churches, the offering, the Holy Ecucharist, following any of the two texts in the churches, co-operation in social welfare activities, arranging the meeting of priests and youth of both churches together, etc. The conciliar unity of the C.S.I, the C.N.I and Mar Thoma Church is also notable in this regard. Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan was also invited to the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Church in 1978. All these show the cordial relationship between the two churches and their willingness to come together as the church of Christ.

6.20 The C.S.I and other churches

It was in 1972 that the C.S.I and the C.N.I reached full communion. At present the C.S.I. tries to have cordial relationship with the Jacobite
Orthodox and Catholic churches. Very active participation in the Unity Octave prayers is its speciality. It is also willing to co-operate with other churches in the socio-educational areas.

6.21 The Orthodox Churches and the Unity of Churches

It is the Malankara Orthodox Church that gave the concept to many western churches that there should be a wider unity of churches with mutual understanding, mutual dialogues for unity, thus to reach full communion. With this aim in mind, the Malankara Orthodox Church took the initiative to form a meeting place of unity of the oriental orthodox churches43. We have already seen the ecumenical relationship of many churches with the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church have not yet reached the communion of celebrating the Holy Eucharist together. The Orthodox Church does not have sacramental communion with the Protestant churches. But both of them enter into dialogues in order to find out the areas of consensus and co-operation. Both the Orthodox churches are members of the Kerala Christian Council44. The Malankara Orthodox churches have the opinion that there should be perfect unity and common Christian witnessing. According to them, “Our faith must be appealing to today’s man. We have to reintroduce the christian faith considering the problems faced by modern man45”. For this, the Orthodox Church sees the unity of churches as an essential step to be taken. Therefore, it exhorts its faithful to pray that the scandal of division in the one Church of Christ be removed and the perfect unity of churches be attained in the time and manner Christ wishes, and thereby the whole world may believe in Christ46."
Today, the orthodox churches are in good relationship with other St. Thomas Christians of Kerala. They participate actively in the Unity Octave prayers and special welfare activities. They also take interest in sending candidates for priestly training in the Catholic seminaries. The meeting of the Catholicos with the Pope in 1983 helped a lot to intensify the relationship between the two churches. In short, the Kerala Orthodox Church takes great interest in ecumenical activities. It is a fact that a still good length is to be covered. Yet the initial steps are capable of leading to the goal, if things go ahead with the vigour and vitality shown at present.

6.22 Relevance and Need of the Unity of Churches in the Indian Context

We attempted an overview of Christianity in Kerala with all its divisions and groups. We also had a glance at the ongoing attempts for reaching the unity in accordance with the will of our Lord who prayed “that they all may be one” (John 17:21). If divisions were the mark of the church in the past centuries, at present, a quest for unity plays an important role. All Christian churches have the intense desire for unity. Today, all admit that it is the same Christ that all proclaim. Then, why do the faithful stand divided? Mutual acceptance and forgiving is a must in order to give the witness of love and reconciliation.

6.22.1 Relevance

Jesus Christ is not divided among different churches. So, He should not be presented as divided, to others. The need for unity on this ground was felt by the missionaries at first. Then only there took
place discussions for unity among different churches. This led to identify those areas where unity could be very well seen and common action was easily possible. The world is moving towards a “global village.” The rapid growth in the field of transportation and communication has accelerated this process. At the very same time, we can see signs of division and alienation. The increasing gap between the haves and have-nots, corruption in every field of life, etc., contribute much to this separation. It is in such a situation that the church has to seriously consider and redefine her role in such a society. It is here that the church has to stand as the example of unity. Therefore, she has to come up for the common weal of the whole mankind through active ecumenical activities. Her role is not to divide humanity into many groups, but to unite it into one and thus to lead the human kind into the love of God. In the Indian context, the church cannot close her eyes to this most important mission.

India is a land of different religions. Evidently, the disunity among Christians is a big scandal in the eyes of the non-Christians. Due to this very fact, our Christian witnessing loses authenticity. Whenever the non-Christians look at us, they see always mutually fighting groups. Through our actions, we become anti-witnesses of what we preach. In order to realize the unity of churches, all churches should have the willingness to work for it. The “Tanqebar Manifest”, published at the end of the dialogue between the South Indian Church and the Anglican Church, explains a very relevant matter regarding the ecumenical activities. “............. but the unfortunate disunity and division among us make us incapable and incompetent to fulfil this task. To a great
extent, we are not responsible for this disunity; rather it is imposed on us from outside. But we do not like to continue in this situation.”

Seeing that this disunity is improper and detrimental to the church, Christ’s body, all should try to change this pathetic situation. As the Kerala churches originated from the same root, it is possible to strengthen their communion. Even though there are differences in the teachings, areas of co-operation can be found out and implemented.

6.22.2 The Indian Context

Looking from different angles, we see the need for the unity of churches in India. Here comes essentially the milieu in which the Indian church exists. The Indian church is to strive for forming a life in accordance with the peculiarities of India. Unfortunately, we have failed in living as an Indian Church. Often, we behave like the Indian agents of some western churches; so we should have a clear idea of our situation and the nature in which our church should be. This prompts us to investigate our context and the ecclesiology fitting to India. Here, therefore, an attempt is called for, to look at the sociological specialities of India and an ecclesiology fitting to India.

6.22.3 Sociological Factors to be considered

When we analyse the sociological peculiarities of India, it becomes clear that unity among churches is a sociological necessity. In order to generate a creative response to the sociological problems that affect Indians very badly, the unity of churches can help a lot. We try to have a look at the problems that seriously threaten our society.
6.22.4 Poverty

According to statistics, 87% of the Indian people live in the villages. Most of them live in utter poverty, ignorance and illhealth, having no access to modern amenities of life. Very often, educational facilities and hospitals are far away. The gap between the haves and have-nots increases day by day. Though the governments claim much increase in the per capita income and financial status of the people, due to the liberal economic policies, its effect does not actually reach the poor. They become more and more poor day by day. They can’t afford the increasing expenses to meet their basic needs. In such a situation, more active participation in the eradication of poverty should be taken by the Indian Church. It is true that each church does many things in this regard. But if the churches in one place stand together to fight against this problem, a great deal can be done. The ecumenical discussions and meetings also should strive for finding solutions to the problem of poverty.

6.22.5 Caste System

Even at the close of the 20th century, India is not free from the clutches of the caste system. The evil practices of untouchability and the like exist still in our society. Its influence cannot be seen much in the cities, but our villages are still under its spell, in many parts of India, especially in the North. Often, the Christians who were converted from the so-called low castes suffer a lot. The Christians are often satisfied by conducting some rallies against this evil practice. The Kerala St. Thomas Christians still follow the caste system to a great
extent. We, who claim to be the descendants of the Brahmin converts, despise our brethren a lot. In some places, the Harijan converts were compelled to have separate churches. Many do not even allow them to enter their houses. So also, marital relationship with them is not welcome to many. In fine, the caste system is a big black mark upon the St. Thomas Christians. The system is seen also in other churches, e.g., in the dioceses of Cochin and Alleppey.

6.22.6 Corruption

Corruption has become a mark of India. All those who have some power or office, go to any extent in this regard. There is no value system that pulls them back in such a situation. Many political leaders and bureaucratic groups give aid and leadership for such activities. The relationship between the politicians and criminals is a hot issue of discussion today. The miserable thing in this situation is that there is today no tangible effort to fight this evil. If anyone raises his voice against this, he is removed from office, or, all sorts of pressures and threats await him. It is in such a situation that the Christian life has relevance. We should be able to live and profess the universal values of Christianity. Our institutions are far away from their goal. There are also a lot of other institutions, especially the educational ones, which to be the arena of training the coming generation for a value-based life. If we can’t convey this sort of value system, our educational institutions will only wander away from their destination. There are also a lot of other institutions of the churches here, such as hospitals, charitable institutions, etc. They become really Christian only if they convey the message of Christ.
6.22.7 The Negligible Minority of Christians

Christianity reached Kerala in the very first century itself. Yet, less than 3% of the Indians are Christians. The churches run a lot of educational and other institutions in India. The most important hindrance on our way is our disunity. If we are not united among ourselves, then, how can we effectively convey the message of unity to others? Therefore, the sociological situation of India demands very effective activities to solve its problems. Once all the Christians stand together to meet these problems, radical changes can be attained. Thus, the unity of churches is the need of the Indian society. It is a hopeful fact that the Indian national awakening and cultural renaissance have enabled the church to deviate from the old paths. As a result, she tries to rediscover her mission in new way in the contemporary society. “Our failure to know the essence of the church, its basic selfhood, is the cause of many of the problems the church is facing today”\(^52\). The identity of the church is not simply a sociological identity, nor is it based on ethnic identity, caste relations or national allegiance.

6.22.8 Openness

The church is said to be an open community, theologically. But openness does not mean any lack of commitment; it means a deep commitment to the gospel. So, when we preach the gospel, we have to be ready to listen also. The Indian church has greater opportunity to enrich herself through her openness to other religions, their traditions, experience and theology\(^53\). This openness is not limited merely to the religious realm; but it extends to the hard social and economic realities
under which the majority of the people suffer a lot. Once the Indian church comes to this openness, she should give up the self-understanding that she is a communal or caste group among many others.

6.23 Unity of Churches in Kerala

In order to have a good interaction with the cultures and religions of India, Christianity should stand united. It is a must to establish a link between Christianity and the Indian religions. We have spoken of the openness that the church should have. This should begin at the level of inter-church relationships. Mutual dialogue and acceptance of one another should lead to the unity of churches, of course, a unity in diversity. The church should explore the meaning and possibilities of pluralism, and let plurality grow and mature within the church. Once we attain the unity of churches, we can enter into dialogue with religions like Hinduism. Thus, we can convey effectively the Christian values to all people of India, and accept what is best in Hinduism or Islam.

6.23.1 Some Positive Elements for Kerala Ecumenical Activities

Theologically, historically and culturally, the issues before our churches are not always the same as those facing the churches in the west. It will be foolish to see the European problem against our situations, or to accept their solutions as our solutions. The discussions is Uppsala or in Vatican II can be helpful to us. But when we come to specific issues, it is a matter we have to work out primarily in Kerala in the light of our history, culture and mission. The way to Christian unity is to work out an ecclesiology specifically for the church in
Kerala. We cannot give any blueprint for Christian unity in Kerala but we can raise some questions to find out a way. Some of these questions are:

1. The rediscovery of the unity of history
2. An analysis of the causes of divisions
3. Understanding of unity in relation to the mission of the church
4. Certain trends in the ecumenical discussions on the unity of the church that are relevant to us.

6.23.2 The Common Origin

Today we speak of different histories. All the churches of Kerala are different branches of the same tree. So we need to discover their common ideal and basis. This is much helpful; in our church unity activities.

6.23.3 Causes of Division

The divisions that took place in the Kerala church are not much doctrinal, but they are political and cultural issues. The coming of the Portuguese and later of the English, and along with them the arrival of the western missions were occasions of divisions in the Kerala church. We have assumed different cultures from the missionaries and allowed them to play a decisive role in the church. Due to this, the Kerala church is divided into Syrians and Non-Syrians or Romo Syrians, Malankara Rite, Cananites, Latins, C.S.I., etc. They did not respect our religious tradition and social ethos. It is our task to find out a remedy for this. One way of overcoming our differences in cultural
ethos may be to get more related to Indian cultural and religious ethos.

6.23.4 Unity and Mission

The church exists for the world. The nature of the church and need for unity cannot be understood apart from her apostolicity - the total commitment of the church to preach the whole gospel to the world. We can see a strong tension between the unity of the church and the mission of the church. In order to attain unity we should not desert the mission of the church. These two are closely related to each other. In Kerala, what kind of unity should we seek? It is a unity where a dialectical tension between unity and mission is maintained. This tension provides dynamism to both the mission and the unity. The church must always be scattering itself in the world for the sake of performing its mission. It must break its static ecclesiastical structure for structure for this purpose. At the same time, the mission must always aim at a gathering of the scattered people of God. This will be possible, only if mission and unity are constantly kept in tension. It is sad to say that so far this has not been done in Kerala. The Kerala church should take the human and national problems around us, as its mission. Then, it has to work out an ecclesiology where unity and mission are constantly kept in dialectical tension.

6.23.5 Certain Trends in the Ecumenical Discussions

In our ecumenical discussions, questions of the church and inter-church relation are approached from a new perspective. Vatican II and Uppsala provide guidance for this. For our discussion, we
have to select real theological questions specially related to the doctrines of the church and to the ministry and sacraments. Baptism is the primary basis for church unity. Then there is the apostolic succession. Today, it is considered that apostolic succession is an attribute of the whole church. Finally, the Eucharist is the final realm where all churches can come together. In Kerala, the ecumenical movement has made much progress in the last few years. Theologians from the various churches have been meeting for a long time at Kottayam. They have done a lot in the direction of church unity.

The Ecumenical Movement of the twentieth century is a significant phenomenon in the history of Christianity. Though the search for the lost Christian unity was never lacking in the church, it took a systematic and organized form only in the contemporary Ecumenical Movement. The concern for the unity of the church means the commitment to the wholeness of the church. Thus, today, the churches happily try to focus their attention on the areas of co-operation. It is with this hope that the churches today engage actively in ecumenical activities. We may say that the Indian church, if it earnestly desires, can fulfil its hopes for unity and solidarity.
Notes and References


8. We are not ignoring the fact that the term ‘Ecumenical’ is used with Councils, and also with patriarchs, i.e., ecumenical councils, and ecumenical patriarch.


32. Ibid., p.91.


35. Menacherry George (ed.), *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India* op.cit., p.90.


39. Ibid., p.9.


43. Ibid., p.119.


46. Ibid., p.122.

47. Ibid., p.123.


