

THE REALITY OF THE CATHOLIC EASTERN CHURCHES IN THE CONTEXT OF VATICAN II AND ECUMENISM: MODEL AND BRIDGE FOR UNITY?

Cherian Karukaparambil[♦]

Secretary, Syro Malabar Synodal Commission for Ecumenism

Abstract

According to Second Vatican Council the recovery of the sources and the greatest fidelity to the ancient traditions are the hallmark of Catholic Eastern Churches, in view of their special task of fostering the unity of all Christians, especially of Eastern Christians (Cf. OE, 6, 24). The very existence of Catholic Eastern Churches has an ecumenical dimension. But to find themselves in this realm of responding to these issues, they need a stronger sense of their own identity; they need to establish their contact with their own deepest resources. Hence in the background of the vision of the Council and the task it entrusted to the Catholic Eastern Churches, as proposed in the Documents *Unitatis Redintegratio* and *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, the following is a search into the reality of the Catholic Eastern Churches. Furthermore in this study I prefer to emphasise the ecumenical dimension of the question over the identity, existence and vocation of the Catholic Eastern Churches. And the question is discussed also in the context of Syro Malabar Church in view of her ecumenical vocation as a Catholic Eastern Church. The Vision of the Council for these Churches is clear: They are called to be

[♦]**Rev. Dr Cherian (Joby) Karukaparambil** belongs to the Archdiocese of Changanacherry, Kerala, and is the director of Sandesanilayam, the Catechetical Department of the Archdiocese. He holds a Masters in Theology (2002, Paurasthya Vidya Pitham) and a Doctorate in Theology (2008, Catholic University of Salzburg, Austria). He is an Expert of Pro-Oriente Colloquium Syraiacum Vienna. He is visiting lecturer in Ecumenism at Paurasthya Vidya Pitham, Vadavathoor and Good Shepherd Major Seminary, Thalassery and the Secretary to the Syro-Malabar Synodal Commission for Ecumenism. Email: cheriankaruka@gmail.com

Model and Bridge. But whence have we come – where are we going?
Unity is still our destination.

Introduction

In the growing awareness of the real nature of the Church, the Second Vatican council marked a decisive turning point, calling the Church to new tasks and challenges. “It is the first time in history that efforts on behalf of Christian unity have taken on such great proportions and have become so extensive” (UUS, 41).¹ Even five decades after Vatican II, it continues to reverberate throughout the Church. The council triggered new theological beginnings, but not discarding the roots. In the words of Pope Paul VI:

The council aims at renewal. The reform at which the council aims is not, a turning upside down of the Church’s present way of life or a breaking with what is essential and worthy of veneration in her tradition. It is rather an honouring of tradition by stripping it of what is unworthy and defective so that it may be rendered firm and fruitful.²

The Council has unleashed a revolutionary return to the Church’s sources, and set Catholic Christianity on its still-unfinished journey of renewal and reform.³ This was the decisive break which the council brought in. Eamon Duffy states:

At the heart of the “New Theology” of de Lubac, Congar and the other theological midwives of the Council, was a passionate call to *rediscover* the Tradition. They set about freeing the Church from narrow straitjacket of a debased neo-scholasticism by opening up the riches of the deep tradition of the Church, in the Scriptures, the liturgy, the Fathers.⁴

According to Vatican II the recovery of the sources and the greatest fidelity to the ancient traditions are the hallmark of Catholic Eastern Churches, in view of their special task of fostering the unity of all Christians, especially of Eastern Christians (Cf. OE 6, 24). The very existence of Catholic Eastern Churches has an ecumenical dimension. But to find themselves in this realm of responding to these issues, they need a stronger sense of their own identity; they need to establish their contact with their own deepest resources. For,

¹*Ut Unum Sint*, AAS 87 (Nov. 11, 1995) 921-982; English version published in India by the Pauline Sisters Bombay Society, Bombay, 1995; henceforth the abbreviation UUS is used.

²Y. Congar & Others, *Council Speeches of Vatican II*, London, 1964, 12.

³A. Ivereigh, ed., *Unfinished Journey: The Church 40 Years after Vatican II*, New York/London, 2003, 1.

⁴E. Duffy, “Tradition and Reaction: Historical Resources for a Contemporary Renewal,” in A. Ivereigh, ed., *Unfinished Journey: The Church 40 Years after Vatican II*, 59.

“ecumenism does not mean worldwide, nor does it refer to a kind of internationalism without any local identity or roots in the situation.”⁵

Hence in the background of the vision of the Council and the task it entrusted to the Catholic Eastern Churches, in the following we will make a search into the reality of the Catholic Eastern Churches. Furthermore this study on the question over the identity, existence and vocation of the Catholic Eastern Churches has got an ecumenical dimension. In the concluding part of this article a special focus is given to the present situation of the Catholic Oriental Churches in India, particularly Syro Malabar Church and her ecumenical vocation in view of her identity as a Catholic Oriental Church.

The Reality of Catholic Eastern Churches

The Catholic Eastern Churches are a reality within the Catholic Church. Despite all kinds of obstacles and difficulties, those Churches exist indeed. Their presence in communion with the Roman Church makes us aware that the Catholic Church is much more than the Roman Catholic Church. Madey says: “The Oriental Catholic Churches are making the Universal Church more Catholic than the Roman Catholic Church would be able to do. They are not Roman, but in communion with the Roman Church, as the Apostles were not Peter, but in communion with Peter.”⁶

The most important achievement of Vatican II was its new ecclesiological approach centred on the understanding of the Church as a *Communio Ecclesiarum*. Starting with the constitution *Lumen Gentium* and the decree on Ecumenism it finds its clear expression in the decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*:

The Holy Catholic Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit by the same faith, the same sacraments and the same government and who, combining together into various groups which are held together by a hierarchy, form separate Churches or Rites. Between these there exists an admirable bond of union, such that the variety within the Church in no way harms its unity; rather it manifests it (OE, 2).

The very proof that the Catholic Church takes the existence of the Catholic Eastern Churches seriously is this Vatican II Decree dealing with them. Koodapuzha writes:

⁵T.V. Philip, “Church History in Ecumenical Perspective,” *The Ecumenical Review* 4 (1987) 417.

⁶Madey, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum More than Twenty Years After*, Kottayam, 1987, 18.

The title of the decree of Vatican II on the Oriental Churches — *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* — may be considered a turning point in the Western attitude in the terminological evolution in ecclesiology. For the Orientals the Church is a particular form and coherent expression of the faith life, which they experience. For them a Church can never be levelled down to a mere rite.⁷

The ecclesiological position of the Catholic Eastern Churches within the communion of the Catholic Church is being expressed further in the same document: “They are consequently of equal dignity (*pari pollent dignitatem*), so that none of them is superior to the others as regards rite (*ceteris praestet ratione ritus*) and they enjoy the same rights and are under the same obligations” (OE, 3).

The Catholic Eastern Churches were encouraged to return to their own traditions (if they have lost them due to the historical circumstances), ending a period of Latinization and opening a new appreciation of variety within the universal Church.⁸ Although the council had affirmed positively the position regarding the existence of the Catholic Eastern Churches, the issue was not welcomed with open arms by the Orthodox Churches. They considered these Churches, though they possess the same tradition as their orthodox counter parts, as the outcome of the *soteriological exclusivism* of the Catholic Church and its method for the search for unity called *Uniatism*.⁹ Some rays of changes in the ecclesial relationship were

⁷X. Koodapuzha, “The Impact of the Vatican Council II on the Syro-Malabar Church and the Present Challenges in Implementing the Conciliar Teachings,” in P. Kannookadan, ed., *Syro-Malabar Church Forty Years After Vatican Council II*, Kochi, 2007, 74; Here he recalls the transition that took place in a century of time in the attitude. For in 1862 Pope Pius IX established the *Sacred Congregation for the Affairs of the Oriental Rites*. But the decree of Vatican II speaks of Oriental Churches.

⁸It was a landmark in the historical development of the Catholic Eastern Churches that the council brought forth a particular document dealing the nature and purpose of the Eastern Churches, which are in communion with the Roman Church. The Decree on Catholic Eastern Churches (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*) was approved on November 21, 1964, which stated that variety within the church does not harm its unity and that Eastern Catholic churches should retain their own traditions.

⁹F. Bouwen, “The Current Theological Discussion of the Problems of Uniatism and Proselytism within the Framework of the Theological Dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox,” in Stirnemann, A., ed., *The Vienna Dialogue, Booklet 7*, Vienna 1995, 94-95. *Uniatism* is a term to be explained in detail. Whether all the Catholic Eastern Churches belong to this category of *Uniate* is still a disputed matter. The Syro Malabar Church which is in union with the Rome claims always its position as not belonging to this group of *Uniate*. Cf. Varghese Pathikulangara, “The ‘Uniat Church’ of St. Thomas — Fact or Fiction?,” in L. Hein, ed., *Die Einheit der Kirche; Festgabe zum 70. Geburtstag von Peter Meinhold*, Wiesbaden, 1977, 350-56.

witnessed in the last decades of the twentieth century. The Balamand document of 1993¹⁰ was an example for that. It stated: "Concerning the Catholic Eastern Churches, it is clear that they, as part of the Catholic Communion, have the right to exist and to act in response to the spiritual needs of their faithful."¹¹

A positive understanding of the presence of the Catholic Eastern Churches is to be found expressively in the documents of Vatican II. When the council speaks of its desire that the Catholic Eastern Churches may flourish and execute with new vigour the task entrusted to them (OE, 1), it uses the word *munus* to specify the word task instead of the traditional word *missio*.¹² The Council is here very particular to avoid any misunderstanding from the part of the Orthodox Churches regarding the presence of the Catholic Eastern Churches and their task as Eastern Churches parallel to the Orthodox Churches. The council on the other hand states that the so called *Uniatism* is no more the will of the Catholic Church; rather the communion is its ultimate goal.

However even today after so much studies and excavations regarding the identity and theological tradition of these Churches they do feel a kind of inferiority towards the Latin and also to their Oriental counterparts. On the other hand the Orthodox do not seem to be ready to credit the Catholic Eastern Churches with a special ecclesial character of their own, distinct from their being part of the Catholic communion. The Orthodox cannot recognize them as a distinct Sister Church. In spite of their recognition of the Catholic Oriental Churches, it is stated in the Balamand Document likewise: "The Catholic Eastern Churches, who have desired to re-establish full communion with the See of Rome and have remained faithful to it, have the rights and obligations which are connected with this communion."¹³

¹⁰This is a Document published by the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church VII Plenary Session, held in Balamand School of Theology (Lebanon), June 17-24, 1993 on the subject: "*Uniatism, Method of Union of the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion.*"

¹¹Balamand, § 3.

¹²*Ecclesiarum igitur Orientalium, quae huius traditionis testes sunt vivi, sollicitudinem gerens, haec Sancta et Oecumenica Synodus cupiens ut eadem florent et novo robore apostolico concreditum sibi munus absolvant, praeter ea quae ad universam spectant Ecclesiam, capita quaedam statuere decrevit, ceteris ad providentiam Synodorum orientalium nec non Sedis Apostolicae remissis (OE. 1).*

¹³Balamand, § 16. Despite these agreements it is to be noted that the Balamand Agreement was not recognised by all the Orthodox Churches. There were vehement

The Vision: Model and Bridge for Unity?

It is a matter of concern in the context of the documents of Vatican II *Unitatis Redintegratio* and *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* whether the Catholic Eastern Churches were and are or can be a model and bridge in the world of Ecumenism. The origin of the Catholic Oriental Churches was the fruit of a certain ecclesiology which is called *uniatism*,¹⁴ but likewise the fruit of the big desire of many Orientals to fulfil their grand hope: the unity of the Church.¹⁵ The very existence of the *Uniate* Catholic Eastern Churches has always been considered by the Orthodox as one of the major obstacles to any sincere theological confrontation with the Roman Catholic Church. While expressing this common conception of the Orthodox regarding the Catholic Eastern Churches Schmemmann, an orthodox theologian, respects to a certain extent the role of them as bridges. Commenting on the document *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* he wrote:

It is one more step, and a decisive one, toward the recognition of the Eastern tradition as “equal in dignity” to that of the West. Of utmost importance is its emphasis on the temporary character of its provisions — “until such time as the Catholic Church and the separated Eastern Churches come together into complete unity.” This seems to indicate a rather significant shift in the very understanding of the function of the Eastern Catholic communities called now to serve as bridges to, rather than substitutes for, the Orthodox East.¹⁶

Bishop Tawfiq, a Coptic Catholic theologian illustrates this concept of the Catholic Eastern Churches as a “bridge” in following words:

The Catholic Oriental Churches are quite conscious that their reason of existence is to be bridges (links) for exchange and intercourse, passages of union between the Orient and the Occident. History is a witness to that. It was mostly the refusal from the side of the Orthodox Churches to acknowledge them and the limits which the West set to them, that had restricted their role of a mediator and a link between East and West.¹⁷

criticisms against the very attempt and to interpret it as a trap set by the Catholic Church against the Orthodox. Cf. J. Romanides, “Orthodox and Vatican Agreement, Balamand, Lebanon, June 1993,” *Theologia* 6, 4 (1995) 570-580.

¹⁴ See footnote 9.

¹⁵M. Tawfiq, “The Role of the Oriental Catholic Churches in the re-Establishment of Unity between the Orient and the Occident,” in A. Stirnemann & G. Wilflinger, *The Vienna Dialogue on Ecclesiology*, Booklet 7, Vienna, 1995, 115.

¹⁶A. Schmemmann, “A Response,” in Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II*, London, 1972, 387.

¹⁷M. Tawfiq, “The Role of the Oriental Catholic Churches in the re-Establishment of Unity between the Orient and the Occident,” in A. Stirnemann & G. Wilflinger, *The Vienna Dialogue on Ecclesiology*, Booklet 7, 115.

The Catholic Oriental Churches are the visible signs of the theological pluralism in the Catholic communion and their main function is to serve as the basis of a theological pluralism in the Church. "Within the Catholic field they are witness of unity in diversity, and within Orthodoxy they are witness of Catholicity. Their function is to bring Orthodoxy as well as the Latin West to appreciate the Universality of the Church."¹⁸ This is the bridge building role. This role of the Catholic Oriental Churches is recognised or affirmed in other words in the Balamand document when it speaks of the Practical rules in search of the communion:

The first step to take is to put an end to everything that can foment division, contempt, and hatred between the Churches. For this the authorities of the Catholic Church will assist the Catholic Eastern Churches and their communities so that they themselves may prepare full communion between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches.¹⁹

This vocation of the Catholic Oriental Churches calls for a renewal in their life and existence as true Oriental Churches. This call for renewal must lead them to the realisation of the lost traditions characteristic of their oriental nature. The distortion of their true tradition was caused in the name of the Catholic model.²⁰ The Catholicity of the East is not to be assessed and determined by checking how far they resemble their Latin brothers and sisters.²¹ In this search for the true identity we must also assert and accept the fact that renewal is not a naive modernisation. Historical origins must be adopted responsibly today against the horizon of the future. As Easterners a serious loyalty to their own Tradition is to be considered as important by the Catholic Oriental Churches.

The Church, which has its origin, structure and destiny in the Trinitarian God, is a unity in diversity of different apostolic traditions, a communion of communions, a Church of Churches.²² Church, as the guarantee and guardian of apostolicity, has the prime and God-given duty to guard and foster the orthodoxy and

¹⁸N. Edelby, "Between Orthodoxy and Catholicism," in Maximos IV Sayegh, *Eastern Churches and Catholic Unity*, Freiburg, 1963, 71.

¹⁹Balamand, § 21.

²⁰This Catholic model was considered as synonym to the Latin tradition until Vatican II, which embarked a new horizon of ecclesiological vision which we witness specially in the documents of LG, UR and OE.

²¹J.P., Lang, "Eastern and Catholic," *Diakonia* 17 (1982) 24.

²²M. Vellanickal, "Biblical Theology of the Individual Churches," *Christian Orient* 1, 1 (1980) 129-142.

orthopraxy in the light of her apostolic tradition.²³ In this realm of communion the Catholic Oriental Churches have, in fact, the task, to present to the West, and to encourage it to look closer on the theology, the spirituality and the values of the East.²⁴

Ecumenical Obligation of the Catholic Oriental Churches

The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council wished to base dialogue on the communion which already exists, and it draws attention to the noble reality of the Churches of the East (UR, 14). The concern for restoring unity pertains to the whole Christians and “the Catholic Church embraces with hope the commitment to ecumenism as a duty of the Christian conscience enlightened by faith and guided by love” (UUS, 8, also 6-9 and 15-16). This commitment is now and again reiterated by the Church to its faithful. It has been directed to the Catholic Eastern Churches in a special way by Vatican II as a duty in virtue of their very existence (OE, 30). Certainly the Eastern Catholic Churches, in the spirit of the Decree on Ecumenism, will play a constructive role in the dialogue of love and in the theological dialogue at both the local and international levels, and thus contribute to mutual understanding and the continuing pursuit of full unity (OL, 24).

This explains the very obligation and duty of the Catholic Oriental Churches, which they are entrusted with being part of the Catholic communion. As we already mentioned above the Catholic Oriental Churches are treated by their Orthodox counterparts as hindrances in the way of ecumenical endeavours. Many Catholic theologians hold this idea too, though not open. Despite these factors the fathers of the Vatican Council emphasised the ecumenical mission of these Churches declaring that they have a special duty in the work of reconciling East and West (OE, 24). Patriarch Maximos IV underscored this duty of the Catholic Oriental Churches: “The Oriental Catholic Churches are, for Christian unity, a mighty and indispensable factor. In spite of our small number, we are fully conscious of being charged with a great mission.”²⁵

According to the decree on Catholic Eastern Churches the Oriental Catholic Churches are obliged to promote the unity of all Christians,

²³J. Powathil, “Church as Tradition,” in P. Pallath, ed., *Church and its most Basic Element*, Rome, 1995, 101.

²⁴M. Tawfiq, “The Role of the Oriental Catholic Churches in the re-Establishment of Unity between the Orient and the Occident,” in A. Stirnemann & G. Wilflinger, *The Vienna Dialogue on Ecclesiology*, Booklet 7, Vienna, 1995, 116.

²⁵Madey, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 150.

especially of the eastern Christian. The decree envisages this specific task in its fivefold aspect in accordance with the principles announced in the decree on ecumenism:

The Eastern Churches in communion with the Apostolic See of Rome have a special role to play in promoting the Unity of all Christians, particularly Easterners, according to the principles of this Sacred Synod's Decree on Ecumenism: *first of all by prayer, then by the examples of lives, by religious fidelity to ancient Eastern traditions, by greater mutual knowledge, by collaborations, and by a brotherly regard for objects and attitudes* (OE, 24).²⁶

"A specific task of the Catholic Eastern Churches is to manifest to the separated brethren that Church Unity can be achieved without the particular Churches losing their individual characteristics."²⁷

The Ecumenical Task

In accordance with the teaching of the Catholic Church ecumenism is not an appendix to the life of the Church, rather it is the very vocation of the Church (UUS, 1). "The attainment of union is the concern of the whole Church, faithful and shepherds alike. This concern extends to everyone, according to his talent, whether it be exercised in his daily Christian life or in his theological and historical research" (UR, 5).

Therefore the Second Vatican Council "exhorts all the Catholic faithful to recognize the signs of the times and to take an active and intelligent part in the work of ecumenism" (UR, 4). The Council put it clearly how this work be treated in the Church life:

Catholics, in their ecumenical work, must assuredly be concerned for their separated brethren, praying for them, keeping them informed about the Church, making the first approaches toward them. But their primary duty is to make a careful and honest appraisal of whatever needs to be done or renewed in the Catholic household itself, in order that its life may bear witness more clearly and faithfully to the teachings and institutions which have come to it from Christ through the Apostles (UR, 4).

It calls for a proper ecumenical orientation which leads to an appropriate ecumenical vision. The Council teaches: "Sacred theology and other branches of knowledge, especially of an historical nature, must be taught with due regard for the ecumenical point of view, so that they may correspond more exactly with the facts" (UR, 10).

This again underscores the need of due attention to the ecumenical formation of the Church. Only an oriental perspective in every aspect

²⁶Italics is added to emphasise the different aspects of the task.

²⁷Walter M. Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II*, London, 1972, 383, foot note 48.

of theological formation will bring a new wind in the Church. This would help to create an ecumenical atmosphere in relation to its sister Churches.

Reviewing the liturgical renewal and adaptation in the Syro-Malabar Church, Elavanal writes, “there is an aspect of ecclesial life and tradition in the liturgy, which cannot be forgotten. We cannot receive an apostolic patrimony apart from the liturgical forms and prayers lived and prayed down through the centuries forming an unbroken chain of tradition.”²⁸ In addition to that the absence of proper catechetical and theological formation focusing on the distinctive oriental identity of the Syro-Malabar Church and the ignorance of the richness of the oriental spiritual traditions has vitiated the controversy in the Church.

Though there have been attempts at restoration, renewal and adaptation, the Liturgy was not taught as the source of spirituality and Christian life. Such a catechesis and formation was not given to our priests, religious and laity. The liturgy became rather the point of controversy and hence our priests, religious and faithful are devoid of proper liturgical formation.²⁹

And many of the religious and the people at large are alarmingly ignorant of the theology of individual Churches and lack a proper consciousness of their ecclesial identity. Elavanal admits that “our Church in general failed to give proper liturgical formation to the priests and the people of God. Many of the abuses in the liturgy are the results of ignorance about the liturgy.”³⁰ This in turn restricts the ecumenical openness of this Church towards its sister churches.

Archbishop Joseph Powathil, who is one of the most important contributors to the unofficial Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition sponsored by the Foundation Pro Oriente (Vienna/Austria), emphasizes that a “Church does not have the fundamental ecclesial character unless it is open and sensitive to other Churches in terms of Communion. Hence, no Church can live in an isolated manner.”³¹ Likewise, we have to consider the words of Kasper:

²⁸T. Elavanal, “Influence of Vatican Council II on the Liturgical Life of the Syro Malabar Church,” in P. Kannookadan, ed., *Syro-Malabar Church Forty Years After Vatican Council II*, Kochi, 2007, 99.

²⁹Elavanal, *Influence of Vatican II in the Liturgical Life of the Syro-Malabar Church*, 92.

³⁰Elavanal, *Influence of Vatican II in the Liturgical Life of the Syro-Malabar Church*, 93.

³¹Archbishop J. Powathil, *The Ecclesial Milieu. Ecclesial Vision and Historical Interventions*, Trivandrum 2009, 206.

Ecumenism is ecumenism in truth. That necessitates going back to the sources, above all in Scripture and liturgy. We must communicate once more what constitute the common basis and the common foundation, and make the differences comprehensible from the perspective of that common ground. How can this kind of ecumenical formation occur in the congregations, in the seminaries, at the universities, etc.?³²

So, Syro-Malabar Church, in view of its ecumenical mission, has to consider the sister churches of Thomas Christian tradition. Besides that, the ecumenical openness demands a revival and restoration in the process of renewal, and the restoration of one's own identity and tradition.

One of the crisis the Church faces in the modern times is that the ecumenical questions have lost their fascination or the kind of enthusiastic ecumenism has strained in the present time. This is very often connected with a lack of catechetical and homiletic instruction. Analysing the situation Walter Kasper writes:

In this situation we are faced with a double task and challenge. Firstly, we have to promote ecumenical education and the reception of ecumenical results. The results of ecumenical progress have not yet penetrated into the hearts and into the flesh of our Church and other churches as well. Ecumenical theology is not present as an inner dimension in theological programmes.

Secondly, we must clarify and renew the ecumenical vision; we need a new ecumenical push and verve. We are in danger of losing a whole generation of young people if we do not give them a vision. This means catechetical, homiletic, theological endeavour, but even more a spiritual renewal and a new start.³³

"The Catholic Church embraces with hope the commitment to ecumenism as a duty of the Christian conscience enlightened by faith and guided by love. In the present situation of the lack of unity among Christians and of the confident quest for full communion, the Catholic faithful are conscious of being deeply challenged by the Lord of the Church. The Second Vatican Council strengthened their commitment with a clear ecclesiological vision, open to all the ecclesial values present among other Christians. By engaging in frank dialogue, Communities help one another to look at themselves together in the light of the Apostolic Tradition. This leads them to ask

³²W. Kasper, "Ecumenism in Transition," *Information Service* 123, 2006/III-IV, 104-105.

³³W. Kasper, "Present Situation and Future of the Ecumenical Movement," *Information Service* 109, 2002/I-II, 14.

themselves whether they truly express in an adequate way all that the Holy Spirit has transmitted through the Apostles" (UUS, 8, 10, 16).

Conclusion

The atmosphere of ecumenism in the Church is a necessity and a pre-condition for the dialogue with the other Churches. The Catholic Church in India, being a communion of three individual churches, should be an example for this. The history of Indian Church with all its divisions is an example of the negation of rights for evangelisation of the Oriental Catholic Churches outside its so-called proper territory.³⁴

The problem of the Syro-Malabar Church in India is essentially different from that of the other Eastern Churches because it is a matter of re-establishing jurisdiction in their own country itself, where this Church had enjoyed 'all India jurisdiction' for at least more than thousand years, which was unjustly and arbitrarily suppressed during Portuguese colonial administration.³⁵

In contrast, the Orthodox Churches originating from that section of the St Thomas Christians, which in protest of the forced westernisation, have always maintained their "all India jurisdiction."³⁶ Still today one of the main problems in the ecumenical relations in the context of the Indian Church is these difficulties in the inter-Church relationship within the Catholic Church of India.

Following the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, there is an urgent need to overcome the fears and misunderstandings which appear at times between the Catholic Eastern Churches and the Roman Church, and among those Churches themselves, especially with regard to the pastoral care of their people, also outside their own territories. As children of the one Church, reborn into the newness of

³⁴The Latin Church of India is spread all over India and possesses the right for missionary activities in the whole territory of India, while the other two Catholic Oriental churches are still limited in their Jurisdiction. Although both of these churches (Syro-Malabar and the Syro-Malankara Churches) are elevated to the status of Major archiepiscopal churches, their right for all India Jurisdiction and consequently the right for evangelisation are still curtailed. For some information related to this matter cf. G. Chediath, "Einheit im Widerspruch zur Einförmigkeit, ein ökumenisches Problem aus indisch-orientalischer Sicht," *Der Christliche Osten* 37, 3-4 (1982) 93-103; See also, *Christian Orient*, 3, 1-2 (March 1982); *Christian Orient*, 4, 1 (March 1983).

³⁵P. Pallath, "Suppression of the all India Jurisdiction of the Church of St Thomas Christians in India," *Ephrem's Theological Journal* 6 (2002) 162.

³⁶P. Pallath, "Suppression of the all India Jurisdiction...", 180.

life in Christ, believers are called to undertake all things in a spirit of common purpose, trust and unflinching charity. Conflicts must not be allowed to create division, but must instead be handled in a spirit of truth and respect, since no good can come except from love.³⁷

An ecumenical atmosphere demands the respect of the individuality of the churches and mutual acceptance of their rights within the Catholic Church. The inter-ecclesial relationship within the Catholic Church in India was always an ecumenical scandal according to many authors as we already quoted above. In the Bishops' Synod in Rome 1985, pointing out the ecumenical and ecclesial problems due to the denial of equality of the Churches in India, Powathil remarked:

One of the major obstacles for ecumenism is the attitude of some of the Latin hierarchs towards the Orientals, in the Catholic communion. A few of their recent assertions are disturbing to the separated brethren. They call India, for instance, a Latin territory. They stand for uniformity for jurisdiction and hinder the Orientals from fulfilling their pastoral and missionary obligations. For genuine ecumenism much remains to be done.³⁸

The new vision launched by Vatican II has to be translated into action in its true sense, especially in India. Despite reminding the ecumenical dimension of the Catholic Eastern Churches, the Roman Catholic Church has to come out of its colonial image which still shadows the relationships in India. Rome has repented and confessed its failures against the orthodox brethren. But the Church in India has to wait still for a radical change in the attitude of the Roman Church towards its oriental brethren.

So ecumenism demands not only returning to the sources, but also returning the due rights and privileges that belong to the age old traditions of the Church. When both these aspects are taken into account a better ecumenical environment will be created in the Indian context of ecumenism and of the churches of Thomas Christian tradition. And that is the mind of Vatican II with regard to Eastern Churches (OE, 2, 3, 6, 9, 24). The pain which these churches undergo has to be accounted to their gain, which leads them to be a model and bridge in the whole question of their ecumenical obligation.

³⁷*Ecclesia in Asia*, 27.

³⁸J. Powathil, "The Second Vatican Council and the Syro-Malabar Church," *Christian Orient* 7, 1-2 (March 1986) 37- 40. It may appear to be an old scene, but we still need a clear and positive attitude towards the matter.

Finally, the ecumenical dimension of the Catholic Oriental Churches in the light of the vision of Vatican II entrusts them with new prospects. Pope John Paul II wrote:

The Eastern Catholic Churches are thus called to maintain a twofold fidelity. First is fidelity to the traditions which have been handed down to them, so that they may in turn hand them on faithfully; useful in this regard are the bonds which unite them to their own Mother Churches. Second is fidelity to the men and women of today with their joys and hopes, their sorrows and pain, their desires and expectations, as they thirst for the truth and the fullness of life that finds its source only in God; this is faithfulness to the continuing search, especially in consumer-oriented societies, for the deeper meaning of life. This twofold fidelity is fidelity to God and to his revelation — shining brightly in the many different traditions which come from the Apostles through the Fathers (OE, 1) and fidelity to man and to his need of God, in the various ways in which this is expressed.³⁹

The words of Hambey on the ecumenical prospects of the Catholic Eastern Church may give a good conclusion to this discussion:

They have to continue standing as a living proof that there is in the Catholic Church a genuine and active presence of the eastern tradition. They will not be able to do so, if they do not make a conscious and systematic, a revolutionary, return to the most authentic sources of their oriental character. This includes assuming a real, often new, if not challenging ecclesiology. They have to show that theological and ecclesiological differences are compatible with the broadest conception of the Catholic Church.⁴⁰

³⁹John Paul II, "Letter to Cardinal Achille Silvestrini," *L'Osservatore Romano*, November 8-9, 1999, 5.

⁴⁰Hambey, E., "Problems and Prospects of Ecumenism in the Eastern Catholic Churches," in X. Koodapuzha, ed., *Oriental Churches: Theological Dimensions*, Kottayam, 1988, 249.