

Benjamin Bailey and the CMS in the Ecclesiastical Development of Kerala

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Abstract

It was in 1816 that Benjamin Bailey arrived in Kerala as part of the ‘Mission of Help’ to the ancient Syrian Christian Church of that state. These Christians trace their heritage back to the labours of the Apostle Thomas and are therefore also known as Thomas Christians. The Mission of Help had as its main goal the reformation and revival of this ancient Christian Church. The CMS did not wish, they claimed, to establish the Anglican Church in Kerala. The thesis appraises this Mission of Help and why the Syrian Christians ultimately brought it to an end in 1836. Firstly, theological differences between the Anglican Evangelicals of the CMS and the Oriental Orthodox Syrian Christians are assessed. It is argued that these differences were seriously underestimated by Bailey and his colleagues. Secondly, the Mission of Help was politicised through the influence of the East India Company Resident of Travancore Col. John Munro who desired to see the Syrians brought into the Anglican Church. Munro believed such an ecclesiastical union would also foster deeper political ties in an era of nascent colonialism. The thesis will also look at the legacies of the Mission of Help subsequent to 1836 in the development of Anglicanism in Kerala and reform movements within the Syrian Church. It will be argued that indigenous movements also help to explain some of the developments which took place and Bailey cannot therefore be wholly praised or blamed for these occurrences. In conclusion, some lessons will be drawn from this episode for contemporary debates about mission and empire, mission and ecclesiology and the nature and scope of mission.

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Abstract.....	6
Abbreviations.....	8
A Note on Transliteration	9
Introduction – Aims, Methodology and Overview	10
Chapter 1 - Benjamin Bailey and the CMS Mission of Help in Context.....	36
Chapter 2 - Differing Doctrines: Convictions on the Constants as the Mission of Help began (1811-18).57	57
Chapter 3 - Different Perspectives as the Mission of Help began: The Conversation and Counsel of Col. John Munro (1816-18)	87
Chapter 4 - The Call to Reform and Conversion, 1818-27	110
Chapter 5 - The Mission of Help Ends (1828-36).....	139
Chapter 6 - Benjamin Bailey and the Church in Kerala, 1836-50	165
Chapter 7 - The legacies of Benjamin Bailey and the Mission of Help.....	189
Chapter 8 - Conclusion: Historical, Theological and Missiological Reflections.....	215
Bibliography	237

Abbreviations

BMS – Baptist Missionary Society

CMS – Church Missionary Society

EIC – East India Company

LMS – London Missionary Society

MISC – Malabar Independent Syrian Church

SOC – Syrian Orthodox Church

SPCK – Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge

SPG – Society for the Propagation of the Gospel

A Note on Transliteration

In transliterating Malayalam or Syriac terms for titles such as *malpān* and *kattanār* I am following Robert Eric Frykenberg in his work *Christianity in India* (Oxford University Press, 2008). In quotations I preserve the original spelling. The same practice applies to place names, such as Kottayam, and to personal names.

Introduction – Aims, Methodology and Overview

Introduction

This thesis will seek to appraise an episode in mission history that has not been extensively researched, the Church Missionary Society's (CMS) Mission of Help to the Syrian Christian Community of Travancore.¹ A number of useful volumes, some of which are discussed below, have sought to familiarise us with the Syrian/Thomas Christians of Kerala. Their story in itself is fascinating as it is complex. This study, however, will look at this community insofar as they had interaction with the missionaries of the CMS in the early nineteenth century. John Fenwick, in his masterly study of the Malabar Independent Syrian Church (MISC), notes that there is “ample material to justify a new look at the Mission of Help in the early 19th century.”² These pages aim to provide such a fresh perspective on the Mission of Help. The focus will especially be on Benjamin Bailey (1791-1871) who, as part of this mission, translated the Scriptures into Malayalam. Bailey was also a leading figure in the eventual establishment of the Anglican Church in Kerala. Moreover, his influence on some Syrian Christians who remained in their own Church was considerable. For these reasons, as well his long service of over thirty years in Kerala, Bailey is the specific face of the Mission of Help as far as this project is concerned.

It would be helpful at this point to consider the beginning and end of the Mission of Help in brief compass. The chapters that follow will assess the various phases of the Mission and demonstrate why it came to an end after twenty years. It was in the years 1815-16 that the Rev. Marmaduke Thompson, Chair of the recently organised Madras Corresponding Committee of the CMS, and Col. John Munro, the East India Company (EIC) Resident of Travancore, were the architects within South India of this missionary endeavour. We will come to the details in due course, but suffice to note for now that both these men were keen to have missionaries at their disposal, if

¹ Travancore corresponds to the modern day state of Kerala, although also included parts of Tamil Nadu.

² John Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops: The Malabar Independent Syrian Church and its Place in the Story of the St Thomas Christians of South India*, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies, Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press (2009), 587. The MISC was one small faction of the Syrian Christian community who had their own Metropolitan Bishop and diocese around Thozhiyur. At various times this church had considerable influence in the whole Oriental Orthodox Syrian Christian community.

for different reasons. Munro had in 1815 established a College in Kottayam, then a small village, for the training of Syrian clergy and the general education of their young people for government roles. Dissatisfied with the initial leadership of the college by senior Syrian clergy, Munro believed the solution was to have an English clergyman in charge.³ The CMS Committee in Madras, meanwhile, chaired by Marmaduke Thompson, expressed their wishes thus:

We could greatly wish for an establishment there, of three missionaries at least. Soon might we then hope, through Divine Mercy, under their Ministry *and the patronage of the Resident*, that the Syrian Churches might revive; and Travancore not only yield a large increase of Native Christians, but also supply Missionaries, peculiarly qualified above Europeans themselves, to a large extent of country, and gather in multitudes to the fold of Christ.⁴

In this quotation it is clear that Thompson was most eager to have the political clout of the Residency behind the missionary endeavours in Kerala. At the behest of Munro Thomas Norton, destined for Ceylon, was diverted by the CMS to Travancore.⁵ Norton was joined shortly thereafter by Benjamin Bailey, Joseph Fenn and Henry Baker. The latter three were to become known as ‘the Travancore Trio’ and were most directly involved in the attempts to ‘help’ the Syrian Church to reform along the lines Thompson had desired to see.

More background will be given on the Syrian Christian community in Chapter 1.⁶ At this point it is sufficient to say that the congregations Bailey was seeking to influence were part of the Oriental Orthodox family of churches and were under the control of the Patriarch of Antioch, with the exception of the MISC mentioned above and a small Chaldean Orthodox faction in Thrissur. The CMS missionaries and the Syrian Christians worked together with some degree of

³ On the establishment and early leadership of the college by Syrian clergy see Babu Cherian, *Towards Modernity: The Story of the First College in India: The Impact of CMS College, Kottayam on Kerala Society and How it Paved the Way for Modernity*, Delhi: Media House (2014), Chapters 1 and 2.

⁴ *Missionary Register*, 1816, 387, my emphasis. This periodical was subtitled: *Containing the Principal Transactions of the Various Institutions for Propagating the Gospel: With the Proceedings, At Large, of the Church Missionary Society* and was published in London by L. B. Seeley. The articles generally are not assigned a specific author, so therefore will be referenced simply by year and page number.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ The Syrian Christians of Kerala are also known as Thomas Christians as they believe that their origins lie in the evangelistic work of the apostle Thomas in Kerala. Although ‘Thomas Christian’ is their preferred designation, ‘Syrian Christian’ is also a very common usage and was the term used most commonly by the missionaries. Therefore we shall refer in these pages mainly to the Syrians.

understanding and mutual support until in 1836, after a growing period of tension, the Syrian Jacobite Church made the following unilateral statement:

we, the Jacobite Syrians, being subject to the Supremacy of the Patriarch of Antioch, and observing, as we do, the Liturgies and ordinances instituted by the prelates sent under his command, cannot deviate from such Liturgies and ordinances and maintain a discipline contrary thereto; and a man of one persuasion being not authorized to preach and admonish in the Church of another following a different persuasion without the permission of the respective Patriarchs, we cannot permit the same to be done amongst us.⁷

This *padiyola* (agreement) spelled the end for the Mission of Help but not for CMS involvement in Kerala.⁸ This separation had been coming. In Chapters 2, 3 and 4 we will see how there were substantial doctrinal differences between the CMS missionaries and the Syrians. In addition, Col. Munro's influence ensured the Mission of Help was being politicised to serve the interests of nascent British indirect rule. Discussion of the events leading up to and surrounding the breach itself will be dealt with in detail in Chapter 5. It was in consequence of this breach that the establishment of the Anglican Church in Travancore began in earnest, as shall be demonstrated in Chapter 6. The CMS missionaries were not intent originally on establishing Anglicanism, but on reforming the ancient Syrian Church itself. Meanwhile the missionary involvement also birthed reformation movements within the Syrian Church that led eventually to the secession of the Mar Thoma Church in 1889. These developments will be discussed in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 will draw conclusions regarding how this episode informs debate about mission and empire, mission and ecclesiology and the scope and nature of mission. In discussing the key features of the Mission of Help and its legacy, the overall theme will be the role of Benjamin Bailey and the CMS in the Ecclesiastical Development of Kerala.

Aims and Objectives

In this introductory section four aims and objectives will be presented for this thesis:

⁷ Official translation of the Mavelikara *Padiyola*, Appendix H in P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians and the Church Missionary Society, 1816-1840*, Published by his grandchildren, Kottayam, (2015). Originally published by Kottayam CMS Press in 1935, 421.

⁸ The *padiyola* was, of course, an 'agreement' amongst the Syrians themselves. It reflected deep disagreement with the CMS missionaries!

1. To construct an authentic historical narrative of the CMS Mission of Help to the Syrian Church in Travancore, with particular reference to the work of Benjamin Bailey.
2. To assess the influence of theological and political factors on the success of this mission.
3. To show how the Mission of Help and its aftermath shaped the ecclesiastical landscape in Kerala.
4. To demonstrate the impact of this study for debates surrounding ecclesiology and mission today.

In doing so wider debates into which this study speaks are also introduced. For that reason considerably more space is given to discussing aims 1 and 2 than aims 3 and 4. It should also be noted that the first three of these aims are dealt with throughout Chapters 2 to 7 which follow. The fourth and final aim is discussed mainly in the concluding chapter. Hence some chapters will deal more exclusively with one or other of these aims. For example Chapter 3 will mainly deal with the second of these aims, while Chapter 7 will deal mainly with aim 3.

1. *To construct an authentic historical narrative of the CMS Mission of Help to the Syrian Church in Travancore, with particular reference to the work of Benjamin Bailey.*

Noting the need for an authentic historical narrative is not to suggest that previous histories have been inaccurate. Yet, as we shall see in the brief review to follow, previous attempts to write about the Mission of Help have had limitations. In some cases, the Mission of Help is dealt with only briefly as part of a much larger historical overview. In other cases the analysis is too close to being either an official CMS account on the one hand, or a Syrian Orthodox polemic against the CMS on the other. Whilst this thesis cannot claim complete objectivity, nevertheless a conscious effort is made to build upon the strengths of these previous works and so construct a more balanced historical narrative. Moreover, previous histories of this missionary episode have generally not given sustained analysis of the multi-faceted factors which accounted for the Mission of Help's end. Here we shall observe how theological and cultural differences between the CMS and the Syrians combined with politicisation of the Mission's goals conspired to sow seeds of trouble from the beginning. At this point, however, it is appropriate to comment on some previous accounts of the Mission of Help.

The Mission of Help has been noted in passing in generic histories of mission and been dealt with in some detail in other volumes. An example of the former is Stephen Neill's treatment in his work *A History of Christian Missions* (1964). Neill noted that the first cohort of missionaries, by whom he meant Norton, Bailey, Fenn and Baker, generally followed the instructions they had been given to serve the ancient Church, train its priests and translate Scripture, but not to interfere in its inner life. Changes of leadership in the Syrian Church and of personnel amongst the missionaries contributed to the breach noted above in 1836. For Neill, the subsequent involvement of the CMS in Kerala was questionable if understandable. He wrote: "The missionaries, naturally but perhaps unwisely, stayed on to educate Christians and to evangelize the non-Christians." This led to the formation of the Anglican Church in Kerala and eventually the Mar Thoma Church in 1889.⁹ Neill, therefore, regrets the divisive role that the Mission of Help and its aftermath had upon the church in Kerala, whilst noting hopeful signs in the mid-twentieth century of greater evangelistic zeal amongst the various Syrian Church factions.¹⁰ To what extent these divisions, or indeed this greater evangelistic zeal, can be attributed to the CMS missionaries are questions that merit attention in these pages as we seek to construct an authentic historical narrative. Chapters 6 and 7 in particular will consider the influence of Bailey on leading figures within the Syrian Church who advocated for reform. Neill's treatment in *A History of Christian Missions*, therefore, is necessarily brief given that he is attempting to give an overview of the whole missionary enterprise. Yet he raises important questions about the CMS role and legacy in Kerala that we deal with in these pages.

The CMS centenary historian Eugene Stock, meanwhile, gives some attention to the Mission of Help in the first of his four volumes. In discussing efforts to revive the Eastern Churches, Stock saw in the CMS a general willingness to work with traditional episcopal churches. He observed how in 1812 a report of the CMS Committee had found that "the Syrian Christians of Malayala ... have maintained a regular Episcopal Succession from the earliest ages, and in all important

⁹ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions: The Pelican History of the Church* 6, Harmondsworth, Penguin (1964), 270-271. Quote is from 271. For more detail see Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India, Vol. 2: 1707-1858*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1984).

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 272.

points accord with the faith of the Primitive Church.”¹¹ As we will see in Chapters 1 and 2, the influence of Claudio Buchanan was highly influential in the outlook of the CMS at this point. Claudio Buchanan (1766-1815) was a Scottish Presbyterian in background. He studied theology at Queen’s College Cambridge, however, and was nurtured by such Anglican Evangelicals as Henry Thornton of the Clapham Sect, John Newton, and Charles Simeon. He was ordained in the Church of England and appointed an East India Company Chaplain.¹² The view of Stock, however, was that such rosy views as the likes of Buchanan held were in fact mistaken. Hence, as he reflects on the end of the Mission of Help in 1836, he believed that at that point there was less desire than ever for the purifying and reform of the Syrian Church and that the termination of the partnership actually was liberating for the CMS missionaries.¹³ Stock’s work is a comprehensive overview of the first one-hundred years of CMS activity. As such he cannot give sustained comment on the Mission of Help. Moreover, the analysis he does provide tends to lay all the blame on Syrian obduracy for the Mission of Help ending. The present thesis will be more aware of failures in thinking and approach on the part of the CMS.

Leslie W. Brown, writing in 1956, gives us a detailed account of *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*. A former Principal of the Kerala United Theological Seminary, Brown sought to give us a sympathetic and impartial history of this ancient Christian community and the CMS mission to them. Brown believed that previous histories had been inadequate and partial.¹⁴ Brown’s volume considers the history of the Thomas Christians from ancient times, their social life and their faith and practice into the twentieth century. He also assesses their contacts with foreigners, whether missionaries or armies. For Brown, such contact had ensured that the expression of Christian faith had never become truly Indian in the Syrian Church. Yet, ironically, he believed that “in social life and custom the Church is completely Indian.”¹⁵ Brown is therefore

¹¹ 1812 Report of the CMS Committee, cited in Eugene H. Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society: Its Environment, Its Men and its Work*, Volume 1, London: Church Missionary Society (1899), 232. Malayala is synonymous with Kerala and derives from the language spoken in what is now Kerala, Malayalam.

¹² Allan K. Davidson, *Evangelicals and Attitudes to India 1786-1813: Missionary Publicity and Claudio Buchanan*, Sutton Courtenay Press (1990), 56.

¹³ Stock, *History*, 234, 325-326.

¹⁴ Leslie W. Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas: An Account of the Ancient Syrian Church of Malabar*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1956), 1-2.

¹⁵ Ibid, 3.

highlighting the tensions of which Bailey and his colleagues were not sufficiently aware. On the one hand this ancient church had, it appears, suffered much at the hand of foreigners. On the other hand, cultural practices from the non-Christian population remained embedded in the popular consciousness. The result was a faith that was not critically applied to the Syrians' own cultural context and a church that was vulnerable to external exploitation. These factors made the Syrians wary, even in the early days, of the CMS missionaries.¹⁶ Brown therefore shows a greater awareness than Stock of the need to understand this missionary encounter from the Syrian point of view. Along with later scholars such as Penelope Carson and Susan Bayly,¹⁷ Brown is also helpful in showing us how Christianity was inculcated amongst the Thomas Christians. Such inculcation is, moreover, a feature of Church life amongst the Syrians that the missionaries had not taken into account. It is to some of Kerala's historians of these events that we now turn. In doing so, it shall be evident that there are differences in perspective amongst indigenous interpreters of these events. The twin dangers of listening exclusively to either Western triumphalist views of this missionary encounter, or essentialist post-colonial criticism will therefore be avoided.

The most comprehensive English language work on these events from a Keralan perspective is by Judge P. Cherian (1867-1951) and is entitled *The Malabar Syrians and the Church Missionary Society 1816-1840*. First published in 1935, this work will be quoted much in these pages and has extensive appendices of primary sources as well as a thorough, if somewhat overly long, narrative of the events. The book was born in the disputes that have all too often been characteristic of church life in Kerala. Cherian was entrusted with a case relating to Kallada, also known as Munro Island, which apparently was successfully resolved. In working on this legal case, Cherian had access to many of the primary sources which helped him write his history. It is worth noting that he was the son of Thiruvalla Pulimoottil Idicherian Punnoose, described as "a strong advocate of Reformation theology." It is also of relevance that he was an

¹⁶ For an account of the modern period in the life of the Thomas Christians, i.e. the nineteenth century, see *Ibid*, Chapter 6.

¹⁷ Penelope Carson, 'Christianity, Colonialism, and Hinduism in Kerala: Integration, Adaptation, or Confrontation?', in Robert Eric Frykenberg (ed), *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2003), 127-154; Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700-1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1989).

honorary life governor of the CMS and was a vice-president of the CMS Home Committee. While no doubt “a scholar, a committed Christian and a renowned Judge,”¹⁸ Cherian had a tendency, based on his own churchmanship, to favour the CMS missionaries in his narrative, even though he is recognised as factually accurate.¹⁹ Useful as his history is, it is hardly impartial. For the purposes of this study, however, Cherian provides a wealth of information on the background and chronology of relevant events as well as a useful series of appendices containing primary sources. We shall therefore make extensive use of this volume whilst acknowledging its shortcomings, even in terms of the primary sources he chooses to include in his appendices. Cherian has nevertheless set a benchmark for more recent writers and K.M. George, for one, leans heavily on Cherian’s content and perspective.²⁰

More critical perspectives on the Mission of Help generally come from Syrian Orthodox or Mar Thoma writers. A key figure in this tradition of writing is E.M. Philip in his 1907 work *The Indian Church of St. Thomas*. Philip’s is an important voice since he came from a priestly family and served as a one-time secretary to the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Association. He drew on diaries and manuscripts of his grandfather Rev. Edavazhikal Philipose Catanar and his uncle Rev. Edavazhikal Philipose Chorpiscopa “both of whom were priests of tact and literary attainment among the Syrians.”²¹ Moreover, his grandfather as a young priest was present with senior clergy at meetings with the missionaries and Col. Munro.

Useful as Philip is in getting the Syrian perspective on events surrounding the Mission of Help, the work is strongly biased against the missionaries. He practically acknowledges so much in his prefatory remarks. He was aware that some may consider his views on the CMS overly harsh, but believed they were subjected to scrutiny and contemporary CMS workers at the time of writing could not exonerate the missionaries, despite their efforts. Philip said of these attempts,

¹⁸ Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, iii, from a brief biographical sketch at the beginning of the work. No author details of the sketch are given.

¹⁹ See C.P. Mathew and M.M. Thomas, *The Indian Churches of St. Thomas*, Delhi: ISPCK (2005 [1967]), 80.

²⁰ See K.M. George, *Tradition Verses Reform: Church Missionary Society ‘Mission of Help’ 1816-1840*, Kottayam: Benjamin Bailey Foundation (2013).

²¹ E.M. Philip, *The Indian Church of St. Thomas*, Kottayam (1907), iii. For an example of how Philip uses this family oral testimony see the discussion in Chapter 3 below.

“ultimately they failed, and retired from the field of contest.”²² Philip’s work therefore serves a polemical purpose with the reformers within the Syrian Church also coming in for vitriolic criticism.²³ More recent writers without a pro-mission bias acknowledge that Philip is overly critical of the missionaries of the CMS.²⁴ John Fenwick, meanwhile, notes that the Edavazhikal family of E.M. Philip had a long history of engaging in polemical campaigns and disputes.²⁵ Nevertheless, and perhaps because of these features of Philip’s writing, his work serves as a source of primary tradition from a Syrian Jacobite perspective. He also deals extensively with the Mission of Help itself and the reform movements within the Syrian Church. As these are the subjects of the chapters which follow, Philip’s is therefore an extremely useful work for this present study.

C.V. Cherian’s 2003 work *Orthodox Christianity in India*, gives a slightly more balanced critique of the Mission of Help. Cherian was a one-time professor of history at CMS College, Kottayam, and an ordained priest in the Malankara Orthodox Church. He was not, therefore, from the Jacobite faction represented by Philip. The book is endorsed by His Holiness Baselius Mar Thoma Mathews II, Metropolitan of the Malankara Orthodox Church, as follows: “This book clearly brings out the fact that the Malankara Orthodox Church was an independent and autocephalous Church strictly adhering to the Orthodox faith until the arrival of the Portuguese on the Malabar coast around the close of the fifteenth century.”²⁶ It was then, Cherian goes on to argue, that the influence of Antioch over this independent church in India began. Cherian’s work, therefore, is to be understood as part of the internal debates between churches of the Syrian tradition in Kerala.

Cherian provides a nuanced account of the interplay between the missionaries and the Syrians. He particularly seems to appreciate the pressure that Benjamin Bailey was under in his early days from the forceful Col. Munro. He notes, for example, that “Bailey in cooperation with the

²² Ibid, iv.

²³ See the discussion in Chapter 7 below.

²⁴ Mathew and Thomas, *The Indian Churches*, 80.

²⁵ Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops*, 286-287.

²⁶ C.V. Cherian, *Orthodox Christianity in India: A History of the Malankara Orthodox Church AD52-2002*, Kottayam: Academic Publishers (2003), vii.

Metropolitan tried to carry out the arrangements for the improvement of the Church without giving offense to anybody.” Munro, on other hand, saw the missionaries as intermediaries between himself and the Syrian Christians and as key to his wishes being carried out.²⁷ Cheriyan, therefore, whilst very much a defender of the Syrian version of events, shows nuance in understanding the external factors that influenced the approach of the earlier and later missionaries. While Bailey was under political pressure from Munro, later missionaries such as Joseph Peet and W.J. Woodcock came to Travancore as the Anglo-Catholic Oxford movement was gaining a foothold in Britain and this coloured their views of the Mission of Help’s cooperation with the Syrians.²⁸ These issues will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 5 respectively.

This brief review of previous work on this missionary episode has highlighted something of the CMS Mission of Help’s complexity and the challenge which Benjamin Bailey and his colleagues faced. This is why the first main aim of this study is to construct an authentic historical narrative of the CMS Mission of Help to the Syrian Church in Travancore, with particular reference to the work of Benjamin Bailey.

2. To assess the influence of theological and political factors on the success of this mission.

This aim will be fulfilled through providing a theological history of this missionary episode. It has been argued that this is an approach to writing mission history that is as old as the New Testament itself. Stephen Neill believed that Luke has been underrated as a historian and that one of his decisive contributions was to demonstrate that “sacred history must be related to the history of the world.”²⁹ Such a methodology has also been advocated by Timothy Yates in his volume *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century*, who argued: “At its best, then, the study of the theory and practice of the Christian mission will attend with care to the historical setting and much of the interest will lie in the interplay, or dynamic relationship, between the setting and the message or messenger in a given society.”³⁰ While the historical context is of great importance for Yates, “missiology is at its best when history and theology are held in tension and there is a

²⁷ Ibid, 240-241.

²⁸ Ibid, 247.

²⁹ Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 22.

³⁰ Timothy Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1994), 5.

continuing oscillation between historical context and Christian input, so that the analysis of the form in which the gospel is expressed, the theory of the mission, is related firmly to the setting.”³¹ It is to be hoped that in these pages such oscillations between history and theology will be unobtrusive. Yet theological reflection will be present to some degree throughout as understanding theological differences are vital to trace how the historical trajectory of the Mission of Help evolved as it did. Chapter 2 deals specifically with the issue of theological differences by seeking to reconstruct the working creed of the Syrians at the time of the Mission of Help and contrasting this to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. The latter would have been the doctrinal formulation that Bailey would have most identified with. These differences were ultimately at the heart of the call for conversion of the Syrian Church which Bailey issued in Chapter 4. Moreover the Mission’s end in 1836 was in significant ways an outworking of these differences, as we shall see in Chapter 5.

Brian Stanley also encourages and helpfully exemplifies the need for such oscillation between narrative and theology. In his work on the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910, for example, he notes that in dealing with the commissions of the conference his work “may appear to oscillate between detailed chronological narrative and perspectival reflection on the issues thrown up by the Commission reports.”³² In other words Stanley is recognising the need for reflection on vital issues of theological moment that shaped the remit and occasionally endangered the wide co-operation that was a feature of that conference. The theological issues that lay behind discussions on what missionary enterprises were included in official statistics and which potentially endangered Anglo-Catholic involvement included such weighty matters as the goals of Christian mission and, most fundamentally of all, “[j]ust what is a Christian?”³³ We shall see as we proceed in this study that such theological questions were very much in the mind of Bailey and his colleagues as they engaged in the Mission of Help. Similarly, in writing this

³¹ Ibid.

³² Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910: Studies in the History of Christian Missions*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (2009), Kindle Edition, Loc. 109.

³³ Brian Stanley, ‘Defining the Boundaries of Christendom: The Two Worlds of the World Missionary Conference, 1910,’ *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 30:4 (2006), 171-176., ref., 171. See also Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference*, Chapter 3.

history, theological as well as historiographical reflection will enable a fuller understanding of why the mission proceeded as it did.

In charting this theological history our focus is particularly on Benjamin Bailey for the reasons outlined above: namely his role in translating the Bible into Malayalam, his contact with the Syrian Churches and his eventual involvement in establishing the Anglican Church in Kerala. At this point, however, the approach of focusing on a particular individual needs to be explained. Yates pointed out that this is an approach that has long antecedent in mission history. He asserted: “missiology will provide the kind of graphic pen-portraits of individuals which Luke gives us in [John] the Baptist or the more recognisably missionary figure of Paul: but this will be done in a wider setting, so that the Christian mission is seen in historical context.”³⁴ In looking at Bailey, and at his colleagues, both the theological and political pressures they faced in conducting their missionary labours come clearly into view. For example, the correspondence between Bailey and Col. Munro, which will be investigated in Chapter 3, throws considerable light on how the Mission of Help had somewhat precarious prospects of succeeding in its original aims. Moreover, the rise of the Oxford Movement within Anglicanism ensured that younger missionaries who later joined Bailey in Travancore were much less sympathetic to the whole idea of a Mission of Help to a church they feared was decidedly Roman in its doctrines and practices. These developments will be traced in Chapter 5. In these ways the focus on individual actors in mission history helps to shed light on the various contextual factors that shaped their contributions.

In terms of the political factors that were brought to bear on the Mission of Help the question of mission in relation to empire needs to be introduced at this point. The Mission of Help took place against the backdrop of the EIC’s increasingly political role in India generally and Travancore in particular. Chapter 3 is the most appropriate place to discuss imperial relationships in Travancore. Here, however, some general comment on how this study contributes to the discussion of the relationship between mission and empire is necessary. Given the complexity of

³⁴ Yates, *Christian Mission*, 5.

these relationships, such contributions are welcome and needed.³⁵ It was certainly not the case that the Bible and the flag always went hand-in-hand.³⁶

Yet it is a widespread perception that mission and empire were inextricably linked. For this reason the nature of mission and even the terminology of mission have been questioned in missiological thinking over the last century. Michael Stroope, a one-time Southern Baptist missionary to Sri Lanka, sees such language as a construct borne out of medieval Catholic and later Protestant forms of seeking to Christianise the imperially subjugated lands of Western Christendom. Therefore he argues that Christian witness requires “a transition to more appropriate, more useful language. Such a shift is necessary because the heart of the ‘missionary problem’ is the problem of mission language.” For Stroope, such language had its birth in colonial conquest: “*The colonial legacy* of mission is difficult to overcome and cannot be casually dismissed.” Therefore terms such as mission and missionary, for Stroope, are terminology that is best discarded: “Rather than helpful language that facilitates, mission is a liability that distorts. Rather than creating possibilities and opening doors, mission limits and restricts. Rather than clarifying Scripture and Christian tradition, mission infuses both with disturbing noise.”³⁷ It is questionable, however, if such a change in language is likely to solve the historical problems that the language of mission has supposedly created. For Stroope, pilgrim witness is the language he offers as alternative.³⁸ However, the terminology of pilgrimage, as Stroope himself acknowledges, has been abused by crusading empires.³⁹ It may well be abused again in the future if a new Christendom arises in those parts of the world where the Church is in advance. Like much other language of Christian and everyday discourse, however, mission seems to have stuck and will therefore be used throughout this contribution to Mission Studies without further appraisal of its appropriateness.

³⁵ See, for example, Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, (2004).

³⁶ See Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Leicester: Apollos, (1990).

³⁷ Michael W. Stroope, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic (2017), 347, 348, 349. His emphasis.

³⁸ Ibid, Epilogue.

³⁹ Ibid, 202-203, 207-208.

It was also in response to the challenges posed by mission's supposed complicity with Western imperialism that the language of mission as *missio Dei* has become prominent from the mid-twentieth century. The concept of *missio Dei* is often seen as originating in Karl Barth's placing of missiology as a subset of Trinitarian doctrine rather than as a subset of ecclesiology or soteriology. The idea gained particular prominence after the Willingen conference of the International Missionary Council in 1952. Bosch explains

Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God ... The classical doctrine of the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another 'movement': Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. As far as missionary thinking was concerned, this linking with the doctrine of the Trinity constituted an important innovation.⁴⁰

Other missiologists who have contributed to this concept include the late 'missionary bishop' of Madras, Lesslie Newbigin. One of his key contributions has been to ground mission in Trinitarian theology. Indeed he argued "[t]he mission of the church is to be understood, can only be rightly understood, in terms of the Trinitarian model."⁴¹ Newbigin unpacks his Trinitarian model in *The Open Secret*, which is a stimulating distillation of his teaching on the theology of mission. There he argues "[t]he mission of the church is in fact the church's obedient participation in that action of the Spirit by which the confession of Jesus as Lord becomes the authentic confession of every new people, each in its own tongue."⁴² Indeed across the divisions and denominational spectrums of the church, the concept of *missio Dei* has prevailed. Kirsteen Kim notes "[t]his view of mission assumed something of a consensus in the late twentieth century."⁴³

Although *missio Dei* is seen as safeguarding against old colonial notions of mission, where mission was widened to include imperial concerns, it should be noted that theorists of this school

⁴⁰ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis (1991), 390.

⁴¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, London: SPCK (1989), 118.

⁴² Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, London: SPCK (1995), especially chapters 4-6. The quotation is on page 20.

⁴³ Kirsteen Kim, *Joining in with The Spirit: Connecting World Church and Local Mission*, London: SCM (2012), 29.

have also widened the definition of mission considerably. Bosch, in the long final chapter of his *Magnum Opus*, deals with thirteen elements of an emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm.⁴⁴ These include Mission as the Church-With-Others, Mission as Mediating Salvation, Mission as the Quest for Justice, Mission as Evangelism, Mission as Witness to People of Other Living Faiths and Mission as Action in Hope. More conservative evangelical conceptions of mission would probably be keen to stress the primacy of evangelism, salvation and witness. One such treatment begins “Missions exists because worship doesn’t.”⁴⁵ The focus of missions is here very much seen as reconciling humans and God, of making worshippers out of rebels. The criticism may come that a narrower focus makes missions one-dimensional and does not sufficiently take into account the Scriptures as a whole.⁴⁶

A potential problem with the *missio Dei* paradigm is that the focus on what mission is can be lost just as much as in an imperial context, albeit in different ways. The *missio Dei* paradigm is in some ways an elusive concept. This is recognised by some of its own proponents. Wolfgang Gunther has said that *missio Dei* functions as a “container term, which is filled differently depending upon each individual author.”⁴⁷ John Flett adds that “a wide variety of seemingly incongruous positions can all lay claim to the name *missio Dei*.”⁴⁸ J. Andrew Kirk had earlier warned:

God’s *missio* (to use the word’s Latin root) has become a popular place to begin an enquiry into the nature of mission ... Its primary reference is to the purposes and activities of God in and for the whole universe. The wideness of its scope means that it has become a tag on which an enormous range of meaning has been hung. Legitimately and illegitimately the *missio Dei* has been used to advance all kinds of missiological agendas.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 368ff.

⁴⁵ John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, Leicester: IVP, (1993), 11

⁴⁶ For example Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*, Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press (2006), 306.

⁴⁷ Cited in John G Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth and the Nature of Christian Community*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids (2010), 5.

⁴⁸ Flett, *The Witness of God*, 6, 10.

⁴⁹ J. Andrew Kirk, *What is Mission? Theological Explorations*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd (1999), 25.

Michael Stroope, albeit somewhat allergic to the *missio* in *missio Dei*, shares this concern that it is difficult to pin down what the term means. Stroope ponders whether *missio Dei* means God planting churches? Or his special work amongst non-Christians? Or his sending of missionaries? Or, indeed, “all of his actions in all of his creation in all places?”⁵⁰ Stroope fears that “[r]ather than adding clarity to mission, *missio Dei* appears to be a theological veil, a way to justify talk about ourselves with talk about God.” His verdict is therefore damning: “As an inexact, and thus vague, concept, *missio Dei* is a wide gate through which almost any concern, issue, or cause can traffic – ecclesiology, ecology, ecumenics, liberation, justice … *Missio Dei* is everywhere and means everything.”⁵¹ So nailing down this paradigm can be like the proverbial nailing of jelly to a wall. Whether, therefore, the language of *missio Dei* can prevent the old excesses of the terminology of mission and missionary from the imperial period seems open to question. In fact the language is open to manipulation in the service of multiple, sometimes contradictory, agendas and as a means of authorising them.

These pages will, however, provide some theological and historical appraisal of the missionary task in the light of this episode. Granting Stroope’s point that language is important, it certainly could be argued that the whole idea of a ‘Mission of Help’ speaks of a paternalistic relationship from the outset. C.P. Mathew and M.M. Thomas have written on missionaries to India generally: “they often exhibit a kind of confidence in the superiority of their own heritage, habits and customs which leads them to assume that these will be, or at any rate should be, adopted by all people of good sense, if given sufficient time for reflection and choice.”⁵² While Benjamin Bailey, Joseph Fenn and Henry Baker displayed patience in their desires for the reformation of the Syrian Church, as we will see in Chapter 4, there can be little doubt that they viewed their Anglican and Evangelical Protestant tradition as far superior. Col. Munro was much less patient and urged immediate reformation. Yet in dealing with an existing Church that professes Christianity, and in the context of a budding colonial relationship between the nations involved, it was no doubt extremely difficult to avoid a paternalistic superiority in this and similar

⁵⁰ Stroope, *Transcending Mission*, 17.

⁵¹ Ibid, 18.

⁵² Mathew and Thomas, *The Indian Churches*, 61.

missionary enterprises. Throughout the thesis, therefore, the influence of theological and political factors will be assessed in relation to the Mission of Help's progress.

3. To show how the Mission of Help and its aftermath shaped the ecclesiastical landscape in Kerala.

Writing around the bicentenary of the CMS, the then general secretary Diana Witts noted “partner churches and mission agencies have been trying hard to overcome patterns of paternalism and dependency inherited from the past.”⁵³ The realities of such patterns have been hard to shake. Yet, as Kevin Ward points out, this has not been the whole story. Rather, Ward argues, the missionary expansion of Christianity has been a shared enterprise from the beginning. The establishment of churches, for example, “could never have been accomplished without the active initiatives of local people, who freely appropriated the Christian message for themselves and commended that message both within their own societies and beyond.” Indeed such locals were often the “driving force” in the broad range of mission activities.⁵⁴ In this study considerable evidence is uncovered to show how this was so in Bailey’s mission to Travancore, both in the ‘Mission of Help’ phase and afterwards. This will be demonstrated especially in Chapters 6 and 7 which follow. The appropriation of CMS teaching helped to explain the reformation movement within the Syrian Church associated with such figures as Abraham *Malpān* and his nephew Mathew. Even this movement, however, arguably had roots in wider society and the missionaries were not essential to reformation of some kind taking place. Benjamin Bailey, however, through his work as a translator and preacher, was instrumental in shaping the precise forms the ecclesiastical reformation would take.

4. To demonstrate the impact of this study for debates surrounding ecclesiology and mission today.

This final aim will be discussed in Chapter 8 in light of the historical example we have before us throughout the thesis. The aspect of ecclesiology which is particularly relevant for present

⁵³ Cited in Kevin Ward, ‘Introduction,’ in Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley (eds.), *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799-1999*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and Richmond: Curzon Press (2000), 1-12, ref., 6.

⁵⁴ Ward, ‘Introduction’, 7.

purposes relates to ecumenism and partnership for mission. In brief, some contemporary writers, for example, Norman Thomas and Wilbert Shenk, see the activities of the CMS and other agencies with respect to ancient Christian churches as being proto-ecumenical initiatives.⁵⁵ The analysis of both Thomas and Shenk runs the risk of being somewhat anachronistic when it comes to the ecumenical movement as it has emerged since the mid-twentieth century. Nevertheless, there are two main practical impacts to be considered. Firstly, this historical episode underlines the need for theological clarity when seeking to establish any kind of partnership for mission. What these pages testify to repeatedly is that there was a lack of such clarity in the CMS approach to the Syrian Christians of Kerala. Secondly, if such partnership is to produce desirable results, then there must also be open and honest exchanges between the partners involved. This means that the calls for reform and conversion that we see, for example, in Chapter 4 are a necessary part of true ecumenical exchange. The goal must be mutual sharpening in understanding the gospel and the Church's mission. However influenced by political and imperial context, or however much misunderstanding there may have been, and however much personality may have intruded in the relationship, the challenges issued by the CMS to the Syrians were not in themselves illegitimate.

These, then, are the aims of this thesis, which in some respects are interlinked. In constructing this historical narrative, it is impossible to avoid the theological and political factors which influenced the success of the Mission of Help. Likewise, the impact of the Mission of Help on the ecclesiastical landscape of Kerala has abiding lessons for ecclesiological thinking and missionary practice today. Aims 1, 2 and 3 are worked out in the thesis as a whole. Aim 4 is mainly considered in Chapter 8, but where appropriate application of this historical example to contemporary debates can be made throughout the thesis this is done.

⁵⁵ Norman E. Thomas, *Missions and Unity: Lessons from History, 1792-2010*, Eugene OR: Cascade Books (2010), 8-10; Wilbert R. Shenk "Ancient Churches" and Modern Missions in the Nineteenth Century,' in Richard Fox Young (ed), *India and the Indianness of Christianity: Essays on Understanding – Historical, Theological, and Biographical – in Honor of Robert Eric Frykenberg*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans (2009), 41-58.

Methodology

Two aspects of methodology warrant discussion at this point, namely, the use of archives and secondly, the use of voices from Kerala. Although the latter are generally taken from later reflection on these events, they nevertheless do offset somewhat the danger of hearing only the official CMS voice through their unpublished archive material, as well as in periodicals such as the *Missionary Register*. In this thesis these Keralan voices serve a vital function in giving us a more rounded picture of how the Mission of Help was in fact received amongst Syrian Christians. What can be observed is that there was diversity of opinion amongst various Syrian writers, as, in fact, there was amongst Anglicans themselves, as to the benefits or otherwise of the CMS Mission of Help. Simplistic praise or blame of the activities of Bailey and his colleagues therefore will not be attempted in these pages. The legacy is complex, and the Syrian Christians themselves have not a unified view of the Mission of Help.

1. The use of archives

The primary source material for this research was unpublished archival material related to Bailey, his colleagues and the Mission of Help. This is held in the Cadbury Research Library at Birmingham University. For Bailey the archive includes letters to the Madras Corresponding Committee of the CMS, to the London Headquarters, a collection of letters between himself and Colonel Munro, various other letters from throughout his time in Kerala and a personal journal which ran for a significant part of 1821. Bailey's colleagues Norton, Fenn and Baker all have similar archives of their own held in the Cadbury Research Library which were consulted when necessary to throw light on Bailey's activities.⁵⁶ Kevin Ward sees enormous value in missionary archives, of which he believes the CMS Archive is amongst "the richest and best ordered of all mission resources."⁵⁷ It hardly needs to be said, of course, that neither the archives, nor those who interpret them are unbiased. Ward makes this helpful comment: "The biases and preconceptions with which the missionary was likely to approach other societies and cultures can

⁵⁶ John Fenwick notes other potentially relevant archives, in both the UK and India, in *The Forgotten Bishops*, 4-6. There is scope therefore for much further research on these events to be done. I have on occasion quoted from primary sources that Fenwick uses, with appropriate acknowledgement.

⁵⁷ Ward, 'Introduction', 4.

be openly examined and taken into account from the different perspectives and biases of modern scholarship.”⁵⁸ Approaching the archive critically, however, does not negate the value of missionary archives. Ward is careful to note that missionaries, in terms of their knowledge of peoples and languages, often are unsurpassed as historical witnesses.⁵⁹ So much is recognised even by such radical deconstructionists of missionary endeavour as Jean and John Comaroff. They fully acknowledge “the importance both of the missionary impact and of the creative appropriation and reconstruction of missionary Christianity” by the Tswana people about whom they wrote.⁶⁰

The postcolonial theorist Antoinette Burton challenges researchers to recognise what they themselves bring to the archives. She notes “[r]esearch, writing, teaching … are embodied experiences in ways that belie claims to total objectivity for the historian even as they require, of course, responsible, self-aware interpretive methods.”⁶¹ Moreover she highlights that such official archives as will be used in this thesis can themselves influence historians to produce historical accounts that do not give sufficient weight to those on the margins. Such a dynamic, Burton argues, requires reading against the grain of what, at face value, is presented in the archives.⁶²

The missiologist Stanley H. Skreslet applies this kind of postcolonial approach to mission history, arguing it fits in with the critical ethnography approach to history which has developed since the late twentieth century. He too urges reading archives against the grain “with an eye for supporting characters and hidden themes.” The reason why this approach can be useful is fairly apparent. Skreslet cautions “[e]specially when using materials created by missionaries (or sending organizations) to explain their work to supporting constituencies, one has to consider

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid. See also J.D.Y. Peel, ‘Problems and Opportunities in an Anthropologist’s Use of a Missionary Archive,’ in Robert A. Bickers and Rosemary Seton (eds), *Missionary Encounters: Sources and Issues*, London: Curzon Press (1996), 70-94.

⁶⁰ Cited in Ibid, 4. See also Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Vol. 1, Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1991), and *Vol. 2, The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1997).

⁶¹ Antoinette Burton, *Empire in Question: Reading, Writing and Teaching British Imperialism*, Durham and London: Duke University Press (2011), 10.

⁶² Ibid, 95, 96.

how the needs of each group may have shaped this literature.” There is therefore a need for “looking around the narrative periphery … in order to hear suppressed voices speaking from the past.”⁶³

Certainly we do well to heed these counsels on the use of historical archives. Yet there is undoubtedly a need also to heed the warning of Frykenberg that “[a]t least for the moment, some historians have been listening to the siren song of anti-historical literary criticism. Theory, in the names of current fashions, has become a cloak for dogma, for denial of empirical evidence, and for scorning real events in historical understandings.”⁶⁴ Caution, therefore, is needed to prevent an overly sanguine view of the archive on the one hand, or an overly cynical view on the other.

In the present thesis, the approach to the archive, and published sources, is critical without being cynical. Rather than simply taking what appears in the archives at face value, the wider political or theological context that lies behind what emerges from the material in question is ever in view. Yet this contextual awareness prevents over cynicism as there is recognition that ecclesiastical controversy is always situated and the actors involved cannot be expected to see clearly things that those who later write about the events can perceive with the benefit of hindsight. Thus a robust assessment of the material uncovered in the archives will produce an authentic narrative of how Bailey and the CMS were involved in shaping ecclesiastical life in Kerala.

2. *The use of voices from Kerala*

As a necessary part of rigorously assessing the archives, writers such as E.M. Philip, P. Cherian, C.V. Cherian and others referred to in these pages all serve in various ways to bring into our hearing Syrian Christian voices.⁶⁵ These works were consulted and acquired during seven weeks of research conducted in Kerala during January and February 2016. The main benefit of using these sources is that we are not merely limited to the missionary perspectives.

⁶³ Stanley H. Skreslet, *Comprehending Mission: The Questions, Methods, Themes, Problems, and Prospects of Missiology*, Maryknoll: Orbis (2012), 60.

⁶⁴ Robert E. Frykenberg ‘India to 1858’, in Robin W. Winks (ed), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Historiography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1999), 194-213, ref., 211.

⁶⁵ I refer to the works by these authors cited in this introduction.

Moreover, these are works not widely available outside India. Therefore we are not merely dependent on either Western-based archives or subsequent analysis. In this way the voices of the subjects of this missionary episode can be more clearly heard through those who are their descendants. Subsequent to the research conducted in early 2016 it has become apparent that unpublished archival material, dating from the days of Bailey, is held at the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary in Kottayam. Of particular interest for our purposes are English language diaries of Mathew Mar Athanasios, of whom much more is written in Chapter 7.⁶⁶ Time forbade first-hand perusal of these and, indeed, of similar primary resources in Kerala. It would be hoped that future research can rectify this. Yet it is to be suspected that contemporary archival sources in Kerala will simply reflect the later differences of perspective we see in the Syrian historians of these events.

There is not, therefore, a unified voice among the Syrian Christians of Kerala regarding the activities of the missionaries and to create a reductionist narrative of paternalistic exploitation will simply not do. It may be argued that such divisions amongst Syrian Christians themselves over the legacy of the Mission of Help points to one its great problems, namely, that this missionary enterprise served to divide and rule the community that was supposed to be helped. Yet there is evidence in this study, particularly in Chapters 6 and 7, that Syrians were not in perfect unity before the Mission of Help began. Benjamin Bailey, through copying and summarising eighteenth-century Syriac letters, helped to demonstrate the history of divisions and contested identities of the Syrian community.⁶⁷ Moreover, indigenous factors in the society of Kerala, such as a movement away from feudalistic Brahmanism, served to destabilise the *status quo* as much as the Mission of Help did.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ These archives have subsequently been drawn to my attention in Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops*, Chapter 12.

⁶⁷ See the discussion in Chapter 7 below.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Augustine Kanjamala, *The Future of Christian Mission in India: Toward a New Paradigm for the Third Millennium*, Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications (2014), 8-9; M.M. Thomas, *Towards an Evangelical Social Gospel: A New Look at the Reformation of Abraham Malpan*, Madras: The Christian Literature Society (1977), 9-13.

The specific methodology for this thesis, therefore, is to critically, but not cynically, investigate the relevant CMS archives. The same applies to primary source publications such as the *Missionary Register*. However, to ensure that more than the CMS and Western scholarly perspective is heard, we shall also engage with Syrian Christian historians of various eras and persuasions.

Hypotheses

The following four hypotheses are put forward in light of the four research aims with confidence that analysis of the archives and relevant literature bear them out.

1. Politicisation is at least as important a factor as the theological distinctives of the CMS missionaries in helping explain why the Mission of Help came to an end. This is the particular focus in Chapter 3.
2. Nevertheless, theological differences between the CMS and the Syrian Church proved to be irreconcilable and a parting of the ways was inevitable. This hypothesis is worked out in Chapters 2, 4 and 5.
3. The CMS Mission of Help contributed to, but by no means solely explains, the ecclesiastical fragmentation that took place in Kerala from 1836, when formal co-operation ended. Evidence for this hypothesis is given in Chapters 6 and 7.
4. A more general hypothesis that is explored is as follows: The Mission of Help demonstrates the importance of careful theological and cultural understanding in attempts at partnership in mission. This hypothesis is demonstrated throughout and applied in the conclusions of Chapter 8.

Overview of this study

Chapter 1 will place Benjamin Bailey and the Mission of Help in historical context. It will look at how the CMS emerged in the context of late-eighteenth century Anglicanism. We will discover how Benjamin Bailey was prepared for his missionary work. In addition we will

attempt to outline in brief some historical and cultural background to the Syrian Christians of Travancore and the rationale for the CMS Mission of Help to them.

Chapter 2 will continue to set the contextual scene to the Mission of Help by considering Buchanan's (mis)understanding of the doctrine of the Syrian Church which he seemed to consider as very close to that of the Church of England. We will investigate how in various key doctrines, namely Christology, Ecclesiology, Soteriology and the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, there were actually much wider differences between the CMS and the Syrian Christians than Buchanan had suggested.

Chapter 3 will look at the differing perspectives that interested parties held on just what the remit of the Mission of Help was. In particular some further background will be given on the role of the East India Company in Travancore and that of Col. John Munro in particular. We will then observe and assess Munro's influence on the Mission of Help in its earliest days through looking at his correspondence with the Madras Corresponding Committee of the CMS and Benjamin Bailey.

In Chapter 4 we will consider the period 1818-27 where we will chart the call the CMS made to the Syrian Church to reform and convert. The address to the Syrian clergy by Joseph Fenn in December 1818 where wide ranging reforms in theology and practice were called for will be considered. Then we shall chart Benjamin Bailey's interactions with the Syrian Christians in the subsequent years. We shall see that Bailey, whilst patient and measured, became more and more concerned that the majority of Syrian Christians were Christian in name only. In this chapter we shall also observe some of the tensions these developments created for senior Syrian clergy and the way in which the politics of indirect rule continued to influence mission strategy.

Chapter 5 will cover the years 1828-36 and attention will turn to the end of the Mission of Help. Bailey's time on furlough in Britain, from 1830-34, corresponded with increasing tensions between the missionaries and the Syrian Christians. There was a formal parting of the ways in 1836. This chapter will seek to document the circumstances that surrounded this split with the missionaries, in particular the unsettling effects on the Mission of Help of the personalities of

younger missionaries such as John Woodcock and Joseph Peet. Theological developments within the Church of England at home will also be shown to have played a significant role in effecting the Mission of Help. The Oxford Movement polarised opinions and some of the younger missionaries, along with mission leaders at home, had a deep fear of this movement. The rites of the Syrian Church were then looked at in this light and this contributed to relationships between the missionaries and Syrians breaking down.

Chapter 6 will look at the final years of Bailey in Kerala, 1836-50. The decision of the Syrians to cease working with the CMS formally in early 1836 brought the Mission of Help to an end. A change of direction for the CMS missionaries was therefore necessitated. We shall consider how this change of direction was anticipated, defended and worked out in practice, as well as the practical implications for Benjamin Bailey. It was in these years that the Anglican Church began to be established in Travancore, including Bailey's own congregation in Kottayam. We shall consider the issues surrounding this, including charges of proselytism.

The legacies of Benjamin Bailey and the Mission of Help will be the subject of Chapter 7. We shall consider to what extent Bailey really did set in motion reform movements within the Syrian Church which proved to be unstoppable. The influence of Bailey and his colleagues in the eventual secession of the Mar Thoma Church in 1889 cannot be denied. Yet this chapter will also seek to show how movements within wider society in Kerala help explain the rise of the reformation movement in the Syrian Church.

Chapter 8 will conclude the thesis by drawing together discussion on the themes of mission and empire, mission and ecclesiology and the nature and scope of mission. These broad themes shall be considered in the light of recent debates and the historical episode before us. It will be concluded that while the nascent colonialism of the EIC provided the context for the Mission of Help, this historical situation cannot be seen as the primary motivating factor of Bailey and his colleagues. They were, rather, concerned to follow what they perceived to be the providences of the EIC's involvement in India and the new opportunity for missionaries to go to there. Nevertheless, the imperial context did serve to muddy the waters and it was almost inevitable that the Mission of Help would become somewhat politicised. Moreover, while some would

argue that the Mission of Help was a proto-ecumenical project, it will be concluded that Bailey's ministry in Kerala cannot easily be seen in this light. The call for change that Bailey and others issued disqualifies the Mission of Help from being a forerunner of the conciliar ecumenism of the twentieth century. Insofar, however, as Bailey and his colleagues would recognise the remains of genuine Christianity in the Syrian Church, their work does prefigure to an extent recent debates about ecumenical recognition. Finally, regarding the nature and scope of mission, it will be concluded that Bailey's prioritising of 'the ultimate good' of personal and eternal salvation in missionary endeavour, whilst working also for temporal and penultimate benefits, still provide a helpful focus for missionary engagement today.

The study will therefore aim to contribute to both the history of mission and the theology of mission. Whatever flaws it is possible for us to discern in the Mission of Help, it is no doubt to the great credit of Benjamin Bailey and his colleagues that such questions can be discussed two hundred years after the mission began. From humble roots and seeming failure, the story of Bailey and his colleagues demands to be heard and their approach to mission requires serious attention, fair critique and even, in some respects at least, imitation.

Chapter 1 - Benjamin Bailey and the CMS Mission of Help in Context

Introduction

Having introduced the subject of this study, complete with aims and objectives, this opening chapter will now place Benjamin Bailey and the Mission of Help in historical context. As a starting point we should note that the Evangelical Revival of the late eighteenth century gave birth, albeit belatedly, to the modern missionary movement.¹ In the final years of that century various missionary societies, associated with different Protestant communions, came into being. In 1799 the Church Missionary Society (CMS) was founded and at once began the search for suitably qualified missionaries to send overseas, particularly to places where Britain had an embryonic imperial interest. It is likely that these locations were chosen for both pragmatic and imperialistic reasons. The founder of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), William Carey, had made the case that the operations of such organisations as the East India Company (EIC) provided an opportunity which those determined to take the Christian gospel to foreign lands could not refuse:

Yea, and Providence seems in a manner to invite us to the trial, as there are to our knowledge trading companies whose commerce lies in many of the places where these barbarians dwell ... and every fresh account of their ignorance, or cruelty, should call forth our pity, and excite us to concur with Providence in seeking their eternal good.²

Yet it is also likely that more directly imperialist motives shaped the increase in missionary endeavour to places such as the Indian sub-continent. In the case of Travancore, the scene of the labours recounted in this study, political Residents of the EIC there would see missionary endeavour as not only vital for the spiritual well-being of the population but for the stability of British power in the region. Hence Col. John Munro in particular would be a zealous advocate

¹ Andrew F. Walls, 'Missionary Vocation and the Ministry: The First Generation', in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis (1996), 160-172, 160.

² William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens. In Which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, The Success of Former Undertakings, And the Practicability of Further Undertakings, are Considered*, Leicester: (1792). I quote from the reprint in the Appendix of Timothy George, *Faithful Witness: The Life and Mission of William Carey*, Leicester: IVP (1991), E. 47.

for missionaries being sent to Travancore.³ It was in this context that the specific foci of our story in these pages, Benjamin Bailey and the CMS Mission of Help, began work in what is now Kerala.

We will begin this chapter by positioning the CMS within Anglican mission. Then we shall proceed with a brief sketch of Bailey's early life and preparation for his mission. Having done so, we will then consider the background to the Mission of Help. We shall look in general terms at the interest of the CMS in ancient churches and then consider something of the history and culture of the Syrian Christians of Travancore in particular. Having considered this general background, we will then consider the influences that led to the establishment of the CMS Mission of Help to Travancore. In outlining these background considerations, we will then be better oriented to understand the historical and theological particularities of the Mission of Help in the chapters which follow.

The CMS and its Place within Anglicanism

The involvement of the Church of England with the evangelisation of overseas peoples dates back to at least 16th June 1701 when the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (later United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, hereafter SPG) was founded by Royal Charter of William III. The Charter gave authority for “the better Support and Maintenance of an Orthodox Clergy in Foreign Parts.”⁴ In this context “orthodox” referred to the High Church ecclesiology of Richard Hooker and the Caroline Divines. As Daniel O’Connor, tercentenary historian of the SPG, points out: “Accompanying this high ecclesiology was a political theology which saw Church and state intimately associated, theologically and practically two aspects of a single national community.”⁵ Needless to say, such a political understanding of church and state lent itself well to mission becoming a handmaiden to colonial concerns. For O’Connor, “the location

³ See the discussion in Chapter 3 below on Col. John Munro in Travancore.

⁴ Daniel O’Connor and Others, *Three Centuries of Mission: The United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1701-2000*, London: Continuum (2000), 7.

⁵ Ibid, 8.

of [the SPG's] mission principally in British colonial and imperial domains was to bring many problems and uncomfortable contradictions to its operations.”⁶

The same issues faced the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), which was founded in 1699. Like the SPG, the SPCK was the brainchild of Thomas Bray. On visiting the American Colony of Maryland he had seen the need for clergy to be sent to ‘foreign parts.’ The SPCK’s focus was on education through publications, libraries and schools. Through these activities funds were raised to support mission in colonial parishes.⁷ Such close links between church, state and colonial concerns could contribute to mission becoming a handmaiden of empire. To what extent SPG or SPCK missionaries on the ground sought to resist these pressures or otherwise is beyond the scope of this chapter. For present purposes we note that the SPG was involved deeply in mission to India. As early as 1806 their work in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, was taking shape and many in the so-called lower castes were joining the church.⁸ In fact the SPCK had been involved in missionary work in India since 1706, with the SPG joining in 1728. They worked closely with the European Pietist missionaries and a significant proportion of their personnel came from Europe.⁹

Coming to the CMS, it is important to assess its relationship with these pre-existing Anglican missions. O’Connor is keen to question the narrative that views William Carey and the CMS as the founders of the modern missionary movement so as to relegate the work of the SPG to “prehistoric darkness.”¹⁰ As we shall see in the following paragraph, it is unlikely that the CMS viewed themselves as the new dawn of missionary endeavour. It is certainly true, however, that the SPG and the CMS had different approaches to organising missionary congregations which reflected their respective High and Low Church ecclesiologies. In the outworking of these ecclesiologies Spencer notes that the High Church SPG believed bishops should be sent straight away to mission fields and build a church around them from the top down. Henry Venn, mid-

⁶ Ibid, 8.

⁷ Ibid, 9.

⁸ Vincent Kumaradoss, ‘The SPG and the Impact of Conversion in Nineteenth-Century Tirunelveli,’ in O’Connor, *Three Centuries of Mission*, 274-289.

⁹ O’Connor, *Three Centuries of Mission*, 14.

¹⁰ Ibid, xiii.

nineteenth century secretary of the Low Church CMS, however, believed bishops should arrive at the end of the process, once churches were self-supporting.¹¹ It is probable that Venn was simply vocalising what was the practice of the CMS from the beginning.

Hence, the rationale for the CMS coming into existence as a separate Anglican entity was the fact that those involved were committed Evangelicals and were not advocates of the High Church Ecclesiology of the SPG. Writing at a distance of one hundred years, Eugene Stock argued that the founders of the CMS had no realistic option in the end of joining with the SPG. The CMS founders all belonged to the Evangelical party of the Church of England. Among those of higher church ecclesiology there was often a disparaging fear of what they termed “Church Methodism.” This opprobrium of the Evangelicals could apparently go to ridiculous lengths. Stock noted “if the Bishop of London’s carriage conveyed a visitor from his house to that of a leading Evangelical rector, it must put her down at a neighbouring public house to avoid being seen to stop at such a clergyman’s door.”¹² The Evangelicals, for their part, were not entirely opposed to working with High Church Anglicans in general, or the SPG in particular. Nevertheless, for the founders of the CMS, the SPG “was not committed to the gospel as the Evangelicals understood it.” Moreover, the non-conformists of the Baptist Missionary Society and London Missionary Society were “not committed to the Church as Anglicans understood it.”¹³ In addition, the SPG and SPCK, Stock claimed, were not interested in candidates of Evangelical persuasion. So, Stock noted, “[i]f, therefore, the Evangelicals were to do anything for the evangelization of the Heathen, they must act for themselves; and this being so, they naturally determined, under God, to work upon their own lines, and in accordance with their own principles.”¹⁴ Not only so, the funds of both the SPG and SPCK were rather depleted at this time. The doctrinal differences, however, were really the decisive factor in the Anglican Evangelicals forming the CMS. These became even more acute later in the nineteenth century as the SPG and

¹¹ Stephen Spencer, *SCM Studyguide to Anglicanism*, London: SCM Press (2010), 70. On Henry Venn and his approach see Peter Williams, “Not Transplanting”: Henry Venn’s Strategic Vision,’ in Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley (eds), *The Church Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799-1999*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans and Richmond: Curzon (2000), 147-172.

¹² Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society: Its Environment, Its Men and Its Work*, Volume 1, London: Church Missionary Society (1899), 39.

¹³ Andrew F. Walls, ‘Missionary Vocation and the Ministry,’ 164.

¹⁴ Stock, *History*, 66.

SPCK were influenced by the Tractarian movement.¹⁵ As we shall see in Chapter 5 below, fear of Tractarianism influenced the younger missionaries in the Mission of Help in the early 1830s. Moreover, differences in doctrine with the Syrians were a significant part of the explanation of why the Mission of Help would ultimately fail.

For these reasons, therefore, the CMS proceeded as a separate entity. Their problem in these early days, however, was recruiting English candidates. Non-conformists and Churchmen agreed “that a missionary was essentially a preacher, and that a preacher should normally be a minister.”¹⁶ Therein lay a problem. The Church of England wanted educated men of good social standing for its clergy and such men were not likely to offer themselves for service overseas. Confusion over who to send meant that “[t]he CMS was thus reduced for several years to the invidious position of issuing reports with nothing to report, and holding meetings about what they hoped to do in the future.”¹⁷ Perhaps this was why the CMS Secretary Thomas Scott (1747-1821), disappointed with a lack of English candidates, urged the following upon the CMS committee: “If you could find out young men of sterling piety and good natural ability in inferior stations of life … it appears to me that you would be far more likely to succeed than on any other plan.”¹⁸ The plan was duly implemented and one of the first two CMS missionaries to receive Anglican ordination was Thomas Norton.¹⁹ It was hoped that he would be part of the Mission of Help to the ancient Syrian Church of Travancore, South West India, which began in 1816. Close on Norton’s heels was the Rev. Benjamin Bailey, who had served a Yorkshire curacy before arriving in Travancore toward the end of 1816.²⁰ It is to Bailey’s preparation for missionary service that we now turn.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Walls, ‘Missionary Vocation and the Ministry,’ 161.

¹⁷ Ibid, 166.

¹⁸ Cited in Charles Hole, *The Early History of the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East to the End of A.D. 1814*, London: Church Missionary Society (1896), 125.

¹⁹ Up to this point the CMS had sent continental Lutherans associated with the Pietist movement as missionaries.

²⁰ Walls, ‘Missionary Vocation and the Ministry,’ 170.

Benjamin Bailey of Dewsbury: His early life

The Bailey family of Dewsbury were a quite remarkable family in the story of the CMS in its early decades. Benjamin Bailey was born in November 1791. He was the son of Joseph and Martha Bailey. He had what could be described as a basic education and then worked in the wool industry.²¹ His brother, Joseph Bailey, five years Benjamin's junior, also went as a missionary to Ceylon in 1821.²² Moreover, his sister Sarah Bailey, married Thomas Dawson. They also travelled to Kerala, settling in Cochin in 1816. They were only able to stay two years, however, due to Dawson's health.²³ So, while not much is known about this Dewsbury family, it is quite clear that they were exceptionally willing to offer themselves for missionary service.

A probable explanation for the enthusiasm of the Bailey family for overseas missionary service was the influence of their parish minister in Dewsbury. The Rev. John Buckworth appears to have been a constant source of encouragement to his young parishioners to consider world mission. The early history of the CMS is deeply indebted to Buckworth. He is described by Hunt as "one of the most active of Evangelical clergymen."²⁴

A later Vicar and Rural Dean of Dewsbury, the Rev. Canon H. Lowther, noted: "Mr Buckworth's name is one to be held in high honour by every friend of the Church Missionary Society. The early records of the Society show in what confidence he was held by the great men for whom and under whom he worked."²⁵ Born in Lincolnshire in 1779, Buckworth was just twelve years older than Bailey. Buckworth initially came to Dewsbury as a curate under the Rev. Matthew Powley, and became vicar upon the latter's death. Buckworth, in his early years, could command large congregations with "youthful zeal and fervent impassioned utterances."²⁶ Buckworth's predecessor Powley had started a Sunday School in Dewsbury, likely the first north

²¹ Babu Cherian, *Towards Modernity: The Story of the First College in India: The Impact of CMS College, Kottayam on Kerala Society and How it Paved the way for Modernity*, Delhi: Media House (2014), 346.

²² CMS Register of Missionaries, No. 70, 14, Adam Matthew Publications database.

²³ Ibid, No. 30, 7. See also W.S. Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore and Cochin, 1816-1916: Operations of the Church Missionary Society in South-West India*, Vol. I, Kottayam, CMS Press (1920), 123.

²⁴ Ibid, 114.

²⁵ Rev. Canon H. Lowther 'A Yorkshire Friend of the C.M.S Eighty Years Ago: The Rev. John Buckworth, *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, Vol. LII, Vol. XXVI. New Series, (1901), 497-500.

²⁶ Ibid, 498.

of the River Trent. Buckworth enthusiastically engaged in this work also. It was in this Sunday school that he had a great influence among his young parishioners and amongst all his people he encouraged a missionary spirit.²⁷

Buckworth had remarkable success in his ambition to raise up missionaries. It is noted, for example by the CMS historian Charles Hole, that in 1811-12 William Greenwood, a blanket manufacturer from Dewsbury, Benjamin Bailey, a clothier, and his soon to be brother-in-law Thomas Dawson were all accepted by the CMS for missionary training on Buckworth's recommendation.²⁸ Following Thomas Scott's retirement from training missionary candidates for the CMS, this duty devolved upon Buckworth, who had already been giving some training in Greek, Latin and Theology two nights a week to those whose character and gifts he considered suitable for Christian service.²⁹ A memoir of Buckworth, published shortly after his death, notes that this class was a fruitful source of raising up missionaries for India. William Greenwood, who went with the CMS to Calcutta, Thomas Dawson and Benjamin Bailey all passed through this class. Joseph Bailey, Benjamin's brother, was another pupil who went to Ceylon.³⁰ In addition several pupils became Church of England clergy and two others ministers of other denominations. Isaac Clarkson, who compiled this memoir, observed: "These he considered as his peculiar children in the Gospel, and they looked upon him as their spiritual father."³¹

Buckworth, whose journal and correspondence Clarkson collated in his *Memoir*, was a good friend of the Rev. Daniel Corrie who went as an East India Company Chaplain to Calcutta and was later Bishop of Madras. It seems that Corrie had actually invited Buckworth to join him in India. Buckworth wrote to him: "it would have been a pleasure to me to have united with you, my dear friend, according to your pressing invitation, had not a gracious providence pointed out

²⁷ Ibid, 498.

²⁸ Hole, *The Early History*, 126, 221.

²⁹ Lowther, 'Rev. John Buckworth,' 498-499.

³⁰ Isaac Clarkson, *Memoir of the Rev. John Buckworth M.A., Late Vicar of Dewsbury, Yorkshire*, London: Seeley, Sherwood and Co. (1836), 50. Can be viewed as a free e-book at https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=C0VfAAAACAAJ&pg=PA15&lpg=PA15&dq=Rev+John+Buckworth&source=bl&ots=06LmPdHdXN&sig=p3vpOIG45KvSmD4EZa_dwnXu1wg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwislsmX95XOAhUjOsAKHQ1GCooQ6AEIHDA#v=onepage&q=Rev%20John%20Buckworth&f=false. Accessed 26th July 2016.

³¹ Ibid, 51.

my labours in another direction.”³² Despite Buckworth’s apparent willingness to go to India himself, the death of Powley, his vicar in Dewsbury, opened up the way for him to succeed the latter and he accepted this as God’s providence and stayed in Dewsbury until his own death in 1835 aged fifty-six. The missionary spirit, however, was not dampened by matters parochial and he was particularly concerned for India; hence he encouraged Bailey, Dawson and Greenwood to go there.

Putting these observations together the picture that emerges regarding Bailey’s early life is one of basic education, hard work and evangelical piety. The influence of his parish minister upon him and others cannot be over-estimated. In the CSI cemetery in Kottayam today there is a gravestone to one of the four children Bailey lost. It is dated May 1824 and is in honour of the memory of Samuel *Buckworth* Bailey, who died aged just nine months. Benjamin Bailey’s aspirations for this son must have been that he be like his original mentor, John Buckworth.

Bailey’s Missionary Training

Bailey would return to Buckworth’s care as he completed a brief curacy in Harewood, Yorkshire, before setting sail for India. This short time in parish ministry at home was preceded by two years of missionary training under Thomas Scott.³³ The latter was in many ways suited, in the opinion of CMS insiders, to preparing missionaries for the rigours of their life. Charles Hole notes how he was a man with little money, a simple life, and frugal habits. Scott was self-taught, but, according to Jowett in the *CMS Jubilee Volume* of 1849, had “made himself a thoroughly learned man, especially in theology.”³⁴ Bailey’s training, which took place in Scott’s Buckinghamshire parish of Aston Sandford, was to be highly formative in the theological and spiritual formation of Bailey and many of his CMS colleagues. It seems highly probable, therefore, that Scott’s doctrine will have influenced those missionaries who had been under his tutelage. Indeed in 1885, long after the days of Scott and Bailey, one writer in the *Church Missionary Intelligencer and Record*, would note that both Thomas Norton and Bailey “received

³² Ibid, 46.

³³ *CMS Register of Missionaries*, No. 29, 7.

³⁴ Hole, *The Early History*, 639.

from Thomas Scott's own lips the theology which he learned from the canonical Scriptures, and which we may all study in his notes and comments, and especially his references. May this theology never be corrupted in any of our Society's Missions.”³⁵

The theology to which this later writer refers was in general terms evangelical. It focused on the desperate sinfulness of humanity, the need for regeneration by the Holy Spirit, on conversion and on the absolute necessity of propagating the faith. More specifically, Scott's theology came to be Calvinistic, particularly in his understanding of how the gospel came to fallen humanity. Scott wrote in his early spiritual autobiography *The Force of Truth*: “Thus I perceived redemption to be the effect of a settled design, formed in God's eternal counsels, of manifesting himself to his reasonable creatures, complete and full-orbed in all conceivable perfections.”³⁶ Scott's Calvinism, however, like that of Charles Simeon of Cambridge and John Newton of Olney and London, was warm with evangelistic zeal. Simeon was, in fact, a trusted adviser of the EIC and recommended most of the men, such as Henry Martyn and Claudius Buchanan, who went to India as EIC chaplains. Newton, meanwhile, had been influential in the conversion of Buchanan after the latter had fled from Scotland to London.³⁷ In addition, Simeon was, according to one writer, “the key spiritual influence in the founding of the Church Missionary Society” as well as an avid supporter of other mission agencies.³⁸ Stock claimed “India owes to Charles Simeon an untold debt of gratitude.”³⁹ Returning to Scott's evangelistic Calvinism, however, he stated it thus: “(God's) love and all-sufficiency having, in the person, offices and work of Christ made all things ready; his providence directing absolutely to whom the word of invitation shall be sent;

³⁵ H.S. ‘Recollections of South Indian Missions’, by a Very Old Indian,’ *The Church Missionary Intelligencer and Record*, 10, (1885), 371-374, ref. to Scott on 374. Scott's works included a series of volumes commenting on the whole Bible.

³⁶ Thomas Scott, *The Force of Truth*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth (1984, first published 1779), 82.

³⁷ For this detail on Newton and Buchanan, see Brian Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2005), 85-86.

³⁸ John Piper, *The Roots of Endurance: Invincible Perseverance in the Lives of John Newton, Charles Simeon and William Wilberforce*, Wheaton IL: Crossway Books (2002), 85-86. For further biography of Simeon see Hugh Evan Hopkins, *Charles Simeon of Cambridge*, London: Hodder and Stoughton (1977).

³⁹ Stock, *History*, 59.

and his Holy Spirit alone inclining and enabling the soul to embrace it by faith.”⁴⁰ Such was the stream of Trinitarian and reformation theology that early English CMS missionaries espoused.

Another specific feature of Scott’s theology was his belief that theology and practice should be derived from Scripture alone through the prayerful seeking of aid from the Holy Spirit.⁴¹ On the one hand these convictions would have ensured those Scott trained were encouraged not to treat other professing Christians with prejudice. He urged his readers: “thou runnest very great hazards in passing judgment upon men and doctrines. Be cautious what thou doest; let these men quite alone, until thou hast imitated those noble Bereans, and thoroughly, and with unbiased mind, examined and meditated upon the whole Word of God.”⁴² Here is an influence which could well have explained the patience in implementing the reforms that Benjamin Bailey and his colleagues Henry Baker and Joseph Fenn perceived were necessary in the Syrian Church. Not only were they willing to bring the practices of themselves and others before Scripture, they also would have wanted the Syrian Church leaders to be bound by Scripture in their own consciences.

On the other hand, this commitment to Scriptural authority would have led to Bailey and his colleagues demanding change to practices for which they did not see biblical warrant. Standing in this evangelical tradition, it is not hard to conceive how tensions would inevitably develop between Bailey and the Syrian Christians, for whom centuries of accumulated tradition would have been a considerable source of authority.⁴³ Bailey’s upbringing under Buckworth and training under Scott both set the tone for his eventual work in India. Having considered Bailey’s early life and missionary training, we shall now consider how the strategy of the CMS served to prepare the way for Bailey to go to Travancore.

The CMS and the Ancient Churches

A feature of the CMS in its early decades was a keen desire to have continuity with the primitive Church. One of the founders, John Venn, had urged “[t]he nearer we approach the ancient church

⁴⁰ Scott, *The Force of Truth*, 83.

⁴¹ This is not to suggest, of course, that Scott was unique in this or that those from whom he differed theologically would not have had similar commitments.

⁴² Scott, *The Force of Truth*, 108.

⁴³ On Scripture and Tradition in the Syrian Christian tradition see the discussion in Chapter 2.

the better.”⁴⁴ In this desire to get back to primitive Christianity, the Evangelicals imitated their High Church fellow Anglicans. The latter, as David Bebbington reminds us, sought to construct an *Ecclesia Anglicana* which conformed to “[t]he ideal of ‘primitive Christianity’, stripped of the decadent accretions of later centuries.”⁴⁵ This may explain why there was such enthusiasm for the Mission of Help to the Syrian Church in Travancore and the ancient churches of the Middle East. The CMS had established a base on Malta in 1815 with a view to reform the ancient Christian communities of the Middle East.⁴⁶ These appeared to be to the CMS authentic ancient Christian communities, albeit in a run-down condition. As with the Syrian Christians of Travancore, these churches tended to be non-Chalcedonian in their Christology and were either Miaphysite or Diophysite (Nestorian).⁴⁷ It seems, however, that these Christological distinctions were not the main concern of the CMS in seeking to establish missions to work with or around these ancient churches. For Murre-Van Den Berg, the motivation of such missions by Protestant mission boards was to see Muslims converted to Christianity. There also seems to have been some recognition of the fact that Christians in the Middle East were best placed to carry out this task. The problem was, however, that nominalism and lack of true conversion were seen as endemic in the Middle Eastern Churches. Hence for the missionaries of the CMS and other Protestant missions the “reformation of these churches towards an evangelical model was of the utmost importance.”⁴⁸

It would appear that there was moderate success in this goal of reformation. Various revivals in the Middle Eastern Churches during the 1840s would result in the appropriation of evangelical forms of spirituality. This, however, caused tensions with the leadership of these churches.

⁴⁴ Cited in Stock, *History*, 63.

⁴⁵ David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from 1730s to the 1980s*, London: Unwin Hyman (1989), 36.

⁴⁶ On these developments see Heleen Murre-Van Den Berg, ‘The Middle East: Western Missions and the Eastern Churches, Islam and Judaism,’ in Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley (eds), *The Cambridge History of Christianity: World Christianities c. 1815 – c. 1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2006), 458-472. For a more specific Church of England example of such a missionary project, see J.F. Coakley, *The Church of the East and the Church of England: A History of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Assyrian Mission*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1992).

⁴⁷ Ibid, 459. For an overview of these various churches see Sebastian Brock, ‘The Syriac Churches in Ecumenical Dialogue on Christology,’ in Anthony O’Mahony (ed), *Eastern Christianity: Studies in Modern History, Religion and Politics*, London: Melisende (2004), 44-65.

⁴⁸ Murre-Van Den Berg, ‘The Middle East,’ 463-465, quote is from 465.

Separate Protestant congregations would therefore be formed. The work of mission in the Middle East would thereafter focus on strengthening these new churches.⁴⁹ What we have briefly described here regarding the CMS work in the Middle East parallels what would in fact happen in the Mission of Help to Travancore. We shall therefore give some background at this point to the ancient Christians of that Indian state.

The Syrian Christians of Travancore

Over the centuries the Syrian Christian community had been shaped by the Malabar society to which they belonged. Nevertheless there was dependence on the Syrian Churches for theology, liturgy, and bishops.⁵⁰ ‘Syrian Christian,’ is not the designation preferred by this ancient Christian community. They pride themselves on being the Thomas Christians. It is reckoned that this tradition of having been founded by Jesus’ disciple Thomas dates back to at least 200 A.D. Samuel Hugh Moffett makes the point that “it may be wise to admit that underlying some of the most improbable legends there often lies a foundation of fact.”⁵¹ It is worth noting that as early as the third and fourth century St. Ephrem the Syrian had placed Thomas’s apostolic mission in India. In his hymns he eulogized Thomas as “one among the Twelve” who “India’s dark night flooded with light.”⁵² Their apostolic origins in Thomas have also been a feature of the oral tradition of the Christian community in Kerala for many centuries, a fact which is taken more seriously in recent scholarship with the renewal of interest in oral tradition as a historical source. The tradition also has the advantage of a living community with strong communal memories behind it.⁵³ Indeed their establishment by Thomas is given canonical status by the community.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Leslie W. Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas: An Account of the Ancient Syrian Church of Malabar*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1956), 16-18.

⁵¹ Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume I: Beginnings to 1500*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis (1998), 25.

⁵² M. Thomas Thangaraj, ‘Is Full Church Unity Possible or Desirable?’ *The Ecumenical Review*, 44 (1992), 91-99, ref. 91.

⁵³ Moffett, *Christianity in Asia, Vol I*, 35.

Frykenberg notes that if we are to give due attention to Indocentric perspectives, then the Thomas tradition needs to be examined “both carefully and critically.”⁵⁴

The apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*, alongside oral tradition, is therefore an important source for the Thomas Christians. Consistent with gospel characterisations of Thomas, he is portrayed as extremely reluctant to go to India when his lot is cast there. He went, the story goes, after an encounter with the risen Christ when he was assured “[d]on’t be fearful, Thomas. Go to India and preach the Word there, for my Grace is with you.” Even then Thomas is claimed to have protested that he would go anywhere but India. After further reassurance, however, he consented to go.⁵⁵ Accounts of Thomas’s often miraculous activities in India follow. The apostle’s encounter with a king Gundaphar forms an important part of the narrative in the *Acts of Thomas*. This king was not known to have been a real ruler over his territory until the discovery of coins bearing his name in the last two centuries. These discoveries, Frykenberg claims, “lend shreds of credibility to the *Acts of Thomas*.⁵⁶ Certainly there is strong evidence for there being Christians in South India no later than the third or fourth centuries. They may have earlier, perhaps even apostolic origins. For the Thomas Christians “this is an established article of faith – a part of their own canon from which there can be no deviation.”⁵⁷

The mission of Thomas supposedly met with considerable success. Landing on the Malabar coast in 52 A.D., Thomas is reputed to have been instrumental in the conversion to Christianity of over 17,000 people in India including 6,850 Brahmans.⁵⁸ It is claimed that he established seven original congregations in Kerala, for whom he appointed high caste leaders and then left behind a strong, self-propagating and self-sustaining Christian community.⁵⁹ They are a community, moreover, who have experienced considerable privileges over the centuries as they found various means of cultural accommodation with high-caste Hindus. Not least, they became a much

⁵⁴ Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2008), 91.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 94. For the text of the Acts of Thomas see J.K. Elliot (ed.), *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1993 [1924]), 439-511; and A.F.J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction, Text and Commentary*, Leiden: Brill (2003 [1962]).

⁵⁶ Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 98.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 115.

⁵⁸ Brown, *The Indian Christians*, 50.

⁵⁹ Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 99.

respected martial people and often received gifts of land and churches from grateful Hindu rulers with and for whom they had fought.⁶⁰ The supposed Brahman origins of this Christian community has been prized highly by them for centuries. Susan Bayly notes that Kerala, in pre-colonial times, had an extremely strict demarcation between castes, with non-negotiable rules as to how many steps those of lower caste, be they Hindu or Christian converts, needed to keep their distance from Brahmins, Nayars and Thomas/Syrian Christians.⁶¹ Much of the cultus of the Thomas Christian community can be explained by these concerns for maintaining high-caste ritual purity and its attendant privileges. Rites concerning birth, puberty, marriage and death often were remarkably similar to those practiced by high-caste Hindus. These were not, therefore, as European missionaries tended to think, mere accretions resultant from living in close proximity with high-caste Hindus. Bayly argues on the contrary,

they were rites which safeguarded the Syrians' corporate substance and guaranteed their status within a shared moral order which was defined in terms of gradations of ritual purity and pollution. It was through adherence to these standards that the Syrians had come to be classed as *savarna*, persons of clean caste and standing in the Hindu moral order.⁶²

Certainly we see recognition of the continuing importance of caste in CMS publications later in the nineteenth century. A couple of examples will suffice for the present. The October 1879 issue of *The Church Missionary Gleaner* has a feature on Travancore and reported that “nowhere else is the caste system so elaborate.” In the 1879 Census there were 420 castes to be precise. “And nowhere else,” the anonymous writer goes on, “is the tyrannical power of caste more manifest. It is, indeed, now gradually yielding to the potent influences at work against it, but it still has immense power.” Ritual purity required a certain degree of distance to be kept between higher and lower castes. For example “a Chogan must keep thirty-six steps from a Brahmin, and twelve steps from a Nair.”⁶³ An 1869 *Gleaner* article claimed that the Syrians were wedded to caste and gave the following example: “The [non-Syrian] barbers were forbidden to shave any of the

⁶⁰ Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700-1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1989), 247-251.

⁶¹ Ibid, 248.

⁶² Ibid, 252.

⁶³ Anonymous, ‘Travancore: The Land, The People, and The Mission,’ *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, Vol. 6, Issue 70 (1879), 109-112, refs. on 109. Made available digitally through Adam Matthew Publications.

Christians. The Syrians, when they met them, drove them off the road as unclean persons, and would not enter their houses or shops.”⁶⁴ Such assimilation of the Syrian Church to Hindu caste culture may explain why the previously cited feature of 1879 would comment: “its lack of spiritual life was evidenced by the total absence of any effort to evangelise the surrounding heathen.”⁶⁵ For Judge P. Cherian, writing in 1935, “[t]he privileges which the Kerala kings granted to these ancient Christians from time to time must have been sufficient to quench any little missionary ardour they might have possessed. For it would be felt that admission of the lower castes by conversion would lower the social status obtained from the Hindu kings.”⁶⁶ Such evangelistic inertia has been questioned in recent times by John Fenwick who argues that “the community had not entirely lost sight of the Great Commission.”⁶⁷ This issue will be turned to again as we assess the Mission of Help’s success or otherwise in Chapter 6. For now, however, it is sufficient to say that the complex interweaving of caste culture with Syrian Christian profession certainly made indiscriminate Christian witness difficult for this ancient community.

Leslie Brown has noted other aspects of the complex relationship of the Syrian Christians with their Hindu culture. Brown questioned the idea that the actual worship and theology of the Church was inculcated into Indian thought forms. However, Brown continued, “in social life and custom the church is completely Indian … 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 the Hindu gods, though they did not worship them.”⁶⁸ Questions, therefore, would likely have been raised by CMS missionaries as to what extent the Syrian Church was truly Christian. In Chapters 3 and 4 below we will see how the increasing awareness of these issues as the Mission of Help progressed in its first ten years led Bailey and his colleagues to effectively

⁶⁴ ‘Anonymous,’ in *The Church Missionary Gleaner*, Vol. 19, (November 1869), 121-123, ref. on 123. Adam Matthew Publications.

⁶⁵ Anonymous, ‘Travancore: The Land, The People, and The Mission,’ 110.

⁶⁶ P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians and the Church Missionary Society, 1816-1840*, Published by his grandchildren, Kottayam, (2015). Originally published by Kottayam CMS Press in 1935, 42.

⁶⁷ See John Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops: The Malabar Independent Syrian Church and its Place in the Story of the St Thomas Christians of South India*, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies, Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press (2009), 344. cf. Mar Abraham Mattan, *The Indian Church of St Thomas Christians and Her Missionary Enterprise before the Sixteenth Century*, Vadavathoor. Oriental Institute of Religious Studies in India, (1985).

⁶⁸ Brown, *The Indian Christians*, 4.

call for the conversion of this ancient church. For Brown, however, it was their liturgy and a sense of being part of a greater whole that kept them authentically Christian down the centuries.⁶⁹

More recently, Penelope Carson has concurred with Brown's analysis, claiming that it was quite clear that Christians in Kerala became part of a 'Hindu' culture and society. As well as enjoying high caste status, Carson points out that they maintained clean status through adopting Nayar rituals. Churches and temples were sometimes built on adjoining sites and processional regalia were shared.⁷⁰ In the Portuguese era, despite contact with outsiders, Syrian Christians continued to be considered ritually pure by Hindus, were granted procession rites, and were allowed "to hold joint shares in local goddess festivals and other Hindu temple rites."⁷¹ These issues of cultural influence were seriously underestimated by Claudius Buchanan, Colonel John Munro, and the early CMS missionaries. Col. Munro, the EIC Resident, seemed to perceive that much of this was done under duress by the Syrian Christians and sought to free them from the need to participate in Hindu customs. For Carson, Munro and the missionaries "do not seem to have comprehended that Christians could participate in rituals involving idolatry without being under duress."⁷² The testimony seems rather to be of a Christian community deeply embedded in Hindu culture. It is in this context that the Mission of Help, albeit somewhat blindly, began its work to reform the Syrian Church in 1816. The more immediate influences on that Mission beginning will now be considered.

Key instigators of the CMS Mission of Help

The influence of two British missionary pioneers to India, William Carey (1761-1834) the Baptist and Claudius Buchanan (1766-1815) the Anglican, will be briefly considered in this section. These two were certainly among the key figures in motivating missionary endeavour amongst evangelicals across denominational lines at this time. Carey is often seen as a pioneer of

⁶⁹ Ibid, 5.

⁷⁰ Penelope Carson, 'Christianity, Colonialism, and Hinduism in Kerala: Integration, Adaptation, or Confrontation?', in Robert Eric Frykenberg (ed), *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2003), 127-154, see especially 132-134.

⁷¹ Ibid, 139.

⁷² Ibid, 144.

the Protestant missionary movement. Timothy Yates, however, has argued that the Puritans of North America, such as John Eliot (1604-90), David Brainerd (1718-47) and Jonathan Edwards (1703-58), may have been even greater influences than Carey and others of the late eighteenth century. These figures, Yates argued, displayed “a Protestantism which, in contrast to the post-Reformation period elsewhere, accepted responsibility for mission.”⁷³ As general background instigators for the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century advance in mission these theologian-practitioners must not be overlooked. Yet Carey and Buchanan deserve their rank amongst these earlier thinkers.

William Carey and Claudius Buchanan, moreover, were more immediate instigators of the Mission of Help. It was Carey whose labours before and after going to India provided the theology of mission for evangelical Protestants during this period. Walls notes that “Carey was, of course, by any reckoning a remarkable man; yet he represents a type bred among the English Dissenters and Scots seceders: independent, hard-working, developing their own tradition of learning.”⁷⁴ Indeed, it was Carey’s ‘boast’ to a sneering army officer that he was “[n]ot even shoemaker, sir: just a cobbler.”⁷⁵ We shall look briefly at Carey the Baptist because, some ecclesiological questions aside, there was much commonality in the theological influences that shaped both him and the missionaries of the CMS Mission of Help.

Carey, for example, had close connections to important figures in Benjamin Bailey’s story. Not least of these was Thomas Scott who had held a neighbouring parish to John Newton of Olney. Newton was involved in the lengthy process which saw Scott transformed from Unitarian to Evangelical. The Northamptonshire Baptist Carey, however, would comment years later in India that “[i]f there be anything of the work of God in my soul, I owe much of it to his preaching, when I first set out in the ways of the Lord.”⁷⁶ For Carey, we may well wonder if he found more spiritual encouragement from the likes of Scott and Newton than he initially did from his fellow

⁷³ Timothy Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1994), 10-11.

⁷⁴ Walls, ‘Missionary Vocation and the Ministry,’ 161.

⁷⁵ Cited in *Ibid*, 161, n. 5.

⁷⁶ Scott outlines his spiritual journey in *The Force of Truth*. The Carey quote is cited in John E. Marshall’s introduction to the 1984 Banner of Truth Edition, 20.

Baptists. The Baptist movement was split into what have been termed General and Particular Baptists. Carey belonged to the latter and as such held to a Calvinistic creed as summarized in the 1644, 1677, and 1689 Baptist Confessions of faith.

In Carey's time and place, however, a hyper-Calvinism abounded which refused to offer the gospel freely to all. This chilling influence on the churches, as eminent Victorian Baptist Charles Spurgeon would later put it, was challenged within the Particular Baptist circle by Andrew Fuller in his 1785 publication *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*. This work gave Carey the theological boost he needed as he was to call his Baptist brethren to the cause of world mission. His initial attempts in this were met with the famous rebuke, allegedly from John Ryland Senior, "Young man, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without your aid or mine!"⁷⁷ Carey was never easily put off his course of action. Armed with the theology of Fuller, a heart for the cause and the results of his own research, Carey in 1792 published his famous work *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*.

In the *Enquiry* Carey gave a comprehensive survey of the nations of the world, large and small, with their religions. George notes that "Carey's survey was as complete and accurate as the best information available to him would allow."⁷⁸ Carey listed the population of India, beyond the Ganges, as being 50,000,000 and of Indostan as being 110,000,000. In both cases he lists the religious affiliations of the peoples as being "Mahometans and Pagans,"⁷⁹ by which he presumably meant Muslims and the various Indian religious systems that came to be known as Hinduism.⁸⁰ So it seems that, in the information available to Carey, he was unaware of the

⁷⁷ In the preceding paragraph I draw on George, *Faithful Witness*, 53-57. The quotation is given on 53.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 60.

⁷⁹ Carey, *Enquiry*, E. 30.

⁸⁰ 'Hinduism' is really a construct of the British in India who saw the various sects and cults there as a monolithic religion. It would be wrong to assume, however, that these various Indian sects formed a united and all-embracing religious system. See Penelope Carson, *The East India Company and Religion, 1698-1858*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press (2012), ix. See also Geoffrey Oddie, 'Constructing "Hinduism": The Impact of the Protestant Missionary Movement on Hindu Self-Understanding,' in Robert Eric Frykenberg (ed), *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2003), 155-182. Brian Pennington, adds a note of caution to viewing Hinduism as entirely an invention of British imperialists: "colonial encounter certainly created the conditions under which Hinduism, in terms of a world religion, comparable to other 'great traditions' such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam, emerged not only as an idea, a composite portrait of various,

Syrian Christians of Kerala or pockets of Jewish populations also. Carey sought to remove the kind of objections put forward against attempting missions in foreign parts and so called for the formation of a missionary society within the Particular Baptist denomination. He suggested it was better for denominations to work separately, to prevent discord in areas of disagreement, but that nevertheless “each denomination would bear good will to the other, and wish and pray for its success, considering it as upon the whole friendly to the great cause of true religion.”⁸¹ The CMS, therefore, had an ally in William Carey, even if his Baptist principles, or their Anglican ones, would not allow formal unity for mission in India.

It was Cladius Buchanan who brought the Syrian Church of Travancore to the attention of the British public. Buchanan visited Malabar in 1805 and sought to investigate their literature and history, collect Biblical manuscripts and “if he should find them an intelligent people, and well acquainted with the Syriac Scriptures, to endeavour to make them instruments of illuminating the Southern part of India, by engaging them in translating their Scriptures into Native Languages.”⁸² On visiting the Church and her leaders, Buchanan sensed that “there was an air of fallen greatness.”⁸³

Nevertheless, great publicist that Buchanan was,⁸⁴ he reports to his readers at home his conversations with senior Church figures. A senior priest in Chinganoor apparently related to Buchanan how negative experiences with the Portuguese and injustice by native princes had brought the Church to a low state. The old priest was confident, however, that Great Britain could help: “The glory of our Church has passed away; but we hope your nation will revive it again.”⁸⁵ Buchanan also pulls Britain’s heart strings by appealing to patriotic feeling. In a

sometimes contradictory traditions, but also an incipient reality. I must stress at the outset, however, that I cannot accept the position that Hinduism was invented in the nineteenth century by Europeans as an administrative or academic convenience that did violence to some vast array of mutually exclusive Indian religious communities and traditions.” Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*, 5.

⁸¹ Carey, *Enquiry*, E. 56.

⁸² Cladius Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia: With Notices of the Translation of the Scriptures into the Oriental Languages*, Fourth Edition, London: T. Cadell and W. Davies (1811), 110.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 117.

⁸⁴ On Buchanan as a missionary publicist see Allan K. Davidson, *Evangelicals and Attitudes to India 1786-1813: Missionary Publicity and Cladius Buchanan*, Sutton Courtenay Press, (1990).

⁸⁵ Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia*, 117.

discussion on English government with a priest called Zecharias, Buchanan related how England's government was founded on biblical principles. Buchanan records his reply: “‘Ah,’ said old Zecharias, ‘that must be a glorious Government which is founded on the principles of the Bible.’”⁸⁶

It is therefore interesting to note that the key figures whose thinking and writings instigated the Mission of Help were characterized both by a robust evangelical mission theology, seeking the spread of the gospel to all, and by patriotic concerns. In Chapter 2 we shall consider more of Buchanan's interactions with the Syrian Church on doctrinal matters. Yet we cannot escape the conclusion that ecclesiastical and evangelistic goals were combined with somewhat more political agendas even as these early missions of the CMS were planned. This is said not to debunk the whole missionary project as simply a handmaiden to empire, but rather to highlight the particular context in which the Mission of Help took place. Moreover, this political context did, as we shall see in the following pages, contribute significantly to the stresses and strains which would develop between the Syrian Christians and the CMS missionaries.

Conclusion

This chapter, therefore, has sought to introduce the key movements and figures that will be the focus in the following pages. While detailed discussion of either the CMS, or the Syrian Christians of Travancore, has not been possible in this chapter, what can be discerned is that the two groups were markedly different in culture and theological understanding. Chapter 2 will discuss the latter in much more detail. The chapters that follow will see how the cultural differences increasingly impressed themselves on Benjamin Bailey and his CMS colleagues in ways in which they could not have been expected to foresee. Moreover, the political context hinted at in discussing Buchanan above found its peak influence under Col. John Munro. This is the subject of Chapter 3. Yet the shadow of politicisation was long over the Mission of Help. These cultural-theological and political factors would conspire to ensure that the Mission of Help

⁸⁶ Ibid, 119.

would soon enough run into difficulties. This chapter has served to give advance notice of the areas of difficulty that would be encountered.

Chapter 2 - Differing Doctrines: Convictions on the Constants as the Mission of Help began (1811-18)

“[T]he doctrines of the Syrian Christians are few in number, but pure, and agree in essential points with those of the Church of England.” Claudio Buchanan (1811)¹

“Never was there a greater mistake. The errors of Syrianism were the errors of Antioch, not Rome ... they were entwined amid the very vitals of the system.” Richard Collins (1873)²

These two quotations serve to highlight that the mission of the CMS to the ancient Syrian Church of Kerala has been viewed very differently by different agents of that Society. Admittedly, they come from different periods in the CMS involvement in Travancore. Claudio Buchanan wrote in 1811 in the hope that suitable candidates would come forward to engage in a mission to that church. Collins, writing in 1873, had been able to observe at first hand, as a missionary in Kerala himself, the results of the Mission of Help. The purpose of this chapter is to outline and assess the differing doctrinal perspectives that were held by the CMS and the Syrian Christians at the beginning of the Mission of Help. Not only were there differing doctrinal perspectives, but a whole different approach to doctrine between the missionaries and the Syrians. This shall be discussed more below, but in this chapter as a whole we shall see that such differences were not adequately recognised as the Mission of Help got underway from 1811-18.

The first of these dates is significant in that the publication of Buchanan’s *Christian Researches in Asia* was a key motivating factor in the Mission of Help being commissioned by the CMS. As we will see in this chapter, Buchanan’s assessment of the Syrian Church’s doctrines was influential. The latter date is an important marker also, for it was in 1818 that Joseph Fenn came and took over from Bailey at the Syrian College. This enabled Bailey to concentrate more single-

¹ Claudio Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia: With Notices of the Translation of the Scriptures into the Oriental Languages*, Fourth Edition, London: T. Cadell and W. Davies (1811), 123ff.

² Richard Collins, *Missionary Enterprise in the East: With Especial Reference to the Syrian Christians of Malabar and the Results of Modern Missions*, London: Henry S. King & Co. (1873), 100.

mindedly on his work of Bible translation and on preaching in the churches. It was in this way that Bailey's role as a reformer in the ecclesiastical development of Kerala really began to gain traction. As one of our main aims is to explore how theological factors served to undermine the Mission of Help, this excursus on differing doctrines is necessary to understanding the unfolding events in which Bailey and his colleagues were involved.

Buchanan on Syrian Christian Doctrine

When Claudio Buchanan³ published his *Christian Researches in Asia*, he was attempting to present the ancient Syrian Church of Travancore in the best possible light so that missionaries would be encouraged to go to its aid. Indeed the whole book is an appeal concerning the spiritual needs of India and was influential in the opening up of India to missionaries when the EIC charter was renewed in 1813.⁴ The following quotation demonstrates Buchanan's enthusiasm for a missionary venture amongst them:

By their long and energetic defence of pure doctrine against anti-christian error, they are entitled to gratitude and thanks of the rest of the Christian world. Further, they have preserved to this day the language in which our blessed Lord preached to men the glad tidings of Salvation. Their Scriptures, their doctrines, their language, in short their very existence, all add something to the evidence of the truth of Christianity.⁵

Buchanan was aware to some extent of what he would have considered corruptions of the church. Nevertheless, he seems to have firmly believed that the church as a whole was a potential ally of the Church of England, and its new Evangelical Society the CMS. This explains Buchanan's assessment:

The doctrines of the Syrian Christians are few in number, but pure, and agree in essential points with those of the Church of England: so that although the body of the Church appears to be ignorant, and formal, and

³ Buchanan is briefly introduced in the Introduction above and also in Chapter 1.

⁴ On Buchanan's role in opening up India to mission see Wilbert R. Shenk, 'The Legacy of Claudio Buchanan', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 18:2, April 1994, 78-84.

⁵ Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia*, 144.

dead, there are individuals who are alive to righteousness, who are distinguished from the rest by their purity of life, and are sometimes censured for too rigid a piety.⁶

The few doctrines upon which Buchanan comments seem on a superficial level to suggest common ground with the Church of England. These were 1. Vicarious atonement and justification by faith in that atonement alone. 2. Regeneration by the Spirit, leading to *metanoia* (repentance). 3. Trinitarian belief in line with Athanasius, thus upholding the full deity of Christ. No mention, however, is made of controversies concerning the natures of Christ. Buchanan did record, however, that a senior priest had denounced the teachings of Nestorius. We will discuss more on these Christological questions below. Buchanan sums up their teaching on Christ as follows: “the Son appeared on earth for the salvation of mankind, ... he was born of the Virgin Mary by means of the Holy Ghost, and was incarnate God and Man.”⁷ Apart from the reference to Nestorius, no mention is therefore made of the hindrances to ecumenical relations that the Christology of the Syrian Orthodox Churches have occasioned in recent times.⁸

So Buchanan’s opinion seemed considerably positive toward a church that he probably regarded as something of a smoking flax, in the language of Isaiah.⁹ That said, as John Fenwick reminds us, there was both more suspicion and misunderstanding in the meetings between Buchanan and the Metran Mar Dionysius I than his *Christian Researches* would suggest.¹⁰ No doubt, however, Buchanan influenced the CMS decision to send missionaries to Travancore. The Syrian Christian historian, Judge P. Cherian, quoted the twelfth annual report of the CMS, where it was suggested “that a few learned, zealous, prudent, clergymen would be received, as there is ground

⁶ Ibid, 123-125. This quote is over three pages as Buchanan has an extremely long footnote running at the bottom of each page.

⁷ Ibid, 125.

⁸ On the Syrian Churches’ Christology in relation to other churches see Sebastian Brock, ‘The Syriac Churches in Ecumenical Dialogue on Christology,’ in Anthony O’Mahony (ed), *Eastern Christianity: Studies in Modern History, Religion and Politics*, London: Melisende (2004), 44-65.

⁹ See Isaiah 42:3 “a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoking flax he will not quench” (NKJV).

¹⁰ See John Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops: The Malabar Independent Syrian Church and its Place in the Story of the St Thomas Christians of South India*, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies, Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press (2009), 300-308. Fenwick bases evidence for this on unpublished letters of Buchanan held in the British Library (IOR/MSS Eur D.122). These letters formed a basis for his *Christian Researches* but were much more open about the problems of his initial encounters with the Syrians.

to hope, with open arms by the venerable Church.”¹¹ Cherian notes that it would hardly be surprising, in the light of Buchanan’s work, if a somewhat “erroneous impression” was developed of the Syrian Church amongst the evangelical supporters of the CMS in England.¹² We must now assess Buchanan’s claims concerning the essential doctrinal similarities between the CMS and the Syrian Christians of Kerala with whom they worked.¹³ A range of Christian doctrines that are widely considered as constants across the many different cultures where Christianity has a foothold will form the basis for this comparison. Discussion of these doctrinal differences form the main thrust of this chapter. To begin with, however, some consideration of what it means to be Christian for the CMS and the Syrians needs consideration.

Contrasting Conceptions of Christian Identity

We begin by considering more general differences between Eastern and Western Christianity as these are essential to understanding the differences between the Anglicans and the Syrians. Contemporary Reformed theologian Robert Letham notes that in the Western Church there tends to be general agreement on the theological questions that are being asked. In the Eastern Church, however, there are different questions asked in comparison to Western Christianity. Kallistos Timothy Ware has written: “Christians in the west, both Roman and Reformed, generally start by asking the same questions, although they may disagree about the answers. In Orthodoxy, however, it is not only the answers that are different – the questions themselves are not the same as in the west.”¹⁴ It seems unlikely that Bailey and his colleagues in 1816 would have fully appreciated these differences. Little was known amongst Western Protestants about the Eastern churches even in general terms at that date. W.S. Hunt reminded us that this was perhaps even more so the case with the Syrian Christians of Travancore. The missionaries and the Syrians

¹¹ P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians and the Church Missionary Society, 1816-1840*, Published by his grandchildren, Kottayam, (2015). Originally published by Kottayam CMS Press in 1935, 74.

¹² Ibid, 77.

¹³ See the discussion in Chapter 1 above for more background on the group with whom the CMS attempted to work. While I refer throughout for ease of reading to ‘Syrian Christians’, it must be remembered that this was a somewhat fragmented group. For more extensive background to the Thomas or Syrian Christians see Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2008), 111-116.

¹⁴ Cited in Robert Letham, *Through Western Eyes: Eastern Orthodoxy: A Reformed Perspective*, Ross-shire: Mentor (2007), 12.

were, W.S. Hunt argues, “ecclesiastical antitheses.”¹⁵ It appears, however, that under the influence of Buchanan, Bailey and his colleagues did not think this was the case.

This radical dissimilarity between the CMS and the Syrians involved such basic questions as ‘what is a Christian?’, and ‘what is the Church?’ The germane doctrines of soteriology and ecclesiology are discussed below. At this point, however, it should be noted that there were completely different ways of approaching these questions in the churches we are considering in this thesis. Further analysis follows in concluding Chapter 4. For now, however, we note that the Reformed Anglicans of the CMS understood the Church as in essence the company of those who had experienced personal salvation. The Western Protestant theological emphasis of justification by faith alone in Christ’s atoning sacrifice alone was therefore of supreme importance. For Bailey and his colleagues, resting on hereditary belonging to the Church or any sacrament as the locus of one’s Christian identity was sure to breed a nominal Christianity. In the Syrian Church, however, such concerns would have smacked of a “dogmatic intellectualism” that over-emphasised individual conversion at the expense of corporate belonging to a communion of the faithful based on tradition.¹⁶

In practical ecclesiology as well there was a gulf of difference between CMS evangelicalism, with its generally ‘low church’ order and priority on preaching, and that of the Syrians. Hunt again is illuminating: “To a Protestant Westerner the service would seem long and elaborate and the lay people’s part in it that of spectators; they used to speak, a hundred years ago [i.e. in the period this study is looking at] … of ‘going to see the service,’ not to participate in it – and some do still.” He adds that the liturgy “has the atmosphere of adoration and mystery that characterises Eastern services.”¹⁷ We can therefore see that there were considerable general differences in the understanding of the Church and Christian identity between the Syrians of Travancore and the CMS missionaries.

¹⁵ W.S. Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore and Cochin, 1816-1916*, Vol. I, Kottayam: CMS Press (1920), 89.

¹⁶ On this point see C.P. Mathew and M.M. Thomas, *The Indian Churches of St. Thomas*, Delhi: ISPCK (2005 [1967]), 53-54.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 41.

Contrasting Theological Convictions

While there were commonalities between the beliefs adhered to by the CMS missionaries of the Church of England and the Syrians to whom Bailey and his colleagues were sent, it is, however, the differences that are more significant for present purposes. This thesis aims to show that it was these differences which provide significant explanation for why the Mission of Help ultimately came to an end, alongside the politicisation of the Mission, as we shall see in Chapters 3 and 4.

Coming to the more specific theological differences, assessed using the categories of Systematic and Contextual Theology, this chapter will apply the approach of Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder in their seminal work *Constants in Context*. Observing the vastly different contexts of Christianity throughout the world, Bevans and Schroeder note that there are six theological constants that are always present and make Christianity Christian. They list these as Christology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology, Salvation, Anthropology and Culture.¹⁸ The use of such constants is fine, as one reviewer notes, “as long as we allow room for theologians, especially those from different cultural and philosophical backgrounds from our own, to be themselves.”¹⁹ Striving to heed this caution, the focus in this chapter will be on the main doctrines where there were differences between the CMS and the Syrians. Bevans and Schroeder are, of course, writing early in the twenty-first century. Yet the argument of their book is that these constants tend to shape belief whenever and wherever Christianity has taken root. Moreover, they also classify three different theological types, namely orthodox/conservative theology (Type A), liberal theology (Type B) and radical/liberation theology (Type C).²⁰ While the theology of both the CMS and the Syrians would most comfortably fit into Type A, these classifications remind us that the constants are really areas of theological engagement as much as being the grounds of theological agreement. In this chapter we will consider in particular Christology, Ecclesiology and Salvation/Soteriology. Moreover, it is somewhat surprising that Bevans and Schroeder omit a consideration of the role of Scripture as being a constant in the worldwide church across

¹⁸ Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis (2004), 33-34.

¹⁹ Kirsteen Kim, “A Pneumatological Reading,” A Review from Europe’, ‘*Constants in Context* and Missiology as a Discipline in Theological Education,’ *Mission Studies*, 22:1 (2005), 135-139, ref., 139.

²⁰ Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 35ff.

history and culture. It could be argued that Scripture is the constant which determines what the other constants ought to be. As another reviewer notes: “I wonder how the Bible can be left out when they claim to strive after ‘seeing both the constancy of the church as it lives out its mission and the contextual, changing shape that such constancy requires.’ Has not the Bible been the constant mission-doer in all contexts?”²¹ With this reminder in view we shall also consider the differences in the relationship between Scripture and Tradition between the CMS and the Syrians.

Source material on the doctrines of the Syrian Jacobite Orthodox Church of Kerala is somewhat rare.²² Leslie Brown noted that there has historically been little awareness of doctrinal *differentia* amongst the Syrians of Kerala. He suggested that for the faithful of the Syrian Christian community: “[t]he place of personal faith is never emphasized, it is enough to be incorporated into the faithful, worshipping, believing Church.”²³ More recently John Fenwick has argued that the Puthenkur, or Jacobite, community at the beginning of the nineteenth century was “far from being ‘pure’ Syrian Orthodox” in doctrine. It was, rather, the tiny Malabar Independent Syrian Church (MISC) which was more intentional in following West Syrian, or Jacobite, belief and practice at this time.²⁴ Brown notes, however, that following contact with the CMS missionaries there have been theological books published by Syrian theologians who seek to prove all points by Scripture. Even where the aim of these works is to defend traditional Syrian belief against reformist ideas, the methods of a more Western style theological tradition have been influential.²⁵

One such work is *Mathopadesa Sarangal*, or *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines*. This work dates back to 1900 and was written as a catechism of the Church’s faith by Mor (or Mar) Dionysius Geevarghese Vattasseril. It was translated into English in recent years by O.M.

²¹ Laurent Ramambason, “‘The Variables and Constants of Christian Mission,’ A Review from Africa’, ‘*Constants in Context* and Missiology as a Discipline in Theological Education,’ *Mission Studies*, 22:1 (2005), 148-151, ref., 150.

²² It reflects later alignments and labelling to refer to the Syrians of our period as the Syrian Jacobite Orthodox Church. Nevertheless this body, with links to Antioch, were the main faction of Syrians with whom the CMS dealt.

²³ Leslie W. Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas: An Account of the Ancient Syrian Church of Malabar*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1956), 295.

²⁴ Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops*, 297.

²⁵ Brown, *The Indian Christians*, 291.

Matthew Oruvattithara who also adds some comments of his own to the text. The author had been a *malpān* in the church and was consecrated as Mar Dionysius VI. Although he was a ring leader in the split which from 1910 onwards has seen two factions amongst the Syrian Orthodox in Kerala, this work nevertheless is a systematic outline of the beliefs of the undivided Syrian Jacobite Orthodox Church at the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁶ This little book is a valuable source for our purposes for two reasons. Firstly, it grew out of a perceived need in the Syrian Church to clearly outline their faith and practice in the wake of the upheavals caused by the Anglican Mission in Travancore and the formation of the Mar Thoma Church in 1889. The 2006 Publisher's Brief states: "The litigations and rift prompted by the reformist group, inspired by the Protestants, challenged the orthodoxy of the Church through their speeches and pamphlets. A very strong initiative was taken by the then leaders of our church to defend the faith, history and doctrines of the Church."²⁷ Hence this work seeks to take back ground that eighty plus years of Anglican Mission in Travancore had caused to be lost, from the Syrian perspective.

Secondly, this little book is valuable for us because it seeks to strongly defend the historical and traditional beliefs of the Syrian Church in Travancore and its unity with the great Syriac theologians of the past. In a further introduction, Kaniamparambil Curian Corepiscopa notes that Mar Dionysius VI moulded his work after the writings of Maphryono Mor Gregorius Bar Ebroyo, the thirteenth century Syriac theologian.²⁸ The work is therefore an attempt, from a Syrian perspective, to outline the historic teachings of the Syrian Church before there was any Protestant involvement and, indeed, before the Roman Catholic contact of the sixteenth century. We shall certainly need to assess further the influence of Roman Catholicism on the Syrian Christians. Yet regardless of that influence, the doctrine contained in the *Quintessence*, within fifty years of Bailey leaving Kerala, will give us a good indication also of what the doctrines of

²⁶ Publisher's Brief by Kuriakose Corepiscopa Moolayil, in Mor Dionysius Geevarghese Vattasseril, *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines (Mathopadesa Sarangal): The True Faith of the Syrian Orthodox Church with Biblical References*, Changanacherry: Mor Adai Study Centre (2006 [1900]), 8. Hereafter referred to as *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines*. The Publisher's Brief also states "in the Indian Branch of the Syrian Church very little has been ever written or even translated." 5.

²⁷ Ibid, 5.

²⁸ Ibid, 13.

the Church were on his arrival there. We shall now therefore contrast the convictions on the constants that would have prevailed between this ancient church and the Anglican evangelicals of the CMS at the time of first encounter.

Christology

The Syrian Church clearly affirms, as any Christian Church does, the deity and uniqueness of Jesus Christ. In the *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines*, Mar Dionysius VI stated “Jesus, who is one of the persons of the Trinity and who is the Word cum Son of God the Father, is begotten of the Father from eternity.”²⁹ The phrase “Word cum Son of God the Father” could be understood to suggest that the Christ was not always the Son of God. This, however, probably reflects sloppiness of translation rather than doctrinal heterodoxy. There is no controversy with any church in mainstream global Christianity in this statement.

The difference between the CMS missionaries, along with all Chalcedonian churches, and the Syrians, would have lain in the view of Christ’s person and natures. The Chalcedonian Definition of 451 states that Christ is “to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons.”³⁰ The Council of Chalcedon was certainly ecumenical. Brian E. Daley, SJ describes Chalcedon as “a gathering at which virtually all the Christian churches were to some degree represented.”³¹ Widespread representation, however, did not translate into universal subscription for the Chalcedonian Definition. Many Christians in Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Armenia and Ethiopia believed a Miaphysite doctrine was not merely an eastern expression of faith, but “was fully consonant with the teaching of the earlier orthodox church fathers, including Athanasius of Alexandria, the Cappadocians, Cyril, and all

²⁹ Ibid, 30.

³⁰ The Chalcedonian Creed (A.D. 451). I am using the text reproduced in Appendix 1: Historic Confessions of Faith in Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Leicester: IVP (1994), 1169-1170.

³¹ Brian E. Daley, SJ, ‘Christ and Christologies,’ in Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2008), 886-905, ref., 897.

those who were universally recognized as the pillars of (imperial) orthodoxy.”³² Chalcedonian uniformity therefore failed, and by the sixth century Syriac had become the main language of a non-Chalcedonian, Oriental Orthodox tradition.³³ It is this Christological tradition that subsequently took root amongst the Thomas Christians of South West India. It may well be that such debates also left Christians on the imperial and theological margins of Rome and Byzantine somewhat cold. Hannah Hunt has suggested that Christ as an example of kenotic humility and obedience, rather than the minutiae of how his humanity and divinity related, was the devotional driving force of their Christianity.³⁴

Returning to the Chalcedonian Definition, however, it was designed to dismiss the twin historic heresies associated with the names of Nestorius and Eutyches. Nestorius served as Bishop of Constantinople from 428. On assuming this responsibility, Nestorius was unhappy with the emphasis given to Mary as *Theotokos* (mother of God), and was concerned that the Christology of the time blended the two natures of Christ, the human and divine, in such a way that both were confused. What Nestorius’s own Christology was seems to be a matter of no little confusion, but what came to be known as Nestorianism “so stressed the humanity of Christ and so distinguished it from his divinity as to convey the impression that the Mediator was two separate persons, one the Son of God and the other Son of Man.”³⁵ MacLeod urges us to note that “discussion of the issue is complicated by the fact that Nestorius was almost certainly not a Nestorian.”³⁶ Nevertheless, the heresy, or family of heresies, arguing for two persons and two natures in Christ has come to be known as Nestorianism. This position has been associated with the Chaldean Orthodox Church, or Church of the East. In Kerala there remains to this day a small remnant of the Church of the East in and around Trichur (Thrissur).³⁷

³² Lucas Van Rompay, ‘The East (3): Syria and Mesopotamia,’ in Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, Oxford; Oxford University Press (2008), 365-386, ref. 378.

³³ *Ibid*, 379.

³⁴ Hannah Hunt, *Clothed in the Body: Asceticism, the Body and the Spiritual in the Late Antique Era*, Farnham: Ashgate (2012), 184.

³⁵ Donald MacLeod, *The Person of Christ*, Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press (1998), 181.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 180-181.

³⁷ Brock, *The Syriac Churches*, 44ff gives a helpful summary of the various churches of the non-Chalcedonian and Syriac tradition.

Eutyches, meanwhile, taught that in the incarnation the deity of Christ completely absorbed the humanity. He is described by J.N.D. Kelly as an “a confused and unskilled thinker, blindly rushing forward to defend the unity of Christ against all attempts to divide him.”³⁸ Mark Edwards is also less than flattering: “Eutyches … is not so much the paradigm as the caricature of Alexandrian teaching … Eutyches could not believe that a man who was God could share one nature with mortal and fallen specimens of humanity.”³⁹ His followers developed a more consistent monophysitism “arguing that the union of the two natures resulted in a compound which was neither human nor divine but formed some kind of *tertium quid*.”⁴⁰ There is some disagreement over what terms can be applied to the Syrians’ Christology, and, indeed, over which of these two opposite errors truly reflects their historic position.⁴¹ Brock, for example, prefers the term miaphysite and argues that monophysite is best avoided when describing the Syrians’ Christology since this term is likely to be conflated with Eutychianism.⁴² In actual fact, Eutyches is generally regarded as a heretic in the Oriental Orthodox Churches including the Syrian Jacobites of Kerala.⁴³

The official teaching of the Syrians, however, at the time when the CMS Mission of Help was beginning and subsequently was monophysite.⁴⁴ This was one of the religious doctrines that Mar Dionysius VI was eager be reasserted around 1900, in his response to the various Protestant and reform movements. The Metropolitan wrote: “As the union (of the two natures) has been accomplished in perfection no subsequent separation into two hypostases or persons is possible.” In this statement, he challenges Nestorianism. He then goes on, however, “[t]he two natures are

³⁸ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Fifth Edition, London: A & C Black (1977), 333.

³⁹ Mark Edwards, *Catholicity and Heresy in the Early Church*, Farnham: Ashgate (2009), 141, 163.

⁴⁰ MacLeod, *The Person of Christ*, 184.

⁴¹ Space does not permit entering into the debate as to whether the Church was actually Nestorian prior to the arrival of a Jacobite Bishop in 1665, after freedom was gained from Roman Catholic control. For an account of these developments, see Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Vol II 1500-1900*, Maryknoll NY:Orbis (2005), 19-20. That the connection with the Jacobite Patriarchs began so late as the seventeenth century is, however, denied by many amongst the Syrian Jacobites. See P Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 18. For the contrary view, that the Syrian Church in Kerala has been Jacobite from the sixth century, see, for example, E.M. Philip *The Indian Church of St. Thomas*, Kottayam (1907), Chapter IX.

⁴² Brock, *The Syriac Churches*, 45, n. 1.

⁴³ In the *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines*, 167, Mar Dionysius VI lists Eutychus as a heretic!

⁴⁴ Monophysite is more common in the literature than miaphysite. It is also acknowledged that being anti-Euthycian does not mean a person or church is not monophysite. Therefore we will use the term monophysite for our purposes.

fused together as to form one nature, one Person ... He is true God and true human simultaneously." He appeals to Ephesians 4:5, "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism," as a proof text.⁴⁵ Without getting into the exegesis of this passage, it is sufficient here to say that it pertains to questions about the unity of the Church rather than the unity of Christ's person, although, it should be remembered that the Church is viewed in Scripture and tradition as the Body of Christ. This monophysitism has been illustrated like this by Jacobite writers:

Not like oil and water; but like wine and water, the Divine and human natures of our Lord are joined together and are become one. They believe in Him as perfect God and perfect man both at his conception and birth and his sufferings, death and resurrection, and at his coming at the last day, and that they did not destroy his humanity by his Divinity, or his Divinity by his humanity.⁴⁶

Whether or not such illustrations are helpful, the intent appears to be to outline a non-Chalcedonian alternative to the conception of Christ's natures being indivisible, inseparable and distinct.

The monophysitism of the Syrians is an obvious theological point of contrast with the Anglicans of the CMS and all Chalcedonian Churches. Echoing the language of Chalcedon, Article II of the Anglican *Thirty-Nine Articles* states that Christ "took Man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, the Godhead and the Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God, and very Man."⁴⁷ Cladius Buchanan, however, significantly underplayed the monophysitism of the Syrians in his *Christian Researches*. In this he set an example for the first generation of the CMS missionaries in Kerala. Hunt wrote "the significance of the Syrian Church being Jacobite [i.e. monophysite in Christology] was not understood or was purposely disregarded by the CMS and their friends a hundred years ago." For this Hunt holds Buchanan responsible: "In his 'Christian researches' he minimised the Church's Jacobitism." While Buchanan found a few priests holding to monophysitism, he claimed that they generally

⁴⁵ *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines*, 35.

⁴⁶ Cited in P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 16. No attribution is given.

⁴⁷ From Appendix I in Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1171.

explained it away.⁴⁸ The impression Buchanan gave was that the issue of monophysitism need not be a great barrier for co-operation between the Syrians and the Anglican Church.

Richard Collins, however, saw things very differently. As principal of CMS College Kottayam from 1855 to 1865 he himself was able to observe at first hand the ongoing ecclesiastical developments in Kerala. Quoting from the Syrians' Christmas Day service he noted the following stark statement: "The only son has *one nature*, and one person. He who imputes to Him two persons and *two natures* is cursed. Hallelujah! Let him inherit hell!"⁴⁹ Such anathematizing from the unreformed wing of the Jacobite Church suggests that they themselves did not view monophysitism as a doctrine that could be easily dispensed with for the sake of co-operation with Chalcedonian churches or missions such as the CMS. Collins sees such sentiments as "a full exhibition of Eutychianism."⁵⁰ Collins' designation here is not quite accurate. We have seen above that the Syrian Jacobite Church actually condemns Eutyches as a heretic. Yet, as P. Cherian argued, a condemnation of Eutyches does not exonerate a church from the charges of being monophysite. Rather, "[s]o far as orthodox Christianity is concerned, the test is whether the individual or Church concerned accepts or rejects the Christological teaching of the Council of Chalcedon, and not the acknowledgement or repudiation of Eutyches."⁵¹

Regardless of the precise labels Collins puts on aspects of Syrian Christology, however, he is right to attribute the rather sanguine view of the early CMS missionaries on doctrinal matters to Buchanan. "Dr Buchanan," Collins suggested, "partly, no doubt through ignorance of their language, and partly led astray by the great urbanity of the ecclesiastics he visited, seems to have

⁴⁸ See Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore*, Vol. I, 74, 75.

⁴⁹ Collins, *Missionary Enterprise in the East*, 81-82. Collins takes this quotation from the Christmas Day Service of Jacob of Urahâi (or Edessa) who lived from 640-708 and was a leading miaphysite Syriac theologian. Collins notes (80) that he is quoting from a tract written by a leading Syrian priest in the same year that he is writing. This suggests that the contact with the CMS and the reformist tendencies which followed had by the 1870s stung the Syrians into setting forth and defending their Christological position. It is not clear if Collins got the quote from Jacob from this tract, although this seems likely. In any case, the monophysitism it presents is an ancient teaching of the Syrian Jacobite Church.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 81.

⁵¹ P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 13.

formed too favourable an opinion of ‘the scriptural nature of their liturgy.’”⁵² There appears to be some truth in these claims. Buchanan records meeting the then Metropolitan, Mar Dionysius I in 1806 and being reminded of John Chrysostom by his impressive, other-worldly, appearance: “He was drest in a vestment of dark red silk; a large golden cross hung from his neck, and his venerable beard reached below his girdle.”⁵³ There is also evidence from the early missionary literature reporting on the CMS Travancore Mission that there was a genuine spirituality about such men as Mar Dionysius II and III and Mar Philoxenes that impressed the missionaries. While the spirituality of such men, along with their welcome and sense of fraternity with the missionaries was a great encouragement to the latter, these admirable characteristics may have partially blinded Buchanan and the early missionaries to the important differences between themselves on Christology and other important doctrines. However, it is to other teachings of this ancient Church that we must now turn.

Ecclesiology

As the interest of the CMS in the Syrian Christians of Kerala was developing, the signals concerning inter-church relations between the Anglican Church and the Syrians were mixed. Claudio Buchanan, in his *Christian Researches*, wrote “[s]ince my coming amongst this people, I had cherished the hope that they might one day be united with the Church of England.”⁵⁴ Buchanan’s narrative was very much anti-Roman Catholic and in making this assertion he was motivated by the continuing power of the Roman Catholic Church in India. Buchanan, and the missionaries inspired by him to go to Travancore, believed that the departures from what they perceived to be biblical belief and practice were attributable to later Roman Catholic influence, and hence the Christianity of the Syrians was seen as suspect and nominal. It is the contention of this chapter, however, that whatever nominalism there may have been amongst the Syrians, they had more ancient origins than Roman Catholic influence. In any case, Buchanan hoped that these initial contacts with the Syrians would provide a basis for discussion that could be built upon by

⁵² Collins, *Missionary Enterprise in the East*, 88.

⁵³ Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia*, 126.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 127-128.

other Anglicans.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, it would be unfair to view Buchanan as completely naïve in hoping for Church union between the two communions. He was aware of the problems that lay in such a path. Both churches adhered strongly, for example, to episcopal ordination. Yet the Syrians apparently questioned the legitimacy of English ordinations. Buchanan explained that, in effect, Anglican ordinations had apostolic antiquity as the Church of England stood in the same line of succession as the Church of Rome. The Syrians, however, trace their lineage back to Thomas, not Peter, and believed that they possessed apostolic succession, not Rome.⁵⁶ Hence, at the very least, Buchanan noted: “They expected that in any official negotiation on this subject, the antiquity and purity of Syrian Ordination should be expressly admitted.” In this way, it would seem, Buchanan laid the groundwork by which a way would be opened for Anglican missionaries to preach in Syrian churches and for Syrians possibly to preach in Anglican churches.⁵⁷ In these initial discussions with the Metropolitan of that time in 1806, Buchanan assured him that the Syrian Church’s purity and dignity would be preserved. Buchanan added: “The Church of England would be happy to promote its welfare, to revive its spirit, and to use it as an instrument for future good in the midst of her own Empire.”⁵⁸

In assessing Buchanan’s ideas on the church’s co-operation, it is vital to our present purposes to comment on the brand of strongly Evangelical and Protestant brand of Anglicanism advocated by the CMS. William Henry Taylor speaks to this issue when he states: “Had the ‘mission of help’ been balanced by representatives of less hard-line Protestants, the venture would have been on a more solid footing.”⁵⁹ Certainly, from the early days of the Post-Reformation Church of England, a more ‘high church’ and a more ‘low church’ form of Anglicanism had uneasily co-existed. The internal differences of Anglicanism were essentially ecclesiological. Spencer sums up the basic difference thus: “Word or sacrament: which is the primary point of contact between the believer and their God.”⁶⁰ The ‘high church’ party began in the early years of the seventeenth

⁵⁵ Ibid, 128.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 128.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 129.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 130.

⁵⁹ William Henry Taylor, *Antioch and Canterbury: The Syrian Orthodox Church and the Church of England 1874-1928*, Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press (2005), 124.

⁶⁰ Stephen Spencer, *SCM Studyguide to Anglicanism*, London: SCM Press (2010), 83.

century under King James I. Some of the leading ecclesiastics of that time, such as Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, “demonstrated a revival in a certain section of the Church of a deeply sacramental piety that hardly fits within Reformed Protestantism.”⁶¹ What is important to note for our purposes, is that the CMS, like Buchanan himself, was very much in the tradition of Reformed Protestantism, as we have seen in tracing Bailey’s theological training and the origins of the CMS itself.⁶²

Taylor’s case that the ‘low church,’ strongly Protestant Anglicanism of the CMS hindered the potential for success of the Mission of Help is inadequate. The subsequent chapters of this thesis show that political factors were at least as significant. However, at the theological level Taylor’s statement also is problematic. Letham, for example, argues that the Orthodox Churches in general have more in common with Anglicanism than they do with Rome. He notes: “The Eastern Church has never had a hierarchical structure such as Rome has had, with the church embodied in a single bishop.” There is, rather, parity amongst bishops, notwithstanding the Pentarchy of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Rome and Constantinople. Yet “their position is one of respect rather than power.”⁶³ Hence, Letham concludes, “[t]his is a model of the church very close to the post-Reformation Anglican one – and the Church of England was widely recognized as a Reformed church.”⁶⁴ Miroslav Volf, meanwhile, in engaging with the ecclesiology of leading Eastern theologian Metropolitan John Zizioulas, notes that the latter views relationships between local churches as symmetrical, with every local church “capable of passing judgment on everything.” Volf comments “[s]uch an understanding of unity and ecclesiality seems to tend toward a confederation of local churches.” Zizioulas tries to offset this by granting hierarchy to the Patriarchate and cautiously toward the universal church.⁶⁵ These observations of Volf very much concur with Letham’s assessment that on the doctrine of the church itself there was not too much of a gap between Reformed Anglicanism (as opposed to Anglo-Catholicism) and Eastern Orthodoxy. Nevertheless, there were significant differences in

⁶¹ Ibid, 91.

⁶² See the biographical sketch of Bailey and the historical background to the Mission of Help in Chapter 1.

⁶³ Letham, *Through Western Eyes*, 199, 200.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 278.

⁶⁵ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1998), 107.

the ecclesiology of the CMS and the Syrians and the key to these differences is to be found in their respective understanding of the sacraments.

There are differences in the general view of sacraments as a whole. Mar Dionysius VI, in the *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines*, introduces his section ‘On the Holy Sacraments’ as follows: “The Holy Sacraments are decreed and instituted by our Lord as essentials for the salvation of mankind and are the very visible rituals of invisible grace.”⁶⁶ Confessional Anglicanism would go along with this in part. That they are visible signs of invisible grace is a generally agreed point throughout the Christian Church. Disagreement comes as to what extent they are more than that. Article XXV of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* leaves some room for ambiguity: “Sacraments ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men’s profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God’s good will toward us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but does also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him.”⁶⁷ The CMS in the early nineteenth century would have affirmed that the sacraments were signs of grace and that they are also means of grace to strengthen and confirm faith in him. They would, however, with their low-church Protestantism, have been opposed to the suggestion that the sacraments had any power in themselves to effect salvation. Hence the assertion above in *the Quintessence of Religious Doctrines* that sacraments are “essentials for salvation” was a significant difference on the nature of the gospel between the CMS and Syrians. It could be argued, in fact, that the CMS position was more accurately defined by the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646) which states “The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them”.⁶⁸

Indeed, the ‘low church’ Anglicanism of the CMS was criticised by some of their fellow Anglicans. E.M. Philip quotes one such source, a European Clergyman of the Church of England: “So enamoured were those C.M.S. men of their extreme notions, that, though they were the ordained clergy of the Church of England, they translated the [Westminster] Assembly’s

⁶⁶ *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines*, 40.

⁶⁷ *Thirty-Nine Articles*, in Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Appendix I, 1175.

⁶⁸ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 27:3, in Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Appendix I, 1193.

Catechism into Malayalam, and made it one of the textbooks at the College; nay, one of them even used it, alternately with the Word of God, as the basis of his Sunday lectures.”⁶⁹ The CMS missionaries therefore had probably more in common in many of their doctrinal views with other Reformed denominations than with High Anglicans. For their critics within Anglicanism, their ‘low’ view of the sacraments considerably hindered any partnership they might have had with the Syrians.

Another general difference on the sacraments was in the number of sacraments recognised. Mar Dionysius VI lists seven in his catechetical work, namely Baptism, Eucharist, Confession, Chrismation, Holy Orders, Matrimony and Anointing of the sick.⁷⁰ The *Thirty-Nine Articles*, however, clearly teach “[t]here are two Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel, that is to say, Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord.” The other five sacraments, held in the Roman Catholic Church and by the Syrians, are seen as corruptions, or as being derived from lawful states of life which there is no biblical warrant for making sacraments of.⁷¹ That the CMS and Syrians could not even agree on the number of sacraments would make long-term co-operation much more difficult.

Soteriology

We shall consider the differences in the understanding of salvation between the CMS and Syrians from several different angles, since soteriology is another constant in every place where a profession of Christianity is made. In the first place, there were differences concerning *how salvation is understood*. Writing of Eastern Orthodoxy generally, Letham notes that their soteriology is synergistic rather than monergistic. In other words, they teach that humans co-operate with God in salvation, rather than God being viewed as the sole agent. Letham argues that this goes back to the Fathers of the Eastern Church. John Chrysostom of Antioch, for example, taught that God forces no one to be saved. The Augustinian and Reformed teaching of

⁶⁹ E.M. Philip, *The Indian Church*, 294. Philip is quoting an article published in *The Indian Church Quarterly Review*, July 1901, 290.

⁷⁰ *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines*, 40-44.

⁷¹ *Thirty-Nine Articles*, XXV, in Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Appendix I, 1175.

the West, on the other hand, asserts that God makes us willing.⁷² Letham sees this as a major sticking point in contemporary relations between Eastern and Western Christianity. He writes: “the East has had a vigorous doctrine of free will. This puts orthodoxy further away from the Reformed than is Rome. This is in many ways the most serious division of all.” This is so because “[t]he question ‘what is the gospel?’ is an absolutely crucial one. How the Reformed, Rome, and Orthodoxy answer it differs in key respects.” The soteriology of the Eastern Church, as far as Letham is concerned, does not take sufficient account of sin and God’s sovereignty.⁷³

This difference over how salvation is understood was a crucial difference between the CMS and the Syrians at the time of the Mission of Help. We see evidence of this in the *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines*. On questions of sin and synergism, the Metropolitan writes “[e]very human being is guilty before God; not only by original sin but by sins committed in this life.”⁷⁴ At this point, there would have been no disagreement with Western Christians of almost any hue. The explanation of humanity’s state, however, puts the accent strongly on free will. Mar Dionysius VI wrote: “Men do good or bad due to their freedom of action and not because of the difference in their nature. God has not created anybody a sinner.” He continued: “Nobody is coerced to do good or bad; no reward or punishment is meted out by forcefully making somebody do good or bad … But God instructs man as to which is good or bad, prompts him to turn to righteousness; He helps man to do good while (He) does not aid him to do evil.”⁷⁵ This is a synergistic emphasis which contrasts with the official teaching of the Church of England. Article X of the Thirty-Nine Articles states:

The condition of Man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God. Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.⁷⁶

⁷² Letham, *Through Western Eyes*, 245.

⁷³ Ibid, 285.

⁷⁴ *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines*, 132.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 134-135.

⁷⁶ *Thirty-Nine Articles*, X, in Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1173.

Contrary to the Syrians, the missionaries of the CMS would have applied synergistic logic to sanctification, not to conversion and justification. It is after we have a good will, this Article teaches, that God works with us. The implication is that before that point God must do all for us.

The understanding of how salvation comes to humanity also includes questions such as foreknowledge and predestination. On these teachings too there are clear differences in the official statements of the Syrian Church and Anglicanism. *The Quintessence of Religious Doctrines* consistently critiques what Mar Dionysius VI calls pre-determination. The Metropolitan wrote: “As one is endowed with the freedom to commit sin, so he is free not to commit it, if he so chooses. God desires that man engages his free will for going good.”⁷⁷ At this point, the contemporary translator O.M. Mathew Oruvattithara comments: “Theory of the SOC against pre-determination as expounded by John Calvin of France and others. According to the SOC, human being is not an automatum (*sic*) or a pawn in the game of fate as the ancient Greeks held. Free will, is a grand gift of God to mankind, says the Church.”⁷⁸ The Metropolitan goes on to deny that God made any pre-determining decisions as to who should inherit heaven or who would go to hell. He did acknowledge that God possesses “the right or power to earmark and purify some people whom he knows beforehand by his foreknowledge, for employing them in his work.” Moreover, he upholds that God had separated and glorified “those who according to his unchanging precognition were known to him and were found eligible for his calling,” citing Romans 8:29-30 for support.⁷⁹ Here, it would seem that the Syrian Church’s understanding of God’s foreknowledge and predestination includes seeing some merit in the individual so called.

This teaching is in sharp contrast to that of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*. Article XVII ‘Of Predestination and Election’ is clear in its argument that there is a positive choosing by God of some unto eternal life based purely on grace, not on any eligibility for being called. It is worth quoting the first paragraph of the Article in full:

⁷⁷ *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines*, 149.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines*, 152-153. The supporting Scripture is quoted by the translator in the Good News Bible: “Those whom God had already chosen, he also set apart to become like his Son, so that the Son would be the first among many brothers.”

Predestination to Life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them to Christ by everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour. Wherefore, they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God, be called according to God's purpose by his Spirit working in due season: *they through Grace obey the calling*: they be justified freely: they be made sons of God by adoption: they be made like the image of the only-begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.⁸⁰

It is reasonable to assert that the idea of pre-determination attacked by the Syrian Church misrepresents the position espoused by Western Christianity from Augustine onwards. Letham makes the point on Orthodoxy generally “[t]hese Orthodox apologists have confused Reformed theology with fatalism, a rigid determinism exemplified by Islam, with which so many in the East have been confronted.”⁸¹ Certainly, insofar as the Syrian Orthodox Churches in Kerala were influenced by the Patriarchates of the Middle East, there may be such understandable explanations for misunderstanding of the Western position. Equally, in the Hinduism of Kerala, a fatalistic caste system may put Christians on the guard against any teaching that sounds like pre-determination, cultural assimilation notwithstanding.⁸² Added to probable misunderstanding along these lines, we also have seen already that Bailey and his colleagues in the early CMS were influenced by strongly Calvinistic clergy such as Thomas Scott and brought an evangelical Calvinism with them to the Mission of Help.⁸³ To what extent there was misunderstanding on these specific doctrines needs further investigation. Suffice to say, however, that there were significant differences in how salvation was understood.

Here then, is a difference that undermined the likelihood of success for the Mission of Help. The understanding of salvation between the CMS and the Syrians began at different starting points. Subsequent conversation on this issue would therefore be at cross purposes. As with

⁸⁰ *Thirty-Nine Articles*, XVII, in Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Appendix I, 1174. Emphasis added.

⁸¹ Letham, *Through Western Eyes*, 267-268.

⁸² These are questions which space forbids fuller discussion of. Chapter 4 discusses some of the ways in which the Syrians were deeply ingrained in Hindu culture. Whether or not this inculcation made them suspicious of fatalism *per se*, it most likely would lead to misunderstanding of predestination as communicated by Western trained missionaries.

⁸³ See Chapter 1 above.

Christological understanding, so the soteriology of the Syrians was significantly different from that of the Anglican Evangelicals of the CMS.

Secondly, there were *differences on how salvation is mediated*. We have seen above the differences between the CMS and the Syrians on Christ's person. There also were differences on Christ's work. In particular, as the CMS missionaries would come to view it, there were elements in Syrian belief and liturgy that undermined Christ as the sole mediator of salvation. It is important, of course, to note that this doctrine is actually affirmed by the Syrians. *The Quintessence of Religious Doctrines* stated regarding Christ: "He is the way, the truth and the life. No one shall be saved except through him."⁸⁴ Nevertheless, official teaching on both Mary and the saints would have been perceived by the CMS missionaries to undermine Christ as sole mediator. The teaching summarised by Mar Dionysius VI holds to the idea that Mary "remained ever a Virgin."⁸⁵ The Metropolitan continued, "[w]e shall, in accordance with the annunciation of the Angel give every honour to this Holy Mother and desire of her solicitations for us." The comment is added by O.M. Mathew Oruvattithara:

myriads of men and women vouch on the efficacy of Her intercession. SOC, however, is cautious to see that the dulia that She accords to the Divine Mother does not verge on hyperdulia or over veneration. It is true that the SOC hails St. Mary as the gate of Heaven. But she is not hailed the Lady of the Immaculate conception as the Roman Catholic Church predicates her.⁸⁶

We can note in passing that there is a tradition within the Syrian Church on Mary and other doctrines that shares common features with the Roman Catholic Church and yet is independent of it. The narrative, associated with Buchanan, that it was the Portuguese Roman Catholic influence that led to this kind of teaching is overly simplistic. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Syrian Church values both the intercession of Mary and in some way regards her as the Gate of Heaven. These concepts would have been deeply concerning to the CMS missionaries.

⁸⁴ *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines*, 36. The language clearly echoes John 14:6, which is quoted in support "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" (ESV)

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 98.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*.

Another area of concern and difference would have been seeking the intercession of saints. That this was desirable is evident from the *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines*. Speaking of the saints, the Metropolitan wrote: “And, as they adore the Lord, like the angels do, as they wish and pray for the redemption of all the people of the world, our solicitations to them to intercede for us will be quite efficacious.” Furthermore, “God answers the intercession not only of the saints but also the prayers of concerned supplicants, after assessing the faith and intention of such ones.”⁸⁷ Once again it must be stressed that it is not the intention of such teaching to undermine Christ as mediator. The Metropolitan seems to anticipate this possible objection, perhaps having heard much of such accusations coming from Syrian Christians influenced by the reform movement. He argued:

As praying for each other is a divine decree and as the practice of the dead saints and living ones praying for each other and for the welfare of the world does not in any way go against or deny or belittle the mediation of Christ, it does not in any way, deprecate or marginalise the exclusive mediation of Christ for us. For, if such a belittling takes place when saints are solicited to intercede, the same thing happens when the living are besought to pray for another living person.⁸⁸

To the CMS missionaries, however, such practices would have, albeit unintentionally, deflected from the uniqueness of Christ’s mediation. Article XXII of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* speaks to this issue in no uncertain terms: “Worshipping and Adoration, as well of Images as of Relics, and also Invocation of Saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.”⁸⁹ For missionaries of the evangelical and reformed wing of Anglicanism, therefore, discovering such practices would have brought into sharp focus important differences regarding the mediation of salvation. These divergences, which seemed to increasingly dawn on Bailey and his colleagues, removed the basis for meaningful common witness or ecclesiastical unity.

Thirdly and finally, there were differences concerning *the appropriation of salvation*. There appears to have been, around 1900 at least, and arguably much more so a century before, some

⁸⁷ Ibid, 103, 104.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 106.

⁸⁹ *Thirty-Nine Articles*, XXII, in Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Appendix I, 1175.

misunderstanding between the Syrians and Protestants in general about what each party actually taught. So, for example, Mar Dionysius VI wrote concerning repentance:

Therefore nobody shall believe the theory propagated by the reformers that the post baptismal sins shall not be forgiven as they are sins against the Holy Spirit and therefore mortal ones; believing such theories, nobody shall keep away from repentance out of despair on that score. Such sinners must repent with full hope and faith and draw near the all merciful God.⁹⁰

The final sentence here actually is in full accord with Reformation teaching. How the Metropolitan got this impression concerning the teaching of reformers, and which reformers he was referring to, he does not make clear. In any case, Article XVI of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* clearly states:

Not every sin willingly committed after Baptism is sin against the Holy Spirit, and unpardonable. Wherefore the grant of repentance is not to be denied to such as fall into sin after Baptism. After we have received the Holy Spirit, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and by the grace of God we may rise again, and amend our lives.⁹¹

It appears, therefore, that there were times when the CMS missionaries and the Syrians misunderstood each other. Moreover, as noted earlier, doctrinal precision was not essential to Syrian Church life in the same way it was to the CMS missionaries.

Perhaps it is on justification that the differences on soteriology were most serious of all. Mar Dionysius VI states the Syrian position thus: “Therefore man is justified neither by faith without action nor by actions without faith nor by free grace alone … It is, rather, by grace, obtained through faith that is accompanied with action.”⁹² Ephesians 2:8 is quoted in support “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (ESV). The comment at this point by O.M. Mathew Oruvattithara does nothing to clarify the Metropolitan’s position: “The theory that God grants grace whimsically or on the basis of his own liking is refuted here. For that would be against the justice of God. The grace of God will be

⁹⁰ *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines*, 139.

⁹¹ *Thirty-Nine Articles*, XVI, in Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1174.

⁹² *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines*, 141-142.

showered on those deserving, by the standards of faith and action.”⁹³ Insofar as this statement represented Syrian teaching as the Mission of Help began, it appears that Claudius Buchanan had been mistaken in asserting that vicarious atonement and justification by faith alone in that atonement was one of the few and pure doctrines of the Syrians.⁹⁴ Moreover, the official teaching outlined above does not agree on this essential point at least with that of the Church of England. Article XI states it quite memorably: “We are accounted righteous before God, only on the basis of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only, is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort”.⁹⁵ Others have pointed out that the Fathers of Eastern Christianity have anticipated the Reformation doctrine of justification.⁹⁶ It seems, however, that the working creed of the Syrians on this doctrine was significantly different from that of the CMS missionaries, staunch Protestants that they were. This difference also displaced one of the cornerstones of unity and partnership between the CMS and Syrians over the long term.

Scripture and Tradition

Claudius Buchanan was intrigued by the thought that the Scriptures had been read and maintained in South West India at a time when he perceived the Word of God as being scarce in Europe. He wrote: “How wonderful it is, that during the dark ages of Europe, whilst ignorance and superstition, in a manner, denied the Scriptures to the rest of the world, the Bible should have found an asylum in the mountains of Malay-ala; where it was freely read by upwards of an hundred churches.”⁹⁷ He was, of course, concerned that there were certain objectionable practices in the Syrian Church, from a Reformed and Anglican point of view. Yet he seemed reassured, in conversation with the Metropolitan, that these were later innovations that could easily be removed.⁹⁸ The reality would prove much more difficult.

⁹³ Ibid, 142.

⁹⁴ Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia*, 125.

⁹⁵ *Thirty-Nine Articles*, Article XI, in Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1173.

⁹⁶ See Letham, *Through Western Eyes*, 248-251.

⁹⁷ Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia*, 140.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 130.

Turning to the *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines*, the following point is made in the translator's prefatory remarks: "Verily Syrian Orthodox Church holds the Bible along with the Tradition as the two fundamental sources of her theology and ecclesiology."⁹⁹ This approach is traced back to the great Mar Gregorius Bar Ebroyo of the thirteenth century and, beyond that, to such Church Fathers as Mor Ephrem the Syrian and Cyprian of Carthage. Both Fathers, we are reminded, laid down the aphorism "that he who did not know the Church as ... Mother could not know God as the Father."¹⁰⁰ The intent of this statement is to show that tradition, along with Scripture, is a key source of authority for the Syrians. We shall consider Scripture itself, followed by tradition, in turn.

On the canon of Scripture there are clear points of difference between the Syrians and official Anglican teaching. The *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines* includes the three books of Maccabees as canonical Old Testament books. Coming to the New Testament, there is the addition of the two Epistles of Clement. Moreover, the Revelation of John is not seen as canonical, but as in that category of books which may be read and studied "to augment faith and devotion."¹⁰¹ Article VI of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* omits Maccabees from the Old Testament canon. The following comment on the New Testament, applies to the Old Testament also: "All the books of the New Testament, as they are commonly received, we do receive, and account them Canonical."¹⁰² This includes the book of Revelation. For the purposes of our study, we may conclude that Benjamin Bailey, as he set about translating the Scriptures, did not fully appreciate these differences. As he began his work there does not appear to be evidence that he sought agreement on which books of Scripture ought to be translated.

On the place of other writings from the Syrian tradition, Mar Dionysius VI stated "canons, histories, preachings, epistles, homilies, can be recognised, after careful scrutiny by the bishops."¹⁰³ This evidences what Letham states about Eastern Christianity more generally when he states "tradition means the whole teaching of the church, whether in church councils, the

⁹⁹ *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines*, 15.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 15-16.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 156-157.

¹⁰² *Thirty-Nine Articles*, Article VI, in Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Appendix I, 1172.

¹⁰³ *Quintessence of Religious Doctrines*, 158.

Bible, official dogma, or the liturgy.”¹⁰⁴ Ideally, of course, these things do not contradict each other. Protestants, however, have affirmed that the Scriptures are the sole and final arbitrator for faith and practice in the church. The Reformation slogan *Sola Scriptura* was not, Letham reminds us, intended to mean that only the Scriptures were admissible. Rather, it meant that the Bible must judge the Church, not *vice versa*.¹⁰⁵

The CMS missionaries, while professing respect for the Syrian tradition, believed the Scriptures demanded changes to be made to the Church’s belief and practice. Article XXXIV of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* did not seek or expect uniformity in the traditions of churches throughout the world. The article begins: “It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, or utterly like; for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and men’s manners; so that nothing be ordained against God’s Word.”¹⁰⁶ This helps explain why, from Buchanan’s time onwards, the Anglican missionaries professed commitment to the purity and dignity of the Syrian Church being preserved.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, Article XXXIV also demands “that nothing be ordained against God’s Word,” and therefore concludes “[e]very particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish Ceremonies or Rites of the Church ordained only by man’s authority, so that all things be done to edifying.”¹⁰⁸ So the Mission of Help was conceived as an aid to the Syrian Church “[t]o remove the rubbish and repair the decaying places.”¹⁰⁹ For the early missionaries at least, they were not to be the ones to do this, but the Syrians themselves under their guidance. Yet there was not a clear understanding on the part of the CMS of the Syrian view of tradition as integral to the Church’s authority alongside Scripture. Tradition was therefore not subordinate to Scripture as in official Anglican teaching.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ Letham, *Through Western Eyes*, 174.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁰⁶ *Thirty-Nine Articles*, Article XXXIV, in Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Appendix I, 1177.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia*, 130.

¹⁰⁸ *Thirty-Nine Articles*, Article XXXIV, in Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Appendix I, 1177.

¹⁰⁹ The quotation is from Henry Baker, writing in 1829 and cited in Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore*, Vol. I, 91.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Assessing the Contrasts

To conclude this chapter we need to assess the significance of these contrasts in doctrinal conviction between the CMS and the Syrians. The implications of these differences, moreover, were a significant factor undermining the eventual success of the Mission of Help. Hence aim 2 of this thesis, assessing the importance of political *and theological* factors on the success of this mission, has been in view throughout this chapter. Writing six decades after Buchanan published his *Christian Researches* and claimed the Syrian doctrines were few in number, but pure and in agreement with the Church of England, Richard Collins was not convinced. Collins had been principal of CMS College in Kottayam from 1855 to 1865. Collins, in assessing Buchanan's claim and the approach of the early missionaries, wrote in 1873: "Never was there a greater mistake. The errors of Syrianism were the errors of Antioch, not Rome ... they were entwined amid the very vitals of the system."¹¹¹ Here Collins echoes the words of Article XIX of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*: "As the Church of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch, have erred; so also the Church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of Ceremonies, but also in matters of Faith."¹¹² Collins, it seems, recognized that there was a tradition within the Syrian Church that had survived and was independent of the Roman Catholic influences of the sixteenth century. Moreover, these errors, as Collins perceived them, were related to matters of doctrine and not simply practice. Collins was undoubtedly right to note the independent heritage of Syrian Christian doctrinal belief in Travancore. He failed, however, to grasp the fundamentally different ways of thinking about Christian identity that were discussed early in this chapter. While the perceived errors were deeply embedded in "the very vitals of the system" to repeat Collins's phrase, a major part of the difference consisted in the fact that compared to the Anglicans of the CMS, the Syrians did not really have a doctrinal system.

We need therefore to see, as we return more directly to Bailey and his colleagues, that the CMS men were not sufficiently grounded in the doctrinal and cultural differences they would face. A contemporary of Collins, George Broadley Howard, wrote in 1864 concerning the Reformation

¹¹¹ Collins, *Missionary Enterprise in the East*, 100.

¹¹² *Thirty-Nine Articles*, Article XIX, in Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Appendix I, 1174.

of the Syrians: “Any effort which may be made in this direction will require not merely piety and zeal, but much wisdom, tact, forbearance and of course, considerable theological attainment, especially in reference to those questions which are so constantly interwoven with the history of the Eastern church.”¹¹³ Piety, zeal, wisdom, tact and forbearance were displayed in considerable degree by Benjamin Bailey, Joseph Fenn and Henry Baker. Yet they did not have the theological attainment and nuance necessary to untangle the web of doctrinal differences outlined above.

In assessing the underestimated difference between the CMS missionaries and the Syrians, Hunt writes of the former: “None of them can be called remarkable – except for the definiteness of their religious views and experience, definitely Evangelical, direct products of the Revival of the preceding century.” On those they went to try and work with, Hunt continues: “The Syrians were an Oriental people … proud of being what they were, intensely proud of their ‘long descent’ from St. Thomas’s converts and the Syrian immigrants, clinging also to Antioch and all that she connoted. Missionaries and Syrians were ecclesiastical antitheses.”¹¹⁴ This was the insight of one of their fellow labourers one hundred years later. Mathew and Thomas, writing as Syrian Christian theologians, agree with Hunt’s assessment when they write: “the missionaries had very little understanding of the heritage of the ancient Eastern churches.” Hence, they argue, they thought those things they disagreed with were due to Roman Catholic influence. “In truth,” Mathew and Thomas continue, “they were oriental and Orthodox in nature, and not specifically Roman.”¹¹⁵

These doctrinal differences also involved subjects that are considered primary doctrines in ecumenical dialogue, namely Christology, Ecclesiology, Soteriology and Scripture. It may be worth asking the question, therefore, if a Mission of Help was the thing most needful when such differences existed. We could contend that had these evangelical Protestant missionaries known

¹¹³ From George Broadley Howard, *Christians of St. Thomas and their Liturgies*, cited in Paulos Mor Athanasius Kadavil, *The Eucharist Service of the Syrian Jacobite Church of Malabar: The Meaning and Interpretation*, Second Edition, Changanacherry: Mor Adai Study Centre (2003), 204.

¹¹⁴ Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore*, Vol. I, 89.

¹¹⁵ Mathew and Thomas, *The Indian Churches*, 52.

the extent of doctrinal difference more fully they would probably have approached the Syrians in a different way, assuming much less common ground than they did. Most likely they would have sought to set up Anglican Churches from the beginning, while seeking through informal relationships and by example to influence the Syrian Christians. As we shall see in Chapters 5 and 6 this approximates to what eventually would happen. Whilst the early missionaries clearly recognised the piety of a number of the Syrians' leading Churchmen, they would in years to come express the desire that many within this church be converted. We see from 1818 onwards a clear call for reform and Bailey himself would come to the conclusion that many in this ancient Church were not actually converted, but were in fact Christians only in name.

Chapter 3 - Different Perspectives as the Mission of Help began: The Conversation and Counsel of Col. John Munro (1816-18)

Introduction

We could greatly wish for an establishment there, of three missionaries at least. Soon might we then hope, through Divine Mercy, under their Ministry *and the patronage of the Resident*, that the Syrian Churches might revive; and Travancore not only yield a large increase of Native Christians, but also supply Missionaries, peculiarly qualified above Europeans themselves, to a large extent of country, and gather in multitudes to the fold of Christ.

Rev. Marmaduke Thompson, Chair of the CMS Corresponding Committee, Madras, (1816) Emphasis added.

I repent having sought the Sahib's help in the construction of a Seminary; since the days of Buchanan, the eyes of Europeans are fixed upon our poor Church as those of a kite upon chickens; God knows the end; as long as I live, I will, under God's guidance, guard this poor Church. May God preserve it for ever.

Metropolitan Mar Dionysius II (1816)

These opening quotations, to which we shall return, serve to highlight how those who were party to the Mission of Help's beginning in 1816 often had different perspectives and goals as to what the Mission was to be and do. Having considered the differing doctrines of the CMS and Syrians in Chapter 2, this chapter will therefore consider these differing perspectives. We will consider in particular the influence of Col. John Munro, the EIC Resident whose patronage the CMS sought. We will also consider the perspectives of Syrian Christians from Kerala as the events unfolded and subsequently. We will begin by assessing conversations that were taking place as the Mission was being conceived and then consider the counsel that was given to Benjamin Bailey and his colleagues from the CMS committees and Col. Munro respectively.

The chapter will therefore serve to question William Taylor's claim that it was the "more evangelistic, biblicist, and Protestant character" of the CMS which hampered the Mission's prospects of success.¹ Here it will be demonstrated that the politicisation of the Mission of Help, from its earliest days, was almost as important a factor. Before considering the role of Col. Munro, therefore, it is important to understand something about him as a man and the political context in which he operated.

Colonel John Munro (1778-1857)

John Munro was born in 1778 in Teaninich, Ross-Shire, north of Inverness.² He was baptised in the Church of Scotland parish of Alness. Scotland's established church was and is, of course, Presbyterian. Since both before and after his time in India Munro maintained his Presbyterian links, he was not a natural supporter of the Anglican CMS.³ Munro was born into a position of some privilege, his father James Munro was Laird of Teaninich, the hereditary Lord of the Manor. As early as 1794/5 Munro set sail for military service in India and would become a scholar of Sanskrit and fluent in several Indian languages.⁴

Munro served with some distinction in the military. He rose at an early age to the position of Quartermaster-General of the Madras army in 1807. His period in Madras, however, proved controversial. A serious scandal arose over tent contracts which actually resulted in Munro's arrest on January 20th 1809 for "conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman."⁵ It was on exoneration from these charges that Munro secured the position of Resident of Travancore in 1810. Munro's evangelical faith most likely was the result of contact in India with Evangelical EIC chaplains such as the Rev. Richard Kerr. Munro married Charlotte Blacker, daughter of a

¹ William Henry Taylor, *Antioch and Canterbury: The Syrian Orthodox Church and the Church of England 1874-1928*, Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press, (2005), 124.

² There has been little attempt to put together a biographical sketch of Munro's life. In what follows I am indebted to Phillip Tovey, *Colonel John Munro, Evangelical Christian*, unpublished manuscript, Ripon College, Cuddesdon. Accessible at https://www.academia.edu/15029987/Colonel_John_Munro_Evangelical_Christian, accessed 11th April 2017.

³ Ibid, 1.

⁴ Ibid, 2.

⁵ Ibid.

distinguished Church of Ireland clergyman, the Rev. St. John Blacker.⁶ As Munro took up his position in Travancore, therefore, these prior contacts and indeed marital ties with noted Evangelical Anglicans may help explain this Presbyterian's support for the CMS in India.

On leaving Travancore in 1819, Munro returned to the Highlands and to Presbyterianism. An irony of Munro's life is that he was involved in the Great Disruption of 1843 which saw the formation of the Free Church of Scotland. Tovey comments:

It is ironic that a Scottish Presbyterian called on an Anglican mission society to work in Travancore and thus accidentally helped to found a part of the Anglican Communion ... It is also ironic that as Resident and Dewan he virtually appointed bishops for the Syrian church, while later in life leaving the Church of Scotland over state interference in the church.⁷

It may be the case, however, that Munro's ecclesiastical allegiances evolved. If he only came to the evangelical faith whilst in India, it could well be that his attachment to Presbyterianism to that point had been fairly nominal. Perhaps it was on return to Scotland, as a still relatively young man, that he really embraced the doctrine and practice of the Presbyterian churches there. Whilst in India and Travancore in particular, however, it seems likely that Munro was influenced by his Scottish ecclesiastical heritage. Tovey points out, for example, that the missionaries in Travancore intended to set up a school in every Syrian Christian parish. This was a practice that was true in Scotland but not England up to that point. We can most likely detect in this the influence of Munro.⁸ Col. John Munro was therefore a relatively youthful, zealous evangelical Christian and military statesman. Yet there were blemishes on his record. His active support of missionaries was also not typical of senior EIC officials, as we shall see below. So these factors made him extremely keen to succeed in Travancore and to vindicate his policy of working closely with missionaries. This may help explain the somewhat overbearing approach he would employ.

⁶ Ibid, 2, 3.

⁷ Ibid, 6.

⁸ Ibid, 4.

The political context of Travancore

In the closing years of the eighteenth century, the relationship between the EIC and the Indian states, once commercial, was becoming more and more political and was in fact taking on the dimensions of indirect rule.⁹ It was these political relationships that brought Munro to his position in 1810 and ensured that the Mission of Help would be politicised from the beginning. To understand the political context in which Munro operated and his role as Resident, it is important to remember that India in the eighteenth century was not a united political entity but rather a myriad of princely states. These states were often in rivalry with one another which meant that the EIC was generally reluctant to interfere in matters of local custom and religion.¹⁰ Hence, as Penelope Carson points out, “[w]hatever religious rhetoric both Indians and British employed, questions of economic and political advantage were never far away.”¹¹

Travancore was a sizeable princely state. The ancient Chera Empire was the historical forebear of Travancore but had dissolved around the year 1100 leaving the region governed by petty chiefs ruling over little kingdoms. It was to Martanda Varma that the state of Travancore owed its origins in the mid-eighteenth century. Having become the Raja of Venad in 1729, he set about creating a centralised state in the years which followed.¹² By 1758 this included around 7000 square miles of territory. Under Maharaja Rama Varma, who reigned from 1758-1798, Travancore drew the unwanted attention of ‘the Tiger of Mysore,’ Tippu Sultan, who attempted to annex Travancore to his own state. These threats led the Maharaja to conclude a deal of subsidiary alliance with the EIC in 1795. By 1800 it had become necessary for the Princely Court of Travancore to accept its first Resident and this arrangement was cemented by a further treaty in 1805.¹³

⁹ For a detailed overview of these developments see Michael H. Fisher, ‘Indirect rule in the British Empire: The foundations of the residency system in India (1764–1858).’ *Modern Asian Studies* 18:03 (1984): 393-428.

¹⁰ Penelope Carson, *The East India Company and Religion, 1698-1858*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press (2012), 1-2.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 4.

¹² See Barbara N. Ramusack, *The New Cambridge History of India: The Indian Princes and their States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2004), 33.

¹³ *Ibid*, 34.

The Residency system in India was an eighteenth century phenomenon, beginning around 1764. Residency therefore involved the development of a ‘political line’ in the governance of India by the EIC. Michael H. Fisher analyses not only the development of this political line but also those who came to hold these Residency positions. Whilst civil servants seemed to be the Court of Directors preference for holding Residencies, at various times of expansion of British interests in India there were a significant number of military men who offered themselves and were appointed to these positions. From 1798 onwards, military men began to overtake civil officials in holding positions as Residents or Political Agents.¹⁴ The Residency system in Travancore seems to have had different dynamics at different stages in the era of indirect rule. Robin Jeffrey argues that the four models of Residency, in relation to the Raja and Chief Minister from 1800-1947 were as follows: the ‘dominant Resident,’ the ‘balanced system,’ the ‘laissez-faire approach’ and the ‘imposed minister.’¹⁵

Munro was Resident when the seat of power in Travancore fell to the young Ranis Gouri Lakshmi Bai, from 1810-1815, and her sister Gouri Paravathi Bai from 1815-1829.¹⁶ Given Munro’s strong character, it is evident that he took on a dominant role in fulfilling his Residency duties. Indeed he also took on the role of *Diwān* (Chief Minister) as well until 1814. Thereafter, those whom he appointed to this role were, according to Jeffrey, little more than his clerks. In Travancore at least, Munro made the dominant Resident system work as it never would again.¹⁷ Munro was therefore the most powerful man in Travancore as the Mission of Help began. That is not to say there were not pressures upon him. For one thing, his zeal for missionaries to be welcomed to Travancore was not widely shared in South India at this time. In the Madras Presidency at this time the Governor Hugh Elliot was responsible for what Marmaduke Thompson described as “a very virulent anti-missionary disposition.”¹⁸ Munro, on the other

¹⁴ Fisher, ‘Indirect rule in the British Empire,’ 406-407.

¹⁵ Robin Jeffrey, ‘The Politics of “Indirect Rule”: Types of Relationship among Rulers, Ministers and Residents in a “Native State”,’ *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 13:3 (1975): 261-281.

¹⁶ Babu Cherian, *Towards Modernity: The Story of the First College in India: The Impact of CMS College, Kottayam on Kerala Society and How it Paved the way to Modernity*, Delhi: Media House (2014), 14-15.

¹⁷ Jeffrey, ‘The Politics of ‘Indirect Rule’’, 265.

¹⁸ Carson, *The East India Company*, 164. The Rev. Marmaduke Thompson was the Evangelical Presidency Chaplain in Madras and Secretary of the Madras Corresponding Committee of the CMS.

hand, was extremely enthusiastic that missionaries be sent to Travancore to work “under his advice.”¹⁹

In Munro’s welcoming of missionaries, therefore, he was still swimming somewhat against the current of EIC opinion. In his mind he had to make this experiment work. Munro is also likely to have faced pressure as Military Residents were viewed with suspicion by the EIC Court of Directors.²⁰ For example, Munro, the India Office Records reveal, had struggles with the Court of Directors throughout his time in Travancore regarding his salary. In March 1814 Munro wrote to the Governor General in Madras desiring to have his allowances restored to him. The Governor General’s Chief Secretary, Geo[rge] Strachey, replied to Munro “whatever allowances are granted to the Servants of the Honourable Company, the continuance of them must invariably depend on the pleasure of the authorities in England.” Strachey added that Munro should have been aware of this, while assuring him that the Governor General would write to the Court of Directors regarding Munro’s request.²¹ In what follows, therefore, we see Munro as a strong character concerned to ensure co-operation from the Syrian Christians, the Madras Corresponding Committee and the CMS Missionaries. He was well-intentioned and humanitarian. He was pushy and patronising. Moreover, he was under immense pressure to ensure that his political role was viewed as successful and that his enthusiasm for missionary involvement did not backfire upon him. This pressure was exerted upon his pocket as much as by other means. It clearly was costly for Munro to leave a senior army position for this political one. This example of the strain Munro was under gives us some understanding of his at times over-bearing approach to his role.

Certainly the evidence we have suggests some difficulty on the part of Benjamin Bailey in gaining access to Travancore. It seems that the Governor of Madras had tried to stop Bailey reaching Travancore as his licence had specified the Carnatic as his area of labour. Bailey

¹⁹ Ibid, 171.

²⁰ See Fisher, ‘Indirect rule in the British Empire’.

²¹ ‘Application from Lt. Col. Munro the Resident of Travancore for the restoration of his original allowances, with a reply by Geo. Strachey,’ 29th March, 1814, IOR/F/4/481/11553.

therefore advised Josiah Pratt in London that future missionaries be specified as requiring access to “the Peninsula of India … as the Committee here will then be able to get permission from Government to send them to what station they think proper.”²² Meanwhile in October 1816 D. Hill, secretary to the Madras Government, had rather grudgingly granted Bailey’s permission to travel to Travancore with the words: “The Governor in Council cannot recognize the competency of any Society in England, or the Agents of any Society, ever to form a judgment with regard to those considerations which ought to determine the Government to grant the permission which you solicit.” Nevertheless Bailey’s permissions were granted.²³ Reflecting on this, one month after arriving in Kerala, Bailey wrote to Pratt: “I would observe that it does not manifest a very favourable opinion of missionary exertions, or a desire that the glorious Gospel of Christ should be spread among the inhabitants of India.”²⁴ The influence of Munro, however, ensured that Bailey and others would gain access to engage in expressly missionary activity. In what follows we shall consider Munro’s interactions with the Malabar Syrian Christians, the CMS Committee in Madras and Benjamin Bailey. In these conversations and counsels we shall see that the Mission of Help was being politicised from its earliest days.

Munro and the Syrian Christian Community

As we continue to explore the background to Bailey’s arrival in Travancore, this section will consider Munro’s interactions with the Syrian Christian community. It was Munro who was the most significant figure in Travancore at this time and whose efforts ensured the arrival there of Benjamin Bailey. Munro’s political accomplishments as Resident and *Diwān* were significant. He managed to clear a large debt owed by Travancore State to the EIC within three years. He also, it seems, foiled a secret plan by the Governor General of India to accede the State of Travancore to the Madras Presidency.²⁵ Munro took a particular interest in the Syrian Christian community, or at least in the non-Roman Catholic part of it. He had a comprehensive vision of

²² Bailey to Pratt, C.M. House Madras, 20th September 1816, CMS Archives, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham, C I2/E1/60.

²³ D Hill, Public Department, to Bailey, Fort St. George, 5th October 1816, C I2/E1/84.

²⁴ Bailey to Pratt, December 17th 1816, C I2/E1/83.

²⁵ K.M. George, *Tradition Versus Reform: Church Missionary Society “Mission of Help” 1816-1840*, Kottayam: Benjamin Bailey Foundation (2013), 15.

religious, social and political renovation of this ancient community. He therefore sought their educational advancement, the distribution of the Bible amongst them in their own language and the improvement of their social status. The latter objective he sought to achieve by getting Syrian Christians into government roles, including as judges.²⁶ Munro had also hoped to see some of the missionaries of the CMS appointed as judges. This move, however, was blocked by his EIC superiors.²⁷ This further illustrates Munro's socio-political agenda for the missionaries and the tensions this caused with his own employers.

Munro therefore saw the CMS as a hugely significant ally. Indeed K.M. George, a present-day Keralan historian, believes Munro was "the moving spirit and inspirer of the Missions."²⁸ Certainly the missionary-minded public of Britain were increasingly becoming familiar with the Resident of Travancore and his desire for a CMS mission there. The *Missionary Register* for 1816 notes how Munro had established a college in Kottayam for the training of Syrians. Clergy for the Church were to be trained here, but also general education was given, so that the Syrians could fulfil government roles.²⁹ Munro, however, was frustrated by internal dissensions amongst the Syrians at this time, and therefore in the September issue of the *Missionary Register* it was reported that he was more desirous than ever for an English clergyman to be sent to Travancore. He requested of the Madras Corresponding Committee of the CMS that Thomas Norton, who intended to go to Ceylon, be diverted to Travancore and placed at his disposal. This proposal was agreed to by the Madras committee, whose desire was to settle at least three missionaries there.³⁰ So Thomas Norton came to be the first of the CMS missionaries to settle in central Travancore. He would work in Alappuzha (Alleppey). It is interesting to note at this point that the political Resident Munro seemed to consider it as his right to have missionaries at his disposal. The Mission of Help was being politicised from the beginning.

²⁶ Ibid, 17.

²⁷ 'Fort St. George Political Letter 138, 26th Jan 1819', IOR/F/4/616/15311. It seems this discussion had been going on for two or three years subsequent to the missionaries' arrival.

²⁸ K.M. George, *Tradition Versus Reform*, 25.

²⁹ *Missionary Register*, 1816, 37-38.

³⁰ *Missionary Register*, 1816, 387.

We turn now to Munro's conversations with the Syrian Church clergy which took place in 1816 as the Mission of Help commenced. In doing so we shall seek to get behind official CMS accounts and listen to voices from the Malabar Syrians themselves. Munro had wanted Norton to go straight to the College at Kottayam. So Norton met with the Syrian Church Metropolitan, Mar Dionysius II, at the residence of Munro in Quilon. Norton soon picked up on some nervousness on the part of the Metropolitan: "It appears that some apprehensions existed in his mind, and much more in the minds of the clergy and the people, lest we should innovate and endeavour to do away with some of their legitimate rites and bring them under English ecclesial power." Norton continued in his report to headquarters: "I have reason to be thankful that after a little conversation, I succeeded, and he received me, as he expressed himself, as sent by the Lord to be the deliverer and protector, and prayed that God would bless my efforts among them. He scarcely knows how to express his gratitude sufficiently for my arrival."³¹ So it seems that this conversation was sufficient, provisionally at least, in reassuring the Syrians on the *bona fides* of Munro and Norton. K.M. George goes so far as to say "[t]he Metropolitan was very happy with the meeting."³²

There is some historical evidence, however, that the Metropolitan was less than happy with the meeting. E.M. Philip, whose work *The Indian Church of St. Thomas* was published 1907, was a member of the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church and came from a family of priests in that communion. It turns out that Philip's grandfather, Edavazhikal Philipose Kathanar, was a young priest who accompanied the Metropolitan to this meeting. Philip's, therefore, is a voice we must hear since he can give us an alternative account of the proceedings ninety years on from the events. For one thing, the Metropolitan's happiness seemed somewhat diminished at the prospect of Norton coming to be involved in the fledgling seminary at Kottayam. Mar Dionysius II reportedly told Munro quite clearly "[h]e is a member of a different creed; *his faith and our faith are not one, if he were to live in the Seminary, it might lead to Religious feuds, and the results might be deplorable.*"³³ This statement challenges Munro's perception that before the Syrians

³¹ *Missionary Register*, 1818, 98.

³² George, *Tradition Versus Reform*, 23.

³³ E.M. Philip *The Indian Church of St. Thomas*, Kottayam (1907), 222, His emphasis.

had contact with the Roman Catholic Church in the sixteenth century they had followed a faith more or less the same as his own Protestantism.³⁴ In this view, Munro was no doubt influenced by the writings of Claudius Buchanan, discussed above in Chapter 2. In any case it was as a result of this reluctance on the part of the Metropolitan, so Philip claims, that Norton was settled in Alappuzha and not Kottayam, even though there were few Syrian Christians there. The Metropolitan agreed to this arrangement, and for Norton to visit the College regularly.³⁵ P. Cherian has questioned this version of events, claiming that Alappuzha was chosen for practical geographical reasons. Alappuzha was a port and, via the backwaters, provided easy access to the Syrian communities of Central Travancore. It was therefore CMS policy, Cherian claims, to make Alappuzha an initial headquarters. There was also the practical consideration that there was no suitable accommodation ready for Norton and his family in Kottayam at this point.³⁶ It is probably the case that both explanations are true. Philip is giving a Syrian Christian perspective, Cherian a CMS one.³⁷ The latter's point may be accurate enough. Philip, however, gets us behind the more 'official' CMS version of events presented by George and Cherian.

More significant than where Norton ended up living, however, was the Metropolitan's perspective on the very prospect of co-operation at all. Philip expresses admiration for the Metropolitan's willingness to stand up to Munro: "The Metran, who was actually foreseeing the trouble and calamity which the community is suffering at present, thought it better to incur the displeasure of the Resident than betray his Church."³⁸ Moreover, it seems that if the Metran had given Munro and Norton the impression of being very happy in public, privately he was both concerned and contrite at allowing himself to give such ground. Philip, again employing his grandfather's oral testimony, records the Metran's feelings:

On his return home, the Metran expressed to the attendant priests in bitter terms, with tears running down his furrowed cheeks: 'I repent having sought the Sahib's help in the construction of a Seminary; *since the days of Buchanan, the eyes of Europeans are fixed upon our poor Church as those of a kite upon chickens;*

³⁴ P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 86.

³⁵ E.M. Philip, *The Indian Church*, 223.

³⁶ P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 102. Cherian uses the older transliteration Alleppey in his work.

³⁷ Cherian, let us remember, was actually an honorary life governor of the CMS in the mid-twentieth century.

³⁸ E.M. Philip, *The Indian Christians*, 223.

*God knows the end; as long as I live, I will, under God's guidance, guard this poor Church. May God preserve it for ever.*³⁹

Philip comments: "Such was the way in which the C.M.S. missionaries were first introduced into the Syrian Church, and such was the spirit in which they were welcomed."⁴⁰ As it turned out, Mar Dionysius II would not live long. He would die on 12th November 1816. Mar Philoxenos, who was actually Metran of the MISC at Thozhiyur, assumed the role temporarily. He then appointed his Vicar General as Mar Dionysius III. Both men would appear friendly to the missionaries and it was the latter who gave them freedom to visit and preach in the Syrian churches.⁴¹ Had his predecessor remained in office, it may be that the Mission of Help would not have got off the ground. Or, perhaps, the differences in doctrinal perspective between the Syrians and the CMS would have been more clearly articulated from the beginning. For now we turn from these conversations to the hopes for the Mission of Help of the Madras Corresponding Committee, and Munro's influence upon them.

Munro and the Madras Corresponding Committee

With the East India Act of 1813, the way was clear for missionaries to enter India under the jurisdiction of the EIC. It was in the light of this development that the Madras Corresponding Committee of the CMS was set up in November 1814. The Rev. Marmaduke Thompson was its first secretary.⁴² It would appear that Thompson was fully supportive of Munro's initiative in opening the college. An extract from a letter published in the 1816 *Missionary Register* appealed for books to be sent to this college. Even more importantly, Thompson appealed for "clever, as well as pious" young men for the work of mission there.⁴³ It was in response to such appeals that Bailey and others ended up in Travancore. Thomas Norton arrived on May 8th 1816 in Cochin before travelling to Alappuzha. Bailey would arrive in Alappuzha on November 19th of the same year.⁴⁴ Benjamin Bailey was therefore not the first CMS missionary to arrive in Kerala, but he

³⁹ Ibid, Philip's emphasis. Sahib refers to Munro and was a general term used for the British in India.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid, 224ff.

⁴² P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 87-88.

⁴³ *Missionary Register*, 1816, 37.

⁴⁴ Cherian, *Towards Modernity*, 388.

would turn out to be the first whose main role was working with the Syrians on the Mission of Help. Norton, as Hunt reminds us, “devoted himself from the very first chiefly to the conversion of non-Christians.”⁴⁵

The basis on which these wished-for candidates were to be engaged by the Corresponding Committee was one of non-interference in the affairs of the Syrian Church. They certainly desired no political influence for the missionaries either. Thompson’s desires seemed quite clearly for revival and evangelism, as might be expected of someone whose movement grew out of the Evangelical Revival. The following extract expresses Thompson’s heart:

We could greatly wish for an establishment there, of three missionaries at least. Soon might we then hope, through Divine Mercy, under their Ministry and *the patronage of the Resident*, that the Syrian Churches might revive; and Travancore not only yield a large increase of Native Christians, but also supply Missionaries, peculiarly qualified above Europeans themselves, to a large extent of country, and gather in multitudes to the fold of Christ.⁴⁶

Of note here is the desire for reviving of the Syrian Churches and their employment subsequently in the evangelisation and conversion of those around them. Yet we should also be alert to Thompson’s desire for the patronage of the Resident. It is understandable that the active support of a man like Munro, who shared so much in common theologically with the CMS men, should be sought. Yet whether his goals in having missionaries there and those of the Madras Corresponding Committee were entirely congruous needs some probing.

Thompson had no hesitation, it would appear, in placing Norton at Munro’s disposal. We are told that, in sending Munro the relevant minute from the Corresponding Committee, “[h]e communicated, at the same time, the objects of the Church Missionary Society and the Corresponding Committee.”⁴⁷ Munro’s response is also preserved for us in the *Missionary Register*. In this response we see clearly that, unlike many in the EIC, he desired the spread of Christianity in Travancore. Yet he was also firmly committed to what was a political calling, as

⁴⁵ W.S. Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore and Cochin, 1816-1916*, Vol. I, Kottayam: CMS Press, (1920), 132.

⁴⁶ *Missionary Register*, 1816, 387, emphasis added.

⁴⁷ *Missionary Register*, 1816, 452.

the following extract asserts: “Regarding, as I do, the diffusion of Christianity in India, as a measure equally important to the interests of humanity and to the stability of our power, I view, with the most sincere pleasure, the commencement of a systematic plan for the attainment of that object.”⁴⁸ Munro welcomed the desire to establish at least three missionaries in Travancore. In doing so he saw this as equally important “to the interests of humanity and the stability of our power.” Munro’s political context was one of nascent colonialism and he took his political responsibilities extremely seriously. For the Mission of Help, however, there was always going to be a tension between purely missionary endeavour and Munro’s desire that this should, in some way, help in consolidating British rule.

Nor was Munro content to simply be a background influence on the missionaries in the prosecution of his political interests. In the same response to the Madras Corresponding Committee, Munro concedes that the missionaries are responsible to them and to the Home Committee, yet there is a caveat: “but, from the circumstance of Travancore being a foreign state, it is necessary, for many reasons, that the Missionaries should attend to the advice of the Resident, whose support will indeed be essential to the success of their exertions.”⁴⁹ So his support for the missionaries, sincere as it no doubt was, was also conditional on their attending to his advice. This would work itself out in Munro seeking to make the missionaries an intermediary between himself and the Syrians so that both would, in effect, do his bidding. As we turn now to Bailey’s correspondence with Munro, we shall see one example of how this worked out in practice.

The counsel of Munro to Benjamin Bailey

As we turn now to Munro’s correspondence with Bailey, between March 1817 and July 1818, we shall see that the former’s counsel and commands to Bailey display a distinct Anglicising and politicising tendency. This is seen in two key areas: the goals of the Mission of Help and the reformation of the Syrian Church.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

The goals of the Mission of Help

Turning to the Mission's goals, Bailey was quite clear about this in a letter he had sent to the Resident of Travancore: “*While we are principally affected by the ultimate good*, into which the Christian Religion introduces its disciples, we are not ignorant or careless of the innumerable temporal blessings which accompany it and are anxious to behold that improved state of Society which Christianity never fails of producing.”⁵⁰ So Bailey's primary goal was the ultimate and eternal good of those to whom he was sent. This certainly meant, for Bailey, the conversion of nominal Christians and Hindus alike. Yet he was eager that temporal good, flowing from the diffusion of the Christian gospel, should be an important by-product of the Mission.

Munro most likely agreed wholeheartedly with Bailey's perspective on a purely theological level, given his commitment to the Evangelical faith which we have seen above. We have also already seen, however, that Munro believed that the diffusion of Christianity in India served both “the interests of humanity *and ... the stability of our power.*”⁵¹ It would not be surprising, therefore, if we saw evidence in his counsels to Bailey of his desire that the Mission of Help to the Syrian Church also help in the consolidation of British power in Travancore. This is precisely what we see. In his first letter to Bailey, dated 14th March 1817, he urges Bailey to move to Kottayam, the location of the College, as soon as possible. Munro then makes bold to advise Bailey on the main priorities of his mission: the translation of the whole Scriptures and the organising of a proper plan of study and discipline at the College.⁵² While there was nothing in this letter with which Bailey, then staying at Alappuzha with Norton, was likely to disagree, it is significant that from the very beginning, Munro is taking the initiative in setting Bailey's agenda. The same letter reveals Munro's goals in establishing the College: “My general views in establishing the College were to educate young men for the Priesthood, & for the office of

⁵⁰ Cited in Kenneth Ingham, *Reformers in India 1793-1833: An Account of the Work of Christian Missionaries on Behalf of Social Reform*, New York, Octagon (1956, 1973), 55, emphasis added. The author has yet to find this letter in the original sources. It may be that it is missing. It cannot therefore be known for certain whether or not this letter was addressed to Munro. Ingham references the quote as follows: C.M.S. MSS. ‘South India Mission’, vol. I, fo. 64.

⁵¹ *Missionary Register*, 1816, 452, emphasis added.

⁵² Munro to Bailey, Trivandrum, 24th March 1817, C I2/027/20, Letter No. 1.

Schoolmasters – & also to educate the youth in general.”⁵³ Munro’s goals, therefore, were not strictly ecclesiastical and missiological. He clearly wanted to uplift the Syrian Christian community educationally and socially as well as spiritually. A subsequent letter to Bailey, dated 10th March 1818, helps us understand why. Munro requests a receipt for a donation of 20,000 Rupees to the College from the Rani of Travancore.⁵⁴ This young Hindu princess took pains to ensure the well-being of her Syrian Christian subjects. While such patronage was clearly “a generous act on the part of a ruler of another faith,”⁵⁵ it ensured that the scope of the College’s educational activities needed to be broader than simply theological education for the Syrian Church’s candidates for ordination.⁵⁶ A much wider curriculum was followed to train Syrians for serving in government roles and other useful activities.

Munro was therefore confident that the College could be an agent for wider transformation, and that in a way which suited British interests. He wrote Bailey in May 1818 that “a regular course of Christian education at the College will be the most effectual mode of reforming the Cattanars, & *also the great body of the people.*” As part of the curriculum Munro continuously urged the study of English, as he believed English would soon surpass Portuguese as a language spoken on that coast.⁵⁷ It seems likely that the nascent rise of the British Empire in India in general and Travancore in particular was much in Munro’s mind as he considered how to counsel Bailey on his coming to the College.

Bailey, in his letters to Munro at this time, seems much less pre-occupied with how his activities served British colonial interests. We will see below how reformation of the Church was his great concern. When Bailey, however, turned his attention to practical steps that could help improve life in this world for the Syrian community, he seems to have confined himself to the general duties of the Great Commandment: “you shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Mark 12:31). In an August 1818 letter to Munro Bailey laments the lack of education amongst Syrian girls. His wife Elizabeth, he noted, was willing to provide for this lack in the hope of one day raising up

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Munro to Bailey, Quilon, 10th March 1818, C I2/027/20, Letter No. 7.

⁵⁵ Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore*, Vol. I, 10.

⁵⁶ Cherian, *Towards Modernity*, 15.

⁵⁷ Munro to Bailey, Nagarcoil, 26th May 1818, C I2/027/20, Letter No. 10, my emphasis.

school mistresses for the girls. They had also taken one orphaned boy and three girls under their care. Bailey confides in Munro that this was a challenge on a missionary salary, but adds “I can truly say that we are willing to deprive ourselves of many comforts, if we can only promote the temporal & eternal interests of the poor Syrians.” In addition, Bailey is concerned for the great number of poor around Kottayam.⁵⁸

On this question of the Mission’s goals, therefore, Munro is much more directly concerned than Bailey on how it can serve political as well as spiritual ends. Where Bailey moves from the strict mission focus of the Great Commission to the Great Commandment, it is very much an overflow of his own Christian concern to alleviate the need of individuals. Munro certainly was not impervious to such needs. His goals, however, appear to be much more all-embracing and include the advancement of Britain’s colonial interests.

The reformation of the Syrian Church

Secondly, it is instructive to consider this early correspondence between Munro and Bailey on the question of the reformation and discipline of the Syrian Church. Munro had plenty to say on this issue from the beginning of Bailey’s mission. His concerns seemed to be both for the general reformation of the Syrian Church and, more specifically, for the immediate translation of the Scriptures into Malayalam along with the Book of Common Prayer. In terms of Munro’s desire for general reformation and discipline within the Church, he was not beyond laying down the law in matters ecclesiastical as well as civil. Hence he wastes no time in instructing Bailey, in May 1817, that no priest is to be ordained who has not spent time at the College and taken a standard examination.⁵⁹

Munro here seems to be taking his stand against simony in the Church. There had been a practice of ordaining young, uneducated boys as deacons. The Metropolitan and bishops received considerable income from doing so. Keay points out that this was very much a local practice that neither Rome nor Antioch could be blamed for.⁶⁰ Yet some writers from the Malabar Syrian

⁵⁸ Bailey to Munro, Cottayam, 15th August 1818, C I2/027/21, Letter No. 12.

⁵⁹ Munro to Bailey, Quilon, 24th May 1817, C I2/027/20, Letter No. 3.

⁶⁰ F.E. Keay, *A History of the Syrian Church of India*, Madras: SPCK (1938), 66

tradition have questioned the CMS version of events in this respect. Whilst not defending abuses in this practice, E.M. Philip claimed that the young deacon was attached to an experienced priest (a *malpān*) and instructed in the doctrine and liturgy of the church. With his customary suspicion, Philip claims the objections to this practice from the days of Munro and Bailey onwards were really an attempt “to arrogate to themselves the right, of dictating who were eligible for admission to holy orders in an Independent Church.”⁶¹ It may be, of course, that Munro and Bailey did not fully understand this local custom and misunderstood it as simony in every case. Whatever the truth about this practice might be, Munro was quite adamant in calling for it to be stopped.

In August 1817, Munro wrote to Bailey stating that “the church government of the Syrians appears from several expressions in your letters to demand immediate reformation.”⁶² In making this call, Munro puts a huge weight of responsibility on the young Bailey’s shoulders in seeing this reformation carried out. In doing so, however, he is putting political muscle behind his ecclesiastical instructions. Commenting on the general moral state of the Syrian Christians, Munro warned: “While such cases of disobedience & relaxation occur, it is in vain to look for any improvement of religion and morals among the Syrians; & a stricter system of discipline than has hitherto obtained in the Syrian Church is obviously necessary.” Bailey was the man, for Munro, to deliver such discipline. So he continued “The first point to be attained is to establish invariable obedience to your commands: & I request that you will in conjunction with the Metropolitan address a circular letter to all the Churches enjoining strict, uniform, & implicit obedience to all your orders on pain of such penalties as you may think proper to establish.” And so Bailey is given authority to suspend *kattanārs* for contumacy or neglect and to report them to Munro.⁶³ We may infer from the evidence of Bailey’s long ministry in Travancore that he did not use this authority given him by Munro in a tyrannical way. As we shall see in Chapter 4, his goal was to patiently educate and instruct.

⁶¹ Philip, *The Indian Church*, 286.

⁶² Munro to Bailey, Courtallam, 6th August 1817, C I2/027/20, Letter No. 4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

More positively, Munro saw the best strategy for reformation to be the translation of the Scriptures and the Church of England liturgy. So he is unwavering in his exhortation of Bailey to this work, almost to the point of impatience. He encourages Bailey onwards in his oversight of Bible translation and adds: “The translation of the English liturgy is another object of primary importance, & I think if it were well translated it might without any difficulty be substituted in all the churches for their present form of worship.”⁶⁴ This instruction from the political Resident was going well beyond the official CMS programme for reform at this point. So much is recognized even by contemporary Syrian Christian critics of the Mission such as C.V. Cherian. He writes that “the Home Committee was for moderation and they cautioned the missionaries on the question of reforming the Suriyani Church. The missionary report that the Anglican prayers had been rendered into Malayalam and were being used by some Kathanars did not elicit any enthusiastic response from the Home Committee.”⁶⁵ That this occurred seems to have been due to the pressure put on the young missionaries from the forceful character Munro. In the same letter Bailey is also urged to prepare the minds of the Syrians to drop the five sacraments that they shared with the Roman Catholic Church, retaining just Baptism and the Eucharist.⁶⁶

In these calls for reformation and discipline in the Syrian Church, Bailey was quite in agreement, even if not quite able to keep up with Munro’s pace. In the second archived letter we have from Bailey to Munro in 1817 Bailey informs Munro that “I am fully aware of the important charge now committed to me & the responsibility under which I am placed. It is the Lord’s work, & he has graciously promised every support for the accomplishment of it.”⁶⁷ Central to the work Bailey perceived God had given him was the translation of the Scriptures. Bailey believed until this was accomplished, no permanent good could be done. He was, however, more patient than Munro about the timescale, desiring that the work be done well. Bailey also, however, had been effectively appointed by Munro to superintend the College at this time and took this role

⁶⁴ Munro to Bailey, Nagarcoil, 23rd May 1818, C I2/027/20, Letter No. 9.

⁶⁵ C.V. Cherian, *Orthodox Christianity in India: A History of the Malankara Orthodox Church AD52-2002*, Kottayam: Academic Press (2003), 240-241.

⁶⁶ C I2/027/20, Letter No. 9.

⁶⁷ Bailey to Munro, Cottayam College, 28th March 1817, C I2/027/21, Letter No. 2.

seriously. It is noted in this letter that Bailey intended to begin lectures on Divinity soon.⁶⁸ We may well wonder if Bailey felt fully equipped for this role that Munro had given him. In the event, we know that Joseph Fenn would take over after approximately eighteen months of Bailey's tenure.⁶⁹ The pressure Munro exerted was due to a conscientious but overbearing desire to succeed as political Resident. Such priorities could not help but skew the Mission of Help in a political direction.

Bailey's great hope appears to have been reformation through translation. In a letter less than a month after the previous one, he assured Munro that the Syrians considered him their greatest friend and, regarding his own work, wrote “[f]rom what I have seen of their mode of worship, they appear to have a great deal of Roman Catholicism among them. But I am not without hopes that we shall find them willing to lay it all aside so soon as their minds are better informed.”⁷⁰ As Bailey found his feet throughout 1817, this conviction seemed increasingly to be seared into his conscience. “I consider the completion of the whole translation of such vast importance that I shall use all my endeavours to get the work forward,” he wrote to Munro in July of that year. In the same letter he claimed the people are hungry for the Scriptures and vows not to rest, if his life is spared, until they have them. For ultimately, in Bailey's words, “[n]othing, I am fully persuaded, will thro' the blessing of God be more effectual in raising the Syrian Church from its present lukewarm fallen state than this.”⁷¹

Bailey's passion, one senses, was to give the Syrian Christians the Bible in their own language, to see their church reformed and revived, to see its members truly converted and to see them become agents in the evangelisation of India. However, Munro's significant control over Bailey on the ground likely made it harder for Bailey to focus exclusively on these mission goals, free from politicisation. It is no surprise, therefore, to find Bailey seeking to assure Munro that his wishes are being carried out. For example, Bailey wrote to Munro in October 1817, after Archdeacon George had been appointed Metran Mar Dionysius III, the previous Sunday. Bailey

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ See Cherian, *Towards Modernity*, 48.

⁷⁰ Bailey to Munro, Cottayam College, 22nd April 1817, C I2/027/21, Letter No. 3.

⁷¹ Bailey to Munro, Cottayam College, July 14th 1817, C I2/027/21, Letter No. 5.

was keen to tell Munro that he had spoken to the Metran before his consecration and that the latter agreed to stricter discipline and a desire to carry out the Resident's wishes. Plans were afoot to visit the churches with the new Metran so that, no doubt, the wishes of Bailey and Munro could be practically demonstrated to him.⁷²

Bailey was keen to point out to Munro that reformation would take time. He wrote that "The spiritual as well as the temporal concerns of the Syrians are indeed, Sir, in such a very low state that it will, I fear, be a considerable time, before we shall see any alteration for the better." In the meantime he hoped that "the Lord will not only continue their present privileges, but also bless the means used for their restoration to their primitive state."⁷³ Munro does not appear to have been patient, however. We have seen above his desire for the English liturgy to be substituted, even though the CMS Committees in Madras and London did not see this as desirable. The pressure from Munro, however, meant that Bailey agreed at least in principle with this move. In a letter dated 22nd July 1818, Bailey acknowledged that it would be desirable to substitute the Anglican Liturgy, once translated, for the present forms. Bailey believed this would serve to bring an end to Roman Catholic usages. Bailey assured Munro that he is busy in persuading the Syrians of the error of these forms and seems confident there is growing agreement with his position.⁷⁴

Munro would leave Travancore on January 24th 1819.⁷⁵ The reformation work of Bailey, and his colleagues Joseph Fenn and Henry Baker, over the following years would in fact be much slower than Munro probably would have wished. The instructions of both the Madras Corresponding Committee and the Home Committee would therefore be obeyed. The Home Committee had actually reined the missionaries in somewhat when it was reported in 1818 that Anglican prayers had been translated into Malayalam and were being used by some of the *kattanārs*. They "conveyed to the missionaries their decided judgment that the Syrians should be brought back to their own ancient worship and discipline rather than be induced to adopt the liturgy and

⁷² Bailey to Munro, Cottayam College, 22nd Oct 1817, C I2/027/21, Letter No. 7.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Bailey to Munro, Cottayam, 22nd July 1818, C I2/027/21, Letter No. 13.

⁷⁵ Cherian, *Towards Modernity*, 389.

discipline of the English Church.”⁷⁶ We could probably quite fairly suggest that pressure from Munro had led to this development. Hunt remarks, reflecting on the counsel of the Home Committee, that the “liberal and judicious spirit thus enunciated was absorbed by the earliest missionaries and regulated their dealings with the Syrians … The leaven of the Gospel was introduced by them and left to leaven the whole lump.”⁷⁷ This approach was more easily followed, it would appear, after Munro’s departure.

Munro’s Influence on the Mission of Help: An Assessment

As we assess Munro’s contribution, it is vital to note that he was a hugely important figure in the history of Kerala. Whilst the young missionaries may have been tempted to breathe more easily with Munro gone, that is certainly not the spirit conveyed in their public reflections on his departure. A letter from the missionaries, reflecting on the year 1819, noted “[t]he year has been an anxious one. The departure of the late Resident depressed our spirits at its commencement.”⁷⁸ Joseph Fenn commented: “Travancore mourns his departure. I never read of any country receiving, in so short a time, such radical improvement, well, therefore, may she mourn.”⁷⁹ These are not just the sentiments of the CMS missionaries. The Malayalam scholar Babu Cherian has recently claimed “the title of ‘Christian Philanthropist’ would better suit him than the title of a Colonial Bureaucrat.”⁸⁰ He had a real concern for the Syrian Christian community and effected much that was good on their behalf. Munro’s influence on the Mission of Help, however, was by no means entirely positive for several reasons.

Firstly, on the level of personality, Munro was not a patient man. Jeffrey has noted that the personality of the Resident was a vitally important factor in the key relationships which developed in the political context of indirect rule in Travancore.⁸¹ Cherian notes that Munro’s impatience meant that he always wanted immediate results. This “led him to render to the Missionaries advice which, if they had followed it, would have defeated the very objects he had

⁷⁶ Cited in Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore*, Vol. I, 64.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ *Missionary Register*, 1820, 486.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 485.

⁸⁰ Cherian, *Towards Modernity*, 27.

⁸¹ Jeffrey, ‘The Politics of ‘Indirect Rule’, 261

in view.”⁸² An explanation for this may be that Munro “seems to have entertained exaggerated notions about the efficacy of political authority in bringing about reforms in social and ecclesiastical matters, in changing the habits of people and in reforming their character and making them good.”⁸³

A second explanation may well be “that however earnestly and unselfishly he may have worked for the good of the people committed to his charge, he was a man of despotic temperament.”⁸⁴ Certainly, as Cherian claims, the bold and strong leadership Munro offered did much good in the states of Travancore and Cochin. His benevolent despotism, however, went somewhat too far.⁸⁵ Susan Bayly adds a colourful detail: “Munro also had a taste for direct action in pursuit of [his] goals. His campaigns to impose western standards of ‘good government’ in the two states was enlivened by his practise of personally flogging erring officials with his own cat-o’-nine tails.”⁸⁶ One suspects Bailey and the other missionaries, whilst greatly admiring his work and sharing his faith, nevertheless may have found his presence somewhat intimidating.

Thirdly, his treatment of the Syrian Christian Community had been partial. For a start he concerned himself mainly to help the Syrian Jacobites rather than the Romo-Syrians. He also was less active in redressing wrongs done to other communities. Hence there appears to have been a reaction after Munro left. Colonel Digby Mackworth, visiting Travancore shortly after his departure, found that the condition of the Syrians had again declined. He recorded in his diary: “It strikes me that perhaps that good man showed them too much favour; more than what in justice or prudence he ought to have done, and their present miseries are the natural consequences of a reaction.”⁸⁷ The CMS themselves, moreover, were concerned by what they perceived as Munro’s pampering of the Syrian Christian community. The Parent Committee, in the wake of Munro’s departure, wrote to the missionaries:

⁸² P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 95.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 97.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700-1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1989), 285. Bayly’s source is C. Achyuta Menon, *The Cochin State Manual*, Ernakulam (1911), 150.

⁸⁷ Cited in P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 97.

It deserves well to be considered whether the great favours shown to the Syrians as to externals by Col. Munro might not in the end have served to divert them from a higher kind of object ... If they can be raised by the blessing of God on our earnest endeavours to the vigour and energy which will accompany vital religion, all needful temporal comforts will arise from their own activity and industry ... In this way, Dear Brethren, you may become to them messengers and instruments of the highest good.⁸⁸

We can hear once again Bailey's concern for the ultimate good leading to temporal blessing. For Munro, however, pressing political needs to consolidate British indirect rule meant that he perceived an ally in the Syrian Christian community. He seems to have assumed that, if their religion could be brought in line with that of the Church of England, then ecclesiastical bonds would result in political allegiance also. Hence he was less patient with the more indirect approach to social transformation of Bailey and the other CMS missionaries and committees.

Penelope Carson has reminded us that when Munro left nearly all concessions to the Syrian Christian community ceased. Over three hundred Syrians employed in public service were dismissed. Moreover, Munro's successor, Colonel McDouall, told Bailey that the Syrians were to receive no more special treatment:

In regard to the protection you solicit for the Syrians from the British government, ... they are already more highly favoured than any class of the subjects of the Travancore government ... What is just I will seek to support them in; and this is all that becomes the national representative to interfere with.⁸⁹

Carson therefore concludes: "Colin Macauley and John Munro's policy of favouring Christianity had done the cause of Christianity more harm than good."⁹⁰ From what we have seen from Munro's correspondence with Bailey, his interactions with the Syrian Christian leaders and the Madras Corresponding Committee, we can conclude that Munro's well-intentioned yet over-bearing contribution was ultimately unhelpful for the Mission of Help. It would be no surprise if, as the 1820s unfolded and Munro's favouritism was replaced by a reaction, the Syrians no longer felt that there was quite as much to be gained from the Mission of Help as they had hoped. We shall see how this turned out to be so in the subsequent chapters.

⁸⁸ Pratt and Bickersteth to Norton, Bailey, Fenn and Baker, C.M. House, London, March 10th 1820, C I2/E2/107.

⁸⁹ McDouall to Bailey, 27th August 1819, CI 2/MI, 74, cited in Carson, *The East India Company*, 173.

⁹⁰ Carson, *The East India Company*, 173.

Chapter 4 - The Call to Reform and Conversion, 1818-27

Introduction

The previous two chapters have dealt with the differing perspectives and priorities that existed amongst the key players as the Mission of Help began. In Chapter 3 we considered the role of Col. John Munro in his conversations with and counsel to the Syrian Christians, the Madras Corresponding Committee and, in particular, Benjamin Bailey. We saw that politicisation of the Mission of Help was taking place from the very beginning. In Chapter 2 we looked at the different doctrinal perspectives of the CMS and the Syrian Jacobite Christians on such key Christian doctrines as Christology, Ecclesiology, Soteriology and the relationship between Scripture and Tradition. Whilst historical interpreters take contrasting views on the historical and theological influences on the Syrians¹, our contrast of official teachings of the CMS and Syrian Church makes it clear that there were significant differences doctrinally between the two groups as the Mission of Help began.

Moreover, we have seen that these differences were significantly underestimated by Bailey, Fenn, and Baker, the earliest missionaries of the Mission of Help. That this is so is in large part due to the influence of Claudio Buchanan and his work *Christian Researches in Asia*. K.M. George has noted how the early Travancore missionaries Thomas Norton, Joseph Fenn, and Henry Baker Sr. had all been stirred to offer themselves for missionary service through the reading of Buchanan's volume.² Given that he moved in the same circles, Bailey also would most likely have been deeply influenced by this work and by what it had to say about the similarities and differences of the Syrians as a church body.

¹ In particular the debate as to whether the Syrian Church was actually Nestorian prior to the arrival of a Jacobite Bishop in 1665, after freedom was gained from Roman Catholic control. For an account of these developments, see Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Vol II 1500-1900*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 19-20. That the connection with the Jacobite Patriarchs began so late as the seventeenth century is, however, denied by many in the Syrian Jacobite faction. For the contrary view, that the Syrians have been largely Jacobite from the sixth century, see, for example, E.M. Philip, *The Indian Church of St. Thomas*, Kottayam (1907), Chapter IX.

² K.M. George, *Tradition Versus Reform: Church Missionary Society "Mission of Help" 1816-1840*, Kottayam: Benjamin Bailey Foundation (2013), 33, 49, 52.

Having explored evidence in Chapter 2 for how there actually were significant doctrinal differences between the CMS and the Syrians, in this chapter we will aim to begin exploring how these differences gradually began to impress themselves upon the missionaries. We shall chart the call to reform and conversion from 1818 to 1827. This call was issued by Benjamin Bailey, and his colleagues in the CMS to the Syrian Christians. It was on 3rd December 1818 that the newcomer missionary Joseph Fenn, flanked by Bailey and Metropolitan Mar Dionysius III, gave an impassioned address to a large gathering of *kattanārs* and elders of the Syrian Church at Mavelikara. In this address he called for reform in various areas, as we shall see below. In the months and years immediately preceding and following this occasion, Benjamin Bailey had also been discovering to his disappointment that the Syrian Church was not as close to the doctrine and practice of the Church of England as he had hoped. This led, by 1827, to a specific acknowledgment of the need for conversions amongst what he increasingly believed was a largely nominal Christian community. We will therefore survey Bailey's unpublished letters and published reports of his work in the *Missionary Register* to help us to see his growing concern for the fundamental spiritual well-being of the Syrian Christians.

In observing these calls for reform and conversion, we shall also be keeping a careful eye on the process of politicisation that accompanied the Mission of Help. This comes out in Fenn's address, in Bailey's correspondence in this period and even in contemporary sources available to us from the Syrians themselves. This chapter will therefore further build the case that it was not simply the fact that the CMS missionaries were Evangelical Protestants that explains the eventual separation from the Syrians. Rather there was significant continued politicisation of the mission that was sowing seeds of mistrust and eventual failure.

Joseph Fenn's address: A Call to Ecclesiastical and Political Reform?

The Rev. Joseph Fenn (1790-1878) was probably the most intellectually able of the 'Kottayam Trio' of missionaries. Born into a wealthy London family, he studied law and practised successfully as a conveyancer before Buchanan's *Christian Researches in Asia* stirred him to offer himself for missionary service with the CMS. He undertook theological training before ordination in 1816. After curacies in Lowestoft and some time working for the CMS in London,

the Fenns arrived in Madras on May 19th 1818. Fenn and his wife had hoped for a long career as missionaries in India. Health considerations, however, cut short these ambitions and they returned home in 1827. Fenn did, however, remain a lifelong supporter of the CMS from his charge at St. Michael's Blackheath, where he was preaching lucidly until shortly before his death in 1878.³

It was not long after his arrival in Kerala, therefore, that Fenn assumed responsibility for the college at Kottayam and gave the address to the Syrian Church which is of interest to us in this chapter. The assembly at Mavelikara had been convened by the Metropolitan, apparently to allow the bringing into the open of matters which had been “frequent subjects of friendly correspondence between himself and the Missionaries.”⁴ With the Metran presiding and Bailey sitting on one side and Fenn on the other, the latter rose to address the assembly. His concerns touched on issues of ecclesiology, soteriology, and the relationship between Scripture and Tradition in the Syrian Church. As we will see below, the Metran had considerable misgivings about the occasion.

On ecclesiological matters Fenn was obviously concerned by reports of disunity within the Syrian ranks. This, he believed, was a terribly counter-productive testimony to the surrounding society. Fenn’s first heading was therefore on the “Importance of Union Among Yourselves.”⁵ He did not mince his words:

Living as you do, under a Heathen Government, surrounded on all sides by the votaries of idolatry, the followers of Mahomet, or the Members of the Church of Rome, it is manifest, that, if you are disunited among yourselves, you will sink before the baneful influence of the pernicious tenets and practices maintained and promulgated around you.⁶

³ Ibid, 49-52.

⁴ P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians and the Church Missionary Society 1816-1840*, Kottayam (2015 [1935]), 392. An abstract of the address, covering its substance fairly comprehensively, was published in the *Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society* for 1819-1820. It is reprinted in P. Cherian’s work here noted as Appendix B. A copy of the original text is held at the Cadbury Research Library in Birmingham. File C I2/E3/38. For our purposes we quote from the reprint in Cherian and will note the references as *Fenn’s Address*.

⁵ *Fenn’s Address*, 392.

⁶ Ibid.

To deal with this problem of disunity, Fenn recommends “due subordination” within the church of laity to clergy in dubious matters.⁷ Not that this subordination was to be absolute and unquestioning. Fenn urged his hearers: “in every dubious matter, the submission must be unlimited; in matters provided for by Scripture, only so far as there is a consonance between the instructions of the Clergy, and the rule by which such instructions must be framed, the Word of God.”⁸ So Fenn here is arguing for clerical authority but also for submission to Scripture by all. He holds before the people the idea that the clergy could be wrong. In this he probably helped to set in motion principles that drove the later reform movements inside the Syrian Church, of which we will say more Chapters 6 and 7.

This exhortation brings us to Fenn’s views on Scripture and Tradition. His second heading sought to address the “Present State of your Ritual.”⁹ Fenn’s concern primarily seems to have been that there was lack of uniformity in the ritual or liturgy from one church to another. He believed there were departures in many places from both Scripture and Tradition as a little further listening in illustrates: “There can be no doubt but that different practices obtain in different Churches; some of which, as we have witnessed, are highly derogatory to the honour of God, very dissonant from his commands, and, we believe, not sanctioned by Canons of your Church.”¹⁰ With these departures from Scripture and Church Tradition thus highlighted, Fenn continued, “[i]t cannot reasonably be expected that you have entirely escaped the baneful influence of surrounding error and superstition; and we doubt not that many of your present rites and practices will prove to be imitations and modifications of similar practices among the Heathen.”¹¹ This comment suggests that the missionaries were not completely unaware, even in these early days, of the influence of Hindu culture upon the Syrians.¹² Fenn is therefore calling this ancient Church back to Scripture and the best aspects of its own tradition.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, 393.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Not that they understood the complexities of this issue comprehensively. Yet there was not, perhaps, the extent of ignorance of these matters that some suggest. See, for example, Penelope Carson, ‘Christianity, Colonialism, and Hinduism in Kerala: Integration, Adaptation, or Confrontation,’ in Robert Eric Frykenberg (ed), *Christians and*

It is in the perceived aberrations, however, that Fenn also sees threats to what he would understand as a biblical soteriology. He believed that insofar as the Syrian Church was being influenced by surrounding religious practice in general, and Roman Catholicism in particular, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and his mediation were being undermined. Fenn argued that the First Commandment, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3 KJV), and the New Testament assertion that “There is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the Man, Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5 KJV), were undermined by this assimilation into worship of unscriptural practices. Fenn was adamant that

Any prayer, vow, act of adoration, praise or confidence in matters purely spiritual, directed to any other, is idolatry in the sight of God. In matters of this kind, every creature stands on the same level; and it is equally displeasing to God, whether we worship the Virgin Mary, or any beast, or creeping thing, or idol of wood or stone.¹³

Fenn therefore issued a rallying call on behalf of himself and his missionary colleagues:

We adjure you then, by the Living God, and by His son Jesus Christ our Saviour, that you henceforth abstain from every act of worship to any but to the God who made, redeemed, and sanctifies you. In Him, and Him alone, are power to protect you, patience to bear with you, love to listen to and grant all your petitions, and wisdom to direct you ... Your doctrines, your ceremonies, your habits, everything about you, should proclaim, ‘There is but one God and one Mediator between God and man.’¹⁴

Fenn continued by urging enquiry into “[w]hether the ends proposed by the Lord Jesus Christ in the establishment of a priesthood and the institution of public worship, are secured in your Church.”¹⁵ What we have heard from Fenn above, suggests that he clearly believed this was not the case. He was concerned that no biblical instruction was given to the people by the clergy, that the Syriac language could not be understood by the people, that enforced celibacy among the

Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans and Richmond: Curzon, (2003), 127-154.

¹³ *Fenn’s Address*, 394.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

clergy was attempting to be “wiser than God,” and was “laying snares for our feet, and securing our own downfall.”¹⁶

In these matters, Fenn appears to have understood that the Metropolitan, Mar Dionysius III, was in full agreement with him. The address to this point was a clear call for ecclesiastical reform. Fenn was concerned, however, that concrete action be taken by the Syrians themselves to effect changes. So he announced to the assembly: “To take these matters into consideration, the Metropolitan will appoint six of your most able and beloved Kattanars, who will meet and discuss them, and report to you the result of their deliberations.”¹⁷ Fenn therefore was acting in line with the CMS policy, from both London and Madras, that it should be the Syrian Church itself which should effect the reforms. The aim, as Hunt reminds us, was that all the rites, ceremonies and worship of the Syrians be brought to the test of Scripture. The missionaries would act as advisers in this matter. While, however, Fenn had issued this call to ecclesiastical reform and while a working party of leading Syrians had been brought into existence to effect change, nothing much appears to have come out of this development by way of significant reform.¹⁸

We may well wonder why so little reform would subsequently take place. E.M. Philip offers a fascinating explanation. While Philip is hardly an unbiased commentator, he is a useful source from within the Jacobite Syrians as his own grandfather was witness to many of these events.¹⁹ Philip argued that Fenn’s address, and its bold call for reform, was a bit too much for the congenial Mar Dionysius III and actually constituted a significant breach of trust between himself and the missionaries. A pretence of friendship was maintained, Philip claimed, while he appealed to Antioch for advice, believing that it would be expedient “to have an Antiochan Bishop in Malabar whose presence or objection could be urged as an excuse for his inability to

¹⁶ Ibid, 395.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ W.S. Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore and Cochin, 1816-1916: Operations of the Church Missionary Society in South-West India*, Vol. I, Kottayam, CMS Press (1920), 108.

¹⁹ See the Introduction and Chapter 3 for more details on how we should weigh Philip’s contribution.

comply with their suggestions of innovations.”²⁰ Philip continued by quoting a manuscript from a priest supposedly “intimately acquainted” with the Metropolitan:

He (the Metropolitan) was kind, liberal to the poor, patriotic in his sentiments towards his country and community, subtle in his dealings, a lover of worldly pomp and money, and outwardly a friend of the missionaries but inwardly suspicious of their aims. Before he started for the meeting at Mavelikara in 1818, he entered the chancel of the Cheriapally church and privately prayed for a long time; and when he was about to step into his boat *en route*, he said in confidence to his trustworthy friends then present: ‘I am standing on the brink. Tomorrow I must either fall out with the sahibs or betray my Church. They want to change our faith. I would rather lose my honour than be a traitor. Pray for me that I may pass through this ordeal unscathed.’²¹

There is likely to have been, therefore, more to Mar Dionysius III than what the missionaries saw in their dealings with him. Indeed, whether he really was the reforming figure they supposed him to be may be questioned. Yet this is not to cast aspersions on his character or spirituality. The missionaries’ perception of him as “a man of prayer”²² is in fact borne out by this account of his behaviour given by a Syrian source close to him. In reality, Fenn’s call for ecclesiastical reform must have put the Metropolitan in a huge dilemma. The choice seemed to be to go against cardinal doctrines of his church, or jeopardise a mission from which he believed his Church was receiving benefit.

While Fenn clearly did issue a call to ecclesiastical reform, political and cultural reform, however, also appears to have been part of his agenda, probably under Munro’s influence. The latter, of course, had shown significant favour to the Syrian Christian community.²³ It was under Munro’s influence that the Rani had given permission for the Syrian College to be erected and given a significant personal endowment to it. Fenn mentions these facts as he brings his address to a close.²⁴ He does so to urge the clergy of the Syrian community to encourage their people to

²⁰ E.M. Philip, *The Indian Church*, 228-229.

²¹ *Ibid*, 229.

²² *Missionary Register*, 1822, 78.

²³ See the discussion in Chapter 3 above.

²⁴ *Fenn’s Address*, 397.

train themselves to fulfil government roles.²⁵ It was because of this desire from the Rani that the Syrian Seminary and College was a seminary *and* a college.

There was therefore a tension within the thinking of the Madras Corresponding Committee of the CMS regarding the role of the College and the exact nature of the CMS Mission in Travancore. So the Committee noted in 1819 “[t]he College at Cotym must, in every view, be considered as an Institution of the first importance. It is a point, at which we are silently and gradually collecting the means, which, by the Divine Blessing, *may ultimately accomplish the political, moral, and religious renovation of a whole people.*”²⁶ So in the background to Fenn’s address were the evangelistic and reforming desires of himself and the CMS Committees in London and Madras. Yet there was also a desire for political and moral renovation, coming from Munro, the zealously evangelical Resident, and even the Rani of Travancore herself. The latter, however, had given her support in the hope that this large section of her subjects could be made better citizens of Travancore, regardless of whether or not they were made better citizens of heaven. Hence the Madras Committee expressed their view on the need to go beyond the theological training of the Syrian priesthood:

This expectation will necessarily introduce several branches of instruction, which may be considered foreign from a Missionary’s office and objects; but the Committee are, at present, disposed to think, that these branches of instruction, not essential to the direct objects of the Missionary as a means to an end, are yet, in this case, so important and so inseparably connected with the great purpose of the Mission, that any attempt to dissolve this connexion would be attended with great risk to the benefit expected from the Institution.²⁷

The CMS were therefore, like Bailey, concerned for the ultimate good, by which they meant the eternal spiritual welfare of the people of Travancore.²⁸ Yet they also saw the intrinsic importance of temporal goods and were willing to use these as a penultimate means in accomplishing their purposes. The final paragraphs of Fenn’s address therefore reveal twin concerns for both spiritual reformation and revival and the appreciation by the Syrians of the political benefits they have

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ *Missionary Register*, 1819, 428, my emphasis.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ See the discussion on Bailey’s missionary priorities is Chapter 3 above.

received from Munro. Fenn tells the assembled elders and *kattanārs* to amend their ways and to seek God: “the best way in which, both as Church and people, you can secure His favour, is by a confession of all your offences, a general humiliation among all classes before him, and united and fervent supplications to Him for his pardoning mercy and the outpouring of His Holy Spirit.”²⁹ For Fenn, Bailey and his CMS colleagues the fruit and experience of the Evangelical Awakening in Britain made them long to see the same in their particular field of mission.

Yet this was not the only emphasis as the address closed. Fenn takes the trouble to make what may seem an unusual application in what is effectively a sermon dealing with matters of ecclesiology and soteriology. He laments that their cultivation is confined to the mere subsistence crops of rice, coconuts, beetle-nuts, yams and grains. He remonstrated:

How little qualified are you to benefit the country, compared with what would be the case if every useful article was cultivated by you; Pepper, Ginger, Turmeric, the Sugar Cane, all species of dry Grain, Coffee, together with many kinds of trees, would greatly enrich yourselves and prove very beneficial to your country.³⁰

There is likely a political concern behind Fenn’s words here and it is not hard to discern Col. Munro’s influence. As pointed out in the previous chapter, Munro was under considerable pressure in the political context of South India at this time. His enthusiasm for having missionaries was not widely shared by EIC colleagues. He must therefore have been immensely eager to show that his approach could be economically successful. One can therefore easily imagine him impressing upon Fenn the need to raise issues of this kind.³¹ Fenn’s final word combined his spiritual concerns with a reminder of the temporal blessings Col. Munro had brought to the Syrian community:

We trust that it will ever be your practice to remember, with gratitude to Almighty God, the alliance and friendship existing between the Government, under which you live, and the British Nation, an alliance, which has occasioned the residence in your country, of one, who has unceasingly endeavoured at the

²⁹ Fenn’s Address, 398-399.

³⁰ Ibid, 398.

³¹ For a description of these pressures Munro faced see Penelope Carson, *The East India Company and Religion, 1698-1858*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press (2012), 164-171.

revival of genuine religion and piety among you; and to whom, under God, you owe all the blessings which you enjoy, and the happy prospects before you.³²

Thus we must leave Fenn's address. What is striking is that there appears to be no disconnect in his thinking between the ecclesiastical reformation and revival for which he calls and the blessing of having someone like Munro as political leader. It is understandable that a strong doctrine of Providence would see the latter as being a great asset to the former. The dangers in such thinking, however, was that the ecclesiological project which the Mission of Help set out to be, was confusingly entangled with the changing colonial landscape in relations between Britain and India.

Mar Dionysius III understandably welcomed the benefits Munro had brought to his somewhat beleaguered community. Whether or not he was angered by Fenn's address, and whatever he had thought at the prospect of the assembly where it was delivered, he did nevertheless write to the CMS in 1821 expressing great appreciation for all that had been accomplished through Munro.³³ He compared Munro's predecessor Col. Macaulay to Moses and Buchanan to Aaron. They had "brought us forth from the house of bondage, and consoled us with kind words, and assisted us with money."³⁴ Munro meanwhile was compared to Joshua the son of Nun bringing Israel into the land of promise. His efforts in opening a school and a church for the people are celebrated, "in order that our eyes, made dim by the depth of our poverty may be opened by knowledge of the declarations of the Holy and Divine Books."³⁵

The Metropolitan also lauded the missionaries in this letter, hardly surprisingly as it is written to their Parent Committee. The Metropolitan spoke of the Priest Benjamin, the Priest Joseph and the Priest Henry as "[o]ur spiritual and temporal friends, brothers and assistants, whom you have sent to us, that they might root out the thorns and tares from among the children of God," and "anxiously seeking all the requisites for the redemption of our souls, as well as constantly

³² *Fenn's Address*, 399.

³³ See the discussion in Philip, *The Indian Church*, 229, referred to above.

³⁴ Letter of the Syrian Metropolitan to the Society, Appendix C in P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 401. First published in *Missionary Register*, 1822, 431-432. Refs are to Cherian's reprint. Hereafter *Metropolitan's Letter*.

³⁵ *Metropolitan's Letter*, 401.

teaching all the Deacons and children of our place the English Language.”³⁶ So Munro and the trio of missionaries are seen as being both temporal and spiritual friends. In this letter, Mar Dionysius III, seemed open to the painful work of reform. Yet, given the testimony quoted by Philip above, we may well wonder if this was for the benefit of the missionaries’ superiors and supporters in London. We can also ponder if it was in fact the political and temporal benefits for which the Metropolitan was most thankful. While he does acknowledge their work for redemption of souls, it may be that the temporary recovery for his community of the great privileges in their society they had previously enjoyed was what he really was grateful to Munro and the missionaries for. The reformation of church affairs they called for he may have been quite happy to put on one side. In what follows concerning Bailey’s frustration, we should therefore keep Fenn’s address and the responses to it in mind.

Benjamin Bailey: Disappointment and the Call to Conversion

Against the backdrop of Fenn’s address, we will now consider the observations of Benjamin Bailey as he settled into his missionary work, overseeing Scripture translation, meeting with Syrian clergy, and preaching in their churches. We will trace how his disappointments with what he witnessed of the Syrian Church led ultimately to a call for not just reformation but conversion, amongst the bulk of the Syrian Christian community. In doing so, we will also see that political pressures were never far under the surface.

‘very little but the name of Christianity’ (1816-17)

Although Benjamin Bailey did not adequately understand the cultural or doctrinal differences between the CMS and the Syrians, he began his missionary endeavours with a realistic enough sense of the challenge which confronted him. In these early years Bailey had frequent correspondence with Josiah Pratt, the CMS Secretary in London. Pratt, it should be noted, was likely very keen that the Mission of Help should be seen as a partnership between Christian churches. It was he, after all, who had set up the first of a number of widely-read missionary magazines, the *Missionary Register*, in 1813. As Norman Thomas has reminded us “Pratt

³⁶ Ibid. He is referring to Benjamin Bailey, Joseph Fenn and Henry Baker Sr.

attempted to report fully on missionary work regardless of denomination, including Roman Catholic missions. His was a remarkable example of ‘ecumenical sympathies.’³⁷ To what extent this label as it has come to be understood in recent times could be applied to Pratt and Bailey is debatable. The supposed ecumenism of the mission agencies of this period will be more fully discussed in the concluding chapter. For now, however, we may say that Bailey, and his superiors in London, did not see the Mission of Help as simply a cloak for proselytization to the Church of England.

Bailey’s realism about the Christianity he encountered amongst the Thomas Christians comes out as early as 1817 in letters to Pratt. He wrote, for example, concerning the Syrians: “Their church once flourished with pure evangelical truth; but how is the glory of it departed … They are now declined into the mere formality of religion, & I fear very little, if anything but the name of Christianity remains amongst them.”³⁸ This is a key observation by Bailey that helps us understand the ever-increasing calls for conversion in the years that follow.

It seems, however, that Bailey was willing to identify and recognise that there was a little true Christianity amongst the Syrians and therefore embarked on his mission to them with a desire to ‘help’ the church toward reform. Yet in doing so he approached the task through the lens of a distinction between real and nominal Christianity that was brought into sharp focus by the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century. For John Wesley and other leaders of the revival, nominal Christianity was a very real danger in comprehensive national churches. Real Christianity involved the belief in and experience of regeneration, justification by faith alone and a degree of personal assurance that one is truly Christian.³⁹ Moreover this true Christianity was perceived by Evangelicals to be the basis of a stable and righteous nation.⁴⁰ For Bailey and his colleagues, therefore, if the Syrians were to be agents for the evangelisation of South India, and

³⁷ Norman E. Thomas, *Missions and Unity: Lessons from History, 1792-2010*, Eugene OR: Cascade Books (2010), 25-26.

³⁸ Bailey to Josiah Pratt, Cotyam College, 20th September 1817, CMS Collection, Cadbury Research Library, Birmingham, C I2/E2/18.

³⁹ On how the motif of real Christianity was central in Wesley’s thought see Kenneth J. Collins, ‘The Motif of Real Christianity in the Writings of John Wesley,’ *The Asbury Theological Journal*, 49:1 (1994), 49-62.

⁴⁰ Allan K. Davidson, *Evangelicals and Attitudes to India 1786-1813: Missionary Publicity and Claudius Buchanan*, Abingdon: The Sutton Courtenay Press (1990), 41.

if there was to be stability in Britain's relationship to Travancore, it was imperative that the Syrians displayed more than the name of Christianity.

The perspective of the Syrians, themselves, however, was very different. Cladius Buchanan gave us a hint of the difference in his observation "I perceive that the Syrian Christians assimilate much to the Hindoos in practice".⁴¹ He was referring to various practices concerning ritual purity and vegetarian diet. Susan Bayly sees an increase in commitment to such practices as indicative of a weakening of the power and status of the Syrians in Travancore society. Hence the clergy led the way in Brahmanising tendencies. The question was not one of assimilation pure and simple, on the contrary, "in many cases there was a relationship of confrontation and conflict between the two, but this still created an area of community with the region's high-ranking non-Christian groups."⁴²

While Bailey was seeking to promote a Christianity that was more than merely in name, it seems that the doctrines which distinguished real and nominal Christianity for Evangelicals in the Church of England were not the issues and ideas that the Syrians were grappling with. They were rather more concerned with maintaining a long negotiated and hard-won place within South Indian society, whilst remaining Christian. It was therefore somewhat inevitable that the call for conversion issued by Bailey would cause tension within this ancient community. Bailey could not fully have understood how this would be so. It is to his approach in dealing with the Syrians that we now turn.

Reform from within? (1818-21)

We begin with letters Bailey sent to Munro in 1818. An introductory acknowledgement helps us to see that Bailey, and the Syrian Churches themselves, were somewhat under Munro's patronage for the meeting of their practical needs. Bailey wrote to the Resident "I have the pleasure to acknowledge the receipt of 30 muskets & bayonets, with gunpowder, shot, flints etc.

⁴¹ Cladius Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia: With Notices of the Translation of the Scriptures into the Oriental Languages*, Fourth Edition, London: T Cadell and W Davies (1811), 121.

⁴² Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700-1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1989), 284, 319.

for the Syrian Churches.” These were, apparently, to be distributed to churches troubled by wild beasts.⁴³ Much of the content of Bailey’s next two letters to Munro, however, concern the rituals and traditions of the Syrians. Bailey had taken the opportunity to witness a *cāttam* feast in commemoration of a dead Metran, “being desirous to gain a knowledge of their ceremonies.” He reported that they had various kinds of music and tight rope dancing and various things “ill becoming the solemnity of the place or the occasion.” Bailey seemed to take particular exception to a procession with a cross and an image of the deceased Metran which was kissed by all the people. Bailey was in close contact with Mar Dionysius III and he related to Munro that “I reasoned with the Metran on the impropriety of such unscriptural proceedings, & told him that so long as they continued these practices all that has been or may be done for their good would be of no avail.” He then requested of Munro: “May I, Sir, beg to be favoured with your sentiments respecting the speedy abolition of these ceremonies.”⁴⁴ He is therefore seeking a politician’s advice on matters of church reformation. This may have been due to Munro’s strong evangelical sentiments and Christian wisdom. The young missionary no doubt appreciated that Munro had been among the Syrian Christians longer than him and that his advice in dealing with them would be valuable.

In reply Munro did not address the issue of *cāttam* feasts directly, but he did commend Bailey for visiting the churches and adds “it is evident that you ought to see them, for your presence will be highly useful in correcting the errors into which they have fallen.” Munro was ‘hawkish’ when it came to reformation of the Syrian Church and went on to exhort Bailey: “Indeed you should also have in view, & attempt when practicable, the abolition of the masses, sacraments, & other Popish ceremonies.” He encouraged Bailey to translate the English liturgy and to encourage its use in several churches before attempting to abolish all present forms.⁴⁵ Munro was therefore pushing for the *Book of Common Prayer* to be translated urgently and seemed to believe that the introduction of English modes of worship would almost automatically have a reforming effect on the Syrian Church.

⁴³ Bailey to Munro, Cottayam, 22nd May 1818, C I2/027/21, Letter No. 11.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Munro to Bailey, Nagarcoil, 26th May 1818, C I2/027/20, Letter No. 10.

In a further letter on this theme Bailey informed Munro that he was in continued conversation with the Metran about *cāttams*, trying to convince him that no such practices were mentioned in the Scriptures. Bailey reported: “I am happy to say that he coincided with my views on the subject, & with my wish to have them abolished.”⁴⁶ Mar Dionysius III claimed the Catholics had introduced them and a circular letter was to go to the Churches regarding this practice. Therefore *cāttam* feasts and the like were among the issues that Fenn claimed had been the object of open and friendly discourse with the Metran during his address in December 1818. On this matter, however, Bailey showed something of his patience and practical realism. He was aware that priests derived considerable income from *cāttams* and so Bailey told Munro “it may not perhaps be advisable to abolish them at present, until some other source of support be established.”⁴⁷

Bailey did concur with Munro that reformation would be assisted greatly by a more Anglican brand of Christianity gradually being introduced into the Syrian congregations. He wrote in the same letter: “When the Liturgy of our Church is translated into the Malayalim language, I hope, thro the blessing of God, we shall be able to accomplish the abolition of all their Roman Catholic & unscriptural practices.”⁴⁸ So Bailey clearly wished for reform along Anglican lines. It is doubtful, however, if he was as forceful as Munro on the speed with which this was to be accomplished. We might also ask the question as to what extent practices such as *cāttam* were Roman Catholic. It may be, rather, that they were part of what might be termed a Hindu-Syrian cultural fusion. Penelope Carson would certainly be of this opinion. Never mind festivals for dead Metrans, “[w]ell into the nineteenth century, some Syrians were offering sacrificial cocks at the shrines of Nayar warrior goddesses, as well as consecrated food offerings.”⁴⁹ The Syrian Christians, therefore, had a carefully negotiated cultural integration into Kerala’s complex social fabric. Moreover, Carson adds, “[s]ome of the missionaries who later came from Europe do not seem to have understood the extent to which these mutual obligations were embedded in a distinct Hindu-Christian culture; nor, if they did, would they have been ready to tolerate such a

⁴⁶ Bailey to Munro, Cottayam, 15th August 1818, C I2/027/21, Letter No. 12.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Carson ‘Christianity, Colonialism, and Hinduism in Kerala’, 133. See also Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 251 who notes that the *cāttam* ritual of the Syrian Christians had commonalities with both Muslim *urs* festivals and Hindu temple festivals in South India.

culture.”⁵⁰ In Bailey’s case this is most likely so and helps explain his increasing sense of disappointment with the Christian profession and practice of the Syrians.

All accounts of Bailey available to us, however, suggest that his disappointment did not spill over into impatience in his dealings with the Syrian Christians. The *Missionary Register*, for example, contained the following report from the Madras Corresponding Committee in 1819:

They have the satisfaction to state, that the same cordial good understanding, as was before noticed, still appears to prevail with the Syrian Clergy; and that, by the prudent conduct of Mr. Bailey, who is the most immediately concerned with the Syrians, the confidence and esteem of both Clergy and People have been secured, to a considerable degree.⁵¹

This supposed prudence seemed to have been a feature of the early missionaries on the Mission of Help. The Corresponding Committee continued that “With the utmost prudence, the Missionaries are careful to alter as little as possible; that the character and individuality of the Syrian Church may be preserved.” Hence, where reformation was perceived to be needed on grounds of truth and conscience, “the execution is committed, with their own consent, to the Bishop and Clergy.”⁵² Again, as noted in Chapter 2, there was probably an over-confidence on the part of the CMS generally at this stage regarding the similarity between themselves and the Syrians. For example, the Committee stated that there is a “general persuasion” amongst the Syrians, “that the Doctrines of the Church, to which the Missionaries belong, are the same as those once held in the Syrian Church.” They therefore argued that this makes them open to requests for reform.⁵³

Bailey’s trials and experiences, however, gradually saw this perception being challenged as the 1820s dawned. For one thing, 1819 was a period of considerable trial for Bailey. The *Missionary Register*, quoting a joint letter from the missionaries, noted “Mr Bailey’s ill state of health, throughout the whole year [1819], has rendered it impossible for him to make full proof of the

⁵⁰ Carson, ‘Christianity, Colonialism and Hinduism in Kerala,’ 134.

⁵¹ *Missionary Register*, 1819, 427.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

knowledge which he has acquired, and to execute the plans that he had in contemplation.”⁵⁴ The following year’s volume of the same publication reported that Bailey continued to suffer from much ill-health.⁵⁵

When his health permitted, however, Bailey not only plodded on with his translation work in Kottayam, but visited as many of the Syrian Churches as he could. It would appear that he spent a good part of 1821 in this pursuit and has kept a journal of his meetings with leaders and priests of the Syrian Christians. His entry for 2nd May records a discussion with Norton, Fenn and Baker on the proper subjects of Baptism.⁵⁶ That such a discussion was being had suggests who to baptise was proving a problem in their pastoral and missionary work. If, as they claim, the Syrian Church was in a degraded state at this time, it is likely that baptisms were being performed for any who desired it and, perhaps, were willing to pay the fee. Bailey and his colleagues, as Evangelical Protestants in the Church of England, would have been eager that this right was restricted to those showing a credible profession of faith, and their children. The same entry also records that Norton had preached before the Metropolitan and 200 others in Malayalam on Isaiah 60:1 “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you” (ESV).⁵⁷ It is an instructive choice of text, suggesting that the missionaries perceived a need for the Syrians to be aroused and revived. This is a theme to which Bailey would repeatedly return. The following Sunday, 6th May 1821, Bailey records preaching to just sixteen people in Cochin. It is apparent from the journal entries that he made monthly visits there to preach. Bailey records a prayer in his journal: “O Lord accompany by thy mighty power the preaching of thy holy word, & cause it to break the cocky heart asunder, & to be the means of leading sinners to thee.”⁵⁸ Bailey therefore was engaging in a hard work, and this prayer suggests that by 1821 he was already sensing a need not just for reformation, but for conversion amongst his Syrian Christian hearers.

⁵⁴ *Missionary Register*, 1820, 486.

⁵⁵ *Missionary Register*, 1821, 63.

⁵⁶ Bailey’s Journal May 1821 to November 1821, C I2/027/17.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Further entries confirm Bailey's sense of the spiritual desolation of the Syrians, yet he also, unintentionally no doubt, gives us a revealing glimpse into the way in which political concerns were intertwined with missiological objectives. On 18th May 1821 Bailey records being present at a meeting of the Metropolitan with the Resident, Col. Newall. The Political Resident promised help and support for the Syrian Christians. He was, however, exerting influence on the church to 'get its act together.' Bailey noted:

[T]hough he promised all the assistance in his power, & the Ranee was disposed to favour them, yet if those immediately under the Metropolitan [alluding to the *kattanārs*] did not exert themselves for the good of the Church in their respective stations, all the assistance that might be rendered to the Syrians would fall to the ground.⁵⁹

The following day in a meeting which Bailey was present at between the Metropolitan and the Resident, the latter "strongly pressed the necessity of the Syrians manifesting an exemplary conduct, it would not only raise them in the estimation of Government, the Brahmins, & all other castes but also greatly tend to the promotion of [Christ]ianity in the country." This integrity was essential since Christianity was perceived as foreign and therefore Hindus would be jealous of any perceived preferential treatment.⁶⁰

Here we see that Col. Newall was less inclined than Munro had been to give the Syrians special advantages. It would also appear that Newall had less interest in the niceties of ecclesiastical reform and more interest in the general well-being of the Syrian Christian Community. That much is evident in a letter exchange between Newall and Bailey, Fenn, and Baker. In this letter, the missionaries claim that the interests of the Metropolitan include the circulation of the Holy Scriptures in the vernacular and Syriac, the general instruction of Syrian Christian young people, the special instruction of the clergy, and the erection and enlargement of churches.⁶¹ The letter is basically an enlargement upon these themes with some ecclesiastical and historical background. Newall's reply, however, is very short and to the point, even after four months delay in

⁵⁹ Bailey's Journal, May 1821 to November 1821, C 12/027/17.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Bailey, Fenn and Baker to Colonel Newall, Kottayam, March 13 1822 in P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, Appendix D, 403-411, ref, 407.

responding. He notes simply that “[t]he advantage to be derived from a general diffusion of knowledge in a part of India which has heretofore been proverbial among the nations of the East for the ignorance and immorality of its inhabitants, must be considered of primary importance to the interests of the State.”⁶² He then requests the Metropolitan to be given every encouragement in pursuing the goals the missionaries had outlined and assures both the missionaries and the Metropolitan of support of their efforts “by every means in my power.”⁶³ These encounters between the missionaries, Newall, and the Syrians serve to reinforce that the Mission of Help was taking place against a backdrop where the privileged status that the Syrians had enjoyed amongst high caste Hindus could no longer be taken for granted. Moreover, although it seems that Newall was less invested in the Mission of Help than Munro was, he still viewed the project as extremely useful for the State of Travancore and for British interests there.

Returning, however, to Bailey’s journal, we see that he continued to gain little encouragement from his interactions with the Syrian *kattanārs*. On 22nd May Bailey recounts a visit with the acting Metropolitan to two careless *kattanārs* who had not conducted worship the previous Sabbath. Bailey lamented: “They do not appear from the answers to some questions I put to them, to have any knowledge of the Scriptures. We may therefore easily judge in what state their flock must be.”⁶⁴ Bailey, however, was not of a mind to simply write off such *kattanārs*. He continued to be intimately involved in the life of the College at Kottayam. He also took an even more hands-on role in seeking to remedy the situation we have here outlined. K.M. George notes that Bailey worked closely with the clergy “taking three or four by turns near him for instruction, and insisted on getting quarterly reports of churches; he used to appoint Readers, and instructed them in preaching methods.”⁶⁵ Whilst, therefore, Bailey was frustrated and disappointed with the Syrian Church from the leadership downward, he nevertheless seems to have been committed in these early years of the Mission of Help to work for reform of the Church from within.

⁶² Newall to Bailey, Fenn, and Baker, 20th July, 1822, Appendix D in P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 411-412, ref., 411.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 412.

⁶⁴ Bailey’s Journal, May 1821 to November 1821, C I2/027/17.

⁶⁵ K.M. George, *Tradition Versus Reform*, 66. Unfortunately George does not document this piece of information.

'far more encouragements' (1822-25)

Notwithstanding what the Metropolitan Mar Dionysius III made of Fenn's address in 1818, it does appear that in the run-up to the former's death in 1825 Bailey's patience was paying off. This is the impression given in the pages of the *Missionary Register* at least. An unnamed military officer, quoted in the 1823 volume, perpetuated the standard perception at this time that the Syrians had a lot of Romish features in their worship. He is, however, impressed by the unity and efficiency that characterised the labour of the missionaries. He noted that Bailey "translates, preaches and visits the churches."⁶⁶ As a preacher, it would seem, Bailey made quite an impression on the Syrians. The officer attended a service in Mavelikara where Bailey preached:

Mr Bailey went through a part of the English Liturgy in (Malayalam), and then preached a short sermon to them, on the ninth verse of the Fourth Chapter of the First Epistle of John. During the Sermon, contrary to their usual custom, they were all attention, and crowded one upon another, in order to get nearer to the Preacher. The Catanars appeared particularly struck ... for this was the first Sermon which they had ever heard, it not being the custom among them to preach.⁶⁷

Reports at this time suggest that none other than Mar Dionysius III himself was affected by the life and witness of Bailey and his colleagues. Along with the missionaries, the visiting officer seemed confident that "the work of Divine Grace is really begun in his heart." His commitment to private prayer was cited as evidence of this.⁶⁸ It is at least possible, therefore, that even if, as asserted by E.M. Philip in the above discussion, the Metropolitan had been angered by Fenn's address, Bailey's preaching and patient interaction had won him over. Indeed, this extract closed by suggesting progress toward reformation had been made over a four year period.⁶⁹

It is also reported in the same volume of the *Missionary Register* that the missionaries and the Metropolitan were in weekly dialogue specifically about the work of reformation. Major

⁶⁶ Extract from *Diary of a Tour through Southern India, Egypt and Palestine, in the Years 1821 and 1822: by a Field Officer of Cavalry*, in *Missionary Register*, 1823, 150.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 153. 1 John 4:9 reads "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him."

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 155. The four year period would have been 1818-1822 as the Diary covered the period 1821-1822.

Mackworth, writing on ‘The Progress of Christianity in the South of India,’ noted the piety and humility of the Metropolitan and also had the following to say about the ongoing discussions on reformation:

Every Monday, they meet in Committee; and review, in concert, all the measures that have been adopted, and deliberate on such as may seem expedient; in all which the Metropolitan seconds their suggestions, full of ardour and zeal: he is as much attached to them, I firmly believe, as a father to his children.⁷⁰

These accounts, admittedly from a CMS perspective, do suggest that at this point the Mission of Help was making considerable progress towards its desired aim of encouraging the Syrians to reform themselves.

This optimistic narrative concerning Bailey’s work continued in the 1825 accounts. The *Missionary Register* had a brief section on Mr Bailey’s ‘general view of the mission.’ On the internal relationships within the Mission of Help, Bailey was pleased to report “[u]nity and love continue to prevail in our Missionary circle; which I consider no small mercy.”⁷¹ Referring then to the work with the Syrians, Bailey stated: “It is true, we meet with many discouragements; but, at the same time, we have far more encouragements to prosecute our endeavours to promote the glory of Christ among this ancient and interesting people.”⁷² The balance seemed to be tipping toward encouragement. Certainly the tone seems different from the frustration with the Syrians of his 1821 journal entries discussed above. A good relationship with the Metropolitan was central to Bailey’s increasing confidence: “indeed we should not think it proper to attempt anything contrary to his wish,” Bailey told his readers. Moreover, Bailey continued: “He is very anxious to see his Church and people raised as from the dust, and restored to their primitive purity, and I trust that God will grant him his desire, and permit him to see a revival of true religion among them.”⁷³ So while reformation and indeed revival continued to be seen as a great need for the Syrian Church, Bailey at this point at least, seemed confident of better days.

⁷⁰ Major Mackworth, ‘The Progress of Christianity in the South of India,’ *Missionary Register*, 1823, 268.

⁷¹ *Missionary Register*, 1825, 74.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Death, disappointment and the call for conversion (1825-27)

The confidence of the early 1820s, however, would prove to be a false dawn from the perspective of Bailey's desire for reform of the ancient indigenous Church of Malabar. Three deaths must have hit Bailey very hard personally. Joseph Fenn reported in the *Missionary Register* of 1825:

Mr and Mrs Bailey are now at Quilon, in great affliction. It has pleased God to take their eldest child from them – a lovely girl of six years of age: she had been gradually sinking for many months; and had, more than once, expressed a preference of death to life, and a longing after the presence of Christ in heaven.⁷⁴

This was one of four such bereavements Benjamin and Elizabeth Bailey suffered. Losing two children in the same year in the mid-1820s must have been an enormous personal strain on Bailey. Fenn reported also at this time that both Benjamin and Elizabeth Bailey were receiving medical help in Quilon from a Dr Macaulay, nephew of Col. Macaulay the former EIC Resident in Travancore.

Grieving his children and in indifferent health, the year 1825 would also see the death of Mar Dionysius III the Metran. Cheppad Philipose was elected as Mar Dionysius IV in his place. This would prove to be a period of much internal wrangling amongst various factions of Thomas Christians, with competing claims to apostolic legitimacy and opposing allegiances to West and East Syrian Patriarchs.⁷⁵ Not all of this wrangling could, of course, be attributed to missionary intervention. In any case, Mar Dionysius IV is described by K.M. George as "not a likeminded person."⁷⁶ He was a relatively young man and would prove to be a ruthless ecclesiastical politician who was in charge of the Church for thirty years and a constant opponent of reformation. As the historian F.E. Keay put it: "The desire of the missionaries that his church should be awakened to missionary zeal and begin to undertake the work of evangelization found no sympathy on his part."⁷⁷ In 1826, moreover, Mar Athanasius Abdul Mesih from Mardin, in

⁷⁴ Ibid. The sad event actually occurred in 1824. In fact two of their children died in that year.

⁷⁵ Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2008), 247.

⁷⁶ K.M. George, *Tradition Versus Reform*, 80.

⁷⁷ F.E. Keay, *A History of the Syrian Church of India*, Madras: SPCK (1938), 74.

Turkey, visited Travancore having been sent by the Patriarch of Antioch. It seems this was in response to a delegation of Syrians who had not liked Mar Dionysius III's intimacy with the missionaries.⁷⁸ While, it seems, the missionaries did not wish to interfere, Fenn suspected that his visit would cause disunion.⁷⁹ His fears were well founded. Mar Athanasius pronounced anathemas on the elderly Mar Philoxenes and on Mar Dionysius IV.⁸⁰ The latter probably could have found in Athanasius an ally against reform. Athanasius, however, seemed determined to grab the Metropolitanship of Travancore for himself.⁸¹ In fact Athanasius caused so much trouble within the Syrian Church in Kerala that on his return home the Patriarch in Antioch removed him from office.⁸²

Mar Athanasius in the end was effectively deported from Travancore on Col. Newall's orders. Some debate exists around what role the missionaries played in this. Bailey reported back to CMS headquarters in London that Athanasius had been removed from India "wholly independent of us."⁸³ E.M. Philip, however, attributes to the missionaries a much more active role. Indeed, he implies that the respective Residents were somewhat at their beck and call and that Newall had been petitioned by them, in the name of various Syrian bishops, to have Athanasius deported.⁸⁴ Philip, a staunch Jacobite writing in 1907, seems to have been anti-CMS but not anticolonial as the following words about the removal of Athanasius illustrate:

No doubt, the Residents were naturally as liberal-minded as Englishmen generally are. But the C.M.S. missionaries who functioned in Travancore at that time were an exception; when the Residents allowed themselves to be influenced by such bigoted and narrow-minded agents of the C.M.S., they were not always true to those traditions of strict impartiality and non-interference in religious matters, which alone made Britain what she is, the trusted guide, philosopher and friend of the heterogeneous races which go to make up the fabric of the mighty British Empire.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ K.M. George, *Tradition Versus Reform*, 80.

⁷⁹ *Missionary Register*, 1826, 115.

⁸⁰ *Missionary Register*, 1826, 480.

⁸¹ K.M. George, *Tradition Versus Reform*, 80.

⁸² Keay, *A History*, 72.

⁸³ Bailey to E. Bickersteth, Cottayam 23rd April 1827, C I2/027/3.

⁸⁴ E.M. Philip, *The Indian Church*, 233.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 235-236.

Col. Newall was less directly involved in the Mission of Help than Munro. But in the case of the latter, as we have seen in Chapter 3, the missionaries almost seemed to be more at his beck and call than the other way around! The perception of Syrian writers such as Philip, may, of course, be more important than the facts in understanding this historical episode. Bishop John Fenwick, meanwhile, points out a certain irony in the circumstances which led to the visit of Mar Athanasius to Travancore. There is some evidence, corroborated by the likes of Bishop Reginald Heber, that the interest of Antioch in Travancore had been aroused by the arrival there of Buchanan's *Christian Researches* and other publications. This led the Patriarch in Antioch to send Mar Athanasius on a fact-finding mission. While letters from India were also reaching West Syria, it is somewhat ironic that the Mission of Help was significantly wounded by one of its greatest motivators, Buchanan, having his writings fall into the hands of the Antiochene head of the Syrian Christians of Travancore.⁸⁶

No doubt in some measure due to the problems caused by Mar Athanasius Abdul Mesih, it is evident that by 1827 the Mission of Help was in some trouble, and previous progress had been set back significantly. Bailey was quoted thus in the pages of the *Missionary Register* concerning the Syrian clergy:

There are a few, it is true, and but a few, whose minds are somewhat better disposed: but even these do not exert themselves to the best of their ability. May it please God to pour upon them from on high the sacred and enlivening influences of His Holy Spirit – to remove all blindness, ignorance, and superstition from their minds – to enlighten their understandings with the light of Divine Truth – and to clothe them with the garments of salvation! Our prayers and intercessions at the Throne of Grace, as well as our exertions, on their behalf, are still much, much required; and I trust that they *who make mention of the Name of the Lord will give him no rest* until he bring about this most desirable reformation.⁸⁷

Bailey here still has the object of reformation very much in view. It seems, however, that while no less than reformation was considered to be required, he now considered that something much

⁸⁶ John Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops: The Malabar Independent Syrian Church and its Place in the Story of the St Thomas Christians of South India*, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies, Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press (2009), 361-368. There is considerable scope for further primary source research on this incident alone. Fenwick notes that the Mill Papers (MS Mill 191, held in Bodleian Oxford) contain 173 pages (many of them doubled-sided) of correspondence generated by Mar Athanasius Abdul Messih!

⁸⁷ *Missionary Register*, 1827, 91. His emphasis.

more radical was needed. In short, Bailey believed an outpouring of the Holy Spirit was essential. Moreover, the Syrian clergy themselves needed to be clothed with the garments of salvation. Or, as Bailey put it in a letter to Bickersteth in London: “though at present we see but little fruit issuing from our labours, we trust that he will make bare his holy arm and be glorified in the conversion of many around us from the error of their ways.” Indeed Bailey’s desire was to see “a spiritual revival take place in this ancient and interesting but at present degraded church.”⁸⁸ What we see here then is nothing less than a call for conversion. Bailey and his colleagues were coming to the conclusion that the vast majority in the church they had gone out to help were Christians in name only.

This dawning realisation undoubtedly began to sound the death knell for the Mission of Help. Zealous evangelicals as Bailey and his colleagues were, the need for most of the Syrian Christians to be justified rather than merely sanctified, as the CMS missionaries understood these terms, would have ensured an increasing zeal on their part in calling for reformation and conversion, whilst praying for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in revival. In the following chapter, we will observe the final years of the Mission of Help with particular reference to Bailey’s role from 1828-1836. For now, however, we must seek to draw some conclusions regarding the period that has occupied this chapter.

Concluding observations

This chapter has reviewed Fenn’s 1818 address to the Syrian Church leadership and the progress of the Mission of Help until 1827, as seen through the eyes of Benjamin Bailey in particular. There are two interrelated sets of observations that we can draw from these events. Firstly, we notice that the Evangelical Protestant beliefs of the CMS missionaries were central to how they viewed the progress of the mission. The calls for reformation, and indeed conversion, to which this chapter bears witness, are no doubt influenced by the theological concerns that constituted the atmosphere the CMS Missionaries breathed. Mathew and Thomas put it thus: “The ethos of the Syrian Church was in striking contrast to the dogmatic intellectualism of Western

⁸⁸ Bailey to E Bickersteth, Cottayam 23rd April 1827, C I2/027/3.

Christianity, whether Catholic or Protestant, which put central emphasis on the intellectual formulations of particular doctrines.”⁸⁹ Moreover, their Western theological framework, particularly in its Evangelical Protestant form, put particular emphasis on individual conversion. Again, Mathew and Thomas believe that the individualism of the CMS missionaries failed to reckon with the Syrians’ corporate understanding of the Church as a communion based upon tradition. This individualistic conception, it is claimed, explains why Bailey would have found the idea of communion between the living and the dead, prayers to and for the departed saints, not to mention *cāttam* feasts and the like, intolerable.⁹⁰

One possible source for this supposed dogmatism and individualistic focus was the influence of the European Enlightenment on the evangelicalism that emerged in the eighteenth century. Speaking of this period, David Bebbington has written “[t]he Evangelical version of Protestantism was created by the Enlightenment.”⁹¹ Bebbington’s support for this conclusion is instructive for present purposes. He notes that “Thomas Scott appealed to the joint authority of ‘the Scriptures and universal experience and observation’; Henry Venn put together experience and scripture, in that order.”⁹² Henry Venn (1725-1797) was the father of John Venn, who was instrumental in the founding of the CMS two years after his father’s death. Scott, as we have seen in Chapter 1, was Bailey’s main theological educator before his setting sail for India. There may be some ground for claims, therefore, that far from being influenced by a return to primitive Christianity, Bailey and his colleagues were actually part of a most-modern movement whose thought world was alien to the Syrians amongst whom they preached.

Bebbington may well overstate his case, however. He acknowledges himself that it “has not been customary” to associate the leaders of the Evangelical Revival and their successors with the Enlightenment.⁹³ It could be argued, *contra* Mathew and Thomas, as well as Bebbington, that orthodox and catholic Christianity has always called for individual conversions. The claim that

⁸⁹ C.P. Mathew and M.M. Thomas, *The Indian Churches of St. Thomas*, Delhi: ISPCK (2005 [1967]), 53.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

⁹¹ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, London: Unwin Hyman (1989), 74.

⁹² Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 57. The citations are from Thomas Scott’s *The Force of Truth* and Henry Venn’s *The Complete Duty of Man*.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 50.

Bailey and his colleagues did not sufficiently understand the nature of the Syrian Christianity they encountered has been well established in these pages. Yet the roots of Bailey's call for conversion cannot simply be attributed to the fact that they were Western Christians or products of the European Enlightenment and Evangelical Revival. As Brian Stanley has noted:

The conviction of evangelical missionaries that non-Christians were lost in their sin and dependent on the gospel of Christ for salvation was one that evangelicals shared with both their Catholic and Protestant forefathers. It was grounded on the theology of the Pauline epistles and the Augustinian tradition that mediated that theology to Catholic Christendom. If evangelicals reiterated these emphases with greater passion and urgency than their predecessors, it was because they were unambiguously people of the Book, men and women whose consciousness was soaked in the Bible and whose own experience confirmed the scriptural testimony to the natural depravity of humanity and the sovereignty of divine grace. These convictions flew in the face of the confidence that most Enlightenment thinkers placed in natural moral capacity and the autonomy of reason.⁹⁴

If Stanley is correct the charge may, of course, still be made that evangelical missionaries tended to be acquainted with the Western theological tradition only. Yet the intent was to transcend such human boundaries and, as people of the book, seek to present the biblical call to conversion reminiscent of Acts and the Epistles. That Bailey and his colleagues failed to communicate biblical truth free from the particular theological and cultural influences that shaped them puts them, one suspects, in a fairly large club of evangelists, preachers and missionaries from throughout history. Nevertheless that Bailey and his colleagues were strongly Evangelical and Protestant was clearly a determining factor in how the Mission of Help would progress.

Secondly, this chapter reminds us that politicisation of the Mission of Help continued after Col. John Munro's days. We see this in the recourse to Col. Newall by Bailey, Fenn and Baker and also in the thinking of Mar Dionysius III in writing to the CMS Committee in London. The latter obviously greatly rejoiced in the benefits his people had received from Munro's hand. He did not seem to make a sharp distinction in his thinking between the spiritual and political benefits coming to his community and seemed to want both to continue. It seems that Bailey and his

⁹⁴ Brian Stanley, 'Christian Missions and the Enlightenment: A Reevaluation', in Brian Stanley (ed), *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Richmond: Curzon (2001), 1-21, ref., 9.

colleagues may have put too much confidence in the political Residents of Travancore to help deliver a more Reformed and Anglican version of Christianity in that land. Witness Bailey's seeking Munro's advice on matters of ecclesiastical discipline, and the Travancore Trio's long letter to Col. Newall on matters relating to their mission work.

Such politicisation of ecclesiastical objectives is not uncommon. The danger then is that mission gets squeezed into political ends and actually becomes an instrument, whether for good or evil, of political power. Fuller conclusions on how this episode relates to debates about mission and empire will be drawn in Chapter 8. Suffice to say at present that there was, as Jeffrey Cox notes, an inbuilt tension in missionary endeavour between universalising religious claims and the imperial context of those claims.⁹⁵ Andrew Porter, on the other hand, suggests there was self-awareness amongst missionaries of the imperial context that they found themselves in. CMS men such as Pratt tended to view this context as providential and therefore saw missionary endeavour as a serious national and ecclesiastical responsibility.⁹⁶ It is highly probable that Bailey, and his political superior Col. Munro, both viewed the Mission of Help in these terms. The problem, from the point of view of the Mission's success, was that the political project intruded itself too much into the concerns of church reform with which the missionaries were occupied. Indeed, it may be that, while the Evangelical theological convictions of CMS missionaries clashed radically with those of the Syrians, it was the impetus to Anglicanisation that Munro in particular pushed for through the Mission of Help that was more decisive in the Mission's failure. This Anglicanising tendency was a result of Munro's political objectives to bind Travancore's people, and particularly the Syrian Christians, to Britain in political and ecclesiastical allegiance.⁹⁷ It was, moreover, unlikely that the Syrians, as a proud and ancient people, would ultimately stand for this, with their experiences with the Portuguese and Dutch still in their minds.⁹⁸ Mathew and Thomas are therefore right in their assessment that "[w]hile the patronage of the imperial power was welcome, the invitation of the Mission by Col. Munro, a British political officer, had in it

⁹⁵ Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818-1940*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press (2002), 6.

⁹⁶ Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914*, Manchester: Manchester University Press (2004), especially Chapter 3.

⁹⁷ See Chapters 3 and 8 for a fuller discussion of Munro's objectives.

⁹⁸ Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 244-249.

the seeds of trouble.”⁹⁹ It is apparent in this chapter that both the CMS and the Syrians wished to draw on political support for what were most likely competing goals. Here were seeds of trouble indeed, and we shall see the harvest being reaped in the next chapter.

⁹⁹ Mathew and Thomas, *The Indian Christians*, 52.

Chapter 5 - The Mission of Help Ends (1828-36)

Introduction

Mar Dionysius does not possess the firmness & resolution of his predecessor, but we do not anticipate any unpleasant result ... We will, as hitherto, endeavour to give him the best advice we can. May God enable him at all times to act in a manner becoming the high dignity to which he is raised.

Benjamin Bailey to Col. Morrison, Resident of Travancore, 1829.

[W]e, the Jacobite Syrians, being subject to the Supremacy of the Patriarch of Antioch, and observing, as we do, the Liturgies and ordinances instituted by the prelates sent under his command, cannot deviate from such Liturgies and ordinances and maintain a discipline contrary thereto; and a man of one persuasion being not authorized to preach and admonish in the Church of another following a different persuasion without the permission of the respective Patriarchs, we cannot permit the same to be done amongst us.

Decree of the Mavelikara *Padiyola*, 1836.

In the previous chapter we traced how Benjamin Bailey's hopes for reform amongst the Syrian Christians of Travancore were gradually being eroded between 1818 and 1827. Indeed, we observed how by 1827 the call for reform had in effect become a call for the vast bulk of the Syrian Christian Community to repent and be converted. In this chapter we shall chart the final years of the Mission of Help from 1828-36. Our introductory quotations show that in 1829 Benjamin Bailey was still intent on working with the new Metropolitan, Mar Dionysius IV, for the reform of the Syrians. By 1836, however, the Syrian clergy had themselves taken the decision to end their official relationship with the CMS and to forbid the missionaries preaching in their churches. Our aim in this chapter, therefore, is to investigate how this breach came to be.

While the subject matter of this chapter involves controversy, it should be noted that there was well over a decade of close co-operation between the CMS and the Syrians. Benjamin Bailey and Henry Baker were the mainstays of this co-operation at the CMS end. Judge P. Cherian sees it as no mean achievement that the Mission of Help continued for as long as it did and believed a schism of some sort was inevitable. In his view, a point would come when the Syrians would have to sever ties with either Antioch or the CMS.¹

Nevertheless Cherian believed there were various reasons why, until around 1832-1833 the Mission of Help knew a measure of success. Firstly, Munro's legacy of political and other advantages for the Syrian Christian Community ensured a favourable reception for the missionaries.² This observation does, of course, remind us that the Mission of Help was trading on the benefits of political patronage from the beginning. It has been contended in Chapters 3 and 4 that this would store up trouble for its future prospects. Cherian, however, is no doubt correct to state that in the short to medium term Munro's assistance of the Syrian community helped to open the door for Bailey and his colleagues to work amongst them.

Secondly, Cherian views what happened in the first decade or more of the Mission of Help as little more than spadework.³ By this he means the process of building trust and relationships with the Syrian Christians. The difficulties, however, would become apparent once this stage was finished, which is where we are in the years covered by this chapter. Thirdly, Cherian perceptively noted that "the success or the failure of many human undertakings depends largely on the personnel engaged in working them."⁴ This chapter will chronologically assess events leading up to the Mission of Help's end in 1836. We shall pay particular attention to Bailey's work in Travancore up to 1830. The years of Bailey's absence will then be charted and the new CMS personnel who were active in these years will be introduced. Finally we shall assess the

¹ P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians and the Church Missionary Society 1816-1840*, Kottayam (2015 [1935]), 233. The inevitability of schism is discussed further below. It will be observed that Cherian features heavily in this chapter. This is because his work is by far the most detailed English language treatment of the events leading up to the end of the Mission of Help. He also provides a selection of primary source material in his appendices. Later works on the history of these events, at least from sympathetic Indian quarters, are heavily dependent on Cherian.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 234.

⁴ *Ibid.*

state Bailey found the Mission in upon returning in late 1834 until the time of the Mavelikara Synod in 1836. Throughout we shall see how changes in personnel affected the prospects of continued co-operation.

Preparing for change (1828-29)

It is no surprise, given Bailey's call for conversion amongst the Syrians which we saw in the last chapter, that gentle breezes of change were beginning to blow amongst the CMS missionaries from around 1828. For one thing, the *Missionary Register* for that year reported a new departure in the Mission's approach: "The Missionaries have entered on the direct exercise of the MINISTRY among the natives. While they continue to co-operate most cordially with the Syrians, they have, on good and substantial grounds, judged it right to establish, on their own part, a Malayalim service, and have a most encouraging Congregation."⁵ This Malayalam service, alongside direct evangelisation of the non-Christian population, may suggest that the missionaries were already, by the late 1820s, making alternative plans. They were perhaps anticipating a time when they were working less directly with the Syrians.

The influence of other missionary personnel

If such winds of change were in the air, it seems plausible that different personnel arriving on the scene were at least partly responsible for this. Joseph Fenn, the College Principal, had returned to England in 1827. He was succeeded by the Rev. J.W. Doran, who had arrived in 1825 and was already a teacher in the College. Doran, it seems, attracted some degree of controversy at the College over an attempt to impose a more decorous form of dress. Cherian claims that this soon blew over.⁶ For our purposes, it is interesting to note just one example of how Doran introduced more colourful rhetoric concerning the Syrian Church to the readers of the *Missionary Register* back home. Speaking of one particular deacon and the ritual of the Syrians, Doran opined:

His respectable talents, fair industry, and good judgment, have ever impressed me with the conviction, that if it pleased the Holy Spirit to regenerate his heart, he might be a powerful means of effecting the

⁵ *Missionary Register*, 1828, 97. Capitalisation in original.

⁶ Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 189.

reformation of the Syrian Church. Though I have yet no evidence that *the Day-Spring from on high* has visited his benighted soul, yet I can see judgment increasingly operating against the admission of those worse than nonsensical rites and ceremonies with which the Syrian Church chains its members.⁷

The tone here is considerably less reserved than that of Bailey. Doran did not seem to entertain much hope concerning this deacon's spiritual state. Bailey's call for conversion, detailed in the previous chapter, related more to the general picture amongst the Syrians as a whole. Doran, one may conjecture, was much more direct about the Syrian Church and personal concerning individuals, in his dealings with the Syrians. At this time Bailey, by contrast, appeared much more measured in his public statements at least. In a piece in the *Missionary Register* entitled 'Opening Prospects of Good among the Syrians,' Bailey is pleased to report a hunger amongst the Syrians to receive the Scriptures. He viewed this as a considerable reason for optimism:

The free circulation of the Sacred Scriptures among them may, under the Divine Blessing, be productive of incalculable benefit; and tend to remove from their minds any prejudice or superstition that remains: it may also raise their Church from its present degraded condition. I trust that the time is fast approaching, when the Lord will make bare His Holy arm, and favour this Church with the outpouring of His Holy Spirit. We may not be permitted to see this blessed period; but for its speedy accomplishment we labour and pray.⁸

Bailey here seemed to display more patience and optimism than Doran. More significantly, perhaps, we see his deep conviction that the Word of God attended by the Spirit of God has irresistible power. Bailey was not concerned primarily with whether or not he personally would see the fruits of his labour. His view was long-term and his commitment to the work of Scripture translation and circulation was unshaken. He did, however, also note in this piece that a Malayalam Church of England service had been taking place in the College school room since the end of 1827.⁹ Patience was therefore combined with openness to a new approach in the years ahead.

These stirrings for a change in approach, be they expressed strongly as in Doran's case, or in a more reserved manner as in Bailey's, were possibly kindled by the visit to Kottayam of a

⁷ *Missionary Register*, 1828, 98. Emphasis in original.

⁸ *Missionary Register*, 1828, 327-328.

⁹ *Ibid.* 328.

delegation of missionaries from the London Missionary Society (LMS) in 1828. These missionaries were non-conformist Protestants, not Anglicans. Their evangelicalism, however, would have been of a very similar stripe to that of the CMS missionaries. It seems clear from the records of this visit that there was considerable mutual respect between these two groups of missionaries. The LMS delegation reported: “Of these Missionaries, with Mrs Bailey and Mrs Baker, we cannot speak too highly: they are truly pious, and breathe an excellent spirit; and appear to be greatly devoted to their difficult work.” The LMS delegation added “[w]e were greatly interested in this Mission, which we trust will be instrumental of great good; though we fear that its operations will be slow, and the hopes of good are distant.”¹⁰

The admiration of the LMS for the missionaries, however, did not extend to the Syrian Christian ritual and tradition. A couple of summary statements from them make this clear: “Their mode of Worship strongly resembles that of the Armenian Churches; and strikingly approaches, in different ceremonies, those of the Church of Rome … In fact, these Churches are but so many limbs of Popery, from which, as to doctrinal sentiment, they do not essentially differ.”¹¹ Later CMS missionaries such as Richard Collins would draw more subtle distinctions between Antiochene theology and that of Rome.¹² Yet the LMS assessment, along with other influences from home, of which more below, seems to have hardened the CMS stance regarding the doctrine of the Syrians and long-term co-operation with them on the present terms. That their opinion had some influence amongst the CMS missionary circle is seen when we consider Doran’s comment on their visit: “Never can we forget the candour and affection of their observations, in ranging through the Departments of our Mission; and the wisdom of their suggestions, borne out by an extent of experience which does not usually fall to the lot of one man.”¹³ In terms of strategy for their mission, the CMS appear to have valued the input of fellow evangelicals more, perhaps, than that of Anglicans of a different churchmanship. The personal interactions of the CMS missionaries with others whom they trusted and respected played a

¹⁰ *Missionary Register*, 1828, 327.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 326-327.

¹² Richard Collins, *Missionary Enterprise in the East: With Especial Reference to the Syrian Christians of Malabar and the Results of Modern Missions*, London: Henry S. King & Co. (1873), 100. See further discussion on Collins’ assessment of the early years of the Mission of Help in Chapters 2 and 6.

¹³ *Missionary Register*, 1828, 326. This visit is also noted in P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 206-207.

significant role in the change of emphasis gradually taking place in the late 1820s when the ground seemed to be being prepared for an alternative missiological strategy.

The death of Mar Philoxenes and supremacy of Mar Dionysius IV

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the death of Mar Dionysius III in 1825 came as a blow to Bailey and his colleagues. He had seemed to them a Metropolitan who was cautiously sympathetic to their reforming principles. Mar Dionysius IV was much less so and he became joint-Metran from 1825. Until 1829, however, his influence was somewhat limited by the presence of Mar Philoxenes, the Thozhiyur-based senior Metropolitan who was a retiring personality, but was recognised by the missionaries as a man of great piety. Philoxenes died, however, in 1829. Bailey wrote in the *CMS Record* for 1830: “The Syrian Church has sustained a great loss, and the Missionaries have been deprived of a true friend. His memory will be dear to us. I have every reason to believe that he duly appreciated the advantages enjoyed by the Syrian Church from our residence at Kottayam.”¹⁴ In the estimate of P. Cherian, Mar Philoxenes, Mar Dionysius II and Mar Dionysius III were among the best Metropolitans in the history of the Syrian Church.¹⁵

The death of Mar Philoxenes led to Mar Dionysius IV becoming the sole and senior Metropolitan of the Jacobite Syrians. This move was encouraged by Bailey, as is evident in his correspondence with the Resident Col. Morrison. Morrison wanted no time wasted in Mar Dionysius IV being recognised.¹⁶ Bailey in reply wrote: “Mar Dionysius is the lawful successor of Mar Philoxenes, & I fully agree with you in thinking it advisable that he should be publicly recognized by the Govts of Travancore & Cochin with as little delay as possible.”¹⁷ Two interesting points may be made about this brief correspondence. Firstly, Bailey sees it as necessary that the Syrian Metropolitan is considered as such legally by the political forces of the

¹⁴ Cited in P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 113.

¹⁵ Ibid, 114. This, of course, is a subjective assessment. Cherian was generally sympathetic to the CMS and evangelical Protestantism.

¹⁶ Morrison to Bailey, Trivandrum, 14th February 1829, CMS Collection, Cadbury Research Library, Birmingham, C I2/027/19, Letter No. 2.

¹⁷ Bailey to Morrison, Cottayam, 24th February 1829, C I2/027/19, Letter No. 3.

day. Bailey wanted this political authorisation even though Morrison was no Munro, in the sense that he took little to do with either the Syrians or the missionaries.¹⁸ Political patronage was now, however, part of the *modus operandi* of how the Mission of Help continued to function. Secondly, Bailey called for Mar Dionysius IV's recognition despite his reservations. He wrote to Morrison: "Mar Dionysius does not possess the firmness & resolution of his predecessor, but we do not anticipate any unpleasant result ... We will, as hitherto, endeavour to give him the best advice we can. May God enable him at all times to act in a manner becoming the high dignity to which he is raised."¹⁹ These sentiments suggest that Bailey, in his own mind at least, remained firmly committed to the CMS policy of not interfering in the internal organisation of the Syrians.

In any case Bailey seemed committed to working with the new Metropolitan. It may well be that the true nature of Mar Dionysius IV as an opponent to the Mission of Help was not fully realised until the death of Philoxenes. Cherian, giving Dionysius his family name, noted "Cheppat Dionysius was a perfect contrast to his three immediate predecessors in the matter of his attitude to the Missionaries. Nevertheless, there was no open display of antipathy till Philoxenus's death, and until he himself was proclaimed Malankara Metropolitan."²⁰ Mar Dionysius IV would continue as Metropolitan until he was replaced by Mathew Mar Athanasius in 1852 and died in 1855.²¹ He seems to have been a wily ecclesiastic. His attitude to Antioch was ambivalent. He, along with Philoxenes, had defied Antioch's representative, Mar Athanasius, in 1826. Yet a decade later he would appeal to Antioch's supreme authority in rejecting the final call for reformation from Bishop Wilson and the missionaries. He retained his enthusiasm for the Scriptures being translated and circulated in Malayalam.²² This would have served to ensure that a working relationship with Bailey was maintained. Yet the evidence concerning Mar Dionysius IV points to a Metropolitan who was, at best, lukewarm about the Mission of Help.

¹⁸ P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 205.

¹⁹ Bailey to Morrison, Cottayam, 24th February 1829, C I2/027/19, Letter No. 3.

²⁰ P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 115. Malankara is an alternative name for Malabar or Kerala. Philoxenus is Cherian's spelling in this quotation.

²¹ Ibid, 298. On Mathew Mar Athanasius' role in the Syrian Church's reform movement see Chapter 7 below.

²² Ibid, 116.

The Metropolitan's lack of enthusiasm for the CMS Mission of Help may also have been due in part to perceived political interference from Col. Morrison. In Bailey's bundle of correspondence with Morrison, there is a letter from the latter to Mar Dionysius IV. Morrison does not show utmost sensitivity or theological acumen in twice referring to the church he led as the 'Syrian Protestant Church.' That error, of course, may have been fortunately lost in translation. Yet the Metropolitan would not likely have missed the political pressure he was being put under to continue making the relationship with the missionaries work. Morrison pressed on him the benefits the Syrian Church received from the CMS:

the valuable assistance which you will doubtless continue to receive from the able & worthy ministry sent by that body [the CMS], afford advantages, of which I am persuaded that you & the Syrian community at large, are fully sensible. On this occasion therefore I do not exceed the limits of my duty in expressing an earnest hope that the same good understanding which has so happily subsisted between your Predecessor and the Missionaries, to the benefit & honour of the Syrian Church, may still continue to prevail between you & them.²³

How Mar Dionysius responded to this letter is not known to us. From what we know of him, however, he is unlikely to have taken kindly to being told to co-operate with the missionaries by someone other than the Antiochene Patriarch, and a political leader at that. Such an intervention by Morrison would have done nothing to remove the perception that the goals of the Mission of Help and British political interests in Travancore went hand in hand.

What we learn from the closing years of the 1820s is that change was afoot. The missionaries themselves, while still committed to reforming the Syrian Church, were countenancing a more direct evangelistic approach to the non-Christian castes of Kerala. It is likely that just as Thomas Norton was ministering to a small Anglican congregation in Alappuzha, so the Kottayam missionaries would be open to settling converts from the non-Christian communities in Anglican congregations. This was a significant change from the policy of the previous decade which was almost exclusively aimed at enabling the Syrians to become a great missionary force in India. What we see also is that this gradual change of policy was both encouraged and necessitated by

²³ Morrison to Mar Dionysius, March 1829, C I2/027/19, Letter No. 8.

personal interactions and personnel changes. The influence of Doran, the new College Principal, the visit of the LMS delegation, and the ascendance to full control of Mar Dionysius IV worked together to ensure that approaches other than ‘helping the Syrians’ were now beginning to be explored. In the absence of Bailey and Baker on furlough in the coming years, and with other new missionaries arriving from the CMS, the days of the Mission of Help would enter their final stage. The preceding paragraphs have demonstrated that political entanglements continued to undermine the Mission of Help. Yet as we turn to consider the developments of the early to mid-1830s, we shall also see the importance of the theological differences between the CMS and the Syrians coming into prominence again.

Bailey’s furlough and the new missionaries (1830-34)

Benjamin and Elizabeth Bailey, throughout their time in Kerala, had suffered much from ill health. By 1830 it would appear that a furlough was a necessity for this reason. Hence at the beginning of the year we find Bailey requesting a furlough back in England for the sake of his long-term usefulness in India. The Rev. H. Harper in Madras suggested a break in the Nilgherries first. Harper, however, was urged by one I. Sullivan to remove Bailey from Kottayam, or Bailey’s life was considered to be at risk. Harper then gave clearance for Bailey’s furlough.²⁴ Writing from Colombo, awaiting passage to England, Bailey informed Dandeson Coates, at the CMS headquarters in London, that neither his own health nor his wife’s was good.²⁵ Cherian explained that a serious breakdown in Bailey’s health caused the furlough to last until late 1834. He noted that Bailey’s long absence, shortly after the death of Mar Philoxenes, had serious consequences for the Mission of Help.²⁶ To add to this potential instability, Henry Baker also had to take leave on account of his health in early 1833. This meant that for some months there was no English Missionary at Kottayam.²⁷

²⁴ See the exchanges between Bailey, Rev H. Harper and I. Sullivan between January 9th and March 2nd 1830. C I2/027/22. We may probably assume that Harper was part of the Madras Corresponding Committee. Who Sullivan is exactly is not clear from the correspondence in this file.

²⁵ Bailey to D. Coates, Colombo, 6th August 1830, C I2/027/5.

²⁶ P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 212.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 213.

The late 1820s and early 1830s also were a period when the missionaries in Kerala received little instruction from their parent committee in Madras. That committee was formed by committed evangelicals such as Rev. Marmaduke Thompson. By our present period, however, it seems the auxiliary society in Madras was not fully at one with the CMS headquarters in London and was not as clearly evangelical as it once had been. The Home Committee dissolved the existing auxiliary committee and set up a new committee with the Rev. J. Tucker as secretary. He reached Madras in August 1833 and was a zealous evangelical and a forceful character who would subsequently play a considerable role in Anglican mission in Travancore.²⁸ As Hunt noted, Tucker was energetic, able, and sincere but was exasperated at the rate of reform: “He is evidently much impressed with the need to ‘do something’ and this stiffens the Syrians’ resistance to anything being done.”²⁹ The absence of key figures such as Bailey and Baker and the arrival of others such as Tucker would make continued co-operation more difficult.

It was, however, the arrival of newer missionaries in Kottayam during these years that really saw the way in which the Mission of Help was conducted radically change. We shall see below that the Evangelicals in the Church of England in the early to mid-1830s were becoming increasingly concerned about ecclesiastical developments in their own communion, particularly the Oxford Movement. These difficulties would influence how the CMS interacted with other churches in their mission fields. Arriving from England as these troubles were brewing, the Rev. Joseph Peet and the Rev. W.J. Woodcock would have an incendiary effect on the relationship between the CMS and the Syrians. Peet arrived in May 1833 and Woodcock in July 1834. Peet, due to much greater longevity of service, is the more significant of the two.

A brief aside on Woodcock, however, is informative in painting a picture of what was going on even while Bailey was making his way back from England. Extracts from his journal were published in the *Madras Church Missionary Record*. The intent was evidently to call into question the ideas of Buchanan and the resulting approach of the earlier missionaries. We see this in the following example:

²⁸ Ibid, 213.

²⁹ Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore*, Vol. I, 93.

Sadly corrupt indeed is the Syrian Church both as to doctrine and discipline. I have sometimes wondered how good Dr. Buchanan could have suffered himself to be so imposed upon. In his Researches, he states that the Syrians have a pure scriptural liturgy. I have been trying to obtain a complete copy of this liturgy, but have not yet succeeded; however, what I have already seen and heard translated, has convinced me that it is about as pure as that of the Romish Church.³⁰

This extract is revealing as it shows the contrast in attitude between Woodcock and his more senior, but then absent, colleagues. At this time Woodcock was approximately twenty-five years old. As Cherian pointed out “[t]he chief characteristic of Woodcock was a promptness to indulge in doctrinal controversies even before he picked up a few Malayalam words.”³¹ Cherian continues to illustrate this characteristic in humorous vein:

According to his own writings he arrived at Kottayam on 30th July 1834, and began his controversies on the 1st August. It was not his fault that he did not start it when he saw the Metran on the previous morning; for at that interview the Metran was busy making inquiries about his old friends who were in England, and allowed him no opportunity ‘to introduce his Church as a topic of his conversation.’³²

For Woodcock there does not seem to have been any of the patience and deference that was a feature of Bailey, Fenn and Baker. Certainly there was no understanding at this point “that the reformation of the Church would at all times be a difficult, gradual and slow process.”³³ Woodcock would not have the opportunity to learn from his experience and mistakes much in Travancore. Ill health saw him move to Cochin after the split of 1836 and shortly thereafter he left India. He eventually found his way to Australia, via the West Indies, and he became an Archdeacon there.³⁴

Joseph Peet arrived in Kottayam in mid-1833 and until Woodcock joined him a year later was the only missionary based in Kottayam. He was around thirty-five years old on his arrival. In his early days, with Bailey absent, he had the responsibility to both supervise the College and

³⁰ Rev. W.J. Woodcock, ‘South India Mission: Cotyam, Journal of Rev. W.J. Woodcock,’ *Madras Church Missionary Record*, Vol. I, 12, (1834), 177-184, ref. on 179-180.

³¹ Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 216.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ K.M. George, *Tradition Versus Reform: Church Missionary Society Mission of Help 1816-1840*, Kottayam: Benjamin Bailey Foundation (2013), 97.

superintend the CMS Press.³⁵ Peet, seemingly egged on by Tucker, believed that the Mission had been somewhat timid in its dealings with the Syrians up to that point. So, for example, fresh assurances were sought from Mar Dionysius IV on only ordaining candidates who had trained at the College. Peet was determined in exercising his right to preach in Syrian churches and persisted in doing so even where he was not welcome.³⁶

Extracts from Peet's journal in and around 1835 give us a flavour of this colourful missionary's early career. He recalls stopping en route to Niranam at Changanacherry where he began to preach in the open air to a large group of people. The content of his address shows us his boldness. He recorded: "Perceiving that many of them were Romans [i.e. Roman Catholics], I insisted much on the doctrine of justification by faith, to the exclusion of all human merits". On Mary also he got to the heart of doctrinal differences. Peet urged respect for her memory "inasmuch as she was the mother of the Redeemer of the World, and because an angel pronounced her blessed; but there we must stop; she is a creature, and was as much indebted for her salvation to Christ as the penitent thief on the Cross, and therefore to pray to her or trust in her intercessions is sinful."³⁷ Peet continued in the same bold vein. He reached Niranam and met with the vicar of the church there. He records:

after the usual salutation, we had a conversation of more than two hours long on religious subjects; in the course of which, I exhorted him with all possible earnestness to reflect on his state, repent, and turn to God; but, as I told him even with tears, I felt it has been said of him, as it was of Ephraim, 'Let him alone.'³⁸

It may well be that Bailey had similar close dealings with Syrian clergy. If he did so, however, he was much more discrete about such encounters in his correspondence and published accounts of his work. If Peet's boldness is admirable, his tact and his wisdom in achieving the goals for which the Mission of Help was started are less so. In the period we are considering Peet seems to have caused considerable tensions. John Fenwick remarks "superiority, self-confidence and impatience ... was shown by Peet and Woodcock, not against the non-Christian population, but

³⁵ Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 214-215.

³⁶ Ibid, 223.

³⁷ Extracts from the Rev. J. Peet's Journals, Appendix U in Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 442.

³⁸ Ibid. The reference is to Hosea 4:17 "Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone." (ESV)

against the Syrian Christians. They were not so much equal partners in a Christian enterprise, but ungrateful natives who now needed to be shocked out of their ‘superstitions’.”³⁹

The explanation for the behaviour of Peet and Woodcock, however, cannot be explained merely in terms of their relative youth, inexperience, and differing personalities to Bailey, Fenn and Baker. After all, ‘the Travancore Trio’ were themselves young men of stridently Evangelical and Protestant convictions when they arrived to begin the Mission of Help. It seems highly probable, rather, that events within the Church of England in the late 1820s and early 1830s would have coloured the views of Tucker, Peet, Woodcock and others. Syrian Christian writers of different generations and persuasions offer the rise of the Oxford Movement in the Church of England as an explanation for the more confrontational approach in the Mission of Help from the early 1830s. Both P. Cherian and more recently C.V. Cherian have made this connection.⁴⁰ The latter sums up the situation as follows: “Peet and Woodcock, zealous evangelicals as they were, reacted vehemently against the Oxford Movement and its attempted revival of many Catholic practices in the Church of England … Some of the religious practices and teachings of the Malankara Suriyani Church were anathema to them and were denounced as tractarian popish nonsense.”⁴¹

The link between the Oxford Movement and the increasingly critical rhetoric of the English missionaries is more complex than these two Indian writers suggest for at least two reasons. Firstly, it should be noted that the Tractarians themselves were far from being cheerleaders for greater union with the Oriental Orthodox Churches. In connection with the controversial issues of the Jerusalem Bishopric, in 1841, John Henry Newman wrote an unpublished letter to *The Times* in which he complained of negotiations with

the heretical Monophysites especially of Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia is the way to the Euphrates, the Euphrates is the way to India. It is desirable to consolidate our Empire. What is the Church worth if she is

³⁹ John Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops: The Malabar Independent Syrian Church and its Place in the Story of the St Thomas Christians of South India*, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies, Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press (2009), 394.

⁴⁰ P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 215-216, C.V. Cherian, *Orthodox Christianity in India: A History of the Malankara Orthodox Church AD52-2002*, Kottayam: Academic Publishers (2003), 247.

⁴¹ C.V. Cherian, *Orthodox Christianity in India*, 247.

to be nice and mealy-mouthed when a piece of work is to be done for her good lord the State? Surely, surely, in *such* a case, some formula can be found for proving heresy orthodoxy and orthodoxy heresy.⁴²

Newman's cynicism is motivated by fear that the real goal of such attempts at Anglican union with Eastern churches was to serve imperial purposes, not just in Jerusalem, but all the way to India, where the Churches of Middle Eastern monophysitism continued to have a presence. Given the imperial concerns of Col. Munro discussed in Chapter 3, it is at least worth asking if this is why Christological differences do not appear to have been as high on the agenda of the early missionaries as ecclesiological and soteriological differences.

Secondly, it should be said that the Oxford Movement, or Tractarianism as it has also been known, received a mixed reception among Evangelicals in the Church of England. This was particularly so in the early years of the movement before John Henry Newman's reception by the Roman Catholic Church in 1845. Some Evangelicals appear to have been attracted by the movement's focus on revival and holiness, even if there were considerable differences in emphasis as to what was being revived and what holiness looked like. Newman himself, of course, had been associated with Evangelicalism following his conversion.⁴³ Moreover, the power of his early parish sermons are "at bottom the quest for reality in religion,"⁴⁴ a concern most certainly shared by Evangelicals such as Benjamin Bailey and evident in the latter's call for the conversion of the Syrian Church, charted in the previous chapter. Newman's first published sermon, preached in 1826, was entitled *Holiness Necessary for Future Blessedness* and, although the sermon makes no mention of this,⁴⁵ Herring claims it was shaped by the Calvinist Thomas Scott's saying 'Holiness rather than peace,' which became a life-motto for Newman.⁴⁶ Scott, of

⁴² Newman to *The Times*, 1st November 1841, unpublished, cited by Mark Chapman, 'The Oxford Movement, Jerusalem and the Eastern Question' in Stewart J. Brown and Peter B. Nockles (eds), *The Oxford Movement: Europe and the Wider World 1830-1850*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2012), 221-235, ref., 233-234.

⁴³ For a brief introduction to Newman's thought, see Owen Chadwick, *Newman*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1983).

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 19.

⁴⁵ The sermon is published in John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Vol. 1, Westminster MD: Christian Classics Inc. (1966), 1-14.

⁴⁶ In this paragraph I am indebted to George Herring, *Outstanding Christian Thinkers: What was the Oxford Movement?* London: Continuum (2010), 40. Herring summarises the evangelical influences on the young Newman and Evangelicalism's reception of Tractarianism. For more detail on the Oxford Movement's relationship to Evangelicalism, see James Pereiro, 'Ethos' and the Oxford Movement: At the Heart of Tractarianism, Oxford:

course, has already featured in these pages and was largely responsible for the missionary training of Benjamin Bailey and other Travancore missionaries. Since Newman's theology progressed rapidly toward High Church Anglicanism and eventually Roman Catholicism, Scott and Newman cannot therefore be associated too closely. Yet, as Peter Nockles has reminded us, many young men of evangelical families were lured by the Oxford Movement and adds "the points of spiritual affinity between moderate evangelicalism and nascent Tractarianism, often overlaid by later polemic, need recognition."⁴⁷ These spiritual affinities in essence were concerned to restore the Church to its perceived primitive glory.⁴⁸ The rationale for the Mission of Help was that the Syrian Church be restored to some conceived pristine purity. In motivation, therefore, there certainly were commonalities between Oxford and CMS leaders. Where the differences lay was in what that primitive purity looked like. One could get the impression that for John Venn, Claudius Buchanan, John Munro, and Benjamin Bailey such primitive purity looked very much like the Anglicanism that had emerged from the Evangelical Revival.

Not all Evangelicals, however, were attracted by the Oxford Movement, even in the 1830s. It is extremely relevant to the subject of this chapter that one such virulent critic was Edward Bickersteth, sometime secretary of the CMS in London. Bickersteth published a volume in 1836 entitled *Remarks on the Progress of Popery* and wrote of the Oxford Movement:

A highly respectable, learned and devout class of men has arisen up at one of our Universities, the tendency of whose writings is departure from Protestantism, and approach to papal doctrine ... the very principles of popery are brought forward by them, under deference to human authority, especially that of the Fathers: overvaluing the Christian ministry and sacraments and undervaluing justification by faith ... they seem ... to open another door to the land of darkness and shadow of death, where the Man of Sin Reigns.⁴⁹

Oxford University Press (2008), 65-71. Pereiro also deals with how this relationship has been understood by later historians.

⁴⁷ Peter B. Nockles, 'The Oxford Movement in an Oxford College: Oriel as the cradle of Tractarianism,' in Brown and Nockles (eds), *The Oxford Movement*, 11-33, ref., 13.

⁴⁸ Stewart J. Brown and Peter B. Nockles, 'Introduction,' in Brown and Nockles (eds), *The Oxford Movement*, 1-8, ref., 4.

⁴⁹ From Edward Bickersteth, *Remarks on the Progress of Popery* (1836), extracted in Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 104.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to trace all the connections between Bickersteth and new CMS candidates such as Woodcock and Peet.⁵⁰ What is important to note is that reaction to the Oxford Movement, whilst not unified amongst Evangelicals, was hostile from at least some senior figures of the CMS.⁵¹ It is understandable, therefore, if new young missionaries, rather than trying to properly understand the Syrian Church on its own terms, began to see its belief and practice as “tractarian Popish nonsense.” Bickersteth had also been a regular correspondent of Benjamin Bailey. It may also be reasonable to assume that Bailey, on furlough in England at this time, would be aware of these developments and would therefore have some sympathy with the views of his younger colleagues on his return. It is to Bailey’s return and the end of the Mission of Help that we now turn.

Bailey’s return and the last days of the Mission of Help (1834-35)

Benjamin Bailey returned to his field of labour in Kottayam towards the end of 1834. Bailey reported in a letter to Dandeson Coates, at the CMS headquarters in London, that on arrival back in Cochin he was met by “a great number of Syrians, who I have reason to believe were truly glad to see us again.”⁵² Perhaps that reflected the esteem in which Bailey was held personally, but in the same letter Bailey expressed serious concerns over the Mission of Help. Bailey was quite a discreet man, not given to wearing his heart on his sleeve. He therefore is reluctant to write much about the controversies of this period. He simply reported with “much regret” that the state of the Mission had deteriorated since he left in 1830. There had been changes, but not for the better.⁵³

As far as the CMS Home Committee were concerned, they were aware of difficulties in the Mission of Help and believed that Bailey’s return could help to resolve these. The Committee

⁵⁰ Bickersteth was a prolific correspondent of CMS personnel including Benjamin Bailey and other missionaries in Travancore. Further research in the CMS archives is warranted to demonstrate how directly he influenced the thinking of Bailey, Woodcock, Peet and others. The focus here is primarily on Bailey and space does not permit further exploration of these links.

⁵¹ Conversely, Newsome notes that Samuel Wilberforce was an enthusiastic supporter of both the CMS and the Oxford Movement in the 1830s. See David Newsome, *The Parting of Friends: The Wilberforces and Henry Manning*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans and Leominster: Gracewing (1993 [1966]), 172.

⁵² Bailey to D Coates, Cottayam, 11th Dec 1834, C I2/027/8.

⁵³ Ibid.

noted in the *Proceedings of the CMS* that “the Rev. Benjamin Bailey and Mrs. Bailey have returned to their station. The long experience of Bailey, who first entered on this Mission nearly twenty years ago, encourage the Committee to hope that its affairs, which had fallen into some confusion, will be again put upon effective footing.”⁵⁴ As it turned out, however, after his return from furlough Bailey seemed to have lost the influence which he once had over the Mission. We have seen above how Woodcock dared to call Buchanan’s assessment of the Syrians into question. It appears that Bailey, and probably Baker, were given similar treatment. P. Cherian observed that Bailey’s “new colleagues were inclined to interpret his prudence and circumspection as due to timidity, and an inclination to let things go on as they were.”⁵⁵

Whatever way Bailey hoped the Mission of Help would proceed on his return from England, his absence had served to undermine his authority on the ground in Travancore. The aspects of the work in which he specialised, namely Scripture translation and preaching in the churches, had devolved upon others. In terms of Scripture translation, Bailey believed that those who had taken that work forward in his absence had, intentionally or otherwise, undermined work that he already had done. Writing to Dandeson Coates, Bailey noted: “My previous labours as a translator have been condemned by my brethren, perhaps not in the most honourable manner.” Thomas Norton and Samuel Ridsdale had actually proposed another translation of the New Testament but were turned down by the Madras Auxiliary Bible Society. Undeterred, they had published their own edition of the Old Testament, although Bailey had made progress on it before he left. Bailey simply remarked: “These have been discarded by my brethren, but on what grounds I do not know.” Bailey maintained his usual grace, however, in the light of this disappointment:

Tho no fruit may at present appear from my feeble labours in this department, I do not regret what I have done, however little it may be appreciated by others. I heartily wish my brethren better success. A portion of God’s word I have been able to give to the people, & his word shall not return to him void.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Cited in Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 218.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 237.

⁵⁶ Bailey to Coates, Cottayam 11th December 1834, C I2/027/8.

Bailey also noted in the same letter that a weak chest prevented him from doing very much in the way of preaching or other public duties.⁵⁷ So although Bailey's furlough was necessary to ensure he had any future ministry in Kerala, four years away certainly diminished his influence amongst his CMS colleagues. Peet, as we have seen above, took on a lot of preaching responsibilities - often in a confrontational way. As we reflect therefore on the events leading up to the official breach at the Mavelikara Synod, a decline in Bailey's influence is a crucial factor.

Another difficulty that the Mission of Help had in its final days was that mixed messages were given to the Syrians by Anglicans of different churchmanship. While Bailey and his old and new colleagues called for reform, others suggested that no such reform was necessary. Even if Peet's Evangelical Protestantism was being wielded in an authoritative and impatient way, there were certainly some amongst the Syrians who were listening to the missionaries. Others, however, were likely prevented from listening by Anglican visitors who told them differently. Cherian noted that "a few Anglican Chaplains, in the service of the Government as well as certain others began to visit the Syrians occasionally and tell them that their old doctrines and practices were quite right and needed not to be given up. To say the least, this was sufficient to unsettle the minds of many."⁵⁸ To borrow words from a text which the Oxford Movement used in the title page of *Tracts for the Times*, the Anglican trumpet was giving an uncertain sound.⁵⁹ The CMS therefore called for reformation. Other Anglicans downplayed or reinterpreted this call. Consequently few in the Syrian Church prepared for the battle to reform the Church along the lines called for by Benjamin Bailey and others.

The final breach (1835-36)

As has already been mentioned, Cherian believed that a split between the CMS and Syrians was inevitable, with the latter having to choose between Antioch and the missionaries.⁶⁰ Although this may essentially be true with the benefit of hindsight, it would have been by no means clear

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 238.

⁵⁹ Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?*, 13. The text quoted is 1 Corinthians 14:8 "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle" (KJV).

⁶⁰ Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 233.

to the missionaries on the ground that a split was inevitable, even in the early to mid-1830s. In March 1835, for example, Bailey and Mar Dionysius IV were joint signatories to a letter declaring that the Metropolitan and his successors, the missionaries, and the Secretary of the Madras Corresponding Committee should be joint trustees of the Syrian College at Kottayam.⁶¹ Bailey was trying to ensure the partnership continued and was legally safeguarded. He was still in remembrance of what his erstwhile colleague Joseph Fenn had made clear almost a decade earlier: “it is ... the College of the Syrian Church, not the Mission.”⁶²

This was not the only agreement that Mar Dionysius IV entered into with the missionaries in 1835. He even seemed willing to co-operate with Peet over the need for those being ordained to the Syrian clergy having studied at the College. In a letter to Peet he stated:

I am well persuaded that it is of little use to be a Kattanar without the knowledge of the Bible; in consequence of this deficiency, I am bound for the further not to ordain Kattanars before I receive a written satisfactory testimony from the Rev. Mr. Peet and the Malpan who is in the College, that they have a good knowledge of the Scripture both in Syriac and Malayalam. And I am very desirous that the Rev. Mr. Peet should be very attentive to see that the Deacons and boys learn their lessons.⁶³

He also gave the following assurance in writing to the missionaries in January 1835: “There being now too many Deacons and Priests in the churches under my jurisdiction, I agree not to ordain any Deacons or Priests within two years from this day without the consent of the Missionaries given in writing.”⁶⁴ Despite growing tensions, therefore, the CMS missionaries may still have retained hopes in 1835 that their Mission of Help would continue.

It seems likely, however, that resentment and misunderstanding prevailed amongst leading Syrians regarding such issues as trusteeship of institutions and the ordination of clergy. As C.V. Cherian points out “the Malankara Suriyani Christians viewed all these developments with grave concern and displeasure. They wanted their Metropolitan who appeared before them as an injured person to be disciplined by the Patriarch of Antioch and not by a young missionary of the

⁶¹ See Appendix N in *Ibid*, 432-433.

⁶² *Missionary Register*, 1827, 600.

⁶³ Appendix S in P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 441.

⁶⁴ Appendix T in *Ibid*, 441.

Church Missionary Society.”⁶⁵ It may be that Mar Dionysius IV, as an accomplished ecclesiastical politician, presented himself as somewhat agreeable to the missionaries’ proposals whilst appearing greatly hurt by them to his Syrian colleagues.

In any case in 1835, perhaps because of the more confrontational approach of the younger missionaries, the CMS set about assessing what reforms had really been accomplished as a result of the Mission of Help. John Tucker, chair of the Madras Corresponding Committee, questioned the missionaries on what reforms had taken place. His report of their answers contained four basic points, which are summarised here from Hunt’s work on the Anglican Church in Travancore. Firstly, “there had been no appreciable reform in the Syrian Church.” Secondly, “the time had come when every constitutional method should be employed to induce the Church to purge out such things as are plainly contrary to the Word of God.” Thirdly, if there was failure in achieving reform, the missionaries would invite *kattanārs* and laity to boldly protest against the unscriptural elements in the worship. Fourthly, and finally, the missionaries “should protect any laity excommunicated for this cause and admit them to all the privileges of the Church of England.” Expelled clergy, however, should not be seen as belonging to the Church of England “but be encouraged to retain all such parts of their liturgy as are Scriptural and profitable for edification and cherish the hope of being able to continue their orders through their own bishops.”⁶⁶ Although these proposals of Tucker permitted admission of previous Syrian Church members into the Church of England it does not appear that there were plans as yet for Anglican Churches to be built in Travancore. Rather, the preferred option of the CMS was for these clergy to continue ministering as Syrian Christians to congregations whose fellowship with the Syrian Jacobite Church was suspended, but would hopefully soon be restored.⁶⁷

The desire amongst the CMS missionaries for urgent reform, however, was gaining momentum. And, as we have seen repeatedly in these pages, the political arrangements of the time were used to try and forward these ecclesiastical aims. C.V. Cheriyān writes:

⁶⁵ C.V. Cheriyān, *Orthodox Christianity in India*, 249.

⁶⁶ W.S. Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore*, Vol II, 8.

⁶⁷ Such approximates to the status of Abraham *Malpān*’s congregation at Maramon. See the discussion in Chapter 7 below.

The scheme formulated in this way was followed by political action. Tucker and the missionaries met with Colonel Casamajor, the Resident on 14th March 1835. They discussed with him the reluctance of the Malankara Suriyani Christians to introduce any kind of reform in their Church. The Resident assured them that the Raja and the Dewan would support the views of the missionaries in so far as they were in accordance with the plans of Col. Munro. The Resident and the Missionaries called on the Dewan, Subba Rao who subsequently met the Metropolitan and spoke to him on the subject of a synod or commission and of reforms generally.⁶⁸

It was against this backdrop of intensified politicisation that Bishop Daniel Wilson (1778-1858) visited from Calcutta. Wilson shared the mind-set of his missionary colleagues in the CMS. He considered his role models to be William Romaine, John Newton, Richard Cecil, Henry Venn senior, Joseph Milner, and Thomas Scott. As an admirer of John Calvin also, he would become the first Calvinist bishop in the Church of England since the seventeenth century.⁶⁹ Opposition to his 1832 appointment had been met with the assurance, in Wilson's own words, that "in my new and responsible station I should endeavour to act with discretion and mildness."⁷⁰ Perhaps this resolve had led to Wilson being invited by the Metropolitan in 1834 to mediate between the Syrians and the missionaries.⁷¹ Bishop Wilson, however, arrived in late 1835 and laid down six reforms (with a seventh suggested by Bailey) in a meeting with Mar Dionysius IV that he perceived needed to be implemented without delay in the Syrian Church. These were, as Hunt summarises them:

(1) that the college should be the recognised place of education of the clergy, (2) that the College accounts should be audited by the Resident, (3) that the clergy should be supported by other means than fees for prayers for the dead, (4) that schools should be spread all over the diocese, (5) that the kattanars should preach in the churches on Sundays, (6) that a Malayalam Liturgy should be framed from the Syrian ones and be generally used, and (7) that the arrangement whereby the missionaries were the intermediaries between the Syrians and the Resident and Sirkar, which had fallen into desuetude, should be resumed - this last at Mr. Bailey's suggestion.⁷²

⁶⁸ C.V. Cherian, *Orthodox Christianity in India*, 251.

⁶⁹ Andrew Atherstone, 'Introduction' in Andrew Atherstone (ed), *The Journal of Bishop Daniel Wilson of Calcutta, 1845-1857*, Church of England Record Society, 21, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press (2015), xiii-xv.

⁷⁰ Cited in Ibid, xv.

⁷¹ P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 222.

⁷² Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore*, Vol. I, 83-84.

Cheriyan suggested that Bishop Wilson, while urging these reforms, appears to have been quite respectful toward the Syrians and did not expect them to simply conform to Western Protestant notions or Anglicanism in particular.⁷³ The Bishop also delivered a warm sermon to the Syrians at Cheriapally Church, of which he wrote in his journal “I have declared the Name of Jesus with the firmness, and yet with the deference, which became me in another’s Church as a stranger with no authority.”⁷⁴

However much respect Bishop Wilson had shown the Syrians, the Mavelikara Synod held on 16th January 1836 rejected all of his proposals. John Fenwick has reconstructed the meeting between Wilson and the Metropolitan some weeks before as follows: “The Metropolitan agreed politely with much of what Wilson said, but without apparent enthusiasm. In fact, behind the mixture of Victorian politeness and Eastern courtesies with which the discourse is clothed, it is clear that Mar Dionysius was resisting Wilson’s suggestions and that Wilson knew it.”⁷⁵ It is hence no surprise, in retrospect, that the *Padiyola* (agreement) drawn up severed all ties with the CMS missionaries:

we, the Jacobite Syrians, being subject to the Supremacy of the Patriarch of Antioch, and observing, as we do, the Liturgies and ordinances instituted by the prelates sent under his command, cannot deviate from such Liturgies and ordinances and maintain a discipline contrary thereto; and a man of one persuasion being not authorized to preach and admonish in the Church of another following a different persuasion without the permission of the respective Patriarchs, we cannot permit the same to be done amongst us.⁷⁶

In this way the Mission of Help came to an end. Whatever mission Bailey and his CMS colleagues would now be involved in, it was no longer a Mission of Help to the ancient Syrian Church of Travancore.

Conclusion

In concluding this chapter we shall consider three reasons why the Mission of Help ended. Firstly, that there were serious theological differences cannot be denied. We have considered the

⁷³ Cheriyan, *The Malabar Syrians*, 224.

⁷⁴ Cited in Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore*, Vol. I, 84.

⁷⁵ Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops*, 385-386.

⁷⁶ Official translation of the Mavelikara *Padiyola*, Appendix H in Cheriyan, *The Malabar Syrians*, 421.

English context of the Oxford Movement that may have influenced the missionaries' thinking in the early 1830s. Clearly Peet and Woodcock were wrong if they simply viewed the beliefs of the Syrian Church as "tractarian popish nonsense." Yet there is much to be said for the claim that High Church or Anglo-Catholic missionaries would have had greater affinity to the Syrian Church. Newman, for example, argued strongly in Tract 1 of the *Tracts for the Times* that the church's authority lay in apostolic succession.⁷⁷ Newman, as we have seen above, was unhappy with attempts at unity with the Oriental Orthodox on Christological grounds. In this he probably had sharper theological instincts than Claudius Buchanan and the early CMS missionaries. Nevertheless, on ecclesiology there were greater commonalities between the Syrians and the Anglo-Catholic tradition. Edward Bickersteth, the CMS Secretary in London, would have probably applied the same critique to the Syrians as to the Oxford Movement; there was too much emphasis put on human authority and the Christian ministry and too little on Scripture and justification by faith.⁷⁸ In this sense, High Church Anglicans may have worked more cordially with the Syrians long-term, and it is questionable whether the reformation movements unleashed would actually have come about under a more High Church mission.

Secondly, that politicisation continued to play a significant role in the Mission of Help ending is highly probable. That this is so has been seen in Bailey's correspondence with Morrison where the Resident was reluctantly drawn into these ecclesiastical matters. It is worth re-emphasising also Bailey's desire, appended to Bishop Wilson's proposals, that the missionaries continue to act in a kind of intermediary role between the Syrians and the Resident. The perception in the Syrian Church, not surprisingly, was that the Mission of Help and the Travancore Residency were closely intertwined. C.V. Cherian has recently claimed that Wilson's second proposal concerning church and College financial affairs raised particular suspicions:

The suggestion that all accounts of the Church properties should pass through the hands of the British Resident would practically lead to the interference of the missionaries in the internal life of the Church as

⁷⁷ See, for example, Stephen Spencer, *SCM Study Guide to Anglicanism*, London: SCM (2010), 111.

⁷⁸ See above.

the Resident would in all probability have delegated his powers in this behalf to the missionaries ... it is not surprising that the proposals of Wilson were not implemented.⁷⁹

Interestingly, the concern here does not seem so much to have been about the Mission of Help legitimating British colonial interests in India. Rather, if Cherian is right, the Syrians were anxious about the political arrangements with Britain being used as a means to impose Anglican forms upon their ancient church. John Fenwick sees the breakdown of the Mission of Help against a wider backdrop of increasing distrust of British officials. As the EIC's role became ever more political and military, EIC personnel became much more distinct from the local population. There was also a much greater tendency to demonise local religion and customs. Hence, “[t]here is a sense in which the termination of the Mission of Help can be seen as part of the wider pattern of disengagement between the British and the indigenous population.”⁸⁰ This disengagement was due in part to the Evangelical reaction to Hinduism, but may also be attributed to the growing colonial relationship with the EIC. For the Syrians, Anglicisation was the main downside to these developments. “It is difficult” adds Fenwick, “to avoid the impression that what had driven the Puthenkuttukar so decisively in the direction of Antioch was the influence of the missionaries.”⁸¹ The missionaries, moreover, were influenced by their political context. The Mission of Help episode certainly raises serious questions concerning the wisdom of political exigencies and missionary endeavour being closely related.

Thirdly, this chapter has shown that changes in personnel at key times during the period 1828-36 changed the atmosphere in which the Mission of Help was carried on. The death of the sympathetic Mar Philoxenes was a huge blow from the perspective of the CMS missionaries and many in the Syrian Church. Mar Dionysius IV then assumed the role of Senior Metropolitan and we have seen in these last two chapters that he was much less sympathetic toward the missionaries' desire for reformation. The CMS had necessary changes also. There can be little doubt that the arrival of Woodcock and Peet to Kottayam and Tucker to Madras, whilst

⁷⁹ C.V. Cherian, *Orthodox Christianity in India*, 254.

⁸⁰ Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops*, 386-388. The quotation is on 399. See also William Dalrymple, *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth Century India*, London: Flamingo, (2003).

⁸¹ Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops*, 400. Puthenkuttukar means ‘New Syrians’ one of their own self-designations, referring to those who resisted Roman Catholic dominance in the seventeenth century.

Benjamin Bailey and Henry Baker were absent, brought into the fray two inexperienced and hot headed young missionaries. Regardless of their subsequent careers, their inexperienced interventions from 1833 to 1835 did not advance the Mission of Help's cause.

It is also true to say that there was quite a turnover of EIC Residents during this period. Munro had been very much responsible for getting the Mission of Help up and running and was a staunch supporter if somewhat overbearing presence in the early years of the Mission. The Residents in the years covered in this chapter tended to have short tenures and different levels of interest in and support for the Mission of Help. Col. Morrison, who corresponded with Bailey and the Metropolitan, nevertheless seems to have had little contact with the missionaries or the Syrians. The same is true of his successor, Col. Cadogan.⁸² The Resident in the time immediately preceding the Mavelikara Synod, meanwhile, was Colonel J.A. Casamajor. He appears to have been Evangelical in his religious sympathies, along with his immediate successor Col. J.S. Fraser.⁸³ These changes in personnel and perspective in the Residency would have made it difficult for both the CMS missionaries and the Syrian Christian community to know exactly where they stood. Given that the missionaries tended to look to the Residents for assistance, here was a recipe for instability.

Having outlined these explanations for why the Mission of Help ended, it is important to note that even in the heat of the painful events leading figures amongst the Syrians acknowledged gratitude to Bailey and his colleagues. The *Padiyola* itself praised the benevolent work of the early missionaries.⁸⁴ Ittoop, a Jacobite historian who had been a student at the Seminary before the split, showed his regard for the positive accomplishments of the missionaries and for the EIC also:

the English Missionaries, by Providential Grace, came to Malayala and fixed their quarters here and became bound to the Syrians by ties of brotherly regard (we) are witnesses to, the numerous fruits of their zealous and manifold labours to dispel the darkness of ignorance from among us, and to diffuse light in our midst by imparting to us learning and knowledge, and to spread the knowledge of the Scriptures

⁸² P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 205.

⁸³ Ibid, 226.

⁸⁴ C.V. Cherian, *Orthodox Christianity in India*, 255.

among us, we are as a whole, bound to adequately extol them and their Society, and especially, the East India Company.⁸⁵

Ittoop's mention of Divine Providence reminds us that the failure of the Mission of Help cannot in the last analysis be traced to doctrinal differences, politicisation, or personalities. Two older writers should not be ignored on this subject. P. Cherian wrote a century after the split took place that "a careful observer cannot help looking upon the crisis and its issue as an indication that it was not the will of God that the Mission should continue along its original lines."⁸⁶ Some years before Cherian, the English missionary to Kerala, W.S. Hunt reflected on these events: "He [i.e. God] so often proceeds through apparent failure to ultimate success. And, in His own way and His own time, He will in this case, in spite of the awkwardness and perversity of men, bring to pass that which He has willed. He is doing so."⁸⁷ Just how some of the Mission of Help's goals would come to be realised is the subject of our next two chapters. It must be noted that the missionaries also believed that their labour had not been in vain. In particular, many Syrian Christians had now been greatly influenced by possessing the Scriptures in their own tongue.⁸⁸ For this, Benjamin Bailey was to be thanked. He would continue to shape the ecclesiastical development of Kerala in the years to come.

⁸⁵ Cited in P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 243.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 242.

⁸⁷ Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore*, Vol. I, 90.

⁸⁸ Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 243-244.

Chapter 6 - Benjamin Bailey and the Church in Kerala, 1836-50

Introduction

In Chapter 5 we observed how the Mission of Help to the Syrian Church in Kerala came to an end. For Benjamin Bailey, this represented the end of the mission which had brought him to Travancore and to which he had devoted twenty years in Kottayam. They had been difficult years characterised by rising hope and subsequently by deep disappointment. The previous chapters have attested to the fact that there were mutual tensions in the partnership that the Mission of Help sought to forge between the CMS and the Syrians. Hence, the historian of these events W.S. Hunt, reflected that the “end of the experiment was, no doubt, hailed with relief on both sides. And yet there would be sadness too. For there was no small mutual affection between the Syrians and the missionaries.”¹ Bailey’s work in Kerala continued, however, until his retirement from the mission in 1850. He would continue with his work of translating Scripture and other literature into Malayalam. On the other hand, he would from this time be involved in organising some of the first Anglican congregations in Travancore as the focus of his mission became wider and much more directly evangelistic. The focus of this chapter, therefore, is on the remaining years of Bailey’s career in Kerala, 1836 to 1850.

The missionaries were visited in 1843 by Bishop Daniel Wilson of Calcutta. In addressing them on that occasion, Wilson began “I find you, Rev. Brethren, now in 1843, in a very different position in this Mission, from that which you occupied in 1835.”² Hunt describes the change of direction well:

This was a great change. From ultra-scrupulosity about ‘not interfering with the integrity of the ancient Church,’ and not allowing Syrians to be drawn away from it, the pendulum had swung to the receiving of Syrians into the Church of England and the building of churches for them to worship in. This change of

¹ W.S. Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore and Cochin, 1816-1916*, Volume I, Kottayam: CMS Press (1920), 90.

² Bishop Daniel Wilson, ‘Substance of remarks made in a charge delivered to the Rev. Missionaries at Kottayam, on the Coast of Malabar, Monday February 13th, 1843, by the Rt. Reverend Daniel Wilson, D.D. Bishop of Calcutta, at his first Metropolitical Visitation’, Reprinted in P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians and the Church Missionary Society 1816-1840*, Kottayam (2015 [1935]), Appendix DD, 463-470, ref., 463.

policy was strongly condemned and stoutly defended. There can be no doubt it was made under a conviction of Divine guidance.³

This chapter will seek to explore the final years of Bailey's mission to Kerala in the light of these radically changed circumstances. We will therefore focus on this great change of direction for Bailey and for some in the Syrian Church community. The condemnation that CMS activities after the Mission of Help received from some, such as the Syrian E.M. Philip and the Anglican George Broadley Howard, will be noted in passing. Our main focus, however, will be to observe three aspects of this great alteration in Bailey's mission; Firstly, how the change was anticipated and defended; secondly, the implications of this change for the ecclesiastical development of Kerala, and thirdly; how Benjamin Bailey's activities were affected by the Mission of Help's end.

The change of direction anticipated and defended

Writing in 1873 in his *Missionary Enterprise in the East*, Richard Collins expressed his view that the change of direction the CMS Mission to Kerala was forced to take in 1836 had been a good thing:

There can be no question that the missionaries were now in their right sphere; they were no longer bound by their silence to sanction things of which they could not approve, or to be parties in proceedings which violated their consciences. They were free to rebuke error, and fully to unfold the whole mystery of God, without compromise.⁴

It should be noted, however, that in the years approaching 1836 such a change of direction was being anticipated and supporters of the Mission of Help were being prepared for a new way of working. This is not to suggest that the CMS would have separated from the Syrians had not the latter acted at the Mavelikara Synod. It is merely to say that such a separation, and what should happen consequently, did not take the missionaries entirely by surprise.

³ Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore*, Vol. II, 29.

⁴ Richard Collins, *Missionary Enterprise in the East: With Especial Reference to the Syrian Christians of Malabar and the Results of Modern Missions*, London: Henry S. King & Co. (1873), 140.

Around 1835, for example, John Tucker of the Madras Corresponding Committee visited the missionaries and put to them seventy pointed questions on the state of their work. This must have represented quite a grilling for the missionaries and the number of questions asked suggests Tucker was impatient with this supposed Mission of Help. He was probably hoping that the missionaries would take a new direction in their work. Tucker had asked: “What substantial reform has been effected in the Syrian Church through the direct or indirect labours of the missionaries from their first establishment at Cottayam to the present day?” Bailey replied:

I cannot say that any real substantial reform has hitherto been effected. The instruction of the youth in the college &c., I trust has not been wholly in vain. The translation and printing of a portion of the Sacred Scriptures have been accomplished and distributed among the Syrians, &c., which, I doubt not, will, through the blessing of God, eventually prove a means of bringing about a reform in the Syrian Church.⁵

Bailey therefore answered with candour and yet with an element of patience and hope that things may yet change. Tucker further inquired: “What are the particular things in which a reform has been attempted?” In reply Bailey stated that attempted reform to that point had mostly been directed at stopping abuses rather than making significant changes to belief and practice. Bailey noted, for example, that “[s]ome other reforms of less moment, such as putting a stop to many evil practices at their festivals, and correcting some abuses in church government, were attempted, and for a time succeeded; but these practices, I am sorry to say, have again been introduced within the last few years.”⁶ This admission by Bailey gives credence to the notion that no reform, from a CMS perspective at least, had actually happened. Such an admission would further prepare the way for a fresh approach.

Tucker was keen to get to heart of the matter and truly assess whether the Mission of Help’s approach was the correct one. So he asked further: “Is there sufficient evidence to lead to the conclusion that the Catanars as a body are more disposed to reform than they were at the

⁵ Cited in Ibid, 115. The original source is catalogued as ‘Questions submitted to missionaries in Cottayam by secretary J. Tucker relating to state of Syrian Church and its attempted reform with detailed answers by Rev. B. Bailey, J. Peet and W.J. Woodcock, Cadbury Research Library, Birmingham University, C I2/O253/46/1. Dated 1836. Given that the Syrian decision to separate was made in January 1836, it seems likely that this meeting took place in 1835, subsequent to Bailey’s return to service from furlough.

⁶ Cited in Ibid, 116.

commencement?” In reply, Bailey is again brutally honest: “No. At the same time many of the Catanars are desirous to change several things in the liturgy.”⁷ Even in this exchange with Tucker, which practically admits defeat, Bailey’s more patient and optimistic assessment of the Syrians comes through. Peet answered the same question as follows: “No. I think there are a few, but how far they are prepared to go is very doubtful.” Woodcock is even more negative: “No. I think that there may be two who would be willing to reform in non-essentials, but know of none who wish to reform in essentials.”⁸ For Bailey, many are willing to reform the liturgy at least. For Peet it is a few. For Woodcock, it is only two and those reforms would not touch the errors in essential matters of doctrine that the CMS perceived there to be. According to Collins, moreover, the missionaries were unanimously agreed on the need for a more definite attempt at reformation. Such an effort would bring the Mission in line, interestingly, with what Col. Munro had wanted and the conditions upon which he raised funds for the college and other aspects of CMS work.⁹ So while Bailey, Peet and Woodcock longed for spiritual reformation, they also, along with later missionaries like Collins, seemed to still live in the shadow of Col. Munro and his more political agenda. This was most likely due to the self-consciously colonial agenda that Munro had pursued and instilled by his influence on the CMS missionaries.¹⁰

The anticipation and defence of the Travancore Mission’s radical change of direction was also carried on through the pages of the *Madras Church Missionary Record*. In 1835, in the organ’s second volume, they ran an article entitled ‘South India Mission, Cottayam, Extracts from Journal of Rev. John Devasagayam.’ The author was only the second native clergyman ordained by the CMS in any field,¹¹ and the editors of the periodical commented: “We cannot but cherish the hope that his affectionate addresses and exhortations, and reproofs, coming from the heart and lips of a native, may be ... attended with a blessing to this poor degraded section of the Christian Church.”¹² The observations of Devasagayam were deployed to show that the Mission

⁷ Cited in Ibid, 117.

⁸ Cited in Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, 117-118.

¹⁰ For evidence of Munro’s colonial goals, see Chapter 3 above.

¹¹ See the *CMS Register of Missionaries*, 297.

¹² ‘South India Mission, Cottayam, Extracts from Journal of Rev. John Devasagayam’, *Madras Church Missionary Record*, Vol II, (1835), 81-85.

of Help was struggling to make progress and indeed could hardly do so. The character of the missionaries and the bulk of the Syrian Christians were clearly contrasted by way of explanation. We see this in the following extracts: “Although the sight of this ancient Church and the residence of the pious Missionaries and their work greatly rejoiced me, yet the ignorance and superstition of the Syrian people and their teachers grieved me exceedingly.” Devasagayam recorded his attendance at a service on Thurs 5th Feb, 1835: “A Catanar conducted it and, their worship mostly resembled the Roman Catholics and Mahomedans.” Devasagayam further recorded asking one Philippus, a senior Syrian clergyman why the ‘heathen’ converts were more willing to change in line with ‘truth of God’ and received this reply: “Philippus answered me that heathen are like a straight stick, which could be bent, but … Syrians are like a crooked stick, which would cause great trouble to make it straight before it is bent.”¹³

This extract was of course published before the end of the Mission of Help. In it those close to the CMS Mission of Help are perhaps anticipating a different approach other than partnership with the Syrians. The strategy employed appears to be twofold. For one thing they may be employing a native voice to give expression to their frustration at the intransigence of the Syrians in making reforms. Such voices, as Gareth Griffiths cautions, proliferated in mission texts and often were filtered for home audiences.¹⁴ They therefore need to be read ‘against the grain’ in order to “reveal traces of the silenced voices of the converted colonized subject.” “The great majority” of such converts, in reality, “discarded neither their pre-existing culture, nor the totality of their previous identity.”¹⁵ While Griffiths’s cautions are well taken, the express links he makes between convert testimony and the colonial agenda may be somewhat reductionist. Peggy Brock, writing in the same volume as Griffiths, notes that if indeed the missionary project was part of a larger imperial project, then indigenous preachers were the foot-soldiers of that project.¹⁶ These indigenous evangelists, or as in Devasagayam’s case clergy, were shaped by their own cultural assumptions yet also could offer stinging critique of their culture. Such a

¹³ Ibid, 82.

¹⁴ Gareth Griffiths, “‘Trained to Tell the Truth’: Missionaries, Converts and Narration,’ in Norman Etherington (ed), *Missions and Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2005), 153-172, ref. 153.

¹⁵ Ibid, 155, 154.

¹⁶ Peggy Brock, ‘New Christians as Evangelists’, in Norman Etherington (ed), *Missions and Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2005), 132-152, ref. 132.

critique, however, was not because they self-consciously saw themselves as agents of some colonial power. Rather, “[t]he basis of their critique was their understanding of the Bible, not an unfavourable comparison between their own culture and a faraway metropolitan society most of them had never experienced.”¹⁷ Whilst, therefore, Devasagayam’s voice may be seen as supporting the Anglicising tendencies of the CMS, it would be quite wrong to see him as a mere exploited pawn in ecclesiastical and colonial politics. Secondly, in the characterisations of the Syrians that are given, the CMS missionaries are somewhat exonerated, with the Syrians portrayed as crooked and suspect in their dealings. One suspects the attitude of Bailey might have been more nuanced. Nevertheless, as a rhetorical device for future support of Bailey’s missionary endeavour amongst British evangelicals in India and at home, such rhetoric would prove effective.

A second article from the same periodical serves to provide defence for the new direction in the years immediately following the split between the CMS and Syrians. The author this time is Bailey’s long-serving colleague, Henry Baker. Writing in January 1839, Baker is reviewing the previous year’s work. Baker noted:

I am happy to state that the new arrangements made a few months ago already promise to be productive of increasing good, to the natives of the country generally, as well as to the Syrian population in particular ... [t]he Syrians some time ago manifested a disposition to offer every opposition they could, but the stoutest opponents, who were generally Cattanars, now give us no trouble ... The Society must remember that though this is an old Mission, and much has been expended on it, apparently to little profit, we have now entered upon a new method of culture and may hope under the divine blessing to reap double advantage.¹⁸

The ‘double advantage’ Baker had in mind was success in direct evangelisation of the Hindus on the one hand and continued influence on the Syrian community on the other.

These examples, from Bailey’s own lips, and from those of sympathetic colleagues, serve to show us that the Mission of Help’s end, which we recounted in the last chapter, was not unanticipated. Moreover, the resultant change of direction was both anticipated and defended in

¹⁷ Ibid, 151.

¹⁸ Henry Baker, ‘Report of the Cottayam District for 1838,’ *Madras Church Missionary Record*, Vol. VI, (1839), 44-46, refs from 44, 45, 46.

the missionary literature of the period. None of this is to say that the CMS really wanted such a change of direction all along. Yet it does seem that they were not left wondering what to do when the Mavelikara Synod took place, for a willingness to engage in what even in these years was termed an open mission was already present in CMS ranks.¹⁹ From now on the missionaries would engage in direct evangelisation to any who would listen. How the change of direction worked out in practice is our next concern.

The change of direction: Ecclesiastical implications

When the decision of the Mavelikara Synod was taken, it was done so unilaterally by the Syrians without consultation with the missionaries. Bailey and his colleagues were presented in effect with a *fiat accompli*. They had no choice but to accept the decision. It seems they were not particularly well informed about the developments and depended, for information, on the sympathetic Syrians Abraham *Malpān* and Marcus *Kattanār*.²⁰ Abraham *Malpān* was a Syriac instructor at the College and was the vicar of the parish of Maramon. Marcus, meanwhile, had been an able student of the College who had been deeply attached to Joseph Fenn during his tenure there.²¹ Both men were sympathetic to the reforms the missionaries had proposed, although both were determined to remain in the Syrian Jacobite Church and strive for reform from within.

We shall consider the Syrian reform movement in the next chapter. For now, however, we will review the response to the Mavelikara Synod by the CMS missionaries. The Travancore Missionary Conference met on February 12th 1836 to consider the next course of action. Benjamin Bailey and Henry Baker were present along with John Tucker. Abraham *Malpān*, it seems, was invited to explain the proceedings of the Synod to the missionaries. Abraham gave those assembled a basic summary to the effect that the Syrians were unwilling to give up their Syrian customs, that they could not adopt “a foreign religion, or … continue to learn from the people of another sect.” Therefore the missionaries could no longer preach in the churches. On

¹⁹ The phrase ‘open mission’ was used, for example, by Bishop Daniel Wilson in 1843. See the discussion below.

²⁰ Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 255.

²¹ Ibid, 532, n. 428.

hearing what had transpired, the missionaries came to the view that the Mavelikara Synod had been a properly constituted and competent assembly of the Syrian Jacobite Church.²²

The CMS had to respect this decision. There was a pragmatic realisation that any good to be done for the Syrians, from their perspective, would now have to be done outside any kind of formal partnership. However it did leave Bailey and his brethren in quite a dilemma. Cherian explains their thinking as follows:

even from the very outset, there was a strong consensus of opinion at Kottayam, Madras, and even in London that it would be a serious dereliction of duty for the Society to abandon the Mission altogether, or to leave those whose hearts had been touched by the teaching of the Missionaries to shift for themselves.²³

It took over two years, however, for a new policy to be formulated as consultations took place between the missionaries and the committees in Madras and London. The final decision made was that what began as a Mission of Help should become an open mission.²⁴

This decision involved three vital aspects of re-orientation in the Mission's work. Firstly, evangelisation, rather than being in the background, was now to be at the forefront of the missionaries' activity. Secondly, their evangelistic efforts, insofar as they were successful, would lead to the establishment of Anglican congregations. Thirdly, the missionaries were now to labour for the conversion of all peoples in Travancore: Hindus of all castes, Muslims, Roman Catholics, and Syrians.²⁵ Eugene Stock, the centenary historian of the CMS, viewed these developments as emancipation for the missionaries. "Now," Stock wrote, "they were free: and they turned to the Heathen."²⁶ It should be noted, however, that not all were called to affiliate to the Anglican Church with the same forcefulness. As Cherian noted: "The Society had always observed an important distinction between calling upon persons to come out of non-Christian faiths and accept the Christian religion, and inviting the members of what were considered

²² 'Minutes of the Travancore Missionary Conference, Tuesday, Feb 12th, 1836,' Appendix X in Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 448-449.

²³ Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 256.

²⁴ Ibid, 257.

²⁵ Ibid, 260-261.

²⁶ Eugene H. Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society: Its Environment, Its Men and Its Work*, Vol. I, London: Church Missionary Society (1899), 326.

unscriptural Churches to abandon their own Churches and join the Anglican Church.” Within this distinction, there was also a difference recognised between the Roman Catholic Church and the Syrians or other Eastern Churches, with the former seen as more irrecoverable than the latter.²⁷

The question then arose as to how to deal with Syrian Christians, such as Abraham *Malpān*, who were sympathetic to the teaching of the missionaries but not clamouring to join the Anglican Church. The consensus among the CMS missionaries and their ecclesiastical superiors was that they should not be obliged or encouraged to do so. Writing to the Kottayam missionaries in 1837, John Tucker referred to sympathetic Syrians such as Marcus *Kattanār* and Abraham *Malpān* and stated: “May God of His great mercy have pity upon this branch of His Church, and guide and govern the minds of these men, that they may be preserved from the fear of man on the one hand and causing needless divisions on the other.”²⁸ In 1843 Bishop Wilson, in reflecting on the very different situation which faced the missionaries, made the following observation:

You had no other course to take but to build churches for yourselves, to go on with your school, to multiply copies of the Scriptures, to erect as you have done, your own College, and to carry on an unfettered and open Mission for the good of the heathen and Mohammedans generally, and of the individual Roman Catholics, Roman Syrians, and Syrians around you, who might voluntarily and peaceably avail themselves of your labours, avoiding all interference with the Metran and the authorities of the Syrian Churches, and awaiting a more favourable time for resuming your system of co-operation and aid with them.²⁹

Even seven years after the split, however, Bishop Wilson was adamant that “no attempt of proselytism must be thought of, either as to clergy or laity.”³⁰ So, as far as the CMS and Anglican Church were concerned, whatever the change of direction required, proselytism of the Syrians was not to be employed as a strategy.

Benjamin Bailey, therefore, found himself in a position where he hoped to continue encouraging the reform of the Syrian Church, whilst at the same time feeling an obligation to begin building

²⁷ Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 262.

²⁸ Tucker to the Rev. Missionaries at Kottayam, Madras, July 19th 1837, Appendix V in Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 444-446, ref. is on 445.

²⁹ Bishop Wilson’s Charge , 13th February 1843, Appendix DD in Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 468.

³⁰ Ibid, 470.

Anglican churches. That is, in fact, what had happened. We will briefly consider these developments now through looking at Benjamin Bailey's activities. The same trajectory was followed by the CMS mission to Travancore more broadly. Yet it was Bailey who embodied most clearly, at the ecclesiastical level, a twin track approach of building Anglican congregations whilst also earnestly desiring and supporting reform of the ancient Syrian Church.

The first Anglican Church to be established as a congregation in connection with the CMS Mission was in Mallapalli. A priest there named Mamman had been a strong ally of the missionaries. When he was removed by Mar Dionysius IV, the flock split. A small number approached Bailey and asked to be formed into a new Anglican congregation. Hunt records that when Bailey seemed to doubt their sincerity, he was firmly assured of both their sincerity and his own responsibility by a member of the delegation named Pothan who said: "You have come here to teach us and our children the truth, and, if you will not do so, you will have to answer for it on the Day of Judgment before the Lord Jesus Christ."³¹ So the first Anglo-Syrian congregation came into being in Travancore. When the church building was opened on September 27, 1842, there were six hundred people present and two people were baptised.³²

By 1843 six church buildings had been erected for Anglo-Syrian Christians, and converts from the surrounding population, to worship in. Perhaps the most notable congregation was the one that became the Holy Trinity Pro-Cathedral in Kottayam, the Syrian Christian heartland. This was Bailey's own congregation. He laid the foundation stone on November 21st 1839 and the building was opened on July 6th 1842. Bailey modestly called the cathedral "a neat and substantial building." Bishop Wilson of Calcutta, however, was much less reserved, calling it in his journal "the glory of Travancore."³³

³¹ Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore*, Vol. II, 26.

³² Ibid, 27. The precise dates of when churches began during this period in some ways depends on whether or not the erection of the church building marks the beginning of a church. This question is posed by K.M. George who states "[i]t seems right to think that the beginning of worship in a particular place starts when the faithful Christians meet together to pray and worship the Lord. The church cannot be equated with any building constructed on stone masonry." See K.M. George, *Tradition Versus Reform: Church Missionary Society 'Mission of Help' 1816-1840*, Kottayam: Benjamin Bailey Foundation (2013), 120, n. 5.

³³ Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore*, Vol. II, 41-42. Hunt's patchy referencing has made these quotations difficult to trace in their original source.

We get a good glimpse into Bailey's thinking and *modus operandi* in the events surrounding the split and the opening of the Anglican Church in Kottayam. Hunt shares some of Bailey's personal reflections at this time. After the first service in the church, Bailey wrote: "May it prove, through God's blessing on the ministrations of His servants, the spiritual birthplace of many souls!"³⁴ Bailey added the following reflection:

I am now the oldest missionary engaged in the service of the CMS having first come out in 1816 ... When I look back on the length of time during which I have been engaged in the sacred ministry and see to what little purpose I have laboured, I have reasons to be deeply humbled ... I cannot, however, refrain from just alluding to three important objects which the Lord has enabled me to accomplish in the prosecution of my missionary labours, viz., 1. The translation and printing of the whole Bible in Malayalam. 2. The translation and printing of the Book of Common Prayer now in use throughout our Malayalam mission, and 3. The building of a neat and substantial church.³⁵

These were, of course, no small achievements. They marked Bailey out, among the Travancore trio, as a long serving agent for reform amongst the Syrian Christian community. Bailey inculcated a submissiveness to Biblical authority that would not allow a significant number of Syrians to settle for the *status quo*. That reform continued to bear effect within as well as without the Syrian church.

Within the Syrian church, as Stephen Neill points out, "the reforming leaven was still at work."³⁶ Abraham *Malpān* became the great agent for reform among his own people. Like John Wycliffe in England before him, Abraham held vernacular services and removed what he believed to be unbiblical elements in the worship.³⁷ Bailey and his colleagues, therefore, continued to have significant influence, as their ideas were appropriated by the Syrian Christians who remained inside that ancient church. Neill notes that Abraham *Malpān* "had learned from the missionaries

³⁴ Cited in Ibid, 42.

³⁵ Ibid, 43. Again, Hunt does not give the primary source of this quotation.

³⁶ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, Harmondsworth: Penguin (1964), 271.

³⁷ Robert Eric Frykenberg, 'Christians and religious traditions in the Indian Empire', in Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley (eds), *The Cambridge History of Christianity: World Christianities c. 1815- c. 1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2006), 473-492, see especially 478.

to test all things by the Bible and had in consequence repudiated many of the ideas and ceremonies which had become customary in the Church.”³⁸

Given the instructions from Madras, London, and Bishop Wilson not to proselytise, cases like those of Abraham *Malpān* and the Christians in Mallapalli presented Bailey and his colleagues with something of a dilemma. Since these Syrians themselves were not inclined to join the Anglican Church and that the missionaries were not to pressurise them to do so, the question remained as to what could be done. The Madras Corresponding Committee had considered this question almost immediately after the Mavelikara Synod had made its decision. Tucker wrote to Bailey, Baker, and Peet in March 1836 and reported to them that the Committee “took into serious consideration, the important question whether it is desirable to introduce our Liturgy, or attempt to compose a reformed one of their own.”³⁹ The decision they came to was as follows: “That the Missionaries be requested to prepare a suitable Liturgy in Malayalam for the use of the Syrians, from the different Liturgies and services now in use.”⁴⁰ So the missionaries set about compiling a composite liturgy based on those of the Syrian Church, not the Book of Common Prayer. It seems that although Bailey listed the translation of the latter as one of his main achievements, it was not intended to be imposed upon the Syrian Church.

It should be noted that the number of Syrians who would come to use this revised liturgy was always rather small. These were Syrians who ceased to be in regular attendance at the Syrian services. As Cherian noted, these Christians needed some sort of provision to be made for their Sunday worship, and other religious rites.⁴¹ It is estimated that the revised liturgy was used by two or three Syrian priests and presumably their congregations. It was not intended for use in Syrian Churches under the authority of the Metropolitan, or in the new Anglo-Syrian congregations. It seems, rather, that the missionaries were providing a third way for Syrian Christians who felt that they could not continue in an unreformed Syrian Church but who, for the time being, were not encouraged to join the Church of England. In terms of the content of the

³⁸ Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 271.

³⁹ Tucker to Bailey, Baker and Peet, Madras, March 14th, 1836, Appendix W in Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 446-448, ref. 447.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 448.

⁴¹ Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 248.

revised liturgy, no seemingly unnecessary changes were made. The main differences were the omission of sections containing prayers to the dead or the Virgin Mary, and anything that looked like the doctrine of transubstantiation.⁴² As we saw in Joseph Fenn's 1818 address in Chapter 4, such doctrines were repudiated by the CMS from the beginning of their time in Travancore. Yet the rise of the Oxford Movement in England, as discussed in Chapter 5, increased the urgency for Bailey and his colleagues to ensure that revised liturgies did not allow for these teachings in congregations over which they had influence.

Although this revised liturgy was not intended as an official alteration of the Syrian Church's worship, criticism of this move by the missionaries was not in short supply. The Rev. George Broadley Howard was an Anglican High Churchman and the author in 1864 of *The Christians of St. Thomas and their Liturgy*. Howard was incandescent:

To alter the liturgy of a Church is a matter of the gravest consequence, even when alterations are made under the sanction of proper authority, but that men in the position of the Missionaries at Kottayam should tamper with and modify the liturgy of an independent Church, into connection with which they had been admitted by mere courtesy is a height of presumption almost incredible – unless they and the Kattanars who were associated with them were acting as a committee duly appointed to carry out such a work.⁴³

Even those with Low Church sympathies joined in the criticisms. Writing almost thirty years later, the Rev. J.D. D'Orsey of Cambridge, a Low Churchman, added "one cannot help feeling that these attempts to tamper with the liturgy of an independent Church are quite indefensible."⁴⁴ Cherian responded by stressing that the revised liturgy was for the use of Syrians who had left the Syrian Jacobite Church but who, at that time, were not yet being admitted into the Church of England. Moreover, the "[m]issionaries never attempted to introduce this modified, or much modified, form of service into the Syrian Church."⁴⁵ Cherian suggested a prejudice against the missionaries lay at the heart of these criticisms: "In their anxiety to secure the condemnation of the Missionaries the critics distorted a perfectly harmless thing done by the Missionaries and

⁴² Ibid, 249-250.

⁴³ Rev. George Broadley Howard, *The Christians of St. Thomas and their Liturgies*, Oxford and London: John Henry and James Parker (1864), 105.

⁴⁴ Rev. J.D. D'Orsey, *Portuguese Discoveries, Dependencies and Missions in Asia and Africa*, (1893), 387.

⁴⁵ Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 253.

made them appear as being guilty of serious ecclesiastical impropriety.”⁴⁶ The truth probably lies somewhere in the middle. It seems that the revision of Liturgy was made by the CMS men as an attempt to ensure that these Syrians, in a difficult position, were not denied the means of grace. Nevertheless, that such a move was likely to be misunderstood and later condemned is not entirely surprising. It may have been perceived as proselytism by the back door.

To what extent, therefore, were the reforms that took place in the Syrian Church an indigenous movement? Or were they rather unashamed proselytism? Michael Bergunder has noted rightly that the events of 1836 were due largely to concerns over the Protestantisation of the Syrian Church. He observes that the CMS decided to continue on the basis of an open mission and adds “[t]he first members of this new work, however, were former West Syrian Indian Christians who had left their mother church to join the CMS, sometimes even as entire congregations.” Bergunder argues that this initial move set the scene for the later emergence of the Mar Thoma church in 1889. Also, he claims, later Protestant missions such as the Plymouth Brethren, the Salvation Army and the Pentecostals all found assistance from former members of the Syrian Church.⁴⁷ Hence, even recent scholars with no particular denominational bias in these events argue that the CMS Mission did amount to proselytism.

That some transfer of membership from the Syrian Church to the Anglicans occurred can hardly be denied. It is worth noting, however, that Syrian Christian writers from past and present have tended to emphasise the indigenous nature of the ecclesiastical development of Kerala. P. Cherian, unsurprisingly, led the way in this in his rebuttal of the claims of E.M. Philip and others.⁴⁸ Philip was among those who argued that the Mar Thoma Church had gained its members through the proselytising work of the CMS. Philip went so far as to say that the Missionaries had formed “the schismatic body known as reformed Syrians.”⁴⁹ P. Cherian, who admittedly became a life governor of the CMS, responded: “Neither the Missionaries nor the

⁴⁶ Ibid, 250.

⁴⁷ Michael Bergunder ‘Proselytism in the History of Christianity in India,’ in Richard Fox Young (ed.), *India and the Indianess of Christianity: Essays on Understanding – Historical, Theological, and Biographical – in Honor of Robert Eric Frykenberg*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans (2009), 181-195, ref. 184-185.

⁴⁸ Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 315ff.

⁴⁹ E.M. Philip *The Indian Church of St. Thomas*, Kottayam (1907), 281, cf. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 312.

Mar Thoma Syrians will accept Philip's assertion as to the origin of the latter body, though probably it may not be denied by either of them that the rise of the reformation movement within the Syrian Church itself was due, in a large measure, to the teachings of the Missionaries.”⁵⁰ Moreover, the same author claimed that even in the Syrian Church itself many reforms of church practice and education have taken place which owe their stimulus to the work of the CMS missionaries.⁵¹

It could be argued, therefore, that reforms within and without the Syrian Church, not to mention the establishment of the Anglican Church in Kerala, was actually an indigenous movement. The general principle that it was Indians themselves who appropriated, spread and reformed Christianity on the sub-continent has been well established by Robert Frykenberg. His volume *Christianity in India*, for example, deals with alien missionaries and other actors only insofar as their contribution was significant to existing Indian Christian communities or institutions.⁵² Daniel Jeyaraj, meanwhile, questions the standard missionary historiography, usually from the perspective of the sending agency, where the heroic achievements of their representatives are contrasted with the perceived initial degeneracy of those to whom they bear witness. On the contrary, Jeyaraj observes, “the major actors in authentic missionary enterprises were not only the missionaries from outside, but above all the local converts.” He concludes “a balanced missionary historiography gives equal importance to the missionaries and to the ‘missionized.’”⁵³

Returning to the specifics of Kerala in the aftermath of the Mission of Help, K.M. George claims that in the Anglican Church at Pallom and elsewhere “the initiative in building the church came from the people themselves.”⁵⁴ This assertion is in agreement with the much more critical C.V. Cherian, who writes from within the fold of the non-Antiochene Orthodox Syrian Church.

⁵⁰ Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 312.

⁵¹ Ibid, 313-314.

⁵² Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2008), 461.

⁵³ Daniel Jeyaraj, ‘Indian Participation in Enabling, Sustaining, and Promoting Christian Mission in India,’ in Richard Fox Young (ed.), *India and the Indianness of Christianity: Essays on Understanding – Historical, Theological and Bibliographical – in Honor of Robert Eric Frykenberg*, Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans (2009), 26-40, refs., 27, 40.

⁵⁴ K.M. George, *Tradition Versus Reform*, 121.

Abraham *Malpān* of Maramon and Kaithayil Geevarghese *Malpān* of Kottayam were among those “not prepared to give up their faith in the teachings of the missionaries.” Yet neither were they willing to join the Anglican Church. They sought rather to reform the Syrian Church from within. Twelve other priests joined them who sought to remove various perceived corruptions from the Syrian Church, including “prayer for the dead, the keeping of relics of the saints in churches, and failure to use the Scripture for instruction.”⁵⁵ Abraham *Malpān* was not averse to some iconoclastic zeal, on one occasion throwing an image of a saint down a well.⁵⁶ The desire for the Scripture to be used in instruction as well as the various other reforms that were made within the Syrian Church from 1836-1850 were not imposed by proselytising missionaries. They came from several leaders within the Church.⁵⁷ It cannot be denied, however, that Benjamin Bailey’s passion for the Scripture being read and preached in the vernacular was a key influence on these reformers. Some consideration of Bailey’s final years in Kerala would therefore be in order.

The Change of Direction: Personal implications for Benjamin Bailey

Though the change of direction from 1836 onwards must have been challenging for Bailey, what is left to us concerning his work from this period reveals that he continued to view Scriptural translation, instruction, and preaching as his greatest priorities. In an 1838 letter to the Rev. W. Jowett, in Church Mission House in London, for example, Bailey notes that his eldest son Benjamin J. Ella Bailey⁵⁸ had failed to gain admission to the CMS Training Institution in Islington. Bailey expresses the hope that he can be trained and sent out to work with him as a printer. It would be churlish, however, to view this request as mere nepotism. Bailey explains why he is making this request: this would, says Bailey, “leave me more at liberty to devote more

⁵⁵ C.V. Cherian, *Orthodox Christianity in India: A History of the Malankara Orthodox Church AD52-2002*, Kottayam: Academic Publishers, 263-264.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 264.

⁵⁷ See Chapter 7 below for further discussion of the indigenous nature of ecclesiastical reform in Kerala and how these were part of wider reform movements in Travancore society.

⁵⁸ This son would have been his third and oldest surviving child. He learnt printing in England and later returned to help his father at the printing press. He returned to England with his father and later worked at the CMS headquarters where he was involved in compiling the Register of Missionaries. See Babu Cherian, *Towards Modernity: The Story of the First College in India: The Impact of CMS College, Kottayam on Kerala Society and How it Paved the Way to Modernity*, Delhi: Media House (2014), 348.

of my time to translations and other work.” Bailey also gave Jowett brief details on the work involved in translating Scripture, “our incomparable liturgy” and other works.⁵⁹ The years immediately following the breach with the Syrians were turbulent and confusing. It is interesting to note, however, that Bailey seems to have remained single-minded in his commitment to the work he had been involved in since his earliest days in Kerala. He believed that the Scriptures, in Malayalam, read and preached, would be the most effective agency for reform. He retained this conviction regardless of the ecclesiastical and political turmoil around him.

By 1845 Bailey would have been settled into his new circumstances as Anglican Vicar of the church in Kottayam. He still, however, retained his desire for the education of Syrian Christians, male and female. Elizabeth Bailey, so far as health permitted, ran a girls’ school and received assistance in this from her two daughters. Elizabeth Sophia Bailey (1825-1911) and Manna Jameela Bailey (1829-1912) both taught at the girls’ school with their mother.⁶⁰ Both daughters had obviously spent time in England also. For it is in 1845 that we find Bailey writing to Dandeson Coates, of the CMS headquarters in London, asking for Manna to be sent out “under the protection of [a] married missionary’s lady.” Elizabeth had come out two years earlier. Bailey noted: “She takes great interest in the instruction of the native females & has been of very great assistance to her mother in this respect.”⁶¹ Bailey, who had expressed a desire to be “principally affected by the ultimate good”, still retained this desire but also was eager that the duty to provide opportunity for those they could help through education remained a major goal of his family’s labours.⁶²

Bailey’s later career in Kottayam, like his earlier years, was marked by various personal trials and difficulties. A painful circumstance in these latter years was a disagreement with the then Principal of CMS College, John Chapman. Bailey is his characteristic discreet self about the causes of this tension. Yet that it was real and painful is evident in two 1847 letters to Rev. T.G.

⁵⁹ Bailey to Rev. W. Jowett, Cottayam, 29th May 1838, CMS Archives, Cadbury Research Library, Birmingham, C I2/027/9.

⁶⁰ Cherian, *Towards Modernity*, 349. It is interesting that the younger daughter here carries an Indian name. They had by 1818 taken three orphaned girls into their care. See the correspondence with Munro discussed in Chapter 3. Manna, however, is listed by Cherian as among the Baileys’ own children.

⁶¹ Bailey to D. Coates, Cottayam, 15th February 1845, C I2/027/12.

⁶² See the discussion of Bailey’s mission priorities in Chapter 3 above.

Ragland in Madras. In the first of these Bailey reveals that Chapman wishes to leave Kottayam. He simply noted: “I have never sought nor wished to quarrel with him. At the same time I am free to confess that I am a frail creature, prone to err in many things & that I come far short of what I ought to be.”⁶³ This was clearly an issue which caused Bailey great angst, however, for the following month he addressed a further letter to Ragland about the matter where he seeks to respond to serious charges from Chapman against him and his family.⁶⁴ Toward the end Bailey wrote:

So long as my heavenly Father spares me & is pleased for me to occupy my post, it is my sincere wish that the remainder of my life may be wholly spent in the service of my Saviour whither thro evil report or good report ... If my feeble efforts in his cause are acceptable to Him it matters little what others think or say of me.⁶⁵

We can only speculate as to what the tensions between Bailey and Chapman might have been. We do know that Chapman was a gifted Principal of the College and had become frustrated that it was not producing young theologians and leaders for the church, but was rather producing civil servants for Travancore, Kochi and Madras.⁶⁶ Chapman would eventually close the College and move to Madras in 1850. As early as 1845 he was considering doing this. He wrote in a report to the CMS: “I had already reported to the Society that my greatest desire was to equip spiritually and intellectually one of my good students for theological training. Unfortunately this desire of mine has not been fulfilled.”⁶⁷ The *Madras Missionary Record* for 1850 reports the arrival of Chapman there “to prepare a few students to be presented to the Bishop for Holy Orders.” And noting: “We regret that circumstances of a painful character have made it necessary to close the Kottayam College for a time.”⁶⁸ The College, however, would reopen in June 1851 with Edmund Johnson acting as Principal.⁶⁹

⁶³ Bailey to Rev. T. G. Ragland, Cottayam, 23rd March 1847, C I2/027/14.

⁶⁴ Bailey to Rev. T.G. Ragland, Cottayam, 18th April 1847, C I2/027/15. Sadly this letter has deteriorated and is illegible in large part.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ See the note on Chapman in Cherian, *Towards Modernity*, 368-370.

⁶⁷ Cited in Ibid, 370.

⁶⁸ Cited in Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore*, Vol. II, 53.

⁶⁹ Cherian, *Towards Modernity*, 396.

Putting Bailey's letters and the comments relating to Chapman's departure together, it seems at least possible that a sharp disagreement may have arisen between them over the nature of the College's ministry and future direction. It seems that, while Chapman continued to offer a broad education whilst at the College, he regretted that the original aim to be a seminary for Syrian Clergy had largely failed. For this he may well have blamed the College's early leadership. Although the temporary closure of the College by Chapman was largely the result of some painful episode that seems shrouded in mystery, Chapman's subsequent work at the Church Missionary Institution in Madras, geared specifically toward producing missionaries, suggests that he had become disillusioned with the lack of clear distinction between seminary training and general education at Kottayam.⁷⁰ Personal misunderstandings of some kind seem to have exacerbated these tensions. For Bailey, who had been involved with the College for thirty years, it must have been a very painful experience.

Benjamin Bailey would retire from the Mission in 1850. Hunt records that at this time: "He was tired with incessant labour and in poor health. His wife's condition caused anxiety. And he had had severe trials."⁷¹ He would not have been the first, or last, to die on the mission field. Perhaps, however, the well-being of his wife and his son's willingness to return to England with them swayed Bailey to leave. It is also probable that the presence of other missionaries, such as Henry Baker, Senior and Junior, Joseph Peet, and others, persuaded Bailey that he could leave the work in Travancore in good hands. His departure, however, would display the low key and modest approach that seems to have been characteristic of his life. In a letter to his son, Henry Baker Sr. had written: "Bailey preached his farewell sermon quite by surprise yesterday week." He preached from Acts 20, where Paul bade farewell to the Ephesian elders. Hunt adds "no doubt the scene on the beach at Miletus was then repeated."⁷² Despite this farewell discourse, however, Bailey's actual departure came as something of a shock. Hunt recorded:

Although it was known for some time that he intended to go home, his actual departure was unexpected. He slipped away quietly. This was probably not only to escape fuss, but because of the sorrow of leaving –

⁷⁰ Ibid, 136, 368.

⁷¹ Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore*, Vol. II, 47.

⁷² Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore*, Vol. I, 123. See Acts 20:36-38 where we read "there was much weeping on the part of all" (ESV).

leaving all that he had built up, and the home and friends of over thirty years – was too poignant to be exposed.⁷³

As Bailey headed for home, he probably could not have anticipated much future usefulness. Yet he would spend a further twenty years as a rural dean in Shropshire. He died there in April 1871 in his eightieth year.⁷⁴

Bailey, both the man and his work, have continued to be held in high esteem in Kerala. Richard Collins, in the midst of his critical assessment of the early methods of the Mission of Help, nevertheless wrote the following concerning Bailey and Fenn: “Many missionaries who have come and gone are forgotten, but the names of Fenn and Bailey are still in every mouth.”⁷⁵ Collins wrote in 1873, while Fenn was still alive in London and Bailey had only just died in 1871. He is also a CMS insider, albeit not a totally uncritical one. Bailey, however, continued to be held in high esteem amongst Keralans themselves. A Malayalam pamphlet, published around 1900, fifty years after Bailey’s leaving India, claimed:

His people loved him greatly and he loved them. Old men still recall his kindness with tears. He was to them, they say, a grandfather … There was none of them whom he did not visit when ill, pray with them, physick them, give them good advice and comfort them … He was an example for all pastors in the zeal with which his pastoral duties down to the minutest were performed.⁷⁶

In W.S. Hunt’s assessment Bailey was a model pastor and missionary: “Primarily a pastor, a shepherd of the sheep, he was nevertheless a missionary and in his dealings with non-Christians the same kind-heartedness and faithfulness were shown.” Bailey therefore managed to combine kindness and grit, compassion and doggedness, “not to say a Yorkshire obstinacy” in his character.⁷⁷ Contemporary writers from Kerala continue to write appreciatively of Bailey⁷⁸ and the CSI Church at Kottayam have named their parochial hall after their first pastor.⁷⁹ Bailey’s

⁷³ Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore*, Vol. II, 47.

⁷⁴ Cherian, *Towards Modernity*, 350. Cherian says Bailey was eighty years old. His exact birth date, however, is as yet unknown.

⁷⁵ Collins, *Missionary Enterprise*, 111.

⁷⁶ Cited in Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore*, Vol. I, 123.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ E.G. the works of Babu Cherian, such as *Towards Modernity*, and *Benjamin Bailey: The Ground Breaker*.

⁷⁹ Personal observation from visiting the site in Kottayam.

ongoing legacy, particularly within the Syrian Church, will be further considered in the next chapter.

Conclusion

In concluding this chapter, we will observe how the change from the Mission of Help to an open mission from 1836 onwards may actually have been a greater stimulus to the original goals of the CMS being achieved. This certainly was the view of various ecclesiastical visitors and missionaries to Travancore in the decades following 1836. The first example is taken from the journal of Bishop Spencer for 12th December 1840. Spencer had visited Travancore and met with Abraham *Malpān*. In the course of their conversation, the knotty questions concerning how reforming Syrians and the Anglican Church might relate were addressed. Spencer assured the *Malpān* that the doors of the Church of England were open to all. Nevertheless, Spencer went on to say that “I utterly disclaimed all desire to make proselytes among the Syrians or Roman Catholics, by any other method than the force of truth exemplified, by our doctrine and discipline above all, in our lives.”⁸⁰ Three years later, Bishop Wilson, in the charge to the missionaries already referred to, commented on the new situation faced by the missionaries as follows:

[T]he general movement in men’s minds, as your peaceable and pious proceedings become better known, and the Bible and Christian schools have diffused more of the truth of the Gospel amongst the people, and the contrast between all this purity and light, and the corruptions and errors of their own worship, becoming more apparent to themselves daily, may lead us to expect great things in God’s good time.⁸¹

Collins, meanwhile, believed that three decades of mission work under the new arrangements, was by the early 1870s having considerable effect on the Syrian Church. He wrote: “The preaching of the missionaries … the example of a pure ritual, the lives and teachings of the native clergy and other agents, increased education, and, above all, the dissemination of the Word of God in the vernacular, have moved the Syrian Church to the centre.”⁸² A final example comes from Bishop Gell in 1876 who sought to deal with objections to the very establishment of

⁸⁰ Bishop Spencer’s Journal, 69, cited in Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, Appendix EE, 472. In this quote I am following the punctuation as reproduced in Cherian’s work.

⁸¹ Bishop Wilson’s Charge, Appendix DD in Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 469.

⁸² Collins, *Missionary Enterprise*, 141-142.

a CMS Mission in Travancore, a place where an ancient Church and the Roman Catholic Church already had a foothold. Gell defended the CMS missionary endeavour there on the grounds that the Syrian Church was in great need of reformation and inert in their evangelistic responsibilities. Yet he did suggest that a different approach from the start may have been more fruitful. In particular, the CMS would have been better doing two things. The first of these was the direct evangelisation of non-Christians. In so far as such efforts met with success, the converts would then be gathered into Anglican congregations. Secondly, there was the responsibility, in the Bishop's own words, of "presenting before the eyes of the Syrian Church, as our light and strength go, a well organised, Apostolic, living and evangelising branch of Christ's Church."⁸³

Whatever may be said about these statements in terms of their sometimes patronising tone, there is a consensus in them that mission to Kerala was warranted on account of the failure of the Syrian Christians to evangelise and also that a different approach probably should have been taken. The alternative would have been to engage in open mission from the beginning and to model an attractive Christian community. The idea that the Syrians failed to evangelise prior to contact with western missionaries has not gone uncontested. John Fenwick questions the idea that the Syrians were a closed caste with little interest in evangelism: "it is important to note that conversions to Christianity were happening prior to the evangelistic impetus given by the British missionaries ... The community had not entirely lost sight of the Great Commission." Often, it seems, conversions and baptisms were done secretly to prevent anger from the Rajahs.⁸⁴ On the other hand, the Indian Catholic scholar Augustine Kanjamala perpetuates the long-standing idea that caste status amongst the Thomas Christians was, in fact, an explanation of evangelistic inertia not just among the Syrian Orthodox but amongst the Syrian Catholics as well. The latter body, for example, only founded the Missionary Society of St. Thomas in 1968.⁸⁵ It would be

⁸³ Bishop Gell, cited in Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 261.

⁸⁴ See John Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops: The Malabar Independent Syrian Church and its Place in the Story of the St Thomas Christians of South India*, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies, Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press (2009), 344. cf. Mar Abraham Mattan, *The Indian Church of St Thomas Christians and Her Missionary Enterprise before the Sixteenth Century*, Vadavathoor. Oriental Institute of Religious Studies in India, (1985).

⁸⁵ Augustine Kanjamala, *The Future of Christian Mission in India: Toward a New Paradigm for the Third Millennium*, Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications (2014), 7-9.

unfair to see the Syrians as completely evangelistically inert before western contact. Yet that great impetus was given to this community by its contact with other forms of Christianity cannot be doubted. In this respect, therefore, the Mission of Help cannot be seen as a complete failure on its own terms.

Wilbert R. Shenk points out that the goal of reviving ancient Churches has had a long history in modern missions, and has been attempted by the CMS in various places such as Greece, Turkey and Egypt. He describes such projects as part of a “grand vision” which “insisted that the *ecumenical* and *missionary* dimensions of the *missio Dei* belonged together.” For Shenk the difficulty of such a task, which these pages have certainly attested to, “in no way invalidates the theological and missiological integrity of the vision. Rather, it stands as a permanent challenge to rise above the conventional habits of thought and ecclesiastical parochialism in order to strive for ‘the more excellent way.’”⁸⁶ For Shenk, therefore, the deviation from such plans were a pragmatic move and ultimately regrettable, reflecting a separation of ecumenical and missionary motivations that ought to be held together.⁸⁷ To what extent twentieth-century conceptions of ecumenism and the *missio Dei* can be read back into the CMS Mission of Help and similar nineteenth-century projects is questionable. Nevertheless, there are theological and missiological lessons to be drawn from this episode regarding such issues as ecumenical recognition and partnership and we shall seek to comment further on these in Chapter 8 by way of conclusion.

For now we may note that a grand vision truly motivated the CMS Mission of Help, even though this vision was not expressed in the language of twentieth-century ecumenism. The problem, however, was that unity with the Syrian Christians and the effecting of their reform was based upon underestimating the magnitude of the differences between these two traditions. There does not appear to have been, amongst Bailey and his colleagues, a desire for a pragmatic pursuit of new approaches. Rather, when the separation came about there was a strong conviction that the work with the Syrians must go on through continued work in Scripture translation and education. Anglican churches were established with some reluctance, on Bailey’s part at least.

⁸⁶ Wilbert R. Shenk “Ancient Churches” and Modern Missions in the Nineteenth Century,’ in Richard Fox Young (ed), *India and the Indianness of Christianity*, 41-58, ref., 57.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Yet there seems to be evidence in the quotes in the opening paragraphs of this conclusion, and especially in the words of Bishop Gell, that presenting an alternative vision of worship and witness actually served to stimulate the Syrian Christians more than working alongside did. While we may question whether deliberate proselytism was motivating Bailey and his colleagues, Bergunder has helpfully pointed out that proselytism has actually sparked revival movements in older church traditions and older missions.⁸⁸ Whether, therefore, Bailey and his colleagues were guilty of proselytism either before or after the Mission of Help ended, their activities do appear to have had an ongoing reforming effect within the Syrian churches themselves. Hence their role in the ecclesiastical development of Kerala continued well beyond their own day. We shall investigate some of these later developments in Chapter 7.

⁸⁸ Bergunder, ‘Proselytism in the History of Christianity in India,’ 194.

Chapter 7 - The legacies of Benjamin Bailey and the Mission of Help

Introduction

Chapter 6 charted Bailey's time in Kerala after the Mission of Help ended up to his departure in 1850. It should be noted, however, that the legacies, for good or ill, of both Bailey and the Mission of Help continued long after this date. Indeed the names of Bailey, Fenn and Baker are still much in evidence in Kottayam today. This chapter will therefore seek to assess the ongoing legacies of the Mission of Help and Benjamin Bailey on the Church in Kerala. While the focus in Chapter 6 is mainly on how Bailey was involved in the beginnings of the Anglican Church in Kerala, in this chapter further consideration will be given to the impact of the CMS teaching on those who remained inside the Syrian Church, particularly Abraham *Malpān* and his nephew Mathew. The latter would be ordained in Antioch as the Metropolitan of Travancore, in competition with Mar Dionysius IV. These developments led in fullness of time to the breakaway Mar Thoma Church being set up in 1889 as a Reformed Syrian Church.

In addition, the work of Bailey and his colleagues left a considerable legacy on wider society. Brief consideration will therefore be given, in the first place, to Benjamin Bailey's work as a translator of Scripture and other works into Malayalam. A further aspect of CMS involvement was in relation to education. Bailey was the first of the British Principals of the Syrian College that became known in time as CMS College. Henry Baker was involved in developing parish schools. The CMS legacy was therefore ecclesiastical primarily, but it also impacted on wider society in Kerala. In discussing these points, however, it will be demonstrated that the Mission of Help coincided with several indigenous movements, within the Syrian Church and in wider society. The ecclesiastical developments in Kerala, and those which involved developments in wider society, will be considered against this indigenous backdrop. It will be concluded that although Bailey and the Mission of Help gave considerable stimulus to and helped shape the nineteenth-century changes to Kerala's churches and society, the involvement of foreign missionaries was by no means essential to some form of change taking place.

Bailey and the CMS as translators and educators

The legacies of Bailey and his colleagues that are most celebrated even today in Kerala involve his work as a translator of the Scriptures into Malayalam and the role that the CMS played in Kerala's education system. These achievements will therefore be considered in turn.

Bailey as a translator

It has been noted in this study that Benjamin Bailey's main task, outside his preaching and pastoral work, was the translation of the Scriptures into Malayalam. This was by no means his only translation work and many other books, of an educational nature, came from the CMS Press in Kottayam which was overseen by Bailey. Bailey was responsible for the first book printed in Malayalam in 1824 which was a textbook for schools and colleges.¹ Malayalam professor Babu Cherian sees this work as Bailey's initial attempt to develop a middle path Malayalam prose. At this point scholarly works, even in subjects such as medicine, were written in High Malayalam's poetic style. Bailey brought together this high style with colloquial Malayalam in such a way that his translation work was accessible to both the scholarly elites and the relatively uneducated.² By the time the full Malayalam Bible was published in 1841 the middle path prose had become standardised Malayalam.³ For Cherian, speaking from a linguistic viewpoint, a work called *Stories of the Holy Bible*, published in 1842, represented Bailey's middle style prose at its best.⁴

Cherian is keen to point out that translation and linguistic work was not Bailey's primary goal:

The translations he made into Malayalam, the establishment of the printing press, the designing and making of the improved types for printing, compiling of dictionaries etc. were, to Bailey, merely the secondary

¹ Babu Cherian, *Towards Modernity, The Story of the First College in India: The Impact of CMS College, Kottayam on Kerala Society and How it Paved the Way to Modernity*, New Delhi: Media House Publications (2014), 93.

² *Ibid.* 77.

³ *Ibid.* 93. For the date see his chronology in the same volume on 394.

⁴ Babu Cherian, *Benjamin Bailey the Ground Breaker*, Translated by C.O. Philip, Unpublished Manuscript (2016), 15. I am grateful to Dr. Cherian for making his published volume and this manuscript available to me.

results of the missionary work, but from a social and cultural point of view these are of paramount significance.⁵

P. Govindapillai agrees, acknowledging that the missionaries were primarily aiming at the dissemination of the Christian message, nevertheless their linguistic work resulted in the secularisation and democratisation of Malayalam. The grand claim is made that “[o]ne of the most important ways for mutual communication and dialogue among humankind is the secularised and democratised language.”⁶ Cherian sees this democratisation of the language as both flowing out from and, in turn influencing the life of the Syrian Church, where “the priesthood was pushed out of the church and the ‘masses’ controlled it.”⁷ This may be an overstatement, of course, but it seems a salient point to make that contemporary scholars of Malayalam recognise Bailey’s contribution to both church and society through his translation work.

That what is termed a middle path Malayalam prose developed through Bailey is probably due to his dependence on the King James Version of the English Bible in his Malayalam translation.⁸ The preface to this iconic English translation expressed the need for translation of Scripture into the vulgar tongue of the people. Yet not that vulgar! In following the King James Version Bailey wanted to produce a Bible translation that was elevated in its language whilst accessible. It is reasonable to suggest, therefore, that Bailey’s contribution to translation and language served to elevate thought and speech in Kerala generally.⁹

The translation skills of Bailey, however, were not universally lauded by his own contemporaries in the years after the Mission of Help. We have already seen in Chapter 5 above that on his return from furlough in 1834 some of his CMS colleagues were petitioning to have his translation of the New Testament replaced with another. John Chapman, the one-time Principal

⁵ Ibid, 10.

⁶ P Govindapillai, *Kerala Navodhanam Yuga Santhathikal Yugasilpikal*, Trivandrum: Chintha Publishers (2010), 44. Cited in Cherian, *Towards Modernity*, 104.

⁷ Cherian, *Towards Modernity*, 104.

⁸ Ibid, 77.

⁹ I owe this point to some discussion with Suzanne Owen and Jane de Gay at Leeds Trinity University.

of CMS College, wrote to John Tucker regarding Bailey on September 1st 1853. The date, and subsequent proposal by Chapman that Bailey's translation skills be further tested, strongly suggests that Bailey was still active in his Malayalam work whilst serving his rural parish of Shenton in Shropshire. In any case Chapman wrote to Tucker: "I am sure you will impute what I have to say only to purely disinterested motives, though it may seem, in a measure, unkind to one whom I greatly esteem for his works sake, as well as for much personal friendship to myself." It was Bailey's linguistic skills that Chapman seemed concerned about. He claimed that Bailey, as a translator, had no originality about him. Chapman claimed Bailey "is an excellent translator, where a very close and faithful rendering is essential, as in the case of the Bible & Prayer Book." He felt, however, that Bailey was led into servility by close translation in other literature, making the books "as useless to the general reader, as it is repugnant to men of ... taste in literature." Bailey's books for schools were described as overly bookish and too Anglican in manner. Chapman believed that Bailey's problem was "a weak circumlocutional style." For example rather than translating "he came to speak to me", Bailey would render "He came in order that he might speak to me." Chapman saw this as equally unacceptable in Malayalam as it is in English. He went on to suggest that the remaining missionaries were "greatly dissatisfied with his books." Chapman proposes a kind of trial for Bailey in which he is to translate a work of geography by one Col. Brown for perusal by the missionaries. All of this, Chapman was keen to stress was "my view" and "strictly confidential."¹⁰ In a prompt reply, Tucker stated "[p]erhaps your plan about Mr Bailey is a good one."¹¹

This piece of primary source evidence suggests that Bailey's legacy as a translator is not uncontested. While his influence has been appreciated by native-speaking Malayalam scholars in recent times, his contemporaries were not always so sure about Bailey's abilities. W.S. Hunt noted that by 1880 there were two Malayalam versions of the Bible. One, used in the North of Kerala, had been produced by the Basel Mission. Bailey's Bible, meanwhile, was used in

¹⁰ Rev J. Chapman to Rev. J. Tucker, September 1st 1853, CM House, London, CMS Archive, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham. CMS/ ACC 91/07/1

¹¹ Rev. J. Tucker to Rev. J. Chapman, September 6th 1853, CM House, London, CMS/ ACC 91/07/1. If the date and place given on these letters are accurate, it appears that Chapman and Tucker were both around CMS headquarters in London at this time and that this was really an internal correspondence.

Travancore and Cochin. At the turn of the twentieth century much work was therefore done to produce a unified version. This work was completed in 1910.¹² That there were two versions is attributed by Cherian to the fact that “there was a gulf of difference between the dialects of North and South Kerala.”¹³ This does not, however, reflect positively or negatively on Bailey’s work.

Bailey’s legacy as a translator and linguist is therefore somewhat contested. It is likely, however, that Bailey would have been less concerned about what was thought of his general educational output if the people of Kerala were getting the Scriptures into their hands in their own language. The fact that Chapman acknowledged, in the extract above, that Bailey “is an excellent translator, where a very close and faithful rendering is essential, as in the case of the Bible & Prayer Book” would have been praise enough for him.

One other aspect of Bailey’s work as a translator deserves attention at this point, namely his copying and summarising of letters in Syriac which reveal the internal power struggles of the Syrian Church. Sometime around 1840, Bailey had copied six letters in Syriac relating to the affairs of the Syrian Church.¹⁴ John Tucker noted on April 13th 1865 “[t]hese letters were copied by the Rev. B Bailey, at my request from the originals, which belong to the Metran of the Syrian Church in Travancore.”¹⁵ Bailey gave a summary of the contents of each of these letters. The letters actually date from the mid to late eighteenth century and basically relate to power struggles within the Syrian Church. Letter 2, which is dated 1753, for example, is from Ignatius, Patriarch of Antioch to the Malabar Church, calling upon them to recognise Mar Basileus and Mar Gregorius as their Bishops “and to put down Thomas, and with him the opinions and practices of the Nestorians, and to embrace the faith, and authority of the See (of Peter) of

¹² W.S. Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore and Cochin, 1816-1916*, Vol. II, Kottayam: CMS Press (1968), 263.

¹³ Cherian, *Towards Modernity*, 99.

¹⁴ Bailey to Tucker – Cottayam, 14th Sept 1840, CMS/ ACC 91/07/1.

¹⁵ Letters in Syriac, copied by Rev. B Bailey, CMS/ACC 91 02/4. James Hough had returned them to Tucker in a letter dated C.M. House, Oct 19th 1841. They had been read by a Dr Mill who had burnt one of them with a candle! Hence Bailey must have worked on these by 1840 at the latest. John Fenwick claims Bailey translated them around 1820 but does not give a reason for this dating. See Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops: The Malabar Independent Syrian Church and its Place in the Story of the St Thomas Christians of South India*, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies, Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press (2009), 194. If, however, this work was commissioned by Tucker as the letters seem to claim, a date around 1840 is more likely.

Antioch.”¹⁶ Letter 5, also dated 1753 is from Mar Ignatius Gregorius, Patriarch of Antioch to Mar Thoma, the Indian, “expostulating with him for his disobedience to Mar Basileus and Mar Gregorius.” Mar Thoma is warned he could not be confirmed as Bishop unless he recognised the latter two bishops. He is also urged not to rely on authority from Mar Gabriel, who died at Kottayam in 1736, since “he was not a Syriac but a Nestorian.” Mar Thoma is given a promise, however, of “confirmation in the episcopate, on condition of recognising his envoys.”¹⁷ A sixth collection of four letters includes a note that Mar Thoma was eventually recognised as Metropolitan of Malabar under the name Mar Dionysius.¹⁸

These letters, summarised in English by Bailey, suggest that the Jacobite tradition in the Syrian Church in Kerala was itself contested.¹⁹ Bailey and Tucker are discussing the importance of these letters around 1840 when the split between the Syrians and CMS was fresh in the mind, and the legal repercussions over property which ensued were ongoing. The picture that emerges from these letters is one of considerable disunity and confusion within the Syrian Church. Around 1840 and in the years that follow, therefore, Bailey and his CMS colleagues were seeking to get to the bottom of historic wrangling in the Syrian Church for their own purposes. It is highly likely that Bailey was also seeking to help the Syrians to understand something of their own history. This was a move designed to show that attachment to Antioch was by no means the unbroken history of this ancient church. By the CMS having access to these letters, the Syrians could be portrayed as internally divided and theologically conflicted. Such information, on the one hand, could have encouraged disaffected Syrians to join the Anglican Church. On the other, the reformers within the Syrian Church would be strengthened to argue for greater purity of doctrine and unity going forward.

Bailey’s legacy as a Bible translator and linguist is therefore complex, yet highly significant. While it overstates the case to suggest that he and he alone gave the people of Kerala their Bible, Bailey nevertheless did set a course in Bible translation that effected much greater societal

¹⁶ Ibid, Letter 2.

¹⁷ Ibid, Letter 5.

¹⁸ Ibid, Letter 6.

¹⁹ For a discussion of whether the Syrian Christians were Nestorian or Jacobite historically see Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, Vol. 1, Maryknoll: Orbis (1998), 500-501. Also Vol. 2 (2005), Chapter 1.

change. Moreover, his linguistic work in copying and summarising Syriac letters related to the Syrian Church make him a key figure in attempts to understand the history of the ancient Church of Kerala. The letters selected played an important role in giving the CMS a continued rationale for involvement in Kerala after the Mission of Help had ended. Encouragement may also have been given to the Reform party of Abraham *Malpān* that the course they were following was a good and necessary one.

Bailey and the CMS as teachers

Benjamin Bailey, and his CMS colleagues, undoubtedly made a lasting impact on Kerala's education system. What was distinctive about the educational legacies of Bailey and the CMS were that the efforts of the College and parish schools as developed by Bailey, Joseph Fenn and Henry Baker helped to pave the way for what has been termed colonial modernity.²⁰ This was a considerable achievement which flowed out of the desire for the ancient Syrian Church to be reformed. It is important to note, however, that there was indigenous agency involved in the development of Kerala's education system. Writing in 1970 K.J. Mathew claimed that initiatives in education and equality of opportunity, often credited solely to missionaries, actually had indigenous roots amongst the Thomas Christian Community. Mathew wrote pointed out that “[t]he Nazaranees were the first to organize a village education system with a school attached to each parish.”²¹ That significant educational legacies flowed from the Mission of Help can hardly be doubted. These, however, built upon existing efforts amongst the Thomas Christians themselves.

Our focus at this point, however, is on how the educational initiatives that the CMS pursued shaped the ecclesiastical development of Kerala. To this end we must introduce two men who were at the centre of the reform movement within the Syrian Church, namely Abraham *Malpān* and his nephew Mathew. Abraham, whose contribution as a reformer will be discussed below, was deeply impacted by his collaboration with Bailey and the other missionaries at the College

²⁰ See Cherian, *Towards Modernity*, who develops this thesis throughout his book.

²¹ K.J. Mathew, ‘The Role of the Kerala Church in Indian Culture’, in Jacob Vellian (ed), *The Malabar Church: Symposium in honour of Rev. Placid J. Podipora C.M.I.*, Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute (1970), 119-121, ref., 120. Nazaranees/Nazranis is another name for the Thomas or Syrian Christians.

in Kottayam. This formal cooperation ended with the separation that took place in 1836 (as discussed in Chapter 5 above), but Abraham remained a trusted friend of the missionaries within the Syrian Church. Moreover, the Mavelikara *Padiyola* of 1836, while not the occasion of Abraham's leaving the Jacobite Syrian Church, nevertheless served only to redouble his efforts for reform. In this sense, the *Padiyola* has been understood as coming too late. For by 1836 Abraham has been credited with being the leader of a significant group of Syrians who were prepared to follow the doctrines of the CMS missionaries to a considerable extent.²² The teaching these indigenous reformers had imbibed, moreover, was learned through their interactions with Bailey, Fenn, and others in the College which was the centrepiece of the educational efforts of the CMS in Travancore.

Abraham's nephew Mathew was to be a hugely significant, if controversial, figure in the history of the Church in Kerala. On the very basis of his being the nephew of Abraham, he had the potential to be a leading character, as succession in the priesthood from uncle to nephew was a centuries-long feature of the Thomas Christian community.²³ Again, some discussion of Mathew's role will be engaged in later in this chapter. Here, however, it is suffice to note that Bailey and his colleagues in Kerala and Madras were well acquainted with Abraham's nephew. This relationship was forged through the links with Abraham and developed at the CMS training institution in Madras where Mathew studied for a time. Mathew, in other words, came to the attention of Bailey and his colleagues in Kerala and Madras through their educational efforts. In a letter to the missionaries dated July 19th 1837, the Rev. John Tucker in Madras commented concerning Mathew the Deacon that he "commends himself to all of you who know him by his Christian simplicity, uprightness and diligence." Tucker added: "I trust it may please God in due

²² See Lucas Vithuvattical, C.M.I., 'The Reformed Missal of Abraham Malpan (Doctrine of the Real Presence and Sacrifice in the reformed missal of Abraham Malpan)', in Jacob Vellian (ed), *The Malabar Church: Symposium in honour of Rev. Placid J. Podipora C.M.I.*, Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute (1970), 33-40, especially 34.

²³ On these lines of succession see John Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops*, 336-337 and Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700-1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1989), 287.

time to make him a faithful and profitable servant to that part of the Church to which he belongs. I request that the enclosed letter from him to his uncle may be delivered.”²⁴

Notwithstanding Tucker’s positive assessment, the picture concerning Mathew’s relationship with the CMS is a somewhat complicated one. Mathew was expelled from the Madras training school for purportedly cheating in a translation exercise.²⁵ Mathew chronicles these events himself in a couple of English language diaries held at the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary in Kottayam. There were four areas of controversy that he apparently had with his CMS superiors: 1. Some debate over whether he dined with Europeans, 2. The length of his stay in a certain lady’s house, 3. A misunderstanding regarding chewing tobacco (it is likely that this was betel) and 4. Whether or not he had used a Latin text in an examination.²⁶ Mathew also claimed in one of his diaries that it was the dismissal of Constantine Varma, a close friend and the Raja of Travancore’s son, which confirmed his decision to leave the Madras Institution:

It was not my intention so soon to leave the “Ins” but the course of proceedings adopted by the Com[mittee] against M [i.e. Ravarma] and another student, both of whom I highly esteemed, loved and always considered very exemplary in their conduct and truly devoted in heart to God and his work decided me.²⁷

These events confirm that the influence of Bailey and his colleagues was considerable, even outside the official confines of the relationship established through the Mission of Help. While Bailey retained the desire for native agency to be primarily involved in reformation of the Syrian Church, such agents were to act in accordance with beliefs and practices considered normative by the CMS. These were instilled through the translation by Bailey of suitable literature and by the curricula and discipline imposed in the CMS training institutions. Mathew, however, was not merely passive in accepting such relationships. Fenwick argues that in the incident with Mathew in Madras “the impression given is not so much of a dishonest individual, but of an intelligent

²⁴ Rev. J Tucker to the Rev. Missionaries at Kottayam, Madras, July 19th 1837, Appendix V in P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians and the Church Missionary Society, 1816-1840*, Kottayam (2015 [1935]), 444-446.

²⁵ Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops*, 415.

²⁶ Ibid, 416-417.

²⁷ Diary of Mathew Mar Athanasios. Marthoma Theological Seminary, MTS/A/229. Cited in Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops*, 418.

and self-assured young man who chafed under the regime of his Victorian masters.”²⁸ Whatever the precise causes of his departure from Madras, amicable relations were soon restored with Tucker and the Kottayam missionaries. Moreover, he shared in some measure at least the concerns that the CMS had for the reform and renewing of the Syrian Church.²⁹ That this was so is testimony to the fact that the teaching and literary work of Bailey and his colleagues did gain considerable traction amongst a significant number of influential players within the Syrian Church. It is to an assessment of the ongoing legacy of Bailey and others for the Church in Kerala that attention must now turn.

The contested ecclesiastical legacies of Bailey and the CMS

Having discussed the role of Bailey in the formation of Anglican congregations in Kerala in Chapter 6, we now turn to the contested legacy of Bailey and his colleagues within the Syrian Church. Again Abraham and Mathew are key figures. We shall look at the role of each in turn, seeking to bear in mind to what extent Bailey and his colleagues stood behind the courses of action which they took.

Abraham Malpān’s call for reformation

More must be said about the Syrian reform movement which had begun under the leadership of Palakunnathu Abraham *Malpān*. Abraham himself, as we have seen in Chapter 6, was anxious for reformation to take hold amongst the Syrians. Believing this to be unlikely, he resigned his role in the College with the hope that reforms could at least be effected in his own parish of Maramon. In making reforms on this local scale, Abraham ensured his prominent place in the ecclesiastical history of Kerala as a whole. His success, it may be suggested, lay in his appropriation of the Reformed principles of the CMS missionaries in a way which avoided the Anglicanisation of his congregation. Changes included the holding of Sunday services in Malayalam, while auricular confession, prayers for the dead, and seeking the intercession of the Virgin Mary and the Saints were stopped in Maramon. He also followed the practice of giving

²⁸ Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops*, 417.

²⁹ Ibid, 419-420.

both bread and wine separately at the Lord's Supper to the laity.³⁰ What Abraham didn't change will be considered below. It is worth noting presently, however, that these were quite significant changes. Earlier chapters have borne ample witness to how Buchanan, Munro, and Bailey viewed what they considered aberrations in Syrian worship to be due to Roman Catholic influence. Whether or not this was entirely so, Abraham shared the concern of the missionaries and Munro over these practices. While Abraham did not change everything, those outlined here reflect a significant shift in the understanding of Christ's sacrifice and mediation, key issues in theologies of Christian salvation. In the outworking of these beliefs in church practice, Abraham aligned himself with Bailey and the missionaries.

In other matters of Christian practice, such as the introduction of regular preaching and making plans for the Lord's Day to be strictly observed, Abraham was making fairly radical changes to the practices of former times.³¹ These were changes which Bailey himself sought to implement and were aspects of worship and practice that had fallen into some disuse prior to the Mission of Help.³² Abraham also saw the need for this reformation to be popularised and did so largely by encouraging family worship in the houses of his parishioners. Through these latter acts of reformation, the reform movement began to spread beyond Abraham's own parish. Various young deacons of the Church were deeply influenced and chose to stand by the *Malpān* over and against the Metropolitan.³³ The influence of Bailey and his colleagues in these developments are certainly not to be underestimated. One recent work describes the influence of the missionaries on Abraham thus: "By his study of the scriptures and his association with the missionaries Abraham Malpan acquired a deep understanding of the gospel."³⁴ Yet the missionaries could

³⁰ These details about Abraham's reforms are found in P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 294.

³¹ *Ibid*, 294.

³² It is helpful at this point to remind ourselves of the observation on Bailey's preaching in Chapter 4 above by an unnamed military officer visiting Travancore in the early 1820s: "Mr Bailey went through a part of the English Liturgy in (Malayalam), and then preached a short sermon to them, on the ninth verse of the Fourth Chapter of the First Epistle of John. During the Sermon, contrary to their usual custom, they were all attention, and crowded one upon another, in order to get nearer to the Preacher. The Catanars appeared particularly struck ... for this was the first Sermon which they had ever heard, it not being the custom among them to preach." *Missionary Register*, 1823, 153.

³³ Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 294-295.

³⁴ Zac Varghese Kannisseril and Matthew A. Kallumpram, *Glimpses of Mar Thoma Church History*, London: The Society of St. Thomas and St. Augustine (2003), 24.

hardly be accused of forcing these developments on the reformers within the Syrian Church. Abraham's vision seems to have been to make reformation, based on vernacular Bible reading, a truly grassroots movement. That there was a vernacular Bible to read was due in large measure to the efforts of Benjamin Bailey. It is evident, therefore, that Abraham enthusiastically embraced Bailey's vision for vernacular Bible reading and preaching. He appropriated the thinking and practice of the CMS missionaries to a considerable extent.

Yet Abraham's reforms were neither uncritical of the Western theological tradition nor unduly disrespectful of Syrian traditions. For example, he did not introduce the *Filioque* clause into the Nicene-Contantinopolitan Creed.³⁵ Whether or not the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father alone or from the Son also (*filioque*) marked out the historic division between Eastern and Western churches, dating back to the eleventh century. On this issue, therefore, Abraham *Malpān* stood firmly in the Eastern Church tradition and can hardly be seen as an unthinking pawn in the proselytising fervour of Western missionaries.³⁶ Moreover, it appears that Abraham was very cautious concerning reform where he did not consider change to be imperative for doctrinal reasons. Cherian notes: "He took care to see that, subject to these innovations, the form and exterior of the Kurbana service, and the arrangement for public worship, were changed as little as possible."³⁷ More recently John Fenwick has claimed that Abraham "remained ... deeply conservative in many respects."³⁸ Abraham was not a man who desired change for change's sake, or simply to please missionary benefactors.

Having noted Abraham's conservatism, however, where he believed that current practice amongst the Syrians conflicted with Scriptural norms, he was strident in his calls for reform. He was not without his supporters and in the wake of the breach with the CMS Abraham was one of eleven senior vicars who continued working on a strategy for reformation. This group of clergy listed twenty-four practices they believed corrupted the faith and practice of the Malankara Syrian Church. They understood the publication of these twenty-four concerns to be a trumpet

³⁵ Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 294.

³⁶ On this historic division between East and West see, for example, Robert Letham, *Through Western Eyes: Eastern Orthodoxy: A Reformed Perspective*, Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor (2007), 128ff.

³⁷ Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 294.

³⁸ Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops*, 403-404.

call for reformation, not unlike Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses*. The aims of these proposals were to correct abuses, corruptions, extra-biblical practices and Hindu-influenced rituals.³⁹ Whilst, therefore, this was an indigenous reform movement, Abraham and his associates strove to be Christian first and Indian second.

Consideration of some of these twenty-four proposals will give us a window into the influence of Bailey on the thinking and concerns of the reform party. The second proposal sought to undercut perceived abuses of the sacrament of baptism: "It is necessary for a baptised child to be instructed in the Christian faith when he/she is grown up so that the baptism is complete. But no such instruction is given and he/she is allowed to marry in church."⁴⁰ So Abraham is here concerned that the sacramental practice of the Syrians begets a nominal Christianity. Again we remember that the proper subjects for Baptism were a discussion point for Bailey and his missionary circle as early as 1821.⁴¹ So like Bailey, Abraham was not content that children simply be baptised and named as Christians and then not be encouraged to actively embrace the Christian faith. He seeks to guard against the perpetuation of this cycle by even raising the question of whether such children can then, when the time comes, marry in church. It is not difficult to discern here the influence of Evangelical Churchmen such as Benjamin Bailey. Chapter 4 above reminded us of his concern, in his early days in Kerala, that many of the Syrians were Christian in name only. Abraham's concern two decades later was to seek to prevent such a situation arising through insisting on proper instruction of those who had been baptised.

Abraham seemed equally concerned about what regular Sunday services looked like in the Syrian Church around 1836. Hence the seventh proposal (or comment) read:

On Sundays when the people came to church it was incumbent on the priest to read the Holy Scriptures, interpret its meaning in a sermon and thereafter celebrate the Holy Communion. Instead the people were asked to come early and the priest demanded from the people betel leaves and areca nuts, the people argued and quarrelled among themselves and assaulted the verger. Both men and women used the occasion to

³⁹ Kannisseril and Kallumpram, *Glimpses of Mar Thoma Church History*, 29.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Bailey's Journal May 1821 to November 1821, C I2/027/17. See the discussion in Chapter 4 above.

gossip and create unpleasantness. Then at the last hour the priest would start the celebration of the Holy Communion debasing its sanctity.⁴²

It seems unlikely that this was referring to what went on in general at every Syrian Church service. It is more likely to be a composite description of the types of abuse that occurred too regularly in Syrian congregations. The main change being called for here is that the reading and preaching of the Bible, in the vernacular, be given a much more central place in worship. Again the influence of Bailey here is unmistakable. It was observed in Chapter 4 above that Bailey himself preached in the Syrian congregations from the start of the Mission of Help, trained some of the clergy in preaching methods and certainly left quite an impression on some through this practice. Abraham and his supporters had appropriated this emphasis and practice and wished others would do the same.

Abraham's concern throughout the 'Trumpet Call' was for the purity and discipline of his beloved Church. Proposal sixteen was on this theme:

It was clearly laid down in the canons that the makers of idols, astrologers, fortune-tellers and heretics should be avoided by the people and debarred from the church. Instead the priests resorted to magic and witchcraft and cast spells to protect crops and resorted to heretical acts.⁴³

Again we must remember that Abraham was concerned with abuses. He is probably not here giving a description of things that were very common practice in the Syrian Church. Nevertheless, such strong sentiments could well have been found in the public pronouncements of the strident young missionaries Woodcock or Peet.⁴⁴ Yet here we see them on the lips of one of the Syrian Church's own clergy.

Lucas Vithuvattical C.M.I. noted that there were, in effect, ten major doctrines and three areas of discipline that Abraham wished to have reformed. Writing from a Roman Catholic perspective, Vithuvattical was most concerned to note how Syrian liturgy was changed by Abraham concerning the Eucharist. The reforms made brought the reformed liturgy used in Maramon and

⁴² Kannisseril and Kallumpram, *Glimpses of Mar Thoma Church History*, 30.

⁴³ Kannisseril and Kallumpram, *Glimpses of Mar Thoma Church History*, 30.

⁴⁴ See Chapter 5 for examples of the rhetoric of these two CMS missionaries.

elsewhere more in line with the Reformed and Anglican understanding of Christ's presence in the elements at the Eucharist.⁴⁵ Undoubtedly this was a bold and audacious move by Abraham *Malpān*. Yet, as highlighted above, the characterisation of Abraham remains as one who is deeply conservative regarding changing the worship of the Syrian Church. That he took such steps suggests that he was deeply committed to new understandings of Scripture that he had come to. These new insights were at least in part in consequence of his contact with the missionaries of the CMS. William Henry Taylor sees the understanding of Bailey and his colleagues on these issues as representing hard-line Protestantism.⁴⁶ Such may be the case. Yet it is worth noting that in Abraham an Oriental Church leader who never joined a Protestant communion became persuaded of such views.

Abraham, it is interesting to note, was influenced by the CMS missionaries also in his methods. He was not afraid to deploy 'the powers that be' in seeking to persuade his church to embark on reform. This is another aspect of Bailey's legacy, even if an unintentional one. Chapter 3 above demonstrates the extent to which Munro and Bailey were in close contact, with the former seeking to shape the early direction of the Mission of Help and the latter viewing Munro as an important, if overbearing, counsellor. Reform-minded Syrians, through Munro and the missionaries' example, had developed an expectation of finding a sympathetic ear with the Resident. To that end, Kannisseril and Kallumpram note that "'The Trumpet Call' listing the ... 24 points was submitted to the British Resident, Colonel Fraser, as a memorandum, requesting him as an independent person to persuade the Metropolitan to consider the reforms."⁴⁷ Fraser, however, does not seem to have been particularly interested in Abraham's 'Trumpet Call.'

Nor was Fraser responsive to another plan by Abraham to have reformist leadership over the whole Syrian communion. The Malabar Independent Syrian Church (MISC) continues to this day in and around Thoziyhur, to the north of Kottayam and the Jacobite heartland. Since the eighteenth century this small Church of one diocese has had its own Metropolitans. It was, in

⁴⁵ Vithuvattical, 'The Reformed Missal,' 35-38.

⁴⁶ William Henry Taylor, *Antioch and Canterbury: The Syrian Orthodox Church and the Church of England 1874-1928*, Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press (2005), 124.

⁴⁷ Kannisseril and Kallumpram, *Glimpses of Mar Thoma Church History*, 33-34.

fact, from this Church that Mar Philoxenes, the sympathetic Metran of the whole Syrian Communion, and Mar Dionysius III, had come. The Mission of Help had therefore co-opted the leaders of the MISC for their reform purposes. Yet it is worth noting that the ethos of the MISC seems to have been more agreeable to Bailey and his colleagues from the start and its life largely left uninterrupted by the Mission of Help. These events had served to bring the MISC influence disproportionate to its size. In any case, this more reform-minded stance had continued in the MISC into the late 1830s and beyond. A priest by the name of George was at this time engaging in vernacular prayers and preaching at Anjur, a small village under the See of Thozhiyur. The MISC Metran, Mar Koorilose III, was seen as “not unsympathetic to reform.” Abraham therefore petitioned Fraser that Mar Koorilose III should replace Mar Dionysius IV. He was, however, unsuccessful since Fraser was unwilling to act on a petition that only had representation from twelve out of fifty-six Syrian churches in Travancore.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Abraham persisted with reform in his own parish of Maramon.⁴⁹

Mar Dionysius IV responded to these developments by excommunicating the entire Maramon congregation. The Metropolitan issued a warning to all parishes that they must not listen to Abraham *Malpān*’s reformation teachings. The reading of the Scriptures in Malayalam met with his strong disapproval and he insisted that the Gospel be read in Syriac.⁵⁰ He also resolved to exclude from the priesthood any candidates who trained under Abraham *Malpān*.⁵¹ Through these actions the Metran was sending a strong signal that CMS-influenced congregations had better get back in line. There is more than a hint here, that whatever Bailey and the Mission of Help had achieved, there had nevertheless been further fractures created in the Syrian Church through contact with the missionaries. Abraham was deeply concerned by these developments, anxious as he was to ensure proper episcopal ordination. Such concern was, perhaps, a token of his loyalty to the Syrian Church rather than proof of any disloyalty. It is claimed that Joseph Peet the CMS missionary had actually offered Abraham a good salary to join the new Anglican Diocese being formed. Abraham apparently replied “[i]t is better to stay in one’s humble kitchen

⁴⁸ See Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops*, 409-410.

⁴⁹ Kannisseril and Kallumpram, *Glimpses of Mar Thoma Church History*, 34.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 36.

⁵¹ Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 295.

than living in somebody else's golden mansion."⁵² According to Kannisseril and Kallumpram this reply "showed that his determined aim was to reform the Church established by Holy Apostle Thomas and to work faithfully for that Church till the end and not to establish a new Church."⁵³ The issue of ordination was, however, a huge issue for Abraham and in dealing with the problem he shows that his loyalty was combined with shrewdness. It was at this point, therefore, that Abraham took steps which would open up a long and highly controversial chapter in the history of the Syrian Churches of Kerala. If his attempts to replace Mar Dionysius IV with the MISC Metran had failed, he would now take matters into his own hands. Moreover, he would do so in a way which sought to respect the familial lines of succession, from uncle to nephew, that were a centuries-long feature of the Thomas Christian community. He would seek to get Mathew consecrated as Metropolitan by the Patriarch in Antioch himself.

The influence of Bailey and the Mission of Help on Abraham is therefore somewhat ambiguous. While he owed a debt to the missionaries theologically, he nevertheless firmly resisted some aspects of Anglican and Western theology, such as incorporation of the *Filioque* clause in the Creed. On a personal level he could, no doubt, have been a great trophy of Anglicanism had he chosen to defect from the Syrian Church. He chose not to. He was a truly indigenous reformer in that respect.

Mathew Mar Athanasios: The missionaries' Metran?

In choosing to take the action he did to secure a reforming Metran, Abraham in actual fact limited the ongoing influence of Bailey and the missionaries. He was appropriating their Reformed theology whilst resisting Anglicanising influences. For this reason, his nephew Mathew's becoming Metran now merits brief consideration. As shall become clear Bailey's influence continued under Mathew, but the latter's leadership ensured, even more so than under Abraham, that the Syrian reform movement forged its own distinctive identity. It was around

⁵² Cited in Kannisseril and Kallumpram, *Glimpses of Mar Thoma Church History*, 38.

⁵³ Ibid.

1841 that Mathew set out for Mesopotamia to meet the Patriarch.⁵⁴ After almost two years abroad and at least seven months' interaction with the Patriarch Elias II of the Syrian Jacobites, Mathew was consecrated Metropolitan of the Malabar Syrian Church.⁵⁵ Cheriyan believed that this long acquaintance bolstered Mathew's credentials for the role, commenting: "Of none of the many Metrans whom the Patriarchs had from time to time consecrated for Malabar, could it be said that the consecration took place after such a prolonged period of personal acquaintance between the Patriarch and the candidate for consecration."⁵⁶ Abraham, therefore, seemed to have good grounds to hope that his nephew would be both lawfully consecrated and able to deliver the reform agenda he wished to see. The implications of this move, however, were probably not foreseen by Abraham and would cause much trouble over the next forty years (and beyond) in the Syrian Church.⁵⁷ The role that Benjamin Bailey and the CMS played in this ecclesiastical turbulence now needs some further consideration.

To read some of the critics of Mathew and his Metropolitanship, the impression is distinctly given that Mathew was the missionaries' Metran. If this narrative holds true, Bailey and his colleagues can justly be charged with a legacy of interference in Syrian Church affairs that caused divisions that remain to the present day. The case for the CMS role being divisive and politically driven is put eloquently by E.M. Philip. As mentioned above in Chapter 3, Philip was from a priestly Jacobite family whose grandfather and uncle were first hand witnesses to these turbulent events. Philip does not seem overly critical of Abraham *Malpān*. His nephew Mathew, however, is another matter. It is also germane for our purposes that Philip seems intent on laying the blame for the problems Mathew caused at the door of the CMS missionaries.

Philip begins by noting, rightly, that Mathew had actually been dismissed from the CMS institution in Madras. Yet despite this he had managed to ingratiate himself with the Patriarch

⁵⁴ It must be said that the precise role of Abraham in sending Mathew to Antioch for consecration has been questioned. Fenwick draws on primary source material to claim that Mathew himself denied his uncle's involvement in 1843. Fenwick comments: "The signs are that Mathew was intelligent enough and ambitious enough to have reached the obvious conclusion himself." See Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops*, 421.

⁵⁵ For the time frames see *Ibid*, 436, n. 48.

⁵⁶ Cheriyan, *The Malabar Syrians*, 295.

⁵⁷ It was after forty years that a split in the Syrian Church led to the formation of the Mar Thoma Church, a reformed Syrian Church.

and get himself consecrated as Metropolitan – this, despite a claim by Philip that Mathew's ordination as deacon was a fabrication, since the Jacobite Metran who he claimed did so was in fact dead!⁵⁸ Philip viewed Mathew Mar Athanasios's ascendancy as attributable to political interference from the Travancore Resident and government and his own shrewdness.⁵⁹ On the later consecration in 1867 of Mar Dionysius V, the rival Jacobite Metran, Philip bemoans political interference which strengthened his rival's hands. This was due, Philip claims, to the "influence which Mar Athanasius had with the British Resident and with the C.M.S. missionaries."⁶⁰ The CMS are therefore blamed for continuing to interfere in the Syrian Church's life, if not by a direct relationship, then through supporting the reform faction and by political machinations. The Anglican missionaries were also seen as either naïve or dishonest about the rival Metropolitan's character. While Philip claimed Mar Athanasios had moral deficiencies, "he was, in the opinion of the missionaries of the C.M.S., the most pious bishop the Syrian Church ever had, and one who deserved their special sympathy and support."⁶¹ Philip's view of the said bishop tended toward the other extreme: "In Mar Athanasius, the evil genius was so much in the ascendant that the Syrian community could not endure him."⁶²

From the time of Mathew Mar Athanasios's arrival back in Travancore in 1843, it is clear enough that his relationship with the CMS was too ambiguous for him being perceived as the missionaries' Metran. On the one hand there were high hopes amongst CMS personnel that "it will please God to employ him as an instrument for reviving and reforming the ancient Church to which he belongs."⁶³ On the other, news of his consecration seems to have taken John Tucker, Bailey and others by surprise.⁶⁴ Mathew himself was keen to ensure good standing with Tucker, given his previous record in Madras, and did so by playing on the anti-Catholicism of the CMS.

⁵⁸ E.M. Philip, *The Indian Church of St. Thomas*, Kottayam (1907), 245-246.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 249-250.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 256.

⁶¹ Ibid, 252.

⁶² Ibid, 253.

⁶³ The quote is from a letter to the Madras Corresponding Committee from the CMS Headquarters in London. Cited in Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 297.

⁶⁴ Tucker to Peet, Madras, 2nd July 1842, CMS/ACC 91 02/05. Cited in Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops*, 445.

He assured Tucker that he stood with the Evangelicals over against the Tractarians.⁶⁵ This was no doubt reassuring to Tucker and the Travancore missionaries.⁶⁶ Yet there is evidence that Benjamin Bailey for one was not entirely convinced by Mathew Mar Athanasios or the whole idea of his Metropolitanship. Bailey wrote to Tucker advising him that Mar Dionysius IV “intends to try to tie Mar Athanasios down very tightly and if the latter submit the former will be disposed to take him by the hand.”⁶⁷ Bailey could probably see trouble ahead. Indeed, Mathew was in no mood to accept this offer. His plan was the diametric opposite. Mathew himself told Joseph Peet that

he would consent to join with the old Metran upon the condition that the old man would go into honourable retirement, or, to use his [i.e. Mathew’s] own words, that he should go about and rule the Churches in the old Metran’s name and the old Gentleman to sit quiet.⁶⁸

Added to this dangerous cocktail was uncertainty in the mind of Bailey and the others as to just where Mathew really stood on the question of reformation. Bailey confided various concerns he had in Tucker and added “nor do I think he has a yet made up his mind on the subject [of reform].”⁶⁹ On the question of reform, Fenwick notes “[s]tatements about Mathew Mar Athanasios’ commitment to reform must be balanced by his apparently equally strong commitment to West Syrian liturgical practice.”⁷⁰ He had, after all, more prolonged experience of people living by this liturgy than any other Indians to this point having spent at least seven months with the Patriarch in Antioch.⁷¹ In relation to the missionaries, Mathew was very much his own man. As Fenwick argues, “Mar Athanasios maintained good relations with the

⁶⁵ Athanasios Malabar to Tucker, 14th March 1843. CMS/ ACC 91 02/ 05. Cited in Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops*, 437, n. 82.

⁶⁶ See the discussion in Chapter 5 above on the influence Tractarianism had on the missionaries’ attitude to the Syrian Church in the Mission of Help.

⁶⁷ Bailey to Tucker, Kottayam, 27th May 1843, CMS/ACC 91 02/05. Cited in Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops*, 441.

⁶⁸ Peet to Tucker, Mavalikara, 11th November 1843, CMS/ACC 91 02/05. Cited in Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops*, 441.

⁶⁹ Bailey to Tucker, Kottayam 27th May 1843 CMS/ACC 91 02/05. Cited in Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops*, 446.

⁷⁰ Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops*, 453.

⁷¹ Ibid, 454-455.

missionaries, but it is certainly incorrect to see him as merely exercising their ‘agenda’ among the Puthenkuttukar [i.e. Jacobite Syrians].”⁷²

These observations from primary sources and recent scholarship lend credence to the argument that the reform movement in the Syrian Christian community had indigenous roots and motivations and cannot wholly be explained by the Mission of Help. What Benjamin Bailey and his colleagues did was provide theological stimulus. The translation of Scripture and revised liturgies into Malayalam also gave the movement considerable momentum. Yet Mathew Mar Athanasios cannot be described as the missionaries’ Metran.

Assessing the legacies of Benjamin Bailey and the Mission of Help

From the mid-1840s to the late 1880s there followed a bewildering power struggle for leadership amongst the Syrian Jacobites. A summary paragraph shall suffice for present purposes. Mar Dionysius IV did not quietly agree to disappear and allow Mathew Mar Athanasios to take up the reins of power. The former, however, eventually overreached himself in 1852 when conspiring with Mar Cyril, a delegate of the Patriarch, in a power play. Appeal to the Travancore authorities saw him accused of forging documents, and so in 1852 the Travancore Government recognised Mathew Mar Athanasios as Metropolitan of Malabar.⁷³ This was not the end of the matter, however. Mar Cyril re-emerged at a more favourable time after five years of obscurity in 1857 as a rival Metropolitan.⁷⁴ Then in 1867 Mar Dionysius V was consecrated by the Patriarch. So there remained a reform party and a conservative party within the Syrian Church. From 1867 the upper hand very much was with the conservatives who became known as ‘the Patriarch’s party.’ Neutrality by government on ecclesiastical matters was a serious setback for Mathew Mar Athanasios who died in 1877 to be succeeded by Mar Thomas Athanasios. For the next decade litigation over power and property continued. A final reversal in 1889 led Mar Thomas Athanasios and his followers to secede from the Jacobite Church and they formed the Mar

⁷² Ibid, 446.

⁷³ Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians*, 298.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 299.

Thoma Church.⁷⁵ The ecclesiastical legacy of the Mission of Help therefore ultimately led to a communion being formed which left behind aspects of the Syrian Liturgy with which the CMS were most concerned. These reforms were very much in line with what Abraham *Malpān* and Mathew Mar Athanasios, from their contact with the missionaries, had been committed to. Yet they probably did not go as far as Benjamin Bailey and his colleagues would have liked.

We therefore need to consider to what extent the Mar Thoma Church, and division in the Syrian Church, is a heritage of the Mission of Help led by Benjamin Bailey and others. It will be seen that while the Mission of Help gave shape to what the reformation looked like theologically, that such a reformation took place cannot be entirely attributed to them. Indigenous factors and agency were also at work. In this respect E.M. Philip went too far in viewing the Mar Thoma secession as directly attributable to CMS activities.⁷⁶ More recent writers from a Syrian Christian viewpoint, however, tend to see the reform movement as attributable to both missionary involvement and indigenous initiative. Moreover the reforms that led to the eventual formation of the Mar Thoma Church were part of wider societal reform movements moving Kerala away from feudalistic Brahmanism.⁷⁷

These indigenous movements spanned the period of the Mission of Help and beyond. The Syrian College was, it could be argued, an indigenous enterprise. From 1815 to 1817 its leadership was held by Syrian Christians. Col. Munro was dissatisfied with this leadership to be sure. Hence Benjamin Bailey became the first in a long line of British Anglican superintendents or principals.⁷⁸ The salient point, however, as we consider the legacies of Bailey and the Mission of Help, is that the desire for such a college appears to have come from the Syrian Christians themselves. At the very least then, in the years during the Mission of Help and subsequently, the CMS and reform-minded Syrians were jointly responsible for the ecclesiastical and societal

⁷⁵ For more detail on these developments see Hunt, *The Anglican Church in Travancore*, Vol. II, 179-190.

⁷⁶ Philip, *The Indian Church*, Chapter XXI.

⁷⁷ Sabu Isaac Auvaneeswaram, *Hybrid Identity of the Mar Thoma Church – Unveiled through the debate: Yuhanon Mar Thoma Vs. K.N. Daniel*, Kollam (2012), 30. Also M.M. Thomas, *Towards an Evangelical Social Gospel: A New Look at the Reformation of Abraham Malpan*, Madras: The Christian Literature Society, (1977). For a case that the CMS had an influence on other indigenous reform movements relating to caste see Augustine Kanjamala, *The Future of Christian Mission in India: Toward a New Paradigm for the Third Millennium*, Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications (2014), 8-9.

⁷⁸ Cherian, *Towards Modernity*, Chapter 2.

changes that took place in Kerala through the College. The brief period of indigenous leadership at the College leads Auvaneeswaram to note that “[f]or the next seventy four years, this seminary was the centre of the Reformation Movement for the Malankara Church. It means that the Malankara reformation is not a product of protestant mission. But … has an indigenous origin.”⁷⁹ While this statement may go too far in downplaying the active role of Munro and the CMS in the founding and ongoing influence of the College, there can be no doubt that there were Syrian Christians throughout Kerala who had a desire for reform and saw the College as a concrete way of bringing this desire to reality.

As we have seen, an implication of the College’s work and the involvement of Bailey and other CMS personnel was that a reform movement sprang up within the Syrian Church that eventually led to the formation of the Mar Thoma Church in 1889. Abraham *Malpān* and Mathew Mar Athanasios were leading lights in this movement. That both had significant contact and shared substantial beliefs with Bailey and his colleagues has been well established in this chapter. Yet there has also been ample evidence to show that they were their own men. They did not go along with the missionaries on every point of doctrine or practice, and desired to remain free of the Anglican Church. We can agree with Auvaneeswaram that the Mar Thoma Church has a hybrid identity in the sense that it was a grassroots Eastern movement influenced by Western Protestantism. The influence of the CMS was seen in such practices as Sunday Schools and preaching. The removal of what Mathew and others believed to be Roman Catholic accretions also bore the mark of the missionaries.⁸⁰ Hence in the Mar Thoma church, “[r]eformation was a process of interpreting the selected past of the Church. Through the reformation the church became Catholic in faith, Missionary in outlook, Ecumenical in nature and Eastern in worship.”⁸¹

Another aspect of the indigenous nature of the reform movement relates to its connections with wider societal developments in Kerala. Leaders such as Chattampi Swamigal in the Nair community and Sree Narayana Guru in the Ezhava Community were advocating movement toward liberal individual humanism and away from traditional authoritarian Brahminism.

⁷⁹ Auvaneeswaram, *Hybrid Identity*, 40.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 44.

⁸¹ Ibid, 51.

Augustine Kanjamala even goes so far as to suggest that “Sri Narayana Guru (1856-1928) born in the socially despised Ezhava community was inspired by the selfless social service of the CMS to their Ezhava converts and their economic development.” Conversion to Christianity for Narayana, therefore, was not considered a matter of great consequence as long as whatever religion was being followed was productive of better human beings.⁸² From the point of view of this study, it is interesting to note that Narayana viewed the later CMS enterprise in Kerala as socially transformative. While, on the one hand, this lends weight to the idea that wider societal developments were an important factor in the Syrian reformation movement, on the other hand such analysis may unduly relegate the doctrinal concerns of both the CMS and the Syrians in understanding these legacies of the Mission of Help.

The great twentieth-century Mar Thoma scholar M.M. Thomas has contributed to this relativizing of doctrinal concerns by questioning to what extent a doctrinal shift from Eastern theology to Western evangelicalism/Biblicism can really explain the reform movement Abraham led.⁸³ Thomas, whilst wishing not to dismiss the theological motivations of Abraham and his colleagues, nevertheless believed that these broader cultural developments are also a hugely significant factor in explaining this reformation. Thomas sees such evangelical emphases as personal, Spirit-illuminated Bible reading, repentance, and conversion, which were espoused by the reformers and the later Mar Thoma Church, as consistent with a wider societal shift away from communal tradition to individual conscience. So he further suggests that

the evangelical regeneration of persons in Christ was the basis of the liberal democratic outlook and the personal values inherent in the Reformed party; and later the Mar Thoma Church became the embodiment and bearer of this evangelical reform of Syrian Christian religion and democratic renewal of the Syrian Christian culture in Kerala.⁸⁴

So for Thomas doctrinal considerations are important, but not paramount. Doctrinal formulation is seen to be culturally conditioned and therefore evolving.⁸⁵ He goes too far toward suggesting

⁸² Kanjamala, *The Future of Christian Mission in India*, 8-9.

⁸³ Thomas, *Evangelical Social Gospel*, 5.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 13.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 5.

that the evangelical doctrines that the reformers espoused were pragmatic teachings that worked in their context, rather than part of a core of doctrine that the CMS missionaries and those they influenced were desperate to recover. In this respect, Kannisseril and Kallumpram are closer to the mark in suggesting that it is the ancient tradition of primitive Christianity that Abraham *Malpān* and other reformers were eager to reconnect with. They should not therefore be accused of simply following the CMS agenda. To be sure, the coming of the missionaries gave impetus concerning the need for reformation, yet the reform that Syrian Christians sought was really a restoration of their primitive forms and doctrines.⁸⁶ This was the goal also, of course, of John Venn and other founding members of the CMS as they contemplated their relationship with ancient churches.⁸⁷ Kannisseril and Kallumpram find an ally for their position in Lord Runcie, who addressed a London Mar Thoma congregation in 1982 with these words: “[The] Mar Thoma Church is the evidence ... that Christianity in India is not some mere colonial import. There were Christians in Kerala even before the time of the first Archbishop of Canterbury, St. Augustine, who landed in Kent in 597.”⁸⁸

All these contributions give helpful nuance, however, to the narrative that the reform movement in the Syrian Church was merely driven by the external movements of colonialists and missionaries. It may even be questioned whether or not the missionaries were essential to these events occurring. That significant theological texture was given by Bailey and others cannot be doubted. Yet reform would most likely have taken place without missionary input. Moreover, such reform may well have caused upheaval as long-held customs and caste loyalties were challenged. While, therefore, Benjamin Bailey and his fellow Mission of Help labourers were probably too confident that their brand of Christianity was primitive Christianity, their goal in launching the Mission of Help was very much in line with those of reforming voices in the Syrian Church such as Abraham *Malpān* and Mathew Mar Athanasios.

⁸⁶ Kannisseril and Kallumpram, *Glimpses of Mar Thoma Church History*, 19-24.

⁸⁷ See the discussion on the CMS and ancient churches in Chapter 1.

⁸⁸ Cited in Kannisseril and Kallumpram, *Glimpses of Mar Thoma Church History*, xix.

Conclusion

The legacy of the Mission of Help on the ecclesiastical development of Kerala is therefore a contested field. These pages have witnessed the constant tensions caused by doctrinal differences between the CMS and the Syrians. In assessing the legacy of Bailey and his colleagues, therefore, it seems fair to concede that the divisions within the Syrian Christian Community in nineteenth-century Kerala were at least in some measure caused by the Mission of Help. Yet, as Bailey's summaries of eighteenth-century Syriac letters attest, divisions in the Syrian Church preceded the involvement of CMS missionaries. They cannot, therefore, be attributed to Bailey and his colleagues. It cannot be denied, however, that the calls for reformation that Bailey made, and his making accessible the Bible in Malayalam, fed into desires for reformation that were already current in the Syrian community. Moreover, wider indigenous societal movements away from feudalistic Brahmanism were also a significant factor in the ecclesiastical development of Kerala.

Chapter 8 - Conclusion: Historical, Theological and Missiological Reflections

Introduction

The previous chapters have outlined the narrative of the CMS Mission of Help to the ancient Syrian Christian Church of Travancore. In particular, our focus has been on Benjamin Bailey of Dewsbury, one of the longest serving missionaries in this particular field of endeavour. Although there has been analysis and appraisal throughout these chapters, it now remains for us to collate some historical, theological and missiological reflections on this somewhat controversial episode of mission history.

We shall begin this conclusion by considering the relative importance of the factors that led to the Mission of Help ending in 1836. The main problems for the Mission of Help identified in this thesis are differences in doctrinal and ecclesial identity, the politicisation of the mission, and the effects of changes in personnel on both sides. These issues will be summarised and weighted in terms of their overall importance for the decision taken by the Syrians at Mavelikara to stop working with Bailey and his CMS colleagues.

Having drawn some conclusions about why the Mission of Help failed on the terms of its original remit, we shall then reflect on how the episode instructs us about wider debates concerning mission. Firstly, we shall consider what this episode teaches us about the vexed question of the link between mission and empire in the nineteenth century. As has been seen in the preceding narrative, the picture is complex. Contrary to what might be expected, given ongoing colonial annexation in India during the nineteenth century, the early years of the Mission of Help, when Col. Munro was Resident, represented the apex of the missionary and imperial enterprise being bound together.

Then we shall consider the lessons from this episode about questions of mission and ecclesiology. The Mission of Help and similar endeavours have been viewed as an early exercise

in ecumenical co-operation for mission.¹ However, the fact that the rationale of the CMS was to persuade the Syrians to reform belief and practice in a way more akin to Western Protestant thinking, it is doubtful if this project was a proto-ecumenical one, at least in terms of the ecumenism of recent decades.

Finally, we shall assess how the Mission of Help can instruct us concerning the scope and nature of mission. Does this episode throw any light on recent debates about the scope and nature of mission? And what can we learn concerning the tendency to obscure the goals of Christian witness in our own day? These and other questions, it seems, are germane to ongoing discussions about the nature and scope of mission today.

This concluding chapter's aim is to make a contribution to debates in which the whole idea of mission is central. As David Arnold and Robert A. Bickers remind us, researchers of many disciplines and opinions find the mission archive a fruitful window to understanding a number of significant historical issues.² The present study cannot go down every possible avenue which our archive could take us, yet it does contribute to understanding the dynamics of nascent colonialism in an Indian princely state. Moreover, in asking hard questions about the links of the missionary enterprise with ecclesiology and, indeed, the nature of mission itself, it is hoped that a useful reflection on missiological practice is also provided here.

Why did the Mission of Help fail?

The separation between the missionaries and the Syrians of 1836 brought the Mission of Help to an end. The project had failed in its original goal of seeing widespread reforms of the Syrian Church along the Anglican and Evangelical Protestant lines that Bailey and his co-workers envisaged. This failure, it should be said, was not absolute. For one thing, there had been two decades of co-operation in the establishing of the College and Seminary, in Bailey's translation work on the Scriptures, and in the missionaries having access to preach in the churches. In

¹ See for example, Wilbert R. Shenk, “‘Ancient Churches’ and Modern Missions in the Nineteenth Century,’ in Richard Fox Young (ed), *India and the Indianness of Christianity: Essays on Understanding – Historical, Theological, and Biographical – in Honor of Robert Eric Frykenberg*, Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans (2009), 41-58.

² David Arnold and Robert A. Bickers, ‘Introduction,’ in Robert A. Bickers and Rosemary Seton (eds), *Missionary Encounters: Sources and Issues*, Richmond: Curzon (1996), 1-10.

addition, there remained a group with the Syrian Church, as Chapters 6 and 7 have shown, who remained committed to substantial reforms within the Syrian Church, having had contact with Bailey and the other missionaries. Yet, insofar as the Mission of Help set out to reform the Syrian Church whilst leaving it essentially intact as a unified body, the project was in itself a failure.

Weighing the evidence of the foregoing chapters, it can be concluded that the fundamental explanation for the Mission of Help's failure lay in the doctrinal and ecclesial differences between the CMS missionaries and the Syrians. These two bodies really were doctrinally and ecclesiastically chalk and cheese. Buchanan's contention that the Syrians were in doctrine essentially similar to the Church of England, if Roman accretions could be removed, proved wide of the mark. Over the twenty years of the Mission of Help these differences would prove just too great for the enterprise to be successful. Yet this cannot be the full or only explanation. After all, the teaching of Bailey and his colleagues, with the considerable aid of a vernacular Bible, gained considerable traction in a minority section of the Syrian Church led by Abraham *Malpān*. So we cannot fully agree with William Taylor that the failure of the Mission of Help lay in the "evangelistic, biblicist, and Protestant character" of the CMS.³ The doctrinal differences were of first importance but were accentuated by other factors.

Almost of equal importance to the doctrinal differences was how the Mission of Help had become politicised from the very beginning. This served to muddy the waters as to what the CMS efforts were essentially about. Col. Munro, as Chapter 3 in particular shows, had treated the Syrian Christians of Orthodox persuasion partially. This led to other Residents seeking to redress the balance somewhat. Moreover, not all the Residents were as invested in the Mission of Help as Munro had been. Yet throughout the twenty years of the partnership, Bailey and his colleagues repeatedly called on the Residents for support, arbitration, and advice. So the nascent colonial concerns of Travancore's Residency ensured that the Syrians were treated somewhat differently by Munro and his successors. This was bound to breed some disillusionment amongst

³ William Henry Taylor, *Antioch and Canterbury: The Syrian Orthodox Church and the Church of England 1874-1928*, Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press, (2005), 124.

the Syrians as to what could be gained for their Church from this Anglican mission. They were a fiercely proud and independent people who had suffered much at the hands of Portuguese and Dutch imperialists. It may be that Munro's favouring of this community flattered to deceive from a Syrian perspective. To be sure, such political entanglements were hard to avoid for the missionaries. Yet if the Mission of Help had started out and continued more independently of political power, the prophetic calls for reform in the Syrian Church may have been heard more clearly without the intrusion of perceived political advantages.

A final important factor in the Mission of Help's failure was the changes in personnel on both sides that inevitably take place over a twenty year period. These are most fully discussed in Chapter 5. In Mar Dionysius IV the Syrians had, particularly from 1829 onwards, a more openly suspicious and hostile Metran toward Bailey and his colleagues. This situation was exacerbated by Bailey's absence for almost four years and the arrival of more confrontational missionaries such as Peet and Woodcock in Travancore and John Tucker in Madras. These less tactful agents of the CMS ensured that personal relationships somewhat broke down. The Anglican theological context of the 1830s, with the rise of Tractarianism, also sharpened awareness of the theological differences between the missionaries and the Syrians. These three factors, therefore, serve to explain the Mission of Help's end in 1836. They raise broader questions that it is appropriate to discuss in this conclusion, namely the relationship of mission and empire, the importance of ecclesiology for mission partnership, and the nature and scope of mission. It is to these concerns that we now turn.

Mission and empire

The co-ordination or otherwise of imperial concerns with Christian mission is an area of heated debate within history, anthropology and other academic disciplines, as well as amongst missionary practitioners and theologians. In this section we shall review some of this debate, illustrate how the Mission of Help provides evidence of the entanglements between mission and empire and then seek to draw some conclusions regarding this particular episode and its complicity or otherwise with that version of empire that the East India Company was providing in the first half of the nineteenth century.

As noted in the introduction, the alleged complicity of mission and empire has led some to question the validity of the terminology of ‘mission’ as applied to Christian witness.⁴ Brian Stanley, on the other hand, assumes the language of mission throughout his work *The Bible and the Flag*. Moreover, having treated various historical examples in a nuanced way, he concludes by questioning whether the very language of imperialism is always wrong. Asking the question ‘Is Christianity an inherently imperial religion?’ Stanley concludes:

Christianity is an inherently imperial religion in the sense that it claims that the revealed truth of God was incarnated uniquely in the person of Jesus Christ, that all men and women are called to respond in repentance and faith to that revelation, and that the kingdom of God inaugurated in the coming of Christ makes absolute demands upon all people and all cultures. Precisely because the love of God is universal in its scope, there can be no exclusions from or exceptions to the invitation to submit to the liberating lordship of Jesus Christ.⁵

The problem therefore, for some, is not empire *per se*, but which kind of empire. The empire of Christ, or Kingdom of God, is perceived to be liberating good news. Yet such a message is proclaimed in the midst of a historical moment and political context. This makes the separation of the one from the other a difficult business. We therefore need to consider the critique that mission in general, and this episode in particular, was complicit in imperial agendas.

Jeffrey Cox seeks to engage with a wide range of literature and the three narratives that generally inform analysis of the role of missions in empire. His overarching aim is to provide: “a study of how missionaries in the most important mission societies, and those with whom they associated, Indian Christians and non-Christians, struggled with the conflict between universalist Christian religious values and the imperial context of those values.”⁶ Cox’s aim is to take the role of missionaries more seriously than either standard imperial histories or post-colonial critics of the Saidian school do. The former tend to see missionaries and mission societies as at best marginal

⁴ For example, Michael W. Stroope, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic (2017).

⁵ Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant missions and British imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, Leicester: Apollos (1990), 184.

⁶ Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818-1940*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press (2002), 6.

imperial players.⁷ Edward Said, and those influenced by his approach, on the other hand, robustly seek to unmask the supposed neutrality of Western scholarship on the imperial project. Said critiqued traditional Orientalist portrayals of India, which generally took a positive view of its religion and cultural diversity. In doing so, Said redefined the whole concept of Orientalism. Said's conception of Orientalism sought to deconstruct the picture painted even in these supposedly positive accounts of non-western cultures. He argues that Orientalist texts were given "the authority of academics, institutions and governments ... Most important, such texts can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe."⁸ This, for Said, was essential to how the West developed conceptions of 'Self' and 'Other.' In particular, he highlights Europe's aversion to 'the Other' and how Enlightenment approaches to knowledge were intensely Eurocentric with Europe at the centre and 'the Orient' being portrayed as backward. In Saidian radical deconstruction, however, Cox notes that "missionaries are often regarded as hardly worth exposing." The Comaroffs' work on Africa is seen as a notable exception where unmasking of missionaries is pursued with considerable thoroughness.⁹

Cox also attempts to engage the providentialist master narrative which he sees as pervasive in mission studies scholarship, as he believes the extent to which imperialism is a religious problem is underestimated. To be fair to Cox, he acknowledges the contribution of such scholarship and regrets that this prolific field is yet largely invisible to imperial history scholars. Yet he warns that "[d]espite these achievements, mission studies scholars continue to rely on a providentialist master narrative of progress toward a multiracial Christian community, and have some difficulty in addressing head-on the Saidian presumption of imperial complicity."¹⁰ Cox therefore believes that the efforts of scholars such as Brian Stanley, Robert Frykenberg, and Andrew Porter, in stressing that missionaries had different motives to purely political imperialists, underplay the imperial complicity of missionaries.¹¹ In sum, therefore, Cox sees imperialism as a religious problem. While he notes that many Indian Christians view missionaries with considerable

⁷ Ibid, 8.

⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, London: Penguin, (2003, first published 1978), 94, His emphasis.

⁹ Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines*, 10. A glance at the index of Said's *Orientalism* and his *Culture and Imperialism* reveals that mission and missionaries are non-existent as significant subjects in these writings.

¹⁰ Ibid, 11-12.

¹¹ Ibid, 12.

admiration, this problem remains. For Cox the racist assumptions that fuelled imperialism were just as evident among missionaries as among military imperialists. This was so even when missionaries were trying hard to be different and avoid racism. So Cox concludes that “[t]hese stories are too complex to be encompassed within the master narratives of providence, or unmasking, or imperial complicity, but too rooted in history to escape them.”¹²

The motivations of the missionary enterprise, however, whilst rooted in the history of their time, cannot be underplayed either. Andrew Porter has reminded us that it is reductionistic to draw a straight line between missionary motivation and imperial expansion. He argues: “No more were conversion, subjugation and possession necessarily linked in missionary minds and to suggest so is surely to confuse much evangelical thought and motive with entirely different and distinct forms of imperial activity.”¹³ Whilst allowing for a providentialist narrative of which Cox is so wary, Porter notes that founders of the CMS, such as Josiah Pratt, were not so much arguing from providence to empire, but from the providential reality of empire to the obligation of world evangelisation. Pratt, for example, wrote in his *Eclectic Notes*, “God’s providence must be *followed*, not *anticipated*.”¹⁴

Yet for such founders of the CMS as Pratt, John Venn, and Thomas Scott, as well as the Baptists led by William Carey, the vision was global and not merely imperial. While the empire of Britain provided a convenient starting point, the empire of Christ was global and, in their minds, infinitely superior to earthly empires. For Porter then, “[s]uch strategic choices were unsurprising. Interpreters of providential design were inclined to view empire as a source of obligation. Possession entailed the duty to Christianise; failure to do so risked incurring divine displeasure and the loss of opportunity for atonement or national redemption.”¹⁵ If Porter is correct, therefore, support for mission and support for empire were not exactly the same thing. Yet some entanglement was inevitable if providence was to be followed in this way, and Porter

¹² Ibid, 13-19, quote is on 19.

¹³ Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914*, Manchester: Manchester University Press (2004), 9.

¹⁴ Cited in Ibid, 64.

¹⁵ Ibid, 65.

sees such entanglement as unavoidable by 1830 in any place where mission and empire were twin enterprises.¹⁶

Porter's conclusions regarding the missionary enterprise are therefore much more sympathetic than those of Cox:

Although missions could not avoid empire, they were determined to put it in its place. The extent of their determination, the universal sweep of their theology, the global extent of their contacts and their consciousness, deserve more acknowledgement than they have generally received ... Aggressive crusading was far from representing the only evangelical approach to the missionary task. The variety and nuance of missionary standpoints, their detachment from empire and the measure of anti-imperialism, all associated with Britain's Christian missionary enterprise, have an important place in the history both of empire and missions.¹⁷

Such a viewpoint will need to be tested against the narrative that has been unfolded in these pages and we shall do so presently. Suffice to note for now that "aggressive crusading" seems to have been far from the objectives of Benjamin Bailey and his CMS superiors and colleagues. Even Munro could not be accused of it, although his contribution certainly hastened the entanglements that Porter notes.

Imperial entanglements in Kerala

The links between the Mission of Help and imperialism in India were, it could be argued, at their most acute under the Residency of Col. John Munro. It is worth remembering his interactions with the Madras Corresponding Committee, noted in Chapter 3 above. In response to Marmaduke Thompson's desire to have missionaries sent there to work with the Syrian Christians, Munro had enthused: "Regarding, as I do, the diffusion of Christianity in India, as a measure equally important to the interests of humanity and to the stability of our power, I view, with the most sincere pleasure, the commencement of a systematic plan for the attainment of that object."¹⁸ So Munro saw the establishment of the Mission of Help as vital to the well-being of

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, 330.

¹⁸ *Missionary Register*, 1816, 452.

Britain's embryonic imperial power. His subsequent somewhat overbearing counsel to Bailey and the other missionaries reflects his benign despotism in seeking to bring both ends about.

Ten years into the Mission of Help, Col. Morrison was much less personally invested in the work of the missionaries. Yet, as we saw in Chapter 5, Bailey saw him as an ally in ratifying the appointment of Metrans and in reminding Mar Dionysius IV of the gratitude he ought to have for the work the missionaries were doing amongst them. This suggests to us that by the late 1820s Bailey and his colleagues saw the EIC Resident and personnel as partners in their missionary objectives. It is likely that this reflected the providentialist view of the trading company that was common in these years. It is less certain, however, that in setting out a decade earlier Bailey would have been so concerned for the approval of political Residents of the EIC. It is entirely probable that such a desire for the approbation and assistance of the Residency was instilled into Bailey by Munro in the early days of his service in Travancore. We could therefore speak of a certain amount of empire creep in Bailey's self-understanding of his role within the Mission of Help.

Commentators on the Mission of Help in particular and Indian mission in general tend to agree that there was a complex mix of motivations and entanglements when it comes to the question of mission and empire. Writing from a present-day Syrian Christian perspective, C.V. Cherian notes that Munro "believed that the extension of the Christian faith would strengthen the British power in India. He hoped that the Christians would be loyal to the British because of the common bonds of religion and because the Christians needed their protection." The extent to which the CMS Committees of London and Madras reflected on the alignment of their motivations with those of Munro is, for C.V. Cherian, doubtful. He adds: "Whatever were the motives of Munro, it was through him that the CMS decided to send its 'Mission of Help' to Thiruvithamcore [Travancore]."¹⁹ For the political and missionary activists on the ground, therefore, it may have been that there was not excessive introspection about one another's motivations. Munro and the CMS were both committed to an Evangelical Protestant faith. Both

¹⁹ C.V. Cherian, *Orthodox Christianity in India: A History of the Malankara Orthodox Church AD52-2002*, Kottayam: Academic Publishers (2003), 233, 238.

believed the Syrian Church was in a degenerate state and needed reforming. And both most likely held to a providentialist understanding of their historical moment. Munro, Bailey, and the CMS saw themselves as having come to the princely kingdom of Travancore for such a time as this.²⁰

Concluding assessments on mission and empire

Such an attitude as we see in Travancore to the links with empire can be traced from the days of Carey onwards. For Brian Stanley, the “early Serampore missionaries … set the tone of missionary attitudes in India for the remainder of the nineteenth century: Christians questioned, not the fact of British rule, but the way in which it operated.”²¹ As Geoffrey Oddie has pointed out, these evangelical missionaries could not remain silent on moral issues such as *sati*: “one of the most striking features of the British missionary movement in India throughout the century is that so many men, influenced by an evangelical theology and a concept of mission which did not emphasise the importance of the struggle for social justice, should have become so caught up in ‘temporal’ affairs and social protest.”²² To paraphrase the words of Bailey, the ultimate good (i.e. eternal salvation) was the primary concern, yet alleviating the temporal suffering of the natives could not be ignored. Stanley, however, argues that such an approach required an acceptance of imperial rule as the *status quo*, for that time at least: “It must also be emphasized that a quiescent political stance on the principle of British rule was the only option if missions were to gain a secure foothold in British India. Without it, there would have been no Christian presence in India to agitate for social and moral reform.”²³

A complex picture has, therefore, emerged of the relations between mission and empire in general and in our particular instance. The very premise of the Mission of Help was to engage Kerala’s culture for the advancement of the gospel in India, at least in terms of Bailey’s work as a translator. The co-opting of the Syrian Church, provided it be reformed, was the mission

²⁰ The phraseology here is taken from Mordecai’s words to Esther in Esther 4:14 “who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this.” NKJV.

²¹ Stanley, *Bible and Flag*, 100.

²² Geoffrey Oddie, cited in *Ibid*, 104.

²³ *Ibid*.

strategy. That it failed, at least in the form originally intended, was due to complex factors, theological as well as political. Yet that the Mission of Help got off the ground at all also involved a measure of native agency as we have seen in Chapter 7. On these complex interrelationships, Atola Longkumer has helpfully noted that “[o]n the one hand, there is a reading of Christian mission as a manipulative project of existing socio-political power dynamics in which the cultures and peoples it encountered were subjugated and shorn of their rich culture ... Conversely, Christian mission [was] also ... expressed in the incarnational nature of Christian mission, with identification with the local cultures.”²⁴ Theological movements within the Syrian Church and wider movements in society helped to pave the way for the Mission of Help and for the need Bailey and others perceived for reformation to gain some traction at least in the Syrian community.²⁵

In leaving this section, it is hoped that at the very least we can say that the Mission of Help was not merely a ruse for the imperial plans of Munro and the EIC. Longkumer’s comment on mission and power is apposite in this case: “The relationship and power shown was probably more complex than any neat categorization into a dominating power and mute recipient communities.”²⁶ Although Munro certainly believed in a heavy hand where necessary, in threatening the Syrians for their own good, the picture that emerges with Bailey and his colleagues is one where accepting the genuine spirituality and agency of senior Syrian clergy is a starting point for their attempted reformation. That there was misunderstanding as to how much common ground there was has been well enough established in these pages. To be sure, there also was more than a hint of paternalism in the interactions between the missionaries and the Syrians. Nevertheless, there was a degree of recognition and a genuine desire for partnership. This was played out against the backdrop of imperial power relations. Yet such relations provided the context, not the driving motivation of Benjamin Bailey and his colleagues.

²⁴ Atola Longkumer, ‘Christian Mission, Power and Native Participation,’ in Atola Longkumer, Jorgen Skov Sorensen and Michael Biehl (eds), *Mission and Power: History, Relevance and Perils*: Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, Volume 33, Oxford: Regnum (2016), 73-85, ref., 74-75.

²⁵ Again note the arguments in Sabu Isaac Auvaneeswaram, *Hybrid Identity of the Mar Thoma Church – Unveiled through the debate: Yuhanon Mar Thoma Vs. K.N. Daniel*, Kollam (2012). Also M.M. Thomas, *Towards an Evangelical Social Gospel: A New Look at the Reformation of Abraham Malpan*, Madras: The Christian Literature Society, (1977).

²⁶ Longkumer, ‘Christian Mission’, 75.

Mission and ecclesiology

We come, in the second place, to the question of mission and ecclesiology. In particular, we need to consider to what extent the Mission of Help was a proto-ecumenical initiative. The view of Babu Cherian is that the Mission of Help was one of the earliest modern ecumenical projects.²⁷ As we have seen in Chapter 6, Cherian's view echoes that of Wilbert R. Shenk, who views attempts to revive the ancient churches as a long and noble tradition within the modern missionary movement which moved beyond ecclesiastical parochialism to a more satisfying ecumenism.²⁸ Mark Laing, drawing on Lesslie Newbigin's *The Household of God*, attributes the recovery of ecclesiology as being due to the demise of Christendom, the missionary encounter with the non-Western world and the rise of the ecumenical movement.²⁹ For Laing and Shenk, the encounter with ancient non-Western churches may well be said to contribute to ecclesiological and ecumenical recovery.

Norman Thomas, meanwhile, sees the rise of the evangelical mission movements, such as the CMS, Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) and London Missionary Society (LMS), as evidence of an advancing unity for the sake of mission. Thomas rightly sees these mission agencies as children of the eighteenth-century evangelical revival. A fruit of this spiritual awakening, Thomas claims, was a putting away of sectarian rivalries. He notes, for example, that Selina Hastings, the Countess of Huntingdon, supported the work of evangelists such as John Wesley, George Whitefield and Thomas Haweis, an Anglican with close links to dissenters. Holders of Church of England charges were esteemed, Independent chapels were set up, and denominational or theological wrangling was minimized. William Carey, meanwhile, influenced by Jonathan Edwards in New England, had called for united prayer for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and world evangelisation. These were taken to be tokens of a renewed ecumenical spirit.³⁰ Thomas

²⁷ Babu Cherian, *Towards Modernity: The Story of the First College in India: The Impact of CMS College, Kottayam on Kerala Society and How it Paved the way for Modernity*, Delhi: Media House (2014), Back cover.

²⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk “Ancient Churches” and Modern Missions,’ 41-58.

²⁹ Mark Laing, ‘From Edinburgh 1910 to New Delhi 1961: Called to Unity for the Sake of Mission’, in Jon Gibaut and Knud Jorgensen (eds), *Called to Unity For the Sake of Mission*, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, Volume 25, Oxford: Regnum Books (2014), 14-32.

³⁰ Norman E. Thomas, *Missions and Unity: Lessons from History, 1792-2010*, Eugene OR: Cascade Books (2010), 8-10.

also lauds the co-operation with the Basel Mission on the Continent, while noting that the High Church tendencies of the SPG and SPCK were a mutual barrier to co-operation between them and the CMS.³¹ Melville Horne's *Letters on Mission*, meanwhile, had been an influence on the inter-denominational LMS. Horne had pleaded: "Let liberal Churchmen and Conscientious Dissenters, pious Calvinists and pious Arminians embrace with fraternal arms."³² For these authors, then, evangelical mission in this period can be understood against a positive backdrop of growing ecumenical co-operation. The Mission of Help could be perceived in this context.

Yet it is a matter of significant doubt whether partnership between the CMS and ancient churches, including in the Mission of Help, really was a prototype of the twentieth-century ecumenical and missiological concerns that Thomas and these other authors seem to have in mind. Thomas notes on the Great Awakening that "[t]he redeemed shared a fundamental understanding of Christian unity. All saved persons shared a common life in Christ. They were one by virtue of this sharing. This oneness, they believed, was the essential Christian unity."³³ This statement, however, seems to hint at certain doctrinal emphases that evangelicals of this period shared regarding what it meant to be 'saved persons.' Whatever differences there may be on other matters, salvation was perceived to involve doctrines such as the new birth and justification by faith alone. The same emphases most likely underlay Horne's call for those of different churchmanship, Calvinists and Arminians, to unite together in common cause. In other words the unity we see in these statements was not necessarily one which embraced all who profess Christianity. At this point, however it would be helpful to briefly review what the encounter between the CMS and the Syrian Church can teach us about mission and ecclesiology.

The Mission of Help: An Example of Unity for Mission?

As we review the evidence of the previous pages, it may be questioned to what extent the Mission of Help was evidence of a budding ecumenism in the missionary movement. We have seen in Chapter 2 that Claudio Buchanan was responsible for giving the impression that there

³¹ Ibid, 15.

³² Cited in Ibid, 13-14.

³³ Ibid, 12-13.

really was significant common ground between the Syrians and the Church of England. While unpublished accounts of Buchanan's reflect a more complex picture,³⁴ it was his addresses and his work *Christian Researches in Asia* that gave considerable impetus to the Mission of Help. A comparison, however, of official Syrian teaching and official Anglican teaching showed that there were actually wide-ranging differences between the churches in the areas of Christology, Ecclesiology, Soteriology and the relationship between Scripture and Tradition. Hence later CMS missionaries to Travancore, such as Richard Collins, saw the understanding which Buchanan transmitted to the early missionaries as somewhat naïve. The doctrines, be they errors as Collins claimed, or not, were Antiochene and part of the church's ancient tradition, not mere Roman accretions. It should also be said at this point that there were also significant doctrinal differences within Anglicanism itself two hundred years ago. As observed in Chapter 1, the SPG and CMS could not work together as a result of considerable difference in the understanding of the gospel and their respective ecclesiologies. Perhaps a partnership between High Church Anglicans and the Syrians would have provided a more proto-typical model of later conciliar ecumenism. The Mission of Help, however, does not.

In any case, from the beginning of the Mission of Help, there was a call for the Syrian Church to reform in doctrine and practice. Whatever level of ecumenism there may have been, therefore, there was a demand for change on the part of the Syrians. The relationship, in other words, was not one of conciliar dialogue. In Chapter 4 we saw that the reforms called for by Joseph Fenn and Benjamin Bailey did not conform to recent ecumenical norms which focus more on mutual dialogue. Rather they called for a change of doctrine and practice back to that of the supposed ancient Church which happened to be very similar, they believed, to that of their own brand of Anglicanism.

A case, however, may be made that the Mission of Help did begin by recognising the Syrians as truly Christian, even if perceived to be in a run-down state. It is worth reminding ourselves of Buchanan's perspective: "although the body of the Church appears to be ignorant, and formal,

³⁴ See John Fenwick, *The Forgotten Bishops: The Malabar Independent Syrian Church and its Place in the Story of the St Thomas Christians of South India*, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies, Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press (2009), 300ff.

and dead, there are individuals who are alive to righteousness, who are distinguished from the rest by their purity of life, and are sometimes censured for too rigid a piety.”³⁵ Ecumenical recognition is an aspect of ecumenism that has only begun to be studied recently as an independent concept. Minna Hietamäki sees ecumenical recognition as “an application of the general form of the act of recognition, consisting of three instances where (1) A takes (2) B as (3) “something. (X)””³⁶ Unaware as they were of such debates and schema, it seems that in the earliest days of the Mission of Help, the CMS (A) took the Syrian Church (B) as truly Christian (X). So in its inception, it could be argued, the Mission of Help aimed for reformation and revival of the Syrians, but nevertheless identified them as a Christian church. Ecumenical recognition, in recent discussion, is also seen as involving a spectrum where identification of a Christian person or church moves gradually to full recognition and reception, as another scholar puts it: “not only to be identified, but to be legitimized.”³⁷ It would probably be fair to say that the dynamic between the CMS and the Syrians in these early days of the Mission of Help involved identification of the latter as Christian by the former without full recognition or approval of their Christianity. After all, that is why ‘help’ was perceived to be needed.

While it is anachronistic to claim that the Mission of Help was an early ecumenical initiative, the enterprise did contain elements of identification and recognition that are seen as key in current ecumenical debate. Moreover, the ecumenical credentials of the Mission of Help should not be dismissed merely on the fact that Fenn, Bailey, and others challenged aspects of Syrian belief and practice. Such challenges do not necessarily indicate that missionaries are engaging in proselytism, or inculcating an anti-ecumenical spirit. A 1956 World Council of Churches report on Christian witness, proselytism and religious liberty sought to balance free Christian witness with concerns about proselytism that undermined the ecumenical project. In doing so, however, the following responsibility was outlined:

³⁵ Claudio Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia: With Notices of the Translation of the Scriptures into the Oriental Languages*, Fourth Edition, London: T. Cadell and W. Davies (1811), 123-125.

³⁶ Minna Hietamäki, “Ecumenical Recognition” in the Faith and Order Movement,’ *Open Theology*, 2015, 1, 204-219, ref. 205.

³⁷ Margeurite Léna, ‘Paths of recognition,’ *The Ecumenical Review*, 69:1 (2017), 15-21, ref., 17.

Should errors or abuses within a church result in distorting or obscuring the central truths of the Gospel and thereby jeopardizing men's salvation, other churches may be bound to come to the rescue with a faithful witness to the truth thus lost to view. Their liberty to do so must be maintained. But before they undertake to establish a rival church, they must humbly ask themselves whether there are not still existent in that other church such hopeful elements of the real Church that frank fraternal contact and cooperation with it might lead to a good end.³⁸

Naïve as Buchanan and the early missionaries might have been about the extent of differences between themselves and the Syrians, the principles here laid down over a century later were foreshadowed in the approach taken by the Mission of Help.

Concluding assessments on mission and ecclesiology

It seems fair to conclude that the Mission of Help cannot be taken as a proto-ecumenical project. Neither structural unity nor common witness between Anglicans and Syrians was ever seriously on the agenda. That qualification made, the Mission of Help may provide some instruction to evangelicals and others concerning how to interact with and potentially partner with other churches for common witness. Insofar as Bailey and his colleagues sought to recognise the Syrian Church as a church indeed, even if degenerate and corrupt, there is an example of how mission projects should be generous in assessing the true state of existing Christianity in a given place before seeking to work independently of such churches.

At the same time we learn from Bailey and his colleagues on the Mission of Help that there must be theological clarity when attempting co-operation with other churches. We have seen above in Chapter 4 Bailey's increasing frustration, from an early stage, with the Syrian Church priests. Other Anglican Churchmen in India some years later, however, seemed to recognise the fundamental nature of the differences between the CMS and the Syrians. While they had great respect for Bailey and his colleagues, it nevertheless seems that they doubted if the Mission of Help could actually be a success. To refer once again to Richard Collins, he wrote in 1873 that "[i]t is difficult to avoid the conclusion, from the records that remain, that a too timid policy

³⁸ World Council of Churches, 'Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty in the Setting of the World Council of Churches, *The Ecumenical Review*, 9:1 (1956), 48-56, ref., 53.

shackled their early efforts. The errors of Syrianism were allowed, nay, kept up – in the very College itself.” For Collins, it was praiseworthy that the missionaries had “proposed to conquer the Syrians by love and by ignoring all claim to any authority over their Church matters. This was no doubt, a laudable theory; but whether, when the theory was reduced to practice, there were not some unfortunate compromises, which resulted in the strengthening rather than the elimination of error, may well be questioned.”³⁹ Today, we may well ask such questions in relation to ecumenical partnerships between churches for mission. Theological clarity will make the remit of the relationship clear and prevent disillusionment and confusion in the long term. Unless, of course, penultimate concerns regarding the common good of humanity and human flourishing are, in reality, the driving force behind such relationships. For Bailey, however, while such things should not be left undone, the ultimate and eternal good was the primary focus. With that in mind, it is now helpful to consider what this episode can teach about the scope and nature of mission.

The scope and nature of mission

Finally, the historical episode which has been the focus of these pages can provide some perspective on subsequent debates about the scope and nature of mission. Christopher Wright is concerned that we should have as broad a view of mission as he believes the Scriptures have. He writes:

Bluntly, we need a holistic gospel because the world is in a holistic mess. And by God’s incredible grace we have a gospel big enough to redeem all that sin and evil has touched. And every dimension of the good news is good news utterly and only because of the blood of Christ on the cross.⁴⁰

Certainly as we look back on the historical episode that we have charted in these pages, it seems clear that Benjamin Bailey (and he is representative of his male and female colleagues) was concerned for the needs of the whole person. We saw in Chapter 3 the concern that Bailey and his wife had for the education of girls and that he and Elizabeth had taken one orphaned boy and

³⁹ Richard Collins, *Missionary Enterprise in the East: With Especial Reference to the Syrian Christians of Malabar and the Results of Modern Missions*, London: Henry S. King & Co. (1873), 109, 102.

⁴⁰ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*, Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press (2006), 315.

three girls under their care. His motives are spelled out to Munro: “I can truly say that we are willing to deprive ourselves of many comforts, if we can only promote the temporal & eternal interests of the poor Syrians.”⁴¹

It seems, however, that while Bailey took the duty to love his neighbour seriously, his primary concern was the eternal interests over the temporal ones. In other words, Bailey’s evangelical emphasis on personal salvation through regeneration and faith in Christ was of paramount concern. In Chapter 4 we were reminded of Bailey’s increasing disillusionment with the Syrian Church and his main concern was their conversion. Bailey wrote to Bickersteth in London: “though at present we see but little fruit issuing from our labours, we trust that he will make bare his holy arm and be glorified in the conversion of many around us from the error of their ways.”⁴² Debate certainly surrounds such use of language and we sought to give some assessment of these debates in Chapter 4. What concerns us here, however, is the clear priority given to conversion and, by implication, evangelisation. Again in Chapter 4 we were reminded of Bailey preaching in Mavelikara on 1 John 4:9: “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.” No transcript of the sermon appears to survive, yet the choice of text suggests that the fundamentals of atonement through Christ were central to Bailey’s concerns as a preacher. Yet we have seen throughout Bailey’s tireless work as a translator, not just of Scripture, but of educational literature of various kinds. So he saw ‘temporal benefits’ as important, if secondary, in the work of the Mission of Help.

Christopher Wright argues that the mission of the church ought to give ultimacy to the work of evangelism. This does not mean that mission work that is not concerned directly all the time with evangelism should be regarded as inferior. Wright pictures the various fields of missional engagement with the world as a circle which may be joined at any point. He therefore prefers the word ‘ultimacy’ rather than ‘primacy’ to describe the priority of evangelism. Yet Wright is clear: we must ultimately get to evangelism or it is not holistic mission.⁴³ On the other hand, he is

⁴¹ Bailey to Munro, Cottayam, 15th August 1818, C I2/027/21, Letter No. 12.

⁴² Bailey to E Bickersteth, Cottayam 23rd April 1827, C I2/027/3.

⁴³ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 319.

equally concerned that evangelism is ethical and warns against ‘evangelism only’ approaches which do not lead to radical discipleship in the world. Emphasising purely the saving of souls, and escape from the world in the long term, does not produce a discipleship in which Christians are willing to sacrificially serve in the world or oppose prejudice and injustice.⁴⁴

Andrew Hartropp and Oddvar Sten Ronsen have questioned whether Wright’s idea of ultimacy regarding proclamation evangelism is as useful as it could be on the basis that no time element is given. They suggest that rather than speak of the ultimacy of evangelism, we should speak of the anticipation of evangelism right from the beginning of a project that involves a social action element. Otherwise ‘mission drift’ becomes a real danger and evangelism may never be done.⁴⁵ Hartropp and Ronsen’s point is well taken. Yet it seems that perhaps the whole idea of integral mission needs reassessing. If mission must include evangelism, as Wright, Hartropp and Ronsen, Bosch, Kirk and many others all seem to agree, then is there perhaps a need to re-narrow the focus of mission on evangelism and discipleship? The concerns of what may be called integral or holistic mission may better be categorised as a central part of obedience to the Great Commandment to love God and to love one’s neighbour as oneself.⁴⁶ In Matthew’s Great Commission Christ commands his disciples to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20 ESV). A detailed study of the Great Commission in Matthew and elsewhere is beyond the scope of this study.⁴⁷ Yet it could be suggested that the right concerns for relieving poverty, social justice and many other aspects of transforming temporal conditions come under the clause “teaching them to observe all I have commanded you.” They are the province of the Great Commandment. Yet the Great Commandment is part of the comprehensive teaching of discipleship that the Great Commission enjoins. While Christopher Wright would question this narrowing of the understanding of the Great Commission, he argues that even if the Great Commission is defined more narrowly in terms of

⁴⁴ Ibid, 320-322.

⁴⁵ Andrew Hartropp and Oddvar Sten Ronsen, ‘Evangelism Lost? A Need to Redefine Christian Integral Mission,’ *Mission Studies*, 33:1 (2016), 66-84.

⁴⁶ See Matthew 22:37-39 and Mark 12:29-31.

⁴⁷ See, for example, David F. Wright, ‘The Great Commission and the Ministry of the Word: Reflections Historical and Contemporary on Relations and Priorities,’ *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, 25 (2007), 132-157.

evangelism, church planting, and disciple-making, it nevertheless does not abrogate the mission responsibilities of God's people picked up from the Old Testament. Referring to 2 Timothy 3:16-17 Wright says:

The divine authority and continuing ethical relevance that Paul asserts for 'all Scripture' must apply to the law as much as to any other part of the Bible ... there is no hint at all that the ubiquitous message of the Old Testament about social and economic justice, about personal and political integrity, about practical compassion for the needy are in any sense provisional or dispensable.⁴⁸

These concerns certainly are not provisional or dispensable, but they rightly belong to the Great Commandment. The Great Commission is distinct, but in a sense inseparable from the Great Commandment, as the teaching which it mandates to be done will teach disciples in detail to love their neighbours as themselves.

Benjamin Bailey perhaps had the kernel of this distinction in his mind when, as we have seen in Chapter 3 above, he told the Resident of Travancore that "*[w]hile we are principally affected by the ultimate good*, into which the Christian Religion introduces its disciples, we are not ignorant or careless of the innumerable temporal blessings which accompany it and are anxious to behold that improved state of Society which Christianity never fails of producing."⁴⁹ A proper debate may be had about what Bailey meant by an improved state of society and to what extent he equated it with the perceived benefits of empire. On a practical level, however, we have seen in Chapter 7 especially that Bailey made a significant contribution to the development of the Malayalam language and education in Kerala. Yet the greater point is that such benefits, whatever they may be, were for Bailey derivative of Christian disciples being made as they came to understand their ultimate and eternal good. Such priorities ought never to be lost sight of as we consider the nature and scope of mission.

⁴⁸ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 305.

⁴⁹ Cited in Kenneth Ingham, *Reformers in India 1793-1833: An Account of the Work of Christian Missionaries on Behalf of Social Reform*, New York, Octagon (1956, 1973) 55, emphasis added.

Conclusion

In conclusion, on the question of mission and empire, there can be little doubt that the CMS Mission of Help to Travancore was conceived in a context where the spread of Christianity and imperial interests were intertwined. Colonel John Munro's concern to have the missionaries at his disposal is ample proof of this. There need be little argument also that Benjamin Bailey and his colleagues were somewhat quiescent in their accepting of the nascent imperial arrangements in Travancore at this time. Whether or not, however, they had much alternative if evangelistic initiative and social reform were to take place is a question worth asking. Brian Stanley's summary of the links between mission and empire in general certainly apply in this case:

Their relationship to the diverse forces of British imperialism was complex and ambiguous. If it was not fundamentally misguided, their error was not that they were indifferent to the cause of justice for the oppressed, but that their perceptions of the demands of justice were too easily moulded to fit the contours of prevailing Western ideologies. In this respect, our predecessors reflect our own fallibility more closely than we care to admit.⁵⁰

So in the critique offered in these pages of the links between the Mission of Help and the EIC, the focus has been on the muddying of waters that this brought to the missionary endeavour. The spiritual and ecclesiastical benefits the mission was intended to produce were too readily associated with the stability of British power. Yet the instinct of missionaries in India at this time to view imperial interests as a providential platform for evangelistic operations should not be too lightly dismissed as mere complicity with colonial agendas.

The lessons from this episode for mission and ecclesiology remind us that such partnerships as existed between the CMS and Syrian Christians of Kerala must be grounded in a clear understanding of each other's motivations. It seems that much misunderstanding existed between the Syrian clergy and CMS missionaries which was not recognised at the beginning. Theological clarity is also essential for partnership in mission. As the Syrian Christians reflected on their encounter with the CMS, and produced documents such as *Mathopadesa Sarangal*, or

⁵⁰ Stanley, *Bible and Flag*, 184.

Quintessence of Religious Doctrines,⁵¹ it seems that they inhabited a different theological thought world than the Evangelical Protestant CMS missionaries. Had these differences been recognised better, no doubt many of the difficulties the Mission of Help encountered could have been avoided. It may be asked, actually, if the Mission of Help would have happened in the form which it did.

On the nature and scope of mission, Benjamin Bailey's instincts about the relationship of the ultimate good to temporal blessings have much that can instruct us. The call for conversion to Christ, even to the membership of a professing Christian church, cuts against the grain of what is considered acceptable mission today. Even within Christian theology, exclusive claims of salvation in Christ are often disregarded in favour of more pluralistic conceptions of the nature of encounter with other religions. Yet we may ask, with Brian Stanley, if such revisionism reflects more on the presuppositions of contemporary theologians than on the biblical accuracy of previous generations in their call to recognise Christ as the one mediator between God and humanity.⁵² Moreover, if this be true, then the ultimate good must be the ultimate priority in mission. A full-orbed implementation of the Great Commission will not leave the duties of the Great Commandment undone, or the culture in which mission takes place unaffected. This has certainly been so in Kerala, where total literacy was declared by the government in the summer of 1991.⁵³ This fact does not mean that Kerala is the free and just society it ought to be. Yet we cannot help but ponder whether Benjamin Bailey's regard for "innumerable temporal blessings," as he pursued the ultimate good of the Christian faith, is not a significant explanation of this happy statistic. His contribution to the ecclesiastical development of Kerala may not have been what he envisaged. Yet his influence on the cultural development of the state is probably much greater than he ever imagined working in the mills of Dewsbury or training in the rectory of Thomas Scott. Mission that prioritises the ultimate good often has many other goods following in its trail.

⁵¹ See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of this document.

⁵² Stanley, *Bible and Flag*, 183-184.

⁵³ Dick Kooiman, 'Who is to benefit from missionary education? Travancore in the 1930s,' in Robert A. Bickers and Rosemary Seton (eds), *Missionary Encounters: Sources and Issues*, Richmond: Curzon (1996), 153-173, ref., 153.

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