

Bethany Vedavijnana Peeth (BVP)

Report of the academic years from 2012-13 to 2014-15

A. A Short history

In order to train its priestly candidates effectively and to expose them to the multicultural context of India, the Order of the Imitation of Christ with the help of Cardinal Eugene Tisserant established Bethany Ashram in Pune on 1st May 1955. It was officially christened as St. Mary's Bethany Scholasticate. Bethany Ashram was an integral part of the Pontifical Athenaeum, the forerunner of today's JDV. In all academic matters though one with JOV the members of the Ashram always felt the need of preserving their identity in matters of liturgy, ecclesiology, spiritual traditions and religious Charism. Such values were zealously preserved in our religious and ecclesial life, and cultivated through a vital link between Bethany Ashram and the Malankara community in Pune.

Gradually, as the concept of the Church as a living communion of individual Churches emerged in the ecclesial horizon of the Church in India, the members of OIC were urged to act as the thinking cell of the Malankara Church. Priestly formation had to be adapted to the exigencies of an emerging and expanding Malankara Church. When it comes to the formation of religious priests the Charism of each religious community needs to be taken seriously. Thus it became a felt need to give due importance to the Oriental ecclesial genius and the Indian religious tradition in the formation process of the Bethanians.

To respond positively to this demand, a study programme was finalized by the General Council of the OIC and was submitted to JDV for approval. Fr. Lionel Mascarenhas, the then Rector of JDV, by his letter of ZS" June 1983, communicated the approval of the programme to the then Superior General Rev. Fr. John Berchmans OIC. The programme was accredited to the B.Th. degree of JDV. Thus the OIC extension centre was established. On 2nd July, 1992 this theology centre for Oriental and Indian studies was named Bethany Vedavijnana Peeth (BVP) by the General Council of the OIC.

This is the 31st year of OIC Extension Centre. Ever since the establishment of BVP hundred students have finished their B.Th programme successfully and sixteen of them have acquired PhDs from various universities in Europe. All of them render their service to BVP and also to other seminaries and institutes. After finishing thirty one years of academic career it is time for BVP to expand its horizon of B.Th programme to M.Th. Therefore it is high time that we evaluate the BVP and its contribution to the congregation, to the Church and to the world. This is not a regional theologate in the strict sense but an Institute for Oriental and Indian studies in the field of theology. Though it comes under JDV, BVP has its autonomy and it is highly appreciable that JDV respects this autonomy, at the same time it is very serious about the extension centres.

Relevance of BVP and theologizing

The aim of BVP is very clearly expressed in its vision statement and objectives:

Vision statement: We aim at an integral understanding of God, world and human being as presented in Christian tradition from an Oriental Christian perspective, rooted in the West Syrian tradition and Indian religious heritage, contextualizing in the life of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church.

Objectives:

We give stress to the Oriental ways of theologizing. The Liturgy, the *locus theologicus* of theologizing in the Orient is its functional foundation. The West Syrian liturgy is this *locus* for us. We also aim at harmonizing Oriental Christian theology with the Indian spiritual traditions.

Our context of theologizing is the Malankara Catholic Church. It undertakes the research and development of its history and patrimony - liturgical, theological, spiritual, disciplinary and cultural. Called to be a sign of communion, we involve in research and study that caters communion with our non-Catholic Sister Churches.

Studying Bethanian spirituality, the source of monastic spirituality in the Malankara Church is our cherished goal.

An interdisciplinary approach to translate theologizing into the multifaceted socio-cultural realities and pluri-religious and multi-ecclesial situations help us to respond effectively to the situation of our country.

The aim of BVP is clear from the vision statement:

- I. Integral understanding of God, world and human being**
 - a. presented in Christian tradition from an Oriental Christian perspective
 - b. rooted in the West Syrian tradition and Indian religious heritage
 - c. contextualizing in the life of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church

The Courses offered by JDV is not enough to our students especially in the realm of moulding a spirituality that is soaked in the oriental theology in the *Sitz im Leben* of Malankara Church. Acknowledging this reality only we were permitted to establish an extension centre of JDV in the same campus. All other extension centers and regional theologates are far away from JDV campus, either in Kolkata or in Karnataka. As an autonomous Institute, BVP must be able to provide courses, as many as possible, to the extent of reaching out its service to the JDV. Since it is the extension centre of JDV, the requirements and qualification of the instructors are the same as that of JDV. This fact was affirmed in the plenary session of the JDV Theology Faculty meeting conducted in February 2013.

Among the 122 credits required for B.Th degree, BVP students obtain 50-55 credits for oriental subjects from BVP and the rest from JDV.

The courses offered by BVP give emphasis on theologizing in the Malankara Church in the Indian context. The courses are on history and patrimony, i.e. liturgical, theological, spiritual, cultural and disciplinary.

B. Functioning

1. Chancellor

The Superior General of the Order of the Imitation of Christ is the Chancellor of BVP. It is his responsibility and privilege to animate and guide the BVP according to its vision and objectives and to keep up its academic excellence. The Chancellor does all appointments / confirmation / termination of the office bearers and the staff of BVP.

2. Director

The Director of BVP is appointed by the Chancellor for 3 years, from among the members of the resident staff. This appointment is to be approved by the Vice chancellor of JDV. The Director, besides the duties mentioned herein, should be the coordinator of studies. As such he will be responsible for the academic functioning of the institution and acts as the liaison person between BVP and JDV. The Director is the convener of the Academic Senate, the Faculty Council and Staff Convention. It is his responsibility to execute the decisions of the BVP Academic Councils.

3. Staff

The Chancellor in accordance with Holy Rule nO.255 and the norms for JDV extension centres appoints the members of the staff. There should be resident staff of at least 3 regular teachers and among them one should hold a PhD in scriptural studies. To be a member of the resident staff a person must reside at Bethany Vedavijnana Peeth, Pune or in the city of Pune. He will be deemed regular teacher if he holds a Doctorate in Theology; or a Doctorate in Indology or in one of the human sciences, with at least a Master's degree in Christian Theology, from a recognized university.

The Director submits all appointments of the resident staff to JDV Theology Faculty Council Meeting for its approval. Besides the resident staff the Chancellor appoints associate staff members who are competent to teach the subjects assigned to them. They are usually members of the Order of the Imitation of Christ.

For the smooth academic functioning of the BVP, in accordance with the syllabus prepared for each year the Director invites other competent teachers to teach in BVP with the consent of the academic senate and in consultation with the Chancellor. The service of a member of the staff of BVP is terminated by the Chancellor by recall or transfer of the member that takes place in accordance with the Holy Rule. The services of the staff members are evaluated from time to time in the competent forum. The results are communicated to the Chancellor in due time. It is the right of the Chancellor to take a final decision on such matters.

Among the three members of the resident staff Philip Vysanethu.OIC is the director. Varghese Thykkoottathil OIC and George Ayyaneth OIC are the resident professors. The founder, the resident professor and the internal force of BVP, Fr. John Berchmans OIC is relieved from his office as resident professor after thirty years of service in BVP. He is 79 years old. The OIC congregation and BVP are indebted to him for his relentless service. Fr. George Ayyaneth OIC who has a doctorate in Biblical theology has been appointed in the place of Fr. Berchmans Ole. There are 20 members in the visiting staff.

4. The Academic Senate

The Academic Senate is the competent body in all matters concerning the general academic policies of BVP. It is the serious responsibility of the Academic Senate to see that through the theologizing process in BVP an earnest effort is made to develop a theology in accordance with the vision of BVP. It recommends members to the Chancellor for appointment as staff, with due consideration of the provisions of the Holy Rule. The academic senate executes decisions and recommendations of the Faculty Council.

5. The Faculty Council

The Faculty Council is the meeting of the entire resident staff. The Superior of Bethany Ashram, Pune, is an ex-officio member of this Council. To this, associate staff of BVP may be invited. A student representative is called to this council. It is convened and presided over by the Director. It meets at least thrice in a year. It is the competent body in academic matters such as fixing up the yearly syllabus,

evaluation of the courses offered in BVP, evaluation of the staff, etc. They can also suggest the names of future staff members to be trained and appointed in BVP.

6. Staff Convention

The entire staff - resident, associate and visiting teachers of BVP are called to a meeting once in a year. The Chancellor, Provincial Superiors, the General Formation coordinator and the Provincial Formation coordinators are invited to the convention. The Director convenes the Staff Convention. He organizes the meeting in consultation with the Chancellor and fixes the topic, date, time and place of the meeting. This meeting is aimed at fostering better understanding and communication, of the theologizing process in BVP, through a seminar organized for this purpose. The convention ends with a business meeting to evaluate the overall functioning of the BVP in accordance with the vision of BVP. The Chancellor presides over the business meeting. In his absence the Director chairs it.

7. Students

In the academic years 2012-13 to 2014-15, there were 106 (28, 33,45) students.

C. Bachelor of Theology - Study Programme

Bethany Vedavijnana Peeth (BVP) follows a B.Th study programme that is accredited to the B.Th programme of Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth (JDV).

1. Course Content

All the courses on Liturgy, Sacraments, Oriental Canon Law, Spirituality, Indian Church history, Pastoral Theology and courses on Dogmatic Theology like Mariology, Ecclesiology, Ecumenism, Sacraments and Pneumatology are offered in BVP for its students. Other courses are attended in JDV. The courses offered in BVP keep the historical, cultural settings and at the same time reflect on how its content is lived in the Oriental Churches in general and particularly in the Malankara Church.

2. Courses

First Year

From Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth

Subject	Credit
Introduction to Theology	2
Introduction to OT & the Religion of Israel	2
Theology of Faith & Revelation	2
History of Christianity I	2
General Moral Theology	2
Introduction to NT	2
History of Christianity II	2
Pentateuch	2
Theology of Christian Worship	2
Theology of Christ Event I -Christology Gospel	2
According to Luke	2
Justice & Human Rights	2
The Acts of the Apostles	2
Gospel According to Mark	2

First Year
From Bethany Vedavijnana Peeth

Subject	Credit
Introduction to Oriental Theology Liturgy of the Hours and its theology Indian Church	1
History	2
Canon Law: Oriental	2
Syriac Language & Culture	2
Baptism & Chrismation	2
Bethanian Spirituality	2
Indian Samnyasa & Spirituality	1
Eastern Patrology	*
Liturgical Hymns & Music	2
Basic Hindi	1

Second Year
From Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth

Subject	Credit
Wisdom Literature & Psalms Letters of Paul	2
Eco- Theology	2
Bio-Medical Ethics	2
Gospel According to Mathew	2
Canon Law: Latin	2
Theology of Christ Event II & Trinity	2
Sociology of Religion Deuteronomistic	2
History Psychology of Religion	2
Book of Revelation Inter-	2
Departmental Seminar	2
	2

Second Year
From Bethany Vedavijnana Peeth

Indian Christian Theology	2
Oriental Pneumatology	2
Theological Anthropology & Eschatology	2
Sacrament of Priesthood	3
Eastern Christian Spirituality & Monasticism	1
Sacrament of Matrimony	1
Sacrament of Reconciliation & Anointing of the Sick	2
Eucharist	2
Modern Trends in Ecumenism	2

Third Year

From Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth

Subject	Credit
Prophets	2
Marriage & Sexual Ethics	2
Theology of the NT	2
Gospel According to John	2
Theology of Religions Oriental	2
Liturgies & Theology Inter-	2
Religious Dialogue	1
Contextual Theology Programme (CTP)	2

Third Year

From Bethany Vedavijnana Peeth

Marriage Law	2
Christology of the Oriental Churches	
St. Thomas Christians Contribution towards An	1
Indian Christian Theology	
Theology of Sacraments	1
Mystery of the Church (Ecclesiology)	
Theology of Mission	2
Catechetics & Pastoral Theology	
Mariology	1
Pastoral Course	
Administration of sacraments & its pastoral dimension B.Th	2
Essay	2

A student of BVP is expected to obtain 122 credits (A credit is a unit of study equivalent to 15 periods of class and a corresponding period of personal work, 30 hrs. in all) during the four years B.Th course. This includes the basic and optional courses offered by JDV and BVP.

3. Schedule of Lectures

The daily schedule of classes in BVP shall be, in the order of precedence, in the forenoon, afternoon or evening. The courses will be scheduled in consultation with the professor concerned and it will be ensured that the courses scheduled for each year are taken in the stipulated time itself.

4. Examination and Grading System

All courses will be evaluated and marks will be awarded. The grading system for all examinations of BVP is the same as that of JDV:

70 and above	: First Class with Distinction:
60-69	First class
50-59	: Second class :
40-49	Pass
00-39	: Fail

Academic Year 2013-14 onwards

90-100	: High Distinction	Outstanding
80-89	: Distinction	Very Good
70-79	: High First Class	Good
60-69	: First Class	Above Average
50-59	: Second Class	Average
40-49	: Pass	Below Average
00-39	: Fail	Fail

5. B.Th Essay

The B.Th essay of two credits is to be completed before January 31st of the third academic year of B.Th. The topic of the essay should revolve around an Oriental theme especially in the light of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church. The guide chosen for it can be a member of the BVP teaching staff or Theology Faculty in JDV provided it is approved by the director of BVP

6. Comprehensive Examination

The B.Th comprehensive examination is conducted in the 4th year during the month of September/October by a board of three Professors. One among them will be designated by the Dean of Theology Faculty in JDV and the other two by the Director of BVP.

7. Contextual Theology Programme

The students did their Contextual Theology Programme in JDV because the themes were found to be very relevant.

8. Seminars

Every third year BVP conducts an International Seminar.
Every academic year the students conduct a seminar on relevant topic.

9. Pastoral Formation Programme

The pastoral formation programme of BVP extends to the four years of theology studies. Though the programme is implemented mainly in the context of Malankara Catholic Church it extends its horizon to other ecclesiastical communities too. This programme includes preparation of homilies, teaching catechism, Vacation Bible Schools, ministry among youth etc. The third year theologians are given special training in liturgical practices, parish administration, guidance for youth activities, family apostolate etc. The resident professors monitor these various programmes. The fourth year theologians attend the Pastoral Course organized by the Synod of Malankara Catholic Church at the Catholicate Centre, Thiruvananthapuram.

Sermons are prepared under the guidance of the resident professors for the whole ecclesiastical year and are published every month. This is a help for the priests to prepare their Sunday/feast day sermons.

10. Ecumenical ministries

The students conducted Biblical quiz in the Mar Thoma Church, Pune. In various occasions some of the students had the opportunity of giving homilies in the Orthodox/ Jacobite churches.

11. Mission Experience and Bible camps

The theology students of BVP have conducted Bible camps (Bethany Bible Studies) for the Children, teens and youth in Delhi, Surat, Mumbai and Pune. During the last summer vacation days they conducted Bible camps in many centres where thousands of children/youth participated. Every Year a text in English is prepared by the students, under the direction of the resident professors of BVP. This text is translated in Malayalam, Tamil and Kannada.

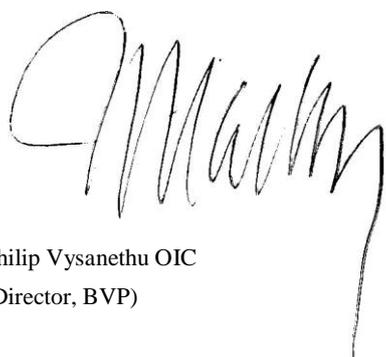
12. Ministry among the local people

The students extend their intellectual and literary talents to school children around Bethany Ashram, Pune by taking tuition and conducting special programmes on occasions like Christmas, Republic day etc.

D. Conclusion

I am very glad that I could spell out some of the programmes which are directly pertained to BVP. Along with these programmes the students have the opportunity to involve in the house administration and Bethany Social Service. They utilize their manual energy in vegetable garden, flower garden, plantain garden and in the dairy and poultry farm by which they strive to synchronize Ashram spirituality consists of *Bhakti, Jnana and Karma marga*.

I take this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude to the direction and support given by JDV, particularly by the Faculty of Theology and to the Superior General and the Council of the Order of the Imitation of Christ.



Philip Vysanethu OIC
(Director, BVP)

