

**Half-Brothers in Christ:  
The Church Missionary Society and the  
Christians of Kerala, 1813-1840**

by

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## **Abstract**

In the 1810s, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) established the College at Cottayam in south India to educate boys intended for the priesthood in the local, indigenous church. While their goal was to help the church, their activities increased British power in the community. The results of CMS involvement included increasing interference of British officials in matters internal to the Malankara Church (e.g., episcopal succession), tacit recognition of the authority of colonial courts to resolve disputes in the church, and the fragmentation of the St. Thomas Christian community. These effects reshaped the church into something more consistent with British Christianity and more subject to British rule.

**Keywords:** British Empire; Christianity; India; mission

*In memory of M. Mae and Cecil Carroll*

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## Glossary

Catanar	A priest in the Malankara Church
Jacobite	Follower of Jacob Baradaeus (Bishop of Edessa, in modern-day Turkey), sixth-century proponent of Miaphysitism
Kerala	A state in southwest India on the Malabar Coast, organized as the Princely States of Travancore and Cochin under British rule
Kottayam	A city in south-central Kerala
Malankara Church (Jacobite Church) (Syrian Church)	The independent church in south India believed to have been founded by the Apostle Thomas in the first century; split in 1975 into the Jacobite Syrian Christian Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
Malpan	A religious teacher in the Malankara Church, especially of Syriac
Metran (Metropolitan)	The bishop of the primary city of an ecclesiastical region; has authority over other bishops in the region

## Preface

I first learned of India's St. Thomas Christians while studying Chinese history at the University at Buffalo. I had the pleasure to meet several Catholics from India who were willing to share their history with me. At the same time, I was taking my first course in South Asian history. I was intrigued by the idea that Christianity could have reached India before much of Europe. Already having an interest in Church history and Christianity in Asia, I knew I wanted to learn more. That small seed of interest has grown into this thesis.

I make no secret of my Catholic faith. I also have no pretensions that my faith does not affect my scholarship; indeed, it is the reason I am interested in the history of Christianity. But I would argue, with Brad Gregory,<sup>1</sup> that all historical scholarship is influenced by the metaphysical inclinations of the author, thus there is no reason that religious convictions need to be seen as a particular liability. They account for just one of the many biographical details that shape the way we read our sources.

<sup>1</sup> Brad S. Gregory, "Historians' Metaphysical Beliefs and the Writing of Confessional Histories," *Fides et Historia* 43:2 (Summer/Fall 2011): 9-17.

# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

In late 1833, an Indian priest employed by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) was travelling around Travancore north of Kottayam preaching in the Syrian churches. In one church he came to, he assisted the local catanar (priest in the Malankara Church) after his service and shared with him the reason for his visit. The catanar snuck back into his church and drove out the congregation to prevent the visitor from preaching to them. Nevertheless, a few hours later the visiting priest had rounded up a number of the congregation. They asked him what preaching was, saying it was not part of their customs. Actually, preaching was not completely unheard of, but—following the customs of the British missionaries—the priest had not used the Syriac term, and the people were unfamiliar with the Malayalam equivalent. They expressed to the visitor their fear that he had come “to do more harm, to introduce more English customs, which are not good.”<sup>1</sup> In reply, the visiting priest took their Syriac Bible and read some passages enjoining Christians to bear witness to their faith, told them that this is what was meant by preaching, “and concluded by saying, This is preaching, what do you think of it? Oh! Was the unanimous rejoinder, this is not against our books, and it is very good, we must hear more of it. Thus concluded the conversation, and since that [CMS] agents have not been able to go to these people a second time.”<sup>2</sup>

The themes apparent in this story, related by one of the CMS missionaries at Kottayam, form the topic of this thesis: the interaction between the CMS and the Malankara Church, CMS attempts to ‘reform’ the church, and the rift that formed between those who accepted the missionaries’ message and those who rejected it. I

<sup>1</sup> Peet to the Corresponding Committee, Reel 69, p. 233-34, 1 Feb. 1834.

<sup>2</sup> Peet to the Corresponding Committee, Reel 69, p. 233-34, 1 Feb. 1834.

address this topic through the prism of the College at Cottayam, with special attention to three of its principals (Joseph Fenn, John Doran, and Joseph Peet) and their complex relationships with temporal and spiritual authorities, both indigenous and imperial, in India.

## The College at Cottayam

Over the course of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, British missionaries made their way out into the mission field. They fiercely debated the methods to be employed, and the role of education in missionary work would become one of the most controversial. William Carey (Baptist missionary to India and widely acknowledged as the father of British mission) articulated a mission strategy based on five points: “(1) preach the gospel widely, using all appropriate methods; (2) support preaching by translating and distributing the Scriptures in the vernacular languages; (3) establish a local church as soon as possible; (4) the missionary must study thoroughly the culture and language of the peoples being evangelized; and (5) make the training of indigenous leaders a priority.”<sup>3</sup> A believer in missionary education, Carey founded Serampore College near Calcutta in 1818.

The Church Missionary Society (CMS), founded in 1799, was a product of the evangelical awakening in Britain. The founders sought to create an Anglican mission society whose purpose was to evangelize the whole world, a much broader mandate than that of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), founded in 1701, which limited itself to evangelizing British settlers and native populations directly subject to the British Crown. The CMS was inspired by Jesus’ Great Commission to preach the Gospel to all nations<sup>4</sup> and identified with the central characteristics of evangelicalism: “the sinfulness of human beings and their justification by faith in the work of Christ on the cross; the need for conversion of each individual; the

<sup>3</sup> Wilbert R. Shenk, “Ancient Churches’ and Modern Missions in the Nineteenth Century,” in *India and the Indianness of Christianity: Essays on Understanding—Historical, Theological, and Bibliographical—in Honor of Robert Eric Frykenberg*, ed. Richard Fox Young (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 42.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 28:19.

supreme authority of the Bible as God's word; and an activism based on optimism about what converted men and women can achieve when inspired by God's Spirit."<sup>5</sup>

India became a main focus for CMS activity, and, at about the same time that Carey founded Serampore College, the CMS founded the College at Cottayam<sup>6</sup> in the Princely State of Travancore (whose borders roughly corresponded to those of the present-day state of Kerala) as part of the Cottayam Mission.<sup>7</sup> Early in the nineteenth century, education was valued as an important component of missionary work. While missionaries working in north India—like Carey—focused almost exclusively on how best to gain Hindu converts, in the south missionaries also encountered communities of Indian Christians who had lived in the region perhaps since the first century. Some work has been done on missionary education in India and there is a significant—but outdated—literature on the Christians of Kerala, but one can find little written on missionary activity in Travancore during the British colonial period, much less on education in particular. This gap in the literature certainly does not correspond to a lack of missionary activity among the St. Thomas Christians (the high-caste Christian community in Kerala, named after its founder, the apostle Thomas), as demonstrated by the CMS founding of this college in Kottayam in 1817 to educate the Syrian Christians (another term for St. Thomas Christians, derived from their ecclesiastical ties to the Church of the East). The college had two principal goals: to educate the Syrian Christians in matters religious and secular and to translate the Bible into Malayalam.

What did the British missionaries think of these Indian Christians? They did not see them as “heathen” in the truest sense, as that term referred to non-Christians. However, in the racial discourses of the nineteenth century the image of Indians was not much better, with the concept of ‘uncivilized Oriental despotism’ predominant early in the century and giving way to ‘scientific racism’ in the latter part. The literature concerning

<sup>5</sup> Kevin Ward, introduction to *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799-1999*, ed. Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 21.

<sup>6</sup> Although the town is currently referred to as “Kottayam,” I follow the missionaries’ usage in referring to the “College at Cottayam” or “Cottayam College,” as well as “Cottayam Mission.”

<sup>7</sup> The mission was initially staffed by Benjamin Bailey (responsible for the press and producing a Malayalam Bible), Henry Baker (responsible for establishing primary schools), and Joseph Fenn (responsible for the college).

British missionaries in India has focused on their attempts to gain converts from other religions, but what goals did the missionaries have in their work amongst fellow Christians?

To answer this question we must first understand the British missionaries and the fundamentals of their Protestant faith. Protestantism demands a number of activities that demonstrate the devotion of the believer and form the foundation of the spiritual life. One of the chief of these is the daily (or at least frequent) personal study of the Bible. We can see the importance of reading the scriptures reflected in missionary projects to translate the Bible (beginning with the New Testament) into the vernacular languages they encountered in the mission field, such as the one that produced the first Malayalam Bible at the school in Kottayam mentioned above. Before this, the St. Thomas Christians proclaimed the scriptures in Syriac, their liturgical language, rather than in Malayalam, the vernacular. Thus there were important similarities between the Syrian Christians of India and the pre-Reformation Catholic Church (especially proclaiming the scriptures in a liturgical language rather than in the vernacular, making personal study of scripture impossible for the majority), which would cause the British to see them as 'nominal Christians,' more like 'Papists' than true coreligionists.

The story told in this thesis is one of unintended consequences. While they had grand visions of reforming the Malankara Church and converting India to Christianity, these missionaries played an important role in the imperial project. Their activities (and very presence) led to increasing involvement of British officials in matters internal to the Malankara Church (e.g., episcopal succession), tacit recognition of the authority of colonial courts to resolve disputes in the church, and the fragmentation of the St. Thomas Christian community. These effects reshaped the church into something more consistent with British Christianity and more subject to British rule.

The goals of the CMS missionaries in Kottayam—as recorded in their writings—are clear: to 'build up' and 'reform' the ancient Syrian Church in Malabar. They believed that by 'strengthening' the church it would then be in a position to send out missionaries to convert India to Christianity. The principal method adopted to reach this goal was the founding of a college—essentially a seminary—to instruct those intended for the clergy

in Western languages, science, and theology, in addition to the training they would normally receive. The CMS reached an agreement with the head of the Malankara Church that he would only ordain students of the College; thus the missionaries hoped that, over time, they could transform the church by having control of the instruction of its future leaders. For them, the best way to 'strengthen' the church was to eliminate 'errors' in theology and practice among the church leaders and to convert them to a more 'authentic' (Protestant) Christianity.

Whether or not this course would have eventually brought about the change the missionaries intended cannot be known; in the event, the CMS missionaries working in Kottayam became impatient with the slow progress of their work and took an increasingly confrontational approach, not only inculcating Syrian youths with the principles of evangelical Protestant Christianity but attempting to convert the whole church at once. The immediate effects of this can be seen in the story above: the Syrian clergy became divided, with some catanars espousing and spreading the missionaries' message and others rejecting it, with the laypeople caught between the two. This division meant failure for the CMS, as it was critical to their designs that the Malankara Church remain intact and be allied as a whole with the missionaries; although the CMS would continue to work with the 'reformist' factions, they did not have sufficient numbers to realize the CMS' dream of an indigenous Indian church that could convert India.

Another significant effect of this CMS work is that it expanded British power in Travancore as well as undermined the 'traditional' power structure. CMS missions often went hand-in-hand with British power, and our case in Travancore is no exception; indeed, it was the British Resident, Colonel John Munro, who invited the CMS to Travancore to work with the Malankara Church and encouraged the local government to endow the College at Cottayam. This occurred at a time when Munro was already championing the cause of Christian communities to earn them valuable support from the government and spearheading government intervention in the selection of the Metran (or Metropolitan) of the Malankara Church. CMS interaction with the church invited British power further into the church, as it would be colonial courts that mediated the split between the missionaries and the Syrians in the 1830s and 1840s as well as settling succession crises throughout the nineteenth century. The instability caused by the

interaction between the CMS and the Malankara Church not only invited the involvement of the Travancore government, organized as a Princely State with British oversight, but also drew the attention of Madras Presidency, an area of direct British rule.

Overall, the CMS missionaries reshaped the Malankara Church into something more consistent with British Christianity. By this I mean two things: that the spiritual power of the church became more entangled with temporal power, reflecting the organization of the Church of England, and that the church split into factions with differing beliefs and practices, as British Christianity was divided between Anglicans and Nonconformists. The work of earlier Catholic Portuguese missionaries had already divided the Malankara Church into Catholic and non-Catholic, but the work of the CMS further divided the church into Reformed and Oriental Orthodox remnants. These divisions would emphasize choice and personal conviction in a community which, historically, had been unified by its Christian identity. Thus, similar to how the Protestant Reformation transformed Britain from a Catholic nation into one divided amongst Catholics, Anglicans, and various groups of Nonconformists, with personal conviction and family tradition driving religious affiliation, so too did the work of CMS missionaries (contributing to a process begun by Catholic missionaries) transform the St. Thomas Christian community from one united in faith to one divided by faith.

## **Beginning the Malabar Reformation**

Although historians of British mission have mostly concerned themselves with interactions between British missionaries and non-Christians, I would argue along with Wilbert Shenk that it is important to consider the importance of 'ancient churches' in the history of British (and Protestant) missions. From its earliest beginnings, the CMS considered the revival of these churches as "an important dimension of its work."<sup>8</sup> The work of missionaries like Claudius Buchanan, who published reports on the state of ancient churches, drove the interest of missionary societies. Indeed,

<sup>8</sup> Shenk, "'Ancient Churches' and Modern Missions in the Nineteenth Century," 42.

It was the opinion of Dr. Buchanan that the Church of England could not as a National Church employ her influence to greater advantage than in restoring and building up the ruins of the Syrian Communion in Antioch, in Mesopotamia, and in India. When this was accomplished, he considered that those countries would supply missionaries for the extension of the Christian faith among the Mohammedans and Pagans. Our design in sending you [Fenn and Baker] among the Syrian Christians is that you should by every suitable means in your power promote these objects in India.<sup>9</sup>

Nineteenth-century British missionaries generally viewed the Malabar Church as having a noble and largely orthodox foundation of Christianity that had been marred by interaction with Nestorians, Jacobites, and Catholics, and which could be rejuvenated by the principles of the Protestant Reformation. In the words of Eugene Stock—author of the seminal work *The History of the Church Missionary Society: Its Environment, Its Men, and Its Work*, a three-volume history of the CMS completed for its centenary in 1899—the CMS adopted the position that “the revival of the Eastern Churches would undoubtedly have an effect on the Mohammedan and Heathen World.”<sup>10</sup> Their intention, as recorded by instructions of the CMS Committee to the missionaries who would work with the Syrian Church, was “not to pull down the ancient Church and build another but to remove the rubbish and repair the decaying pieces.”<sup>11</sup> The church, so restored, would then be eminently placed to spread Christianity. Their purpose—in the words of W. J. Richards, a CMS missionary who worked in Travancore and Cochin from the 1870s into the twentieth century—was to “bring about an internal reformation of the ancient Church in India; but there was no idea of proselytizing.”<sup>12</sup> The missionaries were directed by the CMS Committee to preach “the ruin of man by sin, and the complete redemption by Jesus Christ promised to the believer, and the need of the sanctifying help of the Holy Ghost” and were “to avoid discussions and disputings on the mysterious questions concerning the Nature of Christ, which first divided and afterwards ruined the Churches

<sup>9</sup> W. J. Richards, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas, Otherwise Called the Syrian Christians of Malabar: A Sketch of Their History, and an Account of Their Present Condition, as well as a Discussion of the Legend of St. Thomas* (London: Bemrose & Sons Ltd., 1908), 21.

<sup>10</sup> Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society: Its Environment, Its Men, and Its Work*, 3 vols. (London: Church Missionary Society, 1899), 1:222.

<sup>11</sup> Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society*, 1:233, citing CMS instructions to missionaries.

<sup>12</sup> Richards, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 21.

of the East, and rather to lead their minds to the plain and important truths of the Gospel.”<sup>13</sup> In the event, despite the best intentions of the missionaries, interaction with the CMS through the College at Cottayam had the effect of drawing the Malankara Church further under the influence and control of British rule, and the introduction of evangelical Protestantism—rather than ‘revitalizing’ the local church—led to greater fragmentation of the St. Thomas Christian community.

## **A Brief History of the Malankara Church**

Before embarking on a study of British missionary interactions with the Malankara Church, it is necessary to have some idea of the history of this church. According to church tradition, the apostle Thomas travelled to south India in AD 52 (landing near Maliankara on the west coast). He is said to have founded seven churches in what are now Kerala and Tamil Nadu before being martyred in Mylapore, outside present-day Chennai. To this day, there are communities who identify as St. Thomas Christians in south India.

Sometime between the fourth and ninth centuries, the Malankara Church came into contact with the Church of the East (also referred to as the Nestorian Church) in Persia. The Nestorian Patriarch is said to have sent a bishop—Thomas of Cana—along with clergy and 70 families to reinforce (or introduce) Christianity in south India in 345. From this time, the Malankara Church used the East Syrian Liturgy of the Church of the East, along with Syriac bibles and what came to be known as the Canons, the works of Ephrem the Syrian, a fourth century Syriac theologian and hymn writer. Nestorian bishops came to south India somewhat regularly—if infrequently—over the next thousand years. During this time, Indian Archdeacons exercised leadership of the Malankara Church when there was no resident Syrian bishop. As a result of this ecclesiastical connection, St. Thomas Christians are also known as Syrian Christians.

<sup>13</sup> Richards, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 21-22, citing CMS instructions to missionaries.

The Roman Catholic Church arrived in India with the Portuguese. In 1599, the See of the Malankara Church was vacant, and the Archbishop of Goa convened the Synod of Diamper to select a successor; at this meeting, with the authority of Pope Clement VIII, the Archbishop declared himself head of the Malankara Church. As the new Metropolitan, he accepted the authority of the Pope and the Roman Catholic faith on behalf of the Malankara Church.

In 1653, the Archdeacon Thomas convened a meeting of the Malankara Church near Cochin. At this meeting, he administered the Coonan Cross Oath, the participants swearing off allegiance to the Catholic Church and accepting him as the head of the Malankara Church. A group of priests consecrated him as the first indigenous Metropolitan of Malankara shortly thereafter. Despite the oath, the Catholic Church won back the loyalty of nearly 75% of the St. Thomas Christians in the early 1660s, forming the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church. This was the first schism of the Malankara Church.

Desiring to maintain external episcopal ties, the much-reduced Malankara Church submitted to the Syriac Orthodox Church, and in 1665 the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch dispatched Mar Gregorios, Metropolitan of Jerusalem, to India, who introduced the West Syrian liturgy and doctrines. Despite their allegiance to the Patriarch, the Metran (another word for Metropolitan, denoted by the honorific Mar) consecrated by Mar Gregorios was driven into exile, his followers forming the Thozhiyur Church, presently known as the Malabar Independent Syrian Church.

The first British missionary to interact with the Malankara Church was Claudius Buchanan, who was sent by the Governor-General of India in 1806 to ascertain the condition of the St. Thomas Christians. The East India Company Act (or Charter Act) of 1813 permitted missionaries to travel freely in its territories, and CMS missionaries arrived permanently in Travancore soon after. At this time, Mar Thoma VIII (r. 1809-1816) was the Metran of the Malankara Church, and Mar Philoxenos II (r. 1811-1829) was the Metran of the Thozhiyur Church. On his deathbed, Mar Thoma VIII consecrated Mar Thoma IX as his successor, but at the same time the British had Mar Philoxenos II consecrate Mar Dionysius II. When Dionysius II died later in 1816, the British Resident Col. John Munro and the Dewan (whom Munro had selected), along with some church

elders, appointed Mar Philoxenos II as Metran of the Malankara Church, as he agreed to cooperate with the British to advance the “prosperity of the Church.”<sup>14</sup> He in turn consecrated Mar Dionysius III (r. 1817-1825), who had been one of the original proponents of establishing the CMS College at Cottayam. Upon the death of Dionysius III, Philoxenos II consecrated Mar Dionysius IV (r. 1825-1852); when Philoxenos II died in 1829, the government officially recognized Dionysius IV as Metropolitan.

## The Saint Thomas Tradition

It is only natural to wonder whether the apostle Thomas himself brought Christianity to south India, and missionaries and historians have debated this question for centuries. William Joseph Richards served as a missionary in Travancore from 1871. He held various posts, including Vice-principal of the College at Cottayam.<sup>15</sup> As for his stance on the St. Thomas tradition, he gives an idea just from the title he chooses for his work, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas, Otherwise Called the Syrian Christians of Malabar*, emphasizing both the St. Thomas tradition and the Indian identity of the Christians.<sup>16</sup> This sets his work immediately in contrast to George Milne Rae’s *The Syrian Church in India*, which identifies the Malankara Church as essentially a mission of Syrian Christianity. Indeed, from the same body of evidence, Richards argues for the tradition while Rae argues against it, though missionaries and historians alike concur that Thomas *could* have gone to India.

Rae not only argues that St. Thomas did not go to India but also that even if he had, the Christians of south India no longer have a claim as St. Thomas Christians because of their association with the (“heretical schismatical”) Syriac Orthodox Church. He writes:

Whatever right their fathers may have had to call themselves Christians of St. Thomas—and I for one believe that, according to ecclesiastical usage,

<sup>14</sup> Leslie Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas: An Account of the Ancient Syrian Church of Malabar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982 [1956]), 134.

<sup>15</sup> Stock, preface to *The History of the Church Missionary Society*, vii.

<sup>16</sup> George Milne Rae, *The Syrian Church in India* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1892).

they had the right—the modern Syrians have now no right, nor have they had for more than two hundred years the right to assume that designation. They have been disloyal to St. Thomas, and have set him aside; so that, even if their own contentions and those of the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch were admitted, they would now be Christians of St. Peter, for Antioch is St. Peter's Eastern chair.<sup>17</sup>

In *Saints, Goddesses, and Kings*, Susan Bayly argues that, considering the similarity between the foundation stories of the Indian St. Thomas Christians and the Acts of St. Thomas, “the obvious conclusion is that the St. Thomas tradition was brought to south India by the west Asian merchants and navigators who had been frequenting the Keralan spice-marketing localities since Roman times. Over the centuries the tale would simply have been transformed to fit the local sacred landscape.”<sup>18</sup>

Considering all these positions, this thesis will use the terms St. Thomas Christian, Syrian Christian, and Nasrani (the term used locally, derived from Nazarene) interchangeably. For the purposes of this thesis, these terms will also be used interchangeably with Jacobite. Malankara Church, Indian Church, Syrian Church, and Jacobite Church will also be used interchangeably.

## **Travancore under Munro**

Col. Munro obtained many valuable privileges and immunities for the Syrians, and some of those at the expense of the heathen; the consequence is there exists a strong feeling of jealousy and animosity in the minds of the heathen against them, and but for the protection of the British, who are emphatically denominated their fathers, they would be badly off indeed.<sup>19</sup>

As a social reformer his name will ever be remembered in Travancore and Cochin. He helped to accelerate the dissolution of the old feudal order obtaining in Travancore and for the emergence of a new society out of the decadent. He won the confidence of the unprivileged people and

<sup>17</sup> Rae, *The Syrian Church in India*, 279.

<sup>18</sup> Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 244.

<sup>19</sup> Peet to the Corresponding Committee, Reel 69, p. 241, 1 Feb. 1834.

became their spokesman. To them he was the new Moses with the tablets of the new law, a figure of great moral force.<sup>20</sup>

These two passages, separated by nearly 150 years, show the concern Colonel John Munro had for Travancore's Christians and his enduring legacy as a 'reforming' and 'modernizing' influence.<sup>21</sup> Munro served as British Resident (an advisor to the local government who advocated the interests of the British in the Princely States) of Travancore from 1810 to 1819 and as Dewan (prime minister) from 1811 to 1814. In this time he wielded considerable power and influence in Travancore. He is remembered as a "social reformer, who had heralded a new society, liberal, humanist and equalitarian, in a benighted state, and as an enlightened administrator and a lover of Travancore."<sup>22</sup>

Travancore entered under the 'protection' of the East India Company in the 1790s after receiving British aid in repulsing the invasion of Tipu Sultan (the Muslim ruler of Mysore, a kingdom in southern India, then allied with France against the British) in the late 1780s. When Munro arrived in Travancore, he found the Maharaja was overshadowed by a powerful Dewan. Travancore had fallen behind in debt repayment to the East India Company for their costs incurred in putting down the anti-British rebellion of the previous Dewan and was also behind in the payment of annual tribute to the Company. The Raja died late in 1810 and was succeeded by the first Rani (Queen) of Travancore, Gowri Lakshmi Bayi. On Munro's urging, she dismissed the Dewan and asked Munro to recommend a replacement. He fulfilled the role himself for three years while trying to find a "qualified" candidate. Munro formed a low opinion of the people of Travancore and set out to bring 'reform' and 'progress.' Ultimately, Munro solidified British control of Travancore, which would persist until 1947.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> R. N. Yesudas, *Colonel John Munro in Travancore* (Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Society, 1977), 7.

<sup>21</sup> The degree of Munro's influence in Travancore is a matter of debate; some see the Rani (Queen) as open to Munro's recommendations, even as a rubber stamp for his agenda, while others do not even mention Munro in discussions of the Rani's policies.

<sup>22</sup> Yesudas, *Colonel John Munro in Travancore*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Yesudas, *Colonel John Munro in Travancore*, 55.

## Christianity in India

This thesis tells a small part of the larger story of Christianity in India. Scholars generally agree that Christianity could be adapted to fit the needs of Indians within their existing society, that Indians mediated and adjusted the spread of Christianity to fit their needs, and that conversion to Christianity did not result in an abrupt rupture with greater Indian society, but that converts to Christianity continued to operate in their community in a way similar to how they had before.<sup>24</sup> The older explanation that conversion resulted in a loss of pre-conversion caste status<sup>25</sup> has been refuted by scholars writing more recently.

The current debate in the literature regards the particular processes of conversion and of adjusting Christianity to fit Indian society and culture. Some scholars more openly refer to “negative” aspects of Christianity in relation to Indian culture, while others adopt a more neutral tone. There is little consensus on how to view the missionaries, whether as accommodationists or as imperialists.

John Webster’s study of Christian converts in North India<sup>26</sup> confirms that Western Christian missionaries throughout India attracted more low than high-caste converts. All the discussions of Syrian Christianity in India before the arrival of Europeans suggest that St. Thomas converted Brahmins and that the Christian community continued to hold high caste status. This seeming contradiction is not addressed. It seems very peculiar that in one period high-caste groups would convert, while in another the low caste were more likely to convert.

In *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas: An Account of the Ancient Syrian Church of Malabar*, Leslie Brown highlights the liminality of Indian Christians, describing them as

<sup>24</sup> See Susan Bayly, Judith M. Brown, Robert Eric Frykenberg, Rowena Robinson, Susan Visvanathan, and Richard Fox Young.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Joseph Thekkedath, SBD, *From the Middle of the Sixteenth to the End of the Seventeenth Century, 1542-1700*, vol. 2 of *History of Christianity in India*, ed. D. V. Singh (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1982).

<sup>26</sup> John C. B. Webster, *The Christian Community and Change in Nineteenth Century North India* (Delhi: Macmillan Co. of India, 1976).

“Christians of Mesopotamia in faith and worship and ethic; they were Indians in all else. In church they professed belief in one Almighty God, out of church they observed omens and propitious days and were content to recognize the existence of Hindu gods, though they did not worship them.”<sup>27</sup> He also gives some insight into why the St. Thomas Christian community remained insular (rather than evangelizing) and maintained caste privilege within their Hindu society, writing that “on the one hand the Syrians had an intense pride of race and tradition, summed up in their claim to St. Thomas as their apostle, which made them exclusive. On the other hand, the unit in Hindu society was the caste, and the Christian desire to continue as a separate closed community was to the non-Christians not only acceptable but inevitable.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, it was necessary and unavoidable for the Christian community to take on the characteristics of a caste in order to be comprehensible to the surrounding society. They did not evangelize because in this strictly-ordered society the idea of adding to one’s own community was “entirely unknown among Hindus.”<sup>29</sup> Thus the identity of the St. Thomas Christian community lay at the intersection of their Christian faith and their Hindu culture.

This explains why European missionaries attracted low-caste converts while the existing Christian community was of a higher caste; Indian Christians were very much a part of the caste system and would not want to lose their caste privilege by associating with lower castes. If Thomas himself brought Christianity to India, he may have focused his attention on the elites with the hope that other strata of society would follow, a widely-used strategy; if the Indian Christians were first converted by Middle Eastern merchants, it would make sense that these merchants would try to forge ties with a part of the community that had some power and respect, not the lower castes. Many European missionaries, on the other hand, openly challenged the caste system as they preached Christianity, which would naturally attract those most oppressed by the system while repulsing anyone benefitting from caste, including St. Thomas Christians.

<sup>27</sup> Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 4.

<sup>29</sup> Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 4.

According to Robin Jeffrey, the CMS in 1857 had no more than 10 Nayers (high-caste Malayalis) among 5,000 or 6,000 converts in Travancore.<sup>30</sup>

The historiography lacks a recent, sustained treatment of the Indian Syrian Christians. Scholars writing on Christianity in India tend to give a brief overview, insufficiently documented, relying on secondary literature from the early to mid-twentieth century. This problem makes it especially difficult to know the exact dates of events, lifespans, and reigns. Another problem is the way that the literature has developed different strains of scholarship not necessarily in discussion with one another. For example, Robert Frykenberg's comprehensive history of Christianity in India published in 2008<sup>31</sup> fails to list anything by Rowena Robinson in its bibliography. By 2005, Robinson had published no fewer than four books—monographs and edited volumes—on religion in India in general and all addressing Christianity, if not devoted fully to Christianity.

This thesis contributes to the history of Christianity in India by investigating the interaction between Anglican missionaries and the Malankara Church. Through this interaction, the Malankara Church experienced change, Evangelical Christianity gained a small foothold among the Christians of Kerala, and the leadership of the Malankara Church ultimately rejected the possibility of cooperation with the Church Missionary Society and, by extension, the Anglican Church.

## **Effects on Travancore**

The activities of British officials and missionaries not only altered the lives of Christians in Travancore, they also form part of the larger story of social transformation in Travancore over the nineteenth century. Munro's patronage of the Malankara Church destabilized the position of the Nayers, historically the dominant caste in Kerala. Robin Jeffrey argues that:

<sup>30</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908* (London: Sussex University Press, 1976), 38.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

From the 1850s, however, the balance of the political and social system was increasingly disturbed as new resources became available for which all men, regardless of caste or religion, could compete on fairly equal terms. The commercial or menial occupations of many Christians and low-caste Hindus, and their association with European missionaries, gave them advantages in this competition which Nayars did not share. Indeed, the economic pressures, changing values and rigorous legal system, which were the concomitant of the new resources, seriously weakened the Nayar matrilineal joint-family and hastened its disintegration. As the bonds of the matrilineal family loosened, so did the hold of Nayars on the land.<sup>32</sup>

The British were suspicious of the Nayars, as it was a Nayar Dewan who led a rebellion against the British during the term of the first Resident in Travancore. In addition to himself taking on the power of Dewan as part of his restructuring of the Travancore Government, Munro “carried out a number of reforms intended to lessen still further the power of local officers and leaders, to centralize the administration and to bring it more into line with that of British India.”<sup>33</sup> Under pressure from Madras and the younger, more assertive generation of British missionaries, in the mid-eighteenth century the Travancore Government adopted some ‘progressive’ measures—including the abolition of slavery and other measures that benefitted the lower castes—that further undermined the traditional order.<sup>34</sup>

Jeffrey’s argument also recognizes the role missionaries played in the expansion of the British Empire. As Travancore experienced the transition from “inherited to achieved status,” “from the interdependence of castes to the competition of individuals,” and “from traditional authority to modern bureaucracy,” its traditional society “came unhinged.”<sup>35</sup> Jeffrey argues that “the missionaries, with their emphasis on the equality of men before god, their involvement with the low castes and their willingness to challenge the Travancore sirkar [government], lent impetus to this process. Without them, the

<sup>32</sup> Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance*, xvii.

<sup>33</sup> Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance*, 6.

<sup>34</sup> Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance*, 37.

<sup>35</sup> Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance*, 265.

impact of British suzerainty would have taken much longer to be felt in a princely state like Travancore.”<sup>36</sup>

In Jeffrey’s analysis, the missionaries contributed to imperial power mostly because they were rejected by the higher castes, which led them to work more closely with the lower castes and therefore to advocate on their behalf, both to the rulers of Travancore and to Madras. This posed two problems to the rulers of Travancore: the widespread conversion of the lower castes threatened the upper castes and indeed the entire caste system in Travancore, and maintaining the traditional society made them look ‘backward’ to officials in Madras, which could threaten their continued autonomy. In response, they instituted social change, which brought them more in line with the British Empire.

Koji Kawashima critiques Jeffrey for highlighting the challenge the missionaries posed to the government and the government’s attempts to conciliate them, pointing out that “the missionaries and the state much more frequently co-operated than clashed, and the state at times even expected the missionaries to play a role in persuading the low-caste Christians to be obedient to the existing order.”<sup>37</sup> But there would seem to be no contradiction between Kawashima and Jeffrey, as Jeffrey does not argue that the missionaries antagonized the government, but that they applied pressure in more indirect ways.

In the chapters that follow, we will see that the CMS missionaries stationed at Cottayam did put pressure on the government of Travancore, but they exerted that pressure mostly to persuade the government to interfere with the Malankara Church in ways that advanced the goals of the missionaries, whether asking the government to ‘protect’ it from the influence of the Syriac Orthodox Church or supporting a ‘reformist’ claimant to the leadership over a ‘traditional’ one. This intervention involved the Travancore government in the affairs of the Malankara Church in a way that resembled

<sup>36</sup> Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance*, 265.

<sup>37</sup> Kawashima Koji, *Missionaries and a Hindu State: Travancore, 1858-1936* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9.

the political and spiritual economy of the Church of England more than the pre-colonial status quo.

## **Anglican Missionaries & the British Empire**

In a study of British missionaries, the question of their place within the Empire inevitably arises. In order to engage with this question, we must first sort out what it would mean to say that missionaries were either imperialist or anti-imperialist. In his book on Anglicanism in the British Empire, Rowan Strong suggests that the parameters for contributing to British imperialism are “being favourable to the English-British imposition (by military or political power) of its own culture, rule, or society on overseas territories.”<sup>38</sup> Strong identifies the two polarities as those like Jeffrey Cox—who maintains that missionaries were “engaged with imperialism”—and the “celebratory tradition of Protestant missionary historiography” represented by scholars such as Stephen Neill and Brian Stanley—who suggest that missionaries “had no imperial motives but simply religious ones, unlike others in the British imperial establishment.”<sup>39</sup> In response, Cox argues that “there was unequal power in the imperial context between colonized and colonizers, and the use of the power of the colonizers by missions and other religious bodies, for whatever reasons, meant complicity with that power.”<sup>40</sup>

Strong synthesizes the two into his own view, that “the [Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts], the CMS, and the Church of England in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were undoubtedly imperialist but, I have argued here, for genuinely and thoroughly religious motives.”<sup>41</sup> Indeed, as laid out by Strong, there would seem to be no contradiction between the two sides, as one refers to the actions of the missionaries while the other refers to their intentions.

<sup>38</sup> Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, 288.

<sup>39</sup> Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, 288.

<sup>40</sup> Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, 288.

<sup>41</sup> Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, 289.

While the intentions of the missionaries naturally motivated their actions, the result of those actions cannot be denied by appealing to their intentions. As Myra Rutherdale writes of British missionaries in North America, “The increasing evidence of the damage done by missions and residential schools, in sources such as the church’s own publication, *Sins of the Fathers*, serve as reminders of the misplaced benevolence of colonizers who tried too hard to deliver the message of Christianity.”<sup>42</sup> Heather J. Sharkey also argues against a focus on missionary intentions. Writing that “the emphasis on intent (implicit in its foil, the unintended) has the disadvantage of suggesting a kind of central agency among missionaries and a concomitant passivity among the targets of their missions,” she warns against “suggesting that missionaries alone acted with an intent that led to unforeseen results.”<sup>43</sup>

Strong further refines his position on the imperialism of Anglicanism with claims that “the Church of England in the colonies was enmeshed with the social, political, and economic realities of colonial inequalities of power between colonizers and colonized,” that Anglicans “believed there was a positive meaning and purpose in the institution and maintenance of the British Empire,” and that “they applied to the empire their domestic agenda of the Church of England as constituting the moral and social unity of the nation.”<sup>44</sup>

Rowena Robinson points out another way in which British missionaries participated in the spread of the colonial order: the diffusion of British cultural norms. Although they learned as much as they could about Indian culture and society, British missionaries did not adopt Indian culture. According to Robinson, they “believed in maintaining this separateness—their particular approach to dress, time or the organization of domestic space—for they perceived it as being a necessary part of Christian upbringing and western culture and civilization.”<sup>45</sup> Because of this perspective,

<sup>42</sup> Myra Rutherdale, *Women and the White Man’s God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002), 155.

<sup>43</sup> Heather J. Sharkey, ed., *Cultural Conversions: Unexpected Consequences of Christian Missionary Encounters in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 3.

<sup>44</sup> Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, 290-291.

<sup>45</sup> Rowena Robinson, *Christians of India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), 59.

missionaries encouraged converts to take on British culture. In this way, “they reinforced a particular civilizational model that merged almost imperceptibly with the ideology of colonial rule.”<sup>46</sup> However, because missionaries also saw converts as “equal in the Kingdom of God and invoked the principle of self-determination to assert the convert’s religious freedom,” Robinson argues that “the evangelical enterprise may be viewed as having been paradoxically rather than simply located.”<sup>47</sup>

As suggested by Strong, there are two major trends in the literature discussing the relationship between British missionaries and the British Empire: those who focus on missionaries, downplaying the negative effects of evangelization, and those who focus on the evangelized, often emphasizing the negative effects of mission. The former is typified by historians like Andrew Porter, whose *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* is an apologetic, resuscitating the image of Christian missionaries and maintaining that they meant well and fought against the destructive excesses of colonialism. Ussama Makdisi’s *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* falls into the latter, as he focuses on the life of one convert to draw out the greater processes of conversion.

Most scholars fall somewhere between these two extremes. Jean and John Comaroff’s seminal work, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, analyses the worlds of both the missionaries and the missionized. The Comaroffs conceive of Christian mission and European colonization as counterpoints to one another, a view that takes account of how these two missions happened concurrently, but also that the two missions are not one and the same, and that their goals were sometimes opposed. Colonization both facilitated and obstructed the spread of Christianity, and vice versa. They also highlight the heterogeneous and ambiguous nature of Christian missions.

<sup>46</sup> Robinson, *Christians of India*, 59.

<sup>47</sup> Robinson, *Christians of India*, 59.

Elizabeth Elbourne also treats both sides of the missionary project to get a sense of the relationship between Christianity and empire. In *Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions, and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799-1853* she seeks to show that Christianity played a critical role in the interaction she examines. Ultimately, Elbourne's arguments are about Christianity, but they are not about religion. Both the Xhosa and the British practiced and understood the language of Christianity, but they also adapted Christianity to fit their local cultures.

What Elbourne really shows is that the colonial experience was dominated by race: race set apart colonizer from colonized, before and after the Christianization of southern African peoples. Religion was used by the settlers to justify racial subordination and forced labour and as "the key marker of status and identity in colonial society"<sup>48</sup> while it was useful in differentiating racial groups, but it was dissociated from identity when it no longer served that purpose. In the southern African case, perhaps the success of the missions actually intensified racism: the conversion of black Africans to Christianity caused the white colonizers to resort to simple racism to maintain the distinction between colonizer and colonized.

This study supports the view that missionaries participated in the imperial project. The CMS missionaries at Cottayam brought much more than their religion; they also brought their language, their culture, their ideas of 'proper' behaviour. These would lead the missionaries to admonish Indian Christians not just for their religious beliefs and practices, but also for their "immorality," "stupidity," and "idleness," among other 'flaws.' They would rail against the Malankara Church leadership for drinking and criticize their students for their apparent lack of enthusiasm for the education offered by the missionaries. In this way, they brought contemporary British Evangelical notions regarding temperance and work ethic to Travancore and attempted to impose these cultural sensibilities onto their students during the course of their studies.

<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Elbourne, *Blood Ground: Colonialism, Missions, and the Contest for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799-1853* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 378.

## Missionary Education

Until the second half of the nineteenth century, education was an important part of the British colonial and evangelical agenda. Colonial and mission educational institutions became a major point of contact between colonizer and colonized, and both sides struggled to use education to advance their own agenda. In the College at Cottayam too these struggles took place, both in terms of curriculum—the British administration suspecting the Indian instructors of diverging from the ‘modern’ curriculum and propagating ‘errors’—and in terms of who had final say over the College—as when the Metran would threaten to remove all the students from the College unless the missionaries would agree to his terms. Although most scholarship on missionary education focuses on primary and secondary education rather than seminaries, similar struggles were playing out in both types of educational institutions regarding the content and the meaning of the education the students received.

Two main goals of the mission at Kottayam, to teach English and to produce a Malayalam Bible, centre on the contest between the written culture of the British missionaries and the oral culture of the St. Thomas Christians. The confrontation between oral and written authority is one of the keys to Paul Sedra’s *From Mission to Modernity: Evangelicals, Reformers, and Education in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*. In it, he explores British missionary education among the Copts in Egypt, another branch of Oriental Orthodoxy,<sup>49</sup> and links education to modernization, not only in Egypt but elsewhere. Spoken communication is less efficient—and less accurate—for disseminating information among large groups of people, and people who hear a spoken message associate the authority of that message with the speaker, whereas written communication allows the state to maintain the authority of spreading information. Modern governments seek ways to centralize and increase their own power and to

<sup>49</sup> The term Oriental Orthodoxy describes a communion of churches that are distinguished by their rejection of the Christological theology adopted by the Council of Chalcedon in [year] and their acceptance of the authority of the Patriarch of Antioch. Historically, they have been denounced for espousing the Christological belief known as Monophysitism or Nestorianism (considered heresy by the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodoxy), though they reject these terms in favour of Miaphysitism. Members of the communion include the Coptic Church, the Syriac Orthodox Church, and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.

influence the lives of their citizens; writing, and, by extension, literacy, facilitate this project.

The way the religious impetus to read scripture dovetails with the modernizing efforts of the state is another key point. Hallmarks of Protestantism—*sola scriptura*, the inerrancy of scripture—rest on literacy. Thus the fetishization of written scripture contributes to the Protestant focus on education, and especially literacy. For Protestants, authentic Christianity is demonstrated by certain activities, and one of the most important of these is reading scripture; thus Protestant education is modernizing in the sense that Protestantism itself is a modern religion. Perhaps here the religious agenda works for the same means as the state but to different ends. For Sedra, issues surrounding literacy and language reveal the overlap between colonization and missionization and also illuminate the struggle between British and Coptic Christianity.

In *Pedagogy for Religion: Missionary Education and the Fashioning of Hindus and Muslims in Bengal*, Parna Sengupta looks at missionary education in north India, and she challenges the notion that Western colonialism secularized the non-West. While it might seem clear that secular, modern, colonial governments would have a secularizing, modernizing influence on the societies they colonized, Sengupta shows that the spread of modern education, especially via missionary education, reinforced religious identities in South Asia. In fact this should come as little surprise, for the colonizers in question were Christians, coming from a nation with a state church. Perhaps the real myth here is not one of secularizing colonialism but of secular colonialism.

For Sengupta, it is important that this identity formation is happening in the schools. She suggests that education is just as important for understanding religion and religious change as conversion, sacred texts, and ritual practice are, arguing that learning to read in the modern school fashioned children into faithful members of their religious community. Beyond literacy, Sengupta goes on to say that every part of the curriculum influenced the child's religious identity. The emphasis on reason and rationality in the curriculum did not have a secularizing effect on the students; rather, religious epistemology adopted this rationality, as part of what Sengupta identifies as a

global process. Protestant Christianity sought to incorporate Enlightenment rationality, why would Hindu and Muslim leaders not do the same, especially when exposed to and in contest with Protestant missionaries?

Sengupta sees a problem with how historians have understood the relationship between empire and education and the role of colonial education. She suggests a conception of agency and power at work in colonial education that grants Indians the ability to maintain and transform their precolonial religious identities and to use colonial schools as a vehicle of that change.

## **Sources**

This thesis is based on missionary sources. While logistical concerns (eg., language proficiency, travel funding) influenced this decision, the selection of sources was driven by the underlying research question, namely, why British missionaries spent energy and resources working in a Christian community rather than concentrating their efforts on converting non-Christians and what this might tell us about larger questions of race and religion in the British Empire. The specifics of how the Malankara Church received the British missionaries and the ways in which these interactions affected the St. Thomas Christian community are promising areas for future research. I have neglected these questions not because they are unimportant but because they are beyond the scope of the present work, and they certainly could not be fully addressed without reference to a broader collection of sources.

Citations of primary sources conform to the cataloguing of the Church Missionary Society Archive. Documents consulted in that archive in the Cadbury Research Library of the University of Birmingham include the finding number; materials consulted on microfilm include the reel and page numbers.

## **Layout of the Work**

Chapter 2 covers the first twelve years of the College, when the principals enjoyed a cordial working relationship with the Malankara Church. The chapter introduces the foundation and organization of the College. I argue that the curriculum and operation of the College drew the students and, by extension, the Malankara Church more fully under British influence.

Chapter 3 focuses on the period from 1830 to 1836, when the Malankara Church severed its association with the CMS. The strong personalities of both the CMS principal of the College and the Metran of the Malankara Church combined to make these tumultuous years. I argue that the impatience and confrontational nature of the principal led to the split with the Malankara Church, which in turn divided the St. Thomas Christian community.

## Chapter 2.

### Cooperation

#### A 'Very Peculiar' Mission

The mission at Kottayam stands out among the missions of its day because it principally served a Christian community, the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Church.<sup>50</sup> When Colonel Munro arrived as British Resident in Travancore, he found the Syrian Church in a condition he considered unacceptable: poor, oppressed, and with a largely illiterate clergy and laity. Munro sought to re-establish their status in society and requested that the CMS establish a mission among them. He cultivated a relationship with the church and became known as its patron. Munro then tasked the missionaries with 'improving' the state of the church, and they became liaisons between the church, the British Resident, and the government of Travancore, as well as trustees of the church's property.

The Cottayam College was founded by an endowment from the government and with funds collected by the CMS in Britain. At the time, Travancore was ruled by the 'progressive' Rani (Queen) Gowri Parvati Bayi, serving as regent for her nephew.<sup>51</sup> In addition to allowing foreign missionary activity, the Rani granted some protections to Indian Christians and donated funds to build new churches. She also issued a rescript calling for free universal education. Col. Munro served as Resident for the first years of her reign and encouraged her 'progressive' measures favouring Christianity and education.

<sup>50</sup> This section draws on Joseph Fenn, *Observations on Cottayam Mission*, 1826, CMS/B/OMS/C I2 O96/14.

<sup>51</sup> P. Shungoony Menon, *A History of Travancore: From the Earliest Times* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1998), 383.

Although funded, supplied, and staffed in part by the CMS, the college was officially the property of the Syrian Church, not of the CMS mission. This arrangement reflected the involvement of Munro and the Travancore Government in founding the College. Although Munro invited the CMS to Travancore to effect the changes he believed would strengthen the Malankara Church, he saw himself primarily as the patron of Travancore's Syrian Christians, not of the CMS. Practically, it would have been less controversial for Munro to suggest that the state donate property and funds to an Indian community than to a foreign missionary society. Ideologically, the ultimate goal was that, once 'reformed,' the Malankara Church would be in a position to completely take over the administration of and instruction at the College.

This arrangement ensured that the Syrian Christians would continue to benefit from the property granted by the government, but it put the missionaries in a difficult position. Indeed, Joseph Fenn—the first principal of the College—wished that the CMS had used its influence to argue for the founding of a mission college, which could have achieved all the goals set out for the Syrian College but would have been firmly in the hands of the missionaries and might have better served their purposes. However, the missionaries “were anxious, under the divine blessing, to disseminate that degree of intellectual and religious knowledge, which should issue in a reformation and improvement of the Church by her own endeavours . . . [and] to avoid every thing which might create a schism in the church.”<sup>52</sup> Thus they “contented themselves with pointing out to the Metropolitan and the Superiors of the Church those things which appeared decidedly objectionable, without pressing an immediate correction of them.”<sup>53</sup>

The initial group of students in the college was thirty or forty subdeacons, young men intended for the priesthood. Some of them were illiterate and most were not interested in anything beyond the basic education required for ordination. This first generation faced great difficulty in being instructed by foreigners who had yet to master Malayalam. Things went well enough with the first class that after a few months the missionaries admitted more students into the college, mostly nine and ten years old with

<sup>52</sup> Fenn, Observations on Cottayam Mission, 1826, CMS/B/OMS/C I2 O96/14.

<sup>53</sup> Fenn, Observations on Cottayam Mission, 1826, CMS/B/OMS/C I2 O96/14.

no previous education. Many of them were in the college during Fenn's time there, and he describes them favourably, growing in strength of mind and being open to instruction.

The College at Cottayam served to draw the students into a British-Evangelical worldview, British in terms of language and science, Evangelical in terms of theology and Christian practice. The missionaries tooled the curriculum to effect this change gradually, teaching the students the fundamentals of Evangelical Christianity without directly contesting the 'errors' of the Syrian Church. By teaching English and introducing them to Evangelical Christianity, the missionaries sought to bring the students to an individual belief that would lead them to promote 'reform' in the Syrian Church and to give them the foundation to become missionaries themselves in British India, as well as the means to communicate with those in power. Both the students themselves and the leadership of the Syrian Church retained considerable influence over this process, however, as the students' individual interests and abilities affected their course of study, while the Metran (head of the Malankara Church) had the authority to ordain them when he saw fit.

## **The College under Fenn**

Joseph Fenn was born in London in 1789 or 1790. Inspired by the work of Claudius Buchanan, Fenn abandoned a promising legal career to become a missionary to India. He was ordained in 1816 and arrived in Travancore in early 1818. In addition to learning Malayalam, he mastered Syriac and Sanskrit."<sup>54</sup>

During Fenn's tenure as principal of the Cottayam College enrollment remained fairly steady, between forty and fifty students.<sup>55</sup> The student population might have grown faster if the missionaries had more control over when students left the college. Fenn's reports suggest that they often disagreed with the Syrian Metran's decision to confer orders upon students whom the missionaries thought needed more instruction.

<sup>54</sup> *The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography, 1730-1860* (Oxford: Blackwell Reference, 1995), s.v. "Fenn, Joseph."

<sup>55</sup> Joseph Fenn, *Observations on Cottayam Mission, 1826*; Joseph Fenn, *Report of College for 1821*; Joseph Fenn, *Report of College for 1822*; Joseph Fenn, *Report of College for 1825*.

This often related to their command of English, which varied greatly among the students. In addition to English, the students studied—to varying degrees—Latin, Hebrew, Greek, Sanskrit, Syriac, and Malayalam. In order to fulfill a pastoral role in the Syrian Church they needed to have a reasonable command of Syriac and Malayalam, and so study of other languages depended largely on the interest and aptitude of the students. If they did not place much importance on the study of English, and did not make much progress in it, they might become Syrian priests without learning much of foreign languages.

In studying Western languages, the curriculum consisted not just of sacred and other religious texts, but the missionaries also read classical (principally Latin) texts with the students. The students who excelled in Latin and the biblical languages attracted Fenn's attention and admiration more than the others; Fenn often describes in detail the progress of a student named Marcus, whose study of Latin and Hebrew set him apart from his peers.<sup>56</sup>

The missionaries maintained a close relationship with the Metropolitan, who resided at the college and oversaw its administration outside of instruction hours, including the admission and departure of students. Fenn saw the potential here for future conflict (or at least disagreement) and recommended to the Madras Corresponding Committee that regulations and policies be drafted for the college, but in the meantime suggested deferring to the Metropolitan's judgment. He suggested that the CMS should cultivate an even closer relationship with the church, recommending that the Corresponding Committee write directly to the Metropolitans<sup>57</sup> and that a few Syrian priests might visit the Corresponding Committee.

Fenn also wished that a closer relationship might be nurtured between the Corresponding Committee and the missions in Travancore, recommending that a visit could be beneficial and offering to arrange translators for such a visit, and even between

<sup>56</sup> Joseph Fenn, *Observations on Cottayam Mission*, 1826; Joseph Fenn, *Report of College for 1821*; Joseph Fenn, *Report of College for 1822*; Joseph Fenn, *Report of College for 1825*.

<sup>57</sup> Normally there would be only one Metropolitan (Metran) who would be the leader of the Malankara Church, but at this time Philoxenos had been chosen by the British and had in turn chosen Dionysius as, essentially, acting Metran. Upon Philoxenos' death, Dionysius officially succeeded to the office.

the Committee and the new British resident, Col. Newall. He urged the Committee to correspond with Newall in order to get a sense of his thoughts toward the college, the extent to which the missionaries could manage its funds, and the opinions of the Travancore government and larger Syrian community on such issues. Clearly the Kottayam mission did not have as close a relationship with Newall as it had with Munro, and Fenn shows a hint of insecurity in asking the Corresponding Committee to give him a better sense of where the college stood in the opinions of its benefactors, as well as some frustration in being so far from the Committee.

Due to the ambiguous relationship the missionaries had with the local church, Fenn believed that they must be cautious in their efforts, being careful and diplomatic in order to “prevent any jealousy from arising in the minds of the Syrian Clergy.”<sup>58</sup> To this end, he suggested that they encourage the more advanced students in their study, in order that they might decide on their own to stay longer. He also lamented the young age of marriage amongst Indians, which limited their interest in and time for education, as they needed to provide for their families; to counteract this, he suggested stipends for some of the most advanced students at the college as an honorary distinction. Fenn believed that encouragement would be the surest way to achieve both quick and lasting improvement in the next generation of Syrian clergy. Despite the cautious tactics that had previously been adopted and that he continued to advocate, Fenn insisted that “Circumstances must guide the Missionaries.”<sup>59</sup>

## **Reforming Kottayam**

For what purpose did Fenn endeavour to improve the college and its students? According to him, the Syrian Church was in a “gloomy state;” he considered the elder Metropolitan, Philoxenos, an “anchorite, totally unwilling to take the active management of the affairs of the Church,” and the younger Metropolitan, Dionysius, to be unqualified

<sup>58</sup> Fenn, Observations on Cottayam Mission, 1826, CMS/B/OMS/C I2 O96/14.

<sup>59</sup> Fenn, Observations on Cottayam Mission, 1826, CMS/B/OMS/C I2 O96/14.

for the position, lacking the tact required of good leadership.<sup>60</sup> In this situation, Fenn held that the college would be “the great instrument” of change in the Syrian Church.

Fenn’s sentiments were shared by other British in Travancore at the time. Indeed, Captain Charles Swanston (military paymaster in the provinces of Travancore and Tinnevely during the mid-1820s)<sup>61</sup> considered the Nasrani “lamentably deficient in knowledge, energy, and ability” and in need of outside assistance in order to secure the improvement of the community.<sup>62</sup> Swanston held the missionaries in high esteem, remarking on their respectability, education, and good rapport with the local community, and wished for more Anglican missionaries to come and work in Travancore. He identified the missionaries’ goals as: 1) circulating the Bible and other religious works in Syriac and Malayalam, 2) the general instruction of youth, 3) the special instruction of clergy, 4) to build and enlarge churches, and 5) “The expurgation of the ancient doctrines and rituals from the Popish ceremonies, and the restoration of the primitive discipline and government of the church.”<sup>63</sup> Swanston also expressed opinions of the Jacobite leadership quite similar to Fenn’s. He describes Mar Philoxenos—whom Fenn describes as a recluse—as disinclined toward church government and too infirm to carry out his duties, taking refuge from the affairs of the world and resigning his duties to his assistant, Mar Dionysius.

## **The Syriac Orthodox Church, the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Church, and the CMS**

In 1825, an unexpected visitor triggered a crisis that demonstrated the ecclesiastical connection between India and Syria, the instability of the Jacobite Church, and the tenuous position of the missionaries. Fenn only mentions in passing a mission from Syria that disrupted the Church, but Swanston relates it in great detail. According

<sup>60</sup> Fenn, *Observations on Cottayam Mission*, 1826, CMS/B/OMS/C I2 O96/14.

<sup>61</sup> *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, s.v. “Swanston, Charles (1789–1850),” <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/swanston-charles-2713/text3815> (accessed 20 April 2013).

<sup>62</sup> Charles Swanston, Chapter 5 of “A Memoir of the Primitive Church of Malayála,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1835): 56n.

<sup>63</sup> Swanston, “A Memoir of the Primitive Church of Malayála,” 57n.

to his account, when Mar Athanasius—a bishop sent by the Patriarch of Antioch of the Syriac Orthodox Church—arrived in Travancore, he proclaimed himself Metropolitan of Hindustan. He then attempted to gain the government’s recognition and to depose Mar Philoxenos and Mar Dionysius, using intimidation and even violence to achieve these goals.<sup>64</sup> The Malpan Konatta—a religious teacher who had tried to block Philoxenos’ consecration and, according to Fenn, attempted to “sow discord and schism” because he wanted to be Metropolitan—supported Mar Athanasius’ claim and encouraged the local community to recognize his authority. The Madras government, in response to an appeal from the missionaries, asserted the authority and autonomy of the native Church and denounced the foreign prelate, but this was insufficient to calm the situation. In the end, the government of Travancore expelled Mar Athanasius and punished Malpan Konatta—who later submitted to the Metropolitan—for his role in the events.<sup>65</sup>

This debacle—and Fenn’s and Swanston’s writings of it—highlight the main goal of the missionaries’ presence in Kottayam: to bring the Reformation to the Church in Malabar. After lamenting the “gloomy state” of the Syrian Church, Fenn writes that the college will be “the great instrument of effecting that good which has so long been contemplated,” as long as it continues under the guidance of the missionaries. Swanston draws a direct connection between the Reformation and the CMS’ work in Malabar, deploring the Syrian Christians’ “ancient doctrines” and “Popish ceremonies,” and hoping for their restoration to a more “primitive” form of church government.<sup>66</sup>

The episode brought out tensions between churches—the attempt by Syria to assert authority in Malabar—and within the Jacobite Church, as the community quickly devolved into two rival factions. In the midst of this, Fenn realized the tenuous position of the missionaries; they possessed no authority in Travancore, only influence, and they

<sup>64</sup> The Syrian Patriarch of Antioch (located in Damascus) would have sent a bishop to Kottayam because the Metran of Kottayam, as prelate of the Jacobite Church in Malabar, had ecclesiastical authority over the entire region.

<sup>65</sup> Swanston, “A Memoir of the Primitive Church of Malayála,” 58-62.

<sup>66</sup> Here Swanston’s use of ancient with a negative connotation would refer to the perceived accumulation of non-biblical teachings in the Catholic Church, and primitive used in this positive sense refers to the Church as depicted in the New Testament, one of the main goals of the Reformation being to purge the former and restore the latter.

had only cultivated influence with the Metropolitan. If future Metropolitans did not value the missionaries or their efforts and sought to eliminate their influence in the Jacobite Church, it would be difficult for them to continue their work.<sup>67</sup>

This crisis also strengthened British and missionary influence in the Malankara Church. The missionaries feared that a sudden change in leadership would undermine their position in Travancore and appealed to the government—which had appointed Mar Philoxenos in the first place—to intervene to maintain the status quo. British officials had an interest in protecting the church leaders they had appointed and, ideologically, would affirm the autonomy of a local church against the interference of a foreign church (the argument that supported the authority of the Church of England over the Catholic Church). While the British had previously intervened in the internal selection of the Metropolitan, in this case they also prevented the Syriac Orthodox Church from exercising power in the Malankara Church, although the Malankara Church had placed itself under the authority of the Patriarch of Antioch. The missionaries played a pivotal role in this process, as they appealed to the governments of Travancore and Madras to intervene. Thus the missionaries were able to defend the status quo and, by extension, their own influence in the Malankara Church. That the confrontation was settled by the government rather than within the Malankara Church shows the penetration of colonial political power into Indian religious matters.

Although illness forced Fenn to return to England in 1826, he continued to have an interest in Travancore and the Cottayam College and worried about the future of the missionaries' role. In a letter dated 1827 to someone at the college (likely the new principal, John Doran), Fenn briefly discussed the recent episode concerning the visit from the Syrian bishop. He mentioned that he had considered taking a delegation of missionaries and Indian priests to be consecrated by the Patriarch, thus establishing his authority over the church in Malabar. However, he concluded that such a trip was not necessary, especially since Malpan Konatta submitted to the Metropolitan's authority.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Fenn, *Observations on Cottayam Mission*, 1826, CMS/B/OMS/C I2 O96/14; Letter from Joseph Fenn, 19 Oct. 1827, CMS/B/OMS/C I2 O96/12A.

<sup>68</sup> Fenn, 1827, CMS/B/OMS/C I2 O96/12A.

## Passing the Torch

John William Doran was born c. 1800 in Ireland. He was educated at Trinity College, Dublin and ordained to the priesthood by the Bishop of London in 1825. Two days later, the CMS sent him to Kottayam.<sup>69</sup> The week after he arrived in Travancore in 1826, he accompanied Henry Baker (the CMS missionary in Kottayam responsible for primary education) on a trip to visit his school, taking the opportunity to visit some local Syrian churches.<sup>70</sup> Doran was distressed by the state of the St. Thomas Christians; on this tour, “nought appeared to [him] but ignorance, superstition, and sin.”<sup>71</sup> He confronted a catanar on the topic of Syrian beliefs regarding the Virgin Mary and was dismayed when the catanar could not provide Scriptural passages to support their belief and asserted that their traditions were as important as Scripture. This same catanar later came to the college for a Syriac Bible, and Doran exhorted him to study it attentively.

Upon his return to Kottayam, Doran was surprised when Fenn expressed his intention to put Doran in charge of the college. He opposed the decision because he still needed to devote considerable time to the study of Malayalam but yielded in the face of Fenn’s resolve. Doran felt the weight of taking over the affairs of the college, which Fenn had executed in an admirable way, gaining the respect of missionaries and Indians alike, and which was understood to be of paramount importance to the work of the mission at Kottayam. He knew that to carry out his duties well, he would need “a combination of wisdom, prudence, latent knowledge, forbearance, and, above all, Christian love,” and asked God to grant him every grace necessary for his new position.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> *The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography, 1730-1860*, s.v. “Doran, John William.”

<sup>70</sup> Doran, Account of Students at Syrian College, Jun - Dec 1826, CMS/B/OMS/C I2 O85/7.

<sup>71</sup> Doran, Account of Students at Syrian College, Jun - Dec 1826, CMS/B/OMS/C I2 O85/7.

<sup>72</sup> Doran, Account of Students at Syrian College, Jun - Dec 1826, CMS/B/OMS/C I2 O85/7.

## The College under Doran

Doran kept fastidious records of the students at the college. In 1826 the college had forty-eight students, divided into six classes, ranging in age from eight to twenty, having been in the college from a few months to seven years. The students were ranked into classes based on performance and progress, not age, so that the five students of the first class ranged in age from sixteen to twenty, the six of the second from sixteen to eighteen, the four of the third from seventeen to twenty, the three of the fourth from twelve to sixteen, the ten of the fifth from nine to sixteen, and the remaining twenty from eight to nineteen. The notes Doran wrote for each student reveal that most of the students were engaged in their education; many of the older students in lower classes have notes like “idle habits,” “not clever nor industrious,” “not stupid but amazingly idle,” “stupid and idle,” and “might be respectable if industrious.”<sup>73</sup> From one report to the next (which are much more frequent than Fenn’s), Doran would spend time explaining any apparent deficiencies in his or his students’ progress. This way of dividing the students into classes did not resemble the traditional method of training catanars, which involved them being attached to a parish and learning from the pastor there.

Here in Doran’s commentary on the students we can see him superimposing his Evangelical British perspective in his assessment of Indian Christian students. His repeated references to idleness show that work ethic was a centrally important measure for men like Doran. Whether or not they were bestowed with the gift of intelligence, Doran held that each student ought to apply himself and achieve as much as possible. Indeed, “might be respectable if industrious” sums up British opinions not just of Indians, but of other ‘tropical’ peoples as well.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Doran, Account of Students at Syrian College, Jun - Dec 1826, CMS/B/OMS/C I2 O85/7.

<sup>74</sup> This classification of tropical peoples (derived from the understanding of the four humours) was employed not just by British or Protestants, but was widely held by Europeans. See, for example, Ines G. Županov, *Missionary Tropics: The Catholic Frontier in India, 16th-17th Centuries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

Student enrollment at the college grew significantly under Doran's direction. His last report of the students in the college shows sixty-eight students, divided into twelve classes (eight in the morning and four in the afternoon). Thirty of these students had been admitted since Doran's first report, indicating that thirty-eight of the forty-eight students he recorded in 1826 were still studying there in 1829.<sup>75</sup>

Compared with Fenn, Doran displays less confidence in his own abilities and a more intent religiosity; whereas Fenn seems totally dedicated to the practical details required to educate and reform the Syrian church, Doran seems more focused on the spiritual and theological and on the absolute superiority of his brand of Christianity. This is not to suggest that Doran was a more devoutly or 'authentically' Christian man than Fenn or that Doran was a less capable administrator than Fenn. There are a number of possible explanations for the difference in the tenor of their writings.

First, Paul Sedra has suggested that the mission strategy of the CMS shifted over the nineteenth century from one that used auxiliary projects (e.g., schools and hospitals) to lay a solid foundation for conversion over the long term to one driven by direct evangelization that sought to produce more immediate results. This change Sedra attributes in part to financial strain on the Society; they hoped that increased numbers of converts would translate to more donations back home to support the missions.<sup>76</sup>

M. A. Laird suggests that it may have had to do with the individual missionaries, that some missionaries "had a personal aptitude and sense of vocation as teachers in addition to their general commitment to missionary work."<sup>77</sup> Although there was a general decline in mission education, one can still find individuals arguing for the necessity of education to the missionary enterprise in the early 1900s.<sup>78</sup> There may also be a difference in the way individual missionaries understand the Great Commission,

<sup>75</sup> Doran, Account of Students for Year Ending Sep 1829, CMS/B/OMS/C I2 O85/12.

<sup>76</sup> Sedra, *From Mission to Modernity*, 84.

<sup>77</sup> M. A. Laird, *Missionaries and Education in Bengal, 1793-1837* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 273.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, James M. Thoburn, *The Christian Conquest of India* (Cincinnati: Jennings & Graham, 1906), a textbook for young missionaries.

which calls both for preaching the Gospel and for gaining converts; the former directive is clear, but the latter leaves room for creativity and diversity in mission strategy.

Despite Doran's belief in the superiority of Protestant Christianity, he did maintain a good relationship with Mar Dionysius.<sup>79</sup> The Metropolitan's letter to him in 1832 also had more explicit spiritual and Biblical language than previous letters written to Fenn. In it, Mar Dionysius compares his relationship with Doran to that between Paul and Titus, indicating a close connection but also implying his authority over Doran. The Metropolitan goes on to affirm the important role of the college, writing that he had overseen some improvements to the college building, "by which means the healthfulness both of the body and of the Spirit of the students will come."<sup>80</sup>

## Conclusions

By 1830, the College at Cottayam—and the mission in general—seemed to be enjoying much success. Enrollment at the college had nearly doubled over the 1820s. The missionaries had developed good relationships with the British resident, Travancore government, and Syrian Jacobite leadership. The students in the college were showing promise in their studies. A Malayalam translation of the Bible was well underway.

There were still some indications that trouble might be looming. Fenn anticipated that giving the missionaries only influence over the college might create problems for them if they fell out of favour with the local Christian leadership. He also noted that there were no formal guidelines for resolving any disagreements between the missionaries and the Jacobite Christians.

The attitude of the missionaries towards the Indian Christians also had the potential to create friction. Fenn, for the most part, observed the Syrian customs the better to understand his pupils and what beliefs and practices in particular he would focus on altering in the course of their education. Doran more clearly demonstrated his

<sup>79</sup> Translation of Letter from Mar Dionysius to Doran, 1832, CMS/B/OMS/C I2 O85/13.

<sup>80</sup> Translation of Letter from Mar Dionysius to Doran, 1832, CMS/B/OMS/C I2 O85/13.

repugnance for Syrian ritual and was quicker to offer the Evangelical Protestant ‘correction’ to Syrian ‘error.’ Despite his focus on the practical and optimism for the future of the Syrian church, even Fenn let his revulsion show in his writings at times. With this negative undercurrent among the missionaries at Kottayam, any reluctance by the Syrians to adopt Evangelical Protestantism could cause conflict between the two groups.

The curriculum created by the missionaries, consisting mostly of Biblical and classical languages, shows their primary intent was to instruct their students in theology and the systematic study of scripture. Especially the focus on Biblical languages and, by extension, the study of the Bible in those languages are hallmarks of the Reformation. Teaching the students Latin enabled them to read early western-Christian theology, which would give the next generation of catanars a similar theological foundation as their European counterparts. Besides languages, the students also learned mathematics.

This curriculum consisting of classical texts, systematic Biblical study, and rational thought places the College at Cottayam squarely in the context of the Scottish Enlightenment, which strongly influenced the way that British missionaries spread Christianity in the early- to mid-1800s. The missionaries at Kottayam saw it not just as their calling but their responsibility to reform the Jacobite Syrian Christians and bring them into a closer—and more ‘correct’—relationship with God.<sup>81</sup>

The curriculum and the educational structure of the College also show how the missionaries supported the colonial order in Travancore. Deacons were concentrated in the College and instructed by foreign missionaries, rather than receiving training in the parishes from Indian pastors. Catanars only needed instruction in Syriac and Malayalam to perform their duties, and each of the other subjects they were taught drew them into the Protestant British Empire. As already mentioned, teaching them Biblical languages was meant to inculcate them with the values of the Reformation. Latin, in addition to its religious dimension, also more broadly drew the students into the Greco-Roman cultural

<sup>81</sup> For more on the relationship between the Scottish Enlightenment and Protestant mission, see, for example, Brian Stanley, ed., *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001).

tradition of the British. English and mathematics helped prepare some of the students for careers in the colonial government. By teaching the students Sanskrit and familiarizing them with Hindu texts, the missionaries prepared them to engage their neighbours as evangelists. Thus the College prepared its students to expand the religious, cultural, and political influence of the British Empire in India.

The efforts of Fenn and Doran were intended to lay the foundation for the 'reformation' of the Malankara Church, but they also set the stage for division within it. Doran especially put pressure on the relationship between the CMS and Syrian Christians by increasing the number of students at the College—and thus the sphere of influence of the missionaries—and by more openly and directly challenging what he saw as errors in the church. By increasing both the breadth and depth of missionary interaction with the Malankara Church, Doran sought to produce results more quickly, but he also risked creating a backlash from those who would have preferred to remain free of any intervention from the British.

## Chapter 3.

### Confrontation

#### “To raise this fallen Church”

Joseph Peet was born in London c. 1798. He began training to be a missionary in 1829, was ordained a priest by the Bishop of London in 1832, and departed for Kottayam in January, 1833. Peet was a seaman before training for missionary work, and his manner (e.g., bluntness) made it difficult for other missionaries to work with him.<sup>82</sup> Upon his arrival in Kottayam, Peet took charge of the College. He wrote that he found the mission “a wreck” but that after a year of work it was “flourishing and as prosperous as you could well wish.”<sup>83</sup> In a letter dated 1834, Peet responds to a number of resolutions of the Parent Committee and addresses what he sees as errors supporting these resolutions. He seeks to provide correct information to the CMS so that informed decisions can be made regarding the College at Cottayam.

Peet was eager for the mission and the College to produce results. This eagerness combined with his blunt and abrasive manner undermined the work of the CMS in Kottayam. Peet engaged with the Syrian catanars (priests) in a more confrontational and aggressive way than his predecessors had. He also had conflict with the Metran (head of the Malankara Church), Dionysius IV, who became increasingly hostile to the CMS missionaries following the death of the more conciliatory Mar Philoxenos in 1829. Philoxenos had been selected by the British as head of the Malankara Church in 1816, and it was not until after his death that Dionysius IV had

<sup>82</sup> *The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography, 1730-1860*, s.v. “Peet, Joseph.”

<sup>83</sup> Peet to Lay Secretary, Reel 69, p. 6, 8 Feb. 1834.

clear authority as Metran to lead as he saw fit. With Peet as principal and Dionysius IV residing at the College, the stage was set for conflict and division.

Peet vigorously spread Evangelicalism, and Dionysius IV resisted it just as vigorously. As both sides championed their brand of Christianity, they each gained supporters in the Malankara Church. Peet neglected the long-term goal of the CMS to 'strengthen' the Malankara Church and cultivate it as an ally to spread Christianity in India, instead focusing on the short-term goal of converting the Syrians to 'true' Christianity. In just three years, the contest between Peet and Dionysius IV would end twenty years of cooperation between the CMS and the Malankara Church and sow the seeds of the schism to come, a schism that would fragment the St. Thomas Christian community and dash the hopes of the missionaries.

## **Peet's Assessment of the College**

Peet felt that the College was not achieving its goals. He criticized both the CMS teachers for not being more involved in the instruction of the students and the malpans (Indian religious teachers, especially of Syriac) for undermining the instruction of the British missionaries. One of the many issues Peet identified was the curriculum at the College, which he believed was "by no means calculated, either to impart a sound education, or what is of far more consequence, to give a scriptural one."<sup>84</sup> Peet writes that less than a quarter of the students in the College have learned any English and that less than 10% of those "that did learn English, was capable of understanding a theological discourse tho' delivered in the simplest manner."<sup>85</sup> He goes on to assert that he is the first of the missionaries to be involved in the instruction of the students who did not learn English.

Another problem Peet saw was that "all the good principles taught the English Scholars by your Missionaries, were immediately effaced from their minds by the false

<sup>84</sup> Peet to Madras and Parent Committees, Reel 69, p. 32, 1834.

<sup>85</sup> Peet to Madras and Parent Committees, Reel 69, p. 33, 1834.

Syrian Teachers, whom your Agents allowed to remain in the College.”<sup>86</sup> These teachers Peet characterizes as lacking “correct knowledge” of Scripture and “as ignorant as you can well imagine an Indian Popish Priest.”<sup>87</sup> He suggests that the Syrian catanars (priests) who have attended the College seem to hold Syrian beliefs even more fervently than other catanars and that malpans in the College are teaching the students doctrines that the missionaries find objectionable. Peet reports that the English (Anglican) service is not taking root among the Syrians.

The general tenor of Peet’s writing is that the CMS should exercise more control over the College than had been the norm and that the missionaries should be more active in “correcting the errors” of the Syrians. He concludes his observations in 1834 with a list of four “fundamental errors” that he thinks must be changed as soon as possible in the Syrian Church: 1) Having prayer in an unknown tongue, 2) Not preaching the Word of God to the people, 3) Praying to the Virgin Mary and the Saints, and 4) Praying for the dead.<sup>88</sup>

For Peet, the College in this state could not possibly fulfill its mission. One of the central tenets of Evangelicalism is the frequent and independent reading of Scripture, free from the encumbrances of ‘non-Scriptural beliefs.’ How could the students of the College be taught to read and understand the Bible in the Evangelical fashion if their teachers did not share the missionaries’ understanding of Scripture? How could the students be led to see the ‘error’ of Malankara Church teaching when their teachers shared these beliefs?

Peet would measure success in terms of conditioning students to read the Bible frequently and convincing them of the errors of their church tradition and the correctness of Evangelical Christianity, in eliminating what he saw as the ‘Popish’ (a slur referring to Catholics) tendencies of the Malankara Church. Peet (and the CMS) was fighting not just against the traditions of the Malankara Church and the ‘character’ of tropical peoples, but Cottayam was also a battlefield in the global contest between Catholicism

<sup>86</sup> Peet to Madras and Parent Committees, Reel 69, p. 33, 1834.

<sup>87</sup> Peet to Madras and Parent Committees, Reel 69, p. 33, 1834.

<sup>88</sup> Peet to Madras and Parent Committees, Reel 69, p. 47, 1834.

and Evangelical Protestantism. This is clearly demonstrated by the four issues Peet identified as needing immediate attention, four of the chief complaints the Protestant Reformers made against the Catholic Church, which Protestants would continue to invoke as grave errors in Catholic theology and practice down to the present day.

## **Peet's Work in the Malankara Church**

In another letter, Peet writes that he is having the Syriac liturgy and Canons translated into Malayalam, for the benefit of both the British missionaries and the Malayali priests. Peet believed it would be better for the priests to more fully understand their own prayers and for the people to have services in their first language. He also wanted the Canons (written in the fourth century by a Syrian, Mar Ephrem) translated because they served as a basis for much of Syriac theology and practice. Peet reported that the catanars were defending more recent beliefs and practices by appealing to their ancient Canons and believed that if these were translated into Malayalam that it would be easier for the missionaries to eliminate what they considered objectionable from the local church, as he believed these had no basis in the Canons.<sup>89</sup>

Despite his many criticisms of the Church of Malabar, Peet does occasionally express admiration in his writings. In one such instance—a description of a man he has nicknamed Luther—he gives us a glimpse of what he considers to be the desirable characteristics of a catanar:

This man is, so far as it is possible to discern, unquestionably a genuine disciple of Christ, added to which, he is a man of great talent, thoroughly well versed in the Syriac language, and has a large and minute acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures, . . . but further, he has, as before stated, a most admirable method of conveying knowledge, viz. by catechetical instruction; besides that, he has a thorough reverence and just appreciation of the Word of God, for in conversation with him, as well as from what I know he has stated to the Metran, he constantly affirms,

<sup>89</sup> Peet to Corresponding Committee, Reel 69, p. 226-27, 3 Dec. 1833.

that the Bible should be our rule, and that whatever is inconsistent with that, must be decidedly wrong, and ought not to be taught.<sup>90</sup>

But this man still had the fault of performing the 'idolatrous' and 'Roman' Syrian liturgy, though Peet asserts that "sans doute, this error arises solely from a want of better information."<sup>91</sup>

Peet related the story that opened this thesis to "show the strong feelings of the people, and give a foresight of the certain victory, that the faithful declaration of the Gospel shall eventually gain."<sup>92</sup> Herein lies the crux of Peet's objectives, methods, and hope for success: his objective is to reform the Church of Malabar by persuading the people to follow a more "correct" Christianity, his method is to employ catanars to show the people that the English bring not new customs but ones that are supported even by their own books, and the small, local victories early on in his time in Kottayam convince him that success is inevitable, that all the parishioners of the Church of Malabar will accept the orthodoxy of English customs, though their local catanars may continue to resist and be left behind. All of Peet's hope lies in the few "able" catanars that he employs and in the belief that the congregations are desirous of a more "authentic" teaching of the Gospel.

Peet focused on preparing the Syrian Church for spreading Christianity in India. He was not content to educate those intended for the priesthood but wanted to produce more immediate changes by influencing the pastors in the parishes. When he encountered catanars who resisted, his method was to appeal directly to the people. His influence in Travancore undermined the authority of the Malankara Church, spreading the Protestant ideal of individual self-determination in spiritual matters rather than obedience to the established order when church leaders are believed to be in error. Peet's actions seem calculated to bring about a popular conversion in Travancore, having found the church hierarchy unwilling to embrace reformation. His actions directly contradict the CMS' intention to gradually reform and rebuild the Malankara Church.

<sup>90</sup> Peet to the Corresponding Committee, Reel 69, p. 232-33, 1 Feb. 1834.

<sup>91</sup> Peet to the Corresponding Committee, Reel 69, p. 233, 1 Feb. 1834.

<sup>92</sup> Peet to the Corresponding Committee, Reel 69, p. 233, 1 Feb. 1834.

## The Church of Malabar and the Church of British India

Just as India was divided between areas of British control and areas of Indian control—British India and the Princely States—so too was India divided ecclesiastically. In 1833, the Metropolitan of Malabar wrote to the Bishop of Calcutta to complain about the behaviour of the missionaries at Kottayam. At this time the Bishop of Calcutta (the sole Church of England diocese in India) was Daniel Wilson, who in 1835—with the establishment of the Diocese of Madras—also became the Anglican Metropolitan of India and Ceylon. As such, he had spiritual authority over Anglicans in India, including the CMS missionaries.

The Metropolitan of Malabar's letter to the Bishop of Calcutta set off a flurry of letters. The first of these was a letter sent to Peet from the Bishop. In this letter, the Bishop reminds Peet of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in India, writing,

We are aware, my dear Sir, that in an Episcopal Church like that of which you are a member, all difficult questions of a spiritual nature fall to the cognizance of the Bishop or his Representative. The Church Missionary Committee, indeed, are your lay patrons, who select you from others, appoint you for your Stations, allot you your temporal support, protect and guide you when sick or in necessity, and report to their Society at home the progress you make in your general work among the heathens. Matters of purely spiritual import belong to the jurisdiction and determination of the Bishop, who will expect to hear from you on all such occasions, and will afford you the most affectionate and friendly advice and consideration.

All correspondence with ancient Episcopal Churches more particularly appertains to the Bishop.<sup>93</sup>

Here the Bishop is re-establishing with Peet the chain of command and the proper channels of communication; he goes on to instruct Peet to write him on all matters of "spiritual cognizance," to write the Madras Committee regarding temporal concerns, and to limit his correspondence with his predecessor (now at Cochin) to friendly exchanges. But considering the logistics involved—Peet lived in the same city as the Metropolitan, while the Bishop lived more than 2,000 km. away—one can see that

<sup>93</sup> Bishop of Calcutta to the Rev. J. Peet, Reel 69, p. 215, 21 November 1833.

it would have been very difficult for the Bishop to be involved in the communications between the Metropolitan and the CMS, and indeed before Peet's arrival the CMS had enjoyed a close relationship with the Jacobite Syrian Church. Ultimately, the Bishop is seeking to establish a closer relationship with the Syrian Churches and with the missionaries laboring in his diocese.

The letter also reveals that the Metran has complained of Peet "doing all in opposition to the Bishop."<sup>94</sup> Indeed, Peet's reply to this charge illuminates just how tense the relationship between the CMS and the Jacobite Church had become, as he dismisses them as "altogether groundless; the sheer fruits of base, designing, but disappointed men, whose only aim it was to plunder the College of its property."<sup>95</sup> It is these men who have actually written the letter to the Bishop, Peet asserts, although "doubtless it has the Metran's signature attached to it, but it was in consequence of being imposed upon by the artifices of wicked advisors who took advantage of his weakness."<sup>96</sup> But lest we think that Peet has any esteem for the Metran himself, Peet goes on to write that "he is as wicked as he is weak, a drunkard, or to adopt the expression of the Resident, 'the greatest drunkard of all Travancore,' an ignorant man, unclean, covetous, and altogether vile. . . . [H]e is extremely weakminded, easily led by any party, and made to concur with any measure."<sup>97</sup> It is this last quality that Peet fears will eventually cause a separation between the CMS and the Jacobite Church, as he believes the Metran's advisors want to split up the property of the College.

## **Peet's Depiction of Doran**

Peet also wrote to the Corresponding Committee to apprise them of what was happening between himself, the Bishop, and the Metran. In the course of explaining to the Committee the current situation at the College, Peet took occasion to lambaste his

<sup>94</sup> Bishop of Calcutta to the Rev. J. Peet, Reel 69, p. 215, 21 November 1833.

<sup>95</sup> Rev. J. Peet to the Bishop of Calcutta, Reel 69, p. 216, 14 December 1833.

<sup>96</sup> Rev. J. Peet to the Bishop of Calcutta, Reel 69, p. 217, 14 December 1833.

<sup>97</sup> Rev. J. Peet to the Bishop of Calcutta, Reel 69, p. 217, 14 December 1833.

predecessor, Doran, calling him a dupe of conspiring catanars.<sup>98</sup> Peet criticizes Doran for believing “that the Syrians were as good and as guiltless as himself,” for accepting more students and hiring more teachers than the College could afford, for increasing the salaries of the College staff, and for allowing the Metran and his men free reign to do whatever they wished at the College, using its property to enrich themselves.<sup>99</sup> Peet asserts that it was the self-enrichment they were able to gain under Doran’s naïve tenure as principal that set in motion plans by these men to take possession of the whole College property.

## **Conflict with the CMS**

In May of 1834, John Tucker wrote to Peet on behalf of the Madras Corresponding Committee. He explains that the letter is so long in coming because he needed time to reflect upon Peet’s letters of the previous year. Tucker sets the tone for the letter right at the beginning, writing “I wish, my dear brother, I could say that we do not feel dissatisfied with much in your conduct and mode of proceeding, . . . while out of consideration for yourself and for the avoiding an unnecessary record in our books of that which we really feel, the Comm. have left it to me to communicate to you, by letter only, much of that which has grieved and surprised them.”<sup>100</sup> Tucker went on to enumerate the Committee’s primary concerns, beginning with Peet’s handling of the letter from the Bishop of Calcutta. Although Tucker did express the Committee’s willingness to “attribute much to your inexperience and ignorance of the world,” he also conveys their “astonishment and displeasure, and their deep regret that you should have been betrayed into an act so unworthy of you as a gentleman, so opposed to the common principles of obedience and respect to authority, as well as social order, and so lamentably at variance with Christian uprightness and simplicity.”<sup>101</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Rev. J. Peet to the Corresponding Committee, Reel 69, p. 219, 21 November 1833.

<sup>99</sup> Rev. J. Peet to the Corresponding Committee, Reel 69, p. 219, 21 November 1833.

<sup>100</sup> Tucker to Peet, Reel 69, p. 242, 27 May 1834.

<sup>101</sup> Tucker to Peet, Reel 69, p. 242-43, 27 May 1834.

Tucker goes on to express concern at Peet's general state of mind as evidenced by his letters. He first thanks Peet for giving them what they believe to be the fullest insight into proceedings at Kottayam that they have had and expresses their approval for much of what he has done and their hope that he has laid a firm foundation for future good. Tucker then specifies the Committee's concerns:

That an overweening confidence in your own skill and good management must be not only injurious to yourself, but have an unfavourable effect upon the Mission also, there can be no doubt, while if you meet artifice with artifice you may gain your point in a worldly and pecuniary point of view, and . . . the Syrians may fear and feel respect for you, and be attached to you, but you cannot hope to raise them to a scriptural standard of right and wrong, or lead them to true holiness, by anything but christian simplicity and humility.<sup>102</sup>

At this point, Peet may well have felt besieged on every side, and in September 1834 he actually resigned his post, with the caveat that he would stay until his successor arrived for the good of the mission.<sup>103</sup> It would seem that the CMS was not yet ready to relieve him of his duties in Kottayam, as he stayed on there for four more years. Perhaps they were pacified by his explanation that his errors were due to his lack of instructions and of knowledge, which he had cultivated prior to taking up his post in order that he might arrive in Kottayam without bias.<sup>104</sup>

## **Denouement**

In 1834, Peet shared concerns with the Corresponding Committee that the CMS' footing in Kottayam was destabilizing. In language echoing Fenn's observation that the missionaries exerted no authority, only influence, in Kottayam, Peet queried the Committee,

how far we are acting right? for if the Committee's statement [that the CMS' position is one only of influence] be correct, then the Syrians are in this matter greatly deceived, because the fact is, . . . that as far as the

<sup>102</sup> Tucker to Peet, Reel 69, p. 244, 27 May 1834.

<sup>103</sup> Peet to Corr. Committee, Reel 69, p. 329, 1 Sep. 1834.

<sup>104</sup> Peet to Corr. Committee, Reel 69, p. 329, 1 Sep. 1834.

College and its property is concerned, the Missionaries, in their opinion, have prior claim to the Metran over its affairs, that the College and property is a trust, vested in the hands of the Resident, the Missionary and the Metran for the time being, and that to all intents and purposes the Missionary is the principal manager in all its concerns.<sup>105</sup>

Peet then proceeded with an even more salient question:

Is the influence by which the Missionaries' power has been upheld been of the right kind, and could they support that influence without sacrificing their principles? . . . [A]ll I can say, and what I desire to say distinctly, is, that it cannot be done by adhering to the instructions which the Committee have laid down, that it is decidedly impossible to act in concert with the present Metran, upon any ground of common justice, much less of religion.<sup>106</sup>

Peet's actions and writings show how the younger generation of missionaries exercised less patience in their work and less satisfaction with the results the missions were generating. Whereas the CMS had previously instructed its missionaries to proceed with caution and restraint, Peet adopted a more confrontational demeanor, and even challenged the wisdom of his superiors' approach.

Peet went beyond his instructions in his zeal to affect the Malankara Church. He also worked in the College at a time when the Metran was not interested in the reforms advocated and advanced by the British missionaries. Anglican power, in the man of Bishop Wilson, became more present in Travancore with his increasing correspondence with the Metran and his visit in 1835. It is unsurprising, therefore, that Peet saw the end of the period of cooperation between the CMS and the Syrian Church.

The encounters related above between Peet and the Malankara Church, the CMS, and the Anglican bishop reveal his character: impulsive, overzealous, impatient, defensive, and arrogant. It was this combination of Peet's personality and the disinclination of Dionysius IV to cooperate with the CMS that led to the break between the two bodies. In his haste and zeal to produce positive results more quickly, Peet diverged from the path laid out by his predecessors and by his superiors. Whereas they

<sup>105</sup> Peet to Corr. Committee, Reel 69, p. 332, 1 Sep. 1834.

<sup>106</sup> Peet to Corr. Committee, Reel 69, p. 332-33, 1 Sep. 1834.

planned to bring about a gradual change in the theology and practice of the Malankara Church through instruction of deacons in the College and cooperation with the Metrans, Peet adopted a more confrontational approach, pointing out 'error' wherever he saw it. This characterizes not just his interactions with Indian Christians, but with his superiors as well. He seems to have had little use for diplomacy and subtlety.

Peet's actions put pressure on the Malankara Church. The goal of the CMS was not only to instill the values of Evangelicalism in the church, but also to maintain and strengthen its integrity so that it would be in a position to send out missionaries of its own. By attempting to accelerate the process, Peet encouraged those Indian priests who also wanted change but left behind those who wanted no part of what the missionaries had to offer. With Peet more aggressively attacking the Malankara Church, and factions forming within it, the church leadership had to respond; they had to decide whether to embrace or reject the missionaries. If more time had passed, and more of the church leaders had themselves been educated in the College, then they may have been more inclined to institute the changes suggested by the CMS. At this time, though, there was only a small faction within the Malankara Church that supported the missionaries. Peet's forceful approach was also taken up by 'reform'-minded clergymen. Thus both those who accepted and those who rejected the missionaries did so vehemently, as the former modeled themselves after Peet and the latter were provoked by the former. When such factions had formed in 1825, the government had defused the situation by banishing the foreign bishop who was the cause of the division. This time the crisis could not be resolved so easily.

## Chapter 4.

### Conclusions

In January 1836, the Malankara Church met at the Synod of Mavelikara to consider recommendations made by Bishop Wilson during his visit in November 1835.<sup>107</sup> Those attending unanimously rejected all six of the Bishop's proposals and swore to "have no further intercourse whatever with the Church missionaries."<sup>108</sup> This oath is reminiscent of the Coonan Cross Oath of 1653, when the Malankara Church swore not to obey the Roman Catholic Church. The missionaries made the best of the split, with Bailey, Baker, and Peet writing that "we are sure we can do the Syrians more real benefit when separated."<sup>109</sup> But as in 1655, when the St. Thomas Christians affiliated themselves to the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch, powers outside the church would again play decisive roles in the outcome of the crisis. In opposition to this declaration, Abraham (a malpan at the College, who had also run afoul of Dionysius IV in 1825 in the incident involving Mar Athanasius) along with 11 other catanars submitted a petition to the British Resident, Col. Fraser (who had been appointed to the post just two weeks before the meeting at Mavelikara), describing what they saw as errors being committed by the Metran. Fraser's attempts to intervene earned him the reproach of the Madras government.<sup>110</sup> While this petition had no immediate effect on the Malankara Church, it laid the groundwork for the schism to come. In 1843, Malpan Abraham's nephew—an

<sup>107</sup> Bishop Wilson's six points were: 1) The Metran should only ordain graduates of the College, 2) Accounts of the churches' finances should be submitted annually to the British Resident, 3) Catanars should receive regular income, instead of relying on uncertain fees from offering Eucharist for the dead, 4) Schools should be established in every parish church, 5) Catanars should preach on the Gospel every Sunday during the liturgy, and 6) The liturgy should be celebrated in Malayalam.

<sup>108</sup> S. G. Pothan, *The Syrian Christians of Kerala* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1963), 49.

<sup>109</sup> Bailey, Baker, and Peet to Tucker, Reel 72, p. 390, Dec. 1836.

<sup>110</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Fraser, James Stuart, of Ardachy."

Indian deacon and former student of the Cottayam College, unhappy with the leadership of Mar Dionysius IV—returned to Travancore after traveling to the Patriarch of Antioch, who consecrated him as Mar Mathew Athanasius (remembered as the 'reforming Metran'). In 1852, the Travancore government recognized him as the rightful Metran. However, the power struggle caused by his consecration was not yet over; the Patriarch himself visited in 1875, with Mathew Athanasius and his supporters appealing to the British and Dionysius V (who claimed succession to Dionysius IV in 1865) and his supporters appealing to the Patriarch. The courts returned a ruling in favour of Dionysius V and the Patriarch, and Mathew Athanasius and his followers founded the independent Mar Thoma (Reformed) Church. There are now eight major divisions of the Malankara Church—some independent, some Oriental Orthodox, some Catholic—as well as the Church of South India, part of the Anglican Communion.

The College at Cottayam experienced similar fragmentation. An arbitration committee divided the property of the College between the CMS and the Syrians in 1840, the College itself awarded to the Malankara Church. In 1852, after the Travancore government recognized him as the rightful Metran, Mathew Athanasius took possession of the College property, though he was not able to resume instruction immediately. In 1869 he succeeded, with the support of the missionaries, in drawing the cash settlement which had been awarded to the Syrian Church in 1840 after the split with the CMS, along with the back interest which had been accruing on an investment with the English India Company since 1835, which had not been drawn during the falling out with the missionaries and the ensuing succession crisis. With this significant sum, he was able to reopen the Syrian College as a seminary. But after Dionysius V had won recognition from the government, he sued Mar Thomas Athanasius (who succeeded Mathew Athanasius in 1877) for the College property, finally taking possession in 1889. Instruction resumed in 1893. The original college exists now as the Orthodox Theological Seminary (Old Seminary) of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, an Oriental Orthodox church, and has been affiliated with Serampore University in West Bengal since 1965. The CMS College built in 1838 continues as a college and high school, which were separated in 1907. Due to the split with the Malankara Church, and the attendant shift of the Cottayam Mission from Christians to non-Christians, the new college was open to all. The College was affiliated to Madras University in 1857 and is

now affiliated with Mahatma Gandhi University in Kottayam. The College's notable alumni include former President of India Dr. K. R. Narayanan.

What caused this separation between the CMS and the Malankara Church? In the days of Fenn and Doran, they had enjoyed a cooperative relationship, which disintegrated rapidly in just six years. Many writers attribute the breach largely to Mar Dionysius IV, who clearly did not share his predecessor's inclination toward the reformist agenda pushed by the CMS and the Anglican bishops. If he was the main catalyst, then it seems that the relationship should have begun to sour earlier, since Dionysius IV led the Church from 1825. The death of Philoxenos II in 1829 likely contributed, for it was only then that the government officially recognized Dionysius IV as the legitimate leader of the Malankara Church. From his consecration in 1825 to Philoxenos II's death in 1829, Dionysius IV's position rested solely on the authority of Philoxenos II, who was content to cooperate with the CMS and their activities at the College. Furthermore, the 1836 meeting at Mavelikara is said to have been unanimous in its decision. It was this meeting that formally ended the period of cooperation, thus we cannot attribute the split to just one man. We must consider what forces led to the widespread resentment of the missionaries that culminated at this meeting.

One could be drawn to the conclusion that the Malankara Church simply resisted outside influence, and thus it was only inevitable that they would separate from the missionaries. After all, the church asserted its independence from the Catholics in 1653 and from the Syriac Orthodox Church in the succession crises of 1825 and the 1860s. On the other hand, the Malankara Church affirmed its connection with Antioch in 1655 and in the 1870s. I would argue that the St. Thomas Christians were not categorically opposed to outside influence but that they insisted on interacting with outside powers on their own terms and often did so in recognition of the need to maintain the legitimacy (apostolic succession) of their episcopacy. When they challenged the authority of the Catholic Church over them, they found a new source for episcopal consecrations in the Syriac Orthodox Church. But when that church dispatched a new Metropolitan when they had one already, they asserted their autonomy. The personality of the Metran also influenced their interaction with foreign power; when he favoured cooperation with the CMS or the Patriarch of Antioch, his church engaged with those institutions. When the

group in question worked toward purposes in opposition to his own, he consistently resisted their influence; thus the reform-minded Mathew Athanasius used the authority of the Patriarch to support his claim as Metran in the 1840s, but argued for the independence of the Malankara Church when the Patriarch sided with his opponent, Dionysius V, in the 1870s.

Peet undoubtedly contributed to the hostility of the Syrians towards the CMS. And his interactions were not limited just to the Metran or even to Kottayam. Peet actively toured the Syrian churches in Travancore, sometimes alienating the resident catanars by his demeanor or the content of his sermons. In his writing, Peet often reveals a low opinion of the Syrian Christians. His impulsiveness and occasional disregard for authority drew reprimands from both the CMS and the Anglican bishop. Leslie Brown characterizes Peet as one of the newer missionaries in Kottayam who, unlike Bailey and other veterans, “felt that the indirect influence which was all they had so far been allowed to exert was fruitless. Stronger measures were required; and if the Syrian Church deliberately refused to consider any reformation by the Word of God, her errors should be publicly denounced.”<sup>111</sup> By way of example, Brown recounts an incident when Peet directly confronted Indian Christians for purifying themselves through ritual washing, what he saw as non-Christian superstition, in preparation for a Marian feast. After touching them, in order “to defile this ritual purity, he proceeded to preach violently against their superstitions in the church.”<sup>112</sup>

His own personality traits aside, Peet must also be understood in the wider context of British missionary activity. In Rowan Strong’s book on Anglicanism in the British Empire he describes the worldview of Anglican British missionaries as “a series of theological polarities,”<sup>113</sup> the most fundamental of which being the division between Christians and non-Christians. “Heathens were believed to reside in the parts of the world under the dominion of Satan and, consequently, their lives, beliefs, and societies

<sup>111</sup> Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 138.

<sup>112</sup> Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 138.

<sup>113</sup> Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, 283.

were thought to be systematically shaped by the very opposite to God.”<sup>114</sup> Although Peet interacted primarily with Indian Christians, Strong’s arguments are still relevant. Strong goes on to write that Anglicans saw the Roman Catholic Church as “a spurious and Satanic masquerade for true Christianity.”<sup>115</sup> If we accept Strong’s characterization of the British missionary worldview, then the Malankara Church would have been doubly cursed, both by its location in India and by its similarities to the Catholic Church, a “Satanic masquerade for true Christianity” in “the dominion of Satan.”

Still, the belief of the missionaries in the flawed nature of Indian Christianity did not overcome their certainty that Christ could triumph in India. Indeed, the very existence of an indigenous Indian Church gave them hope that the whole of India could be converted. Nevertheless, the core of the missionaries’ optimism was their belief that the Church of England was “the best of all possible churches, reformed in the Protestant Reformation so that it was the denomination most closely resembling the primitive church of the first centuries” and the concomitant “sense of an alliance between God and the British nation,” the belief that “Britain was blessed by God in order to carry out a providential mission to indigenous populations in the colonies.”<sup>116</sup>

## **Missionaries & the British Empire**

Taking Strong’s definition of an imperialist— “being favourable to the English-British imposition (by military or political power) of its own culture, rule, or society on overseas territories”<sup>117</sup>—the present study supports the view that the missionaries involved in the College at Cottayam did advance the cause of British imperialism. With the support of the missionaries, the Malankara Church resolved its nineteenth century succession crises in the courts, drawing it further into the web of British hegemony. Both the CMS and the Malankara Church appealed to the British Resident to negotiate the split between them; when he called on the Travancore Government to get involved,

<sup>114</sup> Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, 284.

<sup>115</sup> Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, 285.

<sup>116</sup> Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, 284; 137; 286.

<sup>117</sup> Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, 288.

Madras Presidency intervened, determining the makeup of the committee that would settle the dispute.<sup>118</sup> Surely propagating the fundamentals of British Protestantism with the hope that the Malankara Church would remake itself in the image of the Church of England qualifies as being favourable to the imposition of British culture in Travancore.

As for the particulars of Strong's imperialist Anglicanism, the College missionaries certainly can be classified as "believ[ing] there was a positive meaning and purpose in the institution and maintenance of the British Empire," as they owed their presence in Travancore to the influence of the British Resident and Dewan, Col. Munro. However, the CMS did not try to unify the St. Thomas Christians with the Church of England; rather, they actively and consciously refrained from bringing the Malankara Church into the Church of England, instructing its missionaries to spread the fundamentals of Protestantism but not Anglicanism. Even when a group of reformist Syrians wanted to join with the missionaries after the Synod of Mavelikara, the Corresponding Committee affirmed that "it was their 'decided conviction that we ought to preserve their identity and not attempt to amalgamate them with the Church of England.'"<sup>119</sup> Although some of them were later ordained and helped to form an Anglican diocese in south India, it was in part the CMS' refusal to incorporate them into Anglicanism that led these dissenters to later found the Mar Thoma Church. The CMS likely maintained the distinction hoping that a unified Malankara Church, once reformed, would become associated with the Church of England in a way resembling the Anglican Communion today, with which both the Mar Thoma Church and the Malabar Independent Syrian Church are in communion while maintaining their autonomy.

This study also calls into question the dichotomy between missionaries' religious motives and officials' economic and political motives suggested by some scholars who wish to emphasize the distinction between mission and empire. Col. Munro played a central role in setting events in motion in Travancore; he invited the CMS to establish a mission, encouraged the Rani to support Christianity in general and the College at

<sup>118</sup> Rev. Dr. B. Varghese, "The Old Seminary and Two Centuries of Theological Education," Orthodox Theological Seminary, <http://www.ots.edu.in/950/1075//articles/history-of-seminary---fr-baby-varghese-5-6> (accessed 16 July 2014).

<sup>119</sup> Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 140.

Cottayam in particular, involved the government in the selection of (reform-minded) Metrans, gave a monetary gift to the first catanars to marry in order to discourage celibacy, and generally positioned himself as the protector and benefactor of the St. Thomas Christian community. He also intruded on the CMS missionaries, attempting to establish them in a position of authority in the Malankara Church that went against their own policy in Travancore.<sup>120</sup> Munro believed that it was “the duty of every Christian to support and encourage the diffusion of true Christianity, which in his opinion was identical with Protestant Christianity.”<sup>121</sup> As for the relation between religion and empire, Munro “was of the opinion that the spread of Protestant Christianity would be beneficial in the interests of humanity and would also contribute indirectly to the stability of the British rule in India.”<sup>122</sup>

Col. Fraser followed Munro’s example, attempting to interfere in the politics of the Malankara Church when presented with a petition by a group of catanars led by Malpan Abraham. The Madras and Travancore governments resolved several succession crises of the Malankara Church, demonstrating not just the incorporation of the Syrian Christians into the colonial legal system but also the concern of colonial officials with ecclesiastical matters. These serve as examples of “the complex ways in which religion was, and to some extent still is, entangled with other imperial networks and relationships.”<sup>123</sup>

## Final Thoughts

Engagement with Oriental Churches played a key part of British missionary activity. As Wilbert Shenk points out, “a century before the launch of the modern mission movement, a group of visionaries dreamed of a movement that would unify Christian churches as they joined together for world evangelization. This grand vision, introduced in the 1690s, of linking world evangelization to the revitalization of the ancient

<sup>120</sup> Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 135.

<sup>121</sup> Yesudas, *Colonel John Munro in Travancore*, 48.

<sup>122</sup> Yesudas, *Colonel John Munro in Travancore*, 48.

<sup>123</sup> Hilary M. Carey, ed., *Empires of Religion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 3.

churches had an impressive durability. They insisted that the *ecumenical* and *missionary* dimensions of the *missio Dei* belonged together.<sup>124</sup> He attributes their ultimate failure to two shortcomings: that they had “only the most superficial understanding of the ‘ancient churches’” and that “they naively assumed that the ‘ancient churches’ would quickly and gladly receive the resources they had to offer;” they failed to understand “the need for patience and a profound knowledge of the tradition and history of these churches as prerequisites to any action on their part.”<sup>125</sup>

The missionaries derived hope for the success of their mission from the existence of an indigenous church, while lamenting at the same time the degree to which its Christianity had been “corrupted” by Indian society. They wished to build on the success of the Indian Church while stripping it of its Indianness, to extract the indigenous form of Christianity that had developed over the centuries and replace it with Protestant orthodoxy, to pour new Protestant wine into old Indian wineskins. Their tragic flaw was in being unable or unwilling to see that the Malankara Church owed its continued existence to the Nasranis’ ability to accommodate Christianity to Indian society and culture, that pouring in new wine would rupture the wineskins.

<sup>124</sup> Shenk, “‘Ancient Churches’ and Modern Missions in the Nineteenth Century,” 57.

<sup>125</sup> Shenk, “‘Ancient Churches’ and Modern Missions in the Nineteenth Century,” 57-58.

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