
Editorial Note:
For the reader who intends to keep abreast the latest publications on Christianity in Asia but finds Professor Moffett’s comprehensive historical account in two volumes prohibitive to read, George Yana’s concise summary is a welcome alternative. This article is selective in the sense that it focuses on volume II that traces the history of specific Christian sects with an affinity to the Assyrian Christians.

Brief biography
Professor Moffett was born in Korea of American parents, he taught for four years in China, under both Nationalist and Communist governments. He worked in Korea from 1951 until 1981. Dr. Moffett lives in Princeton, New Jersey.

Introduction
As many of the readers may know, professor. Moffett’s volume one, which covers the history of Christianity in Asia from beginnings to 1500, has become an important resource and authoritative reference book for both Assyrians and those students and scholars who follow the history of Christianity in Asia. This is especially true with regard to the history of the Church of the East and the “Syrian Period,” where “The Assyrian Christians of Arbela” and “Tatian the Assyrian” are introduced.

Volume 2 covers four centuries of great missionary outreach with ambiguous results. The author narrates, in an engaging manner, the history of Christianity in countries such as India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Korea, the Philippines, Japan and many more.

All missionary denominations such as Catholic, Anglican and Presbyterian are given full consideration. The histories of the Church of the East, the Jacobites, Maronites, and the Armenians are treated under separate chapters. The story flows chronologically, covering country after country, while throwing light on the social and religious environment where the missionaries were active. As the activities of the missionaries involved dealing with Muslims and Hindus, the author provides a brief history of the penetration of Islam and some explanation about Hinduism.

It should be noted that the author of the book under review often uses the name Nestorian when referring to the Church of the east. No doubt, the author knows that the name Nestorian is a misnomer, and it would prove a better choice.

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1 Samuel Hugh Moffett is Henry Luce Professor Emeritus of Ecumenics and Mission at Princeton Theological Seminary.
if, instead, he used the name “Church of the East.” Familiarity may be the reason for using the name Nestorian, but, if the right name is used all the time, it will, in time, create its own familiarity.

Regarding the subject of names, the author writes:

“On the use of the name “Nestorian,” and its alternatives (Syrian, Chaldean, Assyrian) from the eighteenth century to the present, see John Henry Joseph, The Nestorians and Their Muslim Neighbors: A Study of Western Influence on Their Relations (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), 3ff. Many whom Westerners call Nestorians are quick to point out that their “Church of the East,” as they proudly call themselves, antedates Nestorius by several centuries.”

This review will focus mainly on the Nestorians, Jacobites, Maronites, St. Thomas Christians of India, and a brief account of Armenians. The history of Christianity in the major countries such as Japan, China, and Korea will not be introduced.

Part I: They Came by Sea:
The Return of the West (1500-1800)
Chapter 1: India (1500-1700) St. Thomas or St. Peter
The St. Thomas (Mar Thoma) Christians and the Portuguese

When Da Gama sailed from the coast of Kenya in Africa to India, he took with him a man who claimed to be an Indian Christian. From the commissions the explorers had received from the pope in Rome and the king of Portugal, it is clear that they expected to find fellow Christians in India. Evidently, the pope and the king of Portugal were referring to the Mar Thoma Christians of India, converted by the missionaries of the Church of the East; because, Christianity was brought to India by the Church of the East, and the Mar Thoma Christians were the only Christians in India.

Da Gama first landed in Calicut (1498), the southwest corner of India, and was shocked by the number of Muslims in the predominantly Hindu town.

The second explorer to land in Calicut was Pedro Alvarez Cabral in 1501 with six ships and nineteen missionaries (including eight Franciscans). Next, Cabral sailed south to Cranganore, a large and ancient center of Thomas Christians near Cochin, where for the first time, the Portuguese made contact with them. Cochin was at the center of Kerala’s rich pepper fields, and the Mar Thoma Christians there had been isolated from the rest of the Christian world. The Mar Thoma Christians rejoiced at the arrival of fellow Christians. When the Mar Thoma Christians first met Da Gama in 1503, it was “with all the enthusiasm of a religious minority anticipating the end of cast discrimination by...”

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2 Page 206, note 2.
3 Pages 3-9.
Hindus and outright enmity by Muslims.5

G.M. Moraes, the Indian church historian, estimates that there were then about one hundred thousand Mar Thoma Christians along the Malabar Coast, now known as Kerala. There were about fifty Christian communities, and the strongest were in two of the empire’s minor Hindu kingdoms, Cranganore (Kodungalor) and Quilon (Kollam). A St. Thomas cross, made of stone, was found in Alangad (Mangate). Ecclesiastically, the Mar Thoma Christians recognized the authority of the Nestorian patriarch in Mesopotamian Persia, that is the Church of the East, and were in the process of restoring their own metropolitanate under that authority, just as the Portuguese arrived.

The Mar Thoma Christians of India, in 1490, had sent representatives to Patriarch Simon (Shimon V, A.D. 1472-1502) to restore their episcopate. Mar Shimun responded with the appointment of two Syrian bishops from Persia, namely, Mar John (Mar Youkhanna) and Mar Thomas.

The successor of Mar Shimun, Elias V, continued his support of the Mar Thoma Christians by sending a metropolitan named Yahbalaha (Yavalaha), and two bishops, George (renamed Mar Jacob), and Mar Denha. These emissaries reported to the patriarch a moving account of the Portuguese landings, which has survived.6

The Portuguese soon discovered that the Mar Thoma Christians were a different kind of Christian, and reported their findings to Rome. The Portuguese realized that the Mar Thoma Christians recognized the patriarch of the Church of the East in Persia, not the pope, as the head of the church. The liturgical language of the Mar Thoma Christians was Syriac, not Latin. Their priests married, while the Roman priests were celibate.

The St. Thomas churches had no images, something that the Portuguese considered to indicate a lack of proper reverence to Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints. The Portuguese attributed this to ignorance rather than to faithfulness to the traditions of the ancient Church of the East, in which they had been raised. Portuguese began to press the Indian Christians, sometimes gently and sometime rudely, to conform to Western Catholic customs, but they met with resistance.7

Francis Xavier and the Jesuits8

The Jesuits came forty years after the first Portuguese landing, and this marked the second stage in the Latinizing of the Indian church. The first and greatest representative of the Jesuits was Francis Xavier (1506-1552). Xavier later left India to start a mission in Japan (1549-1552), and died off the coast of China.

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5 Page 5
6 Page 5-6
7 Page 6
8 Pages 9-12.
Friction between Thomas Christians and the Missions

After the departure of Xavier and the death of Mar Jacob, relations between the Indian Christians and the Portuguese worsened. Mar Thoma Christians describe the events as the suppression and disfigurement of the native identity of the Malabar church, and the use of coercion, rather than evangelism, to convert.

In 1553 a schism in Persian Kurdistan between rival patriarch-elect Sulaqa and Mar Denkha broke the unity of the Church of the East. Mar Sulaqa made submission to Pope Julius III, and was ordained patriarch as a Uniate that is, a Roman Catholic. He was permitted to follow a non-Latin liturgy, in this case Syriac. Mar Denkha claimed the loyalty of traditional Nestorians, and thus began a division in two lines of succession. This rivalry spread to India, causing the weakening of its Thomas Christians.

John Sulaqa’s successor, Mar Abdisho the Uniate (Catholic) patriarch of the new line, sent two bishops who arrived in Goa, India, in 1556. They were Joseph, a brother of John Sulaqa, and Elias. The presence of these bishops from the Church of the East caused problems. Although the Uniate bishops from Mesopotamia were officially related as Uniates to Rome, Rome had already placed all of India under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Goa. When Bishop Joseph began showing partiality toward the Thomas Christians and their ancient heritage, he was twice tried for heresy or insubordination, and was ordered back to Portugal. After this incident, there is no mention of Bishop Elias, which means that the Thomas Christians were left without a bishop. Naturally, they asked their older mother church in Mesopotamia for a replacement. The patriarch of the old-line Church of the East responded by consecrating a Thomas Christian as Metropolitan Mar Abraham and sending him back to India. To avoid a repeat of the treatment of Bishop Joseph, Mar Abraham eluded the authorities in Goa and went straight to Thomas Christian territory in the south.

Mar Abraham served as metropolitan of the church for thirty stormy years from 1569 to 1597, stubbornly refusing to bow to Goa’s claim of primacy. He was the only Indian bishop to be consecrated three times, once by the old-line patriarch, once by a new-line, or Chaldean patriarch, and once by the pope in Rome.

In 1560 the Portuguese established the rule of the Inquisition in India, which, as a step toward the westernization of the Thomas Christians, further aggravated their sensibilities.

The enforcement of this “distasteful” form of religious control was placed in the hands of the archbishop of Goa, who now carried a double title- bishop and grand inquisitor.
The inquisition represented a constant threat to the leaders of the Thomas Christians, who might be targeted as heretics if they strayed into their old traditional Syrian ways, from the Latin ways of the Portuguese. As an estimate, the Catholics numbered their membership at 280,000.11

**The Synod of Diamper (1559)**12

Alexis de Menezes, a young new archbishop, arrived in Goa in 1595. Menezes was appointed archbishop of Goa and primate of all India. He was determined to settle once and for all the primacy of Rome in ruling the Indian church, and not the Syrians of the Church of the East of any stripe. Menezes had orders to force the Thomas Christians to renounce their errors and accept Roman jurisdiction under a loyal, thoroughly Roman bishop to be selected as the successor of Mar Abraham.

The current Indian archdeacon was Parambil George, known to the Portuguese as George of the Cross. George was not only the administrative leader of the Syrian church, but also the spiritual leader, as decreed by custom, in time when no metropolitan appointed by Baghdad was in office in India. George accepted the appointment of a bishop by Rome, but insisted that Thomas Christians could worship only under a Syrian bishop.

Menezes wrote to Rome “They have taken an oath that if His Holiness sends them a Syrian Bishop, they will obey him; but if he is a Latin, they will take counsel.”13

Disregarding Archdeacon George’s advice, Menezes moved in three directions in order to bring Thomas Christians under the Latin, not Syrian rule. First, by using his Portuguese pomp and power he influenced the Hindu rajah of Cochin to abandon his support of the rights of his Indian Christian subjects. Second, using the opportunity offered by the absence of a Syrian Indian bishop, he ordained close to ninety new Indian priests, and asked them to disavow any connection with the Church of the East in Mesopotamia. He thus created an ecclesiastical power base loyal to him personally. When Archdeacon George protested this unwarranted violation of his rights as vicar general of the St. Thomas Christians, and threatened to excommunicate anyone that was ordained in this fashion, Menezes proceeded to the third and final step of his campaign, the calling of a general synod aimed at the legitimation of the absolute authority of Rome over the Syrian community.

The synod ruled that there could not be two laws for the Christians of India, one for St. Thomas and one for St. Peter. Therefore, the only law that applies is the law of Christ. It said that Christ has only one vicar, who, is “head of the whole Church on earth… and all who deny his obedience to the said

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11 Page 13
12 Pages 13-16.
13 Page 14
Roman Bishop … are transgressors of the Divine Commands, and cannot attain Eternal Life.”

The synod also renounced all “Nestorian heresies” in general and the “heretical and schismatic” jurisdiction of the Syrian “patriarch of Babylon” in particular. Even today’s Catholics agree that the patriarch was slandered. The patriarch at the time was Mar Simon IX Denha. The synod also removed the names of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Diodorus of Tarsus, Narsai, and other greatly revered fathers of the Church of the East, from the calendar and prayers. The books were to be examined, corrected or burned if found to have serious errors.

According to one author, there were fifteen doctrines in which the Indian Christians differed with Rome, and which according to him, seemed proper Anglican. “For example the Malabar church condemns the pope’s supremacy; denies transubstantiation; condemns images; denies purgatory, auricular confession, and extreme unction; and allows its priests to marry.”

The Synod of Diamper is considered the most important event in the life of the Indian church during the period from 1498 to 1653 of the Portuguese rule. Menezes appointed a Latin bishop, the irenic Jesuit Francis Roz as bishop of the Syrian church. But it was not long before Francis discovered he had inherited a crown of thorns.

The Synod of Diamper not only did not unite the Syrian and Roman Christianity in India, it led to divisions that persist to this day.

The Drift from Nestorian to Jacobite Connections

The most serious rivalry in the St. Thomas Church was between those loyal to Rome and the independent East Syrian protesters. Both were headed by Indian bishops, Alexander Chandy (Parambil) on the Latin side, and Thomas Parambil on the East Syrian side.

Bishop Thomas the metropolitan on the East Syrian side was an archdeacon consecrated by his own priests. Therefore, he felt some doubts about the authenticity of his consecration.

He, therefore, wrote letters to all non-Roman Eastern patriarchs: the Church of the East in Baghdad, the Jacobite Church of Antioch, and the Coptic Church in Alexandria, asking if any of them would send a bishop to confirm his title. In 1665 Mar Gregorios, a Jacobite Monophysite from Antioch responded to the call.

“This was the beginning of a drift from Persian (Chaldean) Nestorianism to Antiochene (Jacobite) Orthodoxy, a shift of jurisdictional loyalty of great historic and ecclesiastical significance, but one that in India evolved

14 Page 14
15 Page 15
16 Ibid
17 Pages 19-20
almost unnoticed at first by the St. Thomas Christians, who had for centuries been isolated from the theological controversies of the west.”

Syrian practices that were outlawed by the Synod of Diamper, were gradually reintroduced. For example marriage of the clergy was reintroduced, and the statues and crucifixes were removed from the sanctuaries. But, by the end of the seventeenth century the independent St. Thomas Christians were non-Roman and non-Nestorian. They had become Jacobite and were to remain so for about one hundred years.

In 1708 bishop Gabriel was sent by Patriarch Elias X in Mesopotamia to restore the Mar Thoma Christians of India to the old fold. Only a few followed him, although the Dutch preferred him over the Jacobite Orthodox Bishop Mar Thoma IV.

The Syrian Christians were gradually driven to the mountains by the Portuguese, where they were called the people of the Serra.

An estimate suggests that at the beginning of the nineteenth century the total number of Malabar Christians was 307000, of which 18700 had accepted the Roman rule and 120000 followed the rule of the Jacobite bishop of Antioch.

Part I: Chapter 9: West Asia under the Turks and Persians (1500-1800)

“At Long last [in 1820 C.J. Rich] revealed to the English-speaking races the astounding facts about the Assyrians, who still conversed in a language similar to that spoken by Jesus and the Apostles, and whose peculiar form of Christianity called for study and sympathy.”

This period covers the end of the Renaissance, the Reformation and absolute monarchies in Europe. This is the period of discovery, prompted by the western man, described as restless, inventive and daring. What economic and social conditions made him restless, inventive and daring are beyond the scope of this review. What the west wanted was access to the fabled riches of the Orient. But, access by land to these riches was barred, not by geography, but by religion.

After throwing the Crusaders out of Asia in the thirteenth century, Islam ruled west Asia for 150 years, guarding it against Western or Christian intrusion. The formidable wall blocking Europe from accessing the riches of the Orient

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18 Page 19-20
19 It should be noted that the Elias patriarchs represent the old line of Shimun VII Bar Mama that originated in the breakup of 1551. The other line was originated by John Sulaka, who was ordained in Rome in 1553, during the papacy of Pope Julius III, and is known as the new line. See Aubrey R. Vine, “The Nestorian Churches,” pages 170-175.
21 Pages 193-205.
were the two great Muslim empires of Ottoman Turkey (1300-1918), and Safavid Persia (1500-1736). The cement that sealed this wall tight was the ancient enmity between the Muslims and Christian religions.

After the fall of Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1454 (1453 according to other sources) at the hands of the Turks, Islam launched its own holy war against Christian Europe. From Istanbul, the Turks moved north into the Balkans. The Turks were not able to maintain their success in Europe because the two Muslim empires, Turkey and Persia, had a crack, a fissure, in their religion. Shi’ite Muslim Persia and Sunni Muslim Turkey were enemies. This crack in the fabric of Muslim unity was one reason Christianity in West Asia survived after the mass devastations of Tamerlane (Teimoure Lang, dead in 1405).  

The Nestorians on the Turko-Persian Borders

The author begins by mentioning the habitat of the Nestorians, east of the Euphrates River, in the mountains of Kurdistan. They lived in villages within an inverted triangle, with its summit in Mosul, ancient Nineveh, and its base running from Lake Van in Turkish Armenia, to Lake Urmia in Iran. He then explains that these people trace their theology to Theodore of Mopsuestia, a fifth-century bishop north of Antioch, in Syria. Nestorians also trace their roots to the first-century pioneers of Christianity in Edessa (ancient Mesopotamia, now Urfa, Turkey).

After the death of Tamerlane, “the Scourge of God,” the scattered remnants of the once great Church of the East, was gradually being driven out of the cities into the mountains on the borders between Turkey and Iran. Despite its precarious situation, the Church of the East had managed to maintain a line of patriarchs. The author reminds the reader that two hundred years earlier a Mongol patriarch, converted to Christianity by the Church of the East, ruled from his base in the capital of the Persian Empire. At that time the missionary Church of the east stretched from the Euphrates River to China. By 1500 the missionaries were gone, and the patriarch was hiding in the mountains.

In 1490, Simon V, or his predecessor Simon IV, received a surprise visit by two Christian pilgrims who had come from the Malabar Coast in India, working their way upstream on the Tigris River from Mosul, and had reached his village Gazarta. They had traveled three thousand perilous miles to ask the patriarch for their ordination by a bishop since no bishop was left in India. The patriarch complied with their request and sent them back.

After the fall of the Mongols and the establishment of the Safavid dynasty (1500-1732) in Iran, the Nestorians living east of the Euphrates River hoped against hope for a better future. West of the Euphrates River, Sultan Salim of
Ottoman Turkey was slaughtering Christians, Jews and Shi’ite Moslems by the thousands. Shah Isma’il (1500-1524), the founder of the Safavid dynasty in Persia had a softer policy toward religious minorities. His treatment of the religious dzimmis (ghettos) followed the traditional recognition of the minorities under the leadership of their patriarch. Shah Abbas I (1587-1628) went so far as to propose an alliance between Shi’ite Persia and the Christian west against the common enemy, Sunny Turkey. The alliance did not materialize and Shah Abbas turned violently against Christians.

The intermittent persecutions between 1500 and 1800 by both the Ottoman and Persian rule were serious enough to force the Nestorians to depart from their own canon law. According to this law, the patriarch must be elected by the free and public vote of bishops. Now, in order to preserve the Christian integrity of patriarchal succession they decided to make the office hereditary. This led to mediocrity and a schism.26

The Nestorian Schism of the Sixteenth Century 27

Patriarch Simon VII bar Mama, after moving from Gazarta to a new mountain retreat nearer to Mosul at Rabban Hormuzd in 1551 named his nephew to succeed him. He was installed as Simon VII Denha (1551-1558).

There was a rebellion against this decision led by three bishops, a number of clergy, and some of the most prominent leaders. They elected as patriarch John Sulaqa, a monk from the Rabban Hormuzd monastery, who took the name Simon (Shimon) VIII.

With the aid of the Franciscan missionaries in Mosul he was escorted to Rome where he submitted loyalty to Pope Julius III and was named patriarch of the Chaldeans.

From this point onward, and for the next three hundred years, the loyalty of the Nestorians of Turkey and Iran was split between these two lines of patriarchs, namely, the old line of Shimon VII bar Mama, and the new line of Sulaqa.

The old line claimed to represent the traditional ancient Church of the East and the patriarchs of Selucia-Ctesiphon. The Sulaqa new line claimed to be more authentically canonical, and interpreted its connection with the pope as the recognition of a wider Christian unity.

But the turn of events reversed the positions of the two lines of patriarchates. The new line of Sulaqa turned independent Nestorian and the old line of Simon bar Mama joined Rome, becoming Uniate Chaldean. This outcome occurred in the course of two centuries, in an irregular manner as follows.

First, the relations of the Sulaqa line with Rome cooled, and in 1600 they reverted to the hereditary succession of patriarchs. Then around 1670 they omitted the patriarchal vow of allegiance to Rome.

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26 Page 194-195
27 Pages 195-197.
“About this time [1670] also, the old-line patriarchate [should be the new-line] moved its seat a short distance across the border from Urmi in Azerbaijan to Kurdistan in Turkey, where it now claimed inheritance of the non-Catholic old Nestorian line from which it had separated in 1551...Thus somewhat vaguely Rome lost its formal relationship with the new-line Nestorians.”

In the seventeenth century Rome tried to recognize both lines of patriarch, giving the successors of the Sulaqa line the title “Patriarch of Oriental Assyria”, and those of the old-line Simon bar Mama the title “Patriarch of Babylon.”

Finally in 1830 Rome admitted the traditional Nestorian old-line church [of Shimun bar Mama] into full status as Uniate or Chaldean, Catholic. From what preceded, this reviewer concludes that if the Chaldean Church is the Church of the traditional old line, then the Church of the East, that does not call itself Chaldean, must be the new line, the continuation of the Sulaqa line. Moffett writes:

“The miracle is that Romanized “Chaldeans” (Uniates) and Assyrian Nestorians alike, both still speaking a form of the Syriac language of Dadyeshu and Mar Aba a millennium earlier, were still Christian in their precarious homeland among the mountains and by the rivers that water the Fertile Crescent.”

**The Jacobites**

The thirteenth century saw the decline of the Jacobite Monophysite Orthodoxy. It began when the tolerant Mongol rulers of western Asia became Muslim. Tamerlane, a century later, wiped them out. He destroyed monasteries, burned their books, and killed their leaders. Those who survived escaped to mountains and caves, until his death around 1404. Then it was the Turks who took over the job of suffocating the recovery of Christians for another five centuries. When all this was done, by the nineteenth century, there were probably about two hundred thousand Jacobites left.

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28 For two reasons this reviewer thinks that this should be the new-line, rather than the old-line. First, further down it says “from which it had separated in 1551,” then it adds “Rome lost its formal relationship with the new-line Nestorians.” It was the Sulaqa line, the new line that separated, and they were the ones who joined Rome, that now Rome lost its relationship with.

29 Page 196.


31 Page 197

32 Page 197.

33 Ibid
Catholic Missions in West Asia

The Catholic mission in Persia, after having been expelled during the Crusades, began in 1507 when the Portuguese occupied the Persian island of Hormuz, situated at the entrance of the Persian Gulf.

The Portuguese hoped to make the island the base for Catholic penetration of the Persian Empire. In 1570 a group of Augustinian chaplains was sent to Hormuz for the Portuguese military and trade personnel. In 1582 King Philip of Spain and Portugal sent Simon Morales, their prior, as ambassador to the court of the Shah of Persia. At that time the Safavid dynasty was ruling Iran. Morales had the advantage of having learned Persian. The capital of Persia at that time was Isfahan, and Morales was given permission to establish a residential mission there at around 1602.

In 1607 another Catholic group, the Carmelites, joined the Augustinians. The trade supremacy of Portugal between Europe and India, as well as the Catholic missions linked to its military power ended when a joint attack of Safavid and British troops took over the Hormuz Island. This signaled the end of Catholic mission’s advance in Asia, and the persecution of Augustinian converts began. Five Persian Catholic converts chose martyrdom with hideous tortures rather than to apostatize. The non-Persian Augustinians were expelled.

In 1628 the French established a mission in Persia, but they were faced with difficulties explained below.

Shah Abbas I, known as the Great, who ruled from 1587 to 1629, issued an edict that was aimed at encouraging Christians to convert to Islam. According to the edict, any Christians who would convert to Islam had the right to confiscate all the property of their Christian relatives for seven generations back. Under the Safavid dynasty of Iran, from 1666 until 1736, the persecution of the Christians intensified. In short, from 1650 to 1770, Christianity was almost wiped out in Persia.

The Nestorians, who were driven out from the cities, were more and more isolated, unschooled and poverty stricken. A Carmelite visiting the area around the mid-1650s found some forty thousand Nestorian families in the hills around Lake Urmia.

Among the Melchites of Antioch, the minority patriarch had since the schism of 1724 joined the Roman Catholic Church. On the other hand, the majority Jacobite patriarch of Antioch secured the recognition of the Ottoman government.

The Maronites have been in communion with the Catholic Church since 1182, but their uninterrupted relationship with Rome dates from 1512-1517. The Armenian Rite Uniate was established in 1742 and centered in Lebanon.

Christians in the Middle East at the Eighteenth Century

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34 Pages 197-200.
35 Page 199-200
Of the Catholic missionaries, Augustinians left Persia in 1750 and the Dominicans in 1764. Those Uniate Patriarchates that catholic missionaries had established in parts of the Ottoman Empire such as Lebanon, Constantinople and Jerusalem, survived.

Armenians on both sides of the Turko-Persian border were repressed, but had expanded as far as India. Khojah Gregory, a humble Armenian cloth seller, rose to the rank of commander-in-chief of the Bengal army, and then from 1760 to 1763 became the virtual ruler of Bengal, in Muslim Moghul India.

The Nestorians, split three ways, were surviving in their isolated villages in the Kurdish mountains. In 1800 there were three Nestorian patriarchs:

1- Elias XIII Ishoyahb (1778-1804), from the old traditional Nestorian line. In Mosul in the nineteenth century, where the patriarch then resided, this line became Uniate (Roman Catholic), and is known as the Chaldean Church in Iran.

2- Simon XVI Jean (1780-1820), represented the Sulaqa line, which in 1551 had turned Uniate, but a hundred years later turned back to Nestorianism. This church is known as the Assyrian Church of the East, and regards itself as the only valid inheritor of the old name “Nestorian.”

3- This line, a separate uniate patriarchate situated in Diarbekir on the upper Tigris River, was absorbed into the Chaldean Catholic Church, when in 1781 its patriarch resigned.37

When the first Protestant missionaries arrived in Asia in 1820, they found the national Armenian Orthodox Church battered but organized and self-governed. The Nestorians were lying low in the Kurdish mountains west of Lake Urmia, and the Catholic Uniates, were all using their own liturgies, their own Bibles and still speaking their own language.38

The West and the Ancient Churches of the Middle East, 1800 to 1860 39

Here the author begins with a general picture of the forced relationships between Turkey and Europe. The Turks twice threatened Vienna, the last one being in 1683. Western Protestants were slow to engage in worldwide mission work. They regarded the Middle East as impermeable enemy territory. On the other hand, Catholics, since 1551 have recognized the possibilities of a Christian recovery in the land of its origin by reviving the Nestorian and the larger Armenian orthodox churches. For more than two centuries, Rome remained in touch with the Christian patriarchs who drifted in and out of the union. This reviewer would like

36 Pages 203-205.
37 Page 204 and note 49 in page 209.
38 Page 204.
39 Pages 376-393.
to remind the readers that the Church of England also had this intention of preparing the Nestorians to renew their missionary activities in Asia, as they had so successfully done centuries ago.40

When the Protestants discovered the Nestorians, it was a happy surprise. It was in 1834 that Justin Perkins arrived in Iran as the resident Protestant missionary to the Nestorians. The welcome was cordial, and Perkins and his medical colleague, Dr. Asahel Grant, were delighted to have found Christians who treasured the scriptures, accepted the authority of the Bible without question, and revered no statues of saints. Perkins wrote home that he had found “the Protestants of Asia,” survivors of the ancient Church of the East. This is an excerpt of what he wrote:

“\text{They were very artless and simple, welcoming us with open arms and hearts to our labors. They were also far more simple and scriptural in their religious beliefs and practices than any other Oriental sects of Christians, acknowledging the Bible, in theory at least, as the only rule of faith, and rejecting all image and picture-worship, confession to priests, the doctrine of purgatory, etc., with hearty indignation. They were thus, in their deeply fallen state, still entitled to the honorable epithet...the Protestants of Asia.} \text{.}^\text{41}

Of course, Justin Perkins was not the first American, and the Americans were not the first Protestants to arrive in Persia. The first American missionaries were Eli Smith and H. G. O. Dwight, two clergymen from the American Board of Foreign Missions who in 1830 explored Nestorian territory on the northwestern border of Persia. But, it was Perkins, serving under the same mission, who in 1834 established a continuing Protestant presence in Persia settling in Urmia, Persian Azarbaijan. Professor Moffett referring to page 45 of John Joseph’s work “The Nestorians and Their Muslim Neighbors,” writes that the unexpected welcome from non-Roman, non-Greek Orthodox Christians led Perkins to believe he had found pre-Reformation Protestants.

The author concludes that Perkins was wrong, as he was later compelled to modify his first impressions. What Perkins had found, writes Moffett, was one of the last pockets in West Asia of the Nestorians, the ancient Church of the East, which was once famous for its missionary passion throughout Asia.

Perkins writes that the ancient glory had gone and the old church had become a “pitiful skeleton in a valley of dry bones,” fatally weakened by centuries of persecution. Despite all these, Perkins considered the Nestorians as having moral superiority to the Muslim culture around them. For thirty-six years, Perkins translated the Bible, preached on Sundays, and almost looked like a native. He had become so popular that when he approached a village the entire

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\item[41] Page 377.
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people would march out and bring him in with the sound of drums and trumpets.  

Urmia at that time had about thirty thousand inhabitants, mostly Muslim but with a considerable Nestorian community. There were also about three hundred villages of which only one hundred were Nestorian. The patriarch, Abraham Mar Shimon, lived in Kudshanis forty miles west, in the mountains of Turkish Kurdistan about twelve thousand feet above sea level. He had recently moved there and was represented by a bishop in Urmia. Near Mosul there was another Nestorian patriarch by the name of Mar Elias. Nestorians seemed content to accept either patriarch, depending perhaps on which one was nearest. The Kurdish attacks and massacres of 1843 forced Mar Shimon out of Urmia to Mosul.

Perkins estimate of the number of Nestorians in West Asia was about 150,000, but Eli Smith estimated 70,000 in Persia and Kurdistan. Moffett adds his own “reasonable” estimate of 125,000.

Perkins was dismayed to find that most Nestorians were illiterate in their own language and could not read their own sacred texts of old Syriac. Perkins reported that no more than forty men and one woman were able to read the Syriac sacred texts. The woman was Helena, the sister of Mar Shimun which, under note 23, is represented as the wife of the Nestorian (Assyrian) patriarch. Perkins noticed that the illiterate peasants spoke a language that is neither Turkish, Persian, nor Arabic, but a language strikingly close to the old Syriac texts. He then realized that this was a modern variation of Syriac that had not been reduced to writing.

He then reported to his mission board that “spoken Nestorian Syriac was not a dead language, extinct for a thousand years, but the spoken language of a brave, long-forgotten, and long-persecuted but still surviving Christian community.”

Perkins set out to reduce the spoken language of the Nestorians to writing, and in this he was helped by Abraham, a Nestorian priest. The first printing press arrived in Urmia in 1840, and that made it possible to print the Bible. Among the books printed were “On the Necessity of a New Heart,” which was printed in 1841, and the Psalms, printed in classic Syriac the same year. The books next printed were:

- The Four Gospels in Urmian Aramaic,
- The Acts and Epistles in classical Syriac,

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42 Page 378
44 Page 379 and note 23 in page 395.
45 Ibid.
The Faith of the Protestants in both classic Syriac and Urmian Aramaic, and
Twenty-Two Plain Reasons for Not Being a Roman Catholic.

Perkins completed the translation of the complete New Testament into spoken Aramaic in 1845, and it was published the next year, and opened a school for Nestorian boys in Urmia, and a seminary for males to be trained as teachers and preachers.

The Muslims of Urmia were jealous of these achievements, and they demanded that the missionaries, Christians though they might be, to open a school for Muslims. Asahel Grant, M.D., and his wife who had both joined the Perkins, reluctantly accepted the education of Muslims.

More interesting and daring was the decision of Judith Grant, the wife of Dr. Grant, to pick four Nestorian girls for the first “female seminary.” This was a daring move because of the oppressive prejudice against freedom of education for women prevalent at the time.

Judith Grant later died at the age of 25, but the seminary became famous as the “Fidelia Fiske Seminary.” The name was chosen for a young recruit named Miss Fidelia Fiske, from Mt. Holyok College, who joined the mission in 1843, and revived the school. She has been called “one of the greatest missionaries of modern times.”

The Nestorian-Protestant Schism (1846-1870)

Characteristic of all the early nineteenth-century Protestant missions in West Asia was the commitment to evangelize the Muslim world through reform of the ancient Christian churches of the East, and to avoid the creation of separate Protestant churches via proselytizing.

“But before ten years had passed, it was becoming increasingly apparent that the Puritan simplicities of Congregational worship and order were not easily yoked with the long, unintelligible liturgies and high authoritarianism of the Nestorian hierarchies. The two traditions began to drift apart, at first almost unconsciously when the missionaries, after enduring a Nestorian mass in language that most Nestorians did not understand, sought to refresh their spirits at home with a simple celebration of the Lord’s Supper in their own familiar language.”

On the other hand, the missionaries added spiritual experience and growth to literacy and academic progress. The Bible was given a prominent place in the teaching and higher moral standards were required of students than those to which they had been exposed. Students had to pray everyday for forgiveness of sin and for personal conversion. This resulted in a series of revivals first in the

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46 Page 380
47 Pages 380-382.
48 Page 380-381.
schools. This revival, in fact, as presented above, boils down to conversion to Protestantism. Afterwards two bishops and most of the seminary converted during the years from 1846 to 1861. The revivals [conversions] spread from schools to villages and churches. The Patriarch Abraham Mar Shimun V regarded these conversions as a threat to the church’s authority. He compared the separatism of the Congregational American mission to the American Episcopal mission to the Eastern churches (1839-1850), and found the high regard for tradition by the latter to be more congenial. Persian Nestorians were passionately attached to their historic faith, which had preserved their identity through centuries of torture.

In 1848 Abraham Mar Shimun V publicly opposed the Protestant reformers, and denounced them to the Russian embassy, the nominal protectors of the mission in the absence of diplomatic relations between Persia and the United States. This was a drift toward separation, but Justin Perkins opposed separation until his death in 1869.49

**Turkey** 50

The author sets Turkey against a historical background with Europe to give the reader a panoramic picture of the country where Christians lived. From 1280 to 1683 Turkey attacked Europe, who was on the defensive and on the edge of disaster. Europe lost Constantinople, its last link with the Eastern Roman Empire in 1453. Turks occupied the Balkans, took Crete, an island southeast of Greece, advanced to the gates of Vienna, penetrated into Ukraine, and attacked Poland. Their last attempt to take Vienna was in 1683, but they failed. Here the tide turned, and within thirty-five years they were driven out of Hungary, Croatia, much of Serbia, and Transylvania, a province in central Romania. By 1800 the Turkish Empire was in full decline, facing the advance of new imperial powers such as Britain, France and Russia. It was not only Turkey that was in decline, but the Qajar dynasty of Persia was in decline too. The battle for the control of the Middle East and Western Asia had begun. At first, the western powers wanted land and commerce; the demand for oil came later.

It was in such a political environment that the missionaries of the American Board came to Turkey in 1820, fifteen years before their counterparts in Urmia, Persia. The difference between Turkey and Persia was that in Persia the Christians were few and most of them Nestorian. In Turkey, about one-third of the population was Christian, and the Nestorians were one of the smallest and most isolated enclaves in the empire.

There were seven Christian communities in Turkey, each of which was a nation within the nation. The members of these Christian communities were not Turkish citizens, but wards or constituencies of the empire. To survive in the vast sea of Islam, each church, Nestorian, Armenian, Greek Orthodox, Jacobite and

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49  Page 381-382

50  Pages 382-385.
others, jealously preserved its own identity. This was a pattern older than Islam; it was a remnant of the millet system of the Sassanids of the fifth-century Persia, a system of semi-autonomous, socially disadvantaged, and politically powerless religious ghettos.

The largest of the Christian communities in Asian Turkey was Armenian, called Gregorian, or Orthodox Monophysite. The second largest group was Greek Orthodox, living mostly along the coast of Asia Minor [modern Turkey].

The Jacobite Church was placed, by the Ottoman Empire, under the authority of the Armenian Orthodox patriarch of Constantinople. The church of the Antiochene Orthodox Jacobites was centered in Syria, which had been ruled by Turkey since the sixteenth century.

The churches that recognized the authority of the pope, but had their own patriarch, were:

1- Maronites
2- Antiochene Rite Catholics
3- Chaldean Rite Catholics or Nestorian/Assyrian Catholics
4- Armenian Rite Catholics.

Shortly after the Turks captured Constantinople in 1453, they gave legal status to only the Greek and Armenian Orthodox patriarchs, as the political heads of recognized religious minorities. The Greek patriarch had his seat in Constantinople, and had the pride of location, but the Armenian patriarch was the most powerful in Asia as the head of the largest ethnic religious group, and also as the representative of all non-Muslim and non-Greek Orthodox Christians.51

As can be seen, the Nestorians had not received recognition from the Turkish authorities, and as late as 1848 the Nestorian patriarchs were still seeking recognition. An estimate in 1858 gives the following figures for the Christian population of Turkey in Asia (Syria, Iraq, Kurdistan, Asia Minor and Palestine):

- Armenian Gregorian (Orthodox) 2 Million
- Greek Orthodox 1 Million
- Jacobites (Antiochene Orthodox) 240,000
- Maronite 180,000
- Independent Nestorians (Kurdistan) 60,000
- Uniate Nestorians (Chaldeans) 40,000
- Uniate Jacobites (Antiochene) 40,000-50,000

This distribution yields a total of 3,560,000 to 3,570,000 Christians52

The Maronites53
After the Greek and Armenian Orthodox, the Maronites were the third largest Christian minority in the Ottoman Empire. It was in the eighth century that they settled in the mountains of Lebanon. Moffett does not trace the origins of the Maronites; therefore the following is added for those interested in the subject.

“The Maronites trace their origins to St. Maron, or Maro (Arabic مارون), a Syrian hermit of the late 4th and early 5th centuries, and St. John Maron, or Joannes Maro (Arabic، يوحنان مارون)، patriarch of Antioch in 685-707, under whose leadership the invading Byzantine armies of Justinian II were routed in 684, making the Maronites a fully independent people.”

In the above quotation, Yūhanna is written with a dot under “h,” which makes it sound like “kh,” that is Yukhanna. Therefore, the word is not Arabic, as stated in the Encyclopedia Britannica, but it is Syriac.

As to their theological beliefs, they considered Christ as the union of two natures, divine and human, but His will remained single and focused, and here they diverged from Orthodoxy.

It was after a council in 1596 that the Maronite patriarch submitted to Rome, accepting changes in liturgy and doctrine, but insisting on the retention of the Syriac rite and language, which was granted

### Protestants in Syria

William Goodell and Frank King, of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, opened their first residential work in 1823 in Beirut. The two missionaries were assisted by an Armenian bishop and a highly literate priest, and were thus able to establish schools with about seven hundred pupils. They were also able to establish a school for girls, laying the foundations for women’s rights in a fiercely Muslim environment. A significant event that caused an angry reaction from the Eastern Churches, was the joining in communion and fellowship of bishop Dionysius Garabed and the priest, Gregory Wortabet (or Wartabet), with the mission church.

The Maronite patriarch excommunicated all those who had associated with the Protestants. The gap between the Americans and the ancient churches widened with the first martyrdom of a converted Maronite at the hands of his fellow Christians.

As a result of these differences, the girls’ school was temporarily suspended from 1833 until 1860, when the American mission was able to report a network of elementary schools enrolling 743 boys and 277 girls. A seminary, or college, was founded in 1846.

The efforts of the American Protestants culminated in the founding of the famous American University of Beirut and the Beirut College for Women.

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54 Encyclopedia Britannica 2005.

55 Pages 391-393.
The growth of the Protestant Church in Syria and Lebanon was insignificant. An estimate of religions in Syria/Lebanon is illustrated below. Out of a total population of 1.5 millions, the spread of the different groups was as follows:

1- Sunni Muslims ...................... 750,000  
2- Maronites ................................. 200,000  
3- Nusairiyeh ................................. 200,000  
4- Greek Orthodox ......................... 150,000  
5- Shi’ite Muslims ........................... 80,000  
6- Greek Catholic ............................ 50,000  
7- Druzes ....................................... 50,000  
8- Jews .......................................... 30,000

Calamity in the Middle East (1860-1900)  
In this part, Moffett condenses several centuries of Turkish history in a few, but vivid sentences. For four hundred years, the Turks were pushing into Europe, and in only a few decades of the nineteenth century, the empire collapsed. On the other hand, the Western Christian military power was on the rise. Despite its weakness, the Ottoman Empire neither lost land (with few exceptions) nor people, and the Middle East remained Muslim. In its weakness, the Islamic power turned against its own Christian minorities, and most brutally against the Armenians. Here, the reviewer would like to mention that Assyrians were also treated as brutally as the Armenians.

One of the symptoms of the decline of the Ottoman power was the mutiny of the Janissary Corps in 1826. The Janissary Corps were formed from four to eight year old Bulgar, Serb, and Bosnian boys, who were torn away from their Christian families, forcibly converted to Islam and trained for celibacy, the Muslim faith and war. These Janissaries had become the heart of the Turkish military elite.

After suffering a series of humiliating military defeats, the sultan ordered a remodeling of the Janissary in line with the Western military model. As mentioned above, the Janissary revolted. The sultan’s reaction was a bloody massacre that wiped out the entire Janissary Corps. The sultan’s reforms proved ineffective and Turkish military power never recovered. It was Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909) who massacred the Armenians, lost control of the Balkans, and was replaced by Muhammad V (1909-1915). Muhammad V was the weakest sultan of them all and came to be known as “the sick man of Europe.”

The Mountain Nestorians  
56 a secret sect, akin to the Druzes  
57 Pages 403-412.  
58 Page 403-404.  
59 Pages 405-406.
Within the time span from 1860 and 1900, the ancient Church of the East had become weaker, and no longer the dominant Christian force in Asia. Since the Mongols turned Muslim in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Church of the East never recovered. They were now to be found in western Persia and eastern Turkey. The strain between the ancient church and the converted church of the American missionaries finally led to a formal separation.

In 1862 a presbytery was organized, and in 1870 the American Board (Congregationalist) turned over to the Presbyterians its work among the Nestorians of Persia. The Presbyterians reluctantly surrendered their long cooperation with the old church to form the independent Reformed Nestorian Church. In 1870 the retiring American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), while passing its responsibilities in Iran to the Presbyterians, organized a seminary for the training of pastors and other Christian workers. Ten years later the seminary changed its name to the Urmia College. It was in the 1890s that persecutions were breaking upon Christians across the border in Turkey.

The Massacre of Armenians

Moffett interprets the vulnerability of the Nestorians as a result of their weakness and that of the Armenians, to their strength. He continues by describing the situation of Armenians in Turkey, where their cultural status and financial acumen was higher than that of the Turks, which made them enviable. In general, Armenians were treated better in Persia than in Turkey; but were caught in the wars between Turkey, Persia, and Russia. In the Turkish Empire in 1860, the Armenians were the strongest of all the Christian minorities. The Christian tradition of Armenians went back to the founding of their church in A.D. 302 under its first patriarch, Gregory the Illuminator (ca. A.D. 240-332).

The Armenians were divided geographically, politically, and ecclesiastically. Geographically and politically they were divided by Turkey and Persia. The ecclesiastical division of Armenians began since the fall of Constantinople at the hands of the Turks in 1453. Here too the division was east and west, the patriarchate of the east remaining in ancient Echmiadzin, near Armenia’s capital, Yerevan. To control their Christian minority, the Turks created the patriarchate of Constantinople. Both patriarchs, one in Constantinople and one in Echmiadzin, possessed authority over the same number of Armenians, about more than a million and a half in each area.

At the beginning of World War I, it was estimated that 3.4 million Armenians lived in Turkey, Persia, and Russia. The Old Armenian Orthodox Church was weakened by the secession of Armenian Catholics, Armenian Jacobites (Antiochene), and Armenian Protestants (Evangelicals).

Russia had been intermittently advancing into Armenian territory in East Turkey. In 1878 Russia occupied part of Turkish Armenia, and large numbers of

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60 Pages 406-410
Armenians migrated into Russia hoping for the restoration of an independent Armenian nation.

But the turn of events was different, and Armenians suffered from both Russia and Turkey. The far northeastern half of old Armenia, which since the early 1800s was under Russian control, suffered suppression and denationalization by a Christian power, i.e. Russia. In 1885 all Armenian schools and newspapers were closed, and the name “Armenia” was condemned. In 1903 the Russian government confiscated all the property of the Armenian Church, causing a rebellion that lasted until 1906. In that year the Russian government restored the church property, but no independence was allowed for Armenians. But, it was that part of Armenia conquered by Russia from Turkey that allowed Armenians to establish their national government; the part that remained in Turkey was lost. 61

In 1894, on the other side of the border in Turkey, sultan Abdul Hamid II acting on the pretext of a supposed secret rebellion, let loose his Kurdish irregulars to slaughter Armenians. It was massacre after massacre, spreading eastward from Constantinople to Trebizond and Diarbekir. It was a tyranny against all Christians. This was followed by the genocidal terror of World War I, from 1915 to 1918, where about a million out of 2.2 millions were massacred.

Lebanon, the Maronites 62

After the great massacre of the Maronites by the Druze in 1860, Turkey yielded to the pressure by the French and created a greater Syria, which included Lebanon. This greater Syria was made an autonomous province with a Christian governor, something astounding in a Muslim empire. Since then the Maronites have remained the dominant Christian presence well into the twentieth century.

Early in World War I, when Turkey found itself fighting against France, it asserted its military control over Lebanon, and repealed all the privileges of the Maronites and other Christians. When Turkey was defeated, the Treaty of Paris in 1920, influenced by the strong Maronite Patriarch Elias Huwayyik, granted independence to Lebanon and separation from Syria, under the French mandate.

Conclusion

This was a brief account of the vast subject covered by this book. The stories of some Christian communities, such as the Nestorians, Armenians, Jacobites, and Maronites were addressed. The book also deals with Christian missionary efforts in Ceylon, Burma, Vietnam, Siam, Japan, China, and more.

What is common in all these missionary efforts is the violent reaction, at a certain point, by the established religion of the country. When the national unity of Armenians or Nestorians was threatened by the new Protestant Church, the reaction became violent. We have been hearing or reading about the massacres of Christians of the Middle East at the hands of the Kurds and Turks. In fact, the

61  Comment by this reviewer.
62  Pages 410-412
persecution and massacres of Christians have taken place in many countries, where the uniformity and unity of society has been threatened. For example, the book explains how Christians were persecuted in Japan, China, and other places. A treaty between Japan and Korea stipulated that any Catholic seeking refuge or escape in Korea was to be returned to Japan for execution. A Chinese shipwreck on Korean soil in 1644 had five Catholic sailors. They were all dispatched to Japan and executed.

The book broadens the outlook of the reader to wider horizons, enriching his or her view of the world. The reader will notice that foreign missionary activity did not result in splitting only the Church of the East; it split everyone it touched. For example, the old Armenian Gregorian Church was split into a Catholic and a Protestant Church, in addition to the Old Church. But the main difference between Armenians and the old Syriac speaking churches is that, Armenians, despite their religious differences, are united and brought together through the glue of Armenian nationalism. This is not the case with Syriac Christians, who are split along religious lines and united by the glue of religious sectarianism. The nationalist glue that could unite all Syriac speaking Christians is the glue of Assyrianism, which has its roots in the ancient history of Assyria and Babylonia.

The author has produced a great work, for which he has to be congratulated.