

**CONTESTING COLONIAL CONSECRATIONS: A STUDY OF CANON LAW,
APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION AND EPISCOPAL CONSECRATION IN 19th-CENTURY
COLONIAL INDIA**

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to understand discourses on Apostolic Succession, Canon Law and Legitimacy in the context of 19th century colonial India. During this period, India had missionaries belonging to varying confessions such as Catholicism, Oriental Orthodoxy and Protestantism. The way these Christians sects functioned during this period was significantly influenced by the colonial political landscape of the region. In this context, two Episcopal consecrations happen in south Asia, one in India and the other in Ceylon, but led by bishops from India. The unique nature these consecrations was that while one involved the joining of a Latin rite community to the Syriac Orthodox Church, the other involved an American Old Catholic priest seeking ecclesiastical legitimacy through the Syriac Church active in south Asia. This thesis narrates the tale of Xavier Alvares, a Goan cleric and René Vilatte, a French American cleric, and how both these figures approached the Christian community in India during their search for a true – authentic Church.

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Introduction

Apostolic succession as a concept is a symbol of legitimacy for several Episcopal Christian denominations in both the Western and Eastern traditions.¹ Apostolic succession is maintained by a valid consecration of bishops under Canon Law. In the late 19th century, two figures were consecrated as bishops by the Syriac Orthodox Church in India, an ethno-linguistically homogeneous community of Malayalam speakers - one a Konkani-speaking cleric from Goa and one a French-American cleric. These two consecrations will be examined to understand how legitimacy, and notions of Apostolic succession were understood during the particular time period, and how that affects the Christian landscape in colonial India. This thesis aims to understand how the Syriac Orthodox Church understood Canon Law and the discourses of Apostolic succession in context of the changing landscape of Christianity in 19th century India.

Several scholars have studied and examined the discourses on Canon Law in the context of the Western Catholic Church and the Byzantine Orthodox Church.²³⁴ In the Catholic tradition Canon Law is understood as the set of legal principles that are followed by the Church for the governance of the community.⁵ With the publication of *Codex Iuris Canonici*, the Latin Church came up with a codified Canon Law that is still considered as the foremost legal document of the Church. However, this is not the case with the Byzantine Orthodox Church where due to regional autocephaly the church does not subscribe to any codified law.⁶ While there have been several commentaries on the way these two

¹ Barrett, David B., David Barrett, Todd Johnson, Todd Michael Johnson, Christopher R. Guidry, and Peter F. Crossing. *World Christian Trends AD 30 - AD 2200 (hb)*. Vol. 2. (William Carey Library, 2001.)

² Beal, John P., James A. Coriden, and Thomas Joseph Green, eds. *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*. (Paulist Press, 2000).

³ Rhidian Jones, *The Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England 2nd edition: A Handbook*. (A&C Black, 2011)

⁴ Hartmann, Wilfried, and Kenneth Pennington, eds. *The History of Byzantine and Eastern Canon Law to 1500*. Vol. 4. (CUA Press, 2012).

⁵ Ramstein, Fr. Matthew. *Manual of Canon Law*. (Terminal Printing & Pub. Co, 1948.)

⁶ John H. Erickson, *The Challenge of Our Past: Studies in Orthodox Canon Law and Church History*. (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1991).

larger churches have understood canon law and discourses on Apostolic succession, there are no academic studies of how the Syriac Orthodox Church has understood these topics. It may be due to the relatively small size of the Syriac Church community even though its diaspora is on all continents. This thesis attempts address this concern, but also elaborate on the idea of Apostolic succession and legitimacy. The existing histories of Christian communities in India, both by colonialist historians and by native church historians, focus primarily on the chronological dimension of the past. Among the major concerns in this field is the limited attention given to the history of ideas. Chronology is important in history writing, but to understand the multiple layers of historical events - social, cultural, economic, and theological - one must also determine how historical actors engaged with discourses of theological ideas, in this case, canon law and notions of Apostolic succession.

This thesis is structured as follows. Following the Introduction, Chapter 1 provides the context by detailing a brief survey of the history of Christianity in India. Given the complex and kind of unique nature of emergence of Christianity in India, despite counting to only less than 2.3 percent of the total population of the country (as per the Census taken in 2011)⁷, it becomes important to understand the popular narratives and legends about the community that would develop certain kind of historical consciousness which would be helpful in understanding the problems to be discussed in the thesis. Chapter 2 discusses the evolution of discourses on Canon Law with specific focus on the Syriac Orthodox Church and also examine the 19th-century colonial context and changing landscape of Christianity in India. This chapter will elaborate on the historical context in which Antonio Xavier Alvares, a Goan cleric left the Roman Catholic Church and was consecrated as a bishop within the Syriac Orthodox Church. The historical factors that led to this shift, and the consciousness of finding a legitimate – true Church will be deduced from the tale of Alvares. The 3rd Chapter of the thesis will

⁷ Although the official records suggest that Christians comprises 2.3 percent of the total population of India, the actual numbers can be much more, around 5 percent of the population. Due to caste dynamics within Churches, laws regarding affirmative action policies which benefits the lower caste Dalits only if they stay within the Hindu fold officially, the actual numbers have been diminished. The number of Dalit Christians as per official records would be less compared to Church baptismal records. (Refer: Joseph P. Menacherry, Uday Balakrishnan and I. Perczel, “Syrian Christian Churches in India”, in: Lucian Leustean (ed), *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 563-597

examine the consecration of René Vilatte, a French-American cleric who represented the Old Catholic community in the Americas. Vilatte's seeking of legitimacy through taking part in the Syriac Orthodox confessionalism can be read together with the case study of Alvares to understand what exactly the different churches involved during the time was looking for, in the context of colonial expansion, and globalism.

Context

The evolution of Christianity in India is closely associated with the various colonial powers that ruled the subcontinent. Despite the presence of Malayalam-speaking Christian populations in the state of Kerala as early as the sixth century⁸, it was colonial missions (starting in the 16th century) that spread Christianity to other regions. Outside Kerala, the region that encompasses present-day Goa was a significant territory for Catholic missionary activity, and the Portuguese Empire ruled the region. In the late 19th century, Antonio Francisco Xavier Alvares (1836 - 1923), a native Goan cleric, broke away from the Latin Catholic Church and joined the Syriac Orthodox Church, thus splitting the Goan catholic community into two. Syriac Orthodox Church, a part of Antiochian Christianity, has maintained a branch in south India since the late 17th century. Alvares, who was consecrated as a bishop, was issued with the Patriarchal Bull and required documents to undergo a canonically accepted consecration. Alvares who would later be known as Mar Julius I, would consecrate Joseph René Vilatte (1854 - 1929), a French-American cleric, and appoint him as the Metropolitan of the diocese of the Orthodox Church in North America. This thesis studies both these consecrations and discusses how these events tell us about changing notions of legitimacy and Episcopal validity during 19th century period.

Bishop Mar Julius' consecration represents the first instance of a Latin rite Church community joining the Syriac rite Orthodox church. The schism should be seen in its colonial context. Through special

⁸ Istvan Perczel. "Syriac Christianity in India" In *The Syriac World*, edited by Daniel King (New York: Routledge, 2018), 663..

grants and privileges the crown received from the Pope, the monarchy of Portugal directly administered the Catholic diocese in her colonies since the 16th century. This system was called *Padroado*.⁹ The Portuguese King had the right to appoint the Archbishop of Goa. Hence, there existed three main authorities: The Pope of the Vatican, the King of Portugal (the Colonial Empire) and the Archbishop of Goa representing *Padroado*.

To understand the reasons for Bishop Mar Julius' conflict with the Roman Catholic church and the subsequent schism, one must know how exactly these three authorities functioned in colonial Goa. The schism is not necessarily the result of purely 'spiritual' or religious factors, but may also have resulted from political conflicts due to the type of actors involved in it. Meanwhile, Joseph René Vilatte had earlier functioned as a cleric as well as a missionary, aligning with several Christian denominations in the West, while identifying with the Old Catholic identity. The controversial dimension posed by these multiple identities raises important questions on how the Churches and its elders viewed what a rightful Church is, and what it means to have a legitimate Apostolic succession.

The main objective of this thesis is to connect the consecrations of Alvares and Vilatte. There are two reasons for bringing these two events together. Firstly, by joining the Syriac Church, Alvares becomes the first Latin-rite bishop of the Orthodox Church and gets a jurisdiction outside of Kerala. Until then, the Orthodox Church in India predominantly comprised of Malayalam speaking population, located in present-day Kerala. By joining the Orthodox Church, Vilatte becomes the first cleric from the West to join the Syriac Christian community. His appointment as the Metropolitan of North America further expands the territory of the Orthodox Church. Secondly, the English version of their consecration certificates appears to be extremely similar thus making opponents of Vilatte claim that his document is a forged one. In 2004, Syriac scholar George Kiraz published an article on the comparisons between the consecration documents of Alvares in (English and Syriac) and the

⁹ Kamat, Pratima P., 'The Goa-Ceylon Religious Connection: A Review Of "The Indian Cry" of Alvares Mar Julius, Archbishop Of Ceylon, Goa and India', *Sabaragamuwa University Journal*, 12 (December 2013), 61-82

alleged consecration certificate of Vilatte. Kiraz based his study on the English copies of the supposed original consecration certificate that were presented by the successors of Vilatte.¹⁰

Research Questions

The purpose of the thesis is to develop a historical analysis of the two events and answer relevant questions pertaining to the overlap between political and religious realms in colonial India. The overarching question, thus, deals with notions of Canon law and Apostolic succession and how these concepts were understood in the colonial Christian community. This thesis will investigate the following specific questions:

- What were the debates on Episcopal Legitimacy and Apostolic succession that emerged during the time of René Vilatte's consecration? How does notions of Canon Law, and the preceding event of consecration of Xavier Alvares help us understand the controversy?
- Why did Alvares and Vilatte approach the Syriac Orthodox Church for Episcopal Consecration? What features of the Syriac Church were necessary and sufficient for the two figures to achieve their purposes?
- What were the understandings shared by Alvares and Vilatte with regards to notions of 'Church', 'Doctrines, and Confessionalism? How can we address these questions by looking at their confessional trajectory?

Methodology

For the purpose of this thesis, review of existing secondary literature on Christianity of India, biographical trajectory of Alvares and Vilatte has been done. Due to the constraints caused by the CoVID-19 pandemic, digitised primary resources had to be relied upon. The photographs of Letters written by Vilatte to the Patriarch Peter III of Antioch, the certificate of Profession of Faith and the

¹⁰ George Kiraz "The Credentials of Mar Julius Alvares", *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies*, Vol. 7,(2007), 161.

agreement between the Bishop and the Patriarch were accessed from the collection of Professor Istvan Perczel.¹¹ Internet archives also paved way to access Newspapers and Magazines published during late 19th century, which would narrate the way these issues were represented. Along with secondary literature written in Malayalam and English, selected Portuguese sources that were translated into English were also included in the study.

¹¹ In 2010, Professor Perczel had photographed some documents pertaining to the history of Indian Christian community, during his visit to the Saint Mark's monastery in Jerusalem. This section included the English translations of the documents mentioned above and the originals in Syriac, which would validate the Syriac canonical legitimacy of Vilatte's consecration. However, for the purpose of the thesis, the research had to be restricted to the English translations which indicates a limitation of this project.

Chapter 1: A brief survey of history of Christianity in India

This chapter is intended to set the scene - how Christianity originated in India. It is essential to understand the origins and the unique nature of the Christian landscape of India in order to have a meaningful discussion on how Canonical legitimacy and notions of Apostolic succession manifest itself within the socio-political context of this region. At the end of the 17th century, two kinds of Christianity established themselves in India: Latin Catholic and Syrian Orthodox. This chapter tries to discuss how various events lead to the formation of these jurisdictions in colonial south India. Before European colonialists arrived, Christianity was mainly found in the southern parts of the peninsula, particularly in the present-day state of Kerala. Consequently, the discussions portrayed in this chapter take place in Kerala.

The history of Christianity in India starts with the evolution of the Syrian Christian community in the southern state of Kerala. It is a widely believed adage in the Syrian Christian community that their origins trace back to the 1st-century: those who were supposedly converted in AD 52 by Jesus' disciple Thomas. This claim becomes important while engaging with "questions about the legitimacy of the Christian faith, claim for Apostolic succession and what elements of the Syriac Canonical law is integral for the faith and practice of the community".¹² The St. Thomas' conversion narrative acts as the theological-historical core of the community's identity. This chapter aims to lay the context and history of the community by examining how the religio-socio-economic interactions led to specific historical instances. The historical context will facilitate a better understanding of how the consecration of René Vilatte and Xavier Alvares unfolded the way they did.

¹² Johan Muzhangody, "Reformation History: A Study of the Mar Thoma - Jacobite Schism in the 19th Century Keralam". MA diss. (University of Göttingen, 2021), 16.

1.1 Early days of Christianity in India

All major Syrian Christian denominations emphasis on the significance of St. Thomas as the Apostle of the community, and the nation.^{13 14} Due to the socio- economic significance of the conversion narrative - the intrinsic caste dynamic that emerge from such a narrative, a few contemporary church leaders have tried to challenge the claim.¹⁵ Kerala, a southern state of India, had strong trade routes with the West, including the Romans and the Greeks, as well as the Egyptians and Chinese, long before the first century AD, owing to the trading of spices.^{16 17}

The St Thomas conversion narrative is a subject of debate among historians, when it comes to its historical validity. Although there is a lack of strong historical evidences to support this narrative, the story is still very significant for the community. Having an Apostle in the foundation stories of the community provides certain amount of theological significance. According to biblical Gospel narratives, the disciples of Jesus Christ began preaching the new faith in different parts of the known world. It is in accordance with this narrative, that St. Thomas is believed to have travelled to south Asia and founded a Christian congregation. It is believed that the local members converted by Thomas belonged to the upper caste Namboothiri Brahmin population.

Historian Susan Bayly argues that the Syrian Christians of south India has a West Asian ethnic origin.¹⁸ However, medieval historian István Perczel emphasises the significance of the Persian origin

¹³ In the context of India, the term Syrian Christians do not refer to Christians from the present-day nation state of Syria. The term Syrian Christian is an umbrella term referring to an ancient Christian community in Kerala that has an upper-caste social identity in today's context.

¹⁴ He is often referred to as *Bharathathinte Apostolan* - Apostle of India (in Malayalam)

¹⁵ Rt. Rev Geevarghese Mar Coorilos of Jacobite Church has actively commented on the lack of evidence of St. Thomas conversion narrative. <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/bishop-demolishes-the-biggest-conversion-myth-of-Kerala/310974>

¹⁶ Sreedhara Menon. *A Survey of Kerala History* (New Delhi: Sterling Publications, 1979), 59-63.

¹⁷ Interestingly, Kerala is home to the first Jewish, Christian and Muslim community in the Indian peninsula. Jews migrated to this region as early as the 3rd-century BC. Keeping the St. Thomas conversion narrative aside, there is a recorded history of a Christian community in 6th-century Kerala. The Arad traders brought Islam to this region in the 8th-century AD.

¹⁸ Susan Bayly. *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700-1900* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 241.

of the term Syrian or *Soryani*- referring to the Christians who were ethnically part of the Sasanian Empire.¹⁹ Merchants and accompanying clerics who used Syriac within a religious context have frequently visited south India at least as early as sixth-century AD. One could argue that it is through such movements that the local Christians of south Asia came across liturgical texts and scriptures of early Christianity, particularly of the Persian Church of the East. Hence, Syriac became the worship and liturgical language of the local community in south India and this must have also added to particular naming. Perczel argues that the term ‘Syrian Christian’ must have gained prominence only after the arrival of the Roman Catholic missionaries in sixteenth century, thus requiring a need to differentiate the community from a different liturgical tradition i.e., Latin.²⁰ The St. Thomas conversion legend added the name *Mar Thoma Christiani* to the community. They are also called *Nasranikal*²¹ ie. the followers of the Jesus of Nazareth.²²

The Syrian Christians belonging to Episcopal churches in Kerala believe that Apostolic succession determines their sect's authenticity. The key distinguishing factor of these churches lies in their understanding of priesthood - as a rite that requires a formal ordination procedure that is administered by bishops ordained by other bishops - a succession line that extends back to first-century disciples (Apostles) of Jesus”.²³ Meanwhile, non-episcopal churches, like the Baptists, Brethren Assembly, Evangelicals, and Pentecostal churches, lack Apostolic succession and do not acknowledge its theological significance. Denominations like the Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians believe that Apostolic succession is preserved through *uncorrupted faith* and not necessarily through the physical

¹⁹ Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India”, 654.

²⁰ Ibid., 654

²¹ The term Nasrani is etymologically rooted in Arabic.

²² It is important to note that only Syrian Christians are called Nasranis and not the Christians evangelised by European missionaries during the colonial period, and by local missionary activity post-independence period. Even if an individual is converted in the contemporary age into Christianity, by a Syrian Christian missionary, the new convert need not be necessarily referred to as a Nasrani. This pattern signifies the caste dynamics within Christiani community of Kerala. Only the upper caste - individuals supposedly converted from Brahmin community is called as a Nasrani.

²³ Muzhangody “Reformation History”, 17.

act of laying hands.²⁴ The issue that develops in the context of this thesis is how the St. Thomas conversion narrative fits into the notion of Apostolic succession for Christians in India. With the arrival of Latin Catholic missionaries and West Syriac bishops, both who proclaim Apostolic legitimacy tracing back to St. Peter, the Indian Christian understanding of Apostolic succession becomes complex.

1.2 Sources of Syrian Christian History

Oral traditions and folklore have been the main medium through which the tale of St. Thomas conversion propagate.²⁵ The tale has become a source for songs and texts that accompany local dance form.²⁶ Traditional aristocratic Syrian Christian households tend to maintain a genealogy of their community,²⁷ tracing their origin among the ‘four families’ conventionally known to have been undergone conversion by Thomas.^{28 29}

The oral traditions, songs and ballad pertaining to the history of the community has significant rooting in the text called *Acts of Thomas*. The text was written in Syriac supposedly in the third or fourth

²⁴ Walter Kasper. *Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue*. (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009).

²⁵ It is difficult to prove the presence of a Brahmin community in first-century Kerala. This affects one part of the legitimacy of the St Thomas conversion narrative. However, the fact remains that the Syrian Christian community in Kerala society have enjoyed upper caste status in the socio-economic realm of the society. Whether it was achieved by being a Brahmin group from the beginning or a position that the community attained over time by climbing up the social ladder is up for debate. However, historians have noticed that Syrian Christians along with Jewish merchants were able to acquire tenancy of the land owned by the Brahmins. Land ownership have played a detrimental role in defining the social capital enjoyed by communities only in Kerala but in the whole of south Asia. Maintaining ties with the local Hindu rulers and royalty would gradually make Syrian Christians a dominant community in erstwhile Kerala.

²⁶ *Margamkali* is a dance form popular among Syrian Christians, especially the Knanaya Christian community. The songs used in this art form, inspired by the Acts of Thomas, narrates St. Thomas' evangelization of Keralam. *Margam* means path. Traditionally locals who converted to the Christian ‘path’ were addressed as *Margam koodiyavar*.

²⁷ The families gather in the form of Kudumbayogam, usually an annual meeting of everyone who could be traced as part of the family and the conversion narrative is revisited and reinforced during these meetings. The meetings often function as a reminder for younger generations of the family to reflect on their identity and religio-theological legitimacy that come along with the identity.

²⁸ Nidhin Donald, a scholar of Jawaharlal Nehru University, has been currently working on the Syrian Christian family historiography as part of his doctoral research.

²⁹ The ‘four families’ are Kalli, Kallikavu, Pakalomattom and Shankarapuri. These four households were supposedly ‘illams’ a term used to refer to Houses of Namboothiri Brahmins.

century AD. However, there is no clarity regarding the authorship of the work.³⁰ The text focus on the missionary activity of Thomas in south Asia as well as the Asia minor region. Due to the geography covered in this tale, the text is integral for the historiography of not only Christians in India, but also for communities tracing their history back to Christians of Babylonia, Chaldea, and Persia.³¹ There are mentions of second-century presence of Christians in south Asia by historians such as Eusebius, who states that Indian Christians were converted by the Apostle Bartholomew.³² However, the usage of the term ‘India’ in this context does not necessarily refer to the present-day nation-state India. It could be a region located anywhere from the Arabian Peninsula to south Asia.³³

Michael Geddes’ work “The History of Church of Malabar” remains to be one of the earliest histories of the Syrian Christian community compiled during the colonial period.³⁴ Although the text was written in English, Geddes’ primary sources were accounts recorded by various actors of the Portuguese Empire, functioning in their colony in south Asia. The colonial period also witnessed account production in Syriac as it continued to be the *lingua franca* of the clerical class of Syrian Christians as late as the nineteenth century period.³⁵ The missionary history accounts generated during the colonial period were written to cater both the political and missionary needs of the denomination and the Empire that they represented.

1.3 Persian Christians in south India

There is a fair amount of consensus among historians that the earliest Christian community in India had a Persian origin, in terms of organizational structure, theology and liturgical traditions. The

³⁰ Robert Eric Frykenberg. *Christianity in India: From Beginnings To The Present*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 93.

³¹ Ibid., 126.

³² Sudha Trivedi, “India Has a Long History of Native Christianity” *The New York Times*, February 22, 1986, 22.

³³ Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India”, 657.

³⁴ Muzhangody “Reformation History”, 19.

³⁵ Istvan Perczel. “Four Apologetic Church Histories from India.” *The Harp: A Review of Syriac and Oriental Ecumenical Studies*, vol 24 (2009): 189-217.

Persian Church, also known as the “Church of the East” was an East - Syriac church that was based in Sasanian Empire, during their time of interaction with the community in south India. The spiritual head of the Church was the *Catholicos of the East*³⁶, a bishop who was under the aegis of the Patriarch of Antioch. The Patriarchate of Antioch was one of the five ancient Patriarchates forming the Pentarchy model of Church administration.

The fourth century persecution faced by Persian Christians³⁷ in Sasanian Empire could be viewed as a probable reason that influenced the community’s influx to south India.³⁸ A widely accepted tradition suggests that Persian merchant named Thomas of Kana (in Malayalam - *Knayi Thomann*) and a group of 72 families arrived at Malabar Coast in 345 AD.³⁹ Both the ‘Northists’ and ‘Southists’ sections of Syrian Christians in Kerala project themselves as the descendants of the legitimate wife of Thomas⁴⁰, and the other group as the descendants of Thomas’ concubine from a lower caste community.⁴¹ The story of Knayi Thomann and his relationship with the local ruling class is based on a set of two copper plates that were not to be available since the 17th century.⁴² However, the Portuguese translation of the lost copper plates is available.⁴³ Recent historical scholarship have disputed the placing of the event in 4th century and questions the idea of 72 “families”. Research by T.K. Joseph in 1929 suggest that it is more possible that there were 72 settlers and not those many families, who received trade guilds and seventy-two privileges and the confusion has been caused due to a misreading of the

³⁶ Catholicos is a term used for an important episcopal office in Oriental Churches. The term originates from the ancient Greek word καθολικός, meaning universal. In this context, the title refers to the bishop who is the universal head of Christian community referred to.

³⁷ It is supposedly believed that Emperor Constantine I was baptised just before his death. This affected the status of Christianity in Roman Empire. The religio-political affiliation and identity formation might have affected the social situation of Christians in Sasanian Empire, given the Roman-Persian political conflicts that existed during the period.

³⁸ Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 107.

³⁹ The exact dating of arrival of Knayi Thomann has been debated by historians. Missionary historians such as C.M Agur locates this particular Persian migration in 8th century. However, modern-day historians of Christianity agree that the migration must have happened earlier, either in fourth century or in sixth century.

⁴⁰ Perczel, ‘Syriac Christianity in India’, 661.

⁴¹ Today Knanaya Christians belong to the Syro-Malabar Church and Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church.

⁴² Muzhangody, “Reformation History”, 20.

⁴³ Ibid., 664.

malayalam script, confusing ‘privileges’ with ‘families’.⁴⁴ The Persian migration to Kerala and its relationship with the issues and challenges faced by an existing Christian community in present-day Tamil Nadu suggests that the migration happened to the Western Coast as the centre of Indian Christianity shifted from the Eastern Coast, due to persecutions.⁴⁵ If the persecutions and the subsequent shift of centre is taken into account, it could be more accurate to suggest that the Knayi Thoman and the 72 settlers migrated to Kerala in the ninth century as opposed to the most accepted narrative.

With the migration of Persian traders to Kerala, the relationship between the local Christians of Kerala and the Persian Church grew gradually over time up to a phase where the local community was influenced by the Church of the East in theological and worship related matters. The Catholicos provided ordained clergymen for leading the Malayalam speaking Christians, who now dealt with Syriac liturgy.

1.4 Trade and status of Christians in Keralite society

Due to the political tensions in the Persian region that also had a religious dimension to them, the Christian merchants sought new trade routes. As a result, under the leadership of Maruvan Sapir Īsō, there was a settler migration of Christians from Persia to the port city of Kollam, in the southern part of Kerala.⁴⁶ In AD 849, the local governor Ayyanadikal Thiruvadikal (translated to: the ruler of Ay), a subordinate of the Chera ruler, granted several economic privileges and rights to the newly-migrated Christians.⁴⁷ These rights and privileges are documented in the Tharisapalli Copper Plates. As a part of the privileges that were endowed upon the Christians, they were yielded the custody of the town’s

⁴⁴ Perczel, ‘Syriac Christianity in India’, 664.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 665.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 666.

⁴⁷ Muzhangody, “Reformation History”, 40.

weights and measures – an act that would eventually lead to them overseeing most of the trade activities in Kollam.

Even today, the Syrian Christian community's popular narratives feature the gesture of Ayyanadikal Thiruvadikal granting rights, and the Tharisapalli Copper plates, as it was symbolic of the 'high social status' the community enjoyed – status that was acknowledged by the royal rulers when they officially bestowed the controls of trade activities of the region upon the Christian merchants. It is also important to examine the commercial dimension of the bestowing of rights and privileges: local rulers sought to also benefit from the extensive Indian Ocean trade network that the traders of the 8th and 9th centuries developed. In order to amass more wealth, the local rulers required robust trade with the Middle East. Therefore, giving rights and privileges for the Christian, Jewish and Buddhist traders was a strategic way for local leaders to bring more wealth into their kingdoms.

The high social status that the Christian traders benefited from, as a result of the new economic privileges and rights they had now received, must also be examined in the light of the Hindu Brahmin community's attempts to "strike at the roots of the Buddhists and Jains".⁴⁸ There was a mass migration of Brahmins to the Chera Kingdom during the end of the eighth century.⁴⁹ The hegemonic conflicts with Buddhists and Jains were not only based on differences in spirituality and ideology, but also because Buddhists and Jains had a new-found dominance in the Chera society as a result of their increased participation in trade. Historian Pius Malekandathil argues that the support Christian traders received from the Brahmins⁵⁰ could be viewed as an attempt to dissolve the financial base of the Buddhists and Jains who now posed as a strong threat to them.⁵¹ However, this speculation could be

⁴⁸ Malekandathil, *Maritime India*, 42.

⁴⁹ Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, 5.

⁵⁰ The copper plate documents that a Brahmin minister named Vijayaragha Devan supported the decision of the ruler of Ay, in granting royal privileges to Christians. Susan Bayly also talks about the treatment received by Syrian Christians from their fellow Brahmins. Christians even took part in Brahmin's festivals showing the closeness of both communities.

⁵¹ Malekandathil, *Maritime India*, 43.

viewed critically given that the Chera rulers did provide privileges and grants to traders belonging to Hindu, Buddhist and Jain communities.⁵²

1.5 The Colonial Period

Due its geographical positioning in the trade route between the Persian Gulf and China, Kollam grew as a trade hub, and with Kollam at the crux, Christian mercantile dominance peaked between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. However, several changes in the global political landscape had ripple effects on the trading dynamics in Kerala. For instance, in 1258, Persian Gulf-Kollam-China trade network took a big hit when the Mongols attacked the Abbasid Caliphate.⁵³ Subsequently, when the Mongols were defeated by the Egyptian Mamluks, Cairo replaced the Abbasid Baghdad as the centre an international trade. When the centre of trade power shifted to Cairo from Baghdad, there was also a change within the trade network in Kerala as the Arab traders from Egypt included Calicut (Kozhikode) into their trade route. Eventually, the importance of Calicut's port as part of the Indian Ocean route became more prominent, leading to a shift of focus from Kollam (south Kerala) to Calicut (north Kerala).⁵⁴

The *Samoothiri* (Zamorin⁵⁵) is the most important ruler in Malabar (north Kerala), yet like many of his counterparts, yielded power only over small territories. Owing to Calicut's growing importance in the Indian Ocean trade, Samoothiri decided to shift his capital from an interior region to Calicut. This allowed him to increasingly participate in trade with the Arabs, and eventually conquer the neighbouring regions and expand his territory. A similar trend was noticed in central Kerala, where the ruler of Kochi (Cochin) attained prominence because of the wealth that was now derived from

⁵² Perczel, "Syriac Christianity in India", 666.

⁵³ John Masson Smith. "Mongol manpower and Persian population." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 18, no. 1 (1975): 271-299.

⁵⁴ Muzhangody "Reformation History", 22.

⁵⁵ Anglicised version used in colonial sources.

trade routes that used Kochi's port. Meanwhile, in south Kerala, the ruler of Kollam administrated a small kingdom with the help of Christian merchants. Since large portions of trade-related wealth came through Calicut, the Samoothiri was considered to be the most influential amongst the three rulers.⁵⁶

In 1498, Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese explorer, arrived near Calicut, a watershed event paving the way for European settler colonialism in the Indian subcontinent. As the presence of the Portuguese traders increased, trade-related conflicts broke out between them and the Samoothiri-Arab alliance. In 1500, to overcome the conflicts, the Portuguese traders took the permission of the ruler of central Kerala and began a trading centre in Kochi instead.⁵⁷ Local leaders, such as the rulers of Kannur, Kollam and Kochi, entered into an alliance with the Portuguese in an attempt to counterbalance the dominance of the Samoothiri. These local leaders eventually contributed to the growth of the Portuguese trade by becoming "secondary politico-economic feeding units" of the Portuguese Empire.⁵⁸

1.6 Portuguese Mission in India

Roman Catholicism was the *de facto* state religion of the Portuguese Empire during the medieval and early modern period and as the Pope was the most important spiritual leader and often, the temporal leader of the Catholic Church, he played a significant role in constructing the European polity. It was through the *Padroado* system, whereby the Pope could give the Portuguese Monarch the right to send clergymen and bishops to the newly established colonies, that missionaries began to accompany the traders and sailors to India.⁵⁹ While in the beginning, the missionaries primarily catered to the pastoral and spiritual guidance of the Portuguese settlers, their roles began to diversify with the changes in

⁵⁶ Muzhangody "Reformation History", 23.

⁵⁷ Frederick Charles Danvers, *The Portuguese in India: Being a History of the Rise and Decline of Their Eastern Empire*, (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1988), 62.

⁵⁸ Pius Malekandathil. *Maritime India: trade, religion and polity in the Indian Ocean*. Primus Books, 2010, 39.

⁵⁹ Muzhangody "Reformation History", 24.

socio-political requirements of the time. Padroado was a system in which the Crown of Portugal emerged with theocratic rights over the Catholic Christians in the Portuguese colonies. Although the system gradually ceased to exist during the turn of the 20th century, it played a crucial role in determining the spiritual and temporal capacities of the monks in the colonies. The evolution of Padroado in Portuguese India and subsequent encounters with other European missionaries in the subcontinent during the 18th - 19th centuries (with the Anglican, Scottish and German missionaries), must have contributed to the way canonical jurisprudence was shaped within the local Christian community in India.

Much like the alliance maintained with the local rulers in south Kerala, the Portuguese also entered an alliance with local traders, who predominantly belonged to the Syrian Christian community. This alliance was made by local traders in south Kerala in an attempt to counterbalance the trade competition they had with the Arab traders and Muslims of north Kerala. The local Christians in south Kerala believed that an alliance with the Portuguese was essential to usurp the hegemony that the Muslims of north Kerala enjoyed over the Indian Ocean trade.

In 1502, during his second visit to Kerala, Vasco da Gama attacked Calicut and destroyed the Muslim settlements.⁶⁰ This was heralded by the local Syrian Christian community who subsequently sent a delegation to meet da Gama⁶¹ and gift him the "rod of justice".⁶² From a religious point of view, the gifting of the rod of justice was perceived as a symbol of accepting the spiritual supremacy of the Pope. This is how Portuguese historians have recorded this event. However, this was not just a gesture of spirituality as it also had an economic symbolism: it symbolized the alliance between the

⁶⁰ M. G. S. Narayanan. *Calicut: The city of truth revisited* (University of Calicut, 2006).

⁶¹ Leslie Brown. *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas: An Account of the Ancient Syrian Church of Malabar* (1982).

⁶² The rod of justice is interpreted as a religious symbol by several missionary historians, including Brown. However, in the context of commercial competition from the Arabs and local Muslim Merchants, the rod was not merely a signal to seek religious leadership from the Portuguese but also to affirm that the local Christians would prefer a commercial alliance with the Portuguese, thus helping them to gain control over the market.

Portuguese and the local Syrian Christian traders as one of protection and production. The terms of this alliance were such that the local Syrian Christian traders provided goods and spices to the Portuguese, and in exchange, these traders would receive protection. Thomas Lopes, a chronicler who accompanied da Gama, offers a third interpretation, whereby he argues that the gifting of the rod of justice symbolised the local Syrian Christians' submission to the Portuguese Crown.⁶³ Lopes' interpretation provides context to understanding how the Portuguese would later justify and legitimize their dominance over the spiritual-religious activities of local Syrian Christians, paving way for the development and implementation of Catholic Canon Law in the Indian subcontinent.⁶⁴

The extent of the Portuguese influence transcended the political-economic sphere of Kerala and spread into the Christian beliefs, norms and practices. The Portuguese believed and propagated that anything that went against the teachings of Catholicism was heresy. Anglican church historian Stephen Neil argues that spreading Christianity played an instrumental role in helping the Portuguese Empire in maintaining its presence in the south western coast of India.⁶⁵ The Empire wanted its Indian subjects to be subsumed into their rituals, practices, beliefs, and doctrines.⁶⁶ This means the local Christians should reject the Catholicos of the East and acknowledge the authority of the Roman Pope. British Missionary histories⁶⁷ suggest that the Portuguese attacked the Syrian Christians primarily

⁶³ Michael Geddes. *The history of the church of Malabar* (London: Smith, 1964).

⁶⁴ Pius Malekandathil. "Thomas Christian Heritage", *Journal of the Syro-Malabar Liturgical Centre*, Vol.X, No.18, p. 61-109.

⁶⁵ Stephen Neill. *A history of Christianity in India: 1707-1858*. Vol. 2. (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.96.

⁶⁶ It is important to note that the Roman Catholic church was facing the challenges of Reformation in Western Europe especially in the German-Switzerland region.

⁶⁷ George Broadley Howard. *The Christians of St. Thomas and Their Liturgies: Comprising the Anaphorae of St. James; St. Peter; the Twelve Apostles; Mar Dionysius; Mar Xystus; and Mar Evannis; Together with the Ordo Communis*. (J. Henry and J. Parker, 1864).

due to their supposed Nestorian beliefs⁶⁸, which was perceived to be heretical according to most Western Christian traditions.⁶⁹

Professor István Perczel, through his extensive research conducted since the year 2000, has provided a more nuanced position regarding the changes in Indian Christianity during the particular period. Perczel argues that although the Syrian Christians acknowledged the spiritual authority of the Pope of Vatican, they did not formally convert into Catholicism.⁷⁰ As per the arrangement with the *Padroado* the local Christians were allowed to continue practising their religion according to East Syriac rite (the Persian rite). Therefore, the Latinization of Indian Christians happened much later than presumed. Latinization must have also intervened with existing juridical practices of the local church community.

The Latinization process was also facilitated when Christian traders in Kollam and other parts of Central Travancore were “facing competition and threats from their Muslim counterparts, as a consequence of the Ottoman attack on Mosul, the seat of the Persian Catholicos.”⁷¹ During this time, the local Christian traders in these regions had sought the Portuguese' help, and this helped bring about Latinization. Eventually, the church had to face first significant schism between mid and late sixteenth century, since it developed an organised structure through the Persian Church administration from the 8th century onwards. The schism had two primary motivations. Firstly, the Persian Church was going through a schism when Shimun VIII Yohannan Sulaqa who claimed to be the Catholicos of the Church of East was appointed by the Roman Pope, thus paving way for a Catholic rite within

⁶⁸ Nestorianism was a theological perspective developed by Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople. According to this concept, Christ's divine and human nature joined in a prosopic union as opposed to a hypostatic union. Nestorius was condemned by Cyril of Alexandria and his theology was considered as heresy. During the 16th century, the Persian church or the Church of the East was perceived as Nestorian, which was a heretical sign for the Portuguese.

⁶⁹ Malekandathil, *Maritime India*, p. 78.

⁷⁰ Perczel, *Syriac Christianity in India*, p. 680.

⁷¹ Muzhangody “Reformation History”, 26.

the Persian Church. Meanwhile, another cleric, Shemon VII Ishoyahb claimed himself to be the rightful Catholicos, independent of Roman superiority.⁷² Both, Sulaqa and Ishoyahb, asserted that they were the Catholicos of the East and sent bishops and clerics to Kerala. This furthered the division that the Portuguese had begun. The bishop sent by Shemon VII, Mar Abraham was the last Persian metropolitan for the Syrian Christians in India, who was later reconsecrated as a Chaldean Catholic bishop in 1568.⁷³

Secondly, the Portuguese established influence over the pepper trade between Kerala and the West.⁷⁴ Several influential “Syrian Christian households, as well as migrant Arabs, engaged in pepper trade”.⁷⁵ With the changing power dynamics, the Syrian Christians yet again sought the Portuguese’ help to overcome the competition caused by the Arabs. In exchange for help from the Portuguese, the Syrian Christians had to concede to submitting to the Catholic doctrine and Pope’s ecclesiastical authority.⁷⁶

In the year 1599, the famous Synod of Udayamperoor (Diamper) was held, during which the congregations in central Thiruvithamkoor (Travancore) and Kochi were formally absorbed into the Catholic church. During the Synod, crucial theological positions, surrounding the nature of Virgin Mary, and that of Christ were discussed.⁷⁷ Through the decisions of the Synod, the Latin Catholic theological concepts tended to replace the Chaldean Catholic ones as it was accused of Nestorianism. Through the *Padroado* arrangement, the Crown of Portugal established an Archdiocese in Angamaly (which is located near Kochi). This Archdiocese came under the authority of the Archbishop of Goa. Later, an Archbishopric independent of the Goa would be established in Kodungallur.⁷⁸ Until a couple

⁷² Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar W. Winkler. *The church of the east: A concise history*. (Routledge, 2003), p. 113.

⁷³ Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India”, 655.

⁷⁴ Malekandathil, *Maritime Trade*, 96.

⁷⁵ Muzhangody, “Reformation History”, 27.

⁷⁶ Malekandathil, *Maritime Trade*, 97.

⁷⁷ Howard, *Christians of St. Thomas*, 61.

⁷⁸ Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India”, 655.

of decades ago, all major historians, both affiliated to the Church and the ones who attempted to write a ‘secular’ history of the Christian community in India argued that several liturgical documents, accounts of historical relevance and theological texts that belonged to the local congregation were supposedly burnt.⁷⁹ However, Perczel, through his recent research, argues that the ‘lost documents’ were preserved by the families who rejected the Synod and the idea that the Catholic Church burned these important texts was a myth that got crafted gradually over time.⁸⁰

In 1653, after a series of events, the first major schism within the Syrian Christian community took place. The sect that continued to accept the Papal authority was known as Pazhayakoor (the old group), while the new and independent group were called the Puthenloor. The Puthenloor group tried to approach Christian communities in Antioch and Alexandria to send a bishop who could ordain clergy among the local believers. This act can be seen as a symbol of consciousness the local Christian community had with regards to notions of Apostolic succession. The Syriac Orthodox Church responded to their request and the Patriarch of Antioch sent bishop Gregorios Abdal Jaleel to Kerala to formally consecrate Archdeacon Thoma as Mar Thoma I.⁸¹ As the Antiochian Episcopacy belonged to the Apostolic lineage of Saint Peter, Mar Thoma I now held a ‘valid’ apostolic succession. This event marked the beginning of the West Syriac ritual influence in Kerala. Thus, two organised, episcopal churches emerged in India, the Syrian Catholic community with allegiance to the Pope of Rome, and the Puthenloor - also known as the Malankara Church - with loyalty to the Patriarch of Antioch.⁸² On one hand, the Syrian Catholics were allowed to maintain their East Syriac traditions

⁷⁹ Muzhangody, “Reformation History”, 36.

⁸⁰ Perczel, “Syriac Christianity in India”, 682.

⁸¹ Thomas Joseph, “Malankara Syriac Orthodox Church,” in *Malankara Syriac Orthodox Church*, edited by Sebastian P. Brock, Aaron M. Butts, George A. Kiraz and Lucas Van Rompay (Gorgias Press, 2011; online ed. Beth Mardutho, 2018), <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Malankara-Syriac-Orthodox-Church>.

⁸² Muzhangody, “Reformation History”, 36.

and heritage while subscribing to Catholic theology. On the other hand, the Malankara church became a part of the Oriental Orthodox world by gradually adopting and using the West Syriac liturgy.⁸³

The aim of this chapter is to explain some important features of Syrian Christian history prior to the arrival of the British mission. The Christian community in Kerala traces the origins of its development to Indian Ocean trade, the exchange of ideas and goods with the Middle East and Persia, and the subsequent migration of Persian Christians. The Christian traders received privileges and grants from the local rulers, that would have contributed to their social standing. The arrival of the Portuguese in 1498 enabled the local Syrian Christians to form a new “protection and produce” alliance that facilitated better trade, but also not only contributed to the Latinization of the local Christians. Latinization was a necessary for the colonial empire to avoid any threat against the Catholic authorities. The result of Latinization and subsequent conflicts in the Syrian Christian community, often driven by commercial concerns, led to the first major schism in 1653.

This chapter explores how the emergence, growth, and early division of the Syrian Christian community in Kerala were driven by more than just spiritual reasons, but also by changing the power dynamics and political-economic conditions of the time. By the end of the 17th century, there were three major trends of Christian thought in India: The Roman Catholic, the West Syriac Orthodox, and the East Syriac Persian. The three churches did not completely replace the existing forms of Christian faith in India. The local community operated as a separate rite or group within the universal map of the three Churches. Furthermore, there are many myths and legends associated with the origin of the Christian community in India, which can be considered part of formal history. In addition, the local Christians may not have entirely renounced the existing indigenous religious cults and practices that can be categorised under the umbrella term of Hinduism. It means the local socio-cultural dynamics

⁸³ Oriental Orthodox Churches in present-day: Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, Indian Orthodox Church, Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Eritrean Orthodox Church. They are different from Eastern Orthodox Churches (Greek, Russian, Ukrainian, Serbian etc.)

of the community get into play not only with respect to the worship practices and traditions of the "foreign" churches, but also with regard to their law and its interpretations.

How did the Canon laws of the Roman, Syriac, and Persian churches travel to India, and how did the local dynamics of the Christian community affect them? What elements of the Canon law are relevant to the specificities of the Indian church? In the next chapter, I will attempt to answer these questions by considering what Canon law means in different geographical settings and cultural contexts, as well as how it evolves within the early modern context of Indian Christianity.

Chapter 2 - Canon Law and Events of 19th-Century Colonial India

The first chapter of the thesis had set the historical context in which Christianity emerged in India, especially in its south western part. By the end of the 17th century, there was a strong hold for the Portuguese Empire and *Padroado* in India. *Padroado* was a system through which the Pope of Vatican allowed the Portuguese Crown to appoint the Archbishop for the Catholics in India.⁸⁴ There were preliminary developments providing a terrain for Roman Catholicism to unfold in India. Meanwhile, the *Puthenkoor* faction that objected against the Latinization process developed ecclesiastical ties with the West - Syriac rite i.e., the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch. Bishops from this particular Church started visiting Kerala to ordain clerics as well as consecrate bishops under the title *Mar Thoma*. For the purpose of this thesis, this chapter will examine the developments on the notion of Canon law within the Syriac church, and how it manifested in the Church's jurisdiction of south India. Debates on Canon law are integral to understand how the Church viewed Episcopal consecration, a ceremony that helps in maintaining Apostolic succession. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first section will discuss notions of Canon Law in general, the second part will explore the idea of Canon law within the context of Syriac Christianity, and the third part will discuss the joining of Antonio Xavier Alvares into Syriac Orthodoxy within the context of changing religio-political dynamic of colonial India.

Simply put, Canon Law refers to the rules and regulations that are required for the Church to function as an institution.⁸⁵ Historically, the word has been closely used in relation to the Roman Catholic church. One could argue that this is due to the sheer size of the Catholic church as an institution, and

⁸⁴ Joseph Brucker, "Protectorate Of Missions," *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* Vol 12 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911).

⁸⁵ James Coridon, *An Introduction to Canon Law*. (London: Burns & Oates, 2004), 3.

also due to the dual nature of the Church for most of the Ante-Nicene and medieval period in which the Church functioned in both spiritual and political realms of Europe. Due to the organisational nature of Episcopal Churches such as the Catholic Church, Church of England, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches, canon law takes a more codified form in these institutions than in the case of several Protestant non-episcopal denominations.⁸⁶

The practice of having some form of law or collective decision-making process, to look after the functioning of the faith community existed since the New Testament times.⁸⁷ Christianity as a belief system emerged within the context of Judaism. However, with the Gospel being spread to the *Gentiles*, Christianity started taking a different form. Given that the Jews and Greeks came from different sociocultural contexts, the faith community developed the need to have clarity regarding the teachings of the Apostles, practices, and rules that they must follow while being in a worship setting.⁸⁸ These issues would get discussed in the gatherings of the elders of the community, gradually leading to the formation of councils.⁸⁹

As the practice of Christian faith attained more attention in terms of numbers as well as in terms of recognition from the local polity, Councils and Synods were formed to discuss the law, faith and practices of the Church. With the idea of a ‘universal Christendom’, ecumenical councils were held, which were often presided over by a ruler. The first ecumenical council of Nicaea, presided by the Roman Emperor Constantine I in AD 325, was an important event in the history of early Christianity.⁹⁰ Several key theological, particularly Christological issues were discussed during the

⁸⁶ Orsy, L. M. , Huizing, . Peter J. and Örsy, . Ladislav M. "Canon law." Encyclopaedia Britannica, February 19, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/canon-law>.

⁸⁷ Hamilton Hess, *The Early Development of Canon Law and the Council of Serdica*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 5.

⁸⁸ Orsy, “Canon Law”.

⁸⁹ Hess, *The Early Development of Canon Law*, 6.

⁹⁰ Mark Edwards, “The First Council of Nicaea” In *Cambridge History of Christianity, Volume 1: Origins to Constantine*, edited by M.M. Mitchel et. al, 552- 567. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

council which was attended by bishops representing different Church groups in the *oikumene*. The Nicene council was one of the foundational events in achieving doctrinal consensus among the different Christian communities involved. The proclamation of faith, known as the *Nicene Creed* which was adopted during the council continues to be the official statement of belief for several Episcopal denominational churches that adheres to the identity of a *one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church* - a concept that was developed during the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (AD 381). The doctrinal positions that were confirmed during the Ecumenical Councils and Synods would gradually get codified as the canonical law that would guide the faith and practices of the early Church.

The Western Catholic church, and the Eastern Orthodox Church had similar Canon Law positions until the eleventh-century, when the universal Christendom went through an East-West schism.⁹¹ These laws not only dealt with theological concerns, but also with temporal and juridical issues. With the split of Eastern Orthodox churches into different autocephalous churches inspired by nationalism, Canon law of respective Churches too went through changes to incorporate changing political conditions.⁹² Meanwhile, the Catholic Church has compiled their ecclesiastical laws and regulations into a text called the 1983 Code of Canon Law (in Latin - *Codex Iuris Canonici*), a text which was published during the reign of Pope John Paul II.⁹³

2.1 Canon Law in Syriac Orthodoxy

Unlike the Eastern Orthodox Church or the Western Catholic church, fellow ancient community of Syriac Orthodox Christians did not have a codified form of Canon Law - a document that encompasses everything about the jurisdictional practices of the institution, defining functions of the

⁹¹ Orsy, "Canon Law"

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ To access the Code of Canon Law, refer to : https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic_index_en.html

various actors involved in the Church during the early days of the Church. One reason could be the fact that Syriac Orthodox Church, despite being presented as one of the earliest Christian sects in the world, was not a large institution panning over different continents, like in the case of Catholic church, or a Church that acquired a nationalistic nature like its Eastern Orthodox counterparts. During the first few centuries after the split of Oriental-Eastern Orthodox churches, the Syriac church depended on the output of various synods and local councils, to determine canonical validity of debates within the institution. It must be noted that a Constitution for the Syriac Orthodox Church was only compiled as late as AD 1933,⁹⁴ although there were Patriarchal bulls and decrees that guided the functioning of the Church. However, there was some basic consensus that the Church would have regarding the pursuit of its jurisprudence, theology and doctrine.

Several early Christian literature that come under the category of ‘Church Orders’, written during the period between the first and fifth centuries, functioned as treaties that guided the functioning of the Church.⁹⁵ Church Orders included works such as *Didascalia Apostolorum*, *Didache*, *Testamentum Domini* etc. - works originally written in Greek or Syriac. These texts had preliminary discussions on the organisation of a church institution, the way sacraments were supposed to be dealt with, ordination and consecration of Church Elders etc. So, it should be a fair assumption to suppose that Church Orders literature and early Patristic traditions⁹⁶ played an important role in deciding the legal and practical matters of the early Christian community, which would include the Syriac Church.

⁹⁴ The English version of S.O.C’s constitution can be found in:
<https://dss-syriacpatriarchate.org/canon-law/constitution/?lang=en>

⁹⁵ Paul Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origin of Christian Worship*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 73.

⁹⁶ Works of the Early Church Fathers.

In an elementary form, the canon law of Syriac Orthodox church is dependent on the following⁹⁷:

1. The rules of the Old and New Testaments.
2. The pseudo-apocryphal canons of the Apostles include the canons of some local and regional synods.
3. The decisions of the three Ecumenical Councils which were held in Nicaea (325 AD), Constantinople (381 AD) and Ephesus (431 AD).⁹⁸
4. The canons quoted from the letters of some famous church fathers who lived in the early centuries of Christianity and other canons prescribed by some church fathers as responses to questions they were asked.
5. Also, the canons of the universal synods which are recognized by the S.O.C.A. after the ascension of Justin I as the Byzantine Emperor in AD 518, argued by some Jacobite authors as an event leading to a schism within the Syriac Church, which include decrees and canons enacted by patriarchs on different subjects.

One of the key contributions for the development and compilation of Syriac Canon Law was done by Mor Gregorios Bar Hebraeus⁹⁹, a thirteenth-century monk and Maphrian of the East.¹⁰⁰ He collected the juridical texts mattering to the Syriac Church and this work was called *Kethabha dhe-Hudhaye*, or *Hoodoyo Canon*, or *Nomocanon*.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ “Concept of Jurisdiction and Authority”, Mor Gregorios Johanna Ibrahim , Last modified July 18, 2010.
<https://syrianorthodoxchurch.org/2010/07/concept-of-jurisdiction-and-authority/>

⁹⁸ The rejection of the Council of Chalcedon - the Fourth Ecumenical Council - is one of the fundamental distinguishing factors between Oriental Churches such as the Syriac church, and the Eastern Orthodox Church.

⁹⁹ “Concept of Jurisdiction and Authority”, Mor Gregorios Johanna Ibrahim , Last modified July 18, 2010.
<https://syrianorthodoxchurch.org/2010/07/concept-of-jurisdiction-and-authority/>

¹⁰⁰ Bar Hebraeus work is also the basis of Canon Law for the Malankara Orthodox Church also known as Indian Orthodox Church, which has been in frequent conflict with the Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese in India since early 20th century in the realm of church jurisdiction and administration of local Parishes. In Kerala, the conflict is conventional known as the Orthodox-Jacobite split/ conflict. However, the two Churches were in Full communion until 2020, and subscribe to same worship practices and theology.

¹⁰¹ According to the official version of the Malankara (Indian) Orthodox Church, out of the 40 chapters of the Hoodoyo Canon, only the first 10 sections are applicable to the functioning of Malankara Christians and the rest 30 chapters cater the needs and demands of the Syriac Christians in the Middle East, due to cultural and historical specificities. This includes

With the expansion of the Syriac Orthodox Church into India, Synods that were held in Kerala also got recognised as canonical sources. The conflict within the Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese regarding the temporal functions and status of the Patriarch of Antioch, would lead to a split within the Indian church, that would be a basis of some of these Synods, and later the formation of a Church constitution in mid-twentieth-century.¹⁰² However, there are very limited literature on the discourses surrounding Syriac Canon law until the end of the nineteenth century. This does not mean that Canon law did not undergo changes and developments during the period between thirteenth century and nineteenth century. It is more about the difficulty in finding sources and preliminary materials of this period.¹⁰³

2.2 19th-Century Colonial India

The 19th century period was a phase of schisms and jurisdictional conflicts within the Malankara faction of the Syrian Christian community in Kerala - the sect which gradually received ordination, consecration, and liturgical traditions from the West-Syriac rite since the event of Coonan Cross oath.¹⁰⁴ Meanwhile, the Portuguese Empire and the Catholic mission had already established strongholds not only in Kerala, but also throughout the south western coast, extending to present-day Goa. This was made possible also due to the relationship that missionaries had with the East India Trading company. English historian Kenneth Ballhatchet argues that the British company had invited Catholic missionaries to engage in mission activities of the presidencies in Bombay, Madras and the

the temporal supremacy of the Patriarch of Antioch, which the Malankara Orthodox Church does not accept. More details on this position can be found in:

<https://mosc.in/administration/he-canon-law-of-the-malankara-orthodox-church>

¹⁰² Mor Gregorios Johanna Ibrahim, "Concept of Jurisdiction and Authority"

¹⁰³ Khalid Dinno, "The Synods and Canons in the Syrian (Syriac) Orthodox Church in the Second Millennium – An Overview" *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 17, no. 1 (2017), 21. <https://doi.org/10.31826/jcsss-2017-170104>

¹⁰⁴ In popular narratives of the Malankara faction, this happened immediately after the Coonan Cross oath. However, the historicity of this claim can be contested. Coonan Cross oath was a declaration of anti-Latinisation sentiments. However, it seems to be less probable that the Malankara faction immediately shifted to West-Syriac rite in its entirety. They must have continued the East-Syriac tradition they acquired through the ecclesiastical relationships with the Persian Church. However, the Syriac Orthodox bishops were important for the community to have consecration of their bishop *Mar Thoma*.

princely states of Travancore and Cochin, which was under the influence of the Company rule.¹⁰⁵ However, once the British took over most territories of the Indian subcontinent, missionaries who were not necessarily affiliated to the Portuguese *Padroado* began to establish mission fields in the region; this included the Carmelites missionaries from Italy, and Capuchin and Jesuit missionaries from France.¹⁰⁶ The jurisdictional authority and administrative powers that the *Padroado* enjoyed under the umbrella of the Portuguese Empire was gradually facing a decline during the expansion of the British colonial regime in India, cornering the Portuguese to certain coastal regions on the southwestern part of the peninsula. It is in this context, the story of Xavier Alvares, who was elected as the Catholic Archbishop of Goa becomes important.

2.3 Alvares within the Catholic fold

Although the Portuguese first arrived in Malabar coast of present-day Kerala, over time their headquarters of their colonial state *Estadio da India* shifted to regions comprising the present-day state of Goa, in Western India.¹⁰⁷ The Catholic Church, through the *Padroado* system, had formed an Archdiocese based in Goa, to look after the matters concerning the Catholic community in the whole of India. Antonio Francisco Xavier Alvares, who was born in the year 1836, was ordained as a clergyman of the Catholic church in this context.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Ballhatchet, Kenneth. "The East India Company and Roman Catholic Missionaries." *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44, no. 2 (1993): 273. doi:10.1017/S0022046900015852.

¹⁰⁶ Ines G Županov, "The Historiography of the Jesuit Missions in India (1500–1800)", *Jesuit Historiography Online*. (November 2016)) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2468-7723_jho_COM_192579>

¹⁰⁷ Pratima Kamat, "Popular Reaction to the Religious Policy of the Portuguese in Goa: The Case of Kunkolle." *Journal of Indian History*, v. LXVII (1-3,1989): 83-90.

¹⁰⁸ J Humbert, *Catholic Bombay, Her Priests and their Training, 1800-1928*, PART. II., (Bombay: International Eucharistic Congress,1964).

According to the Orthodox Church viewpoint¹⁰⁹, Alvares was actively engaged in events and movements that dealt with the idea of independence and patriotism¹¹⁰. He was the editor of a newspaper called *A Cruz*, which dealt with nationalist ideas.¹¹¹ This did not sit well with the *Padroado* officials and the Archbishop of Goa. Within the context of conflicting ideas between the *Padroado* and other European Catholic missionaries with regards to administrative power and jurisdiction over the Church's population in south Asia, the issue between Alvares and the *Padroado*-Archbishop setting became more vulnerable. The arrival of non-Portuguese Catholic mission in India lead to the reduction of *Padroado*'s power.

By latter half of nineteenth century, there were three different kinds of juridical authority that could possible interfere with the matters of the Catholic community in India: "The Congregation of Propagation of Faith", constituted by Pope Leo XIII, the Portuguese colonial Empire and finally the *Padroado* which although now losing its influence was gradually becoming more and more autonomous from the Portuguese Crown's influence.¹¹² Given the conflicting situation arising in jurisdictional and administrative matters of the Catholic church within India, Alvares approaches Joseph Mar Dionysius, the Malankara Metropolitan of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Kerala to request support.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Several clerical scholars of the Orthodox Church in Kerala consider Alvares as a figure who promoted the idea of nationalism through usage of local goods. They even use the term *Swadeshi* which means, belonging to the land (or local). The notion of presenting Alvares as a flagbearer of *Swadeshi* concept becomes important in situating the figure within the context of anti-colonial struggle and independence movement. Interestingly, *Swadeshi* movement as a part of the Indian Independence movement is refers to specific efforts taken by the leaders of the Indian National Congress during early 20th century, very much later after the activities of Alvares.

¹¹⁰ Francisco Luis Gomes, "Obras Completas III A Liberadade de Terra e a Economia Rural da Índia Portuguesa" (Nova Goa: A Livraria Académica, 1929), quoted in BM Thomas, "Bishop Alvares Mar Julius – A Vigilant *Swadeshi* Orthodox Christian Prelate" paper presented at FFRRC seminar (Kottayam, October 2016).

¹¹¹ George Alexander & Ajeesh Philip, *Western Rites of Syriac-Malankara Orthodox Churches*. Alappuzha: (OCP Publications, 2018), 5.

¹¹² Ibid., 8

¹¹³ Ibid., 9.

2.4 Consecration of Alvares

The consecration certificate of Alvares as Alvares Mar Julius was recently published by Syriacist George Kiraz. As per the certificate, Alvares received the staticon from the Patriarch Peter III, and was consecrated through the laying off hands by Paulose Mar Athanasius, Paulose Mar Ivanious and Geevarghese Mar Gregorios, three Metropolitans of the Syriac Orthodox Church from Kerala on the 17th of July, 1889.¹¹⁴ The newly elected bishop Mar Julius, was given the seat of Ceylon, and was declared the Metropolitan of Goa, Ceylon and India (excluding Malabar).¹¹⁵

There are little controversies regarding the canonical validity of Mar Julius' consecration as the Certificate suggest the availability of a staticon that was issued by the Patriarch. With this document, the physical presence of Patriarch seems to be not necessary, given that the consecration process was led by the Metropolitans from Kerala, who were part of the Syriac Orthodox Church. Although Alvares joined the Syriac Church, his small set of followers were allowed to continue following the Latin rite, thus leading to a very unique situation of having a Latin rite under the Apostolic authority of the Syriac Patriarch of Antioch.

Alvares joined the Syriac church for multiple reasons. Although existing literature show that he had conflicts with the changing administrative and political situation of Goa, with respect to the *Padroado* and the Congregation of Propagation of Faith, he was also looking for a Church which was not under a foreign administrative and temporal supremacy. He was looking for a church that had a more 'local' dimension. Interestingly, he joined the Malankara Church, which indeed had a much more local dimension to it in spite being ecclesiastically related to the Patriarch of Antioch. Now, whether this relationship is that of submission or mutual acceptance of autonomy and autocephaly has been a matter of huge debate that has eventually led to the formation of two Oriental Orthodox factions in

¹¹⁴ George Kiraz "The Credentials of Mar Julius Alvares", *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies*, Vol. 7,(2007), 161.

¹¹⁵ Here, one could assume that Goa was separately written as it was a Portuguese colony and was not technically part of 'India' which seem to be referring to the British Empire in India, and the controlled princely states.

India, the Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese (conventionally called as the Jacobite Church) and the Malankara Orthodox Church (or the Indian Orthodox Church). The Malankara Orthodox faction often takes up a national identity for the church. Mar Julius was also looking for a Church which had a national and more local nature. The next chapter will discuss the consecration of René Vilatte, in which Alvares played a significant role. The conclusion section of the thesis will try to put in together both consecration events in its historical context and understand the reasons that led to the events, and what a 'Church' meant for both Vilatte and Alvares.

Chapter 3 - Case Study of Consecration of Bishop René Vilatte

The previous chapter discussed the colonial history of India in the 19th century, in which both the Catholic Church and the Syriac Church had faced challenges due to the changing political dynamics of the region. Alvares, a Goan Catholic cleric, ended up joining the Syriac Orthodox Church because of conflicts within the Catholic community of Goa (Portuguese India). He was consecrated as Mar Julius I by the Syriac Orthodox Church, thus making him the first bishop of the Orthodox Church outside the Malayalam speaking territory of south India. He was appointed as the bishop of the Latin Rite of the Orthodox Church, in Goa and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). This chapter will discuss how Mar Julius I or Alvares Mar Julius, and other bishops of the Orthodox church from Kerala consecrated René Vilatte, an event that has been a subject of controversy, raising questions about the canonical legitimacy of the consecration process. René Vilatte was a French-American cleric during the time of consecration who identified with the Old Catholic community in the United States, at that point in time. This raises two primary questions. Why did Vilatte seek the help of the Syriac Church to be consecrated as a bishop, and come all the way from the US to Ceylon? Are there any motives and interests on the part of the church that prompted them to consecrate a cleric from the Western world, a region where Syriac Orthodox Christians did not exist? The purpose of this chapter is to address both of these questions by historically situating the event of consecration and thus allowing one to discuss the broader debate of canon law and apostolic succession.

3.1 A short biography of Vilatte before 1892

René Vilatte was born on 24 January 1854, in Paris, France.¹¹⁶ He migrated to Canada in 1874 and worked as a teacher for two years. In 1876, he joined the Catholic religious order of Christian

¹¹⁶Theriault, Serge. *Msgr. René Vilatte - Community Organizer of Religion 1854 - 1929*. (Berkeley: Apocryphile Press, 2006), 5.

Brothers in Belgium, but he then returned to Canada to study theology at St. Laurent Seminary in Montreal. He studied under Charles Chiniquy, a man who was a fierce opponent of the Roman Catholic Church and eventually left the Church to become a pastor in the Presbyterian Evangelical Church. The anti-Catholic lectures caused Vilatte to leave the seminary in 1880, to study Protestant Theology at McGill University, Montreal.¹¹⁷ The concept of Papal infallibility that was confirmed through the First Vatican Council (1869) was a major reason for several groups within the Roman Catholic Church, to either criticise the establishment or leave the church. This must have inspired Chiniquy as well as Vilatte to reject Roman Catholicism. In 1884, Vilatte was appointed as a missionary for the Presbyterian Church in Wisconsin, USA.¹¹⁸ He left the Presbyterian Church soon after to work for the Episcopal Church.¹¹⁹ Vilatte was ordained a priest by the Old Catholic community in Switzerland (1889) upon the recommendation of the Episcopal Bishop J.H Brown.¹²⁰

As one could notice, several events are happening in Vilatte's role as a missionary or a religious servant. Within a decade's time he identified himself with Catholics, Presbyterians, Old Catholics and Episcopalians. As scholar of Independent Catholicism Alexis Tancibok argues, Vilatte's early writings show his issues with Roman Catholic church, such as papal infallibility, theology of transubstantiation¹²¹, universal nature of the Pope's authority etc.¹²² However, there is little evidence to show his active interest in Protestant theological positions. This might have influenced Vilatte to explore different Protestant denominations that were already established or being established in North America. This leads us to a hypothesis that Vilatte was searching for a Church that did not have the

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 6

¹¹⁸ Alexis Tancibok, "Early Independent Catholicism in Context: A re-examination of the career of Archbishop Joseph René Vilatte 1884 - 1929" PhD Diss. (Durham University, 2020), 76.

¹¹⁹ Theriault, *Msgr. René Vilatte*. 6.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 8

¹²¹ Transubstantiation is a Catholic doctrine according to which, during the celebration of the sacrament of Holy Communion, the whole substance of Bread and Wine completely turns into substance of Christ's body and blood. This position is not subscribed by several Reformed and Protestant Churches. (Refer: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/transubstantiation>)

¹²² Tancibok, "Early Independent Catholicism" 77.

errors of the Roman Church. He was looking for a Church with the right doctrines, right faith - one which was a 'true Church'. This position becomes important in understanding his further activities and interactions with the Syriac Orthodox Church.

Vilatte's ordination as a priest by the Old Catholic church in Switzerland could be viewed as a sign of his interest in maintaining the *Catholic* identity. This would also substantiate Tancibok's argument that Vilatte did not have clear explanations for joining any particular Protestant sect, because he did not necessarily want to leave the catholic identity. The idea of a catholic i.e., Universal Church became important for Vilatte. One of the fundamental features of Protestant movements in Europe as well as the Protestant churches in the US, is their focus on a decentralised Church system that functioned on a smaller scale. Thus, although he took part in missionary activities of the Presbyterian and Episcopal churches, when it was time for ordination as a clergyman, he did approach the Old Catholic community in Europe.

Vilatte's ordination by Old Catholic was supported by J.H Brown, the Episcopal bishop of Fond du Lac in Wisconsin. However, the relationship with the Episcopal church changed once Brown was replaced by Bishop Charles Grifton. Grifton did not entertain Vilatte seeking an Old Catholic tradition while working with the Episcopal mission.¹²³ Meanwhile, Vilatte's affiliations with the Episcopal community was becoming an issue within the Old Catholic circles, especially in Germany and Switzerland. The Old Catholic mission in Wisconsin elected Vilatte as their bishop candidate.¹²⁴ Continuing the practice that was followed during the clergy ordination, Vilatte approached the Old Catholic church in Switzerland for a 'catholic' episcopal consecration. However, in 1890, Eduard Herzog, the bishop of Christian Catholic Church of Switzerland wrote to Vilatte stating that he or other Old Catholic bishops in the German speaking region would not consecrate him as a bishop.¹²⁵

¹²³ Ibid., 79

¹²⁴ Theriault, *Msgr. René Vilatte*. 8.

¹²⁵ Tancibok, "Early Independent Catholicism" 78.

The situation was difficult for Vilatte as Grafton - representing the Episcopal church and Herzog representing the Old Catholic church wanted Vilatte to leave the other Church. However, given the Episcopal missionary space in Wisconsin, it would not have been easy for Vilatte to completely disconnect with the Episcopal church.

It is in this situation of dilemma, Vilatte writes to Alvares Mar Julius, the Syriac Orthodox Metropolitan of Goa, Ceylon and India (excluding Malabar).¹²⁶ Vilatte was consecrated by Mar Julius, as the Metropolitan of America in an event that was held in Ceylon. This process was supposedly done with the permission of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch. The next section of the chapter will discuss the historical context in which the consecration occurred.

3.2 Vilatte and the Syriac Orthodox Church

Vilatte's relationship with the Syriac Orthodox Church raises two important questions: Why did the Syriac church decide to consecrate a French cleric situated in the Americas - a territory which was extremely far away from the Middle East and South India - the two regions where the Church had hold? Secondly, why was Mar Julius supporting the cause of Vilatte?

Vilatte's reasons for approaching the Syriac church are fairly easy to deduct. Firstly, he had difficulty in attaining consecration from the Old Catholic community in Europe. Secondly, with the kind of theological identity and positions Vilatte held, he would not have been satisfied with the consecration obtained from the Episcopal church, due to contrasting theological understanding of Apostolic succession. On the other hand, seeking the help of the Roman church would compromise his theological discrepancies with the particular Church. In this context, the Syriac Orthodox church offers a better solution. Firstly, the church is one of the ancient Christian denominations in the world,

¹²⁶ Present-day Kerala.

due to its Antiochian heritage.¹²⁷ Secondly, the Church maintained Apostolic succession of St. Peter, the prominent disciple of Christ. Hence, the Apostolic succession proclaimed by the Roman Catholic church is same as that of the Syriac Orthodox Church.

The Patriarchal Bull announcing the consecration of René Vilatte by the Syriac Orthodox Church was issued on 5th of May, 1892, by Patriarch Ignatius Peter III.¹²⁸ As per the document, Vilatte was to be consecrated not only as a bishop, but also as the “Metropolitan of the Archdiocese of America.”¹²⁹ Being a Metropolitan means Vilatte would have more autonomy and authority within the Episcopal hierarchy. However, Mar Julius and his followers in Colombo did not expect this as one could deduct from their writings. The *Independent Catholic* is a journal that was published in Colombo by Mar Julius’s followers and the journal referred to Vilatte as ‘Bishop-elect’ in 1892, until the Patriarchal Bull was released.¹³⁰ Vilatte’s followers in Wisconsin had welcomed this move:

“Father Vilatte expected to be made a simple bishop, but the Holy See of Antioch which had in 1854 sent a regional bishop to Europe and America to gather the lost souls of the house of God from popish and rationalist error into the true fold, again sends our leader forth on a similar errand, making Archbishop Vilatte Primatial Metropolitan with regional jurisdiction for the western world.”¹³¹

Although, there are consecration documents such as Vilatte’s Profession of Faith, letters and agreements exchanged with the Patriarch, Patriarchal Bull etc. that are available either in Syriac or in English translation, a document called staticon has not been found out yet. A staticon is a letter of faculty that the Patriarch gives a newly appointed bishop in the Syriac Orthodox Church.¹³² This

¹²⁷ As per New Testament (*Acts* 11; 20-21), Antioch was the place where followers of Christ were first called Christians.

¹²⁸ This document has been a matter of controversy. The main reason for the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England, and the Episcopal Church in America to reject the episcopal legitimacy of Vilatte lies in the fact that his followers were not able to produce the original Syriac version of the Bull. The documents that were available for most of 20th century were English translations of the Bull. However, in 2010, Professor Istvan Perczel photographed some Syriac manuscripts in Saint Mark’s Monastery in Jerusalem, which would include the Syriac version of the Bull. These materials have not been published yet. Professor Perczel also found three English documents, the Profession of Faith by Vilatte, Letter written to Patriarch Peter III and an agreement by Vilatte with the Antiochian Patriarch.

¹²⁹ Kiraz, *Credentials Of Mar Julius Alvares*, 161.

¹³⁰ Tancibok, “Early Independent Catholicism” 331.

¹³¹ ‘Ibid.

¹³² G. B. Howard, *The Christians of St. Thomas*.

document emphasises the reasons to choose a particular candidate to be elevated as a bishop, and also the functions of the newly appointed bishop. However, in case of Vilatte, a Patriarchal staticon was missing.

Vilatte's consecration certificate states the following:

‘We entrust to his care the general epistle from the Holy See, addressed to the believers of the above said Dioceses; also, we have to add, that His Holiness the Patriarch is prayed and expected to speedily despatch the staticon definitely describing his authority and jurisdiction.’¹³³

This certificate was signed by the Syriac Orthodox bishops from India, Alvares Mar Julius, Bishop of Goa and Ceylon, Mar Athanasius - Bishop of Kottayam, and Mar Gregorius - Bishop of Niranam. The statement suggests that these bishops expected the Patriarch to send a staticon that would consist of information regarding the functions of Vilatte after consecration.

Vilatte had earlier mentioned that the Americas were a region that did not come under the rightful claim of any of the Patriarchal Sees.¹³⁴ In this context, the Patriarch of the Syriac Church might have seen the consecration and appointment of Vilatte as a Metropolitan as an opportunity to develop an American Orthodoxy. For this establishment to be free from the religious-political influences of the Churches of the ‘Old World’ the appointed bishop must have certain amount of autonomy and autocephaly, something that comes up with the rank of being a Metropolitan bishop. Although the lack of a staticon causes issues with the validity of Vilatte as a Metropolitan, the Independent Catholic scholars such as Alexis Tancibok has a positive approach towards the situation. Tancibok argues that the Patriarch did not issue a staticon deliberately, so that Vilatte had more options when it comes to his ecclesiastical function and power once elevated as a Metropolitan.¹³⁵

¹³³ Kiraz, *Credentials Of Mar Julius Alvares*, 163.

¹³⁴ A Retrospect’, *The American Old Catholic*, May 1915, 6-8 (p. 7)

¹³⁵ Tancibok, “Early Independent Catholicism” 313.

3.3 Consecration reasons from a Syriac Orthodox viewpoint

The Syriac Orthodox Church, although an ancient Church, was a very small community in terms of absolute numbers. The political landscape of Ottoman Empire was not always favourable for the functioning of the Church and its missionary activities. By the middle of nineteenth century, the Church only had around two hundred thousand families.¹³⁶ There were pressures from the side of missionaries belonging to other denominations too. The European imperial project and colonial expansion to the ‘New World’ had changed the way preaching of Christianity worked. The world was undergoing challenge as well as innovations due to globalism and it is in this context, one must understand the possible reasons for the Patriarch to support Vilatte’s consecration. The Catholic and Protestant missionaries were engaged in missionary activities in the Middle East, which was also causing concerns for the Syriac church. In this context, Patriarch Peter III consecrates Julius Ferrette¹³⁷ as the bishop for the British islands.¹³⁸ One could therefore argue that, the relationship with Vilatte was not necessarily the first attempt by the Syriac Church to explore options to spread Orthodoxy to the Western world. As mentioned before, the opportunities offered by globalisation provided the Church to get out of its traditional territories of jurisdiction mostly confined to the Middle East and parts of south Asia.

Patriarch Ignatius Peter III’s interest in supporting and consecrating Vilatte could consist of several reasons. Firstly, the Americas was an ‘open field’ in terms of missionary activities for the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Several Orthodox groups within both Eastern and Oriental Christianity had attained a national character due to political and theological reasons that sustained such institutions throughout the medieval and early modern period. Having said that, there was no such institution in

¹³⁶ Tancibok, “Early Independent Catholicism” 24

¹³⁷ The consecration validity of Julius Ferrette is also questioned. However, there is a long chain of Bishops who received consecration from Ferrette, including the elders of the ‘British Orthodox Church’. Thus, the tale of Ferrette becomes another interesting narrative of a European cleric achieving Apostolic succession from the Antiochian Patriarch.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Americas i.e., an American Orthodox community. Given the possibility of Patriarch's consecration relationship with Julius Ferrette of Britain, one could assume that Vilatte provided a second opportunity to establish Oriental Orthodox faith in the Western world. Scholar of Independent Catholicism, Alexis Tancibok argues that the Patriarch viewed Vilatte as a leader who would spread the notion of *Catholic Orthodoxy* within the Western context which was dominated by the Roman Catholic and varying Protestant denominations.¹³⁹ Therefore, the Orthodox community could potentially try to be the national Church in America, and also be a model of Catholic - Orthodox church during a time of growing discontent with the Roman Catholic church.¹⁴⁰

3.4 Relationship between Vilatte and Mar Julius

As per Vilatte's writings in the *My Relations with the Protestant Episcopal Church*, he first corresponded with Alvares Mar Julius in 1891.¹⁴¹ Mar Julius' response to Vilatte was interestingly published in a local Gazette in Wisconsin. The letter consisted Mar Julius' criticism of Episcopal Bishop Grafton, who made Vilatte's attempt to be consecrated as a bishop within the Western world difficult.¹⁴² The letter had polemical elements criticising Grafton and trying to protect the doctrinal approach taken up by Vilatte.

Mar Julius must have supported Vilatte for several reasons. Firstly, as a Metropolitan of the Syriac Church, he had the responsibility to proceed according to the Patriarchal attitude towards Vilatte or any other figure. This becomes a stronger commitment in case of Mar Julius, given that it had only been two years since he joined the Syriac Church as a Latin rite bishop. Secondly, an important doctrinal- theological commonality shared between Mar Julius and Vilatte was their strong opposition

¹³⁹ Ibid., 331

¹⁴⁰ Discontent caused due to the Papal infallibility position declared during the First Vatican Council.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 332

¹⁴² Green Bay Press-Gazette 'An Old Catholic Bishop', (8 October 1891)

towards the Roman Catholic church. In case of Vilatte, he was actively trying to develop an Independent Catholic identity while Mar Julius, once a cleric of the Roman Church had left the same due to issues with the administrative hierarchy of the Church. Thirdly, as one could deduct from a letter exchange between Mar Julius and a figure named Fr. Ignatius, he too was critical of the Protestant churches in the Western world:

“Except the Old Catholic and other Orthodox branches of the Eastern Churches, the whole of Europe is sunk in the greater heresies at the present day. ...the different denominations of Protestants take it upon themselves to suppress the true doctrines of the Universal Church, and thereby lead themselves, step by step, into the greatest heresies and other confusion bordering on unbelief.”¹⁴³

Reading along the lines of nationalist-patriotic sentiments Mar Julius had, one could argue that he must have considered Bishop Grifton’s dynamics with Vilatte as an act of colonial enforcement. Hence, supporting Vilatte would become an act of anti-colonial viewpoint, that would eventually help the latter to develop a local American church - just like the one Mar Julius imagined for himself in case of Goa and south Asia. Moreover, the idea of looking towards Eastern Churches to find a true Church was a possible approach that Mar Julius shared with Vilatte.¹⁴⁴ His later writings in *Antioch and Rome* emphasis Asia as the site of divine revelation which makes the Antiochian Patriarch a more important figure than the Roman Catholic Pope.¹⁴⁵

The letter written to Father Ignatius also consist of the following statement:

“The Old Catholics and others under the Eastern Church now in Europe do not carry out their propaganda extensively so as to increase their strength, and if they remain any longer in the present state their existence in Europe will hardly be of any use. Many of these Churches, in order to live in friendship with Rome and other Protestant denominations, do not attempt to carry on their mission beyond their present limit. This is wrong in every respect.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ “Father Ignatius”, *Western Mail*, (20 July 1899), 6.

¹⁴⁴ Tancibok “Early Independent Catholicism”, 334.

¹⁴⁵ Kamat, ‘Goa-Ceylon Religious Connection’, 69.

¹⁴⁶ “Father Ignatius”, *Western Mail*, (20 July 1899), 6.

3.5 Consecration of Vilatte

As per the English translation of the Consecration certificate of René Vilatte, he was consecrated as a bishop by the Syriac Orthodox Church and given the title “Metropolitan of the Archdiocese of America.”¹⁴⁷ The consecration ceremony was held in Ceylon, in May 1892, in the Cathedral church of Alvares Mar Julius, in the presence of Mar Athanasius, the Bishop of Kottayam and Mar Gregorius, the Bishop of Niranam (both in Kerala). According to the recently discovered English translation of Letter addressed to the Patriarch by Vilatte, the following key points can be deducted. Firstly, Vilatte had informed the Patriarch that he was the superior of the Old Catholic Church in America. Secondly, Vilatte, like Mar Julius, proclaim the superiority of Antiochian Patriarchy over the Papacy of Rome. Thirdly, he would acknowledge the Antiochian Patriarch as the only superior of the Old Catholics of America.¹⁴⁸

Within 5 months after Vilatte’s consecration, the event was condemned by the Episcopal Church in the US.¹⁴⁹ There were three factors that were discussed during the General Convention of Episcopal Church bishops that were raised to condemn Vilatte’s consecration. Firstly, the Episcopal Church does not recognise the consecration led by a bishop who belonged to a sect that rejected the Council of Chalcedon i.e., the Syriac Orthodox Church.¹⁵⁰ This must refer to the doctrinal issues regarding the union of human and divine nature of Christ where the Oriental Orthodox churches rejected the position taken up by the Western and Eastern churches. Since Mar Julius was a bishop of a non-Chalcedonian Church, he did not have the right to consecrate a bishop for a region that came under the charge of the Episcopal diocese of Fond du Lac. Secondly, Vilatte was not elected by the synod (although his supporters present him as the bishop-elect of the Old Catholic mission in Wisconsin).

¹⁴⁷ Kiraz “The Credentials of Mar Julius Alvares”, *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies*, Vol. 7,(2007), 161.

¹⁴⁸ The letter has been photographed and kept in the private collection of Professor Istvan Perczel.

¹⁴⁹ Tancibok, “Early Independent Catholicism” 13.

¹⁵⁰ Joseph René Vilatte, “An Encyclical to All Bishops Claiming To Be of the Apostolic Succession” (1893), <http://anglicanhistory.org/usa/misc/vilatte1893.html>

Thirdly, Vilatte was “deposed from the sacred ministry” before the consecration event.¹⁵¹

The Encyclical document composed by Vilatte consist of his explanations and answers negating all three positions. He argued about the legitimacy of the Syriac Church by citing that the doctrines of Chalcedon with regards to the ‘Person of our Blessed Lord’ which has been acknowledged true by the Syriac Church. He argued that the Syriac Church believed in the substantial union of the two natures of Christ, which is not a heretical position.¹⁵² Secondly, he argued about his legitimacy as a candidate for being a Bishop of the Old Catholics in America to had nothing to do with the Synods or the diocese of the Episcopal Church. He also dismissed the ‘disposed from sacred duty’ claim by stating that an Episcopal bishop(s) could not condemn or excommunicate an ordained clergyman of the Old Catholic sect.¹⁵³

The condemnation of Vilatte’s consecration was done by both the Episcopal Church as well as the Roman Catholic Church - the two institutions that had direct conflict with him. By condemning the consecration event, the problem at stake is the legitimacy Vilatte would achieve as a bishop i.e., Apostolic succession, which is integral for the Catholic, Orthodox and some Protestant churches in one way or the other. This could be the reason that motivated the Episcopal Church General Convention to elaborate on the invalidity of the Syriac Church in the context of the contrasting positions on the Council of Chalcedon. However, Vilatte by sticking onto Christological debate, attempts to justify the doctrinal position of the Syriac Church and hence their validity as a Church without errors, which in turns makes himself a legitimate member in the line of Apostolic succession.

Vilatte approached the Syriac Church for multiple reasons. Not only he required Apostolic successional legitimacy which he could not achieve from the Western churches, he also wanted a

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.,

Church that would incorporate his idea of being a *catholic*, which the Syriac Patriarch would be okay agreeing with, due to the universal connotation that comes up with the concept of catholic. Secondly, in Alvares Mar Julius, Vilatte saw a fellow rebel towards the Roman Catholic church. By consecrating Vilatte as the Metropolitan of Archdiocese of America, the Syriac Orthodox Church could enter a new mission field outside its conventional territories and probably explore the idea of having a catholic-orthodox Church.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to answer some important questions that were raised with regards to the events that led to the consecration of Mar Julius and Mar Timotheus. The Thesis began by elaborating on the long history of Christianity in India, starting from its initial phase. It is important to understand the historical context of the community in India, as some elements of the narrative such as the Saint Thomas conversion tale, could play a role in understanding how Indian Christians themselves perceived notions of legitimacy and authenticity. The story of Saint Thomas conversion narrative has been elaborated in this thesis for another reason. Both, the Syrian Catholic and Syrian Orthodox community in India (to be specific, Kerala), depend upon the Apostolic succession of Saint Peter for their community's legitimacy and Episcopal authority. Nevertheless, Saint Thomas is still perceived as the patron saint of the community. Today, the reformed faction and the Orthodox faction within the Syrian Christian community use the term "Throne of St. Thomas" which raises questions on how the community incorporates both the succession from Thomas, and from Peter. In case of latter, there is an actual lineage of Apostolic succession through the physical act of laying the hands on the bishop-elect and clergy candidates. The problem is complex and does play a role in the popular consciousness of the community's legacy as the 'original Christians of the land'.

The second chapter of the text attempted to draw on notions of Canon Law within the context of Syriac Orthodox Church. As the thesis have presented, the Syriac Church's discourses on Canon law are not well traced when compared to the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches. The entire history of the development of Canon Law between 13th century period and 19th century are muddled due to lack of resources. It should also be acknowledged that continuing cataloguing of Syriac manuscripts and other resources might open up more avenues to understand the issue. However, there exist a long tradition of depending on legal treaties and regulations that could be extended back to the Apostolic age, which are still being used in one way or the other, to portray the functions of a Church elder, in the case of the Syriac church, the various bishop offices. Texts of Patristic tradition and Church orders

have been evolved over time and also taken different forms depending on the changing social-cultural and political circumstances.

The next section of the thesis has attempted to look at the consecration context of Alvares (Mar Julius) and René Vilatte (Mar Timotheus). Both these figures have taken particular confessional trajectory due to the changing circumstances offered by the particular time period. Here, notions of globalism, anti-colonial sentiments, nationalism etc. become important. For Alvares, the shift from the Roman Catholic church to the Syriac Orthodox church must have occurred as a result of a vision of Church that was local in nature and anti-colonial. It had to be Anti- Roman, Anti- Protestant. For Vilatte, the idea of a catholic Church which was not the Roman or the Protestant Church was important. In both cases, one could argue that there was an attempt to seek a true – orthodox – universal Church. By maintaining the ‘catholic’ identity, Vilatte have shown his search for such a kind of Church. By emphasising on the Eastern Church as the original – ancient form of Christianity, Alvares too showed his consciousness of a true Church.

The story of Alvares also shows the idea of a national nature which a Church would require, a concept that is extremely common among the Eastern Orthodox sects. Alvares’ shift from the Roman church can be viewed as a search for a Church with a national identity. Interestingly, today, the Malankara (Indian) Orthodox Church proclaims Alvares as their late Bishop while less attention is given by the Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese of India.¹⁵⁴ The Malankara Orthodox and Syriac Orthodox Churches agree on doctrinal and theological concerns but disagree on the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Antioch. For the Malankara Church, Patriarch is a foreigner who cannot look after the temporal realm of the Church in India. There is an element of nationalism that develops in this situation and Alvares’ nationalistic nature rightly fits within their position. However, historically speaking, Alvares did get

¹⁵⁴ Catholicate in India.

consecrated under the permission of a foreign bishop, i.e., the Patriarch of Antioch thus showing again the emphasis he gave for a rightful Apostolic succession, to be considered as a legitimate church elder. The colonial expansion and subsequent Globalism also changed the understanding of the Patriarchate of Antioch about what the Church's jurisdiction should look like. The attempt to expand to unknown territories of Americas should be understood in this context. Patriarch Ignatius Peter III must have imagined the establishment of a catholic orthodox Church - an American Orthodox Church, by consecrating Vilatte. The doctrinal statement of 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church' that emerged during the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople is interpreted by all three actors mentioned above. Hence, in spite of making confessional changes and seeking consecration from Churches that did not necessarily have an active ecumenical dialogue during the time, one could see the necessity of Apostolic Succession that both Alvares and Vilatte found, to be considered as legitimate church leaders.

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