The history of the Malabar Church which was one and undivided until 1653. Thereafter, it has had two branches, but with the same faith. The separated brethren had always in mind an exaggerated idea of independence. I would dare to mention it here, not to accuse or to condemn them, but to help them in the question of ecumenism or reunion. All ecumenical activities are meant to lead the churches to Reunion. In this sense, Reunion is a wider concept than ecumenism where the latter is included. In a narrow sense, Reunion is a return of individuals to an ancient church which they believe is the mother church. Fundamentally, union can be a reunion within the church. This position taken by the Catholic Church could mean that she was the true church of Christ to the exclusion of all the other churches. It has to be admitted that Reunion may be achieved in two ways, i.e., Reunion of individuals and Reunion of Churches. The impetus towards reunion has come from India, and the degree of union achieved in India is looked up on by many as the result of the ecumenical movement. More important for the ecumenical movement in India were and are the unions that have taken place between denominations of different traditions. The St. Thomas Christians of the 19th and 20th centuries have witnessed what might be called the coming of the age of action.
The ancient Malankara Apostolic Church has suffered divisions in the course of time and it exists today as various small church communities. Today’s Syro-Malabar Church, Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, Malankara Catholic Church, Thozhiyur Syrian Independent Church, Malankara Mar Thoma Church, etc, are all parts of the ancient Malabar Church. Even in today’s C.S.I and in some other Christian communities, one can see the faithful of the ancient Malankara Church and its heritages.

The history of the St. Thomas Christians since the middle of the 17th century has in fact been an interpreted narration of confrontations that took place on various levels between the Padroado and the Propaganda. As a result of this rivalry for power, the cause of restoring unity among the St. Thomas Christians failed to command due attention. The whole question of Reunion could gradually gain momentum only with the arrival of the Cariattil Paremmakkal representation in Europe. But with the sudden passing away of Cariattil, the project of Reunion was again sidelined and was eclipsed.

The 19th century was a period of ferment among the St. Thomas Christians, who remained in a state of unrest and dissatisfaction. The root cause behind all the unhappiness, disturbances and unrest was their legitimate claim for autonomy and their desire to restore the ancient glory and unity of the St. Thomas Christians under a head of their own. Considering the early organization of the St. Thomas Christains, they enjoyed considerable autonomy in its internal administration. The pre-Portuguese organisation of the St. Thomas Christians had
several commendable characteristics. The Bishop was the spiritual leader of the community and he looked after its spiritual needs. The Archdeacon (a native priest) was the real administrator of the churches, church personnel and church property. He was the executive head of the legislative and judicial bodies. The title of his office was ‘Archdeacon of All India’. The office of the Archdeacon was hereditary and confined to one family. Probably the church adopted the hereditary model that existed among the Hindus. The Archdeacon was free to manage the affairs of the church in consultation with the ‘Yogam’. He protected and maintained the unity and status of the community. The ‘Yogam’ was another unit of the administrative machinery. Membership in the ‘Yogam’ was open to all heads of families.

The ‘Yogam’ facilitated participation of the elders in decision making. ‘Poduyogam’ was the legislative and judicial body, with the Archdeacon as its executive head. At the local level, the ‘Edavaka Yogam’ had similar duties, and an elected trustee functioned as its executive. So it was a democratic set up, though not in the modern sense of the term. ‘Yogam’ as a decisive body enjoyed great autonomy in the pre-Portuguese period. The Carmelite missionaries adopted an indifferent attitude towards the reunion proposals of both the Catholic and the non-Catholic St. Thomas Christians. They entertained the fear that they would lose their authority over the St. Thomas Christians, if all the St. Thomas Christians were allowed to be united under a bishop of their own rite and nation. The attitude of Rome towards the reunion struggle was sympathetic. The reunion movement has not yet been complete. Its sad failure has to be attributed to the lack of a central
government for the church. In the pre-sixteenth centuries the Archdeacon was a connecting link, the symbol of unity, authority and dignity of the community.

The Reunion movement can rightly be called a movement for the restoration of the Indian Christian antiquity. The ancient Malankara Church remains today divided into several Christian denominations. Apart from the Malabar and Malankara Catholic churches are not fully in the Catholic communion. The Malankara Church entered into communion with the Apostolic See of Rome in 1930, after a breach of 300 years. It was the attempts to regain this lost communion, carried out under the leadership of the fathers of the Malankara Church for 300 years, that became victorious through the reunion of 1930 held under the leadership of His Grace Mar Ivanios. That event witnessed first of all the declarations of the communion with the Pope of Rome, the successor of St. Peter and the Supreme head of the Universal Church, communion also of the allegiance to his supreme authority.

The history of the St. Thomas Christians of India during the 19th and 20th centuries is certainly an important one. It witnessed the strong desire of the St. Thomas Christian community to regain its lost unity and reunite with the parental church. The major thrust of the thesis was to view the history of the St. Thomas Christians of the period under discussion from the perspective of its unity, division and reunion. The whole story is unfolded in six chapters.

The Reunion Movement, which started as a minority movement in the Indian church, has developed in manifold ways. The social
and institutional gains are numerous. But as an individual church, she neither fails to frame an autonomous administrative system and to develop her liturgical and spiritual patrimony nor could she give shape to a sound theological system. The growth of the malankara catholic church will be on the right track of it. She face attention to all the things.

The question of Reunion was taken up by Mar Dionysius, who had a clear objective. He wished to unite all the St. Thomas Christians and tried every means within his power to realize that objective. But adverse forces frustrated all his efforts, and this frustration brought about a great change in him. His desire to lead the whole community to progress and prosperity, remained beyond his reach. At any rate, the attempts at reunion made by Mar Dionysius and his successors did not succeed until the Syro-Malabarians obtained indigenous bishops.

Fr. Emmanuel Nidhiry founded the Jathayaika Samgham (Syrian National Union Association) to promote the union of all St. Thomas Christians by way of co-operation in social and educational fields. But it ended in failure. It failed due to misunderstanding, misrepresentation of the real issues, personal ambitions and lack of understanding and dialogue on various levels. So the reunion efforts without the real ecumenical spirit were bound to fail.

The 19th and 20th centuries witnessed certain remarkable movements which played key roles in the ecumenical movements by fostering fellowship among Christians. The important movements like the Y.M.C.A,
the Y.W.C.A, the S.C.M, Faith and Order, Bible Society, etc., influenced in bringing about unity among the Thomas Christians. A new momentum was achieved in the ecumenical movement with the foundation of the Madras Christian College. Some of the remarkable students of this great institution raised great hopes for the promotion of closer co-operation among the divided St. Thomas Christians. The Union Christian College, Aluva, stands as a shining example of successful inter-denominational co-operation. Over a whole generation, the Union Christian College, exercised a healing ecumenical influence in an area in which Kerala Christian situation is perhaps more complicated than in any other part of the world.

The latest move in this direction came from a highly enlightened, broad-visioned and self-sacrificing prelate, Mar Ivanios, who within barely three years initiated and established the Syrian Church of Malankara rite. With the emergence of the Malankara Catholic Church, a new chapter in the history of the ecumenical movement was written down. Through the reunion event in 1930, the Malankara Church regained the communion of the Catholic Church, safeguarding its ecclesiastical identity. This was achieved by a narrow encounter and dialogue with an apostolic church on the part of the Malankara Church. The unity of the Catholic Church is expressed in the communion of the Malankara Catholic Church has to witness to the truth of the catholicity of the church of Christ, in its relationships with the non-Catholic Malankara communities, it has to affirm in the need of communion among the churches. This is the great ecumenical task of the Malankara Catholic Church in future. The Malankara community has lost the fullness of
the universal church communion of the Malankara Church under the leadership of His Grace Mar Ivanios is responding to this gesture positively. Only when the whole Malankara Church together so responds, does the reunion of 1930 became a real success and begin to bear fruit.

Mar Ivanios, Archbishop of Bethany, contributed a new spiritual vision in his capacity as the head of the Syrian Catholic hierarchy. His unique contribution to the socio-cultural and political realms of Kerala while shepherding the Archdiocese of Trivandrum will remain an object lesson for generations to come. He has been much more than a religious leader. To see him merely as a church dignitary is to miss much. He was an ardent architect of unity in the Indian Christian community. Dark clouds were gathering on the skies of the Malankara Church. Pitch darkness was engulfing the serenity of the blue skies. Mar Ivanios shone like a bright noon sun in the encircling gloom, a faithful guide to the Malankara Church in its journey towards truth and perennial blessing.

In the light of our discussion hitherto, we shall suggest, in conclusion, a concrete plan of action, which might enable the St. Thomas Christians to carry out the unity of full communion. If the Malankara Catholic Church is to fulfil its ecumenical vocation, it is imperative that it shifts its focus from the model of reunion to the model of full communion. As already seen, the emphasis was on reunion. Though it has its limited advantages, in the new ecumenical atmosphere, created primarily by the Second Vatican Council, this model of reunion may do more
harm than good. Consequently, the Malankara Catholic Church is
to divert its allegiance to the communion model of ecumenism. By
manifesting its commitment to this theology of full communion, it has
to educate its faithful accordingly. The faithful have to be sufficiently
made conscious of the Malankara Church functioning as a bridge
between the Catholic St. Thomas Christians and non-Catholic St. Thomas
Christians. It has to become part of the conviction of the entire Malankara
Catholic Church that it is basically a bridge-church. It is of paramount
importance that the Malankara Catholic Church devises projects which
provide effective ecumenical formation for its priests and laity. It is
true that in the past the relation between these churches was at a low
ebb. There was more mutual distrust and fear than genuine understanding
and appreciation among these churches. Communication among these
churches was lacking. Therefore, it is urgent that the Malankara
Catholic Church, being conscious of its ecumenical vocation, strives
on different levels, as individuals, parishes, dioceses and as a church
to improve its relationship with the other St. Thomas Christians.

The present denominational divisions among the churches, in
great part, no longer correspond to the real issue that respectively
unite and divide the Christians of our day. However, today, we are at
the stage of ecumenical encounter between the churches where equal
emphazis is given to unity and diversity. Differences and diversities
of the churches are seen no more as an obstacle to unity but as
complementary and mutually enriching factors, provided the churches
have communion in faith and sacramental life. If the Coonan Cross
Oath of 1653, by which a section of the Syrian Church broke off from
the Roman communion, was the revolt against the western churches’ refusal to recognize the identity and individuality of the Malankara Church, the historic reunion of 1930 was, to a certain extent, the coming together in unity of the separated Christian churches. According to the ecumenical thinking of our day, the mutual relationship among the churches is more important than the return of individual separated brethren into the Catholic Church. The ministerial role of the Malankara Catholic Church, therefore, consists in serving as a link and a bridge between the churches.

That the St. Thomas Christians remain divided today is a painful fact, and even a most scandalous one, contradictory and detrimental to the very message of the church. Efforts for reconciliation have unfortunately turned out to be causes for further division and estrangement. Finding themselves in alienation and division, the churches are getting more and more aware of the need for coming together, to understand each other, to share with each other the riches they possess as Christian communities. Ecumenism, therefore, is a movement to restore unity among churches and achieve universality of their heritage through dialogue, mutual enrichment, acceptance of each other in each one’s unique ecclesial reality and individuality. Ecumenism being understood thus as a movement to promote church unity, we are in a position to assess the role of the Malankara Catholic Church in this regard. Starting from the very reunion event in 1930, the Malankara Catholic Church has responded to the divine call to unity, and has vigorously continued this process of promoting Christian unity both on the individual level and on the ecumenical level and according to the correct Catholic
principles. One cannot fail to understand that the reunion event in 1930, and the trend it has given birth to, were significant contributions to the ecumenical movement in our day. If ecumenism is understood as a quest for universality and wholeness, and as a process of healing and restoration, the churches that have been alienated from other churches and got impoverished by their division, shall have to be reconciled and healed by their entry into communion with each other. The ecumenical movement has as its goal the promotion of unity of the churches by healing their mutilated traditions and enriching their impoverished spiritual patrimony through dialogue, encounter, reconciliation and mutual acceptance. With the emergence of the Malankara Catholic Church, a new chapter in the history of the ecumenical movement has been written. Through the reunion event in 1930, a wing of the old Christian community in Malankara has regained the communion of the Catholic Church, while safeguarding its ecclesial identity.

Thus today, the St. Thomas Christian churches try to focus their attention on the areas of co-operation rather than on that of disputes. Day by day, new and new areas of co-operation can be found out and lived. It is with this hope that the churches today engage actively in the reunion activities. The body of the church is the universal Catholic Church. No branch can live apart from the tree. The branches bear fruit only when they are on the vine. It is only more than true of the Christian church.

It is true that the old Syrian Church is now divided into several branches or churches each following different rites. But no change
of dogma, or form of worship, or allegiance to an ecclesiastical head, can separate the great bond which unites the large body of Christians in Kerala, who share in common with zeal and pride, the time-honoured and cherished tradition of belonging to a church originally founded by the Apostle Thomas. But it is a sorry fact that this reunion event, owing to the unity attempts of the Malankara Church, could attain only a partial success. On the one side, the Pope of Rome, who is the supreme head of the Universal Church, and all the other apostolic churches of which he is the supreme head, recognize and declare the apostolic foundation and heritages of the Malankara Church and all her ecclesial rights and privileges for her mission fulfilment as an individual church. But on the other side, as the institution of only a small community covering the span of about 2000 years, the church has grown up in India exerting its influence and the impact of its presence at different levels, in varying degrees, and in changing patterns. The church is still continuing to have its share and role in the development and growth of India as a nation and a people. Every church should be aware of its own nature and status in the Universal Church. It is humbly believed that the present study is an initial effort to help at least one community to reach that goal.

The thesis is an attempt to evaluate the most characteristic phenomenon of Christianity in our times. The dictum “United we stand, divided we fall” is very apt to the St. Thomas Christians of Kerala today. In the past, the church was divided into many groups. The St. Thomas Christians should begin, right from today, the efforts that would help co-operation and concerted activities. Prayer, dialogue, common training programmes, etc., are to be organised and fostered.
The St. Thomas Christian community lost its solidarity and split into two major factions, with divergence in certain rituals and practices, after the Coonan Cross Oath of 1653. But, in course of time, the community as a whole realised the imperative need for unity, and its celebrated leaders started thinking in terms of a Reunion Movement. This awareness brought about a change of attitude and vision, in favour of settlement of differences and adoption of a common pattern in church hierarchy and ritual practices. Inspired by the successful Reunion of 1930, all the sections of the St. Thomas Christian Community began to think more broadly in the direction of amalgamation under a single church.

The rift among the St. Thomas Christians was sparked off with the advent of Western colonialism. Apart from trade and political command, the westerners wanted to nurture their interests among the St. Thomas Christians, and to bring them under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of a western church. These ulterior motives of the colonialists stood in the way of communal solidarity in the society of the St. Thomas Christians who had lived in enviable harmony and peace for centuries. The vested interests of the Europeans not only disintegrated the community, but rendered reunion almost impossible.

If the Reunion Movement becomes a successful reality, the St. Thomas Christians will be brought under the sheltering umbrella of a single church, whereby they will together converge into one mainstream of faith. Such a unification alone can pave the way for restoring the life and activities which the community had pursued till the sixteenth century.
The St. Thomas Christians have had their own proud tradition in matters social, political, cultural and linguistic. But their distinct outlook has never been an obstacle to the national integration of the Indian nation. Their tradition, like that of many other communities, rests upon the unique principle of unity in diversity that marks every aspect of India’s culture.

The church of the St. Thomas Christians disintegrated after Coonan Cross Oath of 1653. Reunion efforts were assiduously pursued by leaders of the church in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. The historic ‘reunion’ worth the name was achieved in 1930 under the auspices of Archbishop Mar Ivanios. In my view, this was the ideal reunion, long cherished by the masses.

Ecumenism, today, is a mighty motivating force among the St. Thomas Christians of Kerala. It is a bond and commitment from which no church can stand aloof; it is the only manifestation of strength and shelter for all christians divided and isolated on account of narrow differences which unfortunately prevail throughout.

These disparities must be eradicated from the grass roots level, if the different churches should become one developing community. Ecumenism has, for its motto, the interaction between all the sections of the St. Thomas Christians and their consolidation into one community. Ecumenism, as an attempt at unification of churches, is not an entirely new phenomenon in Kerala today. The movement had its beginnings in the latter half of the 17th century itself, after the first event of disintegration in 1653. Most churches pursued this effort. The Catholic
church hoped for the return of the Syrian Christians. Mar Thoma IV and Mar Thoma V made best efforts to bring about a reconciliation between the factions. During the time of Mar Thoma VI, in 1773, an earnest attempt was made under the auspices of Mar Joseph Cariattil to unite the Catholic church and the Malankara church. But, sad to say, the attempt did not succeed, on account of adverse circumstances. But the effort was not given up, and it was earnestly pursued by Nidhirikkal Mani Kathanar and Mar Dionysius V. The Catholic church became ready for reunion in 1888, but it did not materialise. Sincere efforts in the direction were made by Archbishop Mar Ivanios, with the support of all the bishops of the Orthodox Church. The endeavour towards reunion bore fruit in 1930, and the Catholic Church became ready to accept the relevant terms and conditions. This situation prepared the way for co-operation between the two churches and their recognition of each other’s dignity.

Ecumenism in Kerala faces many hindrances from various quarters. They are surmountable, provided there is sincere and united effort to accomplish Christian unity. Ecumenism can be implemented in actual practice in different ways, depending upon the conditions and circumstances of each region. Theological dialogue, promotion of the study of history, co-operation in the field of education, schemes for social economy and encouragement to unity in spiritual matters and modes of worship are the paths to be chosen, to foster communal solidarity. Christian unity, in the wide sense, can be accomplished only by such deliberate and planned efforts, and not merely by neighbourly charity and informal fraternity.
Ecumenical dialogue in the sense of efforts of the churches to achieve union and mutual communion is not something new to the christian communities of Kerala. The chief obstacles to ecumenical activities in Kerala are lack of intellectual preparation, mutual understanding, lack of leadership, etc. The following items help towards establishing unity among the churches in Kerala. They are family gatherings, common publications, sharing the common historical pilgrim centres, ecumenical study groups, inviting experts from other denominations to give lectures in the training centres including seminaries, theological centres, liturgical centres, etc.

My thesis proceeds from the hypothesis that the christians of Kerala were a single compact community before the arrival of the Western colonial missionaries. Western colonialism has been a handicap to the growth of christianity in India. Christians are becoming more and more aware that their divisions and divergences are untenable. They are sincerely trying to overcome them. After many centuries of separation, when the churchs met together in the 20th century, they were surprised to discover the unity of their faith and the richness as well as complementarity of their diversity.

The Western colonial missionaries opposed and blocked every effort to reunite the divided St. Thomas Christians. But there are certain hindrances to the reunion, mainly related to the material aspect of the possessions of the church. The St. Thomas christians thought that they were not in a position to reunite with the mother church. If they reunited, they feared, their property and all their wealth would go into the hands of the mother church.
Before I conclude this thesis, I put forward some suggestions that may help the Reunion of the St. Thomas Christians.

1. More united churches and institutions are to be established.

2. A mentality of openness towards other churches must be developed. At the faith level, all Christian churches and denominations should come together.

3. If the Christian masses adhere to a common code of faith and worship, it will be conducive to communal reunion, even if they dwell under the spiritual jurisdiction of different churches and ecclesiastical authorities.

4. The St. Thomas Christians, who now maintain divergence in matters of faith and are governed by different church authorities, should adopt a single form of faith and a single ecclesiastical leadership, in order to make reunion a reality.

This study reveals that the search for the unity of the Church of Christ can be made fruitful and effective only by genuine ecumenical dialogue among the churches, fully open to the guidance of the spirit, the source of unity. The discussions on church unity will bear no fruit if we don't agree on a common concept of the church. The common understanding of the church is not the result of a mere theoretical reasoning nor of mere compromising practices. It should be formed both in ecumenical studies and in authentic ecclesial life.