

# Early nineteenth-century foundations of Christianity in Malaya: Churches and missions in Penang, Melaka and Singapore from 1786-1842

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Today Christianity in Malaysia and Singapore seeks an identity which is true to its own energy and cultures at the same time as it is conscious of its participation in a universal faith. It is also important that it be aware of its own history. While associations with the British period have now faded, it remains nevertheless an era worthy of study, just as the nature of that association still requires examination.

The years between the arrival of the British in Penang and the signing of the Treaty of Nanking cover a time when British interests in the region developed but did not yet extend beyond the Straits Settlements. It was no accident that this was also a period of Christian expansion, yet the links were on the whole indirect. For the churches, it was a time when if seldom at government direction, then at least under a British umbrella, a new influx of missionary interest both took root and lost impetus.

Such an influx was not to be repeated until later in the century and again in the 1950s, and in any case much of the core of modern Christianity in the end derives as much from migrant Christian communities as from the work of missionaries in Malaya. Nevertheless the diversification and growth of the church during the early 19th century was not insignificant. What began as a sleepy community of Catholic Portuguese, over a period of 60 years came to encompass other races and at least some other denominations. The story has been well researched in terms of the London Missionary Society<sup>1</sup> and a treatment of Singapore can be found in Bobby E K Sng, *In His good time*.<sup>2</sup> This paper seeks to provide an overall view for the Straits Settlements noting that the subsequent fallow period from the 1840s to the 1870s also needs attention.

For Catholicism, present in Melaka since the 16th century, the church diversified from its pastoral role with Portuguese descendants, to also being a missionary church among the Chinese. During this period the French replaced the Portuguese as the most active Catholic mission in the area. The arrival of the British in Penang, Melaka and Singapore provided a base for Protestant missionaries, as well as for Catholic, together with 'chaplaincy' ministry to the growing British expatriate community. By 1842 missionary work was in decline and most Protestant missions were on the point of transferring to China leaving the chaplaincy churches to make steady if unremarkable progress.

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<sup>1</sup> W J Roxborough, *A bibliography of Christianity in Malaysia*, Seminari Theoloji Malaysia and Catholic Research Centre, Kuala Lumpur 1990, pp.27-29. A C Heron, "A history of the Protestant Christian Churches in West Malaysia and Singapore", unpublished mss, Dunedin, 1977, pp.61-121.

<sup>2</sup> Graduates Christian Fellowship, Singapore, 1980.

## 1.1 The political background

These years saw a steady expansion of British influence. British concerns were primarily to protect their trade with India and to provide for trade with China. Involvement in Malaya was a product of these interests and of the desire to keep other European powers at bay.

Francis Light acquired Penang in 1786 and in 1795 the British took Melaka from the Dutch. It was opportunistic, but the conquest of Holland by the French had made it feasible. When Melaka was handed back in 1818 the British - to retain control of the Straits of Melaka, protect their China trade and ensure the Dutch did not do anything at their expense - looked for a new base nearer the southern end of the Straits; hence Raffles' move into Singapore in January 1819. The Dutch were unhappy but realised there was some point in rationalising their areas of interest. In 1824 an Anglo-Dutch treaty determined that Melaka be returned to the British in exchange for Benkulen in Sumatra.

It is necessary to outline this untidy seesawing in political status<sup>3</sup> to help explain some of the uncertainty in the planning of the early missionaries and why they made some of the decisions they did. Penang was all along under British control, so it was the place where English missionaries and indeed French Catholics first wanted to go. One factor affecting their timing was that as far as mission rather than church work was concerned the East India Company did not permit missionaries in its territories until an Act of Parliament in 1813 forced it to do so and even then it facilitated rather than promoted missionary activity. The earlier policy was inconsistently applied however. In 1807 a Protestant missionary was prevented from sailing from London to Penang, while in Penang itself Catholics, including missionaries, were welcome from the start. It was only in 1814 that the first LMS missionary visited Melaka.

In twenty years Melaka moved from Dutch to British, back to Dutch and then back again to British control. In their first occupation the British wanted to shift the population to Penang because they did not want to give more back to the Dutch than they had to (hence the demolition of the Melaka fort in 1807 until it was stopped by Raffles). At one time the London Missionary Society was more interested in Melaka than Penang because of its greater Chinese population (their primary interest was China). At other times it felt it needed to develop work in Penang. After 1819 there was a question-mark over both Penang and Melaka because Singapore's prospects appeared better and at that point Melaka was back with the Dutch.

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<sup>3</sup> Key dates:

26 Aug 1795,	British take Melaka by force from the Dutch.
1805,	Melaka placed under the 'Eastern Presidency' of Penang.
13 Aug 1814,	At the Convention of London the British agree to hand Melaka back to the Dutch. Ratified at the Congress of Vienna, 8 June 1815.
21 Sep 1818,	Restoration of Dutch rule in Melaka.
30 Jan 1819,	Agreement between Raffles and the Temenggong of Johor. The founding of Singapore.
17 Mar 1824,	Anglo-Dutch Treaty of London. Agreement to swap Melaka for Benkulen in Sumatra.
9 Apr 1825,	British reoccupy Melaka, which is now placed under the government of India.
Mar 1826,	Straits Settlements combined in a single Presidency with a Governor in Penang and a Resident Councillor in each settlement.
1830,	Penang reduced to a Residency.
1832,	Singapore replaces Penang as capital of the Straits Settlements.

Not surprisingly all this contributed to missionary indecision and a lack of concentration of effort. The situation was compounded by uncertainty about who the mission was directed towards in any case. Was it to Malays with a focus on the wider region, or was it to Chinese while people waited for opportunities in China itself? And if it was to the Chinese, then to which dialect group?

## 1.2 The London Missionary Society and missionary motivation

From its setting up in Melaka under William Milne in 1815 until its departure with the 'opening' of China after 1842 the London Missionary Society was the largest missionary group in the Straits Settlements. It was also the missionary society of British non-conformity. Not being part of the Church of England, "the Church by law established," there was at times a certain distance and mistrust between the Mission and the British authorities.

Inspired by William Carey's Baptist Missionary Society which had come into existence three years earlier, the LMS was founded in London in 1795 as a missionary society for "Christians who practice infant-baptism." It was also part of a widespread movement among Protestants in Europe and North America. Up to this point, with few exceptions, missions to non-Christian peoples had been a Roman Catholic activity. With a new awareness of the non-Christian world and the opportunities and therefore obligations created by trade; a missionary commitment soon became an essential part of evangelical identity.

To many in late 18th century Britain the slave trade was the evil which needed to be dealt with first and it was not until 1807 that Wilberforce and others finally managed to get it declared illegal. A sense of the need to make recompense then became one strand in the complex cord of missionary motivation; later paralleled by a desire to give something back to India in the light of Britain's economic exploitation and also to China given the social costs of the highly profitable opium trade.

One has to be cautious about generalisation,<sup>4</sup> but a number of other factors in missionary motivation are also worth noting.<sup>5</sup> Christians were admonished to do good to all men "as ye have opportunity" (Galatians 6.10) and given improved communications with the rest of the world meant that could no longer be left just to Catholics. Hyper-Calvinism was increasingly seen to be a rationalisation of inertia more than a theology which really made it "presumptuous and unnecessary" to convert the heathen. Methodism was a departure from this sort of thinking altogether, and many moderate Calvinists knew that however foreordained might be God's ends, they required the involvement and obedience of people to achieve them on earth.

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<sup>4</sup> S Piggin, "Assessing nineteenth-century missionary motivation: some considerations of theory and method," in D Baker, ed., *Religious motivation: biographical and sociological problems for the church historian*, Studies in Church History 15, Blackwell, Oxford, 1978, pp.327-337.

<sup>5</sup> For missionary motives see S Piggin, *Making Evangelical missionaries 1789-1858. The social background, motives and training of British Protestant missionaries to India*, Sutton Courtenay Press, 1984. Also, J van den Berg, *Constrained by Jesus' love. An inquiry into the motives of the missionary awakening in Great Britain in the period between 1698 and 1815*, J H Kok, Kampen, 1956.

Those who formed new missionary societies and raised amazing sums of money to send missionaries to the ends of the earth were more than all this motivated by religious experience and a sincere desire to share God's love with others. Carey's book, *An enquiry into the obligations of Christians to use means for the conversion of the heathen*, published in 1792, not only cleared away theological objections, it also provided estimates of non-Christian populations as an incentive to action. The LMS began with a South Seas mission to the Pacific which quickly got in serious trouble. It also became involved in Africa and the West Indies, but if British India was not yet open, then at least there were other possibilities "beyond the Ganges" and so what became the "Ultra-Ganges" mission was born.

### 1.3 The LMS Ultra-Ganges Mission

In discussing the LMS in Malaya we are confronted with an almost unique situation for Malaysian Church History in terms of the documentation available. The mission included printing and the output was prodigious, with a good deal of it describing what the missionaries saw themselves as doing.<sup>6</sup> The LMS archives in the School of Oriental and African Studies London, are available on microfiche and include the correspondence and reports of the missionaries. As well as these and some memoirs, there are also a number of modern books and scholarly articles. We are also fortunate to have in *The Hikayat Abdullah*,<sup>7</sup> an indication of how one Malay scholar<sup>8</sup> viewed these strange men and their activities.

The key figure in the new LMS venture was Robert Morrison (1782-1834).<sup>9</sup> Morrison's essential vision was for China where he was the pioneer protestant missionary. There had been LMS interest in translating the bible into Chinese and in 1804 and 1805 Macao and Penang were considered as possible sites. Penang was recognised as a good base for Malay work also and became the favoured location. Morrison had joined the mission in 1804 and began studying Chinese, medicine and astronomy. In January 1807 the East India Company refused him passage to Penang and he ended up going to Canton via New York. By 1809 the East India Company had given him a position as a translator and in 1812 financed at enormous expense a six volume Chinese dictionary. This also enabled him to work on bible translation and by 1813 he had completed the New Testament.

In 1812 Morrison contemplated the idea of a missionary college "beyond the Ganges". It could not be in Canton because of the Chinese government's severe penalties against Christian work, nor could it be on Macao because of Portuguese attitudes towards Protestants. Melaka seemed a possibility and was said to have a population which included 4,000 Chinese. After William Milne (1785-1822) arrived as Morrison's assistant in 1813, only to find that the Macao

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<sup>6</sup> For example, *The Indo-Chinese Gleaner*, published quarterly from May 1817 to 1822; A monthly magazine in Chinese published from 1815 to 1821. In 1821 was also tried a Malay magazine in Jawi with English translation. The *Universal Chinese Gazette* was produced from 1828-29 and the *Periodical Miscellany and Juvenile Instructor* from 1836-37.

<sup>7</sup> Annotated translation by A H Hill, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 28(3), 1955.

<sup>8</sup> Abdullah was a considerable Malay scholar. Although he regarded himself as Malay he was also of Arab and Indian descent.

<sup>9</sup> For an account of Morrison and the start of the Melaka mission see A J Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor and China's open century, Barbarians at the gates*, Hodder, 1981, 112-162. See also, J H Haines, "A history of Protestant missions in Malaya during the nineteenth century", 1815-1881, PhD thesis, Princeton, 1962, 70-123.

authorities would not let him stay, it was logical that he be sent on a fact-finding tour to see where a college and mission might be located. Morrison's instructions to him noted

The mission shall be regulated chiefly with a view to the Chinese but not exclusively so. As soon as instruments and means are obtained, missions to the Malay may be connected therewith ... it is highly probably that the Missionary Society will shortly send out missionaries to the Malays.<sup>10</sup>

Milne visited Melaka in 1814 in the course of his tour and the following year moved there to begin the LMS Ultra-Ganges mission. In the next 30 years the Mission was to send 26 missionaries to Melaka, Penang, Singapore and Java. Of these, only five served longer than ten years and only two of these remained in the Straits Settlements. Five went on to China after the mission was closed down in 1846; eight died - only two after long service - Thomas Beighton (1790-1846) was one year in Melaka and 25 in Penang; Samuel Dyer (1804-1843) had 13 years, eight of them in Penang. Ten resigned for various reasons and three were dismissed.<sup>11</sup>

Their overall contribution has been variously assessed. There is no doubt their work was hampered by the limitations of individuals and the newness of the enterprise they had embarked on. The trying effects of health problems, learning languages in a multi-lingual environment, long-distance communication with London and uncertainties arising out of a constantly changing political environment, should not be underestimated. They did not have much to show in the way of converts and local people educated in the College in Melaka usually went on to use their skills in business and administration rather than the service of the Church. Nevertheless it would be a mistake to see the mission as totally narrow in its evangelistic concerns and thus judge it solely on that basis. Brian Harrison considers that Morrison and Milne had "an attitude of informed, if restrained, admiration" towards things Chinese and deserve to be associated with the early Jesuits in China. Milne's understanding of Islam also was not insensitive, though that could not be said of some of his colleagues. If success with souls was minor, it was greater with respect to education and cultural understanding.<sup>12</sup> The missionaries rejoiced at the few converts they saw and took a long view of what was involved in building the Church in Malayan society.

## 2. MELAKA

Although the social and political story of this period has been well told,<sup>13</sup> further research is needed to trace overall religious developments as distinct from the not necessarily successful efforts of missionaries. After the trauma of British conquest and neglect, and the further decline of its economy and population, Melaka appears to have been a stable if decayed society in which the presence of LMS missionaries and visiting Anglican chaplains brought new

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Haines, *ibid.*, p.89.

<sup>11</sup> A C Herron, "A history of the Protestant Christian Churches in West Malaysian and Singapore", mss thesis, 1977. p.94, based on R Lovett, *The history of the London Missionary Society 1795-1895*, vol.II, 1899, p.743.

<sup>12</sup> B Harrison, *Waiting for China. The Anglo-Chinese College at Malacca 1818-1843, and early 19th century missions*, Hong Kong University Press, 1979, p.xii.

<sup>13</sup> For example, B Harrison, *Holding the Fort*, Monograph 14, Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1986.

forms of protestant Christianity to add to the Catholicism of the Portuguese descendants and the Presbyterianism of the few remaining Dutch families.

For most of the years 1826 to 1838 figures are available in T J Newbold, *British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca*.<sup>14</sup> These refer to a 'Christian' population varying between 2,239 down to 1,799 and back to 2,389. A problem is knowing just who these include. Newbold said they comprised "English, Dutch, Portuguese and natives converted to Christianity. The English, Dutch and Natives are mostly protestants; the Portuguese, catholics."<sup>15</sup> In what proportions however, he did not say. The numbers are very specific which is not to say they are accurate.

## 2.1 The Roman Catholic Church

In the confusion and changes from 1795 onwards the Portuguese community suffered along with the Dutch, though they valued the greater freedom they enjoyed when Melaka was finally returned to the British. The coming into existence of Penang and Singapore brought pressures to migrate which depleted the local church.<sup>16</sup> The use of Portuguese language in a local dialect had survived despite a century and a half of Dutch administration and the absence of schools. Through the church it continued to provide a focus for the preservation of faith and culture in a changing environment. During the short interlude of Dutch administration from 1818 to 1825 the church received some encouragement from the presence of catholics among the officials, including the Governor.<sup>17</sup>

At an official level the administration of the Catholic Church was quite tangled, even if locally things went on pretty much as they had for a century. Although Melaka was basically a Portuguese area, and for some time was less affected by the jurisdictional conflict between Portugal, Rome and the French than Singapore, it was still an issue. From the time of the Dutch conquest in 1641 the bishops of Melaka had been based in Timor or Flores. The last had been appointed in 1781 but was transferred before he took up the position. In 1818 the Diocese of Melaka was dissolved into that of Goa. In 1838 Malaya was placed under Burma and then two years later under Thailand. In 1841 by a papal decree it came under the Paris Foreign Mission as an independent mission.

Within our period these brought no changes, but when in 1845 French missionaries began organising a new parish of St Francis Xavier needless to say the Portuguese were upset and the community divided. However the original churches managed to retain the patronage of the Portuguese government and in 1886 were allowed separate jurisdiction under Macao within a Diocese which was now French.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Originally published in London in 1839. Reprinted with an introduction by C M Turnbull in 1971 by Oxford University Press

<sup>15</sup> Newbold, *ibid.*, p.137.

<sup>16</sup> Bernard Sta Maria, *My people my country. The story of the Malacca Portuguese community*, Malacca Portuguese Development Centre, 1982, p.80.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.91.

<sup>18</sup> F G Lee, *The Catholic Church in Malaya*, Eastern Universities Press, Singapore, 1963, p.44f. R Cardon, *Catholicism in the East and the Diocese of Malacca 1511-1888*, 1938, 23-35.

## 2.2 The London Missionary Society

A good idea of the early years of the mission can be found in Milne's Retrospect of the first ten years of the Protestant Mission to China (now, in connection with the Malay, denominated the Ultra-Ganges Mission), published in Malacca by the Anglo-Chinese Press, 1820.<sup>19</sup>

In this Milne recalled how for two years he helped out with the Dutch church (Christ Church, now Anglican, at that time Reformed or Presbyterian) but felt that it was not his main calling<sup>20</sup> which was first to the Chinese and then the Malays. The novelty of what he was about enabled him to get away with preaching in Chinese temples. He reported:

I sit down before the altar, preach the Gospel, and condemn idolatry in the presence of the idol and its votaries. ... I am obliged to sit before the pots of smoking incense, cups of tea and burning candles of an immense size placed on the altar in honour of the deity whose worship it is my aim to overthrow.<sup>21</sup>

Milne recalled that "every mission expects some difficulties in regard to food, clothing, habitation and personal safety" but that these had not been his concern. Indeed "there was no persecution or opposition from the government," but "the utmost freedom to promote the truth by every approved means."<sup>22</sup> The main problems were the multitude of dialects and lack of interest in his message. It seemed "impossible to gather hearers" - it was hard to get even ten and Sunday was a working day. Such Christians as there were did not set a good example and Protestants were no better than Catholics.

He felt that the Malays were worthy of more attention than they were receiving, but there were difficulties there also. Arabic seemed to be the only language acceptable to God, but it could not be understood by one in a hundred. When the mission developed its printing press a good quantity of material was produced, but translation was not easy. Some biblical and English idioms were harsh to Malay ears. "Several expressions they considered ... very objectionable, e.g. jealous as applied to God in the second commandment" since the word is only used with respect a suspicious husband's concern about his wife. "Father" used to refer to God was "very repugnant to the spirituality and purity of the Divine Being ... implying corporality and carnal affections." There were similar problems with Jesus as "Son of God."<sup>23</sup>

Milne was taught Malay by Munshi Abdullah and formed a happy and mutually respectful relationship. Abdullah found that Milne listened to him, which was not the case with his colleague Claudius Thomsen who refused to accept that some of his Malay translations from the Gospels were nonsense.<sup>24</sup> Milne and Thomsen helped make it possible for Abdullah to marry and supported him when he was under pressure for associating with missionaries and learning English. When Milne died it was like the death of his own father.<sup>25</sup> Abdullah was

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<sup>19</sup> It was until 2007 difficult to find copies of this. These notes were taken from a microfilm copy in the National Library of Singapore. It is also available as a rare book in the Cambridge University Library and on Google Books.

<sup>20</sup> Milne, *ibid.*, p.144.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted by B Harrison, *Waiting for China*, p.24.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.162.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.304.

<sup>24</sup> *Hikayat Abdullah*, 103, 119-122.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-118.

never threatened in his own faith as a Muslim by his friendship with the LMS missionaries in Melaka and later in Singapore and his contribution to the rendering of the Christian scriptures into appropriate Malay was outstanding.<sup>26</sup>

In 1827 the LMS built a chapel, the site being purchased from Munshi Abdullah's neighbour.<sup>27</sup> It caused problems for a Chinese temple on the other side which had badly wanted the site. Relations were not helped by using police to keep the gongs quiet. The chapel was used by a Chinese congregation in the morning and by a European one in the afternoon. It was also a standby when Christ Church was under repair.

Although Milne's writings reveal an insight into the difficulties of relating to the Malay world as to the Chinese, the success of the mission was less in the area of evangelism than in education<sup>28</sup> and printing.<sup>29</sup> The Mission press produced thousands of items - some 140,000 in Chinese and over 20,000 in Malay by the end of 1820<sup>30</sup> - but in the case of Malay the assumption of widespread literacy was not justified. Arguably they would have done better to go for quality more than quantity and to have given more consideration to who was likely to read what they produced. After 1826 little further Malay printing was done.

It was in its Chinese publications that the work of the press was most outstanding. Here at least differences of dialect were irrelevant. Claudius Henry Thomsen (1782- ) had arrived in September 1815 especially to develop the Malay side of the mission. However he had to leave a year later and did not return until December 1817 and in May 1822 he moved to Singapore.<sup>31</sup> Walter Medhurst (1796-1857)<sup>32</sup> was sent out as a printer and arrived in June 1817, but in January 1819 he was sent to Penang and at the end of 1821 moved on to Batavia where he was to work for 21 years.<sup>33</sup>

### 2.3 The Anglo-Chinese College

In 1818, just as the Dutch returned, the foundation stone of the training institution Morrison had long hoped for was laid by the departing English Governor Major Farquhar. It was an impressive Chinese style building completed in 1820 and its name lent itself to countless schools in Malaya and Singapore long after the original College was forgotten. That is a comment worth making, as is the point that in contrast to later "ACS" institutions, the original vision was for a bi-directional education: the English were also to learn from the Chinese.

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Hunt, "The history of the translation of the bible into Malay," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 62(1) 1989, p.37f.

<sup>27</sup> *Hikayat Abdullah*, p.203f. and p.315 notes 1-3.

<sup>28</sup> B Harrison, *Waiting for China*, 1979. R L O'Sullivan, "The Anglo-Chinese College and the early Singapore Institution," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 61(2), 225, 1988, 45-62.

<sup>29</sup> Leona O'Sullivan, "The London Missionary Society: a written record of missionaries and printing presses in the Straits Settlements, 1815-1847," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 57(2), 1984, 61-104. Ibrahim bin Ismail, "Samuel Dyer and his contributions to Chinese typography," *The Library Quarterly*, University of Chicago Press, 54(2), April 1984, 157-169. C K Boyd, *Early printing in the Straits Settlements*, National Library, Singapore, 1970.

<sup>30</sup> L O'Sullivan, "The LMS: a written record of missionaries and printing presses," *ibid.*, p.70.

<sup>31</sup> A C Milner, "Notes on C H Thomsen: missionary to the Malays," *Indonesia Circle*, 25, June 1981, pp.45-53.

<sup>32</sup> J K Leonard, "W H Medhurst: rewriting the missionary message," in S W Barnett and J K Fairbank, *ibid.*, 47-59.

<sup>33</sup> Lovett, *History of the LMS*, vol II, 432-437.

However the person on whom the vision most depended and who was most capable of realising it was not able to serve for long. It was a severe blow that Milne should die in June 1822 at the age of 37. It was true there had been some personality conflicts with other members of the mission - a factor in their going to other places to establish new work - but there was no one else with the language skills or the experience. It would have been the ideal time to transfer the College to Singapore, but although Morrison and Raffles had plans for a Singapore Institution, such a scheme could not be realised without the on-going presence of at least one of them to inspire the necessary commitment among a population more concerned with establishing itself than worried about long-term projects like education.

The College thus continued in Melaka, although the staff who came after Milne were seldom able to carry their language learning far in the time given to them. There was some revival under John Evans (1801-1840) who became principal in 1834 (the year of Robert Morrison's death in Canton) and was seven years in Melaka. At the same time as there developed greater demand for what the College had to offer, in Evans there was a leader who placed more emphasis on evangelism and there were steady numbers of converts. When he was appointed the Chinese department was running schools for 270 pupils, there were 200 Malay students and another 190 Portuguese or Tamil.<sup>34</sup>

Evan's more spiritual success and his involvement in building up a small Chinese church in the chapel built in 1827 were factors in the LMS directors' refusal to grant a fresh request to move the College to Singapore. However the next person of real ability had more radical ideas. From the time of his arrival in 1840 James Legge (1814-1897), later Professor of Chinese at Oxford, made it clear that in his view there was no point going just to Singapore. "The programme of Dr Morrison cannot be effected in Malacca, nor out of China."<sup>35</sup>

Not surprisingly Evans was wounded by the comments of this young, arrogant and opinionated new arrival, but Evans was soon to die of cholera and it was Legge who was left in charge. The signing of the Treaty of Nanking on 29 August 1842 following the opium war meant Legge's vision could become a possibility. On 28 April 1843 the LMS property in Melaka was sold and moves begun to transfer the College to Hong Kong. The LMS Chapel was left in trust to the people of Melaka,<sup>36</sup> its congregation apparently to fend for themselves.

## 2.4 Christ Church Melaka

This fine old church is still a landmark in Melaka today. It had been begun by the Dutch in 1741 and was completed by 1753.<sup>37</sup> After the British arrived in 1795 it was used for both Anglican and Reformed services. However the number requiring Presbyterian services in Dutch was declining and Milne during his first few years was able to assist with English "non-conformist"

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<sup>34</sup> R L O'Sullivan, "The departure of the London Missionary Society from Malacca," *Malaysia in History*, 23, 1980, 75-83.

<sup>35</sup> Harrison, *Waiting for China*, p.106.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.110.

<sup>37</sup> B Harrison, *Holding the Fort*, p.131.

services. Other LMS missionaries also assisted at times as did visiting East India Company chaplains, but ministerial provision was at best erratic.<sup>38</sup>

In 1829 the Dutch community petitioned for a "clergyman of Calvinist persuasion" but the request went unheeded. One does not get the impression of a very active congregational life. The following year a survey report noted that the building was in "a very dirty not to say filthy state ... the pulpit is rotten and unsafe and the windows and seats require attention."<sup>39</sup> However its future became more secure when, not without some opposition, it was consecrated to Anglican usage by the Bishop of Calcutta in 1838.

### 3. PENANG

Penang had a Catholic congregation from the beginning of European settlement in 1786. Here government encouragement of churches and schools was positive and Anglicans and later LMS missionaries contributed to the growth of a Christian presence on the island. In the 1833 census there were 789 Europeans, 21 Armenians and 708 "Native Christians" out of a total population of 40,300.<sup>40</sup> Probably the Europeans were mostly Protestant and the "Native Christians" mostly Catholic.

#### 3.1 Roman Catholic beginnings<sup>41</sup>

Catholic missionaries had been in Thailand from the 16th century and on a more settled basis from 1662. A seminary was started in 1666<sup>42</sup> but the staff were obliged to leave around 1779. Two of these, Father Coud, and Father Gernault went first to Pondicherry and then in 1781 to Kuala Kedah where they were surprised to find a Catholic community of about 80 persons, some of whom were exiles from Thailand and others from Melaka and elsewhere.<sup>43</sup> Good relationships were established with the Sultan of Kedah who made a house available as a

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<sup>38</sup> The following list covering this period, was largely based on *A handbook to Christ Church Malacca*, 1936 In at least one case, that of Robert Burns, they were based elsewhere and would only have been in Melaka as visitors. The 2003 plaque in Christ Church has Josiah Huges serving from 1838.

June	1796	Abraham Thomas Clark, Anglican chaplain
Sep	1811	Johannes Cornelis H Cleever
May	1815	William Milne, LMS missionary.
Sep	1817	Theodorus Medhaardts
Aug	1818	John Slater, LMS missionary.
Feb	1822	James Humphreys, LMS missionary.
July	1824	John Akersloot
Apr	1829	Robert Burns, Residency chaplain, Singapore.
Sep	1830	Samuel Kidd, LMS missionary.
Aug	1831	Josiah Hughes, Anglican chaplain under Bishop of Calcutta.
	1834	F J Darrah, Residency chaplain, Singapore.
Nov	1840	James Legge, LMS missionary.
	1842	J N Norgate, Anglican chaplain.
May	1845	F W Lindstedt, Anglican chaplain.

<sup>39</sup> B Harrison, *Holding the fort*, *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Newbold, *ibid.*, p.44f.

<sup>41</sup> K M Williams, "The Church in West Malaysia and Singapore," PhD thesis, Catholic University of Leuven, 1976. pp.93-96.

<sup>42</sup> *Le Collège Général de la Société des Missions-Étrangères de Paris 1665-1932*, Nazareth, Hong Kong, 1934.

<sup>43</sup> Sta Maria, *My people, my country*, p.85f.

chapel which was dedicated to St Michael. The following year Coud, was able to return to Siam and in 1786 at Francis Light's invitation Gernault took most of his flock across to Penang.<sup>44</sup> Gernault was regarded as the less promising of the two priests, but he applied himself to learning Malay and saw a number of converts.

He was a *fac totum*: setting up a small college where he taught philosophy and grammar, founding a community of young women to teach children and teaching those women Malay so that they could instruct catechumens, composing prayers and catechisms in Malay. ... Garnault was not one for mass baptisms, requiring, rather, a real conversion before acceptance into the Church. ... He seeks ... advice concerning the baptism and conversion of opium addicts and gives examples of how he has handled the matter.<sup>45</sup>

Catholic services were thus the first regular Christian services in Penang and there was a growing congregation in a wooden building, later named the Church of the Assumption, on land now bounded by Church Street, Pitt Street and Bishop Street. Portuguese Eurasians migrated from Melaka and further afield and were offered employment by the British.<sup>46</sup> Malay more than Portuguese appears to have been their language.<sup>47</sup> A new church was built in 1802 and used until 1857 when the present site in Farquhar Street was obtained.<sup>48</sup> In 1819 it was possible to get some government assistance for the repair of the church and by 1827 the government was subsidising Catholic schools.

In 1788 and 1791 two Eurasians were ordained after training as Malaya's first local clergy. The Church of the Assumption became in many ways the mother church of the French mission and it was from here that visits were made to Singapore in 1821. The parish priest from 1790 until 1822, Fr Rectenwald, had responsibilities extending to Burma and Kedah. The next lengthy ministry was that of Jean-Baptiste Boucho from 1824 to 1843. By 1827 the Catholic population of Penang was said to be about 1,200 though how this relates to the figure of about 700 in the 1833 census is difficult to say unless it incorporates the wider area served.

In 1807 and 1809 two French priests, Lolivier and Letondal, brought 11 Chinese seminarians from Szechwan and Fukkien and obtained permission to transfer the Thailand seminary to Penang. Hence was founded the College General. It became a key element in the work of the Catholic Church not only in Malaya but in Southeast Asia and further afield. By 1932 it had trained over 500 priests, including over 50 martyred for their faith.<sup>49</sup>

### 3.2 Anglican ministry

The development of Anglicanism in Penang was directly affected by East India Company policy towards religion and its changing hopes for the development of the island. The early years

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<sup>44</sup> F G Lee, *Catholic Church in Malaya.*, p.45f.

<sup>45</sup> Williams, *ibid.*, p.94f., notes 106 to 108.

<sup>46</sup> Linda Y L Chong, "The Portuguese Eurasian of Penang," University of Penang, quoted by Sta Maria, *ibid.*, pp.86-88.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.87.

<sup>48</sup> 1860-1985. *125th Anniversary. Cathedral of the Assumption Penang*, p.4f.

<sup>49</sup> Lee, *ibid.*, p.46f.

were marked mostly by neglect. It is thought that Anglican services must have taken place soon after Light's annexation in 1786, though the first positive evidence is a marriage in 1799.<sup>50</sup> From 1800 a government official was appointed lay chaplain and in 1805, the year Penang was given the status of Presidency, the first ordained Anglican minister arrived and discussions began about building a church.

However it was the Rev Robert Sparke Hutchings from 1814 whose energy and vision coincided with a broadening of religious commitment by the East India Company and a time in British history when the government believed in the social value of building churches and was not prevented politically from doing so. Hutchings was associated with a number of successful projects, most notably the Penang Free School and the building of St Georges in 1818. Penang was fortunate to get its church at a stage when it was the only British settlement in the Straits - Melaka had gone back to the Dutch and Singapore was not yet thought of. Neither earlier or later would the East India Company have contemplated such a project.

In June 1816, the same year he founded the School, Hutchings held a meeting to form The Prince of Wales Island Auxiliary Bible Society. It was to co-operate with the Calcutta Auxiliary Bible Society and declared its aim to "render this island the medium of distributing the Holy Scriptures among the more eastern islands and nations of Asia."<sup>51</sup> Hutchings was secretary, with a good number of local British worthies on the committee. He noted in his report to the British and Foreign Bible Society in London that the Governor had meant to attend and that the meeting's resolutions had been gazetted. Hutchings worked on bible translation into Malay and spent three years in Calcutta seeing through the printing of a Jawi edition of the Old Testament. Because of this he could not be present in May 1819 when St George's was consecrated by Bishop Middleton from Calcutta.

Hutchings set an example of Christian energy which was not matched for some time, though it is also true to say that his achievement was possible because English commitment to Penang was very definite during his ministry and the intention was that as a Presidency it should have all the status and trappings of those in India. When Singapore became the more important economic centre it was realised that this status could not be sustained and the government of the Straits Settlements was moved to Singapore in 1832. The East India Company became, as was more characteristically the case, more concerned with economics than religion; chaplains were not expected to serve for long periods and the work of the church suffered.

From its origins in a narrow window of opportunity, St George's remains an impressive building, and its funding by the government was a useful contribution to the church. But reflecting on the lethargy which later surrounded the congregation, Anthony Dumper who served there in the 1950s, considered that its being a government establishment was the source of intrinsic inertia.

The European community was encouraged to feel that the church was a department of state not really dependent on their gifts and service, while Malaysians were discouraged from feeling at home in a parish which had so strong a bias towards English officialdom.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> A C Dumper, *The Church of St. George the Martyr*, Penang, 1964.

<sup>51</sup> *Fourteenth Annual Report of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, 1818, p.29.

<sup>52</sup> Dumper, *ibid.*, p.11.

### 3.3 The London Missionary Society

Although Penang had been the place the LMS first thought of as a base for its mission beyond India, it was not until after January 1819 when Medhurst was sent to Penang on an exploratory visit that steps were taken to begin work there. This was followed by the transfer of Thomas Beighton (1790-1844) in April and the arrival of John Ince (1795-1825) in June. Beighton's ministry was to be in Malay and Ince's in Chinese. Beighton's printing office was set up in Georgetown and a chapel opened in June 1824.

Medhurst left in 1821 after working on the far side of the Island for a year, Ince died in 1825 and Beighton was in charge until he died in 1844. He was assisted by Samuel Dyer (1804-1843) from 1827 to 1835, by Evan Davies (1805-1864) from 1835 to 1839 and by A Stronach (1800-1879) from 1839 to 1844 when the mission closed after Medhurst's death.<sup>53</sup>

In the Northam Road Cemetery<sup>54</sup> can be found the graves of Ince, his wife and their three children; of Beighton, and of the independent German missionary J G Bausum (d.1855) who in 1843 married the former Mrs Maria Dyer (d.1846) and who carried on the work after the LMS left. One of the Dyer's children, also Maria, was later to marry the young China missionary, J Hudson Taylor.<sup>55</sup>

There was interest from both Anglicans and Presbyterians in taking over the old LMS chapel and Bausum was offered ordination by the Bishop of Calcutta but declined because of questions about baptismal generation. Bausum also ran a boarding school for about 130 pupils and after his death his second wife continued the chapel services for about 20 Malays and Chinese. Sometime after 1869 the chapel was taken over by Plymouth Brethren.<sup>56</sup>

The basis of the LMS work was printing, tract distribution and schools. In Penang, Malay work was of greater importance than in Melaka, though the results were just as meagre. Somewhat disingenuously Beighton tried to attract Malay children and allay the fears of parents by advertising with a poster saying his school was "not designed to teach the ways of wickedness, but only the way to God who is ever to be praised and most high." He was able to get permission to use a Mosque for his school, as Haines observes something which must be unique in the annals of missions.<sup>57</sup> It is hard to believe it continued very long. Beighton's tracts show an alarming lack of understanding of Islam or of Muslim sensitivities. He seems confused about whom he is addressing and his writings caused serious offence.<sup>58</sup>

## 4. SINGAPORE

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<sup>53</sup> Lovett, *ibid.*, p.438. J Sibree, *London Missionary Society. A register of missionaries, deputations, etc. from 1796 to 1923*, London, 1923.

<sup>54</sup> D Ch'ng, "Some old Penang tombstones. A sequel," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 60(1), June 1987, 75-80. There is further detail in his 1984 Seminari Theoloji Malaysia paper on which this is based, "A study of the early Christian cemetery along Northam Road on Penang Island."

<sup>55</sup> The family links among various China missionaries of Bausum's descendants are set out in Robert Lord Bausum, *The Family Bausum*, privately printed, 1971. A copy is in the Yale Divinity School Library, New Haven, USA.

<sup>56</sup> J H Haines, *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> J H Haines, *ibid.*, p.128.

<sup>58</sup> For examples see Haines, *ibid.*, 300-309.

From its inception in 1819, Singapore<sup>59</sup> attracted large numbers of people and thus raised questions about the viability of existing missionary work in Penang and Melaka, especially with Melaka once again under Dutch administration. As a British settlement it was necessary for provision to be made for the services of the Church of England. As a place to which Portuguese and other Catholics were migrating to it attracted the interest of both Portuguese priests and French Catholic missionaries. Morrison thought it would be logical to move the Anglo-Chinese College and worked with Raffles on a combined scheme for a Singapore Institution - something which did not eventuate in the lifetime of either. Nevertheless the LMS began a mission. Among the trader community Armenians who in 1821 were the first to provide themselves with a centre for worship. Their church of St Gregory the Illuminator, completed in 1836,<sup>60</sup> is still standing though now gifted for Anglican use.

#### **4.1 The LMS mission**

The LMS had difficulty staffing its Singapore mission. Samuel Milton (1788-1849) was sent in October 1819 after a year in Melaka. Thomsen came from Melaka in 1822 and remained till 1834 trying to work among Malays. John Stronach (1810-1888) was in charge from 1838 to 1843. Benjamin Peach Keasberry (1805-1875), who was later to become one of the most notable missionaries to the area, was taken on by the LMS in 1839 but was forced to resign in 1847 after the LMS left for China. He remained in Singapore until his death.

Singapore was more troubled than the other LMS stations in the Straits Settlements. Milton was soon carried away with grandiose and expensive schemes and was dismissed in 1825. An LMS deputation visited in 1826 and concluded that Thomsen was someone "destitute of missionary talent." However in 1823 a Malay Chapel was constructed on the south-east corner of North Bridge Road and Bras Basah Road. The LMS building if not the LMS missionaries proved itself and had a long and useful history beginning with an immediate role as the only protestant church of the Island.

#### **4.2 Other Protestant missions<sup>61</sup>**

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions were the next most significant mission to the LMS. By 1837 they had 19 missionaries in the Strait Settlements, the first being the Rev Ira Tracey who arrived in Singapore in July 1834. Their printer, Alfred North had the largest printing establishment on the Island. A visionary scheme to establish Christian colonies in Malaya was rejected and towards the end of the 1830s the Mission began to wonder if this was where they were really meant to be - especially as it looked as if their hopes of entering China might be realised after all. By 1843 the last of their staff had pulled out.

The Church Missionary Society also had a brief involvement in Singapore, as did the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in America, but to no lasting effect.

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<sup>59</sup> B E K Sng, *ibid*, pp.15-46.

<sup>60</sup> Arshak C Galstaun, "About the Armenian Church of St Gregory the Illuminator in Singapore", typescript, 4pp, May 1982, Department of Oral History and Archives, Singapore.

<sup>61</sup> Herron, *op cit.*, pp.85-88.

### 4.3 Roman Catholic developments<sup>62</sup>

In the early 1820s French priests were among the visitors who recognised Singapore's importance. They tried to arrange something for its religious needs, but until 1827 it was outside French ecclesiastical jurisdiction and the Portuguese were first to actually provide a Catholic ministry. This was appropriate as the core of the Catholic community were migrants from Melaka who brought their language and culture with them and looked to the support of the church in the way they were accustomed. Fr Jacob from Melaka served from 1822 to 1824 followed by Fr Maria from Macao in 1825 who remained for 25 years. He built a small church, probably on land obtained by Fr Jacob, which became the centre of the Portuguese mission.

A French priest arrived in 1831 and in 1832 land was obtained for a church completed the following year. Fr J P Courveyzy who was involved in the building was later appointed Vicar Apostolic for Siam and then Malaya ("Western Siam") while still in Singapore. In June 1839 the first non-European missionary arrived. John Tschu was Chinese ordained in Bangkok.

More than in Melaka the question who had jurisdiction over the Catholic Church, the Portuguese or the French, caused serious conflict. It was a long struggle before it was resolved in a way which enabled Portuguese priests under Macao to administer two parishes, one in Singapore and the other in Melaka. The rest of the area was under the Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP).<sup>63</sup> The conflict was not without its irony - Catholics from two European powers arguing over who would run a mission to Chinese, Indians and Eurasians in a Malay part of the world under British rule. While it lasted - until 1888 - it was a much more serious question than rivalry with Protestants.

### 4.4 Anglicans in Singapore

Government provision of services was first through Raffles' arranging for the LMS missionary Milton to conduct services. Use was also made of visiting chaplains until the Rev Robert Burns was appointed in 1826 after the Anglo-Dutch Treaty had given a greater sense of security to British possession. Burns was followed by F J Darrah in 1833 and Edward White in 1837 who served until his death in 1845. As in the other Straits Settlements the Anglican chaplains were part of the East India Company establishment and under the Bishops of Calcutta.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p.23. W Makepeace, G E Brooke, and R St J Braddell, *One hundred years of Singapore*, vol.II, London, 1921, 243-259.

<sup>63</sup> Williams, *ibid.*, 97-99. On 23 June 1886 a concordat was signed between the King of Portugal and Pope Leo XIII placing "all the faithful living at Malacca or in Singapore Island and belonging to the old Portuguese Diocese of Malacca" under the Bishop of Macao.

<sup>64</sup> Up to 1869 the bishops of Calcutta having jurisdiction over the Straits Settlements were:

- 1814 Thomas Fanshaw Middleton
- 1823 Reginald Heber
- 1827 John Thomas James
- 1829 John Matthias Turner
- 1832 Daniel Wilson (Metropolitan of India)
- 1858 George Edward Cotton (Metropolitan of India)
- 1867 Robert Milman (Metropolitan of India)

In 1823 Raffles had designated land for a church, but it was not until 1834 that a foundation stone was laid. Burns and the other chaplains meantime used the LMS Chapel, the rent of \$20 a month being paid by the East India Company. Darrah in particular was unhappy with this, fearing that by preaching in the same building as someone who was not Church of England he would be "sanctioning a conventicle<sup>65</sup>." When Bishop Wilson began raising money in 1834 the church was to be for the "Protestant community" and the consequent contributions of 16% of the cost by the Scottish community were sufficient to justify its being named after the patron saint of Scotland, St Andrew. Whatever the naming rights, the sensitivities imported from England which troubled Darrah arose again and the perhaps utopian idea that the new building might be available for both Presbyterian and Anglican worship was dropped.<sup>66</sup> St Andrews was completed in 1837 and consecrated by Bishop Wilson in September 1838. It was struck by lightning in 1846 and 1849 and the present Cathedral begun in 1856.

## 5. EVALUATION

In terms of mission work this period illustrates very well the theme of Malaya being a second choice after China. The title of Harrison's book on the LMS in Melaka, *Waiting for China*, applies to the Protestant missionaries in general. Yet in a way the judgement is not entirely negative. The transitory presence of these missions was also a reflection of a general tendency, particularly evident in Singapore. Many of the population had come not to stay, but to make their fortune and return, usually to China. The efforts of the LMS and others towards the Malay and Chinese populations should not be understated any more than overestimated. If some missionaries were not especially competent, others like Milne and Keasberry were able and sensitive. If most left for the greater promise of a China with whom contact was possible after 1842, can they be blamed given the meagre results of their work compared with the prospect of embarking on a vision which they and their supporters had never lost sight of since Morrison first went to Canton?

Still it is interesting to ask if things might have been different had they stayed. Would it have been any better, or could it not have been until another phase in the history of the area, political and demographic, that protestant missions stood much chance of success.

As mentioned the contribution of the protestant missionaries to cultural understanding was at least worthwhile. Munshi Abdullah was of great importance teaching successive missionaries Malay and in assisting with bible translation. At the same time it was the missionaries and the missionary printing presses which saw to the publication of his writings and which recorded aspects of local religious practice and culture which could otherwise have been lost. Some Protestants had little sympathy for the culture they were working among, others had a great deal.

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<sup>65</sup> A conventicle is an illegal religious meeting.

<sup>66</sup> The Singapore Church Record Book No.3 1838-1863 records that there was some objection to its being "dedicated exclusively to the service of God according to the doctrine and discipline of the Apostolical Protestant and Anglican Episcopal Church" and that those protesting had contributed \$1,720. This was by far the largest private contribution. The total cost was \$10,910, the government provided \$6,000, \$2,200 was borrowed and donations from the Bishops and the SPCK together with what was in the Church Building Fund only amounted to \$875.

The Catholic missions stand in considerable contrast. They had no need to escape to China - they had been involved there for centuries. The history of their Asian missions since the sixteenth century gave them long experience to draw on and bases near at hand from which to exploit the opportunities presented by the British settlements. They already had the Portuguese church, but more than that they had the MEP who had also been in the region for some time and knew what to do, and they had Chinese priests who could minister in the dialects spoken. True things were not helped by the bitter controversy over jurisdiction, but that was a small matter compared with the fact that they knew what they wanted to achieve, they had people who had done it before, and they were better able to relate to the Asian populations they were working among.

Anglicans were at this stage a chaplaincy church pure and simple and their parallel conflict to that of the Catholics was that of their differences with the Scottish Presbyterians. This may have been of no great consequence for the local inhabitants of Singapore, but if Bausum had not had real cause to question the Bishop of Calcutta's teaching on baptismal regeneration and if sensitivities in Singapore between Presbyterian and Anglican had been different there might have been a groundwork of ecumenical cooperation. That was something which was embarrassingly lacking, not only among Protestants, but also with and among Catholics.

The departure of the LMS and the American missions meant that after the 1840s Christianity was represented in the Straits Settlements by groups who frequently had difficulty recognising one another as sharing the same faith. A number of Catholic congregations and their Asian theological seminary; three Anglican churches, and two LMS chapels looked after by independent missionaries; Bausum in Penang and Keaseberry in Singapore. The fate of the old LMS chapel in Melaka is unknown.

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John Roxborough