

PHILIP CHEMPAKASSERY
Trivandrum (Indie)

THE EUCHARIST AND ECUMENISM IN THE CONTEXT OF KERALA

This paper is an attempt to address one of the problems faced by Christianity in Kerala, India. Kerala, more than any other state in India, claims to be influenced by Christian values, though the majority of its population still remains non-Christian. The Christianity of Kerala is not only influential in the social and ethical tradition and outlook of the people in general, but also traces its history to the very origin of Christianity in the world. Christianity came to India through the preaching of St. Thomas, the Apostle. The vast majority of Kerala Christians claim to be descendants of the first generation of Christians converted by St. Thomas. They are known as Thomas-Christians. Yet the Kerala Christian scenario is far from being anything like a powerful force to bear witness to the values of Christianity. The main reason is the division within the Christian community in Kerala. It is this situation of Kerala, which makes this paper relevant. Here an attempt is made to address some of the issues precipitated by the divisions, existing in this Christian community in Kerala.

Our procedure will be:

(1) To look at the meaning of Ecumenism, the origin of the term, the meaning it has received in different epochs of the history of the Church, the significance it attained in the council of Vatican II and the final aim of this movement as understood by the Catholic Church.

(2) The unitive significance of the Eucharist, by stating the relationship among the sacraments in general and the special meaning of the Eucharist as the sacrament of sacraments.

(3) to consider the Christian Scenario in Kerala: the many Churches and their common origin and unity till the 17th century; the scandal and confusion, the division of Christians creates today in the minds of all concerned; the common liturgical heritage of the Kerala Christians .

(4) Suggestions for strengthening the relationship among the Christian communities of Kerala.

1. Ecumenism

Ecumenism is rather a new comer to the English language and especially in the language of Christian theology. It entered the catholic theology through the protestant movement to bring the separated Christian communities around the same table and was accepted by the Second Vatican Council as a technical term to refer to the efforts at unity among the Christian denominations. Etymologically the word ecumenism is derived from the Greek word *oikoumene* which itself comes from the word *oikos* (house). Thus *oikoumene* refers to the inhabited country or the inhabited world etc. In its proper application in the ancient world it referred to the area under the Roman rule inhabited by people and the Roman emperor was the ecumenical ruler because he was the authoritative ruler of the world known to people. Those areas in the globe, which did not belong to the Roman empire, was not considered proper inhabited world and the people in these areas were considered *barbaroi* (barbarians). From the political use it entered the ecclesiastical world and the Patriarch of Constantinople, the capital of the *oikoumene* received the title of *oikoumenikos*¹ and gatherings of the representatives of the Christians of the *oikoumene* were known as ecumenical councils.

Later with the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) the word ecumenism received a different emphasis. It is used for the movement of cooperation and mutual help among the different denominations of the Protestant Christian groups. In the Second Vatican Council this same word entered the Catholic world with the meaning of a movement envisaging unity among all people who profess faith in Jesus Christ and have received the sacrament of baptism. The council published a document by name *Unitatis Redintegratio* to promote ecumenism among the different Christian communities. In the spirit of the council, the Secretariat for Christian unity published an Ecumenical Directory in two volumes, one in 1967 and another in 1970 and a new version in 1993.

Why is the Church concerned about ecumenism and what is the final goal of it as envisaged by the Catholic Church? A close examination of the document on Ecumenism reveals the goal envisaged by the Council. In the introduction to the document it is said that there is a visible sign of the prompting of the spirit that all believers of Christ want to come together. The spirit behind this desire is that „almost every one, though in different ways, longs that there may be one visible Church of God, a Church truly universal and sent forth to the whole world that the world may be converted to the Gospel and so be saved to the glory of God”² Therefore the desire for unity is a common feature in the present-day Christianity, whatever is the denominational difference. In this desire

¹ Cf. J. MADEY, *Ecumenism, Ecumenical Movement and Eastern churches*, Kottayam 1987, pp. 11-13.

² Decree on Ecumenism, no. 1. All references to Vatican II Documents are to *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. W.M. ABBOT, New York 1966.

for closer relationship and cooperation, the Catholic Church is ready for self-reformation to make the Christian unity a reality. The Church believes that „it is through Christ’s Catholic Church alone, which the all embracing means of salvation is, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained”³ At the same time the Church does not claim that all that exists in the Catholic Church are essential for the ideal ecclesial reality and that the Church is beyond any reformation of amendment. Further the Church in its concrete existence does not project itself as model to which all other Christian denominations should move forward. The mind of the Catholic Church is clearly expressed in the following words, „Finally all are led to examine their own faithfulness to Christ’s will for the Church and, wherever necessary undertake with vigour the task of renewal and reform.”⁴ Thus the Church, in unequivocal terms, projects the will of Christ as the ideal to which every Christian community should move. In this basic duty no Church, even the Catholic Church has any exception. In other words reformation and renewal are needed in all Christian communities. But these reformations and renewals are oriented towards one and only one goal and goal in its final stage is not simply closer relationship or cooperation in certain areas of existence but the attainment of perfect and visible unity which enables the Christian communities to have full participation in the celebration of the Eucharist. Speaking about the final goal of Ecumenism, the Council says, „The result will be that, little by little, as the obstacles to perfect ecclesiastical communion are overcome, all Christians will be gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, into that unity of the one and only Church which Christ bestowed on His Church from the beginning.”⁵

Here also there is need for a proper understanding. One Church of Christ does not mean one tradition, one theological outlook, and one way of celebrating the liturgy, one Church discipline and so on. The unity that is envisaged is a unity in diversity. The existence of the 21 Individual Churches (*sui iuris* Churches) within Catholic communion itself is clear proof that the Catholic Church does not want to destroy the individual identity of the Christian Communities. Each community remains in their individual identity but forming one Church of God. It is a unity of communion what ecumenism is looking forward to, not a unity at the expense of identity.

2. Ecumenism and the Eucharist

A correct understating of the Eucharist leads us to the urgent need for unity among the Christian Churches, because in the very essence of this sacrament, it is oriented towards unity. In fact, it is not only the Eucharist which is so ori-

³ *Ibid.*, no. 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 4.

ented, but the whole sacramental system of the Church has a definite structure and all the individual sacraments are essentially related to each other and are all related to the Eucharist which is the sacrament of sacraments. We will explain this truth by, first, showing the inter-relatedness of the sacraments and then by pointing out the special characteristics of the Eucharist as a sacrament of unity.

2.1. The Unity among the Sacraments

The Sacraments may be defined as the signs or rituals performed within the Church as indicated by Jesus Himself in which there takes place an encounter between God and man. The God of Christians is a God who goes out of Himself in search of man to meet him, to heal him, to save him by making him His friend. This going out of Himself is, in fact, the specifically Christian idea of God. The whole Bible, the Old Testament and New Testament, is full of the instances of God going out to meet man. Revelation is to be understood against this background. The calling of Abraham, the mission of Moses and the sending of the Prophets are all instances of a God who is on the way to meet man. Therefore, the Christian theology starts with the Divine movement. Man only appropriates this Divine initiative. The sending of the Son of God, the man Jesus of Nazareth, and His death on the cross for the salvation of the whole world are the highest points in the Divine initiative. God goes out to meet man and man has to encounter this God coming to shake hand with Him, to make friends with Him. When God and man shake hands with each other, salvation is realized.

The sacraments are heightened moments of this God-man encounter realized within the Church. As the Church says, „Rightly, then, the liturgy is considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy the sanctification of man is manifested by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which is proper to each of these signs; in the liturgy full public worship is performed by the mystical body of Jesus Christ, that is by the head and his members.”⁶ It is from the Council of Trent onwards that the Catholic Church started to define the Sacraments as seven in number. Even before the Council, the Church had all these Sacraments and the Christian individuals were receiving the spiritual blessing ensuing from these sacraments. But a clear vision as to the number of the Sacraments was not available till the Council of Trent. The Sacraments are in fact heightened moments of one and only one Reality and that Reality is God-man encounter, which took visible form in the person of the God-man Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, in a true sense we can say that the Sacrament, the only real Sacrament-real in the sense that the sacramentality itself is made a visible sign-is Jesus Christ. This one Sacrament after His passage to the Father through the death and resurrection continues to live in space and time in the Church. Therefore, as Christ is the Sacrament the Church

⁶ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 7.

also is the Sacrament because it is the Locus of the encounter between God and man. The seven Sacraments are to be understood against this background. Therefore, they are not separate powers, but they are actions of the Church, which is the real Sacrament as the continuation of the Christ the one and only sacrament. The Eastern Churches are especially praiseworthy for the deep insight they have of the Church. For them Christ lives in the Church. Therefore, they can proclaim to the world that whosoever wants to „meet Jesus and speak to Him should come to the Church”⁷ This insight makes it clear that though the Sacraments are many they are the different forms of the same reality. Therefore, there is an intrinsic unity among them.

The unity among the Sacraments can be understood also from another fact. Of all the actions of the Church, the Eucharist is the most important. Second Vatican Council has so beautifully brought out the unparalleled significance of the Eucharist. The Council says, „As often as the sacrifice on the Cross-by which Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out”⁸ This is because, as the Council of Trent says, „In this divine sacrifice, which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered Himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the Cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner.”⁹ Therefore, as Christ is the only Sacrament and the Sacrament of Sacraments, the Eucharist is the source and summit of all the sacraments, even all the actions of the Church.

This means among the Sacraments there is a unity and the unifying element is the Sacrament of the Eucharist. In fact all the other Sacraments derive their meaning from the Eucharist as well as they converge into the Eucharist. This fact can be explained in the following way.

There are the three Sacraments of initiation – Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. Baptism is given to a person so that he or she may be made a member of the Church and may be able to grow into maturity as the Body of Christ through the participation in the Eucharistic celebration. The Sacrament of Baptism is not an end in itself. It is oriented towards Eucharist and finds its full meaning when the baptized person is united with Christ in the Sacrament of Eucharist. This is true also of the Sacrament of Confirmation. A person is confirmed in faith and membership in the Church through the second Sacrament. But the full expression of the membership is realized in the participation in the Eucharistic celebration. The other sacraments also have a similar orientation towards the Eucharist. The Sacrament of Reconciliation may be defined as the Sacrament of the re-entry of the faithful into full membership in the Church after the loss or suspension of that membership through sins committed after baptism. This Sacrament takes the sinner back to the Church so that he or she may

⁷ Malankara Liturgy, Sunday Night Prayers.

⁸ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 7.

⁹ The Council of Trent, DS 1743.

be able to participate fully in the Eucharistic celebration and receive the Sacramental Body and Blood of Christ. The Sacrament of Anointing the Sick is another Sacrament of similar nature. The sick person is forgiven of all the faults and is enabled to receive the Eucharist. The age-old practice of the Church also shows the inter-connection between the Anointing of the Sick and Eucharist. In all the ancient Apostolic Churches Eucharist is given immediately after the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. The Sacrament of Matrimony is meant for the building up of the Christian family. This has to be understood in two ways. First of all, as St. Paul very clearly says, in his letter to the Ephesians, Christian marriage is the symbol of the union between Christ and the Church. He says, „this is a great mystery and I am applying it to Christ and the Church” (Eph. 5: 32). Therefore, marriage symbolizes the union between the Church and Christ and the Sacrament of this union, as we have said earlier, is the Eucharist. Therefore, it is clear that Matrimony symbolizes the Eucharist and is oriented towards it. The significance of this Sacrament and its orientation towards the Eucharist is clear also from the fact that Matrimony is for the building up of the Christian family, which is the basic unit of the Christian Community, the Church. The Second Vatican Council goes to the extent of calling the Christian family as the domestic Church¹⁰ This means the Sacrament of Matrimony builds up the Church and this ecclesial reality receives fullness in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Thus we can see clearly the inter-connection between these two Sacraments. The Sacrament of Holy Orders is basically meant for the celebration of the Eucharist. In all the three levels of this Sacrament-Deaconate, Priesthood, and Episcopate-it is oriented towards the Eucharist. The Deacon is the official assistant for the celebration of the Eucharist. The Bishop assisted by the presbyterate is the president of the Eucharistic celebration.

These observations about the inter-connectedness of the Sacraments clearly show that there is a basic unity among them. Moreover, all of them derive their efficacy from the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. All of them function in their various ways for the building up of the Church, the Body of Christ. The Eucharist is the sacramental body of Christ. Therefore all sacraments, which build up the body of Christ, are by that very fact oriented towards and are derived from the Eucharist.

2.2. Unity as the end of the Sacraments

The Church is the Body of Christ and the Sacraments build up this Body. This Body of Christ is formed of the various members of the Church. The end result is that there remains one, only one Body though this Body consists of many members. The New Testament has two very important imageries for the Church and the two great theologians of the New Testament Church, John and

¹⁰ Constitution on the Church, no. 11.

Paul give these imageries. To depict the Body of Christ John uses the imagery or allegory of the vine and the branches. Jesus says, according to John's Gospel, „I am the vine and you are the branches” (John 15:5). There is only one vine and that is Jesus Christ. There is only one vinedresser and that is the Father. The vine consists of so many branches. But they form one vine. This is the mystery of the relationship between Christ and the believers. The unity of Christ and the believers results in the unity among the believers because all the believers together form one vine tree. The vine imagery is continued to speak of the love that should exist among the Christian faithful. Jesus who begins by saying that He is the vine and the disciples are the branches continues to highlight the visible and practical form in which this unity should exist by saying „this is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). So by loving as Jesus loved, the Christians should show forth the fact that they are one in Jesus Christ. The source of this unity is not Jesus Himself, but His Father. He says, „as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love” (John 15:9). So it is a life of love, which proceeds from the Father, is made tangible in the life of the Son and is expected to continue in the life of the disciples. Thus an all-embracing cosmic unity is envisaged. This unity contains in itself all realities, God and man. This unity is a three-dimensional mutual indwelling. The Father and the Son indwell mutually and form one reality. Jesus says, „the Father is in me and I am in the Father (John 10:38) and this mutual indwelling results in their unity, „The Father and I are one” (John 10:30). Jesus' prayer is that the same unity exists among the disciples. In His high priestly prayer Jesus implores, „that they may be one as we are one” (John 17:22). So John's idea of unity is a cosmic unity between God, Jesus and the disciples. But this unity does not exclude those outside the Church. The cosmic unity realized through the union of the Father, Son and the disciples is not a closed reality, but an open reality, which invites those outside the Church also to come and enter into this unity. This openness is expressed in the words of Jesus, „As You Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have send me” (John 17:21). This means the unity between the Father, Son and the disciples has a tangible end in view of those outside the community of the disciples. This unity should be a challenge for others also to enter into this unity. Jesus also prays, „I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word” (John 17:20). Here also the hope that the outsiders also will ultimately enter into this unity and form one reality is clearly expressed. In another place Jesus says, „I have other sheep that does belong to this flock. I must bring them also and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16). Here also the clear teaching is that the final end of the salvific economy is the cosmic unity where all humans-all who are saved-become one reality with Jesus and His Father in the Holy Spirit without, however, losing the individuality of

anyone. For this unity the effective sacrament is the Eucharist. It is through participation in the Eucharist, which is the flesh of Christ that the unity is realized. Jesus says, „those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them” (John 6:56). So in this world the practical means for the realization of the cosmic unity is the sacramental system especially the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of other sacraments.

St. Paul has a different approach though he comes to the same conclusion as John. He uses the imagery of the human body. The Church is one body of Christ. The believers form different members of this one body. They are different as members. But they are one as members of the same body. Unity and diversity are simultaneously preserved by this imagery. Paul says, „For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body though many are one body, so it is with Christ (1 Cor. 12:12). This incorporation into the body of Christ is attained in our baptism. He asks the faithful of the Roman Church, „Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” (Romans 6:3). Paul understands the sacraments as rituals through which we participate in the experiences of Jesus especially the experience of Jesus’ paschal mystery. Because of this participation in the experience of Jesus in a sense, a sense known fully only to God, we become Christ Himself. Paul explains this mystery by the imagery of the body. We become Christ because we become members of His body. This sharing in the experience of Jesus comes to completion in the reception of the sacrament of Eucharist. He asks, „The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16). Paul means two things through these questions. First of all the participation in the Eucharist makes us participants in the reality of Christ. We become one body with Christ. Another consequent unity also takes place. We become one body with all the participants, one body of Christ with so many members.

The consequence of this unity is that the Christians cannot lead a life that does not fit into this system. First of all, since they are one body with Christ no immorality can exist in the Church especially the sexual immorality. Comparing sexual immorality to the old yeast, the contaminating yeast, Paul says, and „Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:7-8). Since they are one body there cannot be any division among the believers and no lawsuits. Even if there is an unjust fellow in the community, justice should not be sought with the help of outsiders, but all divisions and differences of opinion should be settled within the Church. Paul also encourages that for the unity of the Church and to show a good example for the outsiders, the Christian faithful may even

suffer injustice, meted out to them. „In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded” (1 Cor 6:7).

Paul understands this unity not as a closed reality with only the believers in it, but as an open reality, which should include all others not only intelligent beings but also the material world. According to his experience the whole creation has been waiting for liberation in Jesus Christ and sanctification through Him through participation in the mystery of incarnation and the mystery of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Paul says, „We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now” (Romans 8:22). What does it mean? He should surely mean not only the human world but also the material world. How is the groaning answered? By the incarnation of the Son of God. When the Son of God took the human flesh and made Himself one reality with Him the material world, it was being uplifted, sanctified and united with God. This is what takes place everyday with the Eucharistic celebration. When the bread is consecrated it is as part of the material world that it is consecrated. Therefore, at every celebration of the Eucharist there is answer to the groaning of the material world. Therefore, the Pauline idea of unity is a cosmic unity, which embraces every reality including the material world. The final end of all these is a cosmic order in which everyone and everything has his/her/its proper place and is subjected to the supreme authority of God. In this situation, the eschatological situation, everyone and everything will attain fulfilment. In Paul’s words, it is like this. „When all things are subjected to Him then the Son Himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under Him so that God may be all in all” (1Cor. 15:28).

2.3. The Eucharist as the Sacrament of Unity

As every sacrament is oriented towards unity and converge in the sacrament of the Eucharist, this sacrament in a very special way can be qualified as the sacrament of unity. Let us illustrate this statement in some details from St. Paul’s idea of the Eucharist. Paul’s theology of the Eucharist as given in 1 Co 11:23- 29 is his response to the division in the Church. According to him the blood of Jesus seals the unity of God’s people; this blood is the same as the cup, which we bless because as often as we partake of this cup we are partaking in the blood of Jesus shed on the cross. But what is the importance of the blood? In the tradition of the Bible blood has a very important role in the theology of covenant. The Bible says, „the life of the creature is in the blood it blood as life which makes the covenant” (Lev. 17:11). Therefore the Eucharist blood, which is the sharing in the life of Christ, is the means of covenant through Christ with the Father. On the cross Jesus lay down his life for us. It was giving his life for us symbolized by the shedding of his blood. We share this life in the Eucharist. The result is that we are made one with Christ and with his Father

because it is the divine life that flows through our veins through the participation with the Eucharist. Therefore the Eucharist cannot be meaningful except if it is able to remind us that we share the same life as Christ. Those who share the same life cannot be divided into warring communities. The Eucharist is the sacrament of unity. All its strength is that it is able to bind us together into a covenanted people of God, one people sharing the same life, which is the divine life.

3. The Kerala Christian Scenario

Christianity in Kerala is as old as Christianity itself. According to the common claim and belief shared by the earliest communities of this part of the globe, the Christian Church in Kerala was instituted by the preaching of ST. Thomas, one of the apostles of Jesus who is believed to have arrived at the Kerala coast in A.D. 52. The entire ancient Christians of this state share the belief and take pride of the fact that they are descendants of those directly baptized by St. Thomas. This ancient Thomas Christian community is now divided into the following Churches:

1. The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church (3.5 million faithful)
2. The Malankara Catholic Church (0.5 million faithful)
3. The Malankara Orthodox and Jacobites (two factions of a community: both together 1.5 million)
4. The Marthoma Church (0.7 million)
5. The Thozhiyoor Church (5000 faithful)
6. The Church of the East or Surais (15000).

Of these communities only the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church and the Malankara Catholic Church have full, visible and canonical communion with the ancient See of Rome. The common origin which is projected as a matter of great prestige and pride is side stepped when it is a question of separation on the basis of trivial differences, that too not in matters of faith but merely on unimportant matters.

Another important consideration, which should promote unity among these Thomas Christians, is their status in the fabric of the Kerala society. As anywhere in India, in this State also there is some kind of cast consciousness. The interesting thing about it in relation to the Thomas Christians is that all of them without exception belong to the same cast, the upper cast. This same social standing should naturally inspire them to stand together as a Church also. But that does not happen.

The harm that the disunity among the Thomas Christians creates to the whole Christian lot is that it acts as a force against unity. In Kerala, there are Christian Communities other than those that trace origin from St. Thomas, like the Latin Catholics, and the various Protestant Churches. But the vast majority of Christians of Kerala is constituted of the Thomas Christians. The disunity

among the Thomas Christians is a negative force that maligns the image of Christianity as a whole and acts as force against ecumenism among other Christian communities. If the same community with the same social status can be divided why should other communities think in terms of ecumenism? This is a natural question that arises in the minds of these other communities.

Another important factor in the Kerala Christian communities is that most of them have the same liturgical heritage. It is not known what liturgy the ancient Thomas Christians were using in Kerala. But at least from the evidence available from the fourth century, it can be affirmed with certainty that this Church was in communion with the Persian Church and the same liturgy, the East Syrian Liturgy, the liturgy of the Persian Church was used in this Church. But after the dissensions and divisions in the 17th century, the group which separated themselves from the main stream slowly adopted the West Syrian Antiochene liturgy. Now this liturgy is practiced by all the Churches, which broke away by the Coonan Cross Oath in 1653. Thus the Malankara Orthodox, the Jacobites, the Malankara Catholics, the Thozhiyoor community and the Marthomites use this liturgy. But this common liturgical heritage has not succeeded in making these communities to think in terms of union and communion; rather they remain divided on the basis of non-substantial matters. An important feature of this liturgy is that it is pervaded by the idea of peace and unity. There are seven solemn occasions during the holy Eucharist, when the celebrant greets peace to the congregation and the congregation responds it in similar words. The words used by the celebrant for greeting peace are: „Peace be with you all” and the congregation responds with the words, „and also with your spirit” But the congregations, which use this liturgy and receive peace by participation in this liturgy, are not prompted to think of living in peace as one Church of God. In a very solemn occasion just before the institution words in this liturgy, the Eucharist is almost identified with peace. The congregation solemnly proclaims: „This Qurbana (Eucharist) is blessing, peace, sacrifice and praise”. But this prayer has not prompted the Churches to come together around one Eucharistic table.

Another consideration, which should promote unity among the Thomas Christians, is the growing communalism in the state. In comparison with other parts of India, there was less tension among the various religious groups in Kerala. But this situation is fast changing mainly because of the influence of the people from the other parts of India. Though there is practically no strife in a visible manner leading to quarrels and fights among the different communities, each religious community in the state is increasingly being isolated from the other communities and each is striving to assert itself against the other. A common social ideology and efforts at creation of a future that is friendly to all people are fast receding from the vision of the people. It is a new phenomenon in Kerala. It is the most important time for the Christians to stand together and witness to social values against fragmentation of the society on the basis of religion and

cast. The Christian population in this state is less than eight million at present. This number includes the Latin and Protestant Christians. The total number of the Thomas Christians is just above sixty million.

4. Some Practical Suggestions

What are the possibilities for the future towards ecumenism among the Kerala Christians? Any change in individuals and groups is brought about by awareness of the imperfections in their present situation. This is true of the Church also and of the Christianity of Kerala in particular. Ecumenism in Kerala has to start from the Thomas Christian groups because they are the bearers of all the glorious aspects of Kerala Christianity like Apostolic origin, higher status in the society, common liturgical heritage and place in the society as the same social group. The move for more ecumenism among the Thomas Christians must inspire other groups to come closer to each other with the final goal of becoming one Church of God with the possibility of all people to be gathered around the same Eucharistic table. For this, deeper awareness is to be created in the minds of the people about their common origin. The history of Kerala Christianity has to be properly highlighted. The Christians of Kerala had great influence in the society before their division into many Churches. Now divided into many groups, their influence as a religious body and as a social body is steadily being reduced. The only possibility for regaining the lost strength is to restore unity among the different communities.

The Kerala Christians regularly attend the Sunday Services. In fact many visitors to this state have commended about the beautiful sight of many hundreds of men and women going out from the Churches on Sundays after the Sunday Service. But the Sunday attendance has still to make them think in terms of unity with their brothers and sisters of other Christian communities. People have to learn the deeper dimensions and meaning of the prayer they say in the liturgical celebrations. The liturgy has yet to go deep into the awareness of the people. A common forum for serious study of the liturgy cannot but make the people think in terms of closer relationship and unity.

5. Conclusion

The sacraments flow from one historical reality, the death of Christ on the Cross. It is this mystery, which is the source of everything that the Church does, especially the sacraments, which are the official sanctifying activities in the Church. Since the source is one, the sacraments form one reality. Among the sacraments, the Eucharist is the source and summit. Every sacrament flows from the Eucharist and leads up to the Eucharist. In this way also the sacraments form a unity. The result of the sacraments is the unification of all the believers

into the one body of Christ, the Church. Thus all the faithful together make one single body of Christ, without at the same time losing their individual identity. There is no denying of the fact of multiplicity. The multiplicity itself is not the result of any sin. It is the result of the Holy will of the God, the Creator. But the friction within the multiplicity and the division, which oppresses and kills, is the result of sin. God sent His Son so that the division may be overcome and the unity which does not preclude multiplicity be maintained. The sacraments are the practical means through which the unity is realized.

John and Paul approach this fact from their own different viewpoints. The vine and branches allegory is John's way of saying that Christian life has to lead up to a very real unity between Christ and the Church, which is like the unity of branches which form one reality with the vine tree. Here also multiplicity is not denied. Rather it is sanctified and sublimated so that the many make one tree. Through his idea of mutual indwelling also John clarifies the same truth. Jesus and the Father mutually indwell making one reality. Jesus and the disciples also mutually indwell. The same way the disciples themselves mutually indwell. In this three dimensional indwelling all is included but it results in a single reality. This open reality looks forward for the inclusion for those outside.

Paul has the imagery of the human body to highlight the same truth. Through baptism we become Christ Himself. This Christic existence is strengthened through the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is the participation in the Body and Blood of Jesus. Not only humans but also the whole world is being sanctified and unified in Jesus Christ to be submitted to the supreme authority of God. The place of the Church is within this economy of salvation. Since the Christians form one body with Christ, there cannot be any unethical behaviour among them nor any division and quarrel. As the sacraments are means of unity and unification they are for the building up of the one body of Christ, the one Church.

Eucharystia i ekumenizm w kontekście Kerali

Streszczenie

Stan Kerali w Indiach uchodzi za najbardziej „chrześcijański” spośród innych, mimo iż większość zamieszkałej tam ludności nie stanowią chrześcijanie. Historia chrześcijaństwa w Kerali jest niemal tak długa, jak trwanie samego chrześcijaństwa w ogóle. Obecni chrześcijanie są bowiem spadkobiercami chrześcijan św. Tomasza. Siłę oddziaływania oraz moc świadectwa dzisiejszego chrze-

ścijaństwa w Kerali osłabiają występujące podziały między różnymi wspólnotami chrześcijańskimi. Artykuł podejmuje niektóre kwestie teologiczno-eklezyjalne, rodzące się w tym społeczno-eklezyjalnym kontekście.

Należy najpierw uwzględnić fakt, że samo pojęcie ekumenizmu implikuje dążenie do jedności Kościoła, której nie należy rozumieć w sensie jednej tradycji, jednej wizji teologicznej, jednego sposobu celebracji liturgicznej czy jednej dyscypliny kościelnej. Jedność, będąca celem dążeń Kościoła, jest jednością w różnorodności. Centralnym miejscem urzeczywistniania się tej jedności są sakramenty, w szczególności Eucharystia zwana „sakramentem sakramentów”. W obrazowy sposób tę rzeczywistość Kościoła ukazują św. Jan i św. Paweł. Czynią to w obrazach winnego krzewu i latorośli oraz Ciała Chrystusa. Uczestnictwo w Eucharystii oznacza udział w życiu Chrystusa. Ci zaś, którzy uczestniczą w życiu Chrystusa nie mogą dzielić się na przeciwstawne sobie wspólnoty. Niestety, taka sytuacja ma miejsce w Kerali, gdzie istnieje obecnie sześć Kościołów chrześcijańskich, powołujących się na starożytną wspólnotę chrześcijan św. Tomasza jako swe źródło. Spośród tych wspólnot tylko dwie trwają obecnie w pełnej widzialnej jedności z Kościołem rzymskim. W kontekście kastowej struktury społeczeństw Indii należy zauważyć, że w Kerali wszyscy chrześcijanie należą do jednej, wyższej kasty, co powinno tym bardziej skłaniać do tworzenia jednego Kościoła. Poza tym większość tych Kościołów posiada to samo dziedzictwo liturgiczne. Szczególnym wyzwaniem dla ekumenicznych dążeń chrześcijan w Kerali jest zatem uświadomienie sobie, tak w wymiarze indywidualnym, jak i wspólnotowym, niedoskonałości i prowizoryczności obecnej sytuacji podziału. Jej zmiana jest także warunkiem wzrostu roli chrześcijan w życiu społecznym Kerali.

R. Porada