CHAPTER I

ROMAN CATHOLIC
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The Chamber's Twentieth Century Dictionary defines the word "Catholic" as universal, embracing the whole body of Christians and also defines the word "Catholicism" as the tenets of Roman Catholic Church. Longman's Dictionary of Contemporary English defines the word Catholicity, as the state of being in agreement with the teachings of Roman Catholicism. So, Catholicism denotes the principles, doctrines and beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church.¹

The Roman Catholics and the Protestants, as a rule, both accept the brief statements of Christian truth, usually called the Apostle's creed, along with the other essential doctrines of Christianity. One great difference between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants is that the former acknowledge the Pope of Rome as the Head of the Church, while the latter deny it. Protestants are so called because they protested against certain doctrines of the Church of Rome. Both Roman Catholics and Protestants receive the Bible as the Word of God, but the former

¹ Edmund Lester, S.J., Catholic Defence, Tiruchiropoly, 1938, p.71.
assert that the Church must be the interpreter of its meaning. The Pope was also later declared to be infallible in matters of doctrine. Many Catholic missionaries visited South Travancore and made remarkable contributions for the spread of their faith and belief.

The first seeds of Christianity were sown in the Indian Soil by St. Thomas, the Apostle of Jesus Christ in the first century A.D. Though he converted a few thousand people in the Malabar Coast, later, for want of continuous contact with the "Home" churches, the Malabar Christians developed a different form of worship. In fact, for all practical purposes, the St. Thomas Christians of Malabar lived as Hindus.

In 180 A.D., an eminent Missionary Rev. Panthenu came to India. He ministered Jesus by carrying the Gospel of St. Mathew, written in Hebrew. According to historical sources, in 325 A.D., Rev. Yeovan, a Christian delighte, visited India.

The year 345 A.D., was notable in the history of churches in India because, the Missionary of Edessa, which was under the control of a

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3 Ramaswami, A., *Gazetteer of India*, Ramanathapuram District, Govt. of Tamil Nadu, Madras, 1972, p.163.
tradesman from Jerusalem, came to India along with Presbyterian Bishops. The Christians of Malabar extended a warm welcome to them and the king of South Travancore allowed them to enjoy absolute freedom and also helped their Mission with grants. ⁴

In 745 A.D., a band of tradesmen from Syria came to South Travancore and the king Veeraraagava Chakkaravarthy made Eravikorthan the leader of Syrian Christians, as the king of a small province with a chartered document in bronze. Besides that, he presented him many gifts and rewards. ⁵

There are no reliable records or historical evidences to describe the life of Christians in India between 850 A.D. and 1250 A.D. ⁶

Yeovan, the French hermit on his visit to China stayed in India for thirteen months between 1292 A.D. and 1293 A.D. The first hand information taken from his travel diary confirms his stay in India and also mentions about a church dedicated to St. Thomas. During his brief stay, he baptized some hundred people at several places.

⁴ Masilamani, J. S., *Indian Church History (Tamil)*, Fasumalai, 1933, p.22.
⁵ Ibid., p.27.
⁶ Ibid., p.33.
In 1310 A.D., Menendilus, a Christian hermit visited India and stayed here for a long time. He proclaimed that, Indians who bore Christian names underwent a lot of sufferings in India.

In the years between 1400 A.D. and 1500 A.D., Christianity did not spread wider thereafter because of many reasons which are as follows:

1. The spread Islam in the West Asia considerably hampered the free movement of Christian Missionaries in Eastern countries.

2. The Muslims spread their religion in Syria, Arabia, Persia and Mesapatomea, opposed Christians and compelled them to embrace Islam.

3. There was a tough tussle between Hinduism and Christianity in India and as a result, the Christian population diminished considerably in Central India. Some Christians also yielded to the force of Hindu religion during the ideological clash.\(^7\)

The grand discovery of a new sea route to India by Vasco da Gama in 1498 A.D., enabled the Portuguese to come to India for the purpose.

\(^7\) Ibid., p.42.
of conquering the world for their God and their king. The Pope Nicholas, by a Bull, assigned the whole of the Eastern World including India to the Portuguese king for conversion to Catholicism. This is called the "Padrado" of Portuguese. Accordingly Goa was captured by the Portuguese in 1510 A.D., and the natives were converted to Christianity. Eventually the Jesuit Missionaries established Roman Catholic Churches in India and played a vital role in bringing Christianity into South Travancore and rest of the Tamil Country. Their letters reflect mostly about the spreading of Christianity, as it was their prime objective.

The vast majority of Indian Catholics lived in the South and belonged to the Dravidian or the Athidravida stock, spoke Tamil, Telugu, Kanarese or Malayalam. Catholicism was prevalent among the hill tribes or aborigines of Burma, Central India and Chotta Nagpore and lastly among the depressed classes, higher and middle castes, who were spread out everywhere in India.

11 Joseph C.Houpert, S.J., Church History of India and Ceylon, Trichiropoly, 1942, p.103.
All over India, Catholicism was welcomed by the depressed classes and by non-Hindu or non-Muslim tribes and races. The Catholic Missionaries offered to help those people in their bid for freedom from economic slavery and maladministration on the part of landlords and money-lenders.\footnote{Ibid., p.96.}

The Catholic Missionaries were helped by the enlightened, sympathetic statesmen and the enthusiastic Philanthropist. The work was common to the three, not so, their ways and means and aims. The state had officials high and low paid to harness, organize, inspect and report upon charity. The Philanthropist advertised his subscription lists, totalled up his achievements, and produced annual balance sheets. The Missionary priest and nun connected Religion and Relief, Faith and Charity.\footnote{Joseph C.Houpert, S.J.,\textit{The Madura Catholic Mission from 1535-1935}, Trichinopoly, 1937, p.202.}

\textbf{St. Francis Xavier}

St. Francis Xavier was the most popular missionary who came to India. He was a Spaniard of noble descent born in 1506 A.D. He was the colleague and friend of St. Ignatious Loyala and was led to Catholic...
St. Francis Xavier
religion by him. St. Xavier was one of those six devoted men who took Solemn vows in a Solemn cell underground at a Solemn hour of the night, to spend their lives in God’s service. Under the leadership of the great St. Ignatious Loyala, they formed themselves into the “Company of Jesus”- commonly called as “Jesuits” who played an important role in the political and ecclesiastical History of Europe and other chief Kingdoms of the world. The great energy and self denial of this new brotherhood, led King John III of Portugal to think, that they were the best adapted for Missionary work among the heathen. St. Xavier was the second of the first ten Jesuits, whom King John III took into his service. His motto was “to me to die is a gain and to live is for Christ”.15

With his disciples St. Xavier visited the Portuguese colony of Goa in May 1542 A.D., then sailed to Cape Comorin in October and shortly afterwards, undertook his journey through South Travancore with amazing results. He baptized the fisher folk of South Travancore and these Christians rightly claimed St. Xavier as the Apostle of their territory. 16

14 Agur, C.M., Church History of South Travancore, Madras, 1903, p.207.
The Tiruvadi Raja, Rama Varma, who was the ruler of Nanjilnad and his brother Martanda Varma, ruler of Travancore on the one hand and the pulas or Nobles of Tirunelveli on the other hand, were very keen on obtaining the favour of Martin Alfonso De Sousa, the Governor of Goa. When the negotiations with the pulas proved fruitless, Martin Alfonso De Sousa asked St. Xavier to visit the Tiruvadis and inform them that the Portuguese would favour them. St. Xavier met the ruler of Travancore Rama Varma and his brother Martanda Varma at Tiruvankod, the capital of the latter. The two princes were very thankful to St. Xavier for all the trouble he had taken for their sake. They now had it announced in the fishing villages of South Travancore, that the people should obey St. Xavier as they would obey the Raja himself and that all those who wished to become Christians could freely do so. Rama Varma gave St. Xavier two thousand Panams (money) for the erection of churches.

St. Xavier realised that he had to act as swiftly as possible, since the political situation could change overnight and with it also the attitude

17 Joseph Thelkedath, op.cit., p.184.
of the Rajas. The Mukkuva fishermen, known as Arasar, lived in fourteen villages, twelve of which were in Travancore proper - the territory of Martanda Varma, and two were situated in the farthest South - the territory of his brother Rama Varma. Castewise, Mukkuvas were considered slightly lower than their neighbours - the Paravas and the Shanars. Since they were generally oppressed and squeezed by the royal officials, they could gain only by receiving baptism and placing themselves under the protection of the Portuguese, as their neighbours, the Paravas had done. They had also heard of the utter selflessness with which St. Xavier had intervened in order to save his Christians during the invasion of the Badagas. This attracted them to the religion of the Missionary and they decided to make immediate use of the freedom which had been granted to them. They sent word to St. Xavier, to baptize them which was done immediately after a very brief explanation of the Christian faith. He wanted to establish schools in every village, in which Christian Theology would be taught before baptism.

19 The Villages were Puvar, Kollankod, Vallavilai, Thuthur, Puthenthurai, Thengapattanam, Enayam, Midalam, Vaniyakudi, Kolachel, Kadiapattanam, Muttam, Pallam and Manaldmadi.
When St. Xavier reached a village, he assembled all the men and boys together, made the sign of the cross and repeated three times their confession of faith one God in three persons. He recited in Tamil, the Confiteor, Creed, Commandments, Our Father, Hail Mary, and Hail Holy Queen and gave an explanation on the tenents of Christianity. After that he made them yearn for God's Pardon to atone their sins, and he recited in a loud voice the creed, article by article asking them whether they believed it. When the people gave an affirmative answer, with their hands crossed over their breast, he baptized them, using the simple baptismal formula without any further ceremonies. Every one was given a piece of palm leaf, on which was written his new Christian name. The men then went home and sent the rest of their families to the priest, who baptized them in the same way. When the whole village was baptized, St. Xavier would get them to pull down their village temple and break into small pieces the idols it contained. 21

St. Xavier founded many congregations and built a number of churches and it is said, that in Travancore alone he baptised ten

thousand men in one month and more were rushing in until, his hand became utterly exhausted. Some regard St. Xavier’s words, “in the Kingdom of Travancore, in the space of one month, I have made ten thousand Christians”, as a piece of exaggeration, and suppose it to be the work of a copyist, for St. Xavier writes only “Plurimos Christianus”. But D’Orsey says that Roman Catholic writers Faber, Marshall and others do not doubt the ten thousand. 22

After three years St. Xavier became weary of the work and fruits of his labour and hence left India for Malacca but again returned to India in 1549 A.D. 23

St. Xavier was a devoted and an eminent Missionary who in great humility, repudiated many extraordinary powers attributed to him and gave the whole glory to God. Many of the Christian churches that fringe the coast of Southern India are monuments of his self-sacrifice and self-denial. 24

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22 Masilamani, J.S., op. cit., p.52.
23 Ibid., p.53.
Though St. Xavier built the first church at Mampully near Anjungo and his chief centre of labour in South Travancore was Kottar near Nagercoil. At Kottar he had a dwelling house and a small church.\textsuperscript{25} Tradition says that the heathens set fire to St. Xavier's house and reduced it to ashes, but they were struck with awe when they saw the holy man on his knees devoutly praying, not in the least touched by the flames. To mark the place, a cross was put up, to which miraculous powers were attributed. Later a church was built, a lamp is kept perpetually burning on the spot. Even Hindus go there and make vows and pour oil. Miracles are recorded to have taken place there and hence multitudes of devout Roman Catholic pilgrims from British India, Ceylon and Malacca resort to the annual festival at Kottar in December every year.\textsuperscript{26}

In 1550 A.D., St. Xavier visited Malacca again, but, his attention was primarily on the ministry in China and Japan. In 1552 A.D., he returned to India and stayed here for many months and in the same year,

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\item \textsuperscript{25} Agur, C.M. \textit{op.cit.}, p.211.
\item \textsuperscript{26} \textit{Ibid.}, p.212.
\end{itemize}
while he was travelling to China, he breathed his last in an Island. It is said that his body was preserved with formalin chemicals and other rich oils. In 1554 A.D., it was brought to India and buried in Goa and later it was discovered, that his body was not decomposed, therefore, it was exhumed from the grave and preserved in a glass coffin. Once in every ten years, the body of St. Xavier would be displayed to the public.  

By the year 1568 A.D., as a result of his untiring efforts, there were seventeen churches and eight thousand Christian fishermen in South Travancore. After the demise of St. Xavier, Adiyta Varma, the Raja of South Travancore was still unfriendly to the Missionaries and hence Christians were subjected to much ill treatment, by both the Raja and the local Lords.

However, a complete change came over the attitude of the Raja, when he realized that he would get the horses which he badly needed for his wars, only if he were on friendly terms with the Jesuit Fathers. Hence, he now gave full permission to the fathers to preach Christianity in all parts of his Kingdom, to baptize anyone who asked for it and to

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28 Joseph Thekkedath, *op. cit.*, p.188.
build churches in his Capital Kalkulam and in all places where they thought it necessary.  

The fathers went one step further by appointing a judge and a policeman in every Christian village to whom appeals could be made. But, the fathers were always available for the more serious cases to see that there was no miscarriage of justice. If they came to the conclusion that any of the judges had received bribes and given unjust decisions, they did not hesitate to depose the guilty one.

Towards the end of 1572 A.D., a serious fight took place between the Christians and their Hindu neighbours - the Shanars due to the reason that, the former was insulted by the latter. The Jesuits tried to disuade the Christians from fighting, but they did not succeed. But the Shanars won over the Raja to their side by making him large presents. Because of the help given by the Raja, the Shanars succeeded in defeating the Christians and killed two of them. Though the Christians slaughtered many more of their enemies, the Christian villages and the churches were

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., p.189.
burnt down. To compel the Raja to make amends to the Christians, Antony de Noronha, the Viceroy of Goa, issued orders that no one should trade with the Kingdom of South Travancore. Subsequently peace was made with the Raja in 1574 A.D., and the Christians began to rebuild their churches.31

Fr. Valignano

Fr. Valignano, another famous Jesuit visitor, arrived in South Travancore in 1575 A.D., with a great vision to open the way for preaching for Gospel.32 At the time of his advent, the villages still wore a desolate look and the spiritual condition of the South Travancore was even more deplorable. This way partly due to lack of Priests, wars, internal disturbances and the people almost lived like pagans. Fr. Valignano arranged two Tamil priests to be stationed at Colachel, one of them would look after all the villages which lay between Colachel and Cape Comorin and the other would care for those near Chowara. Fr. Valignano built ten houses for the priests to live in different villages and also rebuilt churches. 33

31 Ibid.
Fr. Antony Monserrate

Fr. Antony Monserrate, another Jesuit Missionary spent some time on South Travancore and wrote down his impressions about other Missionaries. According to him, though there were very good Christians in South Travancore, some of them gave trouble to the fathers. Thus, for example, Fr. Andrew Hernandez was beaten up because he ordered the demolition of a little temple, which, some bad Christians had set up in front of a church in order to obtain the favour of a devil for their fishing. Fr. Antony Monserrate himself ran the risk of being beaten up once, the reason being they were too bad and rustic and given to much drinking.  

From the annual letters of 1578 A.D., we learn that in South Travancore also, the Jesuits had by then, begun the practice of gathering people every Tuesday for confession and other sacraments. Since there was a Tamil father, the number of confessions increased and the general level of devotion to the things of faith. The Christians showed utmost love for their religion by defending their Churches against the Hindus.  

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34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
Since the Christians of South Travancore did not possess any real estate, they could quite easily go away to some other kingdom if they felt that they were being unreasonably treated. This would mean loss of revenue to the Kingdom from which they departed. So with this threat, they could at times get what they wanted. In 1584 A.D., when the Hindus fought with the Christians of Muttam, they destroyed the doors of the church and inflicted several other indignities on the Christians. At this juncture, the latter as a group deserted not only Muttam but also Kadiyapattanam and swore that they would not return unless the Hindus first rebuilt their church and made reparation for the dishonour done to God.\(^{36}\) The Raja of South Travancore now gave them timber to build a new church. Further, in accordance with what was usually done when a temple was violated, he also offered some cloth and a certain amount of money as reparation to the church. But the trouble did not end there. When the village was being rebuilt, the Muslims went and erected a Mosque in it. The Christians tried to get it removed, but the Muslims

\(^{36}\) *Ibid.*
resisted and offered large presents to the Raja in order to obtain his favour. The Christians deserted the village once again. They agreed to return only after the Raja issued a decree that the Mosque be razed to the ground and thrown into the sea. 37

**Fr. Andrew Buccerio**

Fr. Andrew Buccerio was another Catholic Missionary who succeeded in building three churches, one within the fort at Kalkulam, the Capital of Travancore, the second one outside of fort, since the people would not always be allowed to go inside and the third was erected in a garden at Kottar donated by the king. The neighbouring Christian villages of Manakkudi, Pallam and Rachimatam helped in the construction of this church, where the Christians staged the Gospel story of the rich Glutton, enjoyed by thousands of spectators, most of whom were Hindus. Though the church at Kottar was dedicated to the Holy Trinity. Fr. Andrew Buccerio places a picture of St. Xavier in it, since the people had great devotion to this saintly Missionary and were often speaking of the favours

received from God through his intercession. Within few years, the church at Kottar became a place of pilgrimage, not only for Christians but also for the Hindus alike. Churches were also built at Matavadalur, Varagem and Aatticuri, amidst strong protests from the Hindus, which was overruled by the Raja of Travancore.

In the year 1626, there were about five Jesuit Fathers in South Travancore in charge of about ten thousand Christians spread over twenty three churches. The beautiful stone church of Kottar had then become a great centre of Pilgrimage.

From the reports between 1667 and 1681, it is clear that the Christian population of the region increased considerably during the second half of the seventeenth century.

In the year 1697, it was a challenging task for the Missionaries to make the Nadar community, living in plenty in South Travancore, to embrace Christianity, but they did so in a gradually manner.

Rev. Jean Meynard a priest at Kottar diocese wore Indian conventional sanyasa dress, preached Christian doctrines among the Nayars and converted some of them.

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39 Joseph Thekkedath, op.cit.,p.192.
40 Ibid., p.193.
But the new Nayar converts, disgusted at the Priest's free mingling with the low caste people, withdrew their membership from the church. Hence, the diocese took the decision, that those who supposed to minister among the upper caste people should not mingle with the low caste. During this time, Rev. De Saa established his Missionary at Vadakkankulam and built a church at Marungoor. He was an expert in tackling the problems between the high and low caste people. Savario Borghese, a colleague of Rev. De Saa, also opened a Missionary Centre near Trivandrum. 41

The jealous leaders of Hindu religion inflicted much atrocities on Christians. Many churches were demolished. In 1705, an unfinished Church at Aasaripallam was burnt to ashes. Yet, many of the people grew very strong in faith. Having failed to shatter the faith of the people, the Hindu fanatics hatched a plot against them. They conveyed a false message to the king, that the Christian leaders at Thoppy had plenty of weapons and ammunitions and had a secret plan to topple Travancore along with the British. 42

The enraged king sent his troops to destroy churches and schools where Catechism was rendered to faith.

After the incident, Missionary headquarter was shifted to Colachel and later to Rajakkamangalam. Despite Thoppy incident, and many other tribulations, Nadars and Vellalars of Marungoor and other places continued to embrace Christianity.

In 1708, a separate Missionary Foundation was established at Nemam underwhich Marungoor, Ramanathichanputhoor and Vadakkankulam were brought under its control.

The Nadar Christians at Nemam and the surrounding places were persecuted in 1712 and were not enrolled in the Nemam Missionary Foundation, which was sparsely spreaded at Attoor, Eraniel and Thiruvidankodu.43

**Martyr Neelacunda Pillay**

Neelacunda Pillay was a very popular and the most revered Martyr who spread the message of Christ inspite of all odds. He was born in the year 1712 in a place called Nattalam and considered as one of the

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Martyr Neelacunda Pillay
prominent officers who worked at the Palace of King Martanda Varma, in the beginning of the eighteenth century. He lived in Padbanabapuram the ancient capital of South Travancore about twenty miles North of Cape Comorin. He was a born Hindu belonging to the Nayar or Sudra Caste and educated according to the rites of the orthodox Hindu religion, which he reverred much. Though he had sustained some heavy loss of money and landed property, his religious fervour did in no way diminish thereby.

One day when Neelacunda Pillay was narrating to his great friend Benedictus de Lanoy an European Officer, about the losses and distress he had lately been put to the latter discussed seriously about the uncertainly of earthly riches, the vanity of all sublunary pleasures and urged him to put his trust in God and secure eternal life. Neelacunda Pillay listened to the story in wrapt attention and his clouded mind had a very great relief. Thereafter this sort of a spiritual discussion occurred between them day after day, until Neelacunda Pillay was converted to the Christian faith.

45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., p.3.
Subsequently, De.Lanoy sent him to Vadakkankulam in Tirunelveli, where Rev. Fr. Battari baptized him formally. While baptizing, the priest taught him the creed, the commandments, some prayers and changed his name to Lazarus, but the Native Christians of South Travancore call him Devasagayam till date. Since then, he grew up to be an excellent Christian, endeavouring to preach the Gospel to others, to convert people including his wife and some of his family members into the fold of Christianity.

Rev. Fr. Battari desiring to erect a big church at Vadakkankulam, requested Devasagayam Pillay to seek permission from the South Travancore Government, to fell some teak trees and to carry the timber through the Aramboly pass.

In compliance with this request, Devasagayam made the necessary application to the Government and personally waited on the minister. But the Diwan hated the convert so much, that he threatened,
abused and warned him, that all the Christians would soon be exterminated from the land. Much disheartened at this hostility of the minister, Devasagayam said, "Do as you please sir" and returned home and spent his time in praying God.

Soon the Diwan reported the matter to Raja Martanda Varma, who commanded, a general persecution of all the Christians and Devasagayam be fettered and sent to the prison. Not satisfied with this, the next day morning the Raja again ordered that Erukkamaalai (a garland of the shrub Calotropis gigantea) be put round his neck and taken to the jungle to be beheaded there.\textsuperscript{50} The order was cancelled and a new variety of punishments and prolonged tortures, calculated to cause a lingering death were devised by the Raja. With Christian patience, Devasagayam bore all this persecution, but at last the enemies mounted him on a buffalo and led him from village to village, beaten him up with banyan canes, whipped, stuffed chilly powder into his mouth, nostrils, and eyes, made him stand in the burning sun, made him drink the dirty water in which coconut skins were soaked.\textsuperscript{51} These and a host of other tortures, were

\textsuperscript{50} With which condemned murderers are generally decked as they are led to the gallows.

\textsuperscript{51} Madathathuvilai Saint Sebastian Church Jubilee Malar, Nagercoil, 2003, p.36.
practised on him, but the Christians in the South and those in Veynad including the priests secretly visited him, encouraged and comforted him. It was the Lord who sustained him and gave him the strength to be steadfast in his faith.

Devasagayam was in prison for about eighteen months and during this time, his kith and kin persuaded him and tried every means to make him apostatize the new faith but in vain. Royal Command was issued to take him secretly to Kathadimalai (hill) near Oodagherry Fort and to shoot him down. While he was being led to the appointed place, the sepoys (guards), disgusted with him slow pace made him lie down and passed a pole through the fetters and manacles, carried him in that hanging posture to the hill. And when the sepoys fired at him three times, the noble Martyr Devasagayam Pillay fell down crying “Lord Jesus save me”. Finding that he was still lingering and that his life was not extinct, they again shot him. This mournful event took place on Friday the 13th January 1752 and the body was carelessly thrown away near the foot of the hill.

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Thus Devasagayam, a pious, and a noble Christian served the Christian community for seven years amidst all such trials and tribulations but was killed at an early age of forty. A small church has since been erected at the place where he was killed and his bones were interred at St. Xavier’s church Kottar.  

Meanwhile in the middle of eighteenth century, the Jesuits were not only persecuted in Europe but also expelled by the Portuguese Government and a number of Jesuit Missionaries and organisations were shattered due to financial crunch. This had its repercussions in India also, where the Christian Nadars were persecuted and rioters confiscated their properties and inflicted much injuries on them. The frightened Nadar families left their properties and belongings and settled in mountaineous regions. Many of them from Vanganoor, Thuckalay and Thiruvidancode were arrested and tormented in jails mercilessly. Rev. Paolino, the carmelite who lived at Padmanabapuram pleaded the king for the cause of the poor Nadars, but in vain. The Jesuit Missionary

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54 Maduthattuvilai Saint Sebastian Church Jubilee Malar, Nagercoil, 2003, p.36.
Foundation was also dissolved and was brought under the governance of the Franciscan Missionaries.\textsuperscript{55}

When the Portuguese lost their power and vigour, the Dutch and the British controlled these Missionary activities, as they grew in power one after the other in India. The then Pope sent a Papal Order (Bull) to establish Missionary Foundations in Madras, Bengal, Sri Lanka and other Eastern coastal areas.

The interference of the Dutch caused much disturbances to the activities of Latin and Syrian Catholic headquarters at Cochi. Failing to find a solution to these problems, Pope Gregory XVI brought the headquarters under the control of Varapuzha diocese.\textsuperscript{56}

\textbf{Formation of Diocese}

On March 15, 1853, it was proposed that some parishes would be separated form the Varapuzha ecclesiastical state and a new diocese to be formed taking Kollam as its headquarters. Indeed, in 1886 the Pope XIII Singarayar officially founded Kollam diocese. The most Rev. Ferdinanad Ossi became the first bishop of this diocese.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p.8.
After some years, Pope made an accord with the Portuguese and subsequently some Parishes from Varapuzha and Kollam dioceses were carved out to form a new diocese taking Cochin as its headquarters. Some coastal Parishes of Vilavancode Taluk were also brought under this diocese but, however, these Parishes were annexed with Trivandrum diocese later.

Most Rev. Alocious Maria Bensigar succeeded the most Rev. Ossi, as the Bishop of Kollam diocese on 14th September 1905, whose period is regarded as a Golden age. In the very beginning itself, he took enormous efforts to clear all the debts of the diocese, worked hard to raise a fund for the welfare of the diocese and visited Europe for three times in this regard.\textsuperscript{57}

He divided the diocese into various ecclesiastical provinces in order to have effective administration. During his period, Missionary works were speeded up and the number of Catholics in the diocese increased day by day.\textsuperscript{58}

Besides, he had profound interest in education and founded many primary schools. In 1907, he founded St. Xavier’s Teachers Training

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., p.9.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p.10.
School and after fifteen years, he started an English Medium Middle School at Carmel Nagar.

He had much affection for the Southern people of his diocese and used to visit Parishes every five years. But due to his special love for St. Xaviers, he visited the church during its feast days and held mass there.  

In 1930, most Rev. Bishop Bensigar was solely responsible for the formation and growth of Kottar diocese into full-fledged form. Most of the Catholic churches and diocese were built in the coastal areas of South Travancore.

**Important Churches of South Travancore**

**Kottar Church**

Kottar church was originally built by St. Francis Xavier but was called as St. Paul's church, but again it has been renamed as the church of St. Francis Xavier after he was canonised as a saint, by the Catholic church.

The primitive or original church at Kottar built by St. Xavier between

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59 Ibid.
St. Xavier's Church, Kottar
the years 1542 A.D. and 1550 A.D., at the expense of King John III of Portugal still exists.\textsuperscript{62}

The church does not belong to the native Christians, because neither they nor their ancestors contributed anything for the construction of it, but the church in about three centuries was entirely the property of the Portuguese Bishops of Cochin and was administered by a Vicar with a writer. Afterwards the Bishops of Cochin caused a new and more spacious one to be built close to it. This new church was richly endowed with precious ornaments and utensils by the Kings of Portugal, with the decline of the Portuguese power the wealth of the church greatly dwindled. Since, it had passed into the hands of the Carmelites under the supervision of the Bishop of Quilon about the middle of the sixteenth century, it has undergone many changes and has been improved very much.

In 1865 the church was enlarged by the addition of the cruciform wings and the whole church was vaulted over. The main altar called \textit{"SIMHASANAM"} was made of wood and gold at Quilon by Joachin

\textsuperscript{62} Sherring Smith, \textit{op.cit.},p.9.
Fernandez and was installed in 1876, which remains untouched. Later a stone Mandapam was constructed under the supervision of the Travancore state Engineer John Louis Fernandez.\(^6^3\)

The present massive edifice of the Saveriar koil, as it is known today is the result of renovations and extensions carried out during a long period of diverse tastes in art and architecture, thus representing Gothic, Greek and Indian styles artistically blended.\(^6^4\)

In this regard it is worthwhile to note that the Kings of Venad and later the Monarchs of the erstwhile State of Travancore had taken great interest in the constructions of the church and mandapam by extending their valuable help and co-operation. People cutting across caste, community and religion visit this holy place of pilgrimage even today for spiritual solace and physical well-being.\(^6^5\)

The Annual Festival that begins on the 24th November and ends on the 3rd December every year, is perhaps the biggest event in South Travancore. Christians and non-Christians from Tamil Nadu,

\(^{63}\) *Some Important Churches of Tamil Nadu*, Madras, 1986, p.46.
\(^{64}\) *Catholic Directory of India*, New Delhi, 1969, p.226.
\(^{65}\) *Some Important Churches of Tamil Nadu*, Madras, 1986, p.47.
Pondicherry, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Goa and Kerala participate with a sense of piety and spirit of unbounded enthusiasm. The colourful ceremonies in the Church, the captivating cultural programmes and glittering Car festival are not only solemn in content, but also a veritable feast to the eyes. Being the Principal church of the diocese, it is called Cathedral Church and the official functions of the Bishop of the diocese take place here throughout the year.

**St. Mary's Church**

St. Mary's Church is the famous church in Thiruvithamcode. The Syrian Christians, who were living in large numbers as commercially important businessmen. They were known as Tharaisayees, meaning true believers. The natives tried to convert these Christians to Hindu religion, but they stood with courage refusing conversion. Hence were called Tharaiya/Tharaisayees.

Some of these Christians of Thiruvithamcode and a few others from the Hindu and Islam religions joined the Latin church during the

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time of St. Xavier. The church which rose into prominence in history
books, now continues to be a church known to very few.68

**Kumari Muttom Church**

Kumari Muttom was an ancient centre of Syrian Christians and its
church at Kumari Muttom is believed to have been built by St. Thomas,
the Apostle of Christ.

The Royal Orders of Unnikkerala Thiruvadi—the ruler of South
Travancore were found in this church, which are preserved even today in
the museum of Padmanabhapuram Palace. The content of these are:
For the purpose of purchasing oil for the lamp of Kumari Muttom church,
taxes shall be collected from the different nets such as Madivala,
Vaalavala, Chalavala and Chanavala. Every country boat engaged in
exporting and importing at Kovaikkulam (Kovalam) harbour of Kumari
Muttom should give one panam each. The King's share of the grains
and fish also shall be given for this purpose. But the inhabitants within
the limits of Kumari Muttom need not pay the taxes such as
Idankaivalankaippanam, Padaippanam, Parichandakanikka etc. This
order was published on 15th of the Tamil month Chithira 1494 A.D. On

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20th of the month of Pankuni in the year 1526 A.D., the king had promulgated the second order by which low caste Hindus were forbidden to enter into the residential places of the Mar Thoma Christians.69

Thus the Missionary is played a vital role in bringing Christianity in South Travancore. St.Xavier was the most popular Jesuit Missionary who landed in Travancore and spread Christianity, followed by the Martyr Neelacunda pillay. Due to impact of these Missionaries, Nadars and Fishermen's were converted to Christianity, inspite of opposition from the native Hindus.

On account of human services rendered by the Christian Missionaries coupled with various other factors, the Hindus and the Christians later started living in peace and amity. The Catholics were the pioneers to sow the seeds of Christian faith in the soil of South Travancore, in which they were highly successful.

69 Ibid., p.11.