INTRODUCTION

The Latin Catholic Church is the largest body of Christians in the world. The church has more followers than all other groups combined and it is more than any non-christian religion. Nearly a fifth of the world populations are followers of the catholic faith. The catholics believe that through God's protection the church has preserved the teachings of Christ. The Pope who is the Bishop of Rome, serves as spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church. He governs the church from Vatican city, a tiny independent state within the city of Rome. A group of departments called the Roman Curia assists the Pope in his direction and guidance of the whole wide church. The members of the clergy throughout the world serve the religious needs of catholics in their particular areas. The Roman Catholic Church is an important force in world history. Its universities, colleges, monasteries, libraries and schools become centres of learning. During 1500's and 1600's catholic missionaries travelled into the new world Africa and Asia, where they played an important role in spreading western culture. In India, the Portuguese, the Spanish, the French, the Italian and the Belgian missionaries did a great service of spreading the catholic religion.

Saint Francis Xavier a Jesuit missionary established the church in south India. During the 15th century the christian missionaries took the faith to the corner of the world. The christian texts, the Bible, the writings of the church founders and of the reformers and devotional workers spread everywhere in the world. During the decade between 1920 and 1930 the church made concordats with many nations to guarantee

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its freedom and its spiritual authority over the catholics and adopted a world wide missionary activity\(^5\).

The hierarchy of the church has three levels: the Pope holds responsibility for the whole church, a Bishop for a diocese and pastors for a parish. The Pope appoints bishops who in turn appoint pastors\(^6\). The diocese is a territorial district of the church and the catholics, who live in this territory, belong to this ecclesiastical body. A diocese is divided into parishes. The catholics who live in a territory are said to belong to the parish, and they have stable residence within the parish. The parishioners perform their religious duties and participate in the ministerial events. Pastors and associate pastors lead the laity in christian life. The laity have an active role in the total function of the church. They join with the clergy in worship and prayers\(^7\). The christian laity teaches others by their good example. The laity elects lay members to the governing bodies as Parish Councils. Lay people hold important positions in the church and the church owned institutions\(^8\).

Kanyakumari district withstands with an area of 645.5 square miles. It lies between 77.05 and 77.36 of eastern longitude and 80.3 and 83.5 of northern latitude\(^9\). The district is bounded by Tirunelveli district on the north and the east. The south-eastern boundary is the Gulf of Mannar. On the south the Indian Ocean, on the south west the Arabian sea and on the west and north west the district is bounded by Kerala state\(^10\). Kanyakumari came into existence only after the States Reorganization Act of

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\(^{6}\) Anthil George, M., *Theological Formation of Clergy in India*, Poona, 1956, p.3.


1956 by the grouping of four taluks Thovalai, Agastheeswaram, Kalkulam and Vilavancode which were transferred from the erstwhile Travancore – Cochin states.

Among the four taluks of the district, Kalkulam has the largest christian population followed by Vilavancode and Agasteeswaram. Thovalai taluk has a meagre christian population. Tamil and Malayalam are the main languages of the district, the Tamil speaking population is 89.36 and the Malayalam speaking population is 10.64 percentages. Kanyakumari region was called Nanjilnadu, the literary meaning is land of the plough. Vast stretches of paddy fields, rich forests, mineral sand, the seas, water bodies, hills and the whole environment makes the place adequate for fine human settlements. This land was also called Venad, and Kottar was a principal town of Venad. Pliny and Ptolemy, the early geographers speak of the flourishing emporium as Kottiara or Kottara situated in the land of Ays, an early ruling dynasty. This town included the Nagercoil municipality which is a leading commercial place of Agasteeswaram taluk situated in the main road between Trivandrum to Cape Comorin. Kottar was a war theatre of many battles and this commercial town is fifteen kilometers north from Cape Comorin. Bartholomew says this 2000 year old city was a considerable centre of trade and the place was much frequented by merchants from island Ceylon, Madura, Tanjur and the Coast of Coromandal. The main commodities of trade are pepper, ivory, teak, sandal, rose wood, vegetables, spices, varieties of fruits and there are varieties of bazaars selling

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11 Ibid.,
12 Gopala Krishnan, M., KanyaKumari District Gazetteer, Madras, 1995 p.111.
14 GopalaKrishnan, op.cit.
16 Ibid.
17 VeluPillai, T.K., The Travancore State Manuel, Trivandrum, 1940,p.628
various goods. Thiru Gnanasambandar refers it as Thozhil malgu Kottar (an occupational centre). The commercial prosperity and wealth of Kottar attracted the attention of traders and invaders and this place has rubber base industries, wood – timber base industries, spices – Fruit base industries, printing, oil, textile, chemical, glass, ceramic, aluminum, utensils, candles, engineering units and miscellaneous industries.

Kottar Cathedral has been a centre of ordination of many religious and priests. In 1863, the new Bishop of Colombo (Srilanka) was consecrated in the Kottar church. The christians of Travancore are called Nazarenes or the followers of Nazarene, the term used in all government documents in the union of Travancore and Cochin. The early believers of catholism are called Thomas christians as they were converted by St. Thomas, an apostle of Christ in the first century and also the catholic mass of Kottar are called Xavier christians or Saveriyar christians as they were largely converted by the Jesuit missionary, St. Francis Xavier. The Kottar church proudly reads the martyrology of Devasahayam Pillai, the nation’s first christian martyr who has been adored by the catholic community of this region. The faithful are waiting for the papal declaration of the sainthood of this martyr. The Franciscan sisters of the Immaculate Heart of St. Mary had their headquarter in Kanjiracode from 1907 to 1948. Kanjiracode, the age old christian centre was the headquarters of this congregation for 41 years. Kaliyakavillai parish was declared as a District Parochialis

18 Brou, A, op. cit.,
22 Thomas, P., Christianity in India and Pakistan, Delhi,1999, p.30.
23 Narchison, J.R., A Local Church Emerges,( in Called to Serve), A Profile of the Diocese of Kottar, Nagercoil, 1983, p.42.
24 Souvenir, Platinum Jubilee Celebrations, Kottar, Nagercoil, 2005, p.4.
in 1907 by the Quilon Latin Diocese. Fr. Innocent was appointed director of the religious vicariate from 1907 to 1920. The Bishop of Quilon Aloysius Maria Benzigar signed a draft during his visit to the southern villages of Travancore in 1910.

Puthukadai was a District Parochialis from 1921 to 1926, as Fr. Innocent was transferred to this parish station, and from 1926, Thiruthuvapuram was made vicariate by the late Bishop Aloysius Maria Benzigar of Quilon. Kottar, Colachei and Mulagumoodu were the District Parochialis from the very early time onwards.

In 1935, when Kanyakumari district was electrified, the catholic diocese, and a German agency rendered total help in this venture.

Kottar, the 29th diocese of India, is the 7th in Tamil Nadu and first in Kanyakumari district of Latin hierarchy. St. Thomas, the apostle is called the guide and governor of India and St. Francis Xavier is called the second apostle of Travancore region. The diocese of Kottar is a registered institution under the title Roman Catholic Diocese of Kottar, Act 27 of 1975, No. 8.7 dated 11th February 1985. According to a judgement granted by the Madras High Court in 1975, it is a minority institution with a right to run educational institutions, charitable service, social and cultural programmes. The bishop of Kottar is the head of these catholic institutions and in his capacity he establishes and administers the diocese and the diocesan institutions. When Kottar was under Quilon, the most notable translation of the Bible into Indian tongues after 1815 was worthful and the Tamil and Malayalam

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28 *The old Dioceses of Tamilnadu are Mylapore (1606), Pondicherry (1886), Trichirapalli (1886), Coimbatore (1886), Kumbakonam (1899) and Tuticorin (1923). Source, Catholic Directory of India, Delhi, 2004, p.p. 335-1211.*
29 *Catholic Directory of India*, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 8-1411.
Bible were available everywhere in South Travancore. The institutional emblem of the diocese of Kottar contains the figures of candle, human heart, star and cross which indicate sacrifice, salvation, morality and sufferings. Kottar has at present 154 parishes established for the care of the faithful (curaanimarum). Every year selected candidates from the parishes are sent to St. Aloysius seminary and Xavier Mission Home, the diocesan seminaries to shape priests for the future. There are novitiates in Nagercoil, Mulagumoodu, Holy Cross Nagar, Colachel, Kadiyapatnam Thiruthuvapuram, Kulasegaram convents to turn young women as religious to serve the people. One family one vocation is the aim of the diocese.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The present study is one of the peak trodden and more interesting area in the history of Travancore as well as South India. A series of researches have been undertaken on the institutional history of the Catholic Church. However, the authors have not bestowed much attention to the history of the diocese of Kottar and hence a comprehensive and critical study on the Old Catholic institution of the Kanyakumari district is found necessary. This study has much social, religious and cultural importance, because catholism in Kanyakumari district measures huge weight and the Catholics are the main instruments of this region. Dr. V. Lawrence’s “History of the Catholic Church in Kanyakumari District”, is the only piece of research done in this aspect, which mainly refers the early activities of the missionaries and the formation of the church in this region. The following questions will form as hypotheses in this study. What was the social condition of Travancore in the early centuries?, the

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attitude of the Travancore kings, the high class, the muslims and the other religious people towards the christians of this place? How tolerant were the missionaries and the new converts at times of miseries and troubles? What were the measures and services undertaken by the preachers to spread christianity and to protect the catholics in South Travancore? How did the catholics participate in the religious and national events? How did the episcopes lead the bishopric of Kottar? How did the catholic organisations provide paternal care for the people? How were the people influenced by the church, its systematic associations and organised sectors?

AREA OF THE STUDY

The work area of the thesis is on the Diocese of Kottar of Kanyakumari district, the people, the catholics, the monastries, ecclesiastical institutions, colleges, educational institutions, social welfare organizations, peace making committees, the four vicariate stations of Kottar, Colachel, Mulagumoodu and Tiruthuvapuram, the long term assigning service of the foreign missionaries and home missionaries which all worked with a missionary zeal, the aims and values of these organisations and how the catholics have been practicing harmony, peace, toleration, love and understanding in this region.

SOURCES FOR THE STUDY

The source materials required for the study are spread over different archival repositories in India, Rome and the catholic countries all over the world. Special mention can be made on the archives of bishop’s houses of Kottar, Quilon, Cochin, Trivandrum, Goa and Madurai. The Tamil Nadu State Archives, Chennai, the Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum, National Archives, New Delhi have more references
about the study of the Diocese of Kottar. The sources are mainly inscriptions spread over the diocese, archival documents, acts and files of the councils, decrees, the bulls and edicts of Popes, pastoral letters of the Bishops, civil enactments and orders of ecclesiastical matters, monastic rules, constitutions, liturgies, confessional writings, epistles, diaries, reports etc. These comprised of manuscripts, printed documents and compact discs.

The original data are supplemented by secondary data gathered from published books, projects, dissertations, newspapers, periodicals, journals etc. The university library Trivandrum, campus library Kariavattom, public library Trivandrum, the Connimara public library Chennai, university library Madras, the libraries of bishop houses of Kottar, Quilon, Madurai, Verapoly, Trivandrum, Marthandam, Thuckalay, the libraries of Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Marthandam, St Jude’s College, Thoothoor have much materials to pin all the points one after another. The interviews with the high officials and senior priests supported the scholar to enrich and enhance the work with more threads.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The thesis entitled “A History of the Diocese of Kottar” aims at making a detailed analysis of the functions of Latin(rite) Catholic Diocese of Kottar, the services of the early missionaries, the conversions to the catholic faith, formation and development of the diocese, the institutional functions in Kottar, the administrative, social, economic, educational, charitable and cultural services done through this religious institution and the emergence of Kottar as a flourishing religious and commercial centre even today.
The introductory chapter is intended to present the arrival of St. Thomas, an apostle of Jesus Christ to South India, conversion of the natives, St. Thomas churches and relics, St. Thomapalli and the existence of St. Thomas tradition in south Travancore. Hence, the spread of Christianity in the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent from 52 AD is examined in this introductory chapter.

The first chapter reads about the early Latin missions of John De Marignolli, the Papal mission, the Paulists, the great patron Francis Xavier’s mass conversions, appointment of accountants, melinchi, priests, the establishment of padroado (the Portuguese missionary tradition), the work of Francisco Mansillas, Rodrigues, the later Jesuits, Franciscans, Carmelites and their valuable prints in this region. This chapter would make a detailed note on St. Francis Xavier’s popularity, formation of a church in Kottar, the shrines and parishes and the establishment of the Latin faith in Kanyakumari region. This chapter highlights the early Latin diocese of Cochin, Quilon, Funchal where Kottar was a part. It also includes the establishment of the College of Travancore and the slow and steady growth of catholic faith in South India. Thus the first chapter examines different stages of the spread of catholic faith in Kottar region along with Travancore tradition.

The second chapter “Latin Catholic Community of Kottar” makes note on the catholic societies of this region. It is found that the parava fisherfolk is the first catholic converts who were baptized largely, followed by mukkuva fishermen who live on the shores of the coastal region of Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea. This chapter throws light on the inland converts, the inland parava and mukkuva fishermen who live in 104 villages, the vellala, chettiyar, mudaliyar, nadar (the largest catholic folk who spread in all the villages of the district), the tribal catholics, their pilgrimage
practices and the important religious, national and social days of their observance. Hence this chapter is about the people of the whole region.

The third chapter “Establishment of the Diocese of Kottar” highlights the bifurcation of the diocese from Quilon, the mother diocese, in 1930. It explains the efforts undertaken by the then Bishop of Quilon Aloysius Maria Benziger, the Papal bull on which the diocese was erected, the services of the first Bishop Lawrence Pereira from 1930 to 1938, the humble duties of Bishop Roch Agnisamy, the early 26 parishes, houses of friars and priests in Kottar, the silver jubilee celebrations, construction of the Bishop’s house at Ramavarmapuram, establishment of religious institutions etc. Ultimately the catholic diocese brought Christian solidarity in the tiny district.

The fourth chapter “Development of the Diocese of Kottar” enlightens the services of the third Bishop Marianus Arokiaswamy and the fourth Bishop Leon Augustine Tharmaraj respectively, their pastoral administration, functions of the four vicariates Kottar, Colachel, Mulagumoodu, Thiruthuvapuram and its regional management, regional offices, pastoral guidance, the liturgical reforms, material reforms, rise of new parishes and churches, functions of Basic Christian Communities, the golden and platinum jubilee celebrations, participation of the laity in the day today duties of the church, the Biblical missions and rural developments.

The fifth chapter “Institutions of the Diocese of Kottar” throws light on the religious, economic, educational, social and medical institutions, their aims, services and the impact of these institutions towards the people of the diocese. It also includes the difficulties encountered and the struggles in serving the people.